

“WHEN I STUDY THE
PSALMS . . .” (Vol. II)

Enhancing My Prayers –
Enriching My Worship

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23rd Annual

West Virginia School of Preaching
Victory Lectures

October 22-26, 2017

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“WHEN I STUDY THE
PSALMS . . .” (Vol. II)

Enhancing My Prayers – Enriching
My Worship

23rd Annual
West Virginia School of Preaching
Victory Lectures

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

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Foreword

A lectureship presents many opportunities. It is an opportunity to fellowship with other of the like precious faith. It is the opportunity to exercise speaking the truths found in God's Word. It is an opportunity to produce literature that puts forth the Word of God in book form for posterity. Most importantly, a lectureship should be an opportunity to present the Gospel to a lost and dying world.

This year's Victory Lectures is a continuation of the study of Psalms. Two years ago, this series, "When I study the Psalms . . ." began at these lectures. This study will continue for alternating years until it is completed, which means in 2023, by the will and grace of God, we hope to have a complete series on the entire book of Psalms.

The first lecture on Psalms from the West Virginia School of Preaching focused on Enlarging My Faith—Eliminating Fears. This year's lectures focus on a different class of Psalms that point to Enhancing My Prayers—Enriching My Worship. The Psalms of the Bible can be considered synonymous with the praise and worship of God.

One reason for this is that the overwhelming majority of them are prayers of God-centered people from the past. Much like reading good authors will make one a better writer, reading the good prayers of faithful people in the past will make one better at approaching God's throne through this act of worship. Many of the Psalms were also set to music. These prayers were sung, as Christians still do today. We sing praise to God to reach out to him. Studying the Psalms is a way to enrich and enhance all we do in worship, and hopefully, reading this book or listening to the lectures presented live or online will help all who come in contact with the following information be better able to praise God.

The lectureship committee deserves thanks for choosing this topic, which will encourage all to worship better. They also deserve thanks for the work they do in preparing this lectureship, making sure it runs smoothly, and continuing to promote the spreading of the Gospel in these formats. I also would like to thank them personally for allowing my wife and me to continue to work on the production of these lectureship volumes.

Speaking of my wife, she again deserves recognition and thanks for doing the bulk of the work of copyediting and formatting this book and making it appear in the best form possible so many can consume a clear presentation. She must have been praying for patience when she starting working on these books three years ago, and in addition to patience, she has gained more and more grace as she works with the manuscripts of over twenty-five authors a year.

A debt of gratitude is also owed to Brent Alexander and Gospel Light Publishing. While he always does an excellent job producing the school's lectureship books, this year, he went above and beyond in offering some much-needed technical support.

Lastly, the elders of the Hillview Terrace congregation and Andy Robison deserve thanks for all the work they do not only for these lectures, but also for the school. Thank you to the elders for providing facilities for the lectures and promoting them. Thanks to Andy for being available for preachers, preaching students, and anyone who needs to talk, to share a concern, or a shoulder to cry on and for providing with all that he has to help the propagation of the Gospel. May we all better follow your example!

I pray this book will enrich, enhance, and encourage all who read from it.

Jack Gilchrist
26 Aug. 2017



Dedication

David & Annette Kenney

David and Annette Kenney are tireless laborers for the Lord. First, they take with great seriousness coupled with joy the responsibility of raising their good children, James and Deborah. They are careful to make sure they receive instruction and guidance in nurturing love.

Then, Annette supports David in ways that are behind the scenes and sometimes unnoticeable to the outside observer. She is the definition of a virtuous wife and helper to him. She is a godly mother and a constantly busy worker. I am pretty sure David would say she is the glue of the household.

David is the son of Warren and Kay Kenney; Warren preached the Gospel for over forty-five years. Both David and Annette are alumni of Freed-Hardeman University. While laboring at the Wadsworth (Ohio) church of Christ, the work has borne fruits in perhaps nonconventional areas. David has done a great service to

the brotherhood with his technological and video work. He has edited and produced a highly regarded documentary on the life of Alexander Campbell. He produces a weekly television show, *Light from Above*, which airs locally in the Wadsworth area and globally on the Gospel Broadcasting Network. He has produced videos of *Bible Readings and Hymns* for GBN and for anyone who would like to just listen to the text of the Bible and enjoy some good singing. David is active in blogging in *The Bully Pulpit* and in much writing, including frequent book reviews published in the *West Virginia Christian*. He is called upon to speak at lectureships near and far. Frankly, the amount of work he accomplishes is amazing.

David has always been and continues to be a big help to the West Virginia School of Preaching. Each year, our second-year students have the opportunity to be introduced to television work through David's assistance. He interviews each student for one *Light from Above* show and has them preach a sermon for another. David frequently helps with our Future Preacher Training Camp. He is a supporter of us in many ways.

To David and Annette, we lovingly and gratefully dedicate this 2017 volume of the WVSOP Victory Lectures. We appreciate you both so very, very deeply.

Andy Robison
9 Aug. 2017

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HE BRINGS LOW AND LIFTS UP

1 Samuel 2:1-10

Seth D. McIntyre

Introduction

There is a constant pressure from the world to “humanize” God—for if God is no better than man, He may be dismissed at the whim of man. Once God is reduced to the status of a man, His regulation of worship becomes no more than suggestion, to be accepted or rejected as it pleases man. Once God is reduced to the status of a man, prayer becomes an empty exercise in mundane conversation, to be engaged in, or not, on man’s terms. The church must therefore ever strive to hallow, exalt, and glorify God and to uphold and proclaim the glorious and awe-inspiring truth that “[He is] God, and not man . . .” (Hosea 11:9). [All Scripture references are from the KJV unless otherwise noted].

How we approach God in worship and in prayer is a reflection of our estimation of Him. Are worship and prayer joys to us or burdens? Are we so anxious to appear before the throne of grace that we will allow nothing to prevent it, or do we have to be dragged there? Do we thrill at every opportunity to offer up to God the things that He says please Him, or are we rather inclined to demand that He accept whatever pleases us at the moment? A study of the inspired psalms of Holy Scripture will help us to elevate God to His proper station and to keep Him there: to reverence Him as He ought to be revered, to honor Him as He ought to be honored, to render unto Him the things that ought to be rendered, to praise Him as He ought to be praised, to proclaim Him as He ought to be proclaimed, to trust Him as He ought to be trusted.

The prayer offered up by Hannah upon God’s granting of her request for a son ranks as one of the most beautiful and sublime psalms recorded in Holy Scripture. One might spend weeks, months, even years, studying, contemplating, and meditating upon its themes, phrases, and words. It is exhortation and admonition; preaching and prophecy; chastening and strengthening; bringing low and lifting up. It is a song that takes us on a journey from the

lowest depths of poverty and oppression to the greatest heights of wealth and victory, beautifully and brilliantly juxtaposing that deliverance against a far more consequential one: from the lowest depths of pride and arrogance to the greatest heights of humility and submission to God. Along the way, it teaches us to rejoice. It teaches us to hallow and glorify God. It warns us of the futility of trusting in our own feeble might, knowledge, wisdom, or power. It impresses upon us the magnificence of trusting in the supreme might, knowledge, wisdom, and power of God. It reminds us of the omniscience, omnipotence, perfect judgment, and perfect justice of the Living God. It casts down the haughty and lifts up the meek. It humbles those who trust in their own might, that it might raise them up again to trust in the might of God. A study and application of the marvelous truths of this great psalm will truly enhance our prayers and enrich our worship.

The depth and breadth of Hannah's prayer are such that a study of it might be, and doubtless has been, approached from many different perspectives, with a great diversity of objectives in mind. The psalm can be divided into seven three-line stanzas, or triplets, each illuminating a particular concept that ought to influence the nature of the prayers and worship we offer to God: three addressing attitudes and four addressing truths about God that ought to frame those attitudes. For our purposes, the objective of the study will be as stated above: what can we learn and apply that will enhance our prayers to, and enrich our worship of, the great I AM?

Triplet 1—Rejoicing (v. 1)

*My heart rejoiceth in the LORD,
Mine horn is exalted in the LORD:*

*My mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; Because I rejoice in thy
salvation.*

Hannah's words as she approaches the throne of the Great King are both beautiful and profound in their simplicity. Without fanfare or overabundance of speech, without the kind of flowery language so often used by men in the presence of dignitaries—language designed not so much to honor the latter as to puff up the former—she expresses the simple truth of her grateful and humble heart.

The Hebrew word translated *rejoiceth* is *âlats*: literally, “to jump for joy; exult” (Strong, *Hebrew Bible* 117). Her “words signify, not only inward joy, but also the outward demonstration of it” (Benson). While the choice of such a strong word is noteworthy, we must be cautious that we do not over-interpret it. Man has, through the years, exhibited a tendency towards corrupting the things of God, and corruption has often been driven by a desire for greater expression of emotion in worship. Hannah did not say, “I jump for joy,” but, “My heart jumps for joy.” There is a difference between the two expressions.

McClish observes that “[one] of the building blocks of liberalism, whether social, political, or religious, is unbridled emotionalism.” He goes on to note that while emotions “are powerful for good if we control them with our God-given minds in harmony with the Word of God . . . [they] are a powerfully destructive force if we lay aside our rational powers and let them control us. The danger lies not in the emotions, but in emotionalism.” A rejoicing heart may be and must be outwardly evidenced by things more appropriate, meaningful, useful, and effective than unfettered emotion. Does not a cheerful disposition do more to sow lasting good than an outburst of emotion? Such is the product of a rejoicing heart. “A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken” (Prov. 15:13). Rather than emotionalism, the declaration of the works of God ought to be the outward display of a rejoicing heart (Psalm 107:22). Indeed, His testimonies *are* the rejoicing of the heart (119:111).

It is the soul, the spirit, the inner man, “the centre . . . of the moral and intellectual life” (Smith 26)—the heart—that exults in God’s mercy, goodness, faithfulness, and deliverance; and while “praise is comely for the upright” (Psalm 33:1), unrestrained emotion and emotionalism are unseemly and inappropriate. The Lord Jesus said:

And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast

shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. (Matt. 6:5-6)

In the Old Testament, proper reverence for and restraint before God is indicated in these terms: “But the Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him” (Hab. 2:20). How much more ought reverent silence to characterize the assembly of the church, the true temple of the living God (2 Cor. 6:16)? Paul by inspiration admonished the Corinthian Christians, and by extension us, to maintain a proper decorum in the assembly, summarized in the instruction, “Let all things be done decently” (*euschémonós* “in a seemly manner; becomingly” [Thayer 262]; “decorously” [Strong, *Greek/New Testament* 43]) “and in order” (*taxis* “according to an arrangement; in order, i.e. a fixed succession observing also a fixed time; in due or right order; in an orderly condition” [Thayer 614]; 1 Cor. 14:40).

The heart ought always to rejoice in the Lord (Philip. 4:4), and joy should perhaps be especially expressed in prayer and worship when we undertake most deliberately and intentionally to present ourselves before the throne of the Majesty on high. Hannah’s rejoicing was “not a mere selfish delight” in having been delivered, but “joy in God” who delivered her (Smith 28). To bow before the great I AM; to know as we do so that He commands it, that He commands it because He desires it, and that He desires it because He wants our greatest good; to realize that God Himself knows us individually, loves us individually, and desires our fellowship individually; to contemplate as we approach Him all that He has done for us, all that He has given to us, and all that He does for us in Christ; these realizations ought to inspire rejoicing of the highest order from the deepest wellsprings of our souls.

As she approaches the Almighty, Hannah acknowledges that it is in Him that her strength, glory, and triumph over adversity are lifted to their pinnacles. He is the source of all blessings, the giver of “every good gift and every perfect gift” (James 1:17). As horn, “the symbol of strength and vigour” (Smith 26), crowns the head of the wild ox with strength, power, and glory, and as the oil of anointing soothes and refreshes the body (Psalm 92:10), so God had crowned her with victory in the granting of her petition and

refreshed her spirit with joy in His expression of tender mercy.

The gladness of heart occasioned by God's deliverance from affliction caused Hannah to lift her voice in praise. One can picture a scene in which even the din of the scornful cries of a brash enemy is overwhelmed by the triumphant praise of the humble beneficiary of the might of the arm of God. It is good and right that the saved of God express thanksgiving and praise verbally in prayer (as here) and song (2 Sam. 22:50; Psalm 18:49). In just these three simple phrases, God, through Hannah, gives us example and instruction for prayer and worship to occupy a lifetime of study, meditation, and practice. There is scarcely found a better example than Hannah of the practical application of the inspired instruction given by James: "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms" (5:13).

The meditations of Hannah's heart and the words of her mouth turn next to an acknowledgement and expression of God's holiness, exemplifying the application of the model later set forth by our Lord: ". . . Hallowed be thy name" (Matt. 6:9).

Triplet 2—Reverence (v. 2)

*There is none holy as the LORD:
For there is none beside thee:
Neither is there any rock like our God.*

God expects and commands His people to be holy as and because He is holy (Lev. 11:44; 1 Peter 1:15-16). Nevertheless, try as we might, the creature can never fully attain unto the holiness of the Creator. Only God "is essentially, originally, independently . . . and immutably holy" (Gill). He alone is "perfectly, unchangeably, and constantly holy" (Benson). Our prayers and our worship must be founded upon a realization and acknowledgement of the supreme and sublime holiness of God. Any holiness we might achieve is but a child's imitation of Him whose ways and thoughts are higher than our ways and thoughts, "as the heavens are higher than the earth" (Isa. 55:9). To remember this reality is to render to Him the awe, reverence, and respect due Him (Psalm 4:4; 33:8; Eccles. 12:13) and strive toward "perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1).

Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be
Seth D. McIntyre

more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.

Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few. (Eccles. 5:1-2)

Hannah's expressions of reverence in these three phrases are arranged around the singularity and exclusivity of God. He alone is holy because He alone is God. Only He is "supremely excellent," "morally perfect," and "absolutely existent" (Smith 32). Man may make, and has made, "gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone," but they "see not, nor hear, nor know" (Dan. 5:23). He may "make gods unto himself," but "they are no gods" (Jer. 16:20). He may devise his own doctrines and his own religious hierarchies, and set up complex systems of what he calls *priests*, but such are "priest[s] of them that are no gods" (2 Chron. 13:9).

Hosea pled with Israel to return to the true and living God—to come to the realization that "Asshur shall not save us," and that it was only in Jehovah that "the fatherless findeth mercy" (14:3). When in the days of the judges Israel repeatedly forsook God for the idols of the nations around them, God eventually reached such a point of exasperation that He responded to their pleas for deliverance with this answer: "Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation" (Judg. 10:14). Israel did not do as God suggested on that occasion, because those gods could not deliver them. Because deity is the exclusive domain of God, to be the One to whom prayer and worship are directed is His exclusive prerogative—which gives Him the exclusive right to regulate both.

Hannah's final expression in this section of her psalm addresses the singular nature of God's protective, defensive, and redemptive power. *Rock* is a term found often in the psalms, applied to God to convey the unassailable strength of His might. In just one psalm, Psalm 18, David applies that term and many others to convey a similar idea: *fortress, deliverer, the God of my rock, my strength, shield, buckler, the horn of my salvation, high tower, refuge, saviour, my stay, my power, the rock of my salvation, and a tower of salvation.*

We ought to be resolved to spend the rest of our lives studying

to understand better, appreciate more fully, and trust in more completely the matchless power of our God, who not only has wrought “so great salvation” in Christ (Heb. 2:3) and “delivered us from so great a death” (2 Cor. 1:10), but who has proven Himself able and faithful time and time again to “provide the way of escape” from temptation (1 Cor. 10:13) and deliver us from “the sin which doth so easily beset us” (Heb. 12:1). When we are so resolved, our prayers and our worship will be characterized by the reverence, humility, and thanksgiving of Hannah’s psalm.

The next four triplets constitute the main body of the psalm and the thrust of Hannah’s prayer, encapsulated in the grand theme “he bringeth low, and lifteth up” (v. 7).

Triplet 3—Humility (v. 3)

Talk no more so exceeding proudly;

Let not arrogance come out of your mouth:

For the LORD is a God of knowledge, And by him actions are weighed.

That God casts down the haughty and exalts the humble is taught abundantly both here and elsewhere in Scripture. The proud are brought low (Job 40:12; Prov. 29:23). Those who dwell on high are brought down (Isa. 26:5). Pride and haughtiness are the precursors of destruction and downfall (Prov. 16:18).

Inasmuch as “those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart” (Matt. 15:18), our ears ought to be attuned to our own speech. Do we listen to ourselves? Do we monitor our words? Or are we so wrapped up in being heard that we have no awareness of the outputs of our own tongues? If speech is an indicator of the condition of the heart (and it is), and if our desire and goal is a pure heart (and it ought to be), should we not be taking regular readings of the speech gauge?

There is, perhaps, a subtlety embedded in the word *talk* here that is not immediately evident. The root Hebrew word is unclear, but it seems to have originated with the idea of “arranging”—in this case, presumably, arranging thoughts and ideas into words for the purpose of communication. The actual Hebrew word used conveys notions of answering, appointing, bidding, commanding, communing, *Seth D. McIntyre*

declaring, naming, promising, pronouncing, rehearsing, saying, speaking, talking, teaching, telling, thinking, entreating, and uttering (Strong, *Hebrew Bible* 37).

It is interesting that, with the exception of *entreating*, these synonyms make no reference to asking, inquiring, or beseeching. There may be many things about which we know much, and it may be appropriate from time to time for us to convey such knowledge verbally. But when it comes to God and the things of God, we know no more than He has revealed to us—and there are many “secret things” that He has not revealed (Deut. 29:29). It is a mark of haughtiness, even among men, to be ever declaring and never asking. It is the height of arrogance to so position ourselves and so cultivate our hearts that our communication with God is all declaration, demand, and rehearsal, and no praise, genuine thanksgiving, or humble petition.

When we approach God, are we seeking to talk with Him, or are we “giving Him a talking to”? Remember the Pharisee who “stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.” Remember the publican, who, “standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.” Remember which man “went down to his house justified” (Luke 18:11-13).

God is perfect in knowledge and therefore perfect in judgment. There is no word spoken, action performed, work undertaken, or invention imagined but that God knows the thought and intent of the heart behind it (Heb. 4:12). Consequently, proud talk and arrogant speech are foolishness and vanity. Because God’s estimation of our words and deeds is perfect, and because His standard by which those things are regulated is perfect, His application of justice according to that standard is perfect.

Triplet 4—Justice (vv. 4-5)

*The bows of the mighty men are broken, And they that stumbled
are girded with strength.*

They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; And they

*that were hungry ceased:
So that the barren hath born seven; And she that hath many
children is waxed feeble.*

That God Himself gives strength to the weak, fills up the hungry, and blesses the barren with abundance is evidence that there is nothing inherently sinful in being mighty, full, or fertile. God looks upon the heart (1 Sam. 16:7). It is those whose hearts are corrupted by the pride and arrogance just warned against—who trust in, honor, and praise themselves and glory in the self-assessment of their positions—that fall into condemnation. It is to those who, without thought for God, improperly attribute the blessings of God to their own wisdom and power, and who use those blessings to oppress the weak and afflicted, that the corrective rod of God’s judgment and justice is applied.

Conversely, it is the weak, oppressed, and afflicted that God lifts up. It ought to be no mystery to man, for God has always demonstrated justice, tenderness, and mercy, and He has always demanded that man, to the extent of his God-given capacity, do the same. “Learn to do well;” He told Israel of old, “seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow” (Isa. 1:17). “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Micah 6:8). Psalm 119:75-81 comments well upon the character demonstrated by Hannah as she patiently and faithfully relied on God for the deliverance for which she praises Him in her prayer:

I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right, and that thou
in faithfulness hast afflicted me.

Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort,
according to thy word unto thy servant.

Let thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live: for thy
law is my delight.

Let the proud be ashamed; for they dealt perversely with me
without a cause: but I will meditate in thy precepts.

Let those that fear thee turn unto me, and those that have
known thy testimonies.

Let my heart be sound in thy statutes; that I be not ashamed.

My soul fainteth for thy salvation: but I hope in thy word.

Triplet 5—Redemption (vv. 6-8a)

The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.

The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: He bringeth low, and lifteth up.

He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, And lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, To set them among princes, And to make them inherit the throne of glory:

The great truths expressed thus far in Hannah’s psalm, coupled with her beautiful example of an appropriate attitude in approaching Him, bring us to this pivotal point in the prayer. God’s abasing the high and exalting the low has been well established with regard to His care for the righteous oppressed by the wicked. It has been demonstrated that no man is so high that he can withstand, or so low that he cannot be elevated by, God’s justice. Smith notes that one “ancient philosopher” went so far as to say, “God does nothing else but humble the proud and exalt the lowly” (33).

There is, however, an application beyond the physical that we ought to consider—one that should further regulate our prayers and our worship. The next section of the psalm speaks to a broader, more substantial, and more important application—the spiritual application. The construction of triplet 5 is exquisite. Notice how each item in the second half of each line answers to the corresponding item in the first half:

- “bringeth down to the grave” to “killeth” (v. 6)
- “bringeth up” to “maketh alive” (v. 6)
- “bringeth low” to “maketh poor” (v. 7)
- “lifteth up” to “maketh rich” (v. 7)

Notice how in each of the first two lines the negative precedes the positive: killed, then made alive; brought low, then lifted up. Then, contemplate the stunning language of the third line. There is no negative action—these subjects have already been brought low—but the positive action is “exceedingly, abundantly above” (Eph. 3:20) what might have been expected for the succor of those

individuals. The poor man is not simply “raised up out of the dust,” but is exalted to a place “among princes.” The beggar is not just lifted up “from the dunghill,” but is made an heir of “the throne of glory” (v. 8).

God does not bring the proud one low simply for the sake of bringing him low. He does not do it simply to assert His supremacy or to satisfy His own ego. He does not even do it solely and exclusively to succor His saints. God always desires the highest good for men—even wicked men. He is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). In every bringing low, then, there exists the seed of exaltation—for one who would be lifted up in God’s sight must first be humbled and abased in his own eyes.

Who is made spiritually alive that does not first die to self and sin? Only the power of God can accomplish that, and that power is the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:16). When by that gospel we who were dead in sin die to sin, God makes us alive in Christ (Rom. 6; 8:10; Eph. 2:1-5; Col. 2:13; 1 Peter 2:24). Smith puts it this way:

In the . . . soul saved by Christ, forces of evil once strong and self-satisfied . . . are brought low, enfeebled, made conscious of their impotence, and finally killed; while the poor, faint, struggling spirit of love and faith is, when once “made alive,” girded with strength, satisfied with good, and made finally dominant over the entire nature. (30)

Thus, the Lord both kills and makes alive; He both brings down to the grave and brings up alive again. Who is made rich in the things of God that does not first become poor in spirit toward God and in attitude toward the riches of this world? “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3). As Moses “[esteemed] the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt . . .” (Heb. 11:26), so man is called upon to “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 . . .” (Matt. 6:19-20).

Again, only by the gospel is such accomplished. “Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich
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in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?” (James 2:5).

. . . But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. (1 Cor. 1:27-31)

There is an interesting phrase in Psalm 18: “thy gentleness hath made me great” (v. 35). The word translated *gentleness* there means first “humility or meekness,” then “condescension” (Brown 776). Certainly it is by God’s condescension that we have any hope of being brought “up higher” (Luke 14:10). Is it not also true, however, that it is only by the meekness and humility engendered by God through His gospel that we have that same hope? His “strength is made perfect in weakness,” and it is when we are weak that God makes us strong (2 Cor. 12:9-10). Therefore, the Lord makes poor and makes rich; He brings low and lifts up. Through the gospel of Christ, God gently lifts the poor in spirit up out of the dust of hopelessness, and mercifully lifts the one enslaved by the “weak and beggarly elements” of the world (Gal. 4:9) from the dunghill of sin and death, and exalts them to the place of princes—to “the adoption of sons” (4:5; Eph. 1:5); to “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ . . .” (Rom. 8:17); “to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven . . .” (1 Peter 1:4).

Triplet 6—Authority (vv. 8b-10a)

For the pillars of the earth are the LORD’s, And he hath set the world upon them.

He will keep the feet of his saints, And the wicked shall be silent in darkness; For by strength shall no man prevail.

The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; Out of heaven shall he thunder upon them:

The sixth triplet recaps the plight and fate of the wicked in contrast to the faithful: the silent darkness of the place of the wicked (Matt. 25:30) versus the glory of the inheritance of the saints; the fruitlessness of their strength that allows them to be broken to pieces versus the strength of God, by which the righteous are kept and guarded. God is the Author of creation. “The earth is the LORD’s, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein” (Psalm 24:1). He has both the power and the right to order it as He sees fit. He has the power to keep His saints and to judge the wicked.

Note that “no man” shall prevail by strength (v. 9). The godless cannot by their strength stand against God. Likewise, the saints cannot by their own strength keep themselves against the wicked. All men are completely at the mercy of God. For the adversary of God, that means he will be broken to pieces—not could be, not might be, but will be. That is God’s judgment, and that is why it is imperative “that the wicked turn from his way and live,” for God has “no pleasure in the death of the wicked . . .” (Ezek. 33:11).

For the righteous, however, it means that God will keep his feet (v. 9)—that He will “guard [his] steps, [his] earthly course” (Smith 27), preserve and protect him. God is “for us” rather than “against us” (Rom. 8:31). Rather than silent darkness, we have “life and immortality” (2 Tim. 1:10); fellowship with God, Christ, and one another in the light of the gospel (1 John 1:7); and “the confidence . . . that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us . . .” (5:14). If the recognition of these blessings does not flavor and season our prayers and our worship and attune us to appropriate humility, praise, adoration, reverence, and gratitude, then we seriously misapprehend God’s “unspeakable gift” (2 Cor. 9:15).

Triplet 7—Judgment (v. 10b)

*The LORD shall judge the ends of the earth;
And he shall give strength unto his king,
And exalt the horn of his anointed.*

Hannah’s song ends with an affirmation of the certainty and completeness of God’s judgment, which will be accomplished by the King to whom He gives strength—the Anointed whose horn He exalts. The whole of the psalm rings with the echo of prophesy, and
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although we have approached it from a different angle for this study, we must touch on it here; for in the end, all that has been said herein is briefly comprehended in Christ and His glorious Gospel. It is Jesus Christ whom God exalted over His enemies (Psalm 2:2; Acts 4:26), whom He lifted from the dust of rejection and humiliation (Isa. 53:8; Acts 8:33), whom He raised victorious from the grave (Rom. 6:4; Eph. 1:20; 1 Peter 1:21), whom He “exalted . . . to be a Prince and a Saviour . . .” (Acts 5:31), to whom He gave a throne (Psalm 2:6; Heb. 1:8; 8:1), and by whom He will judge the quick and the dead (Acts 17:31; 2 Tim. 4:1; 1 Peter 4:5).

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philip. 2:5-11)

It is in Christ alone, and only in Christ, that one realizes all the blessings of this psalm and every other spiritual blessing that flows from the throne of God, for by inspiration Paul wrote, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ . . .” (Eph. 1:3). A study of Hannah’s psalm should lead us to examine and, where necessary, correct the propriety with which we approach God in prayer and worship: the joy, reverence, and humility we express in answer to the mercy, holiness, power, wisdom, and faithfulness (Smith 29) with which He exercises His supreme authority, executes His flawless judgment and perfect justice, and accomplishes His magnificent salvation.

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Biographical Sketch

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MY GOD, MY PRAYERS AND MY WORSHIP

Psalm 28

Aaron N. Burch

Introduction

Why should we praise God? The psalmist provides at least one answer to this question in Psalm 28. This psalm is primarily a psalm of praise but contains elements of supplication, thanksgiving, exhortation, and imprecation, as well. Cloer designates it as a “lament psalm” (368). Externally, we know nothing about the exact background of this psalm. Even the superscription simply suggests that the passage is a “Psalm of David.” From the text, however, we can deduce that the psalm resulted from an occasion in the psalmist’s life when God had answered some particular plea for help. Because of God’s answer, the psalmist subsequently “will praise Him” (v. 7). [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted]. Specifically, though, we know nothing else about this psalm’s background. If David is the author, the psalm might fit any number of events in his life, including perhaps Absalom’s rebellion (Delitzsch 362), but, again, this remains uncertain.

Naturally, the psalm divides itself into two sections (Delitzsch 362): (1) supplication (vv. 1-5) and (2) declaration (vv. 6-9). In the first section, the author uses six petitionary imperatives to call passionately upon the Lord to hear his pleas. In the second section, he turns primarily to affirmative statements about God, God’s response, and his praise of God, although in the final verse he returns to four petitionary imperatives in order to ask God to bless and protect his people, a common theme and conclusion in several psalms (51:18-19; 122:6-9; 125:5; 128:6, etc.).

In this psalm, the poet explains why he will praise God and, implicitly, at least one reason why we ought to praise God, too. At the same time, he expresses some important spiritual concepts concerning his relationship with God and the consequent impact upon his prayers and worship.

The Cry to Hear (vv. 1-5)

The inspired poet begins Psalm 28 with the assertion, “To You I will cry, O LORD my Rock. . .” (v. 1). In this opening statement, the psalmist emphasizes the direction of his pleas. He does this in two ways: (1) he places the indirect object, *To You*, at the beginning of the sentence and (2) he addresses God with three terms (*You*, *Lord*, and *Rock*) in this very short sentence (in Hebrew, the whole sentence consists of only five words). He does not call upon one of the Baals, some idol, Molech, or any other false god. Instead, he directs his pleas to the living and true God. Centuries later, Jesus would similarly teach His disciples to direct their prayers to “Our Father in heaven” (Matt. 6:9). Although it is politically incorrect these days to say so, we, in our time, must not pray to Allah, Buddha, the dead, or any other thing. In fact, to pray to anyone or anything other than the living God is the epitome of folly. They cannot hear; they cannot answer (1 Kings 18:26). Only the God of the Bible can be our “Rock,” our “protection, safety, and refuge” (Koehler et al. 1017). And, consequently, only He is worthy of our prayers and pleas.

The Cry

Following his introductory assertion, the psalmist enunciates his plea. In particular, he desperately wants God to hear and answer his prayers. Perhaps nothing is more difficult and disconcerting for the believer than for God to appear to be silent as the believer faces some sort of trial. Long ago, Job bemoaned: “I cry out to You, but You do not answer me . . .” (30:20). Later, he would cry again, “Oh, that the Almighty would answer me . . .” (31:35). Not wanting to find himself in such a situation, the psalmist pleads with God to hear his prayers.

The Comparison

Specifically, the author cries, “. . . Do not be silent to me . . .,” (v. 1) and, “Hear” (v. 2). The writer fears God’s silence. He compares it to “go[ing] down into the pit” (v. 1). The *pit* is a euphemism for “the grave or the realm of the dead” (Koehler 116; NET). In other words, the psalmist pictures God’s silence as the equivalent of his own death. He cannot bear God’s silence.

The Contrast

In addition to asking God to hear him, the psalmist also requests that God “not take [him] away” (v. 3). To *take away* (*mashak*) is a strong term, meaning to “seize, carry off” or “pull, drag” (Koehler 645). According to the psalmist, God takes away the “wicked” (v. 3), that is, those who practice “iniquity” and “wickedness” (v. 4). The individuals the author has in mind are two-faced, duplicitous hypocrites. They speak kindly but devise “evil” against their “neighbor” (v. 3), something God especially hates (cf. Zech. 8:17). Moreover, they wantonly violate God’s will, for the Law specifically commanded the people to “love your neighbor as yourself . . .” (Lev. 19:18). The author also describes them as those who “do not regard the works of the LORD . . .” (v. 5). In other words, they do not think about who God is, what he does, and what he is capable of doing. If they did think about God and His nature, they would no longer live in sin, for they would realize that God is just and holy. They would repent and practice God’s will (cf. Job 34:27-28). But, since they will not contemplate God and thus will not repent, they will suffer God’s righteous punishment. They will be “destroy[ed]” (v. 5).

The psalmist does not want to suffer that same fate. He does not want to be taken away (v. 3) and destroyed (v. 5). He has considered God. He knows God’s just and holy nature. And, therefore, he pleads with God to hear him. We, too, should contemplate God’s nature (cf. Rom. 11:22). Those who forget God or remove Him from their thoughts are destined to sin (cf. 1:28). The more we think about and understand God, the more we will learn to fear and obey Him!

Perhaps, the suggestion exists as well in these verses that the author has committed some sin and desires God’s forgiveness. If so, he apparently knows that he has done wrong and seeks reconciliation. The clause “. . . When I lift up my hands toward Your holy sanctuary” (v. 2) may point in this direction as well. The Old Testament “sanctuary,” of course, was Solomon’s Temple. *Sanctuary*, here, especially refers to the Most Holy Place (Delitzsch 364). At the dedication of the Temple, Solomon had asked God:

Yet regard the prayer of Your servant and his supplication,
O LORD my God, and listen to the cry and the prayer which
Your servant is praying before You today: that Your eyes

may be open toward this temple night and day, toward the place of which You said, “My name shall be there,” that You may hear the prayer which Your servant makes toward this place. And may You hear the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. Hear in heaven Your dwelling place; and when You hear, forgive. (1 Kings 8:28-30)

Without forgiveness, the author would certainly face a grave situation. Nonetheless, he is not like the wicked. Unlike them, he cries to God (vv. 1-2). Unlike them, he acknowledges God and His works (v. 5). And, unlike them, he does not live in sin (vv. 3-4). Certainly, they “deserve” punishment (v. 4), but the psalmist does not. Further, because of his lifestyle, he has the confidence that God hears his prayers.

In the author’s statements in vv. 3-5, he implies an important fact about prayer, namely, that how we live affects our prayers. James would say it this way: “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (5:16). In the converse, the prophet Isaiah wrote: “Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, That it cannot save, Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. But, your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face far from you, So that He will not hear” (59:1-2). In other words, we should not expect God to hear our prayers if we live in wickedness (cf. 1 Peter 3:7-12). However, if we live righteously, we can live in the confidence that God hears us and will answer appropriately (1 John 5:14). God’s response to our prayers is directly related to our godliness or lack thereof.

The Cause for Praise (vv. 6-7)

In verse 6, the psalmist states: “Blessed be the LORD, Because He has heard the voice of my supplications!” According to the poet, his earnest plea of verses 1-5 has been answered. God has heard him. God has answered his prayers. Now, because God has answered his pleas, he in turn will praise God.

The Praise

The phrase “Blessed be the LORD . . .” (v. 6) is a statement of praise. That does not mean, however, that we bless God like He

blesses us. God, of course, blesses us by giving us life, salvation, and all things physical and spiritual. We certainly do not bless God in that way. The “blessing” we offer God is praise and worship. In Psalm 34:1, the writer says: “I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth.” The parallelism of the verse correlates *bless* and *praise*. For humans, to bless God is to praise God!

The Position

As well as blessing the Lord, the psalmist exalts Him. God is his “strength” and “shield” (v. 7). “[S]trength” (*‘az*) is a place of “refuge” and “protection” (Koehler 806). The term does not denote strength in the sense of the fortitude or endurance one needs to continue or strength in the sense of the power or ability to do something as much as it denotes strength in the sense of a position of safety, a safe haven. The term *shield* (*manen*) has the same nuance in this passage— God is his “protection” (Koehler 545). Because the psalmist “trusted” in God as his protection, rather than trusting in himself or false gods, he has been “helped” (v. 7). God has answered his pleas and has taken care of him.

Again, the psalmist implies an important fact about the effectiveness of our prayer. God will not share our allegiance (cf. Matt. 6:24). The psalmist trusted in God alone. God was his protection. He did not trust in wickedness. He did not trust in himself. He did not trust in wealth or physical strength. He trusted God! If we trust in anyone or anything other than God, we should not expect help from God. After ancient Israel had turned to idols and false gods, God said to them: “[Y]ou have forsaken Me and served other gods. Therefore I will deliver you no more. Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in your time of distress” (Judges 10:13-14; cf. Jer. 2:26-28). God expects us to serve and seek Him alone!

The Promise

Verse 7 concludes with a promise: “with my song I will praise Him.” Since God answered the psalmist’s pleas, he vows to praise Him. He promises to worship Him.

Certainly, God deserves our praise for everything. He deserves
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our praise simply as the Almighty (Psalm 113). He deserves our praise as the Creator. He deserves our praise as the Sustainer (119:90). He deserves our praise as the Giving God (James 1:17). He deserves our praise as the Redeemer and Savior and for so many other reasons. But, lest we forget, He also deserves our praise and worship because He answers our prayers. Even Jesus praised God for answered prayers. Before He raised Lazarus from the dead, He said: “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me” (John 11:41). How often though do we forget to thank and praise God for His response? Perhaps, we have some earnest plea, some desperate concern, that drives us to our knees, but when the storm has passed, we forget the Lord. Not the psalmist, though! He would not forget. He would remember and praise the Lord. When God hears our prayers, we too should respond with thanksgiving and praise. In fact, our worship of God ought to be directly related to who He is and what He does and has done for us. Answered prayers ought to drive us to worship.

The Confidence from God (vv. 8-9)

While praise and thanksgiving are certainly proper responses to answered prayers, they are not and should not be the only results. Recognizing that God answers His people’s prayers ought to develop our confidence in Him and in His concern for us.

The psalmist expresses his confidence in God in two ways. First, he declares that God is “their strength” and “the saving refuge of His anointed” (v. 8). *Their* presumably refers to Israel, and *strength* is the same term the psalmist used in reference to himself in verse 7. God is Israel’s place of protection. “[S]aving refuge” (*ma’oz*) refers to a “mountain stronghold, refuge” or “fortress” (Koehler 610), again emphasizing a place of protection. *Anointed* is the Hebrew term *meshiach*, from which we get the word *Messiah*. It is the equivalent of *Christ* in the New Testament (cf. John 1:41; 4:25). Possibly, then, the passage is Messianic, and the term would thus refer to Jesus. Certainly, God was Jesus’ “saving refuge” (v. 8). It might also be a reference to the Davidic king of Judah, who was also God’s “anointed” (cf. Psalm 18:50; 2 Sam. 23:1; 2 Kings 9:3). But the parallelism of *their* and *anointed* suggests that the psalmist is referring to the nation of Israel. Additionally, the psalmist’s requests

in verse 9 are all in regard to Israel. The nation, of course, was God's special chosen people (Exod. 19:5-6; Deut. 7:6) and was, in a sense, His "anointed" people (v. 8). Whichever way, the psalmist clearly asserts that God is the anointed's protection.

Second, the psalmist expresses his confidence in God by appealing to Him again, not for himself this time, but for his people. In verse 9, he makes four requests: "save," "bless," "shepherd," and "bear up." The psalmist desires that God take care of His people, protect them, and "exalt" (Koehler 726) them "forever" (v. 9).

Like the psalmist, we should be concerned and pray for God's people, but, perhaps even more importantly, in this text, we need to notice that the psalmist's confidence in God's care and his confidence to approach God with his concerns about his people came directly from his past experiences. Because God answered his prayers in the past, the author believes that He will in the future, too! In one sense, his confidence came from God. God answered his prayers, and now he is confident God will answer. Past answered prayers should build our confidence in God, His care, and the effectiveness of praying to Him. From time to time, we need to stop and contemplate what God has done for us, be thankful and worshipful for His help, and be confident to approach Him in the future. As well, we should look to the Scriptures and see how God answered the prayers of His saints like Elijah (1 Kings 17:1; 18:1; James 5:17-18) and others and grow in our confidence that He hears us, too.

Conclusion

As the psalmist reveals, when it comes to God, our prayers, and our worship, an interconnected relationship exists. Our trust in God should compel us to pray, His answers should compel us to worship and to grow more in trust, and our growing trust should compel us to pray again!

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Biographical Sketch

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THE NEED IN THE CHURCH FOR ENHANCING PRAYERS AND ENRICHING WORSHIP

Matt Cook

While writing this manuscript, I have four different screens at my fingertips, providing a plethora of potential distractions. The blessing and curse of abundantly available technology has made its way into the church; while listening to a sermon, the “average” millennial has a smart phone in his pocket, potentially a tablet with a Bible app in his hand, and his eyes fixed on the projector screen, following the message. While these are each helpful tools, animated PowerPoint presentations and phones vibrating at the incessant barrage of emails provide constant potential distractions for even the most focused worshipper. For those who struggle to focus during public worship or private prayer time, a postmodern worldview only complicates the matter. Hiebert, in his insightful chapter on postmodernity, writes, “The great evil in postmodernity is boredom. Entertainment provides us meaning in an otherwise meaningless world. It gives us temporary, often intense, experience that alleviates anxious boredom, our implacable enemy. Entertainment has become our new religion” (25). Because we are so eager to be entertained and the opportunity to mindlessly scroll through social media is constantly at our fingertips, respectful worship and quiet personal prayer time are equated with this postmodernity’s enemy: boredom. In addition to these readily available distractions, if one desires an entertaining worship experience, such experiences are easily accessible, both in person and digitally.

In light of our culture’s consistently distracted state of mind, the need for an emphasis on enhancing the prayer and worship life of both the church and individual is obvious. But, on a deeper level, why is such an emphasis necessary? This article proposes that the church must carefully consider how to enhance its prayers and enrich its worship for two reasons, the first of which is primary: *because God deserves it and people need it*. The following will provide three reasons that God deserves enhanced prayer and

enriched worship and three reasons that people need enhanced prayer and enriched worship. Again, why does the church need the theme of this lectureship? *Because God deserves it and people need it.*

God Deserves Enhanced Prayers and Enriched Worship

God deserves enhanced prayers and enriched worship because of who He is and what He expects, because of His glory, and because of what He is capable of.

Because of Who God Is and What He Expects

While God is beyond our comprehension and His ways are higher than our ways (Isa. 55:8-9), He has revealed Himself both in nature (Rom. 1:20) and in the written Word. Scripture reveals the characteristics of the incomprehensible Creator of all things. He is Spirit (John 4:24), which points us to the non-physical and invisible nature (1 Tim. 1:7; Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 6:16) of God. Further, God is self-existent, which reminds us that God was neither created nor dependent on anyone or anything. When Moses asks God how to respond to the Israelites when they ask Moses who sent him, God says to Moses, “‘I AM WHO I AM.’” And He said, “‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (Exod. 3:14). [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] God tells Moses and us the most basic fact about Himself. He is. He simply is. His existence does not depend on anyone or anything else. In the New Testament, God is described as incorruptible (Rom. 1:23), the One who alone has immortality (1 Tim. 6:16), the One who has life in Himself (John 5:26), and One that is not served by human hands, as if He needed anything (Acts 17:24). Additionally, to add to the vexing nature of God, He is both one (Deut. 6:4) *and* three. While no verse explicitly refers to God as *three* or as *trinity*, the New Testament presents the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each as God, yet as separate entities (Matt. 3:16-17; 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 2:17-18). Connected closely to His self-existence, God is also described in Scripture as eternal (Psalm 93:2; Isa. 40:28; 57:15; Rom. 16:27). He is perfectly righteous and just in all of His ways (Psalm 11:7; 129:4; 145:17). God’s righteousness has been described well by Jack Cottrell:

That God is righteous means that all his actions conform perfectly to the proper standard or norm. What is this norm? It is not external to himself, but consists of his own eternally perfect nature. Thus divine righteousness is that consistency or constancy in God by which all his actions are faithful to the eternally perfect norm of his own nature. (77)

In relation to His creation, He is transcendent (Psalms 8:1-4; 95:3-4), sovereign (Psalm 47:2; 97:9; 103:19), omnipotent (Psalm 115:3; Eph. 3:20), omnipresent (Psalm 139:7-10; John 4:21, 24; Acts 17:24), omniscient (Psalm 147:5; Rom. 11:33; 1 John 3:20), and perfectly good (Exod. 33:19; Psalm 25:8; 100:7; 119:68). In relation to human beings specifically, He is holy (Lev. 20:26; Psalm 25:8; 1 Peter 1:15-17; Rev. 4:8), love (Psalm 119:64; 2 Cor. 13:11; 1 John 4:8), jealous (Exod. 20:5; 34:14; Deut. 6:14-15), wrathful (Psalm 2:5; John 3:36; Rom. 1:18), merciful (2 Sam. 24:14; 2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 2:4; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 1:3), gracious (Psalm 103:8-12; Eph. 2:5-8; Titus 3:4-7), and patient (1 Tim. 1:16; 2 Pet. 3:9, 15; see Cottrell for a thorough, systematic theological study of the characteristics of God).

Only a passing glance at the characteristics of God widely opens the eyes to who God is and leaves no other response but to fall to the knees in awe at this God who is, as the song states, “beautiful beyond description, Too marvelous for words, Too wonderful for comprehension, Like nothing ever seen or heard” (Altrogge). Further, an understanding of God’s nature not only demands worship, but demands worship that is performed both in spirit and truth (John 4:24). The audience of this lectureship book takes seriously the command to worship God in truth—“according to the book.” The church must continue to emphasize this necessity because of who God is and what He has communicated to His people in Scripture. Prayer will be enhanced and worship will be enriched, as the title of this lectureship implies, when we continue to worship “in truth.”

The church also must emphasize God’s desire that His people worship Him “in spirit” (John 4:24). God not only sees our external acts of worship, but also sees our hearts and requires that our hearts be fully attuned to the external. The Psalms, in particular, often speak of the internal attitudes that should characterize worshippers

of God and accompany their worship. For example, the psalmist writes of reverential humility, “Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth” (96:9). Further, the Psalms repeatedly call for God to be worshipped joyfully (5:11; 35:27; 42:4; 47:1; 66:1-2; 81:1; 95:1; 98:4; 100:1). If a perfect and holy God calls for sincere worship that is both reverent and joyful, His worshipful creatures must carefully consider how they might balance these two internal characteristics. My own observation is that Christian worship, instead of exhibiting a healthy balance of joy and reverence, sometimes tends to lean toward one extreme or the other. Some congregations are so formal in their attempt to be reverential that a joyful smile rarely is found on the faces of its members as they sing “joyfully” to the Lord. On the other hand, some churches are so ambitious in their attempt to be joyful that it is difficult to observe reverence in the worshippers. Admittedly, God sees the heart and may see joy and reverence that is unobservable with the human eye. Still, though, local churches, their leaders, and their members must seek to worship God in spirit by fostering *both* a reverential atmosphere towards a holy God *and* a joyful atmosphere towards a God who makes significant effort to communicate His desire for such in Scripture. Both reverent *and* joyful worship is obedient worship. Because of this lack of balance that churches sometimes exhibit, the church needs the topic of this lectureship.

Because of the Glory of God

A quick search of the word *glory* in Psalms indicates over fifty occurrences that reference the “glory” of God. The previous section’s description of the characteristics of God makes a clear case for the glorious nature of God. Specifically, at least four psalms directly call the reader to give glory to God (29:1-2; 96:3, 7-8; 105:3; 115:1). Psalm 96, perhaps, is the clearest: “Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples. . . . Give to the LORD glory and strength. Give to the LORD the glory due His name . . .” (96:3, 7-8). All of Scripture is replete with calls for the follower of God to glorify Him in worship and in all that He does. John Piper argues:

God’s righteous passion and delight is to display and uphold

his infinitely valuable glory. This is not a vague theological conjecture. It flows inevitably from dozens of biblical texts that show God in the relentless pursuit of praise and honor from creation to consummation. (620)

In Isaiah 48, God describes the reason He has refined Israel:

For My name's sake I will defer My anger,
And for My praise I will restrain it from you,
So that I do not cut you off.
Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver;
I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.
For My own sake, for My own sake, I will do it;
For how should My name be profaned?
And I will not give My glory to another. (9-11)

Piper comments on this text, “What this text hammers home to us is the centrality of God in his own affections. The most passionate heart for the glorification of God is God’s heart. God’s ultimate goal is to uphold and display the glory of his name” (625). If God’s ultimate goal is that His name be glorified, His people should have the same goal. According to Paul, God “chose us” and “predestined us to adoption . . . to the praise of the glory of His grace . . .” (Eph. 1:4-6). Even in the salvation of humankind, God had the glory of His name in mind.

Not only does Scripture directly point to God’s zeal for His own glory, it repeatedly delineates the importance of humans living for His glory. We are called to let our lights shine so that others will glorify Him (Matt. 5:16), to “receive one another . . . to the glory of God” (Rom. 15:7), and to do “all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31; cf. Rom. 11:36; 1 Peter 4:11). If it is the case that the Scriptures consistently point to God’s own passion for His own glory both in His own actions and His call for humans to glorify Him, then the topic of this lectureship is of utmost importance. In an effort to worship in a way that is worthy of the glory He deserves *and* desires, the church must carefully consider a topic such as Enhancing Prayers and Enriching Worship.

Because of What God Is Capable Of

Christians believe that God is capable of answering prayers in profound ways. God is capable of healing the sick, so we pray in
Matt Cook

faith for God's answer of good health (James 5:14-15). Though we do not understand exactly how, we believe that God is capable of working in the lives of our lost family members and friends in a way that opens their hearts to the Gospel, so we pray for their open hearts (Acts 16:14). Disciples of Jesus believe that God is the source of every physical blessing, so we ask that God would supply us with our daily needs (Matt. 6:11). We believe that God is the One who gives growth to the church as we plant and water, so we diligently beg Him for the church to grow, all to His glory (1 Cor. 3:7). We believe that, "according to the power that works in us," God is "able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). Finally, we believe that God will help us in our most desperate situations, so we cry out as the psalmist does, "Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck" (69:1). If God is capable of all of this, and more, then the church needs to enhance its congregational prayer life and Christians need to enhance their individual prayer lives.

While the church seeks to improve its prayer life, it is important to note that the words themselves that are uttered are powerless. The order, complexity, beauty, ornateness, and eloquence of a Christian's prayer do not "force God's hand" and cause Him to answer. To believe that wording a prayer perfectly allows for more favorable answers from God is to turn God into a vending machine. As long as one puts in the right prayer and presses the right button, God gives what the customer seeks. God is not a game show host looking to dole out prizes to the "winners." As Christians seek to improve their prayer lives, they are not necessarily trying to improve in eloquence. In fact, the spirit of Jesus' words in Matthew 6 would indicate the opposite: "And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him" (6:7-8). Rather, Jesus models a prayer of simplicity. My studies of the world's religions have repeatedly reminded me of the same reality. Most of the religious people of the world, whether they practice a well-known world religion or a local, animistic folk religion, attempt to connect to their god (or gods, beings, spirits, etc.) through ritualistic prayers with the hope that maybe, just maybe, the being

will hear and respond favorably. Most, though, live in uncertainty and hopelessness because, regardless of their perfectly performed rituals, they are unsure if the entity to which they perform the ritual will answer. As Christians, the very simplicity with which we approach God and His willingness and promise to respond ought to motivate us to study more carefully from the Psalms as to how we might enhance our prayers. Indeed, “[t]he effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16).

The Psalms, in particular, remind us of the honesty with which we may come to God. Psalm 69, for example, records the raw words of one who suffers deeply (69:1) and is desperate physically (69:21, 29) because of his enemies (69:4, 7-12, 19-21). He begs God for deliverance (69:1) while crying out with words of imprecation against his enemies: “Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, And not be written with the righteous” (69:28). Psalm 69, and by extension all of the Psalms, teaches us that we do not have to mince words as we desperately express our sorrows and frustrations to God. The Psalms challenge us to speak honestly to God in full assurance that He is capable of helping us in our difficulties, according to His will. If He is capable of answering prayers in mighty ways (Eph. 3:20), the church needs to drink deeply from the wisdom of Psalms to enhance its prayer life.

People Need Enhanced Prayers and Enriched Worship

In review, this chapter has proposed that the church must carefully consider how to enhance its prayers and enrich its worship for two reasons, the first of which is primary: *because God deserves it and people need it*. I have argued that God deserves enhanced prayers and enriched worship because of who He is and what He expects, because of His glory, and because of what He is capable of. Secondly, though, the theme of enhanced prayers and enriched worship is important for the church because people need it. Below, this chapter suggests three reasons that enhanced prayers and enriched worship is necessary for people: (1) because the nations need our enhanced prayers, (2) because we will be more effective in reaching our culture, and (3) because we need to grow spiritually.

Because the Nations Need Our Enhanced Prayers

According to the Joshua Project, which studies the advancement of the Gospel among unreached people groups by evangelical churches (churches with a high view of Scripture, a belief in the centrality of the crucifixion and salvation exclusively in Christ alone, and a belief that the Gospel must be actively proclaimed), of the 16,835 ethnolinguistic people groups in the world, 6,945 of them are still unreached (“Global Summary”). No such statistics are kept among churches of Christ, but the number of ethnolinguistic people groups still unreached by New Testament Christianity will be significantly higher. According to the most recent statistics from Wycliffe Bible Translators, of the more than 6,900 languages in the world, only 1,442 of these languages have the entire New Testament translated and only 636 languages in the world have a complete translated Bible. Ninety-four percent of the world’s population recognizes the Coca-Cola symbol after being invented only 121 years ago, but one-third of the world’s population has still not heard the basics of the Gospel after two thousand years (“What’s”). In light of the Great Commission and the Greatest Commandments, the collective heart of the church should be broken by the hosts of those untouched by the Gospel.

In anticipation of the time when God’s kingdom would include all nations, the Psalms, likely to the surprise of some, calls all of the nations, not just Israel, to worship God (e.g., 96; 117). The emphasis on global missions in Psalm 67 is unmistakable:

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.

The psalmist calls for all of the nations and peoples of the earth to praise God and imagines a time when salvation would be known “among all nations” (67:2). In the New Testament, Jesus challenges His disciples to “make disciples of all the nations” (Matt. 28:19) and asks the seventy to “pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (Luke 10:2).

With these statistics, Psalm 67, and the words of Jesus in mind, the church must enhance its prayer life for the lost of this world. The world needs the Gospel, and it needs the church’s renewed emphasis on prayer for the lost. At stake is the salvation of the nations. While we focus our prayers on our own needs, based on the statistics above, I estimate approximately sixty thousand people pass into eternity *every* day having never heard the basics of the Gospel. For the sake of these souls, the church must enhance its prayer life. We must pray more fervently for generosity so that the necessary financial resources will be made available for world missions. We must pray for God to open the hearts of the lost. We must pray for courageous missionaries and national Christians across the globe. We must pray for eased governmental restrictions in countries where access is difficult. We must pray for the lost of our own increasingly secular nation. We must “pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (Luke 10:2). The church must enhance its prayers for the sake of the nations, “. . . That Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations” (Psalm 67:2).

Because Our Culture Needs to See Our Enriched Worship

While the church should enrich its worship because God deserves it, it should also carefully consider how to improve its worship to God because the unchurched of our communities are observing. When they happen to visit our assemblies, what do they see? Do they observe heartfelt, sincere, well-done worship services or dead, ritualistic worship that appears to be only “going through the motions”? Enriched worship is far more likely to make an impact

on our culture. Some might assume that this is referencing an “entertaining” worship experience that is unbiblical in order to better “market” the church. Such is not the case. Biblical worship is carried out both in truth *and* spirit (John 4:24). While biblical worship may be aversive to many in our culture, not all share these sentiments. For those who are receptive to the Truth, heartfelt biblical worship—enriched worship—will help to draw them to the Gospel. For the sake of these truth-seekers, the church must carefully and scripturally consider how to enrich, or improve, their public worship.

All of us have attended a worship service that was biblical and thought something like, “Wow, that was a great worship service.” What we likely mean is that it was biblical, enthusiastic, and carefully and thoughtfully planned and spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually stirring. On the other hand, many of us have likely attended a worship service that, while biblical, felt dead and ritualistic. Which would be representative of your church? Would an unchurched guest to your church, while possibly not understanding the reasons behind everything that occurred, find the worship service to be thoughtful, well-planned, energetic, and spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually stirring? Or, might the guest find the worshippers to be distracted and only “going through the motions.” Again, for the sake of clarity, we must worship “in truth” (John 4:24), or biblically, but biblical worship can also be enriched in the aforementioned ways and still be scriptural. Our desire to be scriptural is very important and God-honoring, but commenting generally about evangelicals, Howard makes this observation about a condition he calls “terminal earnestness”:

It is a condition wherein we are so desperate—so earnest—to “get things right” in the matter of spiritual affairs that we squeeze any joy completely out of our lives. . . . [I]n the Pharisees’ sincere desire to know what it meant to keep the Sabbath commandment . . . they only saw the “doing”: the rules, the regulations, the constraints. They lost any sense of joy in the keeping and remembering. (13-14)

Without being too hard on ourselves, self-examination might show that at times we may have been guilty of squeezing out the joy in our worship services. For the sake of the unchurched who visit our

assemblies, churches must carefully consider how to joyfully enrich their worship.

Further, some of these unchurched guests may be from an immigrant minority population that has never witnessed Christian worship before. According to Pew Research Center, the United States has a foreign-born population of almost fourteen percent, more than forty-four million (“Modern Immigration Wave”). While much could be (and is) said about immigration, one thing is certain. The American church has been given an unprecedented opportunity by God. The world is literally coming to us. The unreached people groups from across the globe are coming to our own back doors. God is giving us an incredible opportunity by bringing the world to us, yet we have the audacity to indicate through our rhetoric that we do not want them here. They are here. Will we take advantage of this rich opportunity God has given us? As the world comes to us, what will they see in our worship assemblies as we invite them (Do we invite them?) and they visit us? May God bless us with the wisdom to enrich our worship so that the world will see a church that is biblical and enthusiastic in its praise to Him!

Because It Aids in Individual Spiritual Growth

Much has been written over the past century on the spiritual disciplines, but a recent trend among conservative scholars is to ensure that the emphasis is on *biblical* spiritual disciplines for the purpose of growth in Christlikeness. The biblical spiritual disciplines definitively include Bible reading and study, prayer, fasting, meditation, service, stewardship, solitude, and evangelism. With these disciplines in mind, Christians are called to “[p]ursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord . . .” (Heb. 12:14). Paul exhorts Timothy to “exercise yourself toward godliness” (1 Tim. 4:7). The purpose then of any spiritual discipline or “exercise” is godliness or Christlikeness. Donald Whitney, in his work on the biblical spiritual disciplines, has written, “The only road to Christian maturity and godliness (a biblical term synonymous with Christlikeness and holiness) passes through the practice of the Spiritual Disciplines” (4). Though some practice the disciplines (often unaware of their motives) to “check off a box” or to feel as if they deserve their salvation, the motive

must be godliness or spiritual growth.

Therefore, when the church focuses on enhancing prayers and enriching worship corporately, individual members of the body will be learning to enhance their prayers and enrich their worship privately. They will learn to practice the spiritual disciplines more effectively and consequently will grow in Christian maturity and godliness, the goals of the spiritual disciplines. A lack of spiritual maturity that sometimes exists in churches elevates the need for better understanding of the “how to” of spiritual disciplines. A study of the prayerful, worshipful, and honest Psalms will challenge modern Christians in their own personal devotional life, which will lead to greater levels of Christlikeness. The church needs to enhance its prayer life and enrich its worship because it will help its members to improve their personal prayer and worship, aiding them in their own pursuit of godliness.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the need in the church to wrestle with the profound theme of this lectureship: Enhancing Prayers and Enriching Worship. While many other reasons might be listed, two major reasons have been provided. Why do we need to enhance our prayers and enrich our worship? *Because God deserves it and people need it.* As you peruse the Psalms and the content of this book, the good news is that the Psalms provide exactly what this theme indicates. A study of Psalms will enhance our prayers and enrich our worship and, as a consequence, God will receive the glory He deserves and His people will be challenged and strengthened.

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Biographical Sketch

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AT THE DAY'S BEGINNING

Psalm 5

Dale Parsley

William Vanderbloemen wrote an article in *Forbes.com* on *How Successful People Start Their Day*. In the first place, he notes that they all have a routine: “Successful people may or may not control their destiny, but to a name, they control the first hour or two of their day.” Second, they start a little earlier. “The key to a good morning routine is getting going at an hour before other people need your time.” Third, they read something positive. “[I]f the first words I read are something motivating or uplifting, there are sure to be positive ripples throughout the day.” Finally, they center on gratitude. What is interesting with this final point is that the author writes, “So I’ve learned that my first words need to be ones of gratitude. For me that means devotional time with God and giving thanks for all that I have been given.”

How people start their mornings may very well contribute to their success or lack thereof in this world. Regardless of if one is deemed successful by the world’s standards or not, as a Christian, more important than starting the day with exercise, a cup of coffee, or any of the things previously mentioned is following the example of David when he says, “My voice You shall hear in the morning, O LORD; In the morning I will direct it to You, And I will look up” (v. 3). [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.]

In regard to this psalm, Boice writes,

Psalm 5 illustrates with clarity the polarity and tension which characterize certain dimensions of the life of prayer. On the one side, there is God: on the other, evil human beings. And the thought of the psalmist alternates between these two poles. He begins by asking God to hear him, but recalls that evil persons have no place in God’s presence. He turns back to God again, expressing his desire to worship and his need of guidance, but then is reminded of the human evils of the tongue. Eventually, he concludes in confidence, praying for

protection and blessing. (44)

When in David's life this psalm was written is difficult to determine. Rawlinson notes:

With respect to the time in David's life whereto it should be assigned, there are no very distinct indications. It was not while he was in exile, for he had ready access to the house of God (verse 7); nor was it in the later years of his life, when he has no open adversaries. Perhaps "a short time before the revolt of Absalom, when David was aware of the machinations of conspirators against him under a bloodthirsty and treacherous chief" is the most probable date. (Rawlinson and Conder 30)

Righteous Servant (vv. 1-8)

David begins this psalm with a *request from the heart*:

*Give ear to my words, O LORD,
Consider my meditation.*

*Give heed to the voice of my cry,
My King and My God,
For to You I will pray.*

*My voice You shall hear in the morning, O LORD;
In the morning I will direct it to You,
And I will look up. (vv. 1-3)*

He begins with a description of *what prayer is*: a plea for God to hear his words and even his cry (vv. 1-2). The privilege in having the Ruler of the universe listen to one's voice demands that a prayer must be sincere and from the heart. If one utters the popular phrases, "God, forgive us of our sins," or "Thank you for another day of life," with little or no thought, he is doing the opposite of David's cry.

David also reveals *whom one is pray to*: "My King and my God" (v. 2). Even though David is the king over God's nation, God, in reality, is David's King! In the New Testament, prayer is pictured in a similar way. Jesus is One who understands the earthly struggles of temptation, persecution, grief, rejection, disloyalty, and death. Being the High Priest, a child of God can "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16).

Next is *when to pray*: “in the morning” (v. 3). Prayer can be done at any hour of the day. Paul commanded the church at Thessalonica to “pray without ceasing . . .” (1 Thess. 5:17). The psalmist also declared, “Evening and morning and noon I will pray, and cry aloud, And He shall hear my voice” (55:17). Mark 1:35 reveals that Jesus “in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight . . . went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.” He prayed all night before He chose the twelve apostles (Luke 6:12-13) and in the evening after He fed the multitude (Matt. 14:23).

The text does not specifically reveal how often to pray, but it is still worth mentioning: How often one prays often depends upon (1) the realization of one’s need and dependence on God, (2) an awareness of God’s blessings and gratitude for them, and (3) an understanding of His ability and power to alter the course of history by just the prayer of one righteous man (James 5:17-18).

The frequency of one’s prayer is also intertwined with any potential obstacles. God answers prayer according to His will. Not even Jesus would change that (Matt. 26:39). Why a response to a prayer is not according to one’s wishes is not always known. Both Peter and James were arrested by Herod. James was killed, but Peter was freed by an angel. That night, when Peter went to the home of Mary, some disciples were there praying (Acts 12:1-15). It is safe to assume that Peter was one of the subjects of their prayer, and previous to his death, James probably was, too. So, why did God permit James to die, but Peter to live? It is not because God loved Peter more. It is doubtful that the church prayed only for Peter. This writer believes the answer is not known. Likewise, one should not be surprised that at times there is no answer as to why God allowed something tragic or difficult to occur. A personal set of demands for God such as, “If God can hear prayer, then He should audibly respond,” or, “If God can hear prayer, then He would answer when I wanted Him to,” or even, “If God can hear my prayers, then why am I not feeling His presence?” all do not prove that prayer is of no effect.

The psalmist now *reflects on the holiness of God* (vv. 4-6). Even though holiness is not explicitly stated in the text, it is still clearly seen. The word *holiness* means, “to be consecrated . . . dedicated . . . set apart. It is removed from the realm of the command and

moved to the sphere of the sacred” (Richards 340). Charles Hodge further elaborates on this word in writing, “Holiness, on the one hand, implies entire freedom from moral evil; and, upon the other, absolute moral perfection. Freedom from impurity is the primary idea of the word. To sanctify is to cleanse; to be holy, is to be clean” (qtd. in Lanier 93)

When asked why something is either right or wrong, Christians often reply, “Because the Bible says so.” This is true in part, but the complete answer based on who God is. He is the standard of right and wrong. For instance, a reason why Christians are to be holy is not just because the Bible commands it, but because God is holy (1 Peter 1:14-16).

God’s holiness *delights not in wickedness*: “For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness . . .” (v. 4a).

Superior to the man-made gods of ancient Greece and other parts of the world, God does not approve of wrongdoing in any circumstance. Telling a lie to save one’s life is still a lie; and even though Rahab was justified by faith (Heb. 11:31; cf. Josh. 2:3-4), she was not justified in doing something that is contrary to the nature of God (Titus 1:2). Vigilante justice in bombing an abortion clinic is still an act of murder. People regularly justify sinful behaviors and lifestyle in the name of progress, personal growth, or being “spiritual.” NFL quarterback great and ESPN commentator Joe Theismann, when asked by his wife why he had an affair, replied, “God wants Joe Theismann to be happy” (Romano). Mr. Theismann and many others are sadly mistaken. More important than being happy is God’s demand to be holy.

God’s holiness *dwells not with evil*: “. . . Nor shall evil dwell with You. The boastful shall not stand in Your sight . . .” (4b-5a).

Darkness has no interest in light. Since its deeds are evil, it does not want to be exposed (John 3:19-20). The dangerous thing is being deceived into thinking one is walking in the light, but really is living in darkness. God warned through the prophet Isaiah, “When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear” (1:15). He also wrote, “Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you,

So that He will not hear” (59:1-2). Jesus bore this evil on the cross. Second Corinthians 5:21 reads, “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Perhaps this is why when Jesus was on the cross He uttered the prayer of Psalm 22:1, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

God’s holiness *despises workers of sin*: “. . . You hate all workers of iniquity. . . . The LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man” (vv. 5b, 6b).

It is not uncommon for Christians to make the statement, “Hate the sin, but love the sinner.” Yet, here in the text God hates “all workers of iniquity” (v. 5). A Calvinist may allege support from this verse of the idea that God indiscriminately chose some to be saved and others to be lost and His love is for the saved and His hatred is for the lost. Since the Bible does not contradict itself, any interpretation must be harmonized with others. It must be remembered that: (1) God loves the whole world (John 3:16), (2) God desires all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:3-4), and (3) Jesus did not die for just a select few, but tasted death for every man (Heb. 2:9). If one takes this passage at face value, then it is possible that God both loves and hates individuals at the same time, and the idea of one’s actions being separate from one’s identity is not true. When a person is identified as a drunkard, it is because he is enslaved to alcohol. If a man is labeled as a liar, it is because he probably has a habit of telling lies. What one does cannot be separated with who one is. It is possible to be disgusted with an individual on account of his actions but still at the same time desire for him to repent and turn to the Lord.

One writer notes,

God’s hatred of sin does not contradict His love, but is inseparable from it. Because “God is love,” [1 John 4:16] he must desire the happiness of his creatures. But men are created to be happy through holiness. Sin poisons the very source of human happiness; fills the world with strife, injustice, cruelty, vice, disease, want, pain, tears, death. Where would Divine love be if our Maker calmly looked upon the destruction of all that is best in his creatures, and the wholesale wreck of human happiness? (Rawlinson and

Conder 32)

God's holiness *destroys the wicked*: "You shall destroy those who speak falsehood . . ." (v. 6a).

Even though God is longsuffering in hopes of repentance (2 Peter 3:9), He has numerous ways of carrying out His justice. Sometimes, He acts within the government (Rom. 13:1-7). At other times, He providentially uses another nation to execute vengeance, as seen in the book of Habakkuk. Still, there have been a few times when God has directly intervened, as He did with Sodom and Gomorrah or the global flood of Noah. But even if one escapes the justice of God in this life, an unremorseful sinner will not escape the life to come. Jesus warned to fear the one who can kill both body and soul in hell (Matt. 10:28).

David *responds* to God's character *by going to the place of worship*: "But as for me, I will come into Your house in the multitude of Your mercy; In fear of You I will worship toward Your holy temple" (v. 7).

Two times in verse 7 is the phrase "I will," which reveals a *choice* David made. The first "I will" is about *why* David made the decision to worship God. There is a sense in which one could say that worship is an obligation (Heb. 10:25). Steve Higginbotham once wrote a short article titled "Do I Have to Go to Church?" He notes how people have asked, "Do I have to go to all of the services of the church? I mean, what if I don't go on Sunday night?" Some of his response was, "Do you have to hug and kiss your little children? . . . Do you have to buy Christmas presents for your family? . . . Do you have to attend the funeral of a close friend or loved one? . . . There are some things in life we don't 'have' to do, but we 'get' to do." It was because of the abundance of God's "mercy" (v. 7; "steadfast love," ESV) that David went into God's house. The word for *steadfast love* or *mercy* in Hebrew is *hesed*. Knight contends:

the word is used in the OT to describe the content of the Lord's Covenant, that which God is doing for Israel, and in and through Israel for the world. Moreover, it is what God expects of Israel to do for him in return, in covenant . . . it is a work that seeks to express, not an idea humanity has thought up, but God's gracious love and unspeakable loyalty

within the bonds of the Covenant that he himself has laid upon Israel. (4)

As this writer heard one preacher say, “The best verse on church attendance is not Hebrews 10:25, but Matthew 22:37, ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’”

The second “I will” in verse 7 reveals *how* David worships God: “In fear,” which is the word *yirah* in Hebrew. This word

has a range of meaning in the Scriptures. Sometimes it refers to fear we feel in anticipation of some danger or pain, but it can also mean “awe” or “reverence.” In this later sense, *yirah* includes the idea of wonder, amazement, mystery, astonishment, gratitude, admiration, and even worship . . . therefore includes an overwhelming sense of the glory, worth, and beauty of the One True God. (Parsons)

Isaiah experienced this type of fear when he came into God’s presence in Isaiah 6. He saw God’s glory and holiness face to face, with the seraphim covering their face in God’s presence, crying out, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts . . . !” (6:3); Isaiah immediately came to the realization of his own impurities before a pure and holy God.

David’s continued response towards God’s character was *by seeking a way of life that is right*: “Lead me, O LORD, in Your righteousness because of my enemies; Make Your way straight before my face” (v. 8). David is to be admired in the first place because he sought God’s guidance in a difficult time in his life. In spite of having the authority as king, David still turned to God. In the midst of being mistreated, David perhaps could have taken matters into his own hands and easily sought revenge; yet, his greater concern through prayer is one of guidance. When a person seeks counsel from another, sometimes he seeks justification from what he has already done or agreement with what he wants to do. Legendary football coach Lou Holtz once said, “My athletes always follow my advice . . . unless it conflicts with what they want to do” (Atteberry 29). David’s request was not, “Lead me in all the ways that I like,” or, “Lead me in all the ways I agree with,” but, “Let me know what is the right thing to do so I can obey.” When enduring various trials, James commands that if one lacks wisdom, “let him

ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (1:5). God gives this wisdom through His Word— “Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105)—and through the counsel of others—“The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, But the perverse tongue will be cut out” (Prov. 10:31).

Reprobate Sinners (vv. 9-10)

In describing the wicked, David points out the *destruction of selfishness*: “For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; Their inward part is destruction; Their throat is an open tomb; They flatter with their tongue” (v. 9).

Perhaps the most common way a person can sin is through the tongue. Scriptures refer directly or indirectly to:

a wicked tongue, a deceitful tongue, a lying tongue, a perverse tongue, a filthy tongue, a corrupt tongue, a bitter tongue, an angry tongue, a crafty tongue, a flattering tongue, a slanderous tongue, a gossiping tongue, a back-biting tongue, a blaspheming tongue, a foolish tongue, a boasting tongue, a murmuring tongue, a complaining tongue, a cursing tongue, a contentious tongue, a sensual tongue, a vile tongue, a tale-bearing tongue, a whispering tongue, an exaggerating tongue, et cetera. (MacArthur)

Indeed, “we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able to also bridle the whole body” (James 3:2). Just like one’s actions, speech reveals the heart. Jesus said, “But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Matt. 15:18-19).

The speech of David’s enemies:

(1) Contain no “faithfulness” (v. 9) or “truth” (ESV), implying their loyalty does not go beyond their own noses. They may tell the truth, but only if it is in their best interest.

(2) Are an “open grave” (ESV, v. 9). Hilber notes:

Embalming was not practiced in Israel as it was in Egypt, so signs of bodily decay commenced within days of death . . .

Except for the temporary offset from burial spices, the odor

of decomposition was potent, and an open grave is a graphic image of the “rot” issuing forth from the mouth of the wicked (324)

Others interpret “open grave” to mean “their deadly words . . . With their slippery tongue they sow discord, hatred and death” (Vangermern 799).

(3) “[F]latter with their tongue” (v. 9). Even when a compliment is given, it is done with an ulterior motive to benefit self. Solomon wrote in Proverbs 29:5, “A man who flatters his neighbor Spreads a net for his feet.” A children’s story illustrates this:

Once upon a time there was a fox. One day as this fox was sitting around doing nothing, he smelled something.

“Does my nose smell rightly?” the fox asked himself. “Am I smelling cheese? Yes, I am.”

So the fox followed his nose, which was smelling cheese, until he came to a big tree. The fox looked up and saw a crow sitting on a branch and holding in its beak a piece of cheese.

The fox thought, *That piece of cheese is in the wrong mouth. It belongs in my mouth. . . .*

So the fox said to the crow, “Crow, has anyone ever told you how handsome you are? Has anyone ever told you what beautiful feathers you have? Let me tell you something, Crow. If your voice is as beautiful as your feathers, then you are the most beautiful bird of the forest.”

Wow! the crow thought. *No one has ever said such nice things about me before, not even my own mother.* And to show that its voice was just as beautiful as its feathers, the crow opened its beak to sing and . . . dropped the piece of cheese. (Timmer 162)

In verse 10, the psalmist writes of the *destruction from selfishness*: “Pronounce them guilty, O God! Let them fall by their own counsels; Cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions, For they have rebelled against You.”

Ungodly counsel is something a righteous man rejects (Psalm 1:1-2). When a judge pronounces the guilty verdict, one’s punishment follows. David requests his enemies suffer the consequences of their own ideas. When the people came to the newly appointed King Rehoboam, they requested that he not be so

demanding on them as his father, Solomon. He rejected the wise counsel of the older men who told him to listen to the people and sought counsel from his peers that probably already agreed with his aspirations. As a result, God's nation divided into the Northern and Southern kingdoms (1 Kings 12:1-19). A selfish heart changed the course of history. Proverbs 3 teaches that following the counsel from Scripture contributes to a better life. For in so doing, one can find favor with God and man (3:4), health and strength (3:8), length of days (3:16), pleasantness and peace (3:17), a good night's rest (3:24-25; cf. Psalm 32:1-5), and grace to the humble (Prov. 3:34). Contrasted with a life of rebellion, Romans 1 teaches that when man decides to reject God and rationalizes his rejection to form his own religion, God gives him up, or allows him to choose his own path (1:18-23, 24, 26, 28). Sin becomes a form of punishment in and of itself. He makes creation an idol and worships something that will not satisfy (1:23). He fills the world with divorce, unwanted pregnancies, unwanted children, sexually transmitted diseases, and pornography, due to the unrestrained sins of homosexuality and sexual immorality, as well as murder, theft, and violence (1:26-29). Because children are not raised according to God's Word, they are "disobedient to parents" (1:30), which contributes to a lack of respect in other areas of life, such as school and the work place, and even toward the police. Since some suppress that natural family love (1:31), they murder children in the womb or severely abuse them through neglect. In other words, the more sin, the more misery; the more God is rejected, the more problems the world will see; the more ungodly counsel seeks to solve the world's problems, the more it will create problems. The solution is to abandon such worldviews and to "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths" (Prov. 3:5-6).

Reassurance for the Saved (vv. 11-12)

*But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You;
Let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them;
Let those also who love Your name
Be joyful in You.*

*For You, O LORD, will bless the righteous;
With favor You will surround him as with a shield. (vv. 11-12)*

The psalmist closes out the psalm by *portraying the faithful* as those who “rejoice,” “shout for joy,” and are “joyful” in the Lord (v. 11). Why? Because *God promises* to “bless the righteous” and “surround Him as with a shield” (v. 12). The shield was “a large, long shield that protected the whole body” (Rawlinson and Conder 31). Thus, from head to toe, God was the source of protection against the weapons and attacks from David’s enemies.

It is not uncommon for a sports fan to miss his favorite team play live. Thanks to an age of being able to record the event, he can watch it at his own convenience. Sometimes, he may fast-forward to the end to see the final score. If his team wins, he need not worry when watching the game and his team is down; he already knows the outcome. Likewise, even though David has not been delivered from his enemies, his trust in God gives him confidence to celebrate as if it has already occurred.

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Biographical Sketch

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THE HOLINESS OF GOD

Psalm 29

Terry G. Jones

Introduction

As were many of the psalms, Psalm 29 was authored by David, “the sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Sam. 23:1). [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] It is only fitting that such a thrilling portion of Holy Writ be produced by the inspired pen of this spiritual giant.

Considering the psalms as a whole, the first two verses of Psalm 29 serve as a worthy theme to the entirety of the book: “Give unto the LORD, O you mighty ones, Give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name; Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.” David was a faithful and frequent worshiper of God and often called upon others to do the same. The psalms regularly drive their readers to their knees with hearts swelling up with utterances of praise for the God of heaven.

Many of the psalms were prompted by some particular circumstance. It is apparent that David was compelled to write this psalm after experiencing a severe thunderstorm. Spurgeon made this eloquent observation:

Just as the eighth Psalm is to be read by moonlight, when the stars are bright, as the nineteenth needs the rays of the rising sun to bring out its beauty, so this can be best rehearsed beneath the black wing of tempest, by the glare of the lightning, or amid that dubious dusk which heralds the war of elements. The verses march to the tune of thunderbolts. God is everywhere conspicuous, and all the earth is hushed by the majesty of his presence. (32)

This great psalm is all about God. Its eleven verses are saturated with some twenty-five references to the Lord. In it, we see the exaltation of the Lord (vv. 1-2), the elevation of the Lord (vv. 3-9), and the enthronement of the Lord (vv. 10-11). The Lord is to be praised for His glory (vv. 1-2), for His greatness (vv. 3-9), and for His gifts (vv. 10-11). God is holy, and this psalm informs us that He

is to be worshiped in the beauty of holiness. In the nineteenth chapter of Leviticus, verses 1 and 2 say, “And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.”’” As we examine Psalm 29, we will observe five characteristics that contribute to the holiness of God.

The Glory of God (vv. 1-2)

The glory of God is His resplendent beauty and magnificence. “Concerning God, it is the display of His divine attributes and perfections” (Tenney 315). Moses said to God, “Please, show me Your glory” (Exod. 33:18). The glory of God is at the center of our worship.

The Command to Worship (v. 1)

This psalm begins with a command to praise God in worship: “Give unto the LORD, O you mighty ones, give unto the Lord glory and strength.” The word *give* here means “to ascribe” and is often translated as such. Worshipers are here called upon to acknowledge God’s glory and power and to praise Him for it.

It is interesting that three times in these two verses David commands, “Give unto the LORD.” The world says to God, “Give me, give me, give me!” The psalmist said, “Give unto the LORD, Give unto the LORD, Give unto the LORD!” While multitudes are looking for the church that has the most youth activities, serves the most meals, has the best daycare, and offers the most programs, we are reminded that it is not about receiving; it is about giving glory to God in our worship. To the Samaritan woman, Jesus said, “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:23-24).

The Congregation of Worshipers (v. 1a)

“Give unto the LORD, O you mighty ones . . . ” (v. 1a). Many commentators believe that David is calling upon angels to pay homage to the glory and power of God. Coffman suggests that the reference is to the “rich, the powerful, the rulers and authorities of

the world. The angels of heaven need no such exhortation, but the mighty of earth stand in the utmost need of it” (221).

A similar call to worship God is used in Psalm 96:7 as humanity at large is urged to praise Him. However, this ascription has a uniqueness about it. The word translated “mighty” can also be translated “God.” It is a plural, masculine noun. If the phrase should be translated “sons of God,” then the heavenly host must be intended. A similar phrase in other passages denotes heavenly beings or angels (Gen. 6:2; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Ps. 82:6; 89:6). Perhaps this is a call for heaven and earth to join together in giving praise to God. (Cloer 385)

The Cause for Worship (v. 2a)

The psalmist has told us what is to be done; now he tells us why: “Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name . . .” (v. 2a). Glory should be given to the Lord because it is due Him. The very sound of His name should melt hearts, bend knees, and loosen tongues to utter praise to the Lord. Glory is due to His name because He is creator of all things. “The earth is the LORD’s, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell therein. For He has founded it upon the seas, And established it upon the waters” (Psalm 24:1-2). Later in that psalm, David asked, “Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, The LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates! Lift up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of Glory? The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory” (8-10). When I recognize that He is King of Glory and I am not, then my natural response will be to “give unto the LORD the glory due to His name . . .” (v. 2).

The Conditions for Worship (v. 2b)

Having commanded what to do and why, David now emphasizes how this worship is to be given: “. . . Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness” (v. 2b). It matters not only whom we worship, but how we worship. We ought to learn this lesson from the mistakes of those in the past. For instance, Cain failed to give sufficient consideration to how God is properly to be worshiped, and his sacrifice was rejected by God (Gen. 4:1-7). Nadab and Abihu failed to exercise

adequate caution in adhering to God's word, which led them to offer unauthorized fire before the Lord. The result was that God sent fire from heaven to consume them both (Lev. 10:1-2). Consideration must be given to what we do and how we do it. Winfred Clark made the following observation:

He is not only to be worshipped but he is to be worshipped in the right manner. It is to be "*in the beauty of holiness.*" Some have thought that this refers to the garments the priests were to wear (2 Chron. 20:21). This may well be the case and such clothing would be in keeping with their respect for the Lord. But such would also demand the beauty of a holy life. This is the sort of thing Peter had in mind in 1 Peter 3:3-5. He speaks of adornment of the "*hidden man of the heart, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit.*" Such would surely befit one who sought to approach God in worship. Just as they are to approach God in the proper way in worship, so are we. We have no right to think that we can worship God without proper respect for the way he is to be worshipped. Did Jesus not say, "*God is a Spirit and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth*"? Since we are told to worship and who to worship we dare not do less. (164)

The Grandeur of God (vv. 3-4)

The grandeur of God has to do with His being elevated and exalted above all things. In Psalm 103:19, David declared, "The LORD has established His throne in heaven, And His kingdom rules over all." God's grandeur can certainly be seen here in verses 3-4 as the psalmist sees the Lord in a thunderstorm.

The Grandeur of His Voice (v. 3a)

"*The voice of the LORD is over the waters;*" (v. 3a). Seven times in seven verses David mentions the voice of the Lord. The power and grandeur of God's voice was set forth from the beginning. In the Genesis record of creation, each day began with, "Then God said . . ." (1:3 et al.) Everything in existence finds its origin in the voice of the Lord.

By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,
And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.

He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap;
He lays up the deep in storehouses.
Let all the earth fear the LORD;
Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.
For He spoke, and it was done;
He commanded, and it stood fast. (Psalm 33:6-9)

When Moses and Aaron appeared before Pharaoh with the command of God, “Let My people go . . .” (Exod. 5:1), Pharaoh said, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice . . . ?” (5:2). He received the answer to his question in the form of ten plagues. Ironically, the very first plague was the turning of the waters to blood. Truly, “The voice of the LORD is over the waters . . .” (v. 3).

The Grandeur of His Glory (v. 3b)

“. . . *The God of glory thunders;*” (v. 3b). David likened the Lord’s voice to thunder—loud, pervasive, and cannot be ignored.

When a thunderstorm is present, it cannot be ignored. The sound of the waters falling, and the noise of the thunder, evidence power. It is there, and cannot be ignored. In like manner, God is present, and when He speaks, one dare not ignore! Like mighty thunder, God’s voice demands attention. (Wacaster 65)

The Grandeur of His Power (v. 4a)

“*The voice of the Lord is powerful;*” (v. 4a). As David observed the sheets of rain, the sound of thunder, and the streaks of lightning, he knew that it was more than a phenomena of nature. To him, this was a grand display of the power of God. God’s power may be seen in the world that He created, in the wonders that He has performed, and in the Word that He has given. The writer of Hebrews declared, “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (4:12).

The Grandeur of His Majesty (v. 4b)

“. . . *The voice of the LORD is full of majesty*” (v. 4b). David often visited the subject of the majesty of the Lord: “Bless the LORD,
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O my soul! O LORD my God, You are very great: You are clothed with honor and majesty . . .” (Psalm 104:1). “I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty, And on Your wondrous works” (145:5). Spurgeon stated, “As for the written word of God, its majesty is apparent both in its style, its matter, and its power over the human mind; blessed be God, it is the majesty of mercy wielding a silver scepter; of such majesty the word of our salvation is *full* to overflowing” (34).

The Greatness of God (vv. 5-9)

The first three references to “the voice of the Lord” (vv. 3-4) help define the grandeur of God, while the last four references (vv. 5-9) illustrate the greatness of God. God’s greatness can easily be seen by observing what His powerful voice does.

What His Voice Breaks (v. 5)

“The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars, Yes, the LORD splinters the cedars of Lebanon” (v. 5). The cedars of Lebanon were known for their strength and beauty.

These trees were used to construct the temple of Solomon and were famous for their strength and beauty. . . . The voice of God is like a powerful storm that can twist the limbs off these great cedars or splinter them into a thousand pieces of kindling wood with one bolt of lightning. (Wacaster 66)

Knowing the power of God’s voice upon the cedars of Lebanon, one is compelled to think about the impact it has upon the hearts of men. When the gospel of Christ was preached on the day of Pentecost, the Bible records, “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’” (Acts 2:37). Winfred Clark made the following comment:

One is not left to wonder as to the effect of God’s word. Such can be seen in scores of ways. Countless millions have been saved by his word that has been preached to them for it is through that word that faith comes (Rom. 10:17). It is by that word that men are brought to repentance. It is through that word that men come to obedience. It is by that word that homes and hearts are mended in the right way. Yes, we can

measure the effect of the word of God in a hundred ways.

What His Voice Makes (v. 6)

“He makes them also skip like a calf, Lebanon and Sirion like a young wild ox” (v. 6). Not only does the voice of the Lord make the cedars of Lebanon splinter, but it also makes them skip. As the storm moved across these mountain ranges, David observed that the treetops were helpless to resist its force and appeared as a calf or ox skipping along. In this we see that these trees, as strong as they may have been, were no match for this powerful storm. That is exactly the way God’s Word should affect the lives of men. Our lives should bend and sway in exact accordance to the voice of the Lord. To the Romans, Paul declared, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (1:16).

What His Voice Bakes (v. 7)

“The voice of the LORD divides the flames of fire” (v. 7). James Smith explains that “[t]his is a poetical description of the forked lightnings darting from the cloud” (254). The loud clap of thunder may be heard, but the sudden strike of lightning is both blinding and burning. Its powerful effects are destructive and dangerous. It can splinter a tree, start a forest fire, or strike a man dead. The psalmist informs us that the power behind the lightning is the voice of God. Just as lightning must be respected, so must the voice of Almighty God be revered in the hearts and lives of men.

What His Voice Shakes (v. 8)

“The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; The LORD shakes the Wilderness of Kadesh” (v. 8). The blowing of the wind, the beating of the rain, the blasts of thunder, and the burning of the lightning all work together to leave the wilderness in a shaken state. The Wilderness of Kadesh mentioned here “was on the southeastern border of the Promised Land, towards Edom” (Barnes 251).

What His Voice Quakes (v. 9)

“The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth, And strips the forests bare; And in His temple everyone says, ‘Glory!’” (v. 9). The
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tremors of the Lord's quaking voice are felt in the *womb*, making "the deer give birth"; in the *woods*, stripping "the forests bare"; and in *worship*, "in His temple everyone says, 'Glory!'" The Word of God is able to penetrate every crack and every crevice of earth, while imposing its trembling effects. This brings to mind the occasion of the apostle Paul's preaching to Governor Felix. "And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee" (KJV, Acts 24:25). It is difficult to fathom how a man who has been left quaking in his shoes after facing the reality of the judgment of God could neglect the salvation of his own soul by not obeying the gospel of Christ.

Cloer has well summarized this section of the psalm, saying:

In the storm the writer sees the greatness of God. He notices that God is stronger than the crash of the thunderbolt, the fire of the lightning, and the shaking power of the wind. Our Lord is bigger than the mountains, the seas, and the heavens. He commands the floods, the trees, and the raging rivers. The Creator is above all that He has created. (389)

No wonder David prayed to God, "I will extol You, my God, O King; And I will bless Your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You, And I will praise Your name forever and ever. Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; And His greatness is unsearchable" (Psalm 145:1-3).

The Governing of God (v. 10)

As the psalmist carefully considered all of the very powerful effects of the storm, he was reminded that God is in control of all things and He is governing from heaven.

Governing the Flood (v. 10a)

"*The LORD sat enthroned at the Flood . . .*" (v. 10a). David had in mind here the great flood of Noah's day. That flood was not an occasion where the forces of nature got out of control and wreaked havoc worldwide. Rather, it was an epic event that was entirely orchestrated by God. While sitting upon His throne, He declared the coming flood to Noah, then delivered it at the proper time. During the storm, we ought to be reminded of the One who is greater than

the storm and is in control of the storm.

Governing Forever (v. 10b)

“. . . *And the LORD sits as King forever*” (v. 10b). God was on His throne, governing that great flood, and has been in control of every storm since. Furthermore, He will do so forever. Winfred Clark observes:

In the affairs of men we see a change of administration from time to time as in our presidential election. A man may serve for a while and then move on. His power is not retained forever. Not so with God. Of his rule there is no end. So what does that mean for man today? It means the God that we serve will still be God when we are dead and gone. He will still be God when the dead are raised and the judgment takes place. In view of this, we need to be very conscious of our responsibility to him and all that we do.

The Goodness of God (v. 11)

Among all of the many outstanding features of this sublime psalm, the writer does not conclude without providing the assurance of the goodness of God upon His creation. He draws attention to two major blessings the Lord bestows upon His people.

He Gives Power (v. 11a)

“*The LORD will give strength to His people;*” (v. 11a). Herein is the promise of an all-powerful God providing the needed strength to His children. Paul said, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philip. 4:13).

Nature has taught the viewer to sing about God’s goodness. A destructive wind of this kind may strike terror in the hearts of God’s people; but according to the Holy Spirit, it should instill faith in us, not fear. The power seen in the thunderbolt, the wind, and the flashes of lightning are just representations of God’s power—a power that He uses for (not against) His people. (Cloer 390)

He Gives Peace (v. 11b)

“. . . *The LORD will bless His people with peace*” (v. 11b). Often
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attention is drawn to the calm before the storm. Here, the psalmist reveals his calm during the storm. He had the calm assurance that God would protect him, and his heart was filled with peace.

Those who have placed their confidence in Jehovah will be able to weather the storms. While all about them is “thunder,” and “lightning,” and “floods” of destruction; deep inside, the believer will be confident in the providence of God, and serenity will surround the soul. (Wacaster 68)

We are reminded of the words of Paul: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ” (Phil. 4:6-7).

Conclusion

This psalm begins with a command to give glory to God, followed by two reasons why the Lord is deserving of such—His power over all things and His provisions for His people. Scroggie eloquently stated:

If you get Heaven’s view of all events on earth, there will never be despair. You will know that He Who “*sat enthroned*” at, and *over*, and *for the flood* long ago, controls every visitation (10). He will give His people a share of His *strength*, and in and beyond the storm, will bless them with His peace (11). This is a Psalm for storm-tossed souls. (173)

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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).

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He serves on the board of directors of West Virginia Christian Youth Camp and is co-director of Junior Week. He is on the faculty of the 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 ANSWERS PRAYER

Psalms 20

Matt Cook

One semester during my time as a graduate student at Freed-Hardeman University, I hosted a two-hour morning radio show for the campus radio station. If that job sounds glamorous, be assured that it was not. Looking for an on-campus job for some extra income, I walked into the radio station to see if they had any open positions and I walked out with my own “jazz” radio show in a genre of music about which I knew nothing. With no experience, I learned the inner workings of how to cue up the music and commercials and host a radio show. I moved on quickly after just one semester when a better opportunity arose, but the experience definitely was educational. When one listens to the radio, one has to imagine what is happening behind the voices on the radio. I especially admire radio sportscasters, who must describe the action on the field or court as vividly as possible. When I hear a DJ on the radio, because I briefly worked behind the microphone, I know a bit of what is taking place behind the voices.

When we read the Psalms, especially the “royal psalms” like Psalm 20, the experience is somewhat like listening to the radio. C. Hassell Bullock observes, “We have to imagine what actions are taking place behind the voices. The literary images and metaphors become the sound effects that form our mental picture. The words of Psalm 20:3, for example, paint a scene on our mental TV screen” (146). Painting a mental picture of what is happening behind the scenes of Psalm 20 is especially important because this is not a simple psalm of praise. *Something* is happening that the psalm is describing. Attempting to paint a picture of what is happening behind the words of Psalm 20 is not simple, but to apply appropriately the text to the modern Christian requires an understanding of the background of this psalm. This chapter will argue that the psalm comes from a specific historical setting that, when understood, allows for appropriate modern application. I will begin by describing this historical context, follow with an outline and explanation of the text of Psalm 20, and conclude with several

points of application from the meaning of the text.

The Historical Background and Setting of Psalm 20

Psalm 20 is one of the psalms commonly called the Royal Psalms. Though little connection exists between the ten psalms usually classified in this way (2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 101, 110, 132, and 144), each of them explicitly makes reference to the king and his roles. Psalms 20 and 21 both fit the description of “Royal Psalm” because they both “are prayers for the king” (Cloer 258). This prayer for the king in Psalm 20 is connected to a specific setting in the life of Israel and the king: the departure of the king and his army for war.

While the modern world constantly appears on the verge of war and violence is commonplace, one likely would not, thankfully, describe warfare as central to the American experience. Throughout history, and especially in the ancient Near Eastern world, warfare was simply a part of one’s life experience. Peter Craigie and Marvin Tate explain, “A fundamental characteristic of the experience of ancient Israel was the frequency of warfare. It characterized the historical experience of Israel, as it did that of all nations in the ancient (and modern) world.” The distinguishing factor for Israel is that warfare was “intimately related to religion” (187), and Psalm 20 gives insight into at least a part of how this relation played out.

Although the psalm does not give explicit information as to its background, the consensus opinion is that this describes a scene before the king and his army went to battle and was then later used on similar occasions (Bullock 143; cf. DeClaissé-Walford et al. 215; Wilson 382; Craigie and Tate 185; McCann Jr. 755; Clifford 116; Brueggemann and Bellinger 105). If the heading is taken into account (the headings of psalms are uninspired, but generally reliable), then this psalm was originally composed by David. Psalm 20 then was used during and is descriptive of a sort of “service” or “liturgy” when the people and the king would pray for success in battle and offer sacrifices (cf. 2 Chron. 20:5-12; 1 Sam. 7:9-10; 13:9-23; Psalm 20:3). Cloer describes the potential scene vividly:

Perhaps this psalm pictures that emotional time when David and his army are preparing to leave for battle. The warriors have assembled with their swords, bows and arrows, spears, and shields in place. Fearful forebodings and visions of

triumph are intermingling in their hearts. Solemn goodbyes and expressions of Godspeed are being exchanged. Israel knows . . . the lives of the king and his soldiers are at stake. . . . Before leaving, the king gathers his leading men together and begins the process of offering the appropriate sacrifices (see 1 Sam. 7:9), after which he prays to God. He commits his cause to God, calling upon Him to give the outcome that he sees fit. Perhaps while the sacrifices are offered, the people pray or sing this Psalm. (259)

Second Chronicles 20:5-13 describes a similar setting in which the people of Judah are gathered with the king to pray for assistance in battle. Gerald H. Wilson suggests, “It seems that at the time of an impending military campaign, it was not unusual for king, people, and army to seek divine assistance through prayer, fasting, and temple liturgy. Our psalm represents one such liturgical entreaty of divine assistance” (382). Returning then to the opening illustration of trying to gain a mental picture behind the words, one can imagine the scene from the words of the text. The king offers sacrifices before the battle (v. 3) “and the people who bless him in 20:1-5 anticipate victory that will be accompanied by singing and celebration (20:5). Banners were used by the troops (Num. 2:2; Song 6:4), and by celebrants too, as suggested by 20:5, cheering the troops returning from battle” (Bullock 144). The mental image is one of solemn prayer accompanied by confidence in victory and anticipation of celebration when the battle is over (v. 5).

Two issues arise in connection with this understanding of the historical background. First, verses 2-3, with references to the sanctuary, Zion, and sacrifices closely connected to Zion, seem to point to a time when the Temple had already been built and God’s blessing was connected to it. If David wrote this psalm, how does one explain this distinction? While space will not allow a lengthy discussion, one must remember that the Psalms were written by inspired men like David in specific but varying circumstances and then later collected for use among the congregation of Israel. This collection of the Psalms (and the collection of all of the documents of Scripture into the canon) was guided by God’s providence. With this in mind, consider Cloer’s suggestion as to how these changes occurred: “If ‘sanctuary’ and ‘Zion’ refer to Solomon’s temple, then

an adaptation has been made of the original psalm by some inspired person to make the psalm current with the prevailing circumstances” (260). This view allows for Davidic authorship, the potential Temple references, *and* divine inspiration.

The second issue arises from this entire discussion of historical background. With such a specific usage by Israel, can this psalm have any role for Christians in 2017, who are most certainly not part of a theocracy? Is this simply about a king and warfare? While this chapter will later seek to apply the message of this psalm to a modern audience, a simple answer might be provided to this question that arises from the historical background. First, if this were simply a liturgical record from a king going to war, then no need would exist to collect and keep it as a part of a collection of inspired psalms. It would be better placed among some sort of collection of historical records in a museum. Instead, this psalm was included in the collection of inspired psalms because of its usefulness for future generations. Secondly, one must note that the king is not the primary character of this psalm. God is the primary actor. McCann Jr. maintains, “God’s people would have preserved and transmitted the psalm not so much as a historical recollection of a long-lost monarchy but as a testimony to God’s continuing ability to save the people” (755). God’s people today may still look to Psalm 20 as a testimony to God’s faithfulness while still grasping its original, historical context.

An Examination of the Text

The Structure of Psalm 20

Psalm 20 is best divided into four parts, as seen in the simple outline below:

1. Prayer for the king (vv. 1-5)
2. Assurance of God’s answer (v. 5)
3. Confession of trust in God (vv. 7-8)
4. A final plea for help to God (v. 9)

The psalm makes obvious use of an *inclusio*, a literary device in which similar material is used at the beginning and end of a passage and “frames” or “brackets” the passage. The *inclusio* is formed by the opening line of “May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble . . .” (v. 1) and the concluding line of petition: “May the King

answer us when we call” (v. 9). [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] A yearning for God’s “answer,” then, frames the entire psalm (DeClaissé-Walford et al. 215).

While these textual divisions are based on theme, they are also natural divisions in the text because of the personal pronoun usage in each section in reference to who appears to be speaking and who is being spoken to in each part. This issue is slightly complicated. Speaking of only verse 1, Jacobson’s comments describe the problem of the whole psalm:

The opening stanza is slightly strange in the Psalter, because rather than consisting of a petition directed to God from one who suffers, it is made up of an intercessory petition by some unnamed speaker(s) directed rhetorically to the king, and thus only implicitly directed to God. (DeClaissé-Walford et al. 216)

In verses 1-5, “you” is referencing the king, which is a different approach from most of the psalms. “He” is God (vv. 2, 3, 4). The unnamed speaker appears to be the congregation as a whole, but it could be the army or some representative of the people. The pronoun changes in verse 6 to the singular first person in a statement of confidence in God’s salvation. Who is speaking? Craigie and Tate speak for the majority in their uncertainty. They conclude, “The identity of the individual is not known, though a priest, Levite, or prophet is likely” (186). Cloer appears to be in the minority by suggesting that the king himself is speaking (263). In the similar situation in 2 Chronicles 20, a Levite speaks similar words of confidence. In verses 7-8, the speakers are again a plural “we,” and the best assumption is that this is again the congregation that is speaking in verses 1-5. As for verse 9, translation problems create more complications, which will be addressed below. This appears to be the congregation praying for the king again.

Prayer for the King (vv. 1-5)

As was stated above, Psalm 20 begins uniquely because it is addressed to the king (“you”) with the desire that God intervene on behalf of the king. This section consists of eight consecutive Hebrew imperatives which are usually translated in the future tense, i.e., “The LORD will answer you” Here though, all of the major

translations except for the King James Version translate each as an optative, which expresses a wish: “May the LORD answer you . . .” Bullock suggests, “The blessing of 20:1-5, though not called a blessing, is a string of Hebrew imperfects used in a modal sense, expressing what the people hoped the Lord would do” (145). Specifically, the prayer desires that God answer, defend, send, strengthen, remember, accept, grant, and fulfill. Verse 1 specifically calls for God to answer the king “in the day of trouble.” Jacobson notes that the modern reader may pray this psalm about the day of trouble in reference to “any crisis that is too great for an individual or a community to face alone, but in this case (it) almost surely refers to a military crisis—either to an impending battle or to an impending military alliance” (DeClaissé-Walford et al. 217). In the second half of verse 1, “the name of the God of Jacob” is invoked to defend the king. According to Wilson:

The phrase “the God of Jacob” appears eighteen times in the Old Testament—twelve of them in the Psalter. . . . The shorter phrase “God of Jacob” is an abbreviation of the longer reference to “the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob” (cf., Ex. 3:15). (383)

This divine name provides security for the psalmist, similar to the security that Zion provides in the next verse.

Verse 2’s desire for help from the sanctuary and out of Zion are likely references to the Jerusalem Temple. As mentioned previously, if this is the case, either the uninspired heading is incorrect or a later inspired person edited the psalm after the Temple had been built “to make the psalm current with the prevailing circumstances” (Cloer 260). Verse 2 may also have the ark of the covenant in mind and a procession in which the ark might lead the army into battle as it had done in previous times (cf. Num. 10:35; Josh. 6; 1 Sam. 4:3, 5). Again, we can only speculate, but the psalmist saw Jerusalem as a representative place from which God’s strength was sent. Verse 3’s request that God remember the king’s offerings and burnt sacrifice, though, may strengthen the idea that the Temple is in mind. While one might not normally associate the king with sacrifices, “kings played an important religious role in offering sacrifices” (Wilson 384). While these sacrifices are not always looked on positively (i.e.,

Saul in 1 Samuel 13:8-10, though the actual practice of kingly sacrifice is not necessarily condemned there), “David and Solomon both were prominently involved in religious worship and sacrifice (2 Sam. 6; 24:18-25; 1 Kings 3, 8:62-63), as were the kings of Israel and Judah after them (2 Kings 16:12, 15; 2 Chron. 29:21-23; 31:3; 35:16)” (384). Cloer notes, “A righteous king made the appropriate offerings as his people called upon God to be with him as he defended His people” (261) and the people prayed that God would remember and accept the king’s sacrifices. If a sacrifice is in mind in the immediate context of the pre-war liturgy, 1 Samuel 7:8-9 indicates that a sacrifice was sometimes used as a method for asking the Lord’s favor:

So the children of Israel said to Samuel, “Do not cease to cry out to the LORD our God for us, that He may save us from the hand of the Philistines.”

And Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. Then Samuel cried out to the LORD for Israel, and the Lord answered him.

“May He grant you according to your heart’s desire, and fulfill all of your purpose” (v. 4) makes for great fodder for high school graduation cards, like Jeremiah 29:11. Unfortunately, the context does not lead the responsible student of Scripture to believe that God’s people are praying that every wish of the king’s heart be fulfilled. In context, the psalmist has in mind all of the requests for divine assistance that the king and his army deeply desire, specifically success in battle. Such a request assumes that the king’s motives are pure, in line with the will of God, and seek to glorify God (Cloer 262). Verse 5’s joyful tone foresees God’s positive answer. While application points will be made below, this verse is a reminder that modern Christians ought to anticipate the final victory we will experience and this anticipation should produce a joyous attitude of celebration, similar to the victory anticipated by God’s people in verse 5. As the people pray for the king in these five verses, they, by extension, are praying for themselves because the king is their representative and his success represents their success (Craigie and Tate 186).

Assurance of God's Answer (v. 6).

The speaker and the tone of the psalm both change in verse 6. The speaker, possibly a priest, Levite, or prophet (though unknown), confidently asserts that God will answer the king positively and all but ensures the victory of the king and his army. Whether this is simply a statement of confidence in the Lord's answer or the speaker has received some sort of direct word from the Lord is unknown. But, as Jacobson insists, it is clear that "the psalmist has been moved from hopeful prayer for the Lord's saving help to confident proclamation of the Lord's saving help. The king has received his favorable answer" (DeClaissie-Walford et al. 218). The Lord will save "His anointed" king and answer him from heaven "[w]ith the saving strength of His right hand" (v. 6).

Confession of Trust in God (vv. 7-8)

Now that divine help and victory have been ensured, the "assembled people affirm their trust and dependence on Yahweh in a set of opposingly parallel lines contrasting the fate of those who trust in their own strength with those who hope in Yahweh" (Wilson 388). While these two verses, especially in translations that match the verb from the first line (which is not provided in Hebrew) with the second line, make for strong statements of faith still today, the power of the words is partially lost on a modern audience that does not connect horses and chariots with military power. The enemies of God's people had misplaced their trust by placing their confidence in the best modern war tactics. Wilson vividly describes the importance of chariots and horses in ancient warfare:

By trusting in "chariots" and "horses" the misguided opponents are relying on the most advanced and effective forms of warfare available in contemporary society. Ironclad chariots pulled into battle by seasoned war-horses were terrifying in their ability to break up massed troops and make them vulnerable to the attack of trained foot soldiers following in the destructive wake of the chariots. (388)

Instead of fearing the chariots and horses, God's people were to trust God who would be the source of their salvation, while the opponents would be defeated: "They have bowed down and fallen . . ." (v. 8).

A Final Plea for Help to God (v. 9)

The psalm concludes with a renewed cry for help from God. Exactly how to translate this verse confounds scholars. The New King James Version says (the New American Standard Bible is similar): “Save, LORD! May the King answer us when we call.” The English Standard Version, my preferred translation, says (the New International Version is similar): “O LORD, save the king! May he answer us when we call.” The Hebrew here is unclear and the second option above uses the Septuagint to help in its translation. Most commentators tend to leave either option as open to possibility, due its perplexing nature. The meaning is similar for either option, with the congregation calling for God to save the king and his army and pleading for Him (God is the King in the NKJV) to answer.

Summary and Main Idea of Psalm 20

In summary, Psalm 20 is a psalm that requests the help of God for the king and his army as they face battle. The psalm expresses confident trust in God’s affirmative answer. In order to apply this text to the modern world, appropriate biblical interpretation methods require the reader to draw out a principle from the text that is universally true—both for the original audience and the modern audience. With an analysis of the text behind us and in view of a modern audience, the biblical principle from this text is: *God’s people trust in God rather than their own resources*. In light of the title given for this assignment, this trust is especially expressed in prayer. While the modern reader is not tempted to trust in horses and chariots, he might be tempted to trust in the government, military power, technology, money, or family instead of God. While some might take this psalm as a model for praying for the government and army, in reality, this psalm is “anti-militaristic. It exhorts us to submit our will to God’s will rather than pretend that our will is God’s will. It is another invitation to live under God’s reign” (McCann Jr. 756). Today, one might rephrase this psalm, “Some trust in the military and government, and some in technology or money; But we trust in the name of the Lord our God!”

Applications from the Principle: God's People Trust in God Rather Than Their Own Resources

We Express This Trust in Prayer

Personal and congregational prayer may be the context in which we most obviously express our deep confidence in God. While actions sometimes betray a deeper trust in physical resources, prayer is the starting point from which trust is expressed. Psalm 20 is more than something to be read; it may be prayed for oneself or another who is facing “the day of trouble” (v. 1). After noting the immediate context of the psalm, Jacobson argues, “But the prayer, especially vs. 1-5 and 9, may be appropriately prayed in secondary usage on behalf of any sufferer who sits in need of intercession” (DeClaisse-Walford et al. 215).

The readers of this chapter likely already believe adamantly that God answers prayer. If one believes that all Scripture is from God, then no other conclusion may be drawn. Many verses could be listed that point clearly to the reality of God answering prayer. The scriptural evidence is strong. Yes, God answers prayer. “The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their cry. . . . The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears, And delivers them out of all their troubles” (Psalm 34:15, 17). “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philip. 4:6-7).

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit. (James 5:14-18; cf. Psalm 91:15; James 1:5-6)

A litany of passages could be given to prove that God answers

prayer. But, we would still have this question: “Does God really answer prayer?” The reason that Christians still wrestle with this question is not because of a lack of clarity in Scripture. It is based on the experience that God does not always answer our legitimate (seemingly unselfish and godly) requests.

We Trust God Even When Life Seems Out of Control

While we are confident that God answers prayers, how should Christians respond when it appears that God does not affirmatively answer our legitimate, even righteous, requests? In some cases, the simple answer is that we live in a fallen world in which death and sickness occur. While one might pray endlessly for an elderly grandparent to be healed from an illness, eventually, in a fallen world, people die. On the other hand, such an answer does not always feel satisfactory when those we love, in our opinion, “die too soon.” Why does God seem to save some and not others? Why do some die and some live? If it is true that God answers prayers, and sometimes answers prayers in the affirmative, why does He not always?

If I am honest, I do not know. And when I do not understand why God does what He does, Psalm 20 is a reminder that regardless of the circumstances, I trust God rather than my own resources. I trust a God who is in control even when life seems out of control. While one may claim to trust God, true trust is tested in the fires of trials. When life seems out of control and God is not answering requests as we hoped He might, we trust in God’s love and sovereignty. Even when we appear to be on the losing end of personal battles, we trust that God’s ultimate victory through Jesus Christ is final and decisive. We confidently say, “But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:57).

We Trust in the Work and Love of Christ Instead of Our Own Resources

While Christians are consistently tempted to believe and boast that their right standing before God is because of their own good works, Paul reminds us to trust and boast in the cross of Christ as the source of our salvation. “But God forbid that I should boast

except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal. 6:14). Cloer concludes, “Yes, in God’s salvation we glory. We do not brag about our good works as if that were the source of our salvation (Eph. 2:9). The great price of redemption was fully paid by the sacrificial death of our Savior” (268). In relation to this psalm, our confidence is in Christ, who now is our king. Rather than interceding for the king as the people do in Psalm 20, the King, Jesus Christ, intercedes on our behalf (Kraus 282). We trust in the unshakable love of Christ, from which nothing “shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:39).

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Biographical Sketch

Matt teaches missions and Bible at Freed-Hardeman University and preaches for the Stantonville, Tennessee, congregation along with his father, Randy Cook. He is married to Charla and has two children, Gabbi (7) and Conner (5).

GIVING HONOR TO GOD

Psalm 66

John M. Brown

The Joy of Worship

Our God is worthy! Our God is great and awesome! Our God is majestic and powerful! Exiled on the isle of Patmos, John received “the Revelation of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 1:1), and seeing God as the Reigning Creator on His throne, John recorded the words of creation about the Creator God: “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created” (4:11). [All Scripture references are from the KJV unless otherwise noted.]

The entire Bible shouts the worthiness of God and the honor due Him. The Bible often uses the word *worship* to describe such: man’s appropriate response toward God. In a familiar passage, John 4:23-24, Jesus said, “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”

God seeks such because God deserves such.

The entire Bible extols the worthiness of God and the fact that honor is due Him: both the Old and New Covenants; every age of time; both then and now—past and present—God is worthy of honor, reverence, homage, devotion, awe, adoration, and worship.

Psalm 66 is a song of the worthiness of God and the fact that He is due honor. Indeed, Psalm 66 describes the joy of worship and the fact that worship is both universal and personal: all nations praise God (vv. 1-12), and David praises God (vv. 13-20). The psalm begins very broadly and ends very narrowly: from the entire earth praising God, to the Jewish nation praising God, to one individual praising God.

We shall look at the verses, words, and phrases of Psalm 66 in seeking to deepen both our understanding and our practice regarding the honor we should give to God.

All Nations Praise God (vv. 1-12)

“Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands:” (v. 1). This “noise” is a shout of loyalty and homage (1 Sam. 10:24), and it is to come from all lands (Psalm 100:1). All people everywhere should acknowledge the honor due God. God’s power is so patently manifested that all people should recognize it, and no people are excusable in failing to so do (Rom. 1:18-23).

“. . . Sing forth the honour of his name: make his praise glorious” (v. 2). Singing, a verbal expression of human emotion, both was an Old Testament expression of praise toward God (2 Chron. 29:28-29) and is a New Testament expression of praise toward God (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), rendered in and by God’s holy temple, the Lord’s church (Psalm 22:22; qtd. in Heb. 2:11-12). Further, His praise is to be “glorious”: it is in the church that God is glorified (Eph. 3:20-21).

“Say unto God, How terrible art thou in thy works! through the greatness of thy power shall thine enemies submit themselves unto thee” (v. 3). *Terrible* is “awesome”: God’s power is great and full of awe. Think about that fact that God could but speak, and “something” was created out of “nothing.” What awesome power: “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear” (Heb. 11:3).

“All the earth shall worship thee, and shall sing unto thee; they shall sing to thy name. Selah” (v. 4). The whole world either does, or should, worship God; the whole earth certainly will worship Him: “. . . That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philip. 2:10-11).

There will be either willing worship or forced submission, as every knee bows before God. And note it is “to thy name” (v. 4; cf. 20:1); the awesome deeds of God, done in the name of God, will either produce homage or ultimately strike fear in the human heart (Josh. 2:11; Rev. 15:3).

“Come and see the works of God: he is terrible in his doing toward the children of men” (v. 5). There is that word *terrible* again: a description of the overpowering, awe-inspiring majesty of God

(Psalm 46:8). The illustrations of God's power are numerous in Scripture, two of which are enumerated in the next verse.

"He turned the sea into dry land: they went through the flood on foot: there did we rejoice in him" (v. 6). God delivered Israel from the bondage of Egypt, bringing them through the Red Sea (Exod. 14:21ff; 15:19). And God led Israel in the conquest of Canaan (Josh. 3:19). These and other miracles in the Bible attest to the magnificent power of God—the very God who has power to create and to incorporate natural laws into His creation can also suspend those natural laws in amazing ways to the accomplishing of His will and the demonstration of His power.

"He ruleth by his power for ever; his eyes behold the nations: let not the rebellious exalt themselves. Selah" (v. 7). God "ruleth," and His power is clearly seen in the previous verse citing the Exodus events. His eyes see all, and this awesome power must be acknowledged by all: "Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth" (Psalm 46:10; cf. 2:1-4).

But there are those stubborn and rebellious (Jer. 5:23; 6:28; Hosea 4:16; 9:15) who must not exalt themselves; for in rebelling against God, they shall be made low (Prov. 29:23; James 4:7-10).

"O bless our God, ye people, and make the voice of his praise to be heard:" (v. 8). All people are invited to praise God. To "bless our God" is to praise God and make the praise of God known. The praise due God must not be muted or mumbled, but loud, clear, and decisive.

". . . Which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved" (v. 9). God is the One who had saved Israel, who had preserved Israel. Literally, the phrase means, "the one who put our life among the living." Israel, who at numerous times in her history had been at the brink of destruction, had been rescued, delivered, protected, and saved by God (Psalm 126:1-6).

God, too, is our Savior (1 Tim. 1:1) who saves us not from the Midanites or the Egyptians or the Babylonians, but who saves us from sin, Satan, and hell.

"For thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us, as silver is tried. Thou broughtest us into the net; thou laidst affliction upon our loins" (vv. 10-11). God not only preserved Israel, but also tested

her for her purging (Isa. 1:25). The Hebrew word for *tried* means “examined or tested.” Israel had been tried in the furnace of affliction for her benefit (Isa. 37:3; Jer. 6:29; Zech. 13:9; Mal. 3:3). This “purging” is God’s refining, and it is one of the most misunderstood doctrines in the Bible.

Those whom God loves, those who are His children, are disciplined of a loving heavenly Father for their benefit and for their betterment. As in the past, so also today. Hebrews 12:5-11 describes God’s chastening: “And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him . . .” (12:5).

- 1) God chastens because He loves us (12:6).
- 2) God chastens because we are His children (12:7-8).
- 3) God chastens because through such we learn subjection (12:9).
- 4) God chastens us for our good (12:10).
- 5) God chastens because such yields “the peaceable fruit of righteousness” (12:11).

James also addresses the chastening of God:

My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations [trials]; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience [steadfastness, endurance].” In view of such, “[b]lessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. (1:2-3, 12)

Like the athlete who endures the grind of training or the musician who perseveres in continual practice, so the child of God, through God’s refining, is strengthened in his purpose and resolve. Trials, then, can help to make us stronger and in the end are rewarded.

“Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water: but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place” (v. 12). Having endured afflictions, even suffering as enemies would “ride over our heads,” victory comes from the contest, and triumph from the trial. Israel is pictured as having been wounded, cast down, helpless, lying prostrate, apparently defeated and destroyed. But God brought the people through, and God

brought them “out into a wealthy place.” This is a spacious place, a place of refreshing. As for Israel, so for us.

Paul describes afflictions, necessities, distresses, stripes, imprisonment, tumult, labors, watchings, fasting, stoning, shipwreck, perils, weariness, painfulness, hunger, thirst, cold, and nakedness (2 Cor. 6:4-5; 11:23-27), yet he states, “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;” (4:8-9).

And, from this same inspired writer, the child of God must also always bear in mind that when God comforts us in our afflictions, it is that we in turn can learn to comfort others (2 Cor. 1:3-5). So Paul, like the psalmist, says in the midst of this, “Blessed be God . . .” (1:3).

The Psalmist Praises God (vv. 13-20)

The Psalmist’s Response: Worship

*I will go into thy house with burnt offerings: I will pay thee my
vows,*

*Which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath spoken, when I
was in trouble. I will offer unto thee burnt sacrifices of fatlings,
with the incense of rams;*

I will offer bullocks with goats. Selah. (vv. 13-15)

In view of God’s worthiness, God’s power, God’s works, God’s afflictions, and God’s consolations, we see the psalmist’s response: worship! His offerings to God will be given, his vows fulfilled. This is a picture from suffering to sacrifice.

Our response must be likewise. We bring to God our sacrifices, which are not fatlings, rams, bullocks, and goats, but ourselves! In Romans 12:1, we read, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”

As we learn to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus (Matt. 16:24), we come before God offering us: our talents, our time, our treasure.

“Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul” (v. 16). All should come hear what God had done in the life of the psalmist. *My soul* is my life—me, and

what God had done in the life of the psalmist is but another reason God should be honored. God-fearing people should hear the psalmist's praise as fellow worshippers (Psalm 34:7, 9; 1 Cor. 12:26).

The Readiness of the Worshipper

"I cried unto him with my mouth, and he was extolled with my tongue" (v. 17). Here we see the personal nature of worship. We mentioned earlier that this psalm narrows in its scope: from the world, to Israel, to the individual worshipper. The cry of his mouth and extolling God with his words demonstrate again the readiness of the worshipper: praise was not reluctant, but ready; praise was not far removed, but right at hand.

Think of the readiness of the worshipper as asking if you are "ready" to worship God—anxious, desirous, zealous, fervent. "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD" (Psalm 122:1).

The Righteousness of the Worshipper

"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me:" (v. 18). Here is the readiness of the worshipper, which involves the righteousness of the worshipper. *Iniquity* is from an original word that denotes operative evil, evil which is schemed, planned, and promoted. *Regard* means "seen"; this is evil of which the doer is conscious, yet about which the doer is obviously unconcerned or unconscientious. By implication, this evildoer looks with apathy or even pleasure or satisfaction at his evil deeds.

But note, this is not the characteristic of this worshipper in Psalm 66! He is ready to worship because he is righteous before God. The Bible teaches clearly and plainly, contrary to the commonly held but erroneous opposite view, that the right heart of the worshipper is a necessity. In plain words, many have the idea that they can live howsoever they desire, even in complete rejection of and rebellion against God, and then if an individual "gets into trouble," that person can come before God with petitions, and God is obligated to hear and to hearken. Not so!

- Proverbs 15:29—"The Lord is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous."

- Isaiah 1:15—“And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when you make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.”
- Isaiah 59:1-2—“Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.”
- 1 Peter 3:12—“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.”

The Reception of the Worshipper

“. . . *But God verily hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer*” (v. 19). This is the reception of the worshipper. God heard and attended. God will not hear evildoers, but God heard this psalmist, indicating the writer is indeed walking with God. And this principle appears not only in the Old Testament, but also in numerous places in the New Testament. For example: “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight” (1 John 3:22).

“*Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me*” (v. 20). For all that God is, and for all that God had done, including hearing the psalmist’s prayer and extending to the psalmist mercy, the response is, “Blessed be God . . .”: Let God be praised!

Conclusion

Through all our trials and sorrows, in all our victories and triumphs, the message of this psalm rings clear and is expressed in the old gospel hymn: “To God be the glory, great things He hath done . . .” (Crosby).

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Biographical Sketch

John Brown is a preacher and a school teacher, having graduated from Harding University with a B.A. in history and Bible. He has preached for more than thirty years, most of those full time, and has worked for the past six years with the church of Christ in Olive Hill, Kentucky. Also for the past six years, he has taught U.S. History (regular, AP, and college dual-credit), AP U.S. Government and Politics, and Kentucky History at Greenup County High School in Greenup, Kentucky, having completed his Master of Arts in teaching from Morehead State University and a Master of Social Science from Ohio University. He has almost completed his principal certification and is a doctoral candidate at the University of the Cumberlands in Williamsburg, Kentucky, hoping to complete his doctorate in education in the next couple of years. He and his wife, Dana, have six children and live on a small farm in Greenup County, Kentucky.

WHEN CHALLENGED BY GOD HATERS

Psalm 83

Dan Kessinger

The 83rd Psalm is the last of the selection of psalms credited to Asaph, although whether that inscription was intended to refer to the original Asaph or not is unclear. By “the original Asaph,” we mean the man appointed by David to be a worship leader among the Levites in Temple service (Comay 56). Why not allow the inscription to stand on its merits alone, concluding that Asaph himself penned the psalm? It is primarily because the situation described in Psalm 83 bears no resemblance to any that would have threatened Israel during the reigns of either David or Solomon. On the other hand, a strikingly similar set of circumstances was encountered during the reign of Jehoshaphat, as recorded in 2 Chronicles 20. Adam Clarke listed the following similarities: (1) The Ammonites and Moabites were the primary adversaries, (2) the Edomites also joined them, and (3) the remaining nations aligned against God’s people were from beyond the Sea, evidently the Dead Sea. Those nations identified in the psalm would all qualify (480).

In 2 Chronicles 20, the prophet Jahaziel figured prominently in delivering the message of deliverance to King Jehoshaphat. Of further interest to the student of the psalm, Jahaziel is a Levite directly descended from the original Asaph. Therefore, it is supposed that the inscription of the psalm is in reference not to the man Asaph, but to the family of Asaph. Perhaps the other psalms attributed to Asaph were also composed by members of the Asaph clan. In any case, if Psalm 83 and 2 Chronicles 20 were written regarding the same circumstance, then the one records a request for deliverance, while the other represents God’s magnificent response to that prayer.

Jehoshaphat, who ruled Judah in the middle part of the ninth century, was an exemplary king over Judah. This particular crisis—an alliance of nations able and willing to utterly destroy God’s people—was one that Jehoshaphat evidently considered to be an

overwhelming threat to his people. After Jehoshaphat led the nation in making an appeal to God for help, he received the above-noted reply through Jahaziel. The message from God was that there would be no need to prepare for battle, because God intended to handle the situation personally. Instead, Jehoshaphat was instructed to have the people arranged so that they could witness God's victory over their enemies. As an act of faith in God's promise, Jehoshaphat responded by arranging perhaps the strangest battle configuration ever seen. He appointed singers and proclaimers of God's glory to lead his army onto the battle site. It was an army with unarmed point men. The sole purpose of the army's presence there at all was to witness God's victory and to hear its glory proclaimed and sung.

When they arrived, they found their enemies dead. God had, by unspecified means, caused confusion among the various armies who had turned on one another. God's people had only to gather the spoil from the carnage and return home in peace.

As one considers the psalm, one must do so understanding that it expresses an appeal to God before the victory was realized, before the victory was even promised. This is not to say that it could not have been written after the fact (and it may have been), but the point of view it represents is from the time of distress and despair. It beseeches God for help when no such help seems forthcoming.

The psalm is well arranged, consisting of a verse of introduction, four sections of content, and a concluding verse. The first and last verses relate to one another in resolving the matter. Verse one reads, "Do not keep silent, O God! Do not hold Your peace, And do not be still, O God!" [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] While this verse figures into the first section, it also finds its ultimate answer in verse 18: ". . . That they may know that You, whose name alone is the LORD, Are the Most High over all the earth."

Sound the Battle Cry: Be Realistic

Do not keep silent, O God!

Do not hold Your peace,

And do not be still, O God!

For behold, Your enemies make a tumult;

And those who hate You have lifted up their head.

*They have taken crafty counsel against Your people,
And consulted together against Your sheltered ones.
They have said, "Come, and let us cut them off from being a
nation,
That the name of Israel may be remembered no more."*

*For they have consulted together with one consent;
They form a confederacy against You:
The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites;
Moab and the Hagrites;
Geba, Ammon, and Amalek;
Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre;
Assyria also has joined with them;
They have helped the children of Lot. Selah (vv. 1-8)*

The God haters are alive and well. A few years ago, I had an experience that opened my previously uninitiated eyes to the tactics and attitude of today's atheists. In the winter of 2010, I found myself debating several Bible skeptics at once on the Internet. There were several things to be learned from this experience. First and foremost, if one is ever granted the opportunity to engage in an Internet debate, one ought to pass. No matter how thoroughly my opponents' arguments were dismantled, no concession was ever made. When one of their arguments was demonstrated to be without merit, my opponents simply ignored all of the evidence presented, congratulated themselves, and moved on to the next false claim. I found myself answering questions incessantly, while my opponents were never compelled to answer any. When they were faced with information with which they were unfamiliar, they demanded documentation. If I was unfamiliar with a point presented on their side, I was called ignorant.

This is not to say that there are not some atheists or skeptics out there who simply have not yet seen the evidence needed to allow faith in God to bloom, but it appeared that such an attitude was the exception rather than the rule. There was no interest in truth at all, but only contempt. Their tactics spoke volumes, because truth needs not misrepresent its opponents in order to thrive. Had they the truth, they would have been able to make compelling arguments without

resorting to tactics that would be proscribed in any formal debate.

Second, I learned that the world of atheism and skepticism has changed since my youth. I knew, of course, of the arrogance and hostility evident in the Richard Dawkinses and Sam HARRISES of the world. But these, I thought, were the exception rather than the rule. Surely, the typical atheist could be convinced if only he were presented with sufficient evidence. Surely, the arguments would be respectful and gentlemanly and that common respect and courtesy would be valued. This is what I had seen among renowned skeptical thinkers of the past.

The late Isaac Asimov, renowned as a scientist, thinker, novelist, and atheist, was one whose arguments I had read as a young man. When, in the late 1970s, Asimov debated the existence of God in the now-defunct *Omni* magazine, he demonstrated respect for his theistic opponents, admired their intellect (“Last Word” 146). As a novelist, on at least one occasion, he had two fictional characters debate the existence of God. Since Asimov was the creator of both characters, he could easily have made the theist into a dolt who made ridiculous arguments that the atheist would then answer with ease. It did not read that way. Even though this was a fictional exchange, the two argued the matter as intellects on an equal footing (*Fantastic Voyage*). To emphasize further, I doubt such fairness would even be seen on the so-called impartial news networks today.

I entered these discussions believing that the same attitude could be found among those arguing about the existence of God today; I was very, very wrong. The Bible has always been a controversial book, and controversy over the Bible has always been quite personal. In spite of that, many atheists of the past managed at least to deal with the Bible on a level that defied whatever personal animosity they themselves might have had toward it. But these are not your father’s atheists, and I don’t think we’re in Kansas anymore.

For what it is worth, I became convinced that my opponents, doubters of the Bible, were not skeptics because they believed the evidence supported their views. I came to believe that they, quite frankly, hated God’s guts. They hate Him because He has the audacity to actually issue commands to them. How dare anyone do such a thing! These folks analyzed evidence wholly and completely

out of fondness of predetermined conclusions. Why should that have surprised me? Paul informed us that atheism is based on a personal preference, not evidence. “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge . . .” (Rom. 1:28).

In most lectures, I would avoid such a lengthy personal anecdote, but I believe this one well illustrates the attitude that prevails among those pictured in this psalm. It is difficult for the typical believer to prepare himself for a defense of Christianity against the opponents he is likely to encounter in some arenas. The vehemence and dishonesty is shocking, at least to the uninitiated and naive. As in this psalm, there is a need for God’s people to employ a realistic viewpoint of their spiritual conflicts. Yes, some good and honest hearts are also alive and well, decent people who are in need of instruction; others will never obey the gospel, but are neither haters of God nor of His people. But Jesus Himself warned us that Christians would be hated even as He Himself was hated (John 15:18). And 1 John 3:13 echoes that principle: “Do no marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you.” Make no mistake: the God haters are alive and well. God’s people ought to be realistic enough to recognize that they are in a battle with those who hate them and their God.

Those who hate God and His people have an agenda, one based on their hatred of righteousness and rooted in their own pride. Note the allusion to pride in verse 2: “. . . And those who hate You have lifted up their head.” Some may presume that the chosen nation concept was one that prevailed among ancient nations, that is, that other nations considered themselves to be chosen of God as well. But it seems that neighboring nations had at least an inkling that the claim of the Jews was rooted in something more than just patriotism or jingoism. They knew that the Jews enjoyed a special status with God. If this is not so, why the hatred? To illustrate, I once met a Mormon boy (“elder”) who opened the conversation by inviting me to learn more about “God’s one true church, the Mormon Church.” The claim, while false, did absolutely nothing to enrage me because I knew it to be false and could demonstrate its error. Furthermore, I knew that the boy, though misguided, wanted only to help me. But I have also witnessed members of man-made religions become infuriated with the church of Christ because of its exclusive nature.

If we were simply mistaken, that ought to be easily proved and ought to incite little anger. But on the other hand, if one knows or suspects one is in error, the prideful reaction is one of anger.

This may partially explain the long-standing tradition of Jew hatred that still persists. Regarding such actions, there are certainly some unwarranted conclusions to be made. For instance, some would have the holocaust a fulfillment of prophecies that were actually fulfilled in AD 70. Premillennialists have this psalm being fulfilled currently in the modern nation of Israel surrounded by political enemies. Adding fuel to this fire was the finding of an ancient, Irish manuscript in 2006. The twelve-hundred-year-old text was unearthed in an Irish bog and was opened to Psalm 83. The premillennialists breathlessly concluded that God caused this discovery in order to say that Psalm 83 is a prophecy of modern events (Salus). Such sensational claims do little to assist our understanding of the psalm. However, modern hatred of the Jews is a centuries-long and pealing echo, an awful tradition that may be rooted in the seething resentment of Israel's fellowship with the one true God.

This also helps to explain why such a vast conspiracy of otherwise hostile nations existed (and perhaps why with God's assistance it was so easily broken). Seemingly the only thing that bound these nations together was their opposition to Judah. While such alliances exist in the case of a desperate need for self-preservation, this can hardly be the motivation here. At this point, Judah was not the world power that the unified Israel had been under David and Solomon. So, a plan was hatched and an alliance was formed. Micah 2:1 reads, "Woe to those who devise iniquity, And work out evil on their beds! At morning light they practice it, Because it is in the power of their hand."

Faith Is the Victory: Remember

*Deal with them as with Midian,
As with Sisera,
As with Jabin at the Brook Kishon,
Who perished at En Dor,
Who became as refuse on the earth.
Make their nobles like Oreb and like Zeeb,*

*Yes, all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna,
Who said, "Let us take for ourselves
The pastures of God for a possession." (vv. 9-12)*

God's servants are often found calling on God for help, based partially on events of the past; they even remind God of those events. There is no hint that God would literally forget, but the reminder is an appeal for God to both act on His promise and as He has in the past. Nehemiah thus prayed:

Remember, I pray, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, "If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations; but if you return to Me, and keep My commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out to the farthest part of the heavens, yet I will gather them from there, and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for My name." (1:8-9)

The events cited by the psalmist are found in essentially two events from the book of Judges. These appear to have been selected for two reasons. First, the current array of nations opposed to God's people include some that were defeated in Judges 4-8. Second, there is the manner of their defeat. If written prior to the event, the psalmist seems to ask specifically for God to take matters in His own hands and destroy the confederacy. If written afterwards, then the psalmist is using a poetic device to picture God's people asking for God's help to come in the specific manner that it did. But there can be no doubt that the victory belonged to God and that He did respond to their appeal made in faith (2 Chron. 20:1-13).

Verses 9-11 include the following list of foreign notables who were defeated in Judges 4-8: Sisera and Jabin, Oreb and Zeeb, and Zebah and Zalmunna. What these six individuals (essentially from two events) have in common is that they were defeated by non-miraculous, providential means. There was no setting aside of the laws of nature. While God's revealed plan was employed, while God ought to be credited with the victory, there was no sudden failure of walls, no selective hail, no extending of a day, and no unarmed man killing a lion or armies single-handedly.

In Judges 4-5, we read of the Canaanite king Jabin and general Sisera. They enjoyed an extraordinary military advantage against

the tribes of Israel since they fielded nine hundred iron chariots against an army with none. Among ancient armies, the chariot was roughly equivalent to modern tanks; foot soldiers opposing the chariot probably had about the same success ratio, as well. While the initial account in chapter 4 gives few details as to how victory was attained, the song of Deborah in chapter 5 at least alludes to events that were critical to the battle. In her song, she mentions an evidently unexpected thunderstorm in verses 4-5, and in verse 21 she sang, “The torrent of Kishon swept them away, That ancient torrent, the torrent of Kishon. O my soul, march on in strength!”

Is such a victory attributable to God? If so, is it miraculous? One must expect that Sisera and his commanders were all aware of the effect that a violent rainstorm would have on chariots. Therefore, the storm must have come with little warning. So, was it blind luck or Canaanite foolishness that saved Israel that day? It was neither. God sent the storm and did it in such a way as to provide little or no warning. Thus, God saved Israel through natural means. The psalmist is requesting divine intervention against the God haters, but not necessarily of a miraculous kind.

In a similar vein, Judges 6-7 records the victory of Gideon and his three hundred men over the vast army of Midian. While the defeat of Midian was certainly due to God’s plan, there is no miracle involved other than miraculous revelation. In fact, when Gideon was initially called, he was informed that his own prowess would be the means of the nation’s salvation. Judges 6:14 reads, “Then the LORD turned to him and said, ‘Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?’” When Gideon boldly destroyed Baal’s altar, he encouraged Israel to rise up against the Midianites; when the three hundred defeated Midian, the nation was further energized. By the time the hostilities ended, tribes were complaining of being left out of the battle earlier!

In both of these examples, the psalmist remembers past events in which God was able to conquer the God haters, regardless of their numerical advantage and their devious calculations. Proverbs 19:21 reads, “There are many plans in a man’s heart, Nevertheless the LORD’s counsel—that will stand.”

He Is Able to Deliver Thee: God Is Reliable

*O my God, make them like the whirling dust,
Like the chaff before the wind!
As the fire burns the woods,
And as the flame sets the mountains on fire,
So pursue them with Your tempest,
And frighten them with Your storm. (vv. 13-15)*

While the God haters have craftily laid schemes, the people of God set their faith on God's ability to act on their behalf. According to the NKJV, the psalmist calls on God to make these "like the whirling dust" (v. 13). Several other translations agree, while the KJV and others translate it "like a wheel." Several commentators suggest that the reference is to the tumbleweed, which seems to best fit the context, and it is thus translated by the World English Bible. Regardless of the imagery, the imprecation is clear: it is a call on God to utterly defeat those who oppose God's people and by extension indulge in hatred of God Himself. While the forces that opposed God's people seem formidable, they are little more than the tumbleweed rolling aimlessly before God's storm; if spared of being utilized for kindling, it is powerless before the Creator's tempest.

Today's Christians may despair, believing that they are fighting a losing battle against the forces of evil. Perhaps they themselves fall prey to the vain error of limiting God by means of earthly disadvantage. Or to put it as Jonathan did in 1 Samuel 14:6, "... Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be that the LORD will work for us. For nothing restrains the LORD from saving by many or by few." In America, the last few years have not been encouraging, regarding ethics and morals. Are the God haters winning?

In a recent interview with Rolling Stone magazine, tech millionaire turned LGBTQ activist Tim Gill said he's aiming to punish Christians who don't want to participate in same-sex weddings. "We're going into the hardest states in the country," he says. "We're going to punish the wicked." (Payton)

Note Gill's absurd use of the word *wicked* to describe not himself, but any who dare to agree with God regarding Gill's own

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wickedness. By human definition, Gill has thus far been insanely successful in promoting his own insanity.

God's people err by defining strength according to human definition; they also err by defining victory in human terms. That is, while the political ground may be lost, never to be regained, the faithful are always victorious. God remains enthroned.

But we also learn that God remains able to act on His own behalf in earthly matters, as well. God's hand in such events may not be immediately visible, even after the fact. But there is no doubt that God is still able to send both physical and spiritual storms to confound wickedness and to destroy those who hate Him. The responsibility of God's people is to ask for God's help and to trust His wisdom in sending the storm at His own discretion. "Therefore thus says the LORD God of hosts: 'Because you speak this word, Behold, I will make My words in your mouth fire, And this people wood, And it shall devour them'" (Jer. 5:14).

Humble Yourselves in the Sight of the Lord: Repent

Fill their faces with shame,

That they may seek Your name, O LORD.

Let them be confounded and dismayed forever;

Yes, let them be put to shame and perish,

That they may know that You, whose name alone is the LORD,

Are the Most High over all the earth. (vv. 16-18)

In a departure from the expected Old Testament norm, the conclusion of Psalm 83 calls upon the nations to repent. Why would we consider this a departure at all? While the Lord is frequently and consistently recognized as the God over all of the Earth, many of the psalms have a nationalistic flavor; little is said of the eternal fate of the nations. But in this psalm, its call reaches beyond a temporal defeat of those who hate God. Their defeat and humiliation is seen as the means to bring them to repentance. Verse 16 reads, "Fill their faces with shame, That they may seek Your name, O LORD." Incidentally, this departure of emphasis does not imply any conflict or contradiction with other psalms that deal primarily with the defense of the righteous and do not mention God's ultimate goal for all people everywhere. In all cases in both testaments, God is not

only the God of Israel, but also the God over all of the Earth. Let all of the Earth keep silence before Him (Hab. 2:20).

The picture of God calling the nations to repentance and service to Him is a view much more thoroughly explored in the New Testament, especially as pertaining to Judgment Day. This is understandable, given the non-nationalistic nature of the church. Philippians 2:10-11 reads as follows: “. . . that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Men are called upon to humble themselves before Jesus as volunteers, lest they be humbled before the glorified Christ at His return. The God haters may either humble themselves before the Lord or be forcibly humbled forever. But God’s ultimate purpose in humbling the God haters is to bring them to repentance and save them eternally.

In either circumstance of the God haters being humbled, God’s name will be glorified among men. As the psalm closes, there is a resolution to the perceived silence of God to which the psalmist objected in verse 1. God ought not to keep silence forever as those who hate Him rail against Him and victimize the righteous, and neither will He keep silence. God’s name ought to be glorified and honored, and His name will be glorified and honored, either through repentance or by divine justice. “Know that the LORD, he is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture” (Psalm 100:3).

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Biographical Sketch

Dan was unfortunately born in a place other than West Virginia, son of the late Bob and Doris Kessinger. He and his wife, the former Mary Amy West, have two boys. D.J. is a graduate of the West Virginia School of Preaching, and Thomas is a college student.

To the surprise of all concerned, Dan graduated from Walton High School in Roane County, West Virginia, and attended Ohio Valley College. There, the administration was faced with the hard choice of graduating him or having him stay longer. This explains his associate and bachelor degrees in Biblical Science.

Dan has been preaching the gospel of Christ since 1982, serving congregations in Belle, Long Valley, Gandeeville, Proctor, and St. Marys, West Virginia. He now preaches for the Mt. Alto, West Virginia, church of Christ and is working for the West Virginia School of Preaching as an instructor.

Dan conducted a weekly radio program for twenty years, preaches a number of gospel meetings in various locations, has been a contributor to religious journals, and is the author of *A Cloak of Malice*. He worked with West Virginia Christian Youth Camp for thirty years and the West Virginia School of Preaching for eighteen. Since 2011, he has been involved with mission work in Kenya.

WITH A PIOUS LIFE

Psalm 25

Charles C. Fugh III

The great homiletic expositor G. Campbell Morgan eloquently describes the situation addressed in Psalm 25. Concerning this psalm, Morgan wrote:

THE SOB OF A GREAT SORROW SOUNDS THROUGHOUT THIS psalm. The circumstances in which it was written are most evidently revealed by the words which occur through its process; desolation, affliction, distress, travail.

These and other kindred words, sobbing in sorrow, vibrant with pain, are the outstanding words of the psalm. Yet, its main message is not a message of despair, but rather of hope, of confidence. (216)

First, understand that *the undergirding intention* of this psalm involves the quality known as *piety*. Cloer entitles the psalm as “Piety Portrayed” (324). The key statements are: “Who is the man that fears the LORD?” (v. 12), and “The secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him, And He will show them His covenant” (v. 14). [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] The man who fears the Lord, and knows the “secret of the LORD” is the man whose life is characterized by the term *piety*. But what is piety? What is the pious life? How does piety connect with worship and result in worship that increases the awareness of God, and the things of God, in one’s beliefs and practices?

Second, consider how *the structural organization* of Psalm 25 enables one to understand the meaning of piety and how piety enriches one’s worship and life. Morgan again clarifies:

[The psalm] opens and closes with prayer. The first seven verses constitute a prayer, and the last seven verses constitute a prayer, or rather, and more accurately, the first paragraph and the last paragraph constitute one great prayer; and between these two paragraphs is the central one, beginning at the eighth verse and ending with the fifteenth.

That central paragraph is occupied almost wholly with the contemplation and declaration of the goodness of God; not that these things are confined to that central paragraph; they run like a major note throughout all the minor wailing of the sorrowful experience, which created the necessity for, and found expression in, the psalmist's prayer. (216-17)

Continuing our consideration of the structural organization of this psalm, note Cloer's following observations:

With its alphabetical arrangement, this psalm is regarded as one of the nine acrostic psalms in the Book of Psalms (9; 10; 25; 34; 37; 111; 112; 119; 145). This rigid way of organizing a psalm follows the pattern of the first verse or line beginning with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the second verse or line beginning with the next letter, and so on through the alphabet, until all twenty-two letters have been successively used in the verses or lines. Occasionally we use this style of writing in English. It is a literary structure that lends itself especially to memorization (and maybe even visualization). . . .

Inspired writers did not always carry through with the complete alphabetical form; sometimes they deviated slightly from the pattern. This psalm, for example, does not follow a perfect acrostic pattern. (324)

This structural organization of the psalm flows from the prayers of the psalmist (vv. 1-7; 15-21), which prayers serve like bookends for the core of Psalm 25. This core (vv. 8-15) is sandwiched between the two prayers, and it communicates the answer to the relevant questions pertaining to piety and the pious life. This core, or center, of the revelation implies that *godliness*, or *godly fear*, is synonymous with piety and the pious life.

Historically, from both the Hebrew and Greek world, piety is connected to worship and life that evidences deep awareness of, and reverence for, God. *Reverence* is a key word for explicating the implications of the pious life. Piety involves "the totality of the Jewish religion . . . to venerate God as one and to worship Him by keeping His law; the two are the same thing" (Foerster 179). *Godly* is a synonym for pious. *Godliness* is a synonym for piety.

There are at least three great texts in Psalms that contain the

word rendered in many English translations by the word *godly* and synonymous with the word *pious*. These texts are as follows:

- “But know that the LORD has set apart for Himself him who is godly [pious] . . .” (4:3).
- “Help, LORD, for the godly [pious] man ceases! For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men” (12:1).
- “For this cause everyone who is godly [pious] shall pray to You In a time when You may be found; Surely in a flood of great waters They shall not come near him (32:6).

The Greek word for *piety* or godliness, and comparable to the Hebrew word rendered *godly* in the above texts, is *eusebeia*. In the Hellenist-Roman world, “the true content of [this word] for the educated Greek is *reverent and wondering awe at the lofty and pure world of the divine*” (Foerster 178, emphasis added). It is this attitude of mind and life that is a keynote of Psalm 25.

Having considered (1) the undergirding intention of the psalm and (2) the structural organization of the psalm, let us now *consider* (3) the *implicative revelation* of the psalm. The revelation in the twenty-two verses of Psalm 25 provides ten implications that identify the pious life, while enriching the worship of the person characterized in this fashion.

I. The Pious Life Spiritually Communes with God

The psalm begins with the affirmation: “To You, O LORD, I lift up my soul” (v. 1). Piety is “conduct in relation to God” (Foerster 183). It is “life lived with an eye on God” (184). Leslie titles Psalm 25 “The Hunger for Intimacy with God” (319). The existence and infinite nature of God are implied in the meaning of true piety.

The perspective of a pious life is a minority view. Most people think and live from a worldly view, not one that is sacred; secular, not spiritual; ungodly, not godly. In his 2014 book, *The Soul of the World*, philosopher Roger Scruton defends the sacred against the secular. He argues the case for the pious life, pious obligations, and pious vows.

He argues that our personal relationships, moral intuitions, and aesthetic judgments hint [quite a significant understatement] at a transcendent dimension that cannot be

understood through the lens of science alone. To . . . understand what we are is to acknowledge the reality of sacred things. . . . Evolution cannot explain our conception of the sacred; neuroscience is irrelevant to our interpersonal relationships, which provide a model for our posture toward God. . . . (Jacket)

Concerning piety, Scruton, a visiting professor of philosophy at Oxford at the time of this writing, said:

The process of secularization . . . involves clearing away all the threads of pious observance that cannot be replaced by free choice and self-made obligations. The world is remade without the transcendental [divine] reference, without the encounter with sacred things, without the vows of allegiance and submission, which have no other justification. . . . But it turns out . . . that the world without transcendent bonds is . . . a completely different world, and one in which we humans are not truly at home. . . . In all durable societies, I maintain, the order of the covenant [cf. v.14] is overreached into another order, in which obligations are transcendent, attachments sacred. . . . (94-95)

The personal relationship with the true God, who is the absolute ground of true piety, is implied in the words of the psalmist as he addresses Deity: “O my God” (v. 2). This is not some irreverent, profane cultural buzzword abbreviated on social media as *OMG!* It is not a profane exclamation at all. It is a profound salutation spoken from the depths of a soul who is lifted up in awe of God, on whom one is totally dependent.

II. The Pious Life Shamelessly Confides in God

Piety involves the acknowledgment to God that “. . . I trust in You . . .” (v. 2). The ego of the person “directs his soul upwards to Him . . . because in believing confidence he clings to Him and is united with Him” (Delitzsch 341). This sentiment of trust is “settled confidence in God, to the exclusion of all other helpers . . . a fixed determination to confide in God” (Alexander 114). It is scripturally stated in the summation of the true philosophy of life set forth in the wisdom of the following: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge

Him, And He shall direct your paths” (Prov. 3:5-6). This is a trust that believes “. . . In quietness and confidence shall be [my] strength” (Isa. 30:15).

The trust that characterizes the pious life is shameless. “. . . Let me not be ashamed. . . . [N]o one who waits on You [shall] be ashamed” (vv. 2-3). *Ashamed* refers here to the “disappointment and frustration” (Alexander 99) of hopelessness. True Christian theism results in a shameless life of piety that can affirm, “[W]hich is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for *I know* whom I have believed . . .” (ESV, 2 Tim. 1:12; emphasis added).

III. The Pious Life Is Subjected in Constancy to God

Three times in this psalm the writer speaks of waiting on (for) God (vv. 3, 5, 21). This is constant (cf. Delitzsch 346). In another place, he says, “My soul, wait silently for God alone, For my expectation is from Him. . . . He is my defense; I shall not be moved” (Psalm 62:5-6).

The New Testament word that describes this constancy to God is *hupomone*. It is translated *patience*, *steadfastness*, and *endurance*. It is the “characteristic of a man who is unswerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and sufferings” (Thayer 644). Some references to this quality, so crucial to the pious life, include Romans 5:3 and 15:4; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 2 Thessalonians 1:4; Hebrews 10:36 and 12:1; James 1:3 and 5:11; 2 Peter 1:6, et al. We may need more iron in our blood, but we also need more courage in our piety! This powerful quality has eloquently been described in the following statement:

It is the spirit which bears things not simply with resignation, but w. blazing hope. It is the spirit which bears things because it knows that these things are leading to a goal of glory. . . . The word indicates a remaining under, i.e., a bearing up under difficult circumstances. It is the [s]pirit which can bear things, not . . . which grimly waits for the end, but the patience which radiantly hopes for the dawn. (Rogers and Rogers 471, 482)

IV. The Pious Life Seeks Content from God

The life of piety is a life of faith, reasoning, and emotion (1
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Thess. 5:21; Acts 26:25; 1 Peter 1:8, et al.). However, all of this must have content. This content comes from God through His revelation. This special revelation of God, in contrast to general revelation available in the world and in man, is available only in the Holy Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:14-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21) and in the person and work of Jesus Christ revealed in those Scriptures. Warren explains it well:

It must be re-emphasized that all men, having been created by God with intelligent minds (able to recognize, to observe and to properly consider the evidence which God has given) are required by God to draw only such conclusions as are warranted by the evidence. . . . [However,] logical reasoning is not the answer to everything. Logic is **necessary** to a proper life, but **logic alone** is certainly **not sufficient** for such a life. Correct **reasoning** has its place and so does **emotion**. But both reasoning and emotion must be given **content** by the revelation of God, the Bible (Jer. 10:23; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). No purely **intellectual** life can be adequate any more than can a purely **emotional** one. Both are necessary, but both also need **revelation** from God. (31)

The psalmist prays, “Show me Your ways, O LORD; Teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me . . .” (vv. 4-5). Spurgeon comments on this fervent plea spoken by the man of piety:

The believer begins with trembling feet to walk in the way of the Lord. He asks to be led onward like a little child upheld by his parent’s helping hand. He craves to be further instructed in the alphabet of truth. The burden of the prayer in [this] text is the instruction of the saints in the things of God. David knew much, but he realized his ignorance. He still desired to be in the Lord’s school. Four times in two verses, he applies for a scholarship in the college of grace. (383)

Packer says that guidance is a “main theme in Psalm 25, where we read, ‘Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he *instructs* . . . and *teaches*. . . . Who is the man that feareth the Lord? Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose” (211; emphasis added). Learning and knowing truth; teaching and instructing in truth; these words imply content that implies absolute truth for the life of piety

and the worship enjoined upon the pious life. A pious life recognizes the eternal and infinite value of truth (Prov. 23:23; John 8:32).

V. The Pious Life Is Substantiated by the Character of God

The final two verses of the first section (vv. 6-7) and the first three verses of the second section (vv. 8-10) involve “the thought of what Jehovah is and always has been” (Maclaren 244). The character of God vindicates, validates, and verifies the case that God is worthy of our trust, the life of piety is worth living, no matter what price must be paid to live it.

The appeal is made to “*Thy compassions and lovingkindness,*” as belonging to His nature, and to their past exercise as having been “from of old.” Emboldened thus, the psalmist can look back on his own past . . . and can trust that Jehovah will think upon Him *according to His mercy,* and *for the sake of His goodness* or love. The vivid realisation of that Eternal Mercy as the very mainspring of God’s actions . . . enables a man to bear the thought of his own sins. . . . The thought of God beautifully draws the singer from himself. . . . Revelation of the path of life in some fashion is the only conduct consistent with His character. (244-45)

The conduct consistent with the character of God is piety (godliness, the fear of the Lord). It is such because of the reality of God, now and forever. Paul wrote:

[E]xercise yourself to godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of *the life that now is and of that which is to come.* . . . *For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God,* who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe. (1 Tim. 4:7-8, 10; emphasis added)

VI. The Pious Life Is the Life of a Sinner Granted Clemency by God

“The magnitude of sin demands a Divine intervention” (Maclaren 246). “For Your name’s sake, O LORD, Pardon my iniquity, for it is great” (v. 11). Maclaren’s beautiful exposition of verse eleven says:

The pleas for forgiveness of the “iniquity” which makes him feel unworthy of Jehovah’s guidance are remarkable. “For Thy name’s sake” appeals to the revealed character of God, as concerned in the supplicant’s pardon, inasmuch as it will be honoured thereby, and God will be true to Himself in forgiving. “For it is great” speaks the boldness of helplessness. . . . None else than God can deal with it. Faith makes the very greatness of sin and extremity of need a reason for God’s act of pardon. (246-47)

Clemency is grounded in a disposition of mercy that results in an act of grace, exempting one from punishment (cf. vv. 6-7, 10, 16, 18). Piety is godliness, godly fear, and the deep reverential awareness of, and need for, God in one’s life and practice. It is God consciousness guided by the content of God’s revelation in Scripture, culminating in the person and work of His Son Jesus Christ. However, sin shuts God out from our consciousness and shuts us out from God (cf. Isa. 59:1-2). Therefore, true piety can come only from the removal of sin, and sin can be removed only by an act of pardon. Today, we can speak only under the shadow of the cross. The action that occurs when one is redeemed from sin by the blood of Christ and united with Christ in the likeness of His death, raised to walk in the newness of the life of piety (Rom. 6:1-17) is the foundation of the pious life. It is the Gospel of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:1-4). Piety is not pictured as someone walking with a halo on his head or with a holier-than-thou self-righteousness. Rather, piety is portrayed in the life of Paul as he says, “But by the grace of God I am what I am . . .” (15:10). And, what completes the statement, “I am,” for Paul? He says, “. . . Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief” (1 Tim. 1:15; cf. Gal. 2:20).

VII. The Pious Life Sits in Camaraderie with God

The summit of Psalm 25 is found in verses 12-14. It is one of the great mountaintops of Holy Scripture, of which there are many. It is located within the central paragraph of this great psalm, with the key verse for the section, as well as the entire psalm, being the following: “The secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him, And He will show them His covenant” (v. 14).

The key words in the verse are *secret*, *fear*, and *covenant*. Delitzsch summarizes the significance by setting forth the meaning of the first of these three words (i.e., *secret*):

Starting from the primary meaning . . . “to be or to make tight, firm, compressed” . . . signifies a being closely pressed together for the purpose of secret communication and converse, confidential communion or being together . . . the confidential communication itself . . . (345)

Relevant passages containing the word include Psalm 55:14 and 111:1 and Proverbs 3:32 and 11:13. The word is here rendered *friendship* (ESV; ASV), *secret* (KJV; NKJV; NASV) and *confides* (NIV), with the NASV containing a footnote that says, “*counsel* or *intimacy*.” Cloer writes, “God does not have favorites, but He does have intimates who see His majesty in a way that others do not. These people will see His covenant loyalty [v. 14b] as they experience the joy of being a part of that covenant” (337). These verses imply the rewards of the pious life both now and throughout eternity. Herein is “the wealth and comfort” (Morgan 218) of piety that enriches worship and life.

VIII. The Pious Life Is Strengthened by the Contemplation of God

The psalmist says, “My eyes are ever toward the LORD . . .” (v. 15). Here is the focus of piety. The one who is living the pious life—the life of godliness—“keeps his eyes constantly directed towards God . . . constant[ly] looking upwards to God . . .” (Delitzsch 346). The true content of piety “is reverent and wondering awe at the lofty and pure world of the divine” (Foerster 178). The implications for the enrichment of one’s worship should be obvious to a person of Christian faith.

It is extremely significant that British philosopher David Conway in his book *The Rediscovery of Wisdom* states the following:

My aim . . . is to defend . . . the view that the explanation of the world and its broad form is that it is the creation of a supreme omnipotent and omniscient intelligence, more commonly referred to as God, who created it in order to bring into existence and sustain rational beings such as

ourselves, who, by exercising their intellects, can become aware of the existence of God. (3)

Conway's defense of this enterprise is what he correctly called the classical conception of philosophy. He further states that the ultimate goal of this classical conception of philosophy is to arrive at reasoned answers grounded in theism. Conway rejects any special revelation of God, but he does make a significant observation regarding what the Bible teaches, concerning its position on the question of proof for the existence of God, and the nature of God:

[T]he Bible can be regarded as espousing virtually identical doctrines to those which form what I have called the classical conception of philosophy. That it does is not fully recognised today, either by practising Jews and Christians or by professional philosophers, most of whom appear to be as little conversant with the classical conception as they are with the teachings of the Bible. (172)

In other words, Conway believes one can, by correct reasoning, come to know that God exists and also know something about the nature of God. This is exactly what the Bible teaches (Psalm 19:1; 139:14; Acts 14:17; Rom. 1:20; Heb. 3:4, et al.). However, as set forth in a point developed above (i.e., the pious life seeks content from God), reason (as well as emotion) must have content.

In harmony with classical philosophy, but also classical apologetics and biblical teaching, Conway implies natural theology is a valid enterprise. Former atheist the late Antony G. N. Flew said before his death that he was influenced greatly by David Conway's arguments for God in his book *The Rediscovery of Wisdom*. Flew acknowledged that his acceptance of the existence of God had been "an exercise in what is traditionally called natural theology" (93). The content of natural theology is found in the nature of the universe, the world, and man. However, this content, though sufficient for the sound case for the existence of God and His eternal power and deity, as well as His infinite goodness, natural theology is insufficient to provide the answers to all the crucial questions related to God.

The Bible, as Conway implies soundly, argues the case for the existence of God, as it affirms the legitimacy of natural theology. However, the Bible also argues a sound case for the need of special

revelation (cf. 1 Cor. 2:7-16; 2 Tim. 3:14-17; Jer. 10:23, et al.). Conway does not go far enough. His rejection of the Bible's claim to be the complete and final revelation of God to man cannot (nor can anyone) answer the sound argument for the divine origin of the Bible as formulated and explicated by the late Thomas B. Warren (cf. *We Can Know that the Bible is God's Word*).

IX. The Pious Life Is Saved in Life's Conflicts by God

As he contemplates God, the ultimate source of strength, the psalmist implies further evidence of a basic biblical thread: ***Life in the world is a battleground***. Life is not a playground. "In the world you will have tribulation" (ESV, John 16:33). "[T]hrough many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (ESV, Acts 14:22). "Fight the good fight of the faith" (ESV, 1 Tim. 6:12). However, the final verses of Psalm 25 are not only evidence of the fight (conflict) in which we are engaged, but the content of the verses are a reminder of the provisions for victory that are provided in that conflict. The psalmist implies how those who are committed to a life of piety (the proper fear of God) are enabled to win over troubles (v. 17a), distresses (v. 18), and sin (v. 18). Faith is the victory (1 John 5:4). The object of the faith that results in victory is God through Jesus Christ, the Son of God. "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31).

The implication of the affirmation of the final prayer in Psalm 25:15-21 is that God will save the life of the person who fears the Lord. The last four verses of the prayer are a summation of this great hope: "Consider my enemies, for they are many; And they hate me with cruel hatred. Keep my soul, and deliver me; Let me not be ashamed, for I put my trust in You. Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, For I wait for You" (vv. 19-21).

Here is divine deliverance in the conflicts of life's fight of faith. ***We are provided the protection of God***. He will "keep [guard (ESV)] my soul" (v. 20). "Now to Him who is able to keep [guard (ASV)] you from stumbling, And to present you faultless [blameless (ESV)] Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy . . ." (Jude 24). ***We are provided the power of God***. He will "deliver me" (v. 20). Deliverance is salvation, and the power of God for ultimate deliverance (salvation) is the Gospel (Rom. 1:16-17; Col. 1:13). The

power of God for ultimate deliverance in life's conflicts is the power of the cross and the empty tomb of Jesus Christ. ***We are provided the presence of God.*** The psalmist declared, ". . . I put my trust in You" (v. 20), or it is, "I take refuge in You" (ESV). The presence of God in my life is my "fortress" (Psalm 18:2). "[I]n the shadow of Your [God's] wings I will make my refuge, Until these calamities have passed by" (Psalm 57:1). Dr. Warren often would tell us to not look at God while in the shadow of your problems; look at your problems while in the shadow of God! ***Finally, we are provided the preservation of God.*** He prayed, "May integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for You" (v. 21). To the Thessalonians, Paul wrote, "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless . . ." (1 Thess. 5:23). The writer of Hebrews stated,

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (13:20-21)

This benediction, in conjunction with that of Jude, assures the preservation of God to the one committed to the practice of Christian piety. Jude concludes:

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling [falling (KJV)], And to present you faultless [blameless (ESV)] Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen. (24-25)

The possibility of falling does not mean the probability of falling (cf. 1 Cor. 10:12-13). Through God's work for us, His work in us, and our work with God, the pious life is preserved by God. Such enriches our worship both now and forever.

X. The Pious Life Is Secure in the Community of God

The last words of the psalm are: "Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles!" (v. 22). Alexander observes that the psalmist "prays no longer for himself, but for all Israel" because the psalm "was designed, from the first, to be a vehicle of pious feeling and

desire” for all of the people of God (117). This is for all who fear God in the community of the pious and godly. Each needs to remember that he is not the only person in a difficult situation. “Many of God’s people are in equal distress. . . . This is . . . no trivial appendage, nor a loose and inappropriate addition. We are never to become so immersed in our own problems as to forget the needs of all of God’s saints” (Leupold 226).

Today, the life of true piety (the Christian life) is lived in relationship with the house (family) of God—the church (1 Tim. 3:14-15; 4:7-8). The “Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16) today is the church purchased by His blood (Acts 20:28) and called to live the life of piety and godliness as members of the blood-bought body of Jesus Christ. “For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself” (ESV, Rom. 14:7).

Conclusion

The undergirding intention of Psalm 25 is to identify the man who fears the Lord (vv. 1-2) and knows “the secret of the Lord” (v. 14). This is the pious person and the life of piety. While not following a strict acrostic structure, Psalm 25 with its twenty-two verses can be observed as having three sections, each consisting of seven verses, with the content of these verses focusing on the individual, and concluding with a final verse, the twenty-second, which focuses on the whole congregation of the redeemed. The first and last sections of the psalm are the prayers (supplications and thanksgiving) of the one who fears the Lord. The center or core (vv. 8-14) provides the key verses to this psalm, making it obvious that *godliness* or *godly fear* are synonymous with the life of the one who is the friend or intimate of God through the covenant that brings God and man together.

With this background of the intention and organization of the psalm, the richness of this remarkable chapter of Scripture is realized through ten implications. These implications provide the obvious answer concerning how the pious life, the true fear of God, and the intimacy of relationship with God enrich one’s worship of God. By way of review and summation, the implications of the psalm are that the pious life (1) spiritually communes with God, (2) shamelessly confides in God, (3) is subjected in constancy to God,

(4) seeks content from God, (5) is substantiated by the character of God, (6) is the life of a sinner granted clemency by God, (7) sits in camaraderie with God, (8) is strengthened by the contemplation of God, (9) is saved in life's conflicts by God, and (10) is secure in the community of God.

Morgan summarized Psalm 25 in its beauty, power, comfort, and consolation: "It opens and closes with prayer. . . . [It is] sorrow merging into a song of salvation. . . . [From it] may we learn to set the sorrows of the hour in the light of the present consciousness of God" (216, 224, 228). May we truly be people of piety. May our worship be enriched. May our hearts stand in awe of God and His Word.

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Biographical Sketch

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GOD'S WONDERFUL CREATION

Psalms 104

Matt Cook

Introduction

Disney's recent box-office blockbuster, *Moana*, is an entertaining and exciting story about the adventures of an ancient Polynesian chieftain's daughter. The movie has several redemptive qualities to it, and, personally, I enjoyed it. Only recently, though, have I become more cognizant of Disney's heavy inclusion of indigenous and animistic beliefs in its popular cartoon movies over the years. While the young heroine Moana is the main character, the plot of the movie revolved around a demigod who was responsible for many of the agricultural and oceanological phenomena that the island people experienced. In the movie, a darkness covered the land, the fish stopped biting, and the crops stopped growing. This catastrophe was blamed on the anger of one of the goddesses and Moana's task was to find and appease the goddess by returning a special stone that had been taken from the goddess (who took the form of one of the islands). This fits well with the following description of folk religion: "Most societies have stories of creation, and of the origins of their people and culture. Other stories explain why things are as they are—how evil and death entered the world, why animals are different from humans, and what causes lightning and thunder" (Hiebert et al. 4648).

While these animistic beliefs are still prevalent, especially among indigenous people groups, they are representative of the beliefs that surrounded the Israelites when many of the psalms were written. Psalm 104, in fact, sometimes unbeknownst to the modern reader, addresses the mythic beliefs of the ancient Near Eastern world, specifically the Egyptians and Canaanites (a brief explanation of this phenomenon will be discussed below). Just like the demigod in *Moana*, ancient Near Eastern populations had their own myths explaining the origins of their culture and other natural realities. Psalm 104 is a response, in the context of its own culture, to these ancient belief systems. Yahweh, not the sun god of the Egyptians or Ba-al, is the supreme Creator and sustainer of all.

Westerners, on the other hand, tend to view any sort of folk religious belief as superstitious, and instead explain nearly everything with science or technology. Compared to animism, which explains nearly everything with something from the spiritual realm, Western secularism is on the complete opposite end of the spectrum of religion. For modern Christians, Psalm 104 is a response to the complete denial of the spiritual realm by Western culture. Even for Christians, though, who are drawn into a scientific mindset, Psalm 104 is a reminder that God is the source and sustainer of all.

Psalm 104 describes a litany of the facets of “God’s Wonderful Creation.” Walter Zorn describes well the flowing language of the psalmist:

Like a child in a toy store, bubbling with delight as his eyes rest upon one joyful creation after another, the psalmist views the marvelously delightful creations of God that fill the earth. He sees . . . that in everything that passes before his eyes there is reason enough to glorify and to praise the God who made it. Truly, as a psalm glorifying God, this one has few equals. (262-64)

With a psalm as poetically beautiful as the 104th, care must be taken not to analyze it so meticulously that the overall meaning and beauty are lost. Many details, some creating significant and technical textual and historic questions, rise to the surface in a detailed study of this psalm. While careful exegesis of the Psalms is important, a description of each detail in a psalm of this length not only potentially hinders one’s ability to admire its poetic beauty, but also is impractical in the length allowed in this chapter. The following will provide an introduction to Psalm 104 and an explanation of the text, based on its natural divisions, and will conclude with a focus on the meaning of Psalm 104 for modern Christians.

Introductory Matters in Psalm 104

The author of Psalm 104 is unknown. No superscription is included with this psalm, though Psalm 103 is ascribed in the uninspired heading to David. Psalms 103 and 104 appear to be closely connected because both psalms begin and end with the phrase, “Bless the LORD, O my soul . . .” (vv. 1, 22; 104:1, 35). [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] So,

one could make the case that if David is the author of Psalm 103, he may also be the author of Psalm 104. But, the authorship, date, and original circumstances of Psalm 104 cannot be spoken of with certainty.

Psalm 104 is nearly unanimously classified as a hymn of praise (cf. DeClaissé-Walford et al. 769; Longman III 358; Anderson 716). It beautifully expresses praise to God from the beginning to end. Its distinction from some other hymns is that Psalm 104 is a hymn of descriptive praise rather than a psalm of narrative praise. A hymn of narrative praise narrates history and God's acts of deliverance, such as deliverance from Egyptian bondage. A hymn of descriptive praise, however, "does not narrate history, but describes God as he is, constantly and universally" (Zorn 265). This distinction is one of the reasons that Psalm 104 is so compelling to a modern audience. While hymns of narrative praise like Psalms 105 and 106 are beautiful, a modern audience cannot *entirely* relate to the events of God's deliverance described therein. Psalm 104, though, describes the creative and sustaining power of God that is unchanging and is still fully experienced today and is therefore of even greater significance for followers of God for all time. Interestingly, several commentators note its strong connection to the creation account of Genesis 1. Cloer notes, "It reads as almost a rudimentary commentary on Genesis 1" (262). Zorn agrees, but makes an important distinction:

A summary of the creation account is contained in the psalm. . . . [T]he distinctive emphasis of the psalmist is his concern with the purpose of God. He observes that in all of God's creative activity, he has in view the sustenance and well-being of his creatures, especially of man. (264)

One other matter of introduction is worthy of consideration here. While this subject matter is deep, at the very least one who is studying this psalm should be aware of the following information, both to better understand the context of Psalm 104 and to be better prepared for resources that will comment on it. Psalm 104 carries some thematic and terminological similarities to the Egyptian Hymn to Aten (Aten was the sun god), written sometime in the early 1300s BC (Longman III 358). Liberal and secular scholars, as would be expected, point to these similarities and suggest that Psalm 104 is

simply an adaptation of the Hymn to Aten. While similarities exist, especially in verses 20-26, the similarities can be expected because both hymns deal with nature and the provision of the respective gods (Zorn 263). While much could be said here and much has been written elsewhere, Longman III competently responds to the similarities between the two hymns. First noting the similarities between the two, he then argues:

However, the difference between the two poems is even more striking. After all, Akhenaten is worshipping the sun disk, and the Israelite psalmist is worshipping the Creator of the sun and all of the cosmos. The picture of God as cloud rider accompanied by messengers, described as flames of fire in the opening verses, as well as an allusion to Leviathan, further suggests that the psalmist was also inspired by West Semitic poetry. In short, the evidence indicates that the psalmist utilized many different poetic resources as he worshipped the true God, who created and sustains the cosmos. (359)

Most striking to me is that the psalmist is aware of and alludes to the Egyptian hymn (and other sources that will be addressed below) as a way of showing the superiority of Yahweh over all other gods. Broyles explains, “The psalm is very cosmopolitan, echoing motifs from . . . Canaanite Baal imagery and the Egyptian Hymn to Aten. It therefore demonstrates in the language of the ancient culture that Yahweh is the true divine King over creation” (398). So, rather than create problems for believers in the inspiration of Scripture, awareness of and allusions to other religious traditions of the day point to the inspiration of Scripture and the purpose of the psalmist to compare and elevate the supreme God of the universe over all others.

The structure of a psalm of this length is somewhat complex, and little consensus has been achieved in this area (Allen 30). In the following explanation of the text, I will use Zorn’s outline (only slightly adapted), which is focused on the attributes of God and is worded well in English, but still faithful to the structure of the original language (265-72).

A. The Introduction and Conclusion: Praise the Lord (vv. 1a, 35b)

- B. Creator of Heaven and Earth (vv. 1b-4)
- C. Designer of Land and Seas (vv. 5-9)
- D. Provider of Life-Giving Water (vv. 10-13)
- E. And of Vegetation (vv. 14-18)
- F. Guarantor of Times and Seasons (vv. 19-23)
- G. Ruler of the Sea, Teeming with Life (vv. 24-26)
- H. Sustainer of Life (vv. 27-30)
- I. Prayer and Praise—God’s Eternal Glory (vv. 31-35)

An Explanation of the Text

The Introduction and Conclusion: Praise the Lord (vv. 1a, 35b)

Fortunately, the biblical phrase “Bless the LORD, O my soul!” has made its way into the modern hymnody of churches of Christ (especially among younger Christians) through the song “10,000 Reasons.” I have heard only a couple of well-meaning Christians question how it is possible to “bless the Lord” since He is the One that blesses us. Obviously, when they see the very scriptural roots of the phrase, they understand its validity. To “bless” the Lord literally means in this context to “praise God” and “declare God the origin of power for success, prosperity, fertility” (Holladay 49). So, the New International Version’s translation here is still correct: “Praise the LORD, my soul.” When the psalmist “blesses” the Lord, he is praising Him, in this psalm for His sustaining power. As Anderson notes, “To bless God is not to increase his power by the words of blessing, but it means to praise him and to give him glory” (718). Interestingly, the words of verse 1 are self-directed as the psalmist urges himself to praise God.

Creator of Heaven and Earth (vv. 1b-4)

Verses 1-2 simply but magnificently describe the God who is “very great” (v. 1b), and verses 3-4 indicate eloquently just how great He is. God is metaphorically described as being clothed with honor, majesty, and light (vv. 1c-2a). If light has any reference to the sun, which makes sense because of the reference to the heavens in verse 2c, then this is another strike at the sun god of the Egyptians, which God uses as a garment. Not only does God clothe Himself with light, but He also is light and the source of all light. John records this thought most clearly: “. . . God is light and in Him is no

darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). God is so great that when He created the heavens, they are like a tent (which is a better translation than the NKJV’s *curtain*) in which he dwells. The psalmist sees the greatness of God and uses imagery that only shrinks the size and significance of human beings, which makes the rest of the psalm’s emphasis on God’s provision for human beings all the more striking. Psalm 8:3-4 comes to mind in light of God’s grandeur described in Psalm 104: “When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained, What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him?”

While verses 3-4 continue the theme of God’s greatness in creation, the language has reference to mythology. The reference to God laying “the beams of His upper chambers in the waters” (v. 3) likely “draws on ancient myths of a battle against chaos and of the Lord as the one who tames chaos, who *secures the rafters of his upper floor on the waters*” (DeClaissé-Walford et al. 774). Further, describing God as the One “Who makes the clouds His chariot, Who walks on the wings of the wind” (v. 3), the psalmist makes explicit reference to the storm god Ba-al, who “was described in just this way, often depicted with a lightning bolt in one hand. But the psalmist is saying that Yahweh controls the storms” (267). Again, the psalmist alludes to the beliefs of the ancient Near Eastern culture in a way that exalts Yahweh, but in a way that a modern reader will not automatically understand.

Designer of Land and Seas (vv. 5-9)

The psalmist now turns from God’s creative power in the heavens to His creative power on the earth. While reading this through the lens and order of Genesis 1 is valid and interesting (cf. Cloer 267-69), care should be taken not to overemphasize the exact order and science of how God created the seas, rivers, mountains, and valleys. To speak with certainty on exactly how an almighty God fashioned the beauty of the earth is to reach beyond human, finite knowledge. The reader must remember that this is poetic language and is not likely a technical running commentary on Genesis 1. As mentioned previously, such a technical reading of poetry may cause one to miss the overall point of the passage. The

psalmist is emphasizing God's power to bring order over the chaos of the seas (the chaos of the seas was a common theme among religious mythology of the psalmists' day). Jacobson argues, "The Lord's act of creation is thus to bring order out of chaos and thus to fashion, within and among the chaos of the universe, a safe and trustworthy space in which life can flourish" (DeClaissé-Walford et al. 775). The point of this section is that "it is the Lord and not anyone else who created the earth" (Longman 360).

Provider of Life-Giving Water and Vegetation (vv. 10-13; 14-18)

These verses require little comment. Simply, these are beautiful descriptions of God's beautiful creation. Anyone who has sat by a quiet stream can relate to the beauty of these descriptions. Not only does He create the beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens, but also He sustains them with the water, food, and environment that they need. And, "the earth is satisfied" (v. 13), even filled by the blessings from God's hand. Genesis 1:12 especially parallels verses 14-18: "And the earth brought forth grass, the herb that yields seed according to its kind, and the tree that yields fruit, whose seed is in itself according to its kind. And God saw that it was good." More than solely the needs of man are described as being met; man cultivates the earth and enjoys its products (vv. 14-15). In these verses, the psalmist specifically has in mind the common crops of ancient Palestine: grapes (wine), olives (oil), and grain (bread). Zorn comments, "The cultivation of plants and trees enables man to become a partner with God in creation and contributes nourishment, enjoyment, and embellishment of life for man" (268-69). God has not only provided for the needs of His living creatures, He has provided "above and beyond" what they need to make "glad the heart of man . . . to make his face shine, And bread which strengthens man's heart" (v. 15).

Guarantor of Times and Seasons (vv. 19-23)

Describing the implications of God's creation of the sun and moon, the psalmist recalls Genesis 1:16, "Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night." The animals seek their prey at night and "[w]hen the sun rises" they go their places of sleep at the same time that humans rise

to begin their work (v. 22). Longman reasons, “In this way, the psalmist celebrates the fact that God’s creation is well ordered and rhythmic” (360). These verses remind us of the manner in which humans take for granted the arrival of a new day or the changing of a season. Though we are often unaware of these consistent and reliable changes, God is the source of each. One also is reminded of the simple lifestyle that comes from following God’s created order of day and night. While technology is both a blessing and a curse, only over the past one hundred years or so have human beings had the ability to have “light” twenty-four hours per day. For the vast majority of the history of the world, humans have been forced to live on God’s “clock,” sleeping when it is dark and working in the day. Now, to the detriment of our physical, mental, and spiritual health, one has the ability to work at all hours. Perhaps our lives would be simpler, healthier, and more spiritual if we simply followed the created order of day and night described in Psalm 104.

Ruler of the Sea, Teeming with Life (vv. 24-26)

The psalmist, seeming unable to contain himself, bursts forth in exuberant praise, “O LORD, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom you have made them all” (v. 24). God’s creation is not random, but the product of God’s infinite wisdom. For one who has visited the limited but rather amazing diversity of an aquarium, verse 25 describes the experience well. If the aquarium displays this diversity, how much more does God’s “great and wide sea, In which are innumerable teeming things” display God’s creative abilities (v. 25)? The psalmist specifically mentions the Leviathan as an example of “the most formidable of sea creatures (Job 41), a multi-headed (Ps. 74:14) ‘monster of the sea’ (Isa. 27:1)” (Longman 362). Scholars have hotly debated the identity of Leviathan, both in this passage and elsewhere. Jacobson explains the situation well:

On the one hand, Leviathan is certainly a figure rooted in mythology. . . . (Ps. 74:14). But commentators are in strong agreement that in Psalm 104, as in Job 41, Leviathan seems to refer to an actual earthly creature. . . . Leviathan is not a fearsome, mythic monster to be conquered, but is just another creature of the Lord. (DeClaissé-Walford et al. 777).

While an interesting study, to determine exactly what type of animal

Leviathan might be can fall only into the category of speculation. The psalmist is clear that this great beast is created by God to play, McCann humorously calling this fearsome beast “God’s beach toy” (69).

Sustainer of Life (vv. 27-30)

“These all” (v. 27) refers back to all of the creatures described in this psalm, both animal and human. They *all* are utterly dependent on God for their sustenance (vv. 27-28). Life and death are by God’s decisions and our food comes from “Your hand” (v. 28). Again, the poetic language of verses 29-30 must be kept in mind as they describe the cycle of death and new life. God hiding his “face” in verse 29 is simply a reference to God’s presence, not necessarily his approval, especially on animals. “When he removes his presence (*hides his face*), we die. Creatures die and turn back to dust, and then God through his *Spirit* creates new life, again describing the rhythm of God’s creation” (Longman 362).

Prayer and Praise—God’s Eternal Glory (vv. 31-35)

The psalmist concludes his enumeration of the glories of God’s creation by pointing to His eternal glory. The psalmist’s concluding response to the psalm is threefold. First, throughout these five verses, he vigorously praises God. The last line of the psalm, “Praise the LORD!” (v. 35) is the first time that *Hallelujah* appears in the Psalms, which is the only Old Testament book that uses the term. By New Testament times, the term was popular (and still is today), but this is its first occurrence in the Old Testament. Secondly, the psalmist prays that his “meditation be sweet to Him” (v. 34). The psalmist is expressing his desire that his meditations (more literally, *prayer*) expressed in this specific psalm be “pleasing” (ESV) to God. Third, the psalmist recognizes that there are sinners on God’s beautiful, created earth and he prays for their demise (v. 35). In light of the entire psalm, this is a call for evil to be eradicated from God’s glorious creation. The psalm ends as it began, with self-directed praise: “Bless the LORD, O my soul! Praise the LORD!” (v. 35).

Concluding Applications: A Glorious God Who Powerfully Provides

What does the modern reader learn from a hymn of praise like Psalm 104? The outline used in this chapter has described God as the Creator, Designer, Provider, Guarantor, Ruler, and Sustainer. Based on each of these descriptive titles, each portrayed eloquently in the text, perhaps a simple statement that captures what the modern reader learns from this psalm is this: *A Glorious God Who Powerfully Provides*. As one reflects on God's wonderful creation described in this psalm, the *glory of God* quickly comes to the forefront. The psalmist concludes, "May the glory of the LORD endure forever . . ." (v. 31). Perhaps more importantly for a modern audience in a self-sufficient world, this psalm is a reminder that it is God who *powerfully provides* every need and God-glorifying pleasure to be experienced on planet Earth. Modern Christians fall into the mold of our secular culture sometimes by referring to earthly provisions as if their ultimate source is the genius of man rather than the power and goodness of God. The language of Psalm 104, acknowledging God as the sustainer of *all* life and the provider of *all* good things should be the language of people of faith. James L. Mays writes:

Contemporary people have a variety of ways of viewing and speaking about the world and the forms of life it sustains—scientific, economic, aesthetic, recreational. This Psalm offers the view and language that is appropriate for faith. For those who live by faith, its view and language qualify and define the other ways of thinking and speaking. (331)

A biblical worldview demands that faith in a glorious God who powerfully provides determine the ways that we think and speak, even if those ways appear to be scientifically and technologically naïve to a secular culture.

As one reflects on this glorious God who powerfully provides, I suggest, among other possibilities, three responses to His glory and powerful provision as seen in Psalm 104: *Outward Praise*, *Inward Meditation*, and *Complete Submission*. As Christians look for and see His glory in creation, outward praise should be the natural response. As the theme of this lectureship points to enriching our worship to God, a deeper appreciation of His creative power and

constant provision in one's life will lead to more heartfelt and reverent worship. We will say, as the psalmist does, "I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being" (v. 33). Secondly, a consideration of God's glory and provision will lead His followers to inward meditation that produces an enhanced prayer life, as the theme of the lectureship suggests. Prayer will be infused with gratefulness for all that God does and a deeper faith that confidently petitions God for blessings according to His perfect will. Finally, an understanding of the God described in Psalm 104 demands complete submission. Nothing less is satisfactory. A glorious God who powerfully provides will produce in us outward worship, inward meditation, and complete submission.

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Biographical Sketch

Matt teaches missions and Bible at Freed-Hardeman University and preaches for the Stantonville, Tennessee, congregation along with his father, Randy Cook. He is married to Charla and has two children, Gabbi (7) and Conner (5).

ALL DAY LONG

Psalm 86

Scott M. Judge

Introduction

Three years ago, I found myself in the Marietta Memorial Hospital emergency room with my youngest son, Joel. He had been complaining of leg pain and was having difficulty walking. I suspected that he had probably pulled a muscle. The football player in me thought he needed to ice it and then walk it off. If only it were that simple! After seeing the doctor at Marietta Memorial Hospital Emergency Room, she believed that Joel needed to have an ultrasound on his leg. After the doctor looked at the results of the ultrasound, she started using words that I had heard before, but did not know exactly what they meant. They were scary words that, if true, would cause a great time of trial and a very uncertain future.

Joel had a blood clot in his leg that went from below his calf to above his knee in his left leg. He was going to be transported by ambulance from Marietta Memorial to Children's Hospital in Columbus. It was here that further determinations could be made to the extent and cause of the clot. I rode with Joel in the ambulance that night. It was a ride that was filled with prayer. I would pray and then check on my son. I would then pray more and then be interrupted to answer a question for the medic. I had no answers and was at a level of emotional pain that I will never forget. "Will my son be ok?" "What is wrong with him?" I was scared for the worst and tried to hide my fear so that my son could be as comfortable as possible and not be filled with worry.

After arriving at the hospital, Joel looked at me and said, "I don't want to be here." I told him that I knew he did not want to go through the uncertainty but I loved the way he was standing up to what was going on. I prayed and I prayed and I prayed. I prayed that night and the next day and into the following night. As often as I could, I prayed. I trusted God with all my heart at the time that He could comfort Joel and my family and most importantly that His will be done.

Joel had several tests over the next few days. We never found out exactly what caused the blood clot in my son's leg. He had none of the terrible diseases that were mentioned to me before we left Marietta. Maybe his sickness was a fluke. Maybe one day we will find out why he had the clot.

Now, he is healthy and going to school. He plays basketball every day and is very active. I thank God that I had the ability to engage Him in the greatest communication known to man—the ability to talk to God. I grew to have a better understanding of 1 Thessalonians 5:17, “[P]ray without ceasing” [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] My faith grew. I was humbled in learning and knowing that problems arise that I cannot fix. Maybe the lesson was to improve my relationship with God; maybe it was to improve my relationship with my family. Whatever the reason, in a time of great distress, I had to trust in God, who is the Creator of all things and the One that will hear my petition when I am close to being broken.

Prayer (vv. 1-7)

*Bow down your ear, O LORD, hear me;
For I am poor and needy.
Preserve my life, for I am holy;
You are my God;
Save your servant who trusts in You!
Be merciful to me, O Lord,
For I cry to you all day long.
Rejoice the soul of Your servant,
For to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.
For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive,
And abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You.*

*Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer;
And attend to the voice of my supplications.
In the day of my trouble I will call upon You,
For You will answer me.*

David begins this psalm with a cry for help: “Incline your ear, O LORD, and answer me” (ESV, v. 1). It is an urgent plea that God

draw near to him. David is requesting the attention of God so that David's plight will be heard and seen and God can bring forth an answer. David's rationale for such a plea is his state of affliction and need. David is not poor in a monetary sense. He is not needy of material gain. David is a man that is afflicted in his heart and mind by the circumstances that surround him. What time in David's life brought forth this particular prayer, we do not know. However, David was in great danger from King Saul on numerous occasions. Saul eyed David because of the perception of the people (1 Sam. 18:9) and tried to kill David with his spear (18:11; 19:10; 20:33). Because of the many times and turmoil such as this, David found himself poor and needy.

David had great trust in God. This did not happen by chance, but rather by a life David spent trusting in God, and in turn God had never failed him. It is the life that he lived that allowed him to ask for preservation of his own life. David knew God and knew that he lived as one that is holy. Paul was able to describe David as one who lived this life of holiness and was pleasing to God: "And when He had removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom He also gave testimony and said, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will'" (Acts 13:22). David lived a life set apart in honor and respect to God. It was a life in which his direction and focus was to do God's will. He was a servant of God and trusted in what God would do for him.

Because of this trust in God, David asks for mercy. David believes he deserves mercy because he cries for God all day long. David is not unfamiliar with prayer. It is not an avenue to be used only in the event of emergency. David had a prayer life that existed at all times. This is the type of prayer life that God expects, and not only when an emergency may arise. David would offer prayer without ceasing as was commanded by Apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:17. This type of prayer is not a prayer that is nonstop. However, it is a prayer that is heartfelt and prayed often. David has cried out to the Lord for mercy. David needs His help and believes that God is able to provide relief to those that are faithful servants of Him.

David identifies with being a servant of God. He refers to himself as this on three separate occasions within this psalm (vv. 2, *Scott M. Judge*

4, 16). The petition of David is one that is of humility. By being a servant, David is pleasing to God. God expects servitude in the life of His children. The greatest example of being a servant is in the life of Christ, as He was a servant to all men. This servant has lifted up his soul to God.

He has been urgent and constant in lifting up his “soul” to Him in prayer. He has raised to God the deep thoughts and aspiration of his spirit in genuine prayer by putting his life and needs into His hands. He has no other source of strength and no other hope. He can only be gladdened by God responding to his prayers with the appropriate answers. (Cloer 631)

David is putting all his life in the hands of God. Whatever the answer may be from God, David will submit. However, David looks forward to an answer that may rejoice his soul. God can give the answers that will gladden the heart of this petitioner.

God, who is good, is a God who is ready to forgive. He has the qualities of moral acceptability. There is no immorality or injustice in God. Immorality is found only in the flesh. God is the opposite of evil and of bad. Man has sinned (Rom. 3:23). Because of this sin, man needs forgiveness. God is the only one that can provide this. David knows that God is a forgiver of those that ask for forgiveness. Though David was a man after God’s own heart, he did not live a life that was sin-free. David sinned, and in so doing had to come to repentance in his life. By coming to repentance, David was able to continue seeing the goodness of God. Mercy had in times past come upon David: David sinned with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11). David confessed that he had sinned, and the Lord put his sin away (12:13). David called upon God not to take the life of his and Bathsheba’s son. God did not provide that answer for David that he wanted to hear. Rather, the child died and following the death of the child, David arose and went to worship. Consequences remained for the sin, but David found mercy.

David again asks God to give him ear (v. 6). It is important that David knows that he is being listened to.

Again, as in verse 1, David humbly calls upon Jehovah to hear his cry for help. Knowing that he cannot muster the strength from within himself to overcome in his times of

trouble, he calls for the help of the Almighty who is “*our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble*” (Psm. 46:1). To every one [sic] who puts their trust in Him, He gives the power to be “*more than conquerors*” (Rom. 8:37). Being made strong with the strength of **His** might, the child of God has nothing to fear because He has provided an unpenetrable [sic] defense against the evil one (Eph. 6:10-18; cf. II Peter 1:3-10). God does His part in providing for our victories, but it is up to us as to whether or not we will take and use what He gives. (Greiner 100).

God is always present for the prayers of His faithful servants. Knowing this, David will call upon God both day and night. Whenever trouble may abound, David will call. The “day of my trouble” (v. 7) indicates both present and future. If trouble is now, David will call. If trouble comes later, David will call. He knows that God will answer him. God can be depended upon. David can know that God is always there, no matter when he may call.

Praise (vv. 8-13)

*Among the gods there is none like you, O Lord;
Nor are there any works like Your works.
All nations whom You have made
Shall come and worship before You, O Lord,
And shall glorify Your name.
For You are great, and do wondrous things;
You alone are God.*

*Teach me your way, O LORD;
I will walk in your truth;
Unite my heart to fear Your name.
I will praise You, O Lord my God, with all my heart,
And I will glorify your name forevermore.
For great is Your mercy toward me,
And you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.*

David moves from a prayer to God to praise of God. There is one great God to be praised. “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith,
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one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph. 4:4-6). There is but one true and living God. From the beginning, only one God has been in existence. People and nationalities have developed other gods. These gods, however, could only be created by men with the materials that were created by the one true and living God. David’s reference of other gods does not mean that he believes in another god or other gods. Nations had their own gods for worship, which were not gods at all. They were man-made, without power and without knowledge. The true God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. He is the One that brought all things into being (Gen. 1). Man cannot imitate what God has done. God has brought life to the dead. He has brought order to the universe. Other gods can simply be worshipped by the ignorance of man, and no power can come from them. David also wrote, “For who in the heavens can be compared to the LORD? Who among the sons of the mighty can be likened to the LORD?” (Psalm 89:6). Jeremiah also recognized the greatness of the Lord: “Inasmuch as there is none like You, O LORD (You are great, and Your name is great and might) . . .” (10:6).

David is able to recognize that every nation is made by God and the day will come when all will come and worship Him. This shows a messianic hope. The time would come when all will be engrafted into the Word. At this time, the Israelites would have been the chosen people of God. After Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom, all who walk upon the earth will have hope in Christ. Inevitably, as the Apostle Paul tells the church at Philippi:

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (2:9-11)

God is great, and no one can do the things that He does. The wonders of God never cease to exist, and mankind will never fully reach the depths of complete understanding of God’s wondrous being. There is no other God. God stands by Himself and, other than Christ, is unequalled. The greatness of God has been seen in His Creation. The children of Israel have witnessed greatness in the

crossing of the Red Sea and the crossing of the Jordan River. Moses was able to secure military victories because of the greatness of God. God alone has done these miracles that could not be performed by any other. Because of this greatness that is shown for those that belong to God, God will provide for those that seek after Him.

Imitation is the best form of flattery. David wants God to teach him His ways. David desires to know the ways of God so that he may walk in them.

He uses a unique phrase as he prays, **Unite my heart to fear your name.** Out of righteous respect for God's Being and nature, he wants his heart, his spirit, to be completely genuine in understanding, in the object of its love, in what it values, and in its focus. A heart does not properly "fear" God without such singular harmony. (Cloer 634)

David was a man after God's own heart because his heart was united. David served God with completeness in his heart and mind. David was not mixed in his life as to how or when to serve, but rather served with his whole being the whole time.

Because David's heart is united in fear, he is able to praise the name of God with all his heart. David will praise the name of God in all that he does. In Psalm 145:1-3, David writes, "I will extol You, my God, O King; And I will bless Your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You, And I will praise Your name forever and ever. Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; And His greatness is unsearchable." God is worthy to be praised. He is to be praised because of his mercy, love, and unsearchable greatness. Neither David, nor anyone else, can ever fully comprehend the greatness of God or the depths of His majesty. However, enough can be realized that will cause David to forever praise His high and holy name.

David is able to show this praise because of his united heart and the recognition of the greatness of God and the fact that God has shown mercy to David. David states that God has "delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol" (v. 13). *Sheol* is defined as "hell." How could David have been brought back from hell if it is a place of eternal destruction?

"Hell" is put metaphorically for great and extreme dangers, or miseries which seem irrecoverable and remediless; these are figuratively called hell, because hell, properly taken, is a

place from whence there is no recovery. There is no release from the chains of darkness: all changes are on earth; heaven and hell know none. When David praises the Lord for delivering his soul from the lowest hell, he meaneth an estate on earth of the lowest and deepest danger imaginable: mercy helped him at the worst. To be as low as hell, is to be at the lowest. (Spurgeon 473).

David had been in many situations, as recorded by Samuel. He faced death on numerous occasions by the Philistines. Samuel records Saul wanting to kill David to the point of trying to spear him as well as pursuing him. David trusted in God to be rescued from these moments, and God showed mercy and delivered from a figurative hell.

Problem (vv. 14-15)

*O God, the proud have risen against me,
And a mob of violent men have sought my life,
And have not set You before them.
But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious,
Longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth.*

David often found himself in the midst of enemies. Again, we do not know what David may be specifically referencing. David was in harm's way much of his life. Certainly, King Saul sought to kill him. David, on many occasions, battled the Philistines. Regardless of the time, David takes his petition to God. David states that a group of violent men have sought his life. Smith states this:

David is facing hostility from the “proud,” i.e., those who place themselves above the law of both God and man, and from “violent men” who were seeking his life. These enemies gave no thought to God; they were irreligious men. With this proud and merciless opposition David contrasts the revealed character of God. He quotes from Exod 34:6, which reveals Yahweh to be a gracious and compassionate God. Though David may have deserved punishment, God cannot surely abandon him to his adversaries. (357)

These violent, godless men gave no thought to the loss of David's life. Whereas David asked for his heart to be united in fear that he

may follow after God, men that did not know God were trying to harm David. A man that will follow after God in life will try to live after the way of God. God is love (1 John 4:8), and it would not be a way of God to harm another. David recognizes that God is a God of compassion, grace, and longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth. God is not only capable of delivering him, but it is the nature of God to do so.

Plea (vv. 16-17)

*Oh, turn to me, and have mercy on me!
Give Your strength to Your servant,
And save the son of Your maidservant.
Show me a sign for good,
That those who hate me may see it and be ashamed,
Because You, LORD, have helped me and comforted me.*

David's plea is for God to turn to him and have mercy on him. David is at a time in which he needs strength. He possibly had feelings of not being able to go on. David would have felt a need for strength that is beyond what he felt he had. He would have felt uncertainty for his future. God, however, is the one who can strengthen David. God is the one that can show mercy and deliver him as He has before. David uses the phrase "And save the son of your maidservant" (v. 16). This shows the humble nature of David in relation to God.

He refers to himself as "the son of [the Lord's] handmaid" to express his humility and revel in the value he enjoys. He is a servant, but he is one who was born of a faithful servant. The "son" born to a handmaiden of the house was considered to be of great value to the master of the house, more than were the slaves who had been purchased, acquired from indebtedness, or received from the spoils of war. He pleads that he should be heard because, on the two counts of his birth and servanthood, he is a special servant to the master. (Cloer 635-36)

Not only does David ask for relief as a humble servant, but also he prays that those who are against him may see God through what is done. David wants relief in his life, but also just as important to him

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is that the enemy may see and be ashamed because the Lord has helped and comforted David.

Application

Confidence in Prayer

As faithful children of God, we should always feel confident in going to God in prayer. Paul says to “pray without ceasing . . .” (1 Thess. 5:17). Jesus commanded and gave example of how to pray (Matt. 6:5-15; Luke 18:10). Jesus was the greatest example of prayer in the way He lived his life. Consider Jesus praying without ceasing:

- When He was baptized (Luke 3:21).
- When He fed the five thousand (Matt. 14:19).
- When He was alone by Himself (Matt. 14:23; Mark 6:46).
- When He woke in the early morning (Mark 1:35).
- When He taught the disciples (Luke 11:1-4).
- When He healed Lazarus (John 11:41).
- When He was in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36-46).

These are only a few examples of Jesus praying to His Father. It gives us a picture, though, of Jesus’ relationship to God and His frequency of communication with the Father. David had this confidence that He could pray to God at all times. David would cry to God all day long. We need to have confidence in going to God in all situations in our lives. Prayer is not for emergency situations, but rather it is a great tool that is to be used during all moments of life. It is to be used in times of joy, times of heartache, and all times in between. I must pray at all times. Jesus, as He is that great example, could pray for all things in confidence, and then when He was faced with His impending death, He could wail in prayer asking for the cup to pass from Him. Consider that the cup was not removed. Yet, Jesus glorified His Father who was in heaven. We need a prayer life for all moments. In those biggest times of trial, we have confidence that we can go to God and that He will hear. No, we may not get the answer we want. Nonetheless, our lives are made manifest in God as we work toward a bigger reward. Praise be to God who can deliver us from the trials of this world and will deliver us from the pain of the second death.

Comfort in Prayer

The following song, “Bow Down Your Ear,” was written by Brother Andy Robison. Comfort is found in knowing that we have a God that listens to us. We can know that God hears our prayers. John states, “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us” (1 John 5:14). God wants to answer prayer that is in accordance with His will.

O, bow down your ear to me;
Refuge of my soul.
Please, deliver me, O Lord;
Cleanse and make me whole.

Vile, the men who round me sin.
'Wake at night they lie,
Plotting evil toward my soul,
Glory if I die.

Teach them with Thy mighty arm;
Vengeance all is Thine.
Let my foes inflict no harm;
Peace within be mine.

The words that David spoke are the same here, “Bow down Your ear . . .” (v. 1). It is important for all that pray to God to be assured that He is listening. Many times, because of the nature of the trials and tribulations in our life or even the duration, we wonder, “Is God listening?” Rest assured that those that love God and devote themselves to His service are being heard. God always hears the prayers of His children. How and when He answers can become a point of frustration to the one that is speaking. Just as David did, you and I have a refuge for our soul. Safety is found in the promise of God and the assurance of His love and mercy. Even though vile men arise and sin can be seen all around, glory can still be seen for the Christian. You and I live a life not for the here and now, but for the promise of hereafter. Our lives on this earth will cease (Heb. 9:27). We may be surrounded by sin all of our days. It could be the case that others try to harm us because of our love for God. Regardless of the situation, we press forward to the reward of heaven. Though others may try to bring harm to me, it is my hope that the evil ones

will come to know the love of God. Regardless of what my life may bring, peace can reign within my soul. Paul told the church at Philippi, “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be made known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God . . .” (4:4-6). David rejoiced in the love, greatness, and mercy of the Lord. Let us do the same.

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Biography

Scott Michael Judge was born in Missouri at Whiteman Airforce Base in 1970. At the age of two, his parents moved back to West Virginia, where they were originally from. Scott graduated from Valley High School in 1988. He is a 1992 graduate of West Liberty University. Following his graduation from West Liberty, he worked several positions in the mental health field, including liaison work for Fox Run and Ohio Hospital for Psychiatry. From May 1996 until fall 2014, he also preached at small congregations in the Ohio Valley. Starting in the fall of 2014, he began school at the West Virginia School of Preaching. He graduated in 2016, and he began working as the Advertising and Recruiting Director for the school.

Scott has been married twenty-two years to Ellie Eddy Judge. Ellie is a sales associate at Dunning Motors in Cambridge, Ohio. They enjoy farming and fishing when they are not working. They have two children, Jonas and Joel. Jonas is a 2017 graduate of St. Marys High School. He will attend West Virginia University-Parkersburg following recovery from major surgery on his leg. Joel

is a sophomore and plans to go into business following his graduation. They currently live in Belmont, West Virginia.

THE TRANSCENDENCE OF GOD

Psalm 113

Terry G. Jones

Introduction

This is the first of six psalms that comprise the Hallel Psalms. The word *hallel* simply means “to praise.” Psalms 113-118 are a group of hymns of praise that the Hebrews customarily sang at the Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles. Cloer provides some very significant insight concerning the hallel:

As a Jewish home observed the Passover meal, Psalms 113 and 114 were sung at the beginning part of the meal, and Psalms 115 through 118 were sung at the conclusion of the meal. During the course of the Paschal meal, four cups of the fruit of the vine were poured. After the first two cups were drunk, Psalms 113 and 114 were sung as one hymn. The fourth cup was drunk during the last part of the meal, after which Psalms 115 through 118 were sung as one hymn. (537-38)

It is certainly significant that Psalm 113, undoubtedly, must have been sung by Jesus and His disciples as they ate the Passover meal on the night before the crucifixion: “And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives” (Matt. 26:30). [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.]

These hallelujah psalms very clearly emphasize the need to praise God at all times. God is to be praised in persecution as well as in times of peace. Times and circumstances are irrelevant to praising the Lord. He is “the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8). God is worthy to be praised, and we must not allow our circumstances or our mood to interfere with our giving Him the adoration of which He is deserving.

We are provided no information concerning the author of this psalm or the circumstances from which it was written. We are content in knowing that this portion of Holy Writ has been preserved for us and that we are blessed by the instruction and edification we receive from it.

As we turn our attention to the text of this great psalm, we will see that at the very heart of it is the transcendence of God. That is, that God, as Creator of all things, is above all things. That alone is all we need to convince us to worship and praise Him.

A Call to Praise Our Transcendent God (vv. 1-3)

That this is a Hallelujah Psalm is easily determined by the bookend phrases “Praise the LORD!” that appear at the beginning and conclusion of it (vv. 1, 9). As the psalm opens, we metaphorically picture the psalmist raising a megaphone to sound a call to “Praise the LORD!” In the wake of that, there are four things that can be observed concerning that praise.

The Subjects of This Praise—Us (v. 1a)

In the form of a command, the psalmist calls forth, “Praise the LORD! Praise, O servants of the LORD . . .” (v. 1). The word *praise* appears three times in the very first verse. There can be no mistake that the psalmist is uttering a call to PRAISE . . . PRAISE . . . PRAISE the Lord! He identifies the subjects of this praise as “the servants of the LORD.” This would refer first to Israelites and then to others claiming to be the Lord’s servants. Certainly, it applies to the church. Every Christian ought to hear the ringing of this call and sense the privilege and obligation to praise God. “The *servants of Jehovah* are the only safe custodians of his *praise*. But, instead of keeping his praise to themselves, they are called upon to give it wing through all time and to the ends of the earth” (Rotherham 244-45). If servants of God do not praise Him, who will? The Israelites had been servants of Pharaoh down in Egypt, but now they were servants of Jehovah, who had delivered them. Likewise, having been delivered from the bondage of sin, we are servants of God. Paul said:

Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. (Rom. 6:16-18)

Having been released from the bondage of sin and the eternal

consequences thereof, every servant of God ought to stand in a constant state of ready and eager praise for the Lord. The psalmist said, and so should we:

Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good!
For His mercy endures forever.
Let the redeemed of the Lord say so,
Whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy,
And gathered out of the lands,
From the east and from the west,
From the north and from the south. (107:1-3)

“Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Cor. 4:1).

The Sovereign to Be Praised—Unequaled (v. 1b)

This is a call to “Praise the name of the LORD!” (v. 1). Three times in three verses we find mention of the name of the Lord. The “name” of the Lord stands for God, Himself, and everything about Him. “It envisions, in summary form, God’s character that has been revealed in various ways to His people. The ‘name’ of God represents the full array of His perfect attributes” (Cloer 539). This speaks to the sovereignty of God. He is supreme in character, attributes, and power. Those dead idols of the heathen nations were not worthy of praise. The psalmist draws that distinction in Psalm 115:1-8:

Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us,
But to Your name give glory,
Because of Your mercy,
Because of Your truth.
Why should the Gentiles say,
“So where is their God?”

But our God is in heaven;
He does whatever He pleases.
Their idols are silver and gold,
The work of men’s hands.
They have mouths, but they do not speak;
Eyes they have, but they do not see;
They have ears, but they do not hear;

Noses they have, but they do not smell;
They have hands, but they do not handle;
Feet they have, but they do not walk;
Nor do they mutter through their throat.
Those who make them are like them;
So is everyone who trusts in them.

Our great God is to be praised because He is sovereign, unequalled by all!

The Span of This Praise—Unceasing (v. 2)

For how long should this praise be given? The psalmist answers, “Blessed be the name of the LORD From this time forth and forevermore!” (v. 2). The person who does not seem to have time to pray, who considers each Sunday whether he feels like going to worship, and who constantly looks at his watch during the sermon does not have what this psalm is calling for, that is, unceasing praise of God. Dub McClish stated, “Here the emphasis is upon the worthiness of God to be praised without end. The traits in God that make Him worthy of praise now are never-ending, never-changing traits, making Him worthy of never-ending praise” (276). God is eternal and He ought to be praised eternally.

It is always time to bless the Lord, but for those who have not commenced to do so, now is the time to start at once to praise Him. At the beginning of every year, or at the opening of every day, for that matter, we should hear the Lord saying, “From this time will I bless thee,” and our reply should be, “Blessed be the name of the Lord *from this time* forth.” Then the Psalmist goes on to say that such is not only during our time on earth, but when time shall be no more. *For evermore* which means eternally. Endless duration is to be ours, and not until we see the Lord shall we bless Him as we ought. As His servants, we are to sing His praises to the world’s end, and then in Heaven, world without end. This phrase *for evermore* proceeds on the supposition that our God will forever continue to develop and unfold His glorious nature, so that there will be always some new occasion to bless and adore Him for. (Lockyer 479)

The Scope of This Praise—Universal (v. 3)

For the third time in as many verses, we are reminded that “. . . The LORD’s name is to be praised” (v. 3). In the previous verse, we are told when He is to be praised. In this verse, we learn where He is to be praised—“From the rising of the sun to its going down . . .” The psalmist is calling for universal praise. All who are blessed by the warmth of the sun’s rays should praise the Lord. Again, Herbert Lockyer provides a clear explanation:

The language in this most expressive verse, implies everywhere, from east to west—*west* being used in the Hebrew for sunset, or the sun’s going down. From sunrise to sunset the ceaseless praise should rise to Jehovah’s throne, and from east to west over the whole round earth pure worship should be rendered unto His glory. But alas! It is not so, for millions do not know Him sufficiently to bless and magnify His name. (479)

Truly, this psalm reflects the global responsibility of glorifying the God of heaven. Pity the man who enjoys the sunshine and the cool breeze, the beautiful flowers and the shade of the trees, the vast deserts and the endless seas, and fails to praise God upon his knees.

God’s *name is to be praised*; it ought to be praised by all nations; for in every place, from east to west, there appear the manifest proofs and products of his wisdom, power, and goodness; and it is to be lamented that so great a part of mankind are ignorant of him, and give that praise to others which is due to him alone. But perhaps there is more in it; as the former verse gave us a glimpse of the kingdom of glory, intimating that God’s name shall be *blessed for ever* (when time shall be no more that praise shall be the work of heaven), so this verse gives us a glimpse of the kingdom of grace in the gospel-dispensation of it. (Henry 668)

A Call to Ponder Our Transcendent God (vv. 4-6)

In the first section of this psalm, there was a call to praise which specified (1) who is to do the praising, (2) who is to be praised, (3) when the praise is to be done, and (4) where it is to be done. Now the focus turns to the object of this praise as we are called upon to ponder just who God really is.

An Exaltation (v. 4)

When reading this verse, we cannot help but ponder the transcendence of God. The word *above* is found twice in this verse in reference to God, from which we learn two things. *First, our God “is high above all nations . . .” (v. 4a).* The gentile world rejects the God of heaven to serve idols. They “exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever” (Rom. 1:25). Paul went on to say, “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 . . .” (Rom. 1:28). Their rejection of God does not nullify the fact that God rules over them.

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 shall hold 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. (Psalm 2:1-6)

It must not be forgotten that the One who formed the nations transcends the nations. “The wicked shall be turned into hell, And all the nations that forget God” (Psalm 9:17).

Second, “. . . His glory is above the heavens” (v. 4b). We are limited to that which we can see. The Bible reveals to us that far beyond the vastness of every created thing, there is God in all His glory. Tom Wacaster made the following eloquent observation:

The manifestations of God’s glorious character are not confined to the earth; they extend to the heavens, even unto the stars beyond and unlimited space. The universe—the earth and the starry worlds—all are full of the manifestations of his glory; and far beyond the bounds of created things (if

they have a boundary), God is there—without limit—the same God—worthy there of universal praise! Who can comprehend such a God? No wonder the Psalmist wrote earlier, “The heavens declare the glory of God and firmament showeth his handiwork” (Ps. 19:1). (94)

God, in all His glory, transcends even the heavens:

higher than the loftiest part of creation; the clouds are the dust of his feet, and sun, moon, and stars twinkle far below his throne. Even the heaven of heavens cannot contain him. His glory cannot be set forth by the whole visible universe, nor even by the solemn pomp of angelic armies; it is above all conception and imagination, for he is God—infinite. (Spurgeon 240)

An Examination (vv. 5-6)

Having called upon us to ponder the glory of God, the psalmist now challenges us to ponder the greatness of God. He does so by asking us to carefully examine three things.

(1) *His honor (v. 5a)*. We are to ponder the question, “Who is like the LORD our God . . . ?” (v. 5). This is certainly a rhetorical question that demands the answer, “There is none!” Any other answer would demand proof of some equality with God, and from where might that proof come?

The meaning is, that no creature—no idol—can be compared with Jehovah. The remark here has special reference to his attributes as immediately specified—his humbling himself to behold the things in heaven and in earth; his raising up the poor, etc. It is true *in general*, in regard to God, that no creature can be compared with him; it is true, in regard to each one of his attributes, that they are far above all created excellence. (Barnes 150)

At the dedication of the Temple, Solomon stood before the people with his hands stretched toward heaven and declared, “LORD God of Israel, there is no God in heaven above or on earth below like You, who keep Your covenant and mercy with Your servants who walk before You with all their hearts” (1 Kings 8:23).

2) *His home (v. 5b)*. The greatness of God may also be seen as we ponder the place of His home—“Who dwells on high.” God is

great because He makes His home in heaven above. Rahab declared to the two spies from Israel:

For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. (Josh. 2:10-11)

“None can equal him, none dare compare with him. God is to be praised as transcendentally, incomparably, and infinitely great; for he *dwells on high*, and from on high sees all, and rules all, and justly attracts all praise to himself” (Henry 668-69).

3) *His humility* (v 6). As we continue to examine our transcendent God, perhaps the pinnacle of His true greatness is seen in His humble condescension: “. . . Who humbles Himself to behold The things that are in the heavens and in the earth . . .” (v. 6). It is not easy, if not impossible, for humanity to comprehend One who both exalts Himself *and* humbles Himself. Yet, that is exactly what this verse exclaims that God has done! When we ponder the fact that our God has exalted Himself high above the heavens but also humbles Himself to the concerns of the things in the heavens and earth, is it any wonder that the psalmist asks, “Who is like the LORD our God . . . ?” (v. 5)? Adam Clarke observed:

Those who are highly exalted are generally unapproachable; they are proud and overbearing; or so surrounded with magnificence and flatterers, that to them the poor have no access; but God, though infinitely exalted, humbleth himself to behold even heaven itself, and much more does he humble himself when he condescends to behold earth and her inhabitants; (Psa. 113:6;). But so does he love his creatures that he rejoices over even the meanest of them to do them good.

God is exalted so high that He must bend low to observe the stars. He is so high that He must humbly bend to observe the affairs of lowly men. Scroggie states:

The two things which these lines teach us are: (1) that

Jehovah Elohim is transcendent, *above, above . . .* and (2) that He who is so great in His exaltation is equally great in His condescension (6a), *He cometh down low to look*. Two great truths about God, clearly revealed in the Bible, are that He is both transcendent and imminent; He is above the highest, and yet stoops to the lowest. (107-08)

A Call to Picture Our Transcendent God (vv. 7-9)

Having pondered who God is, the psalmist now gives us a picture of what God does. Multitudes of blessings abound in us when we realize that God is great and He is also good. Because of the goodness of God, His blessings flow into our lives. In these verses, two examples are provided for us.

He Raises the Impoverished (vv. 7-8)

As our transcendent God bends low to observe the human condition, He does not do so without showing compassion upon the needy. This is evidenced here by two things. *First, seeing the poor* (v. 7). “He raises the poor out of the dust, And lifts the needy out of the heap. . . .” These are references to the most destitute and downtrodden among us. It is unlikely that those of position and power would ever give any thought or consideration to such lowly people whose plight is so easily overlooked. However, the author assures us that God does not overlook the poor and needy, but looks over them with careful compassion to lift them from their poverty. “God—in a generosity that gravitates to those who need Him the most—lifts the distraught, discarded, and debilitated people to a new life. His tender mercy and concern reaches out to every forgotten person, especially to those who belong to Him” (Cloer 543).

Second, seating with princes (v. 8). “. . . That He may seat him with princes—With the princes of His people.” God changes the condition of the lowly by lifting them from their plight to a place of dignity. Unlike men who help the poor by allowing them to gather the morsels that have fallen from the table, God lifts them up and seats them at the table. This verse pictures God lifting the lowly to sit with “His people.” That is exactly what God accomplishes through the Gospel.

How gifted He is at repairing Satan’s broken earthenware, of

taking the lowest of mankind out of all their filth and degradation and bringing them into positions of power and honor. Looked upon as worthless refuse, corrupt and loathsome, sinners are marvelously transformed by the condescending Savior into new creatures. (Lockyer 481)

Referring to the church, Peter said:

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. (1 Peter 2:9-10)

Lockyer goes on to say:

Truly the distinctions and accolades bestowed upon men by a government are tawdry alongside the exalted position granted to those saved by grace. In Britain, the highest honor to be coveted is elevation to *The House of Lords*, but how such an exaltation fades into nothingness alongside of being made to sit among the princes of God's people. How blest we are if among those elevated to the Peerage of Heaven, we live forever in the House of the Lord of lords! (482)

He Restores the Infertile (v. 9)

A second example of God's goodness is His blessings upon the barren. As mentioned in this verse, the blessing is two-fold: (1) *Granting her prayer*—"He grants the barren woman a home . . ."—and (2) *Giving her posterity*—" . . . Like a joyful mother of children." A barren woman in Biblical times bore a painful stigma. Her sense of worth was attached to her ability to bear children. In the book of 1 Samuel, we read of Hannah's painful experience of barrenness. "And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the LORD and wept in anguish" (1:10). Ultimately, God granted her prayer and gave her a posterity as she gave birth to Samuel.

Conclusion

This psalm ends with those same three words with which it began, "Praise the LORD!" (v. 9). Should that same thing not be true

of our lives? Should it not be the case that our lives be characterized by the giving of praise to God from the cradle to the grave and beyond, “From this time forth and forevermore!” (v. 2)?

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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).

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GOD PROVIDES EVERY NEED

Psalms 84

W. Terry Varner

Psalms 84, similar to Psalm 42, is one of the best-loved psalms in the Psalter. “If the twenty-third be the most popular, the one-hundred-and-third, the most joyful, the one-hundred-and-nineteenth the most deeply experimental, the fifty-first the most plaintive, this is one of the most sweet Psalms of Peace” (Spurgeon 63).

The *time of writing* is unknown; however, we believe Psalm 84 was written during Israel’s monarchy, as seen in the psalmist’s reference to the king (v. 9), the court (vv. 2, 10), and the Temple campus (vv. 9-10). More than this, it is impossible to say.

The superscription states that the *authors* of Psalm 84 were “the Sons of Korah the grandsons of Kohath of the tribe of Levi”; the actual writer is unknown. “In the wilderness the Kohathites carried the tabernacle furniture and vessels” (Gooding 703). Some argue that the circumstances in this psalm are applicable to David and that a sympathetic Korahite transported himself into David’s situation so that he wrote from the soul of David; however, we reject this argument, as it forces a Davidic authorship. The priests of the Kohathite community were allotted thirteen cities (Josh. 21:4). It is irksome for this Bible student to read of the rejection of the truthfulness of the sacred Scripture when “scholars” deal with Kohath. “We know nothing of Kohath the son of Levi save his lifespan of 133 years (Exod 6:18). But he is in fact the personification of a clan, not an historical person” (Propp 95). When discussing the history of the Kohathites in 1 Chronicles, he argues they are considered “often of dubious authenticity” (96).

In the Temple, they were the sacred singers and musicians (1 Chron. 6:1, 22, 31-32; 9:33), they made the showbread (9:31-32), and they were the “keepers of the entrance” or “gatekeepers” of the Temple (9:19; 26:1, 12). [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise stated.] Some of the sons of Korah rebelled against Moses and Aaron. The rebellion involved three accusations: (1) Moses and Aaron had set themselves above all Israel (Num. 16:3,

13), (2) Moses had failed to bring Israel to the Promised Land (16:14), and (3) Moses and Aaron arrogated the priesthood to themselves (16:7-11). The accusers were finally destroyed by God (16:31-35).

The *suggested theme* of Psalm 84 varies with each interpreter:

- Longing for God and His Sanctuary (Yates 117).
- Longing for the Temple (Ash and Miller 291).
- Love for the Sanctuary (Leupold 603).
- The Supreme Psalm of the Sanctuary (Coffman 101).
- Longing for the House of God, and for the Happiness of Dwelling There (Delitzsch 471).
- Longing for God's Presence (Cloer, *Psalms 51-89* 595).
- The Courts of the Lord (Stott 73).
- Dwelling in God's House (Wacaster 199).
- Blessed Are Those Who Love the Father's House (Deaver 295).
- The Soul's Spiritual Home (Harris 92).
- God as a Sun and Shield (Clark 89).
- Love for the House of the Lord (Rhodes 121).

The *setting* of Psalm 84 involves an individual who did not have access to the Temple for unknown and unmentioned reasons. Perhaps, he was unable to attend the services due to sickness, imprisonment, banishment, traveling, etc., but for some reason, he was deprived of being at the Temple. After the temporary period of being unable to have access to the Temple, he is again privileged to attend the services. Once the Kohathite has the opportunity to return to the house of God, his deep appreciation for God and the Temple were as if he had never been there.

Quotations or allusions to Psalm 84 are found eleven times within seven New Testament books: Luke, John, Acts, 1 Thessalonians, Titus, James, and Revelation. Eight of the twelve verses are either quoted or alluded to eleven times. Beale and Carson list the following quotes or allusions to Psalm 84 in the New Testament:

- Verse 1 (John 1:1)
- Verse 2 (Acts 14:15; 1 Thess. 1:9; James 4:6)
- Verse 3 (Luke 12:5-7)
- Verse 5 (Luke 20:37-38)

- Verse 9 (Acts 2:31)
- Verse 10 (Rev. 20:4)
- Verse 11 (John 1:1)
- Verse 12 (Luke 6:20-26; Titus 3:4-6).

The title of our lecture at this hour is “God Provides Every Need.” When man determines to follow God, he is (1) *Determined to Worship God* (vv. 1-4), (2) *Determined to Depend on God’s Strength* (vv. 5-8), and (3) *Determined to Trust in God* (vv. 9-12). Following a brief commentary on Psalm 84, we suggest a series of seven applications.

A Brief Commentary

Determined to Worship God (vv. 1-4)

“*How lovely is Your tabernacle, O Lord of Hosts!*” (v. 1). The Temple was the most sacred spot on Earth for the Jew. Why? The *Shekinah*, glory or manifestation of the presence of God, was in the Holy of Holies. It was in Jerusalem that God placed His name (2 Kings 21:4). “Nevertheless, He had been pleased to ‘put his name’ in Jerusalem and to cause the symbol of His presence to appear upon the mercy-seat behind the veil of the Temple” (Stott 73). *Lovely* or *amiable* (KJV) is a term of endearment, suggesting the place and occasion of worshipping God is dear to the author. This sentiment of the passage is reminiscent of the words of Jesus, “Did you not know that I had to be in my Father’s house?” (Luke 2:49, NASB). As Christians, “We accomplish the Father’s business by being properly concerned about the Father’s house” (Deaver 296). The Father’s house is the church (1 Tim. 3:15). We are indeed blessed when we assemble regularly for worship and live life bringing glory to God the Father (Matt. 5:16). The psalmist starts with God. We must start with God and then look at ourselves. We must be right in our thinking about God, but we must be equally right in our thinking about ourselves.

“*My soul longs, yes, even faints For the courts of the LORD; My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God*” (v. 2). The psalmist’s intense and innate desire to worship God suggests nothing satisfies the soul like the adoration, praise, and worship of God. The author for some reason has been denied access to the Temple and therefore the opportunity to be in the Temple and worship God. He “longs”

and “faints” or “yearns” (NASB) to be in the midst of the “courts” and “altars” of the Temple. *Altars* serves as a metonymy, signifying the activities within the Temple campus (Leupold 605). His “soul . . . heart . . . flesh” sings for joy to God (v. 2); i.e., his determination to worship God with the totality of his being is reminiscent of Deuteronomy 6:5, Matthew 22:37, and Mark 12:30. Yates makes an observation that many never consider when speaking of the intense desire of the psalmist to be at the Temple to worship God: “All of this in the light of the fact that the Temple had so little to commend itself as an attractive meetinghouse. The Temple was a harsh and stern place, and where blood ran freely while the smell of the slaughterhouse went through the entire building” (117).

The author calls God “the living God” (v. 2). Children of God must study God—His nature, His attributes, His providence, and His working in life. The living God is the only God who is immutable (Psalm 102:25-27; Mal. 3:6), who is non-contingent (Eph. 1:4; Heb. 1:3; Rev. 4:11), who is reality (Gen. 1:1; Exod. 15:11), and who blesses man (Isa. 38:14-20). It is for the living God that man’s soul desires and thirsts (Psalm 42:2; cf. Rom. 1:20-25).

“Even the sparrow has found a home, And the swallow a nest for herself, Where she may lay her young—Even Your altars, O LORD of hosts, My King and my God” (v. 3). This verse may, at first, seem out of place to the twenty-first century reader; however, the psalmist recalls the sparrows and swallows building their nests in the crevices and recesses in and around the Temple area. The swallow (*dheror*) signified liberty (Fisher 263) and furnished an “image of the peace and security to be found in the house of God” (Tristram 159).

The nests built by these birds reminded the psalmist of the rest and comfort he had found in God. The birds naturally made their homes in and around the temple. “How privileged they are,” he reasoned, “to have a home near the temple! I envy them.” (Cloer, *Psalms 51-89* 597)

There is a merciful command in the Law of Moses forbidding anyone upon finding a nest to remove the sitting hen and/or the hatch. The maternal instinct makes them an easy prey (Deut. 22:6).

We may know things about God and have certain views about life, but while these are important, they are also insufficient, as the

essence of religion is really and truly to know God so that you can address Him as this man does and say, “my King, and my God.” . . . True religion is not just a matter of morality. That is included, but to make that the end of religion is to rob it of its eternal glory. (Lloyd-Jones 44)

“*Blessed are those who dwell in Your house; They will still be praising You. Selah*” (v. 4) is the key to the first stanza and expresses the blessings of worshipping God. Psalm 84 divides into three stanzas by the use of three beatitudes (vv. 4, 5, 12). *Blessed* is from ‘*ashrey*’ and is plural, suggesting completeness because of the multiple blessings from God.

The word *blessed* (*makarios*) in the New Testament corresponds to ‘*ashrey*’ and its meaning of completeness. The Greeks spoke of the isle of Cyprus (*he makarias*) as “*the Happy Isle*.” The soil, climate, produce, and natural resources of Cyprus “contained within itself all the materials for perfect happiness . . . [of] that joy which is serene and untouchable, and self-contained” (Barclay 84). The happiness of the Christian is untouchable and unassailable, as “your joy no one will take from you” (John 16:22). “May the God of hope now fill you with all happiness and inward security in believing, in order that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 15:13, author’s translation). Psalm 84 depicts that those who serve, live, and worship in the Temple are blessed fully, completely, totally, and thoroughly. Should such a relationship with God produce otherwise?

Each stanza concludes with the word *Selah*. *Selah* occurs in Psalms seventy-one times and in Habakkuk three times. The general meaning of the word either “marks a pause in the music when the Psalms were sung in the temple services” or “it means that the reader should stop and think” (Kinney 52). Rabbi Aben Ezra suggests the word was “used to give weight and importance to what was said, and to indicate its truth” (McClintock and Strong 513). All men everywhere ought to pause, reflect, and meditate with the deepest reflection when God speaks, on what He has done and what He is doing for man. The psalmist states: “Be still and know that I am God . . .” (46:10).

Determined to Depend on God's Strength (vv. 5-8)

The second stanza begins, unlike the first and third stanzas, with the beatitude, "Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, Whose heart is set on pilgrimage" (v. 5), "the ways of them" (KJV), or "the highways to Zion" (NASB). *Pilgrimage*, *ways*, and *highways* all emphasize that true, genuine strength and sustainment are promised to those who walk faithfully with God. The stanza emphasizes that real happiness comes to those who with God's strength overcome every obstacle of life. Ought not the Christian to prioritize his life by being in the way of Jehovah? It keeps us out of the world and fixes our focus on heaven (Col. 3:1-3). The concept of life being a pilgrimage contains the ideas of experiencing both good and bad. In the day of the psalmist, the pilgrimage would be done mainly by beast of burden or by foot. Such an experience would be most trying. In his heart, the psalmist "loved Jerusalem . . . loved God's house . . . loved God. In all of this love there was a great longing to be where he could feel God's presence and find rich blessings for his heart" (Yates 118). True devotion to God involves the celebration of a godly life lived under God and His blessings. The psalmist is determined to know God and depend on His strength.

"As they pass through the Valley of Baca, They make it a spring; The rain also covers it with pools" (v. 6). The Valley of Baca is also called "the valley of lamentation" (Barnes 342) and "a valley of weeping" (ASV; Septuagint). Moll interprets the *Valley of Baca* as "the vale of tears" (464). The American Standard Version and the Septuagint translate it as "a valley of tears." The Valley of Baca is mentioned in connection with the journey of the psalmist. Since the exact location is unknown, it is best to understand the *Valley of Baca* as a metaphor for the trials life. Trials destroy one's joy unless there is devotion to God. It is a comparative concept by which the believer is to consider "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

The Valley of Baca is thought by some scholars to be "the valley of the balsam tree from the same word in plural form found in 2 Sam 5:24," and others considered the "possibility that Baca may mean 'weeping rock-walls' in the valley of Rephaim," where David waited for the Philistine army (Kobayashi 566). There is no biblical

evidence that either are correct. Some consider the balsam tree to be the myrrh tree (King 152); however, this understanding is challenged by many interpreters. The balsam tree (*commiphora opobalsamum*) is also known as the “balm of Gilead” (Jørgenson 177). The oil and gum excreted by the balsam tree were used medicinally for healing wounds, bruises, and putrefying sores, according to Isaiah 1:6, Jeremiah 8:22 and 46:11, Luke 10:34, and James 5:14 (Anderson 239). The balsam tree produced tears of fragrant gum to ooze naturally or as a result of wounding (Moldenke and Moldenke 77, 82-84, 177).

The better understanding of the meaning of *the Valley of Baca* is by a metaphor that expresses his deep sorrows and trials to be showers of blessings. The lesson is simple: “Baca is regarded as a dry place spiritually. The only waters in it are the water of tears and weeping. . . . As the valley of weeping symbolizes dejection, so a ‘well’ symbolizes ever-flowing salvation and comfort (cf. John iv.14; also Isa. xii.3)” (Jamieson et al. 283). Rain falls in Palestine, but only at certain periods of the year. The Bible speaks of the early and latter rains. “[T]hen I will give you the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain . . .” (Deut. 11:14; cf. Jer. 5:24; Hosea 6:3; Joel 2:23; James 5:7).

“*They go from strength to strength; Each one appears before God in Zion*” (v. 7). Trials of life are to strengthen rather than weaken us (Barnes 343). Our faith is to be tested so that we may actually “praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ . . .” (1 Peter 1:7; cf. James 1:2-4). The hope of the psalmist sustains and strengthens him as he goes “*from strength to strength, fortified by the joyful expectation of appearing before God in Zion*” (Stott 74). The meaning of this verse is very similar to Jesus’ statement that absolutely nothing will prevent His church from being established and enduring all the difficulties she may face until He returns to take her home (Matt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 15:24-28).

“*O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer; Give ear, O God of Jacob! Selah*” (v. 8). The second stanza closes with two names for God: (1) God of Jacob and (2) LORD God of hosts. We understand the psalmist’s use of the name God of Jacob to mean “the Mighty One of Jacob.” The descendants of Jacob were “a great people, and have great power” (Josh. 17:17).

The psalmist appeals to “LORD God of hosts” four times within Psalm 84. The phrase or a small variation of “LORD God of hosts” appears in verses 1, 3, 8, and 12. The names of God are important, and each name of God reveals some particular need of man. All men feel in some degree that they are in need of help. Faithful children of God depend fully on God Jehovah. The atheist may deny his need for God, but I know of no atheist who, while in a foxhole facing enemy fire, does not feel the need for help from above. For the Christian in “the foxhole,” God Almighty is our help in time of need (Heb. 4:15-16; 1 Peter 5:7; Psalm 46:1). God’s name, The LORD of hosts, is also known as “the LORD of Sabaoth” (Rom. 9:29; James 5:4).

In the Old Testament, *the LORD of hosts* refers (1) to God of the armies of Israel (1 Sam. 17:15), (2) to the sun, moon, and stars in the heavens (Deut. 4:19), and (3) to the many angels (Psalm 148:2; Rev. 5:11). The two names express “that all the powers and innumerable armies of beings and existences, both in the material and spiritual world, are subject to his command and direction, and entirely derive their respective agencies and capacities from him” (Serle 32). McCord observes that the names describe “the Lord of unlimited resources, able, according to context, to deliver a remnant of Israelites from destruction, able to make Gentiles become his people” (41). God continues to bless His children by using angels as ministering servants (Heb. 1:13-14) to his children (Matt. 18:10). The psalmist used the name LORD God of hosts because He brings to men “help and full deliverance” (Jukes 162). The psalmist pleads to God to hear his prayer. He has confidence God will hear him. In pleading for God to hear his prayer, he shows respect, commitment, persistence, obedience, etc. *Selah* is again mentioned, encouraging the reader to dwell upon God hearing our prayers for help in time of need.

Determined to Trust in God (vv. 9-12)

“O God, behold our shield, And look upon the face of Your anointed” (v. 9). The psalmist gives four reasons *why* he is determined to trust in God. The benefit of godly living is the result of trusting God. The psalmist was confident that God was his “shield” (vv. 9, 11); i.e., Protector and Defender. The earthly king

was important to the Israelites. Exactly which king this verse refers to is uncertain. Israel had insisted on God giving them a king, like the nations around them (1 Sam. 8:19-20). Samuel was displeased with their request, but God said, “[T]hey have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them” (8:7). The psalmist prays for the king: “Your anointed.” The term *anointed* (*mashiyach*) was used in reference to God making David king and would be applicable to the kings of Israel. Prophetically, the term is applicable to Christ as the Messiah.

“For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of My God Than dwell in the tents of wickedness” (v. 10). The reader has a glimpse into the heart of the psalmist, who magnifies and glorifies God. The verse shows his deep, determined desire to be in God’s presence. Surely, this stems from his previous experiences of worshipping God. At the present, he is unable due to some unknown reason to be at Jerusalem worshipping God. This verse gives the *first* reason *why* he is determined to trust God. He compares “a day” worshipping God with “a thousand” days “in” the habitats of the wicked. The word *in* emphasizes not only being among the wicked but dwelling in, joining in, and living in their wickedness. “Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord” (2 Cor. 6:17). His comparison is *only* “a day” to “a thousand.” If a thousand years to God is like yesterday, “then he doubtless meant that one day there was better than a thousand elsewhere” (Lewis 201). Dwelling in the habitat of the wicked or sinful, even though there are pleasures in sin (Heb. 11:25), is temporary and will be judged harshly by God (Matt. 25:46; Rev. 20:11-15). To dwell among the wicked may appear to be stable and enticing, but they are made of tents; i.e., temporary and resulting in eternal punishment. To the psalmist, nothing is comparable to spending a day worshipping God. There is nothing more horrible, for the faithful child of God, than spending his time among the wicked or sinful (Eph. 5:11; 2 Thess. 1:7-10; Rev. 20:11-15). Lewis concludes his thoughts on Psalm 84 as follows:

For we are so little reconciled to time that we are even astonished at it. ‘How he’s grown!’ we exclaim, ‘How times flies!’ as though the universal form of our experience were again and again a novelty. It is as strange as if a fish were

repeatedly surprised at the wetness of water. And that would be strange indeed; unless of course the fish were destined to become, one day, a land animal. (201)

The psalmist gives all a lesson in trust, humility, devotion, perception, and faithfulness.

“For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD will give grace and glory; No good thing will He withhold From those who walk uprightly” (v. 11). This verse continues with three additional reasons *why* the psalmist determines to trust God. *Second*, “. . . God is a sun and shield.” The psalmist repeats his earlier mention that God was a “shield” (v. 9). As a shield to the faithful, He is our Protector and Defender in the day of trial and battle. As for the psalmist, God was his defense.

The psalmist adds a second metaphor to describe God, “a sun.” This is the only place in the Old Testament where God is referred to as the “sun.” The similar concept is found in “The LORD is my light . . .” (Psalm 27:1), “So the Light of Israel will be for a fire . . .” (Isa. 10:17), and “The Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings . . .” (Mal. 4:2). If one reflects on the role of the sun or light, one will understand the psalmist describing God as “a sun.” The literal Sun provides the Earth and man “light and warmth, thus producing life and food” (Greidanus 15). Without the sun, which was created on the fourth day (Gen. 1:14-19), there could be no life. The sun shows us the splendor of the work of God: *“It is handsomely adorned. . . . It is the picture of strength. . . . It is an illustration of faithfulness. . . . It conveys impartiality. . . .* How can anyone study the sun and not realize that its glow and light speak to us of the glory of God?” (Cloer, *Psalms 1-50* 256). The very light of day is but the shadow of God, “O LORD my God . . . who cover Yourself with light as with a garment . . .” (Psalm 104:2).

The psalmist is speaking spiritually of God as “a sun” (v. 11). The word translated *light* signifies light in action, engaged for some purpose of use or advantage, and the illumination of things upon which its rays fall. Therefore, light aptly represents the active, irradiating operation and influence of God engaged in the salvation, happiness, and glorification of man. “The LORD is my light and my salvation . . .” (Psalm 27:1). “. . . But the LORD will be to you an everlasting light, and your God your glory” (Isa. 60:19). “. . . God is

light and in Him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). The prophet said, “The people who walked in darkness Have seen a great light; Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, Upon them a light has shined” (Isa. 9:2).

The prophet spoke concerning our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: “. . . The Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings . . .” (Mal. 4:2). The Lord Jesus Christ is like the shining sun. “The Latins called the sun *sol*, *quasi solus*, because it always appears alone; and so does the incommunicable and essential glory of Christ” (Serle 338-39). As with His representative luminary in nature, when this Sun appears, the light of the inferior orbs is swallowed up in His glory. Sweeney wrote: “A Beautiful metaphor: the Sun of Righteousness compared to the sun of the solar system” (32). The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews describes Jesus as “being the brightness of His [God’s] glory and the express image of His person . . .” (1:3).

The observatory of the biblical prophets has many telescopes of all shapes and sizes, but they are all focused ultimately on the One who is the Great Sun—the Sun of Righteousness—Jesus Christ. More important than knowing how the heavens go is knowing how to go to heaven through the person and work of the Sun of Righteousness—the Light of the world (Mal. 4:2; John 1:6-9; 8:12). He is truly the center of the great Scheme of Redemption. May He be the center of our lives (cf. Philip. 1:21). (Pugh 324)

The *third* reason *why* the psalmist is determined to trust in God is that God gives “grace and glory” (v. 11). To all who will walk with God, He offers the grace of Christ (Titus 2:11; Matt. 11:28-30). Cloer expresses this thought as well as any: “He gives ‘grace’ for his sinfulness and ‘glory’ for his meaning and purpose in living” (*Psalms 51-89* 601-02).

The *fourth* reason *why* the psalmist is determined to trust in God is because “. . . No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly” (v. 11). God, who made man in His image (Gen. 1:26-27), provides for man both physically and spiritually. This phrase refers to the spiritual blessings the faithful receive from God from walking in His way. David asks and answers, “LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? . . . He who walks uprightly, And works

righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart . . .” (Psalm 15:1-2). One’s heart reveals one’s life; one’s life reveals one’s heart. “To walk uprightly is to walk with the right side up—not the wrong side down. Walk is indicative of our pilgrimage through life” (Taylor 29).

“*O LORD of hosts, Blessed is the man that trusts in You!*” (v. 12). In his struggle to reach Jerusalem, the psalmist trusted in his God. In whatever dispensation or testament, trust in God is one of the important facets of the child of God. It is doubtful that there is a greater passage on the inclusiveness of trust than what Paul wrote: “Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us . . .” (2 Cor. 1:9-10). In this text, Paul, as the psalmist, trusted God completely within the biblical concept of divine providence. (1) *Past tense*—“had the sentence of death,” (2) *Present tense*—“trust . . . in God,” and (3) *Future tense*—“God who raises . . . us.” The book of Psalms is filled with lessons and admonitions related to the biblical doctrine of trust. “Deity alone is not active with humanity as passive in this momentous matter. Humanity alone is not active with Deity passive. Both God and man are active in this momentous matter of trust, reliance and confidence” (Taylor 178).

A fitting conclusion to the third stanza of this great psalm is the following summary in the words of an aged writer:

While, therefore, we are strangers and sojourners here below, far from that heavenly country where we would be, in whom should we trust, to bring us to the holy city, New Jerusalem, of which the Lord God and the Lamb are the temple, but in thee, O Savior and Redeemer, who art the Head of every creature, the Captain of the armies of heaven and earth, the Lord of hosts, and the King of Glory. “Blessed,” thrice “blessed is the man that trusteth in thee”? (Horne 351)

Conclusion

God Provides Every Need when the Christian (1) is *Determined to Worship God* (vv. 1-4), (2) is *Determined to Depend on God’s*

Strength (vv. 5-8), and (3) is *Determined to Trust in God* (vv. 9-12).

Applications from Psalm 84

The applications from Psalm 84 are almost unending. We encourage the student to develop the following applications, as well as his own additional applications. While Psalm 84 involves life under the Mosaic dispensation, the principles found in the psalm are applicable to the Christian.

First, the Christian must always determine to worship God in spirit and truth (John 4:24). As the psalmist did not allow difficulties of life to prevent his desire to worship God, the Christian should likewise make every effort to assemble with the saints and not allow the minuscule vicissitudes of life deter his attending worship. The efforts of overcoming obstacles and going to worship are verbs; so is worship. Worship involves preparing, listening, responding, and living life so as to please God. This confirms that worship is a verb and the verbs connected with worship denote activity. Worship is an active experience. Luke writes that the early Christians “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul . . .” (Acts 2:42-43, ESV). Worship involves a relationship with God that produces “a feeling for the majesty of God when we gather to proclaim Christ and to dramatize his death and resurrection to the glory of the Father” (Weber 117). This helps produce the reverence and awe so often missing in our worship services.

Second, the Christian must always have a deep love or passion to worship God. Our deep love or passion is evident in many facets of life—education, work, social graces, recreation, success, etc. Let us as Christians long and yearn for the communion with “the living God” (v. 2). When we love God with the totality of our being, we fulfill God’s law (Matt. 22:37-40; Mark 12:29-34).

Third, as Judaism was to be lived by its devotees, so Christianity is to be lived in the life of the Christian. The Christian’s life “is hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3, ESV). Christians are to have the mind of Jesus (Philip. 2:5). Jesus is to become formed in the Christian (Gal. 4:19). This life is only realized when “we are walking in the light, as He is in the light” (1 John 1:7, author’s translation).

Four, as the psalmist had trials and difficulties in his life, so Christians will not escape the trials and difficulties of life. Sorrows are as much a part of life while on Earth as are birth and death. Trials come to both the good and evil, to rich and the poor, to the youth and the aged, to the healthy and the diseased. From the Bible's teaching that God had one Son without sin (2 Cor. 5:21), someone added, "but NO son is without sorrow." When we examine the Scripture, we read that Jesus was a "Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3). Jesus said of His followers, "In the world you will have tribulation" (John 16:33, ESV). "For our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory . . ." (RV, 2 Cor. 4:17) ought to be a verse we hold dear to our heart. "Paul describes the suffering of God's faithful children as being: (1) light; (2) for the moment; (3) that which makes some contribution to the sufferer's gaining of eternal glory" (Warren 37). [We encourage the reader to consider reading and studying the great work *Our Loving God: Our Sun and Shield* by Thomas B. Warren, which sets forth the trials of a Christian and God's role in a biblical way.]

Five, one cannot but notice the tremendous faith of the psalmist in his determination to worship God, draw strength from God, and trust God. Faith is so ill-defined by many religious people. The faith that embraces Jesus and benefits from His blood is "a conviction full of joyful trust, that Jesus is the Messiah—the divinely appointed author of eternal salvation in the kingdom of God, *conjoined* with obedience to Christ" (Thayer 511, emphasis added). Some wrongly speak of faith as the only thing needful as well as the only thing required to be pleasing to God. "Is it wise to proclaim in so bald, naked, and unqualified a way as many do, that the holiness of converted people is *by faith only, and not at all by personal exertion?* Is it according to the proportion of God's Word? I doubt it" (Packer 94).

Six, the psalmist closed his poem with the beatitude: "O LORD of hosts, Blessed is the man who trusts in You!" (v. 12). In meditating on his twelve verses, the reader cannot help but see his deep trust in God. The Christian must have the same deep trust in God and His working in his life. *Trust* is one of the great words found in each testament. Biblical trust is closely connected to faith

and means to have a firm belief in the reliability and strength of God. Conversely, this would imply, “Cursed are all they who distrust God.” The Psalms state much about the believer trusting God. “But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You . . .” (5:11). “O LORD my God, in You I put my trust; Save me from all those who persecute me; And deliver me . . .” (7:1). “Trust in Him at all times, you people . . . God is a refuge for us” (62:8). “Those who trust in the LORD Are like Mount Zion, Which cannot be moved, but abides forever” (125:1). “When one depends [trusts] upon God in prayer and in life, He works His sovereign will and providence on our behalf. When God strengthens us, God is providing for us. He does something, He gives something, and He sustains us” (Varner 67). Prayer helps us put our trials in the right perspective, as well as our God. The psalmist prayed to God, and he called God a “sun and shield” (vv. 9, 11). Because Israel was taught to make God “a sun and shield,” the Israelites found their refuge in God in time of trials. “God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble, Therefore we will not fear . . .” (Psalm 46:1-2).

Seven, thrice in Psalm 84 the psalmist uses beatitudes denoting happiness and joy. “It is not for nothing that the Psalms so frequently urge God’s people . . . to make a joyful noise to the Lord. Psalm 104 begins, ‘Praised the LORD, O my soul,’ and all that follows is a joyous expression of praise” (Beisner 19). Christians ought to be exemplars of joy and happiness in life when we consider what we have in Christ and what is to come in eternity. God has designed the heart of man to be a happy heart. “A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance. . . . But he who is of a merry heart has a continual feast” (Prov. 15:13, 15). “A merry heart does good, like medicine . . .” (17:22). When God does great things for His children, He expects them to be happy (Psalm 126:1-3). When His children respond to His goodness by being “joyful and glad of heart . . .” (2 Chron. 7:10), God is pleased. Jesus said, “. . . whoever loses his life for My sake will find it” (Matt. 16:25, NASB). Paul manifested reasons for his joy: (1) his citizenship was in heaven (Philip. 3:20, ASV), (2) he enjoyed fellowship with God (2:1), (3) he learned contentment in life (4:10-13), and (4) he appreciated his brethren (4:1-3, 10-18). If we prioritize life by putting first things first (Matt. 6:33), then we will be happy.

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Biographical Sketch

W. Terry Varner has preached the gospel for sixty-three years and serves as both elder and minister at West Union, West Virginia. Terry has served on the faculty of the West Virginia School of Preaching since its beginning, being one of its four founders.

Terry has been married to the former Lillie L. Garrison for fifty-eight years. They have three sons, one daughter, eleven grandchildren, and eight great-grandchildren.

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GIVING GLORY TO GOD

Psalm 115

Rico L. Brown

I am elated to have an opportunity to speak at this year's lectures, knowing that I am the "new kid on the block." I pray that you will gain as much, if not more, appreciation, acknowledgement, and reverence for our God after we engage in this study. Like Paul, I am truly grateful that I am who I am and not what or where I used to be before I met Him (1 Cor. 15:10).

When Job had been allowed to end his self-induced pity party, our God spoke. God posed approximately seventy-seven questions directly to Job, but particular attention should be paid to the question our God asked in Job 38:4, "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding." [All Scripture references are from the KJV unless otherwise noted.] The rest, as commonly stated, is history! In today's world, many are trying to unsuccessfully compete with power and position to that of God. Unfortunately, no matter how much education we gain or learning we become engaged in, we as a people must be reminded of Paul's admonition:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

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; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them. (Rom. 1:18-32)

Knowing that God is serious about the sacrifice His son made for our soul's sake, we would do ourselves a worthwhile and soul-saving service to give God the well-deserved and proper glory He is due. Appropriately stated:

He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant forever: holy and reverend is his name.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever. (Psalm 111:9-10)

The Glory of God

“Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake. Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God? But our God is in the heavens:

he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased” (vv. 1-3). We must acknowledge that our God has assured and given His people a great victory. Life will present us with all sorts of challenges, complications, heartaches, losses, sorrows, tears, and other unfortunate events; however, if we trust in God, we will be given a victory—victory that we must recognize is not a result of anything we have done, but solely the result of serving and praising our God. When put in the proper perspective, we learn that we must take the seat furthest to the back of our God. We wear His name to glorify Him and not to obtain glory for ourselves. We shine forth as a result of His glory and not to obtain the praise of men. If it is a person’s goal to obtain status, position, and/or recognition equal to that of God, then his obvious goal is to gain the glory of man and not to glorify God (Matt. 6:5). It is God’s mercy and truth that has sustained us from the beginning of time as we know it, and it is those same qualities that will endure and outlast the test of time (1 Chron. 16:34). We recognize the glory of God not because of who we are or where we come from, but truly because of whose we are and where we are going.

While the world may ridicule our God, we simply redeem Him. The heathen and unknowledgeable will often mock us and our God, to which we should simply respond by drawing nearer to our God. While God’s timing may not be in accordance with our demands, He will respond in due time as a result of His love and faithfulness. As the souls under the altar cried out, “How long, O Lord . . . ?” we must remember and remind ourselves that He will act when all “should be fulfilled” (Rev. 6:10-11). While we wait, we must remember that our God reigns on high and looks down low. It is the false gods and gods of this world that give empty hope and provide a mirage of dreams and fantasies, while the true, living God has proven Himself countless times throughout the ages. Notice how God is given distinct glory and honor:

Declare his glory among the heathen; his marvellous works among all nations.

For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised: he also is to be feared above all gods.

For all the gods of the people are idols: but the LORD made the heavens.

Glory and honour are in his presence; strength and gladness are in his place.

Give unto the LORD, ye kindreds of the people, give unto the LORD glory and strength.

Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness. (1 Chron. 16:24-29)

Daniel made it very clear that all the population of earth is as nothing when compared with the power of God and that there is no one or force with the ability to stop or even delay the actions of God (4:35). Quite simply, as the heathen rage, we should joyfully engage in glorifying our God.

Idol Inventory

Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands.

They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not:

They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not:

They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat.

They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them. (vv. 4-8)

I heard a story once that went like this: A neighbor named Jane complained that her neighbor Sue was always hanging out dirty laundry. Week in and week out, Jane stated that Sue did laundry and hung up her clothes on the line to dry, but the clothes never seemed to come clean. Then one day, after growing tired of hearing Jane complain and never mention anything to Sue, someone rightly shared with Jane that it is hard to see clean clothes when you have extremely dirty windows. I wonder how many people knowingly go down the wrong path in life but never seem to have the desire to change their ways. They would rather make the same mistakes over and over again instead of changing the error of their ways. In similar fashion to those who serve idols, common sense seems to have disappeared.

The heathen seem to taunt the God who made the heavens and

the earth, while their idol gods could not exist without the creations of God. The idols are made of earthly metals by earthly hands established by the God of heaven, but yet these gods are to be some sort or fashion of competition. How can the created compete with the Creator? It just does not seem logical or reasonable to make such an assertion. Jeremiah provided some insight when comparing the living God with dead gods:

Hear ye the word which the LORD speaketh unto you, O house of Israel:

Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them.

For the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe.

They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not.

They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not: they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also is it in them to do good.

Forasmuch as there is none like unto thee, O LORD; thou art great, and thy name is great in might. (10:1-6)

When we consider the gods of the heathen, note the following observations: they have mouths, but they cannot speak or communicate with their worshipers; they have eyes, but cannot see their worshipers to meet their needs; they have ears, but they cannot hear their prayers and requests; they have noses but have no sense of smell; they have hands but cannot raise their arms; they have legs and feet but still cannot change their position. Interestingly, the ones who formed the idols are just as useless and senseless as the idols they created.

In contrast, when we compare the God of the Bible with the false gods of this world, His characteristics speak for themselves. Whereas their gods could not speak, our God has spoken on numerous occasions and now comes in the “volume of the Book” (Heb. 10:7). Whereas their gods have no eyes to offer protection and no ears to hear their requests, our God’s eyes are over us and His

ears are open unto our prayers (1 Peter 3:12). Whereas their gods have noses with no senses, our God desires a sacrifice as a “sweetsmelling savour” (Eph. 5:2). Whereas their gods have hands with no usage, our God’s fingers made the universe (Psalm 8:3) and His arm is revealing (Isa. 53:1). Whereas their gods have feet and cannot move, our God carries and walks with us where He would have us to go (41:10, 13). It is a very sad summation when the false gods that are served have no rewards but leave their followers further blind to the Light of the Gospel and deaf to the voice of God.

Idols are the deified acknowledgements of mankind’s own frailties and desires. While God’s people will understand and recognize the importance and impact of *History*, the world reveals its own history when the gods it serves are brought to the light. Idols are the work of men’s hands and therefore simply inferior. It would only make sense for the creation—idols, that is—to worship their creator—mankind, that is—but unfortunately idolatry is all the worse because it is practiced in reverse.

Trust in the Lord

“O Israel, trust thou in the LORD: he is their help and their shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD: he is their help and their shield. Ye that fear the LORD, trust in the LORD: he is their help and their shield” (vv. 9-11). It is interesting to me that people will buy a ticket, load their luggage, board an airplane, fasten their seat belts, and put full faith in a human being on board of an aircraft, made and engineered by man, with full confidence and trust, but yet when it comes to God, they have reservations. When we consider the track record of God versus man, the competition was over before it began because man could not exist without God. The idea that many waver in their trust of our God is startling when we face the fact that trust is encompassed by God. We are directed to “[t]rust 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). Trusting in God is an easier path to travel when we recognize the power of His lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness. We must know that it is God who breathed the breath of life into our bodies to make us a living soul (Gen. 2:7) and that it

was not through any knowledge or power of our own.

Why is it that man seeks to make trusting in God some extraordinary event while the mere acknowledgement of the devil is common practice? I respond by stating that it is simply a result of man not knowing whom he ought to serve. Trusting in man is understandably a hesitant action, but to the contrary, the act of trusting in God is a holy event. For He alone is worthy of all the trust man could muster, but He simply requires our obedience to parallel our trust in Him. One of the many benefits that modern-day man has is that the Bible provides countless records of the life of Christ and events that surround Him, while those who existed when He walked the earth relied solely on belief and faith. One such account is that of the Samaritan woman at the well. She had direct conversation and interaction with our Lord and was able to draw the conclusion that He was the Christ. Based on the preponderance of evidence available to prove who Christ was and more importantly is and the fact that these events are recorded exclusively in the Bible, what more could be desired in order for one to place full trust in the Almighty? Jesus stated that “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). The Truth has been revealed to us in the form of Christ, and it is through the Truth that we have access to and the gift of the Spirit. Trusting in God goes way beyond just a certain aspect or facet of life, but it truly entails us placing the entirety of our existence in the trust and hands of God. Israel did it, Aaron did it, and I pray we recognize the benefit of doing it, as well. The psalmist recorded that

He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend is his name.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever” (111:9-10).

When we stop resisting and learn to trust and obey Him, we have assurance that He will fight for us, take our feet out of the miry clay, and set our feet on dry land (Exod. 14:13-16).

Blessed Assurance

The LORD hath been mindful of us: he will bless us; he will bless the house of Israel; he will bless the house of Aaron.

*He will bless them that fear the LORD, both small and great.
The LORD shall increase you more and more, you and your
children. Ye are blessed of the LORD which made heaven and
earth. (vv. 12-15)*

Every child of God ought to have security in his soul, which can be profitable only if his soul is secure. This security can be achieved only as a result of having a peace of mind. It is this peace that passes all understanding and is able to keep our hearts and minds through our Lord (Philip. 4:7). It is then and only then we are able to know with certainty that we have been blessedly assured by and through God. No matter the size of the challenge, the opponent, the victory, or the weapon, it is through the small and the great that we must learn to appreciate what God has done and is doing for us. While man may be impressed by the assets, money, property, and status that one may obtain, it is truly wise to learn that it is praises to God that we all must proclaim. Man is impressed by the simplest of things, but it is not so with God. For instance, money does not impress Him, because He owns it all. The highest degrees of education do not impress Him, because He knows everything. Civic, fraternal, political, and/or social positions do not impress Him, because before we were, He was, He is, and He always will be "I AM" (Exod. 3:14).

It truly indeed is a blessing that both the small and the great are the same in His sight. His blessings are reserved for no particular people, but those that fear and obey Him. God indeed loves us all, for if there were no great ones, there would be no small. He has done everything according to His divine will. He has blessed both the great and the small, for it is He that has made us all. There are many great people that stand out in the Bible, but they are dwarfed in comparison to the small people that God made greater. Whether it was David the shepherd boy, the widow and her two mites, or Zaccheus the short tax collector, God has always used people, whether great or small, to do greater or larger-than-life things to bring glory to His name. It is human nature to allow money, prestige, pride, and power to remove the focus from our Father, but know it is divine guidance to subdue worldly aspirations for heavenly gain. If we permit our possessions to blind us, we can in no way blame

God when we do not see Him right in front of us. According to Paul, we would be wise to know whom we are assuredly blessed to call:

But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. (1 Cor. 1:24-31)

As a direct result of our blessed assurance, we give all honor and glory to God because the Scriptures fortify our faith by helping us to know a few things about our faith in God. We give glory to God because:

- We have the spirit of power (2 Tim. 1:7).
- We know in whom we have believed (2 Tim. 1:12).
- We are no longer separated from God (Rom. 8:38-39).
- We keep His Word and thereby keep Him (1 John 2:5).
- We are enabled to draw nearer (Heb. 10:22).
- We know all things will work out (Rom. 8:28).
- What God has given, we know we have (1 John 5:11-13).
- It is He who has made us and not we ourselves (Psalm 100:3).

The Commitment to Praise

“The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD’s: but the earth hath he given to the children of men. The dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into silence. But we will bless the LORD from this time forth and for evermore. Praise the LORD” (vv. 16-18).

It is apparent that the significance of the word *ble*ss should stand out. It is used six times in Psalm 115. I know that man could not exist or live without the blessings of God, but we must know that it is only just for us, His creation, to bless Him. We do this in part by ascribing all glory and praise to our Father. We bring joy to the heart of God with our giving of thanks and obedience. According to Genesis 2, God made the earth and all that is therein to meet the needs and desires of man and even permitted man to have a role in the development of His creations and works of His hands. He has given us—that is, man—dominion over the earth, and it is a tragedy what we have done with that trust. As a whole, we have forgotten that we are the created and not the Creator. Jesus accurately declared to “let the dead bury their dead” (Matt. 8:22), but it is a sad commentary when the people who serve and worship dead idols do not realize that they also are dead men walking.

Though God from heaven reigns and rules everywhere, He has given the earth to man as his temporary home. He has given us the knowledge and skills to take care of our earthly home while instilling in us the proper path to get to our heavenly home. But what poor managers we have been, for Isaiah rightfully declared: “The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant” (24:5). We must know that the best hope for mankind is to yield to our Landlord’s desires for our destiny and yield to the wisdom of His will. We ought to be grateful that our Lord has been mindful of us and glorify His name for the sins He forgives, the needs He supplies, the mercy we enjoy, the fears He removes, and the hopes that He is fulfilling; but most of all, we give God the glory for the Savior that He sent—Jesus Christ!

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Biographical Sketch

Rico Brown is the minister for the Virginia Avenue church of

Christ in Chester, West Virginia. He is the former youth minister for the church of Christ at Beville Road and former minister for the church of Christ on ML King Boulevard, both in Daytona Beach, Florida. He is a graduate of the Florida School of Preaching in Lakeland. While having achieved two bachelor's degrees and a master's degree in secular studies, Rico desired to further his education and knowledge by enrolling in Florida School of Preaching for what he has attributed to his greatest educational achievement thus far.

Having a strong spiritual background, he delivered his first sermon at the young age of fifteen and has loved preaching ever since. His former work experience includes serving as an aide to a retired Orange County Commissioner and as a congressional aide to a member of the United States House of Representatives. He has also worked as a high school social studies teacher and in public relations.

Rico believes we all should serve and live our lives so that everyone may see Christ in us. In all facets of our lives, our purpose as Christians is to let our light shine. He enjoys working with others in his community and encourages others to get involved to make a difference. His greatest joy is being of service to the Lord.

He is married to the former Latisha Parker of Orlando. They have two children, Anthony and Laila.

IN THE STORMS OF LIFE

Psalms 88

Emanuel Daugherty

No book of the Bible has been studied more consistently and by more people than the book of Psalms. There is a clear reason for this interest: here is a collection that speaks the language of men. Here are hymns and laments which reach to the heights, as well as to the depths of the soul. They touch all the emotions. . . . Sometimes strange, and often difficult, the Psalms never lack the power to plumb human thought and feeling. (Vancil 1)

In the Psalms we see ourselves and the church—sins, sickness, sorrows, sufferings, struggles, aspirations, joys, and victories.

The psalm which I am to address is the 88th—a personal psalm written by one who has long been afflicted by the storms of life. In the New King James Bible, the superscription of the 88th Psalm reads this way: “A Song. A Psalm of the sons of Korah. For the chief Musician. Set to ‘Mathalath Leannoth.’ A Contemplation of Heman the Ezrahite.”

Charles Spurgeon sees it as a song written for the sons of Korah, who have been the singers of several other psalms. This time they are to be the singers of this very solemn dirge (127). *Mathalath* is a word whose definition is now lost to us but seems to have to do with sickness. *Leannoth* stands for *singing*. Thus this psalm is intended to be sung, perhaps as a dirge, lamentation, or funeral song. The word *Contemplation* is from the Hebrew *Maskil*, meaning that it is a psalm of instruction (Cloer 661). That it is to be taught suggests that there is great value in studying this psalm. Heman the Ezrahite is identified as the writer of the psalm. Heman is also described as a musician and wise man in 1 Kings 4:31 and 1 Chronicles 6:33 and 37 and 15:17 and 19.

H. C. Leupold has called this psalm “the gloomiest psalm found in the Scriptures” (626). Similarly, the *Cambridge Bible* says: “This is the saddest Psalm in the whole Psalter” (Kirkpatrick 523). After reading Psalm 87 and seeing the contrast with Psalm 88, Delitzsch

remarked that it “is as gloomy as Ps. lxxxvii. is cheerful . . .” (23). From beginning to end, it is filled with lamentation, bewilderment, frustration, and desperation. Spurgeon describes this psalm as the “incoherence of the author’s grief” (129). On the other hand, J. B. Rotherham, while calling this “the gloomiest psalm in the book,” speaks of it as

one of the most touching . . . also, one of the most encouraging—when all things are considered. It is an elaborate description of almost hopeless sorrow; but its spirit is peculiarly gentle and patient. It contains no reproaches of men, and no upbraidings of God. The sufferings portrayed are not traced to man’s infliction, but exclusively to the Divine hand; and yet the psalmist does not speak against God, far less does he turn away from him. (103)

We might ask, “Why is such a psalm in the Bible? Of what value is it?” We must remember that the Bible is a book designed to provide help for every human situation. It is a book for all seasons of life, and this is especially true of the Psalms. Illness and suffering, death and dying are a part of the human condition; the 88th Psalm is written to help those who find themselves in similar circumstances. All men find themselves in need of comfort at some time in their lives and some, as here, more than others.

Roy Deaver outlines Psalm 88 this way (309):

- I. Cry (vv. 1-2)
- II. Condition (vv. 3-5)
- III. Cause (vv. 6-9)
- IV. Questions (vv. 10-12)
- V. Conclusion (vv. 13-18)

Heman’s opening words, “O LORD, God of my salvation,” are directed to God his Maker (v. 1). [All Scripture references are from the NKJV, unless otherwise specified.] He addresses his prayer to Jehovah, “the LORD God,” the Sovereign God of the heavens and earth, the only One who could give him satisfaction from this dilemma and circumstance of his suffering. This appeal to God is the only ray of hope in the psalm. His hope is inarticulate, but he clings tenaciously in faith to the “God of my salvation.” He is confident that God hears his prayer and is sure that God is able to save him. The psalmist is like Job in this manner: he, as Job, will not

“Curse God and die!” as was suggested by Job’s wife (2:9). His prayer, though given from a desperate circumstance, is a prayer of faith and hope that God is able to help him. In fact, his prayer is somewhat like the answer the three Hebrew children gave to Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, when they were threatened with death in the fiery furnace. They believed, “. . . our God whom we serve is able to deliver us . . . ,” *but if not, they were still not going to bow to any other god* (Dan 3:17-18). Heman knows only God can save him, but he also knows if God does not, all is well.

Though he calls out to God “day and night” (v. 1), his prayers seem to go unheeded; there is no response from the Lord. His troubles are continuous; he is “full of troubles” and he believes he is at death’s door, as his “life draws near to the grave” (v. 3). His friends and acquaintances regard him as one as good as dead; they speak of him as if he is already in the pit. In his weakened condition, he is unable to protest their speaking of him in this manner; he feels he is “. . . Adrift among the dead, Like the slain who lie in the grave, Whom You remember no more . . .” (v. 5).

This psalm is unique, as it uses four different words for *grave*. In verse 3, the Hebrew *sheol* means “grave.” *Pit* in verse 4, *the dead* in verses 5 and 10, and *grave* in verse 5 are translated from three other Hebrew words (Cloer 665). The prophet Jeremiah, in his Lamentation over Jerusalem, uses similar words:

[H]e has made me dwell in darkness
like the dead of long ago.

He has walled me about so that I cannot escape;
he has made my chains heavy;
though I call and cry for help,
he shuts out my prayer;
he has blocked my ways with blocks of stones;
he has made my paths crooked. (ESV, 3:6-9)

In verse 7, he describes his condition as that which may have come about as a result of sin when he says, “Your wrath lies heavy upon me, And you have afflicted me with all Your waves.” He pictures Jehovah’s wrath sweeping over him like the constant waves of the sea. Sin can bring on physical illness in many ways. Sexual immorality may cause AIDS and many other venereal diseases.

Alcohol abuse can cause liver disease. Drug abuse is presently wreaking a high death toll in our country. If sin has been the cause of the psalmist's suffering, it is not specifically stated. Sometimes suffering comes because of mistreatment and abuse of others—like Jesus, Joseph, Stephen, and Job.

But whatever the root of one's suffering might be, good can still come from it if the proper attitude is maintained. Suffering can create an awareness of sin; it can draw us closer to God; and it can strengthen us. "*And we know that all things* (suffering included, RG) *work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose* (Rom. 8:28). (Greiner 110)

As noted in the previous paragraph, no specific reason is given for God's wrath upon him. Many commentators believe his illness may have been caused by leprosy. An indication of this is seen in that he was avoided by his acquaintances, he was "an abomination to them; I am shut up and I cannot get out . . ." (v. 8). This would have caused them to stay away from him. Leprosy, now called Hansen's Disease, was a very loathsome and dreaded disease with no cure. There were miraculous healings of leprosy; for example, Miriam (Num. 12), Naaman (2 Kings 5), and the lepers healed by Jesus in Luke 17. Of course, other afflictions could be responsible for his sad condition. In his anguish, it may seem as if he is being punished by God, but like Job, no sin is stated that would bring on such suffering.

He reminds us, ". . . I have called daily upon You, I have stretched out my hands to You" (v. 9). He is literally begging, and God is still silent to him. "The *spreading out of the hands* conveys the posture of sincere supplication" (Cloer 666). In the New Testament, we have the Apostle Paul writing Timothy, commanding that "men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting . . ." (1 Tim. 2:8). This seems not to be meant as something literally to be done, but as a metaphor, with "holy hands" being lifted up to God as if he is saying, "My life is an open book, examine and see my life, that it is righteous."

The psalmist complains that his eye is wasting away from the flood of tears; he has cried his eyes out to no avail.

In verses 10-12, Heman asks several rhetorical questions in an

effort to gain God's attention to get Him to respond to his cries for help:

*Do you work wonders for the dead?
Do the departed rise up to praise you? Selah.
Is your steadfast love declared in the grave,
or your faithfulness in Abaddon?
Are your wonders known in the darkness,
or your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness? (ESV)*

The answer to these questions is an emphatic, "No!" God's wondrous works are not done for the dead who are beyond His help. God's help is given only to the living, to those who can take advantage of His lovingkindness and goodness given on their behalf.

It is among the living that his miracles are performed, his praises sung, his constancy and acts of deliverance exhibited. Death is no exponent of his glory. Its whole character is negative: it is the last word in inactivity, silence . . . , the severing of ties, corruption . . . , gloom, oblivion. (Kidner 350)

But the complaint goes on and on. Again the psalmist pours out his lament: "But to you I have cried out, O LORD, And in the morning my prayer comes before you" (v. 13). His prayers for help begin early, beseeching God to rescue him or at least give him some respite from his desperate condition. He would like an answer to his questions: "LORD, why do you cast off my soul? Why do you hide your face from me?" (v. 14). From this psalm, it seems that there are times when no answer will come, or at least if there is an answer, it is, "No." Jesus in the Garden asked, "[L]et this cup pass from Me . . ." (Matt. 26:39), and on the cross He prayed, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" (27:46). And heaven was silent. The Apostle Paul prayed three times that his thorn in the flesh would be removed from him. The answer was that it would not be taken from him, but "My grace is sufficient for you . . ." (2 Cor. 12:9). When man puts his trust in the Lord, he finds strength for his weakness.

From the psalmist's youth, all his memories have been filled with the Lord's "terrors" (v. 15). His whole life has been one of misery and suffering. He feels that the end is near, his energy is

sapped, he is distraught and in despair. He speaks of God's terrors causing his suffering. This term is used only one other time in the Bible, in the Book of Job. There, Job describes himself as having been shot with poisonous arrows and ". . . The terrors of God are arrayed against me" (Job 6:4; Cloer 669).

Heman concludes his psalm lamenting that he is surrounded by the fierceness of God's wrath; it overwhelms him like a flood, and even worse, he is completely alone: "Loved one and friend You have put far from me, And my acquaintances [literally, *my intimates*] into darkness" (v. 18). When he looks for a friend, all he sees is blackness. This psalm has no conclusion. While other psalms on the subject of suffering usually end on a high note with encouraging words and cheerful tones, this one does not. This psalm begins with a cry for help and deliverance, and it does not come. It ends as it began; the cry goes on.

Lessons to Be Learned

(1) Prayer is always available to God's children, even to those who are in such desperate situations as the man in this psalm. The late Kenneth Hoover, speaking to a Bible class, said prayer is "traveling on our knees." He said:

By traveling on our knees, we can lift up our hearts and voices to the very God of Heaven, go anywhere in the world, to any country, enter into any closed door, reach the greatest Authority in the Universe. Prayer knows no bounds, is not limited by time zones; it is available night or day. Prayer is not bound by the restrictions that may be put on the physical body.

(2) Prayer has been described as man's "last resort." This seems to be the situation the writer of this psalm is facing. His is a prayer cried out in desperation. He says he has "cried out day and night" for relief from his suffering (v. 1), but none has come. "This believer has no place to turn to but to God" (Cloer 662).

When strength fails, when money fails, when doctors fail, when all resources and possibilities are gone, God is still there, prayer is still available. Prayer bypasses the red tape and dead ends; it hurdles the barriers, obstacles and frustrations; it overcomes the "cannots," the negatives, and the "impossibles"; prayer goes to the highest

authority, to God the Father, the last resort, our last and only hope.

(3) Heman's friends are much like Job's friends, who seemed to have no bedside etiquette, speaking of him in the past tense, giving him up for dead while his life is still in him. When visiting those who are gravely ill, we should not speak our thoughts so bluntly. How discouraging it is to those who are so stricken that they should be spoken to as if they cannot hear and cannot survive; perhaps their death is hastened by such discouragement. As Christian men and women, let us always be considerate of the feelings of others and treat all with dignity and respect. Let us "hope for the best" for those in such pitiable conditions.

(4) Who may benefit from studying Psalm 88? Of course, all may gain knowledge from study, but surely there is a special lesson for those who are chronically ill, for those that have had a sickly life, who suffer constant pain, and those who are bedfast and wheelchair bound. A psalm like this comes to be a rich source of strength and encouragement. The man in this psalm prayed; I can pray. The man in this psalm endured; I can endure. This man trusted God come what may; I can do that. In some situations in life, we are called upon to have sheer determination, an unbreakable trust in God, a "clenched-teeth" determination and faith in order to survive. "I want to live!" can overcome all and must be our resolution. With this dogged determination, the human spirit has been able to endure incredible hardships, survived where others have succumbed, and lived to tell its story. These serve as a model of patient endurance.

(5) This is a psalm enabling us to prepare for death. Sometimes we have to face the cruel reality that there is no cure for our illness or that we have reached the point where death is imminent. The Bible teaches the inevitability of death. "[I]t is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment . . ." (Heb. 9:27). The love of life is strong. When we are young, our thoughts are on life—things to do, places to go, people to see. But as we grow older and begin losing our family members and friends and our bodies begin to wear out, as we become weaker, as sickness and illness come more often, doctors and hospitals become more familiar to us; then a psalm such as this takes on new meaning to us.

Death is not something we seek; but as age creeps upon us, life itself can become a burden. For some, death becomes less a fear and

more a friend. When there is no cure, when the stroke of death is near, desperate situations in life cause us to long for our heavenly home. Sickness and disease, constant suffering and pain wear us down physically and mentally. The wrinkles in our faces remind us of our mortality. We may reason by the ages of our parents and grandparents about how long we will live. “The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away” (KJV, Psalm 90:10). The ills that befall us are reminders that we are “of the earth” (1 Cor. 15:47) and we too will one day “walk through the valley of the shadow of death” (Psalm 23:4). The mature Christian will develop a healthy outlook on life and death and come to the conclusion of the Apostle Paul: “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philip. 1:21).

(6) The Bible’s emphasis is on taking advantage of God’s blessings while we live. “Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion” (Heb. 3:15). And again, “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2). It behooves each one to “seek the LORD while he may be found, Call on Him while He is near” (Isa. 55:6).

This poor man of Psalm 88 is saying that if he is not given some help very soon, it will be too late. The concept of resurrection from the dead was not so clear to the saints of the Old Testament as to those of the New Covenant. May this psalm evoke compassion, pity, and sympathy for those who suffer.

It is this writer’s fervent prayer that those who read and identify themselves in this tragic psalm will find hope and encouragement from the things discussed in this chapter.

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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 two great-grandchildren. He has been preaching for fifty years. Emanuel has preached at Alkire Road in Grove City, Ohio; Dewey Avenue in St. Marys, West Virginia, and Salem in Glen Easton, West Virginia, and served as director of the West Virginia School of Preaching. Presently, he is semi-retired and a member of the Beville Road church of Christ in Daytona, Florida. He preaches by appointment and continues teaching at WVSOP via Skype. He has a commentary on the Book of Daniel and extensive class notes on Isaiah and the minor prophets.

WITH A HUNGRY SPIRIT

Psalms 42

J. D. Conley

The church of our Lord is currently, and most certainly, in a chokehold of apathy. Apathy affects not only our work, but also our worship. How can this pernicious problem be rectified, and what can be done to make sure it does not return? One sure way to deliver a deathblow to apathy and reignite a hungry spirit is by a study and application of the prodigious book of Psalms. Therefore, commendation is in order for the timely selection of this year's lectureship theme: "When I Study the Psalms": Enhancing My Prayers—Enriching My Worship. May the approving smiles of heaven be upon this week of study and upon every effort that is put forth to glean lessons from this marvelous book. Psalms is a book that cannot help but enhance and enrich our spiritual life. As always, gratitude is extended to Director Robison, the lectureship committee, and the Hillview Terrace eldership for the invitation to speak and for their labor of love in making this lectureship a reality.

Introduction

Brethren love to eat. In jest, it has been suggested that our brotherhood put out a book titled *Where the Saints Eat* as a companion to our congregational directory *Where the Saints Meet*. It seems that if brethren are not eating, they are talking about eating. Our affluent lifestyle has made this necessity of life pleasurable, easy, and constant. Because of this, physical hunger is a condition we rarely experience. Our prandial appetites are quickly satisfied at the kitchen table, the vending machine, or the burger drive-thru or via pizza delivery. Should we inadvertently miss a meal, feelings of deprivation sweep over us and we feign famishment. Tepid claims of starvation are unabashedly made as we drag ourselves to our well-stocked refrigerators to find sustenance to carry on. But what we refer to as hunger is only the mild sensation of an empty stomach that desires its steady refill. But real, gnawing physical hunger, such as those in Venezuela are suffering or the bloated children of

Ethiopia have undergone or the forty-day fast our Lord endured (Matt. 4:2), is completely foreign to us.

Nonetheless, would it not be grand if children of God could feel spiritual hunger as sharply as they do physical hunger? To sustain a hungry spirit ought to be our aim, instead of allowing it to be suppressed or taken away altogether by an appetite for apathy.

Yes, there are those who relish apathy regarding spiritual matters; otherwise, it would not exist in the church of our Lord. Would it not be ideal that when we miss portions of worship and communing with God, it would affect us as much as missed portions of food and drink? Would it not be ideal that when a babe in Christ partakes of “the milk of the word” (1 Peter 2:2) or a mature Christian digs into the “strong meat” (Heb. 5:14), he would do so with as much zest as devouring an ice cream sundae or a T-bone steak? [All Scripture references are from the KJV unless otherwise noted.] Sometimes, in our eager quest to satiate our physical appetite, we overindulge and pay the unwanted price of heartburn, indigestion, upset stomach, and acid reflux. But we can never overindulge on spiritual food. Instead, the only result after hungering and thirsting after righteousness is the comforting, “[we] shall be filled” (Matt. 5:6).

As Christians, let us make sure that our hunger for spiritual things remain as acute as our appetite for physical things. To aid us in reaching and maintaining our spiritual appetite, let us turn our attention to the 42nd Psalm, wherein is set forth a hungry spirit that makes worship enrichment possible. Never forget that when it comes to feeding our spirit, our diet must consist of a daily intake of the Word of God. Psalm 42 sets the table well. As we pull up the proverbial chair, we hear:

Hunger Proclaimed (vv. 1-4)

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: when shall I come and appear before God?

My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?

When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had

gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday. (vv. 1-4)

Who is making this dire proclamation of hunger, and why? If the heading (which is uninspired) is true, the authorship must be attributed to the sons of Korah. But this would imply a group of individuals, and this psalm does not mention individuals. This is an oddity that cannot be satisfactorily explained. Although this is the first psalm in Book II of the inspired collection, it is also the first psalm that is not commonly attributed to David, as were the psalms in Book I. Given that fact, along with the Davidic flavor which permeates these eleven verses, one might assume, and perhaps correctly, that the sweet singer of Israel is its penman. If it is not David, then its authorship should be attributed to a Korahite who underwent a similar experience as David. But it would be a *Korahite* singular, as opposed to *Korahites* plural. Even when it is taken into consideration that Psalms 42 and 43 may have originally been one psalm (since Psalm 43 has no heading, the same sentiment, and some identical language), this still sheds no light on why individuals are not mentioned. Both psalms appear to have been composed by a single individual.

Whomever the writer is, why is he proclaiming his fierce hunger? Because he has been debarred from public worship with God's family. It is widely believed this psalm and the next depict the time when David was driven out of Jerusalem by the rebellion of his ingrate of a son, Absalom. If this psalm was written by a Korahite, then he "described an experience of his own, and the similarity of what he lived through and that which David experienced results from the fact that this man accompanied David on the occasion of his flight from Absalom" (Leupold 336).

What would it take for today's Christian to feel such a keen sense of spiritual hunger? Would our religious liberties have to be taken away before we would feel any pang of spiritual starvation? Would it take the state chaining the doors on our buildings and forbidding worship services? Would our Bibles have to be banned and burned before we would feel a palpable sense of loss and despair? Just what would it take? Would our freedom to assemble

have to be yanked from us before we would begin to feel any remorse about forsaking the worship assemblies? Would it take these extremes in order for us to have our desire for worship enriched again? What measures would have to be enforced to get *us* to pant after God and have *our* hungry spirit renewed? How tragic that sometimes something precious has to be lost before it is properly appreciated. What, I ask, is more precious and dear to the child of God than to worship the Father? May we happily “[g]ive unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness” (Psalm 29:2).

The writer begins his proclamation of hunger verbalizing:

The Need Expressed (vv. 1-2)

“*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: when shall I come and appear before God?*” (vv. 1-2). The psalmist’s pressing need is for his spiritual thirst to be slaked. What a vivid metaphor the writer evokes! Just as an exhausted deer pants for clear streams of water, the man with a hungry spirit pants after God Himself. What the water brooks are to the hart’s life, God is to the human heart. Although water is life-giving sustenance, it provides nothing for the soul. Only God can meet the needs and longings of the soul. Clearly, this man needed God and needed him desperately. It was his incessant panting and thirsting after Him that attested to this fact. He craved “for nothing more than God, but still for more and more of him” (Henry 620). How hungry was this individual? Note that four times in these first two verses God’s name is invoked.

The Second Book of the Psalms differs from the first by one distinguishing characteristic,—its use of the Divine Name. In the First, God is spoken of and addressed as Jehovah; in the Second, as Elohim . . . Jehovah occurs 272 times in the First Book, and Elohim but 15 times; whereas in the Second, Elohim occurs 164 times, and Jehovah only 30 times. (Perowne 346)

Throughout this psalm, *God* is mentioned thirteen times. Twelve of these times it is translated from *Elohim*, the Hebrew plural denoting the Godhead Three. The lone exception is in verse 2, where

the living God is translated from the Hebrew term *el*, referring to the Almighty. In verse 8, the use of *Lord* comes from the Hebrew term *Yahweh*, translated *Jehovah*. One can only speculate as to why the sudden shift in Divine appellations. Be that as it may, the dozen uses of *Elohim* in eleven verses seem to underscore how very much the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are needed for our soul's satisfaction.

The scribe continues to portray his hungry spirit as thirsting for “the living God” (v. 2)—not merely God, but for the *living* God. The God that brother A. W. Dicus wrote about in the grand hymn “Our God, He Is Alive,” who is depicted in the soaring lyrics, “There is a God, He is alive, in Him we live, and we survive. . . .” Some see a redundancy in Dicus’ use of the words *live* and *survive*. Perhaps so, but maybe there is a nuance to be appreciated. No doubt the writer of this psalm saw a distinction between living and surviving. In fact, he was starving and thirsting for God. Yes, he was living, but all the while he was striving for spiritual survival, too. Many have lived the Christian life but have stopped. They continue to live physically, but they have died spiritually and need immediate resuscitation. May we recognize our absolute dependency upon God (John 15:5; Acts 17:28)! How reassuring to know that the God who is keenly interested in the apex of His creation can readily and willingly meet our every need (Psalm 68:19, 139:17; Acts 14:17; Rom. 8:32; James 1:17; et al.). Only the living God can satisfy our hungry spirit.

One way in which God seeks to satiate our spiritual hunger is by allowing us to approach Him in worship. The question “[W]hen shall I come and appear before God?” (v. 2) seems to be a plaintive expression issuing from a heart longing to be reunited with God in the public worship setting. Regardless of who composed this psalm, David or a Korahite, one thing is certain: he was separated from God. So intense was this feeling of separation, it is likened to extreme physical thirst.

What about us? After missing a few worship assemblies due to sickness or other circumstances beyond our control, did we experience an overwhelming desire for an immediate return to worship God? Did our absence produce spiritual hunger pangs? Did we express the same sentiments as did the psalmist, “[W]hen shall I come and appear before God?” (v. 2). Did we express this need?

Was a strong desire present to return and worship God with the saints? Or did we dread getting back into the weekly routine?

The Nausea Experienced (vv. 3-4)

My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?

When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday” (vv. 3-4).

Depending on the circumstances, possessing a hungry spirit can be unpleasant. Since a condition such as spiritual hunger exists, so does spiritual nausea. This queasy condition prevails, as evident in the words “tears . . . day and night” (v. 3) and “. . . I pour out my soul in me . . .” (v. 4). Clearly, whomever this person was, he was spiritually upset. Instead of eating, he wept. His separation from God, for whatever reason, had taken away his physical appetite for food. This bout of spiritual nausea had no period of respite. It was “[d]ay and night. Constantly; without intermission” (Barnes 5). To intensify the nausea, his enemies were bitterly taunting him, asking, “Where is thy God?” (v. 3). What uglier question could be asked of believers? Just because adversity makes its appearance, why does that give license to unbelievers to jab us with this vicious barb? Certainly, the psalmist felt the pain this question inflicted; that is why it was asked not once, but “continually.”

He goes on to say, “When I remember these things” (v. 4), i.e., the sickening sorrows of being separated from the house of God and the cruel reproaches of his enemies, but, “[t]he verb here used is in the future tense, and would be appropriately rendered ‘I *will* remember these things, and I *will* pour out my soul within me” (Barnes 5). Thus the writer determines to remember this period of spiritual nausea when his hungry spirit was at its most starved point. He never wanted to forget this time of trial and his dire need for God. If David is the writer, then this may shed light on these words: “It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes” (Psalm 119:71). Such a vivid memory of this forlorn occasion would serve to enrich his worship, as the end of verse 4

declares. Therefore, with a hungry spirit he would once again worship God with a renewed “voice of joy and praise” with many fellow worshipers.

We proceed from hunger proclaimed to:

Hunger Pangs (vv. 5-7)

Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.

O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar.

Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me. (vv. 5-7)

Nourishment Desired (vv. 5-6)

Whenever we feel the pangs of physical hunger coming on, we eat to stamp them out. Likewise, the psalmist is doing the same here in stamping out his spiritual hunger pangs. He is engaged in a healthy dose of self-admonishment. He is inquiring as to why he is despondent and “disquieted” (v. 5), i.e., worried and upset. It seems to dawn on him such is totally unnecessary because, after all, God *is there* regardless of the efforts of those trying to tell him He is not. He preaches a short but powerful sermon to himself, saying, “[H]ope thou in God . . .” (v. 5). In fact, he preaches this sermon again down in verse 11, and if this psalm and the next were originally one, then the sermon is preached yet again a third time in verse 5. In order to have hope in God, we must first have faith. These three occurrences can be taken as being “[f]aith’s rebuke to dejection” in 42:5, “faith’s exhortation in bewilderment” in 42:11, and “faith’s triumphant declaration of certainty” in 43:5 (M’Caw 478). Whenever we feel dejected and bewildered or feel any other pangs of spiritual hunger, let us have the faith to hope in God (Psalm 38:15; 146:5; Rom. 12:12; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18-19; 1 Peter 1:21). Our worship cannot ever be enriched apart from a firm hope and a resolute faith in God. Even when we are tempted to feel slighted or forgotten by Him or feel He is deaf to our petitions and blind to our service or unmoved by our worship, our past experience informs us God has *not*

abandoned us! Because He is all-good and He is all-powerful, we can be assured He still loves us and cares for us. For we “shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance” (v. 5). God, and He alone, can provide us spiritual nourishment.

Though his spiritual hunger pangs have eased up, the inspired penman is still in the unwelcome throes of spiritual want. “The Psalmist goes back to his lament but is more tranquil. He reveals a deep longing; if there is less loneliness, there is more yearning that seeks its answer in God” (Harris 47). This time, his complaint is prefaced with “O my God” (v. 6), which means he has shifted from talking to himself in verse 5 to addressing Elohim. He tells God, “[M]y soul is cast down within me . . .” (v. 6). The fact that he confesses this to God shows that he has begun a spiritual recovery. He is still down, but he is headed up; his grief is less sharp, and his despair is diminished. He is struggling as best he can to hope in God. To assist him in this effort, he takes a trip down memory lane while at the same time providing the geographical whereabouts of his location. He maps out “from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill of Mizar” (v. 6). The writer is obviously depicting the land of Judea where the Jordan River flows. The Hermonites were not a people, but rather a mountain range rising east of the Jordan River. ““The Hermonites’ should probably be amended to the ‘Hermons,’ signifying the three summits of Mt. Hermon” (Douglas 521). “*And of the Hermonites . . . the Hermons*, used in the *plural* because Hermon has a *double* ridge joining in at an angle, and rising in many summits. The river *Jordan*, and the mountains of *Hermon*, were the most striking features of the holy land” (Clarke 356).

The last geographical landmark listed is “from the hill Mizar” (v. 6). A marginal reading has “from the little hill.” This may have been a reference to Zion, which in comparison to the mountains of Hermon, would appear little. The area the writer describes would be where David fled from Absalom.

Nutrients Depleted (v. 7)

“*Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me*” (v. 7). Such language demonstrates spiritual hunger pangs were still nibbling away at the

heart of the psalmist. He feels as though all spiritual nutrients have been depleted, leaving him drained of any hope for renewal, much less enrichment.

Waterspouts is more clearly rendered *waterfalls* in the NKJV, ASV, and ESV, meaning the writer feels pounded with one ceaseless and unrelenting torrent of one affliction after another. It is as though his emaciated soul is submerged in a roiling current of troubles. As a good man, he could not understand this situation. How strange (if not wrong) to be confronted with this spiritual struggle! Had God made him a castaway? Does He make *us* castaways? No! Christ has promised, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5). Peter has warned us, “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you . . .” (1 Peter 4:12). So, why do we ask, “Where is God?” when hardships arise? Why do we impugn His care for us when the way gets rough? The aforementioned passages make such a question inexcusable. God *never* promised us Elysian fields during our earthly sojourn. To the contrary, He said, “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). We should have the attitude recorded in James 1:2: “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations. . . .” Such a mindset will be a safeguard against the depletion of spiritual nutrients and will instead infuse us with the spiritual strength to forge ahead. Yes, hard times will come, but how glorious the thought that God *is there* to guide us through the storm!

We progress from hunger pangs to:

Hunger Postponed (v. 8)

“*Yet the LORD will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life*” (v. 8). The acute hunger pangs have been put on hold and the weary psalmist enjoys a brief interval of peace. This is made possible by the unwavering mercy of God. His mercy is shown day and night and “endureth forever” (Psalm 136). The prophet proclaims, “[H]e delighteth in mercy” (Micah 7:18).

We see in verse 8:

Provender Detected

God's "lovingkindness" (v. 8), i.e., His mercy, is what made this postponement of hunger possible. Spiritual sustenance was lovingly provided for this ravished individual. Jeremiah attested to God's mercy when he wrote, "It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him" (Lam. 3:22-24). When we read the Psalms with a hungry spirit, we can be assured that God will satisfy us when we need it most because "his compassions fail not" (3:22).

God will never allow us to starve spiritually as long as we have a hunger for His Word. Even though we might go through spells of discouragement, God will *always* come to our aid, day or night.

Although hunger was postponed, we see next:

Hunger's Persistence (vv. 9-11a)

I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?

As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God?

Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? (vv. 9-11a)

Just as physical hunger is a persistent reoccurrence, so is spiritual hunger. Sometimes, spiritual hunger morphs into spiritual dissatisfaction. It appears as though the psalmist has digressed somewhat to his former state of mind, as set forth in verses 5-6. But does he check his digression with the resolute declaration, "I will say unto God my rock" (v. 9)? This sounds as though he is confessing that God is his strength, support, and fortress. If that is the case, such is commendable and marks an improved attitude. God is most definitely our rock, supporter, and protector (2 Sam. 22:2).

But others see this as perhaps an indictment, depicting God as a "steep cliff, high above the swirling waters" (Gray and Adams 526). A slippery cliff, maybe? A rock that can be stood upon, but slipped from, too? *If* this is what Gray and Adams meant, coupled with what the Holy Spirit implied, then we note the return of the writer's:

Gnawing Affliction (v. 9)

The affliction is embedded in the questions posed: “Why hast thou forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?” (v. 9).

Thus marks a return to the same, sad sheet of music. God has *not* forgotten him. An omniscient God is incapable of forgetting anything or anyone, even though man frequently forgets God. Whenever God’s people get it in their heads that God has forgotten them, *they* are the ones who have forgotten God, at least the kind of God He is. No greater affliction can be suffered than a child of God thinking God has forgotten him or has abandoned him. That is a sure recipe for mourning and robs us of any desire to worship God, much less strive to *enrich* our worship of Him. “We may complain to God, but we are not allowed thus to complain of him” (Henry 621). Such a gnawing affliction can easily change into a:

Growling Agitation (v. 10a)

“*As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me;*” (v. 10a). Enemies of God’s people have always been an agitation that moves us to growl in grief. Their taunts and insults are the acid test of our faith. But if we can persevere, our reward will be great (Matt. 5:10-12; 2 Cor. 4:15-18). When we are agitated by the enemies of the cross, may we remember (Heb. 12:1-4) and look to Jesus as our example of how to cope with the agitation of persecution and focus our gaze upon that “great cloud of witnesses” cheering us on (12:1). Instead of allowing circumstances to agitate us, may they serve to draw us closer to God, so our worship can be enriched instead of eliminated. Even if our enemies should reproach us to the extent they would thrust a sword into our bones, even that should not deter us from serving God our Rock (1 Cor. 10:4).

Do we detect next a:

Growing Agnosticism? (vv. 10b - 11a)

“*. . . while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God? Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me?*” (vv. 10b-11a) God’s enemies excel at planting seeds of doubt about His existence. Such enemies abound today, incessantly lobbing barrages at Christians, trying to instill doubt regarding God’s reality.

The question here is: “Were these enemies making any headway with the psalmist in undermining his faith in the Almighty?” Was the penman’s theism growing into agnosticism? Their constant mean-spirited question, “Where is thy God?” (v. 10b), certainly carried the potential to at least cause pause for reflection. Since he was compelled to hear this cruel query every day, *did* it start to have its intended effect?

Closer examination appears to discount this, because the next two questions are his own. By posing these questions, he seems to be scolding himself. Evidently, his silent answer to the sneering question “Where is thy God?” (v. 10b) was, “He is *everywhere!*” Since God is omnipresent, he then questions his despondency, wondering why such is the case. After all, if it is true that God *is*, and is *everywhere*, what reason is there for his soul to be cast down and disquieted within him?

Furthermore, why should we ever harbor this sort of disposition? Even living in such a time of militant atheism and visceral hatred for things sacred, we must not find ourselves in a similar state. The more vehemently the masses reject God, the stronger the resolve of the faithful few needs to be. As the throngs spew out their hellish hatred, may the Lord’s church hunger for heaven’s righteousness. In a world where riches are worshiped, let us strive to enrich our worship. Since God is everywhere, there is no reason we should not.

Hunger Pacified (v. 11b)

“. . . *hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God*” (v. 11b). Verse 11 is nearly a word-perfect duplicate of verse 5, the lone difference being the way in which the verses conclude. Verse 5 ends: “for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.” Verse 11 has the variant, “for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.”

This psalm draws to a close by seeing the psalmist’s:

Soul Revived

In verse 5, he is anticipating a return to the public worship of God. He will do so “for the help of his countenance.” The phrase “his countenance” does not refer to God’s face, but His favor. God’s

favor was His support and the satisfaction gained by it. Due to these benefits, the psalmist desired to praise Him.

Verse 11 contains the phrase “who is the health of my countenance, and my God.” The NKJV and ASV have, “The help of my countenance and my God.” The rendering of the ESV is, “my salvation and my God.” “He regards God now as . . . his Deliverer and Friend . . .” (Barnes 12). The revival of his soul is seen in the repeated phrase of verse 5, “hope thou in God. . . .” The writer of Hebrews states: “. . . Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast . . .” (6:19). Apart from God, there is no hope, no anchor of the soul, and we are adrift in the sea of despair. But because this individual has hope in God, his soul is revived.

O how Christians today should eagerly anticipate a return to worship God each Lord’s Day and every time our meeting doors are opened! In joyful unison can we say with the psalmist, “[F]or I shall yet praise him . . .” (v. 11)? If so, then our worship will be enriched each time we assemble. With a hungry spirit, we will zealously look forward to coming and appearing before God (v. 2).

Thankfully, the psalm ends with the psalmist’s:

Strength Restored

Not only does he proclaim God as “the health of [his] countenance” (v. 11), but as his personal God. He proclaims Elohim as “my God.” Twice, in derision, he was asked, “Where is thy God?” (vv. 3, 10), the purpose of which was to erode his faith and ultimately destroy it. In the end, the ploy did not work. “Thy God?” became “My God!” His strength was restored.

May we realize that when God becomes “our God,” then our worship reaches the highest level of enrichment. Unless that takes place, our worship, as well as our work, will be lacking. This in turn will lead to apathetic and lukewarm Christians who will refuse to cultivate and maintain a hungry spirit. Such nominal Christians nauseate the Lord (Rev. 3:16).

Conclusion

Instead of our prayers being filled with the interrogative complaints of, “Why?” “Where?” and “When?” let them be infused with desire, hope, and gratitude for what our God has done for us.

Only then can our worship be enriched and our spirit remain hungry.

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Biographical Sketch

J. D. Conley was born in El Paso, Texas, in 1959. He is a third-generation Gospel preacher and is in his twenty-fifth 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 has had three located works: Spencer, West Virginia; Elkins, West Virginia; and the Harmar Hill church in Marietta, Ohio, where he is in his fourteenth year working and serves as one of the elders. He has been married to the former Denise Cooper for thirty-eight years; they have six children and five grandchildren. Their oldest son, Shane, an alumnus of the West Virginia School of Preaching, preaches for The Land Between The Lakes church of Christ in Dover, Tennessee.

GOD'S WONDERFUL HABITATION

Psalm 48

Wade Webster

The 48th Psalm is about the city of Jerusalem. Four times, the word *city* is used within the psalm (vv. 1-2, 8). [All Scripture references are from the KJV unless otherwise noted]. As you likely know, the city of Jerusalem was very special to the Jews. It was special to the Jews because it was the center of their worship and thus the center of their lives. The city of Jerusalem is called by four names within the psalm, all of them connected with God. It is called “the city of our God” (v. 1), “the city of the great King” (v. 2), “the city of the Lord of hosts” (v. 8), and “the city of our God” (v. 8). Jerusalem was special to the Jews because it was God’s city. His house was there. He dwelled there, and He did marvelous things there.

The psalmist invites the reader to “walk about Zion” and to record what he sees. We read, “Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following” (vv. 12-13). The psalmist specifically calls attention to three things: the elevation of the city, the preservation of the city, and the legislation of the city. Although physical Jerusalem does not hold the significance for us that it did for the original readers, we can make an application to spiritual Jerusalem, or the church. In the book of Hebrews, we read:

But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. (12:22-24)

The Elevation of the City

“Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King” (vv. 1-2). Several words in these verses speak of elevation. First, we read of “the mountain of his holiness” (v. 1; cf. vv. 2, 11). Obviously, when we think of mountains, we think of elevation. Second, we read that Jerusalem was “beautiful for situation” (v. 2). *Situation* means “elevation.” As you likely know, Jerusalem was founded upon four hills. It was situated 2,500 feet above sea level. One can only imagine how beautiful it must have appeared at night. It was a city sitting on a hill that could not be hidden (Matt. 5:14). The psalmist speaks of the city as “the joy of the whole earth” (v. 2). It is hard to imagine the whole earth feeling this way. However, the Jews clearly did. Not only was the city elevated physically, but also it was elevated by God. If God is a great God, and He is, and if He called Jerusalem His city, and He did, then it naturally follows that Jerusalem is a great city (v. 1). It is great because it is the city of a great King (v. 2). It is great because it is the city of the Lord of hosts (v. 8).

The description of the elevation of physical Jerusalem in this psalm should remind us of the elevation of spiritual Jerusalem, or the church. The church has an elevated position. Isaiah wrote:

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. (2:2-3)

As we have already noted, Jerusalem was built upon four mountains. It was an elevated city. The Temple was built upon one of these mountains. Now, the church would be also.

In addition to the physical elevation of the church being built in Jerusalem, the church was going to be exalted by God. You may recall that Peter was instructed not to call “common” that which God

had cleansed (Acts 10:14-15). Although Peter was given that command in connection with what could or could not be eaten, it has a clear application to the church. The church has been cleansed by God. It was purchased by blood (Acts 20:28; Rev. 21:9). We must not refer to it with common terms like *denomination*. The church is not a denomination. A denomination is common. There is only one church (Eph. 4:4; cf. 1:22-23). One-of-a-kind is far from common.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke of the elevated position of the church. He declared:

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. (5:14-16)

Clearly, the Lord expects the church to have an elevated position in society. He expects it to be a city set on a hill.

The psalmist spoke of Jerusalem as “the joy of the whole earth” (v. 2). For sure, it is hard to imagine the whole earth feeling this way about physical Jerusalem. The Jews did; but probably, few others. This statement seems to be a prophecy of the church. The church was/is the joy of the whole earth because of the good news that went out/goes out from it. Paul wrote, “And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” (Rom. 10:15; cf. Isa. 2:2-3). We have a message of hope for a world that is without (Eph. 2:12). It is natural for them to ask us a reason of the hope that is within us (1 Peter 3:15). However, they will ask only if they see our joy.

The Preservation of the City (vv. 3-8)

God is known in her palaces for a refuge.

*For, lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by together.
They saw it, and so they marveled; they were troubled, and hasted
away.*

*Fear took hold upon them there, and pain, as of a woman in
travail.*

Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind.

As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God: God will establish it for ever. Selah. (vv. 3-8)

These verses are most likely recording God's deliverance of the city from the Assyrians (Psalms 46-47; Isa. 37). The Assyrians surrounded the city and were confident of success. Archaeology records that Sennacherib boasted that he had Hezekiah shut up like a bird in a cage. He had counted the towers (Isa. 33:18). He was confident of the battle plan. However, he was not able to shoot an arrow there (37:33-35). God intervened. The safety of Jerusalem was not in her walls, but in her God. He was "her refuge" (v. 3). Those who remain inside are safe from the enemy. He was going to establish her forever (v. 8). Sennacherib came up in great haughtiness, but he would go away in great humility. He would be troubled and run away (v. 5). Fear would seize him like a woman in labor (v. 6). His army would be smashed like ships in the wind (v. 7). Even the strongest ships, like the ships of Tarshish, were no match for God. Sennacherib called himself the great king, but God was the great King, and Jerusalem was His city (v. 2).

The description of the preservation of physical Jerusalem should remind us of the preservation of spiritual Jerusalem, or the church. The church is an everlasting kingdom. Daniel wrote:

And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure. (2:44-45)

The kingdom of Babylon would be destroyed. The kingdom of the Medes and the Persians would be destroyed. The kingdom of the Greeks would be destroyed. The kingdom of the Romans would even be destroyed. However, the kingdom of God would never be destroyed. The stone that Nebuchadnezzar saw that was cut out of

the mountains without hands was the church. “Without hands” (2:45) reveals that this stone (the church) was of divine origin. Since God built it, man cannot destroy it. It will stand forever because that is what God has decreed.

Later, in the seventh chapter, Daniel again described the everlasting nature of the kingdom. We read:

I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him.

And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed. (7:13-14)

The dominion of Christ is an everlasting dominion. His kingdom will never be destroyed.

At Caesarea Philippi, Jesus declared that even the gates of hell would not prevail against the church that He was building (Matt. 16:18). Death would not prevent the Lord from building it. Persecution would not prevent it from surviving or spreading.

One of the reasons why the church will stand forever is because the seed of the kingdom, or the church, is the Word of God. Luke wrote, “Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God” (Luke 8:11). Since the seed of the kingdom, or church, is the Word of God, it will endure as long as the seed does. The Bible makes clear that God’s Word will never pass again. Jesus declared, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Matt. 24:35). In like manner, Peter declared:

. . . Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.

For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withereth and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth forever.

And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you. (1 Peter 1:23-25)

Clearly, the Word of God will endure forever. As long as the Word of God endures, the church will endure (at least, in seed form).

In the book of Hebrews, we read, “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire” (12:28-29). The kingdom that we have been given is unmovable. God is a wall of fire around the church (Zech. 2:5). Those who remain in the church, or the body of Christ, enjoy spiritual blessings that are not afforded to those on the outside (Eph. 1:3).

The Jubilation of the City (vv. 9-14)

We have thought of thy lovingkindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple.

According to thy name, O God, so is thy praise unto the ends of the earth: thy right hand is full of righteousness.

Let mount Zion rejoice, let the daughters of Judah be glad, because of thy judgments.

Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following.

For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death. (vv. 9-14)

When the inhabitants of the city thought of God and of what He had done for them, they rejoiced and were glad. They thought of Him “in the midst of thy temple” (v. 9), or in their worship. In their worship, they praised Him for His lovingkindness, His righteousness, and His judgments. For the first time in forever, they were able to leave the city and to walk around its walls. Cities under siege cannot open their gates. They counted its massive towers. The wall was intact. The towers were all there. They could tell their children, the generation to come, of what God had done. He had preserved them. They could assure their children that He would never leave them. He would be their guide until death. God has always wanted parents to tell their children about His great works. Perhaps, you remember the occasion when Joshua and the children of Israel crossed the Jordan River in flood season. When the feet of the priests bearing the Ark of the Covenant touched the water, the river stopped flowing and the children of Israel were able to cross

on dry ground. Twelve stones were taken out of the Jordan and set up as a memorial to make sure that this great miracle of God was never forgotten. Concerning these stones, we read:

And Joshua said unto them, Pass over before the ark of the LORD your God in the midst of the Jordan, and take you up every man of you a stone upon his shoulder, according unto the number of the tribes of the children of Israel: That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones? Then ye shall answer them, That the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it passed over Jordan, the waters of Jordan were cut off: and these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever. (Josh. 4:5-7)

Eventually, these lessons quit being taught. After all, a couple of generations after Joshua, a generation arose that did not know the Lord or what He had done for Israel. We read:

And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD, that He did for Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being an hundred and ten years old. . . . And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel. (Judg. 2:7-8, 10)

Some of the darkest days in Israel's history followed this statement. I am fearful that we are repeating the mistakes of the past. It is common for things to be lost in the third generation. For example, businesses are often lost in the third generation. The first generation works hard and sacrifices to build the company. The second generation personally witnesses the hard work and sacrifice, even though they themselves experience little of it. The third generation had neither done it, nor seen it. They enjoy the fruits of the hard work and sacrifice but have no direct connection to it. Thus, they have a tendency not to appreciate it as they should. I am convinced that this not only happens with companies, but also with churches. I presently work as a missionary, and I have been able to see this firsthand. In the States, I work mainly with third-generation

Christians. Overseas, I work mainly with first-generation Christians. The difference between the two is often great. Many in the States have little or no connection to the hard work and sacrifices that were put in to build the congregations where they are members. They are often not all that hungry to learn or to work. Overseas, they are usually more eager to learn and to work.

The description of the jubilation of physical Jerusalem should remind us of the jubilation of spiritual Jerusalem, or the church. The church should be known for her joy. God has delivered us from a far greater enemy than Sennacherib. He has delivered us from Satan. We should remember Him in our worship and praise Him for His lovingkindness (grace), His righteousness, and His judgments (John 4:23-24). We should tell our children about what God has done (Eph. 6:1-4). We should assure them that He will be our guide until death. He will never leave us or forsake us. In the book of Hebrews, we read:

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say,

The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me. (13:5-6; cf. Matt. 28:20)

Today, God dwells in the church. It is His habitation (Eph. 1:22-23). We are privileged to be citizens of it and to enjoy the blessings that are in it. It is a sad thought to think that the ancient Jews may have thought more of physical Jerusalem than we do of spiritual Jerusalem. It is sad to think that they may have been more devoted to physical Jerusalem than we are to spiritual Jerusalem. After all, we have been given a better covenant and a better kingdom.

Biographical Sketch

Wade Webster is a graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching. He also holds B.A. and M.A. degrees in English from Jacksonville State University. He has worked as an adjunct professor for Jacksonville State University and Faulkner University in Alabama.

Presently in full-time mission work to Central America and Mexico, Wade has been in full-time preaching since 1989 and

preached for churches in Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi.

Wade and his wife, Jennifer, have been married for twenty-eight years. They have four children: Parker (18), Claire (15), Emma (15), and Sophie (9).

WHEN NIGHT FALLS

Psalm 4

John A. Keith

When, counting slumber,
The hours I number,
And sad cares cumber,
My weary mind,
This thought shall cheer me,
That thou art near me,
Whose ear to hear me,
Is still inclined (Brownlow)

Many expositors believe this psalm was written during the time of Absalom's rebellion (Barnes 33; Clarke 227; Keil 68; et al.) and more specifically "on the eve of the battle which is described in 2 Samuel 18:1-8" (Deaver 13).

This seems likely if we consider what David is enduring at that time. His son Absalom, having "stole[n] the hearts of the men of Israel" (2 Sam. 15:6), has now launched into a full-blown mutiny, forcing David's household to flee Jerusalem (15:15). [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] David pauses on the outskirts and reviews his servants as they pass by (15:17), and as they climb the Ascent of the Mount of Olives—weeping as they go—great sorrow, no doubt, fills his heart and leaves an indelible impression upon his mind as he wonders what has happened to his family, his life, and his legacy (15:30).

Finally, it becomes apparent that David must deal with Absalom in a most severe and heartbreaking fashion. He numbers his troops in thirds and dispatches them under Joab, Abishai, and Ittai and says that he, himself, will lead the armies against Absalom (2 Sam. 18:1-2).

The people plead with their king not to go out into the battle, as he is much too valuable to risk to the fickle winds of war, and so he complies with their wishes (18:3-4). This would leave David behind to wonder and worry and perhaps afford him the time to put quill to

parchment and record this inspired hymn—everything weighing on his mind.

It is almost unanimously agreed that our present psalm is an evening psalm and would, it seems, compliment the 3rd Psalm and its connotations of a morning song. In verse 5 of Psalm 3 we read, “I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the LORD sustained me.” As another night of wonder and worry approaches, David casts his cares upon the Lord and says, “I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; For You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety” (v. 8). In other words, “That is what I did; and I will do it again” (Deaver 15).

Perhaps as the king lies down—removed from his searching armies at the behest of his own family—he anticipates a worrisome and restless night and so calls upon his God to provide another evening of recuperative slumber, hoping to awaken with news of a favorable resolution to his current anguish.

Petition for Mercy (v. 1)

“Hear me when I call,” (v. 1a). God knows our every need and desire (Matt. 6:32). Parents know the needs of their children, but is it not nice when those needs are communicated? “As a father pities his children, So the LORD pities those who fear Him” (Psalm 103:13). We need that interaction with our children, and God desires the same with His children. Odd it is how many folks expect the blessings of God without having ever bowed the head or bent the knee to ask. The Father hearing our prayers has less to do with our merit and more to do with His mercy. Did our children earn the room and board we provided for them throughout the years? Or the wisdom we imparted? We did it out of love and mercy; the same goes for Jehovah. The prayer of vanity renders the Hearer of petition as deaf; the prayer of humility in accordance with the will of God produces results; take Cornelius, for example (Acts 10:1ff).

“. . . O God of my righteousness!” (v. 1b). This is literally, “O my righteous God” (Barnes 34). That God is righteous implies His justice. David makes appeal for God to interpose His righteousness and justice upon the situation, and having interposed His righteousness, His justice will alleviate the dreadful situation. For God’s justice to benefit man, God must first impute His mercy and righteousness, for His justice apart from these dooms all men to hell.

Also, he acknowledges that God is the author of any righteousness attained by himself (Heb. 5:9; 12:2).

David is not only mindful of his enemies, but also of his own past sins and simply asks for what is right to be done. Is this imprecatory, as in the case of Paul when he wrote, “Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works” (2 Tim. 4:14)? A man whose life is disconnected from God will ultimately receive justice; a man whose life is in righteousness and obedience to God will receive mercy.

“You have relieved me in my distress;” (v. 1c). God had acted upon previous requests of David and given him leave of some stressful situation—perhaps when he was fleeing Saul (1 Sam. 19:18)—and David, therefore, petitions God again. God supplied the daily manna in the wilderness until they did not need it (Exod. 16:35), and yet Christ taught His disciples to pray for their “daily bread” (Matt. 6:11).

God is mindful of His children and will comfort us just as any parent would their children:

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. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. (2 Cor. 1:3-6)

“. . . Have mercy on me, and hear my prayer” (v. 1d). David is asking God to treat him “with the same mercy You had before.” Resident in this petition is hope; God had acted favorably on behalf of David previously; God can choose to thus act again—or not to. David requests more than pity here.

Pleading with the Wicked (vv. 2-5)

“How long, O you sons of men, Will you turn my glory to shame?” (v. 2a). In Psalm 3:3, David refers to Jehovah as “my glory.” Does he mean, “How long will you wicked men shame
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Jehovah and turn His glory into shame?” (cf. Rom. 1:23)? Or, does this simply mean David’s glory as king of Israel?

So, is David’s glory (as king) being shamed because the “sons of men” (v. 2) are dishonoring Jehovah by trying to kill “the LORD’S anointed” (1 Sam. 24:6)? Absalom was a disgrace to his father, underhandedly stealing the hearts of the people and going in to his father’s concubines (2 Sam. 15:6; 16:22).

“How long will you love worthlessness And seek falsehood? Selah” (v. 2b). “I have seen your adulteries And your lustful neighings, The lewdness of your harlotry, Your abominations on the hills in the fields. Woe to you, O Jerusalem! Will you still not be made clean?” (Jer. 13:27).

These “sons of men” (v. 2) are reviling “the LORD’S anointed,” which David himself would not do (1 Sam. 24:6; 26:11), and he condemned to death one who boasted of such a claim in 2 Samuel 1:14-16.

“But know that the LORD has set apart for Himself him who is godly;” (v. 3a). It has been pointed out that this *setting apart* has more the thrust of being distinguished and honored rather than the typical thinking of sanctification (Ellicot 90). Christ “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people . . .” (Titus 2:14). Peter writes, “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people . . .” (1 Peter 2:9). The phrase under consideration has more to do with the “chosen generation,” rather than the “holy nation.” The godly are set apart for the goodness of God’s blessings, and so the ungodly are set apart for the severity of God’s wrath; “[t]herefore 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). Rest is promised only for God’s people (Heb. 4:9).

“. . . The LORD will hear when I call to Him” (v. 3b). As the psalm progresses, David demonstrates his confidence that Jehovah will hear him, and such confidence is expressed in no uncertain terms. This confidence is not limited to the current situation, as the psalmist elsewhere immortalizes the same trust: “Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, And He shall hear my voice” (55:17).

Isaiah passed on this vehicle of reliance to God's people when they too had been less than faithful, resulting in captivity. But, as all was not lost for Israel, neither is all lost for David. "For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem; You shall weep no more. He will be very gracious to you at the sound of your cry; When He hears it, He will answer you" (Isa. 30:19). God knows His people well; He knows our every need and our innermost desires, and when our desires are in line with His will, He says, "It shall come to pass That before they call, I will answer; And while they are still speaking, I will hear" (65:24). David, like us, must be careful to observe God's timing for events. While our prayers may be urgent, we must never be impatient, as Micah cautions: "Therefore I will look to the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; My God will hear me" (7:7).

Barnes expressed this thought of David as, "As I am engaged in his service; as I am appointed to accomplish a certain purpose for him, I may confidently believe that he will hear me, and will deliver me out of their hands" (36). God listens when sincere people seek His will.

"Be angry, and do not sin" (v. 4a). Is this stanza directed toward David's friends? Is David warning his friends of the dangers of allowing their trembling anger toward the antagonists to result in further violence and thus cause them to stand in opposition to Jehovah? Brother Paul appealed to the same warning when he wrote rather succinctly, "Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath . . ." (Eph. 4:26). DeHoff paraphrased this verse, "Do not allow our angry tremors at the sinfulness of others to cause us to become sinners as well" (91-92). We certainly have need of patient endurance when dealing with those who oppose us as we strive to maintain righteousness (Heb. 10:36).

On the other hand, it could be that this is being directed toward David's foes (Absalom and company, if we are correct that this was written during his rebellion). One commentator explains that

[h]e asks that his opposers might think of God's wrath upon the wicked and His goodness to the righteous and be constrained by such meditation to "tremble" . . . in humiliation and reverence before Him. Reflection leads to reverence, and reverence should bring reformation. (Cloer 70)

It certainly agrees with the righteousness of our Lord if we heed His counsel: “But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you . . .” (Matt. 5:44). Christ not only preached this, but practiced it as well, and that when in the most excruciating of situations as He languished upon the cross: “Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do’” (Luke 23:34). Our brother Stephen demonstrated this as well when “he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not charge them with this sin’” (Acts 7:60).

To whomever this section is addressed, some very sage and practical advice is given: Even if you think you have a right to be angry, do not allow yourself to be carried into acts of rebellion against that which is righteous. Prayerful and honest contemplation must rule the situation, remembering that we must not allow one evil act to follow another. That this is an evening psalm suggests that perhaps we ought to “sleep on it” lest we be too “quick on the draw,” as is suggested by the next clause.

“Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still. Selah” (v. 4b). Compare this phrase with Paul’s injunction, “[D]o not let the sun go down on your wrath . . .” (Eph. 4:26). We see that righteousness guided by godly wisdom will seek to distance itself from unnecessary problems when we seek tranquility for the night. The so-called “knee-jerk” reactions are most often ill-advised and tend to cause more problems than they solve because they are often fraught with emotion and are lacking in thoughtful consideration of what *is* right juxtaposed with what *feels* right.

In another psalm ascribed to David, he writes, “When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches” (63:6). Paul urges meditation on the right ways of the Lord, as well (Philp. 4:8; 1 Tim. 4:15).

“Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, And put your trust in the LORD” (v. 5). It is known that sacrifices were a part of the law at the time of the events here and that they occupied no small part of Jewish worship. When properly offered under the Law of Moses, animal sacrifices were a “sweet aroma . . . to the LORD” (Exod. 29:18). However, as with anything inherently good, man can turn it into evil and wickedness and thus weary the Father with such (1

Sam. 15:22; Isa. 1:11). Sacrifices were no different, and David urges their sacrifices be righteousness and service to Jehovah. God would not have us to offer a devoted thing, but that we devote ourselves to Him in humility and meekness: “For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart— These, O God, You will not despise” (Psalm 51:16-17).

It matters not what we do in service to the Lord if we are not righteous, that is, in line with His will, as our Lord said very plainly: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matt. 7:21); and also as the Apostle Paul said:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Rom. 12:1-2)

We present the offering; we are the offering.

Prayer for God’s Blessings (v. 6)

“There are many who say, ‘Who will show us any good?’” (v. 6a). In the first place, multiple scholars have noted that the word *any* is not found in the text and was supplied by the translators. Barnes says it should read, “‘Who will show us good?’ That is, Where shall happiness be found?” (38). Clarke adds that “man wants good; he hates evil as evil, because he has pain, suffering, and death through it; and wishes to find that supreme good which will content his heart, and save him from evil” (228).

Does David include this because of an air of cynicism on the part of his followers? He may. This may be indicative of a lack of faith on the part of his band, which could lead to disloyalty to him, or worse, God. David is fully aware of the danger and damage which little faith can inflict, and Paul reminds us of this very fate: “Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear” (Rom. 11:20). Another solemn warning we see is the Hebrew writer saying, “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the

living God . . .” (3:12).

“*LORD, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us*” (v. 6b). One cannot help but be reminded of the priestly blessing that Jehovah spoke to Moses, who, in turn, was to speak in the ears of Aaron and his sons (Num. 6:24-26). David’s petition here seems to long for a similar blessing, as he was no doubt familiar with God’s merciful treatment of His children in Moses’ day. He knows that when God hides His face from man it is not good (Deut. 32:20), and couched in this plea is David longing for God to make Himself known to those who pose the question “Who will show us [any] good?” (v. 6).

Peaceful Sleep (7-8)

“*You have put gladness in my heart, More than in the season that their grain and wine increased*” (v. 7). Harvest was a most joyous time, physically speaking, and it appears that the people have in mind only the physical. David recognizes that happiness is not found where most are looking, a truth which Jesus brilliantly illustrated in the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-11). God’s gladness upon us is a spiritual blessing and infinitely greater than the most abundant of any earthly reaping. “God’s presence brings more joy than the combined benevolent forces of the world” (Cloer 72).

This being true, David will be able to lie down in resplendent slumber—though tormented from without, at peace within.

“*I will both lie down in peace, and sleep;*” (v. 8a). Obviously, man must sleep in order to live, and regardless of circumstances, he will eventually fall asleep. Man cannot always lie down in peace, however. Cares of the world can frustrate him. Ahasuerus tossed through the night, wrestling with the circumstances of Esther, Mordecai, and Haman (Esth. 6:1). The wise man wrote that “The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, Whether he eats little or much; But the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep” (Eccles. 5:12). The anguish of sickness—though a man be righteous—can cause him to pine throughout the night, as in the case of Job: “When I lie down, I say, ‘When shall I arise, And the night be ended?’ For I have had my fill of tossing till dawn” (7:4).

Perhaps nothing has wasted the solemnity of the night hours as has grief within one’s own heart, as in the case of Darius—“Now

the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; and no musicians were brought before him. Also, his sleep went from him” (Dan. 6:18)—or when David himself was grieving the night away in prayer for the life of his child (2 Sam. 12:15-17).

But David is now confident in God and acknowledges the goodness and *rightness* of holding Jehovah in the exalted position He so rightly deserves. Paul expressed similar confidence when he wrote, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31).

“. . . *For You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety*” (v. 8b). True security may be enjoyed only *in the Lord*. That is the only way we can “quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one” (Eph. 6:16). This security for which all men truly desire is not a one-time rescue resulting from one-time obedience. Rather, we seek to “dwell in safety” (v. 8) as a result of our dwelling in the Lord; that is, a man is to take up residence and plant his roots deeply and firmly, looking not to “this earth’s goods, his friends, or his material prosperity . . . [H]is eyes are on God alone for his protection and peace” (Cloer 73).

It is one of the delightful paradoxes concerning the God we serve in that familial relationship with Him is both inclusive and exclusive. It is *inclusive* in that “the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men . . .” (Titus 2:11) and that through Jesus, God gave men the “right to *become* children of God, to those who believe in His name . . .” (John 1:12; emphasis added). The relationship is also *exclusive* because not everybody is just *automatically* a child of God; there are conditions to be met, and those failing to meet the conditions of the Divine Nature are illegitimate and thus lost (2 Thess. 1:6-9).

When all the world seems to rest upon our shoulders and we contemplate each outside negative influence, we do ourselves a disservice as we lay in our beds staring at the ceiling. As the endless barrage of daily cares flash through our minds, it almost seems as if our mind is a TV and somebody else has the remote and is furiously channel-surfing. When night falls, if we could do as David has done and remember that the God of heaven has provided for us “all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3) and that by His marvelous grace we have come this far despite ourselves, we may rest easier as adversity shrinks and faith grows.

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Biographical Sketch

Born on August 26, 1969, in Parkersburg, West Virginia, John is the son of Ruth Ann (Stewart) Keith and the late Arlon W. (Bud) Keith. He was raised in Newport, Ohio, but now resides in Byesville, Ohio, with his wife, the former Tina Holland of Wellsville, Ohio. They have one daughter, Ashley, who blessed their union in 1996.

From 1990 until 1998, John made his living playing mandolin with a bluegrass band, and from 1998 until 2012, he worked construction as a millwright.

John began preaching by appointment in 1997, while worshipping with the church at Newport, Ohio. He has also worked with the Sixth and Washington Sts. church of Christ in Marietta, Ohio; the Naish Springs church of Christ near Belmont, West Virginia; the Mt. Nebo church of Christ near St. Marys, West Virginia; and the Ullman Street church of Christ in Beverly, Ohio. He is a graduate of the West Virginia School of Preaching and currently preaches for the 10th & Clairmont church of Christ in Cambridge, Ohio.

In August of 2011, John, along with Dan Kessinger and Sandy Craig, spent two weeks in Kenya, traveling and preaching to congregations throughout Nyanza Province.

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

Psalm 47

Andy Robison

Introduction

The Title

The title of this psalm includes the address “To the Chief Musician,” which

occurs at the beginning of fifty-three psalms, and at the close of the hymn in Hab. iii.19. It is uniformly rendered “to the chief Musician,” and means that the psalm was intended for him, or was to be given to him, probably to regulate the manner of performing it. In no one instance does the title imply that he was the author. (Barnes, vol. 1, 32)

The wording means properly “to shine” or “to be conspicuous; to be over anything; to be chief; to be superintendent (2 Chron. ii.2, 18; xxxiv.12), and then it means to lead in music. . . . [T]he psalm is to be performed under his direction; or that the music is to be directed and adapted by him” (32).

The title continues, “A Psalm of the Sons of Korah,” which has caused some to speculate that it was these Levitical descendants of a rebel (Num. 16:1ff) who composed the words and music. Korah was a descendant of Kohath, a son of Levi (1 Chron. 6:16-22). These descendants were appointed over music in the sanctuary of God (6:31-48). “The Hebrew may mean *for* the sons of Korah; *of* the sons of Korah; or *to* the sons of Korah” (Barnes, vol. 2, 1). Thus,

it may mean either that the psalms were dedicated to them, or that they were submitted to them for arranging the music; or that they were designed to be employed by them as leaders of the music; or that they were the authors of these psalms, that is, that the psalms thus indicated emanated from their body, or were composed by one of their number. . . . Whether, however, they actually *composed* any of the psalms is uncertain. (1)

Spurgeon, without citing evidence, is quite emotively certain that David, rather than the class of Korah’s sons, is the author of this

psalm:

We cannot agree with those who think that the sons of Korah were the authors of these Psalms: they have all the indication of David's authorship that one could expect to see. Our ear has grown accustomed to the ring of David's compositions, and we are morally certain that we hear it in this Psalm. Every expert would detect here the autography of the Son of Jesse, or we are greatly mistaken. The sons of Korah sang these Psalms, but we believe they did not write them. Fit singers were they whose origin reminded them of sin, whose existence was a proof of sovereign grace, and whose name has a close connection with the name of Calvary. (352)

Authorship, then, appears quite uncertain.

The Time

Equally as uncertain is the timing of the psalm's composition. Some believe God's deliverance of Hezekiah and Judah, when the angel of the Lord slew 185,000 of the Assyrian army overnight, prompted the psalmist's poetic remembrance and praise (2 Kings 18-19; Isa. 36-37; 2 Chron. 32). Cloer notes that if the Hezekiah incident is the occasion of Psalm 47, "it may well be an extension of the rejoicing of the last verse of the previous psalm. If it is extolling God for the same deliverance mentioned in Psalm 46, it does so in a more general way. No clear allusions to the attack of Sennacherib are found in it" (646-47).

Others believe the occasion points to Jehoshaphat's supplication and subsequent victory provided by the Lord in 2 Chronicles 20. There, Moab, Ammon, and others "came to battle against Jehoshaphat" (20:1). [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] Jehoshaphat wisely "feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah" (20:6). Before the assembly of people who had gathered "to seek the Lord" (20:4-5), the king prayed, weaving in themes that pronounce themselves in Psalm 47. He said,

O LORD God of our fathers, are You not God in heaven, and do You not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations, and in Your hand is there not power and might, so that no one is able to withstand You? Are You not our God, who drove out

the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel, and gave it to the descendants of Abraham Your friend forever? (2 Chron. 20:6-7)

After more of the prayer, the Lord answered through Jahaziel that Judah should not be afraid, for they would not have to fight, but the battle belonged to God (20:14-17). The people then worshiped, with “the children of the Kohathites and children of the Korahites” leading in the singing (20:19). At that point, “the LORD set ambushes” (20:22) against the enemy and the victory was won (20:18-24).

In the view of many, this connection of 2 Chronicles 20 with Psalm 47 is strong, due to, first, the mention in Jehoshaphat’s prayer of God ruling over the nations (vv. 2-3, 8-9), then, of the involvement of the Korahites (sons of Korah) in the praise that preceded the battle (as per the psalm’s title). Also, the order of the events in 2 Chronicles 20 seems to mirror the poetic setting of the psalm: Sing praises to God, and then He will deliver. Preemptive worship from God’s people provides a preemptive strike against His people’s enemies.

Fausset (Jamieson et al. 203) joins Keil and Delitzsch (97) in believing this to be the occasion. Fausset even speculates that they sang this Psalm 47 after the victory in the valley of Berachah, blessing the Lord for His deliverance (2 Chron. 20:26), then perhaps sang Psalm 48 upon their return to Jerusalem, when they came “with stringed instruments and harps and trumpets, to the house of the Lord” (2 Chron. 20:28; Jamieson et al. 203). This would be parallel to the “sound of the trumpet” with which God had gone up (v. 5).

Barnes makes note of the opinion, but remains unconvinced. He concludes the evidence to be indecisive: “All that can be expressed with any certainty in regard to the occasion on which the psalm was composed is, that it was on an occasion of victory” (vol. 2, 45).

The Text

Whether or not the Jehoshaphat victory, the Hezekiah triumph, or some other victory was the reason for the composition of this psalm, the laudatory nature of the text is an inscription of spontaneous, joyful praise to God. It does bear marks one would expect if it was written after some great victory for God’s people.

Groups of people are called to praise. The tone of verses 3, 4, and 9 indicate some recent event when God had “subdued” the other nations under Israel’s feet (v. 3). The sovereign rule of God is acknowledged with spontaneous exuberance.

The Shout of Triumph

*Oh, clap your hands, all you peoples!
Shout to God with the voice of triumph!
For the LORD Most High is awesome;
He is a great King over all the earth.
He will subdue the peoples under us,
And the nations under our feet.
He will choose our inheritance for us,
The excellence of Jacob whom He loves. Selah. (vv. 1-4)*

Rejoice

The first verse is a depiction of a spontaneous act of joy. Such is generally the nature of the clapping of hands. This was a theme of poetic and prophetic literature. “The peoples are to show the God of revelation their joy by their gestures and their words” (Keil and Delitzsch 98).

The root Hebrew word for *clap* in verse 1, *taqa*, encompasses more than the modern English word *clap*. It can mean “to thrust,” as a weapon into a man, such as Ehud thrusting the dagger into king Eglon (Judg. 3:21), Jael driving a tent peg through Sisera’s temple (4:21), or Joab piercing Absalom with three spears (2 Sam. 18:14). It can mean “to give a blast,” as in blowing a trumpet, as at Jericho (Josh. 6:4, 8, 9, 13), or as Ehud summoning a following after his assassination of Eglon (Judg. 3:27). Gideon so blew the trumpet (Judg. 6:34; 7:18-19). Such a blast on a trumpet called the people of Israel together (Num. 10:5-6). This is used for the blast of a trumpet to sound the warning alarm of destruction and desolation in prophetic literature (Hosea 5:8; Jer. 4:5; 6:1; 51:27; Joel 2:1, 15). (Note that the sound of a trumpet is within Psalm 47’s context, in verse 5.) It is even used of “ratifying a bargain” (Prov. 17:18; 22:26; Brown et al. 1075).

The root of the word then is some forceful action, either spontaneous or premeditated. In Psalm 47, the idea seems to be that

Israel was to burst forth in praise to God. Men make many spontaneous gestures in cheers over sports or some other temporal victory—a fist-pump, a high five, a shout, and perhaps one, solid, forceful, victorious thrusting of the hands together. The idea in Psalm 47:1 is not a prescription for all of worship to God, even under the Old Covenant. (Even if it were prescribed under the Old Covenant, the New Covenant nowhere mentions it.) Rather, it is simply the animated expression of a people exuberant over a victory from the Lord. “In Old Testament times these actions were typical ways of giving honor and acclaim to an earthly king” (Cloer 647; cf. 1 Sam. 10:24; 2 Kings 11:12). “These two demonstrations [shouting and clapping] are referred to figuratively in ver. 1 of this psalm, as the people were being ask (sic) to acknowledge and celebrate Yahweh as the God of the nations” (Cloer 647).

Keil and Delitzsch, believing the incident of Jehoshaphat’s victory prompted this psalm, note that the victory in the historical record closes with “the fear of the Lord” being upon all around (2 Chron. 20:29). They rightly contrast that with the voice of triumph: “The psalmist, however, does not in consequence of this particular event call upon them to tremble with fear, but to rejoice; for fear is an involuntary, extorted inward emotion, but joy a perfectly voluntary one” (Keil and Delitzsch 98).

This author remembers a group conversation (not in a worship setting) where a young, college-aged man was overwhelmed with the profundity of the resurrection of Christ. Though it may seem a simple thing to the well initiated, when one made a comment to the effect that there was no early grave marker, for the tomb was empty, the young man quietly, but forcefully thrust his elbow toward himself with his fist clenched and his mouth uttering an excited exclamation, “Yes!” That young man may have captured the essence of the voice of triumph in Psalm 47:1.

Reasons

Verses 2-5 of the psalm list reasons for the glee that all have to do with characteristics and actions of God.

These reasons are that he is terrible; that he is king over all the earth; that he will subdue the nations, and make them subject to his own people; and that, in anticipation of this,

and in proof of this, he had now achieved a signal victory, and had gone up as from that victory to his own abode in heaven. (Barnes, vol. 2, 45)

Reverence

“For the LORD most high is awesome;” (v. 2a). This is the characteristic sometimes translated, as per Barnes’ quote, *terrible*. It indicates the respectful reverence that followers of God need to have for Him. Jacob, after his ladder dream, exclaimed, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!” (Gen. 28:17). Moses sang after the Red Sea miracle, “Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, Fearful in praises, doing wonders?” (Exod. 15:11). God introduced the covenant He would make with His people and the giving of the land of Canaan to them as “an awesome thing that I will do with you” (34:10). “The Angel of the LORD” appeared to Manoah’s wife and she regarded His countenance to be “very awesome” (Judg. 13:3, 6). Elihu rightly proclaimed, “With God is awesome majesty” (Job 37:22). God’s works are “awesome” (Psalm 66:3, 5). Even in comparison to all the kings of the earth, God is “awesome” (76:12).

The sense of being awestruck by God is captured in Psalm 96:4: “For the LORD is great and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods.” When people would rise up against Almighty God, they would do well to remember prophetic words and thereby recede: “. . . For I am a great King,’ Says the LORD of Hosts, ‘And My name is to be feared among the nations’” (Mal. 1:14). Of Moab and Ammon (two nations at issue in the Jehoshaphat incident), God reminded,

This they shall have for their pride,
Because they have reproached and made arrogant threats
Against the people of the LORD of hosts.
The LORD will be awesome to them,
For He will reduce to nothing all the gods of the earth;
People shall worship Him,
Each one from His place,
Indeed all the shores of the nations. (Zeph. 2:10-11)

(These references all make use of the same Hebrew root word.)

Being appropriately fearful of God removes the unreasonable, temporal fear of man. In Deuteronomy 7:17-21, God admonishes His people not to be afraid of the nations around them. How could they accomplish such if the nations are indeed great and mighty? Verse 21 answers, “You shall not be terrified of them; for the LORD your God, the great and awesome God, is among you.” Of course, in the New Testament, this concept is expressed in Matthew 10:28 and Luke 12:4-5.

Reign

“. . . *He is a great King over all the earth*” (v. 2b). This line echoes the sentiment of Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 20:6, where He asked rhetorically, “O LORD God of our fathers, are You not God in heaven, and do You not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations . . . ?” The thought is expounded upon in verses 7-9 of this psalm.

Indeed, God “is a great King over all the earth” (v. 2b). God made this known abundantly to Jeremiah. He taught Jeremiah and the people of Judah via the image of the potter and the clay that the plucking up, pulling down, and destroying of any nation was up to Him, as was the building and planting of anyone (18:7-10). With the symbol of the bonds and yokes He said, “I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are on the ground, by My great power and by My outstretched arm, and have given it to whom it seemed proper to Me” (27:5). Nebuchadnezzar learned the lesson “. . . That the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, Gives it to whomever He will, And sets over it the lowest of men” (Dan. 4:17). Daniel had proclaimed before interpreting Nebuchadnezzar’s dream that God “removes kings and raises up kings” (2:21). Isaiah 10:5-12 is an instructive passage about God’s dealings with nations. He would use the king of Assyria as a “rod” and “staff” in His hand to carry out His “indignation” “against the people of My [His] wrath” (10:5-6). Yet, the king thought he was just doing what he wanted to do by being violent and obtaining wealth and power. After God was done using him, he would then “punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria” (10:12). God is King over the earth not only in name, but also in action, both miraculous and providential. “All monarchs are puppet kings compared to His reign” (Cloer 648).

There is no power at all except from Him (cf. John 19:11).

Rule

“He will subdue the peoples under us, And the nations under our feet” (v. 3). Note that historically, in 2 Chronicles 20, and poetically here, the praise for the victory was offered before the victory. The worshipers went before the army, anticipating the promise, not afterwards, hoping for it. This is the confidence the worshipers and the psalmist had in God that He would “subdue the peoples under” them, “[a]nd the nations under our [their] feet” (v. 3). To be put under the feet of someone was to be totally and forcibly subjugated to that victor. Joshua instructed the “captains of the men of war” to put their “feet on the necks of these kings” they had conquered (Josh. 10:24).

In giving man dominion over the earth, God “put all things under his feet” (Psalm 8:6; cf. Heb. 2:8). With Christ’s authority (Matt. 28:18) and His headship of the church, God has put all things under His feet (Eph. 1:22-23). When death is defeated, it is so depicted (1 Cor. 15:26-27).

Reminder

“He will choose our inheritance for us, The excellence of Jacob whom He loves” (v. 4). God would always watch out for His people. The children of Israel were chosen by God and given the Mosaic Covenant for the purpose of establishing law (Rom. 7) and tutoring toward Christ (Gal. 3:24-25). He gave them their inheritance in the land of Canaan, yet their prospering there was conditional upon their obedience (Lev. 26; Deut. 28). Still, there was a sense in which God would always protect this chosen people, for through them would come the Christ. He would not allow them to cease to be a nation before that salvific history would come to pass. Getting to Christ was never about man’s clever schemes, but about God’s superimposing ability to work through the twists, turns, foibles, and falls of mankind to still bring about salvation to the nations. “So then, it is not of Him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy” (Rom. 9:16).

When His people became wicked, He would punish them, but He would never wipe them out completely because of His promise

that all nations would be blessed through their seed—the seed of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). To a nation to whom it had been announced that they would be in captivity seventy years, God reassured: “‘For I am with You,’ says the LORD, ‘to save you; Though I make a full end of the nations where I have scattered you, Yet I will not make a complete end of you’” (Jer. 30:11).

God would defend Jerusalem for His own sake and for the sake of His servant David (2 Kings 19:34; 20:6; 2 Chron. 32:21). God, in Ezekiel 20, repeatedly says that He “raised My hand in an oath” to the descendants of Jacob at different junctures along their history for their good and for their protection, even if sometimes chastisement was involved (Ezek. 20:5, 15, 23, 42). In prediction of restoration after captivity, He reminds:

I have raised My hand in an oath that surely the nations that are around you shall bear their own shame. But you, O mountains of Israel, you shall shoot forth your branches and yield your fruit to My people Israel, for they are about to come. For indeed I am for you. . . .” (36:7-9)

These promises and actions illuminate verses 3-4: “He will subdue the peoples under us, And the nations under our feet. He will choose our inheritance for us, The excellence of Jacob whom He loves.” “The terms ‘subdues’ . . . and ‘under’ . . . suggest the Lord’s overwhelming dominion that results from His actions” (Cloer 648). Israel, the excellence of their forefather Jacob, would have their inheritance, the land of Canaan, chosen by God. He was ready to give it to them when the sins of the Amorites who lived there were filled up (Gen. 15:16). He had promised it (Num. 13:2), but the first generation there did not see the fullness of the promise and did not praise God for the victory He would have given.

The marker *Selah* is likely best described by Cloer’s brief comment, “The truth of what God has done should be carefully thought about” (648).

The Sound of a Trumpet

*God has gone up with a shout,
The LORD with the sound of a trumpet.
Sing praises to God, sing praises!*

*Sing praises to our King, sing praises!
For God is the King of all the earth;
Sing praises with understanding. (vv. 5-7)*

The second portion of this psalm differs from the first in focus.

The second strophe is distinguished from the first by the increased fervor of its calls to praise, by its still more exultant rush, and by its omission of reference to Jacob. It is wholly concerned with the people whom it invites to take up the song. As in the former strophe the singer showed to the peoples God working in the world, here he bids them look up and see Him ascending on high. . . . Now He has gone back to His throne and seated Himself thereon, not as having ceased to work in the world—for He is still King over it all—but as having completed a delivering work. He does not withdraw when He goes up. He does not cease to work here below when He sits throned in His palace-temple above. (MacLaren 88)

Divine Advance

Psalm 47 depicts the victorious God as having “gone up with a shout, The LORD with the sound of a trumpet” (v. 5). The sound of a trumpet has throughout history been a call to battle. The two silver trumpets the Lord commanded to be made had this as one of their purposes (Num. 10:9). The trumpets of rams’ horns were used by the Israelites in the taking of Jericho (Josh. 6). Ehud called together the children of Israel with the blowing of the trumpet (Judg. 3:27). Gideon used a trumpet call to gather men (6:34). The three hundred he finally used in the conflict had trumpets (7:8, 16, 19-22). Saul so employed the instrument (1 Sam. 13:3).

Joab used a trumpet to stop a pursuit (2 Sam. 2:28; 18:16). The ark was returned to Jerusalem with the sound of a trumpet (6:15; cf. 1 Chron. 15:28; 16:6). The trumpet was used to proclaim the ascension of a king, or one who wanted to so be (2 Sam. 15:10; 1 Kings 1:34, 39; 2 Kings 9:13; 12:13). Trumpets were employed in the worship (1 Chron. 16:42). The trumpets were combined with other instruments and singers in the Old Covenant worship at the temple (2 Chron. 5:11-14).

With verse 6 encouraging the singing of praises seemingly

simultaneously with God's sound of a trumpet, the comparison to victory for Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 20 is struck.

. . . God has come down to fight on behalf of His people. They return to the Holy City and He to His throne, which is above on Zion, and higher still, is above in heaven. . . . [T]he "shout" is here the people's shout of victory, and "the sound of the horn" the clear sound of the horns announcing the victory, with reference to the celebration of the victory in the Valley of praise and the homeward march amidst the clanging music (2 Chron. xx.26sq.). The poet, who has this festival of victory before his mind as having recently taken place, desires that the festive sounds may find an unending and boundless echo unto the glory of God. (Keil and Delitzsch 99)

God has gone up in victory many times in history. When the final victory is accomplished for God's people, the change will be announced and accompanied by the sound of the trumpet (1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16).

Declaration of Adoration

Verse 6 admonishes that the adoration of God in singing praises be abrupt and continual: "Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises!"

Singing was part of worship in the Old Testament (2 Chron. 5:11-14) and is the authorized music in the church in the New Covenant (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). This singing is the spontaneous praise accompanying the victory. Imagine the scene: The people worship and sing of the power and goodness of God, the sound of the trumpet blows, and God, as King, rides in and accomplishes the overwhelming victory.

The power, therefore, was not in weapons of war, but in the trust of people in their God. This hearkens to the spiritual warfare of New Testament times:

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all

disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 Cor. 10:4-6; cf. Eph. 6:12)

It is in obedience to God, and not in military might, that victory is found. Even in a time of actual physical conflict where God was involved, God was quite displeased with trust in military prowess (cf. Isa. 31:1).

Serve God, then trust Him in the battle. “[T]he battle is the LORD’s, and He will give you into our hands,” said David to Goliath (1 Sam. 17:47). The sentiment is the same in the Jehoshaphat situation. Jahaziel had said to the assembly, “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).

Delineation Accepted

God is separated from all idols, and from all princes on the earth: “For God is the King of all the earth . . .” (7a). This should be understood and acknowledged with even more singing: “. . .Sing praises with understanding” (7b).

It ought to be remembered when the news of the world political situation seems overwhelmingly unjust and unfair that in the end, the victory belongs to the real, one-and-only, true King.

The Sovereignty of God

The picture of this one Old Testament battle (2 Chron. 20), or all of them together, leads to the triumphant conclusion: “God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne. The princes of the people have gathered together, The people of the God of Abraham. For the shields of the earth belong to God; He is greatly exalted” (vv. 8-9).

Princes’ Attachment

The word *princes* indicates the nobles, the leaders of the people. The definition is well set by the contrast in Psalm 113:7-8, where, in verse 8, the same Hebrew word is employed: “He raises the poor out of the dust, And lifts the needy out of the ash heap, That He may seat him with princes—With the princes of His people.”

Psalm 47, then, pictures all the nobles, the leaders, the princes of the people gathering together to the true God, the King of all the

earth.

People of Abraham's God

In the idolatrous milieu, it needed to be identified that the true God is Abraham's God. Abraham had been called to begin a new nation that would bring about a blessing to all nations in the person of the Christ—that nation that God would protect (Gen. 12:1-3; Gal. 3:16).

God had promised to manipulate kingdoms and empires to His own bidding (Jer. 25:7-11; Isa. 10:5-12). He predicted four empires in succession (Dan. 2; 7-8). In the days of that last world empire of Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Dan. 2), God would establish a spiritual kingdom, represented by a stone cut out of a mountain without hands (2:34, 45). That kingdom would never perish and never be left to other people (2:44).

Christ, in the days of the Roman Empire (which was the fourth of Nebuchadnezzar's dream), promised His kingdom would be set up in the days of the lives of those who were hearing Him, i.e., in that generation (Mark 9:1). He identified the kingdom as spiritual (John 18:36; Luke 17:20-21), and as His church (Matt. 16:18-19). It came, beginning in Acts 2, when the promised power (the Holy Spirit—Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8), came on those apostles, they preached, commanded baptism as the new birth (Acts 2:38; John 3:1-5), and three thousand were born anew into this kingdom, the church (Acts 2:47). Paul would later quite powerfully identify that all those who were baptized into Christ had a designation that superseded all others—they were “Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:26-29). Thus, Abraham is regarded as the father of all those who believe (Rom. 4:11).

All other kingdoms will someday perish, but Christ's kingdom will not. Even in the last day, it will be delivered to God, the Father (1 Cor. 15:24). At that time, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess Christ—even those knees and tongues of the rulers of the world (Philip. 2:5-7). In Revelation's imagery, all kings of all nations shall be brought into the glory of the New Jerusalem (21:24). Indeed, “The princes of the people have gathered together, The people of the God of Abraham” (v. 9).

Power of Attack

“For the shields of the earth belong to God; He is greatly exalted” (v. 9b). This imagery

would seem to have been suggested by the marching in triumph of subdued and vanquished princes and warriors, their shields or weapons of war being borne along in the procession, demonstrating that Jehovah was King among the nations. It was seen in such a march that all those weapons of war *belonged* to him, or that he had a right to dispose of them, and to use them as he pleased. (Barnes, vol. 2, 48-49)

Is verse 9, concerning the submission of princes to God’s people, considered to be a forced thing or a willing submission?

The psalmist prays that all the “nobles” and “kings” of the earth may acknowledge the Lord’s kingship. It is not entirely clear whether they come willingly or as hostages; but from usage elsewhere (cf. 72:8-11), it appears that the psalmist longs for the day when all leaders and nations will freely submit to Yahweh’s sovereignty. (Gaebelein 360)

In the Christian era, the government has the power of the sword (Rom. 13:4), but God’s people are not fighting the spiritual warfare with carnal weapons, but rather with thoughtful persuasion from the Word of God, bolstered by the other items of spiritual armor (Eph. 6:12-17; 2 Cor. 10:4-5). The power of attack is the power of the Word of God (Heb. 4:12).

Conclusion

In 2 Chronicles 7, the Lord appeared to Solomon and instructed Him, among other things, about a nation’s (particularly Israel’s) humility: “[I]f My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chron. 7:14). Nations and the princes of nations would do well to learn this lesson.

In New Testament times, individuals would do well to learn that “the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21). There is a throne in the heart where Christ must rule.

God is sovereign. He somehow allows free will, yet causes the course of history to work to His purposes (cf. Rom. 8:28). He is over

nations, determining their preappointed boundaries and times (Acts 17:26). All individuals are amenable to Him (17:30-31). He is to be feared as awesome. Yet, with all His terrible power displayed in images of war and victory, He allows those of the New Covenant era to call Him, tenderly, “Father” (Matt. 6:9; Gal. 4:6).

Man does well—indeed, He does the only reasonable thing—when He puts off pride and submits to the sovereignty of the God on heaven’s throne. Thus intimates the song, “God Reigns over the Nations”:

God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne.
Our God, the Most High God doth rule in the kingdom of men.

He raises up kings and rulers casts down, appointing all boundaries and times;
The power He gives to whomever He will, but yields not control from on high.

The proud He collapses, the lowly He saves, submission of hearts He demands.
The nations who willingly humble themselves will be the dominions that stand.

The stone from a mountain cut out without hands, this kingdom will never be conquered.
Against it hell’s gates shall never prevail, its throne will be left to no other.

That throne sits on high in the depths of men’s hearts, won over by willing surrender.
A warfare with weapons too carnal a fare, no tyrant, our King, but our Father. (Robison)

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Biographical Sketch

Andy Robison was raised in Moundsville, West Virginia. He has served the Lord's church in West Virginia in Pennsboro and Parkersburg (Camden Avenue) as an associate minister and as pulpit minister for the Oakhurst church of Christ in Farmington, the Hopewell church of Christ in Washington, and the Harrisville church of Christ.

Andy taught Bible and directed 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. He manages the Web site *churchofchristsongs.com*, which contains many of his compositions, along with other originals.

He has been with the West Virginia School of Preaching since 2011, serving as director since 2012.

Andy is married to the former Marsha Giesler of Rolla, Missouri. Marsha teaches a preachers' wives class at the West Virginia School of Preaching and serves as the librarian and is frequently called upon to speak at Ladies' Inspiration Days. They are the parents of one daughter, Hannah, and a son, Andrew.

GOD RESTORES THE SOUL

Psalms 51

Wade Webster

The background of the 51st Psalm is David's *commission of sin* with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11) and his *conviction of sin* by Nathan (2 Sam. 12). As you likely know, David had an amazing record. The inspired record reads, ". . . David did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD, and turned not aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite" (1 Kings 15:5). [All Scripture references are from the KJV unless otherwise noted]. If we could leave that last statement off, David's record would have been great. However, that last statement was a part of David's story. David was an adulterer and a murderer.

As we look at the 51st Psalm, we will see four requests from the broken heart of David. David asked God to remit his sin, renew his spirit, restore his song, and receive his sacrifice. Since we also fall prey to sin, it is wise for us to consider the words of this psalm.

Remit My Sin (vv. 1-9)

"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions" (v. 1). David pleaded for mercy, not justice. He deserved to die (Deut. 17:12). That would have been justice. He had coveted his neighbor's wife, committed adultery with her, and killed his neighbor. Two of those crimes were punishable by death—adultery and murder. You may recall that Jesus summarized the Old Testament in two commands: (1) Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind; and (2) Love your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:37-40). David had broken both sides of this summary. He had failed to love God with all of his heart, and he had failed to love his neighbor as himself. To love God is to obey His commandments (John 14:15; 1 John 5:2-3). David had disobeyed several of them. To love your neighbor is to treat your neighbor as you would want him to treat you (Matt. 7:12). David had stolen Uriah's wife and taken Uriah's

life. I am pretty sure Uriah wanted neither of those things.

Someone has said that mercy is when God does not give us what we deserve and grace is when God gives us what we do not deserve. David asked for mercy. He asked for God not to give him the punishment that he deserved. He asked for mercy on the basis of God's character—lovingkindness—rather than on the basis of his conduct—lasciviousness. David knew that God had a multitude of tender mercies. He knew that there was enough mercy to even cover all of his sins.

Throughout the context, David used a number of different words to describe his actions with Bathsheba and Uriah—*transgressions* (vv. 1, 3, 13), *sin* (vv. 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 13), *iniquity* (vv. 2, 5, 9), and *evil* (v. 4). It might be as beneficial to note some of the words that he did not use—*mistake*, *failure*, *slip*. David began with the word *transgressions* (v. 1). First, it should be noted that David used a plural word. David was not guilty of a single transgression. He had multiplied transgressions—coveting, adultery, stealing, and murder. He was not minimizing his sin by making it seem smaller than it was. Second, it should be noted that David used a word that refers to trespassing. David had crossed the clearly defined lines that God had drawn. He did not lessen his sin by suggesting that he did not know or was not clear on what God commanded.

David wanted his transgressions to be blotted out. “Blotted out” refers to removing marks from a written ledger (cf. Exod. 32:32). David wanted his sins to be removed from his account. The man who for most of his life had kept his record clean wanted it to be clean again. David hated the thought of those black marks on his record.

“*Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity; and cleanse me from my sin*” (v. 2). David felt dirty. He knew that he had soiled his soul. He wanted God to “wash” him from his iniquity and to “cleanse” him from his sin. First, please note that David wanted God to wash him. David knew that he could not wash away his own sins. He knew that only God could do that. Second, please note that David wanted God to “wash” him “thoroughly.” He needed to get behind his spiritual ears. No place was to be overlooked or neglected. Every nook and cranny of his soul needed to be scrubbed diligently. Please note the parts of his body that he mentioned in the psalm—eyes

(v. 3), mind (v. 6), ears (v. 8), bones (v. 8), heart and spirit (v. 10), hands (v. 14), and lips (vv. 13-15). Sometimes, physically speaking, we may just wash our hands or our feet. However, David realized the need for cleansing from head to toe. Most of all, his heart had to be cleansed. Later, he would speak of the truth that God desired “in the inward parts” and “in the hidden part” (v. 6). Sometimes, ladies will talk about “deep cleaning” their houses. They mean more than dusting and straightening up. They mean underneath the refrigerator and stove. They mean in between the couch cushions. They mean everything. In like manner, David wanted God to cleanse the deepest recesses of his heart. The word *wash* refers to the cleansing of dirty clothing (Isa. 1:18; 64:6). To wash and change clothes marked a new beginning (Gen. 35:2; 41:14; 45:22; Exod. 19:10, 14). David had done this following his sin (2 Sam. 12:20).

“For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me” (v. 3). There was a time when David tried to hide his sin (Psalm 32:3-4). As you recall, Uriah was given leave to come home from the battlefield (2 Sam. 11:6-7). David’s hope was that Uriah would go in unto to his wife and lie with her. Then, folks would naturally think that the child was his. However, Uriah was far more honorable than the king that he served. Uriah would not lie with his own wife while his fellow soldiers were on the battlefield and separated from theirs (11:11). David, on the other hand, lay with Uriah’s wife while Uriah was on the battlefield. Uriah’s words should have pricked David’s heart. Yet, David did not abandon his awful plan. He simply added alcohol. David knew that alcohol lessens one’s morality. Although a sober soldier might not go in unto his wife, he believed that a drunken one would. Yet, a drunken Uriah was more honorable than a sober David. Uriah again refused to go in unto his wife. Uriah’s noble behavior should have further reproved David. Still, David did not abandon his plan. He added murder. If Uriah was dead, then David would be free to take Bathsheba to be his wife with no one being the wiser. Who knows? They might even praise him for taking in the widow of one of his mightiest warriors.

For the most part, David’s sins were hidden. The servants that fetched Bathsheba to David’s house and who reported Uriah’s actions must have known something. Joab certainly knew

something. But, by and large, David's actions of adultery and murder were hidden. David's servants were not going to say anything. Who would believe a servant over the king, anyway? Joab was pragmatic enough not to put his job or his neck on the line. After all, he knew that he might be the next one put on the front line of battle and abandoned. However, there was One who could not be bought or bullied. God knew what David had done. Soon, through the prophet Nathan, David would know that God knew, too. God was about to identify David as the man that had stolen his neighbor's wife. In addition to God, David knew what he had done and he knew that it was wrong. His sin was "ever before" him (v. 3). Every time that David saw his reflection, he saw his sin. Every time that David saw Bathsheba—and she was now his wife—he saw his sin. Every time that he took a bath, he must have been reminded of it. Every time that a letter came from the battlefield, he was faced with what he had done. There was no escaping the blood that was on his hands. Later in the 51st Psalm, he would ask God to deliver him from "bloodguiltiness" (v. 14). To David's credit, when he knew that his sin was known, he acknowledged it and abandoned it (2 Sam. 12:13; cf. Psalm 32:5; 51:3). At least eight times in the psalm, David identifies the sin as his own (vv. 1, 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b, 4, 9a, 9b).

"Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest" (v. 4). Although David had sinned against many people—Uriah, Bathsheba, his own body, the nation, etc., David knew that first and foremost, he had sinned against God. David emphasized this by saying, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight . . ." (cf. Gen. 39:9). More than anyone else, David's sin wronged God. The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant reveals this truth. Our sin in relation to God is ten thousand talents; in relation to man, it is one hundred pence. David's actions brought shame upon God. It impugned God's name. God was justified in the judgment that He pronounced upon David (v. 4). David did not argue that his punishment was too great. He spoke simply of how great his sin had been.

"Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom" (vv. 5-6).

Sadly, these verses have been used by Calvinists to support the notion of total hereditary depravity. However, that is clearly not the meaning here or anywhere else in Scripture. Children are innocent. Jesus declared, “Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:14). The nature of children and the nature of heaven is the same. Since heaven has no sin (Rev. 21:27), then this means that children have no sin. On another occasion, Jesus declared, “Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3). To enter the kingdom of heaven, people have to become like little children. Does this mean that they have to become totally depraved? Surely, no one would argue that. Yet, if the Calvinist is right, then that would be what Jesus was saying. Clearly, this cannot be right. What Jesus was saying was that people have to be without sin to enter heaven. Thus, little children are without sin. The fact of the matter is that children do not inherit the sins of their parents. Ezekiel wrote, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him” (18:20). Cain and Abel did not inherit the sin of Adam, nor do we. Cain became a sinner when he transgressed God’s law, and so do we (1 John 3:4).

There are at least two plausible explanations that keep David’s statement in Psalm 51 in harmony with the passages that we have just noticed and others. First, David could have been referring back to the sinful union between Judah and Tamar (Gen. 38; Ruth 4:12). As you recall, there was a restriction that was placed upon those born in this way unto the tenth generation (Deut. 23:2). David was the tenth generation from Judah and Tamar. He was the first generation to be able to enter into the Tabernacle. This was a great joy for him (Psalm 122:1). Now, he had started the long cycle over again. Of course, as you know, the child conceived by David and Bathsheba was going to die. Second, David may have been using hyperbole or poetic exaggeration to emphasize the enormity of his sin. He clearly did this in other places. In the 58th Psalm, he wrote, “The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies” (58:3). David speaks of newborn

babies as speaking lies. However, we all know that newborn babies cannot speak lies. They cannot speak at all. It takes time for them to be able to speak, and it takes even longer for them to speak lies. Yet, the psalmist speaks of it happening as soon as they are born. What is the psalmist doing? He is exaggerating for the sake of emphasis. He is speaking of how soon in life these children learn the behaviors of their wicked parents. The sin that David is addressing in the 51st Psalm goes back only about a year. Yet, David goes all the way back to birth. It is as if David was saying, “I have done the wrong thing my whole life.”

“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities” (vv. 7-9). David requested a number of actions in regards to his sin. In the second verse, he said, “Wash me . . .” and, “[C]leanse me. . .” He would again say, “[W]ash me . . .” in verse 7. In the eighth verse, he said, “Make me. . .” In the twelfth verse, he said, “[U]phold me. . .” In the fourteenth verse, he said “Deliver me. . .” In addition to requests stated positively, there are a couple of requests that are stated negatively. In the eleventh verse, he said, “Cast me not away from thy presence . . .” and “[T]ake not thy holy spirit from me.” In the verse that we are considering, David’s request was positively stated, “Purge me . . .” (v. 7). David wanted God to purge him with hyssop. Hyssop was a plant that was used in applying the blood for cleansing (Lev. 14:4, 6; Num. 19:6, 18; Exod. 12:22). “Whiter than snow” (v. 7) is an interesting expression because snow, although it appears white, contains impurities. No doubt, David used the comparison because of its appearance. Snow was the whitest thing that David knew.

It is clear from the 51st Psalm that sin had robbed David of his joy. The pleasures of sin were seasonal, and the season was very short (Heb. 11:25). In the twelfth verse, David asked God to “restore” unto him the “joy” of salvation. Obviously, David’s request reveals that he had lost his joy. After all, you do not restore that which you still have. David had lost his joy. He wanted God to “make him hear joy and gladness” again (v. 8). For roughly a year, David had not heard joy and gladness. He had heard only the

condemning voice of his own conscience.

Renew My Spirit (vv. 10-11)

“Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me” (vv. 10-11). *Create* comes from the Hebrew word *bara*, which refers to the act of making something from nothing. It is the word used of the initial creation (Gen. 1:1). David, the man that God chose to be king because of his heart (1 Sam. 16:7), was asking for a new one. David’s old heart had been destroyed by lust and murder. He needed a clean heart. He knew that only those with clean hearts or pure hearts could appear before God. In the 24th Psalm, David wrote, “Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, *and a pure heart*; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully” (Psa. 24:3-4, emphasis added; cf. Matt. 5:8). The poetical parallel to creating a clean heart within him was renewing a right spirit within him. David knew that he was in desperate need of renewal. He did not want to be cast out of God’s presence (v. 11). He knew that sin separated (Isa. 59:1-2). He did not want to lose the fellowship that he had always enjoyed with God. Furthermore, he did not want to have the Holy Spirit taken from him (v. 11). He had watched as this happened to Saul (1 Sam. 16:14-15, 23; 18:10; 19:9). As you recall, he had been called to soothe Saul with his music.

Restore My Song (vv. 12-15)

Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.

Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.

Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.

O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. (vv. 12-15)

David had lost his joy. Sin had robbed him of his song. David asked God to “restore” unto him the joy of his salvation (v. 12). He promised God that if He would “open” his lips, he would show forth

His “praise” (v. 15). Not only did David promise to sing, he promised to sing “aloud” of God’s righteousness (v. 14). David was not going to quietly hum a few refrains to himself. He was going to belt out a song of praise to God. I am reminded of a passage from the twelfth chapter of Nehemiah. At the dedication of the wall, the people sang and shouted so loudly that “the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off” (12:43).

In addition to showing forth God’s praise if God gave him his song back, David promised to “teach transgressors” God’s ways (v. 13). Sounds a little like David wanted to start a prison ministry, does it not? David knew what it was to be a transgressor. He knew what it was to be set free and to begin again. Furthermore, David understood the connection between joy and evangelism. To be an effective missionary, David had to have the joy of salvation within him. Those that have lost their song have nothing to offer a world that has no song (1 Peter 3:15). The best missionaries are often those who have been forgiven most. The apostle Paul serves as a prime example of this truth. He went from the chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15) to the chief of soul winners (1 Cor. 9:22). David was wanting to make this same transition.

Receive My Sacrifice (vv. 16-19)

For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem.

Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar. (vv. 16-19)

Obviously, God does not need sacrifices and burnt offerings (Psalm 50:8-12). However, He does desire them. He repeatedly required them in the Old Testament. The issue was not the sacrifices, but rather the one doing the sacrificing. God did not want sacrifices alone. Thousands of sacrifices could not take the place of obedience or penitence. The prophet Micah declared:

Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old?

Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? (6:6-8)

Micah understood that sacrifices without justice, mercy, and humility would not please God. You may also recall the words of Samuel to Saul: “Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams” (1 Sam. 15:22). Saul had saved the best of the flocks and herds of the Amalekites. Likely, there were thousands of them. However, God had no delight in them because they were not coupled with obedience. In like manner, David understood that sacrifices without a penitent heart would not work. After all, the sacrifices of the wicked are an abomination (Prov. 15:8). God wants hearts that are broken over sin. In the 34th Psalm, David wrote, “The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit” (34:18). In like manner, Isaiah wrote, “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (57:15). God wants people to acknowledge their sins and to be sorrowful over them. Earlier in the psalm, David spoke of his bones being crushed by the weight of sin (v. 8). Now, he speaks of his heart being broken over the awfulness of sin (v. 17). I believe that David understood the great harm that his sin had done to the city and the people that he loved. Nathan had told him of the effects of his sin (2 Sam. 12:14).

In the 51st Psalm, David made four requests: Remit my sin, renew my spirit, restore my song, and receive my sacrifice. Although we may never commit the sins of adultery and murder, we may be guilty of other sins. The words of David in this psalm can help us to return to God and begin again.

Biographical Sketch

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GIVING PRAISE TO GOD

Psalm 135

Steven Haguewood

Introduction

Psalm 135 has been called a mosaic, not because it is affiliated with Moses, but because it appears to be a collection of passages from other Scriptures, including many psalms. The following table is a summary of the connections between Psalm 135 and other Scriptures, found by C. H. Spurgeon (182):

<u>Psalm 135</u>	<u>Quote or Reference</u>
Verse 1	Psalm 134:1
Verses 2-3	Psalm 116:19
Verse 4	Deuteronomy 7:6
Verse 5	Psalm 95:3
Verses 8-12	Psalm 136
Verse 13	Exodus 3:15
Verse 14	Deuteronomy 32:36
Verses 15-21	Psalm 115

The theme of Psalm 135 is nothing new to the Bible: Praise the Lord for His greatness. In point of fact, praising God is a main purpose for the entire world. When Jesus entered Jerusalem for the last time, people stood on the side of the road shouting His praise, “Hosanna to the Son of David! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’ Hosanna in the highest!” (Matt. 21:9). [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] Some of the Pharisees told Him to rebuke His disciples for this praise and He answered, “I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out.” (Luke 19:40) Later on, the little children were repeating what they heard their parents say, and Jesus was challenged again for allowing them to say these things. Jesus responded with, “Have you never read, ‘Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise?’” (Matt. 21:16). The entire world desires to praise Him; He is the reason for its existence.

It is the idea of such praise that occasions the writing of Psalm 135. To the exploration of praise, this paper shall now turn its focus. Effort will be made to define *praise* and understand what it means to praise someone or something. Then, the reasons given by the psalmist for praising God will be examined. He lists four reasons for praising God, though the list is not exhaustive. At the end of the psalm, the reader is simply encouraged to “Praise the LORD!” (v. 21).

What is Praise?

Having been encouraged to praise the Lord because praise is the purpose of life, it behooves the human to learn what the term *praise* means. According to *Webster’s Dictionary*, *praise* means “to express admiration or give homage to someone or something” (710). The Greek Septuagint translates *praise* with *exomologeō*, which is most often translated as *confess* (Bauer 351). This word promotes the idea of open, public proclamation of a belief in someone or something. It is coupled with the term *YHWH* to form *hallelujah* (Utley). According to Lambert, *praise* in the English comes from the Latin word *pretium*, which means “price or value” (2429). Praise is bestowing worth or value to someone or something. Lambert further goes on to discuss modes of praise.

Modes of praise begin with inward emotion, a gladness of heart that Jesus desired in Matthew 15:8: “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me.” The psalmist says in 33:21, “For our heart shall rejoice in Him, Because we have trusted in His holy name.” Stemming from the praise of the heart is the praise of the lips, the effort of our verbal abilities to give praise to God. This is illustrated in Psalm 40:10: “I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart; I have declared Your faithfulness and Your salvation; I have not concealed Your lovingkindness and Your truth From the great assembly.” Such praise is often manifested in song: “Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms” (James 5:13). (The NASB and ESV translate “sing psalms” as “sing praise.”) Finally are the ordered modes of public praise. The beginnings are seen in Genesis 4 when Cain and Able offered contrasting sacrifices with different results and then Seth when “men began to call on the name of the Lord” (4:26). Early on, this

included somewhat sudden outbursts as in Exodus 15:20-21. Later was the formation of the psalter and skilled musicians of Ezra 2:41. To them, musical direction is often given in the Psalms. In the New Testament, Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 indicate the continued use of songs to express verbal expression of praise in song to God. The idea in the New Testament seems to encompass both inward praise and the praise of the lips as it employs the voice and heart in its joyous expressions (Lambert 2429-30).

Praise belongs to God, and He desires it. Augustine said, “And if you were to be for ever only servants you ought to praise the Lord; how much more ought ye servants to praise the Lord, that you may hereafter gain the privilege of sons?” (1081). Servants and sons alike owe praise to God. He demands the praise of the lives of man. The outstanding question remains, “Why ought men to praise the Lord?” It is to this answer the psalmist now turns his attention.

Why Praise the Lord?

The psalmist gives us four *fors* as reasons to praise the Lord in the text of Psalm 135. The first is found in verse 3: He is good. The goodness of the Lord is then discussed through illustration. Verse 4 is the second *for*: He chose Israel as His special treasure. You see within this the judgment and justice of the Lord. “For I know that the LORD is great . . .” (v. 5) is the third *for* reason He deserves our praise. His greatness is contrasted with idols and demonstrated with His power over the physical world. The final *for* is His love (v. 14). The tempering of His judgment with compassion indicates His love for His people. God is worthy of praise and admiration.

The First For

“*Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good;*” (v. 3). The first reason the psalmist gives to praise the Lord is that the Lord is good. *Good*, in this instance, is reference to His character. He is good in that He cannot do bad or evil things to His creation. He is good in the actions He takes toward and on behalf of His people.

Verse 12 is an example of His goodness. He gave Israel the land as a heritage. After bringing them out of bondage of slavery in Egypt, He gave them the Promised Land to inhabit as long as they would be faithful. While in Egypt, they grew to be great in number,

as He promised Abraham. Then, He led them through the wilderness to the land He promised to Abraham and Moses. The Promised Land was a land that is impossible to imagine. The spies told of grape clusters so large they required poles to transport. The land flowed with milk and honey and had the resources to care for God's people as long as they would need it. This type of care is the result of His goodness. It is further explained by Jesus in Matthew 6:25-32. Jesus contrasts God's people with the people who care about the world. He promises that if God cares so well for the soulless birds and grass, then He will care for His people so much more.

In the New Testament, the word *grace* appears. *Grace* (Greek: *charis*) means "a beneficent disposition" (Bauer 1079). *Beneficent* means "doing good for someone" (*Webster's Desk Dictionary* 82). The nature of God is to do good, and man is the beneficiary of His goodness.

His goodness began to benefit man in the very beginning of man's existence. Genesis 1:25 says God intended to make man in His own image and likeness. Verse 27 says that He did exactly that. The words *image* and *likeness* indicate man's dignity and value given to Him by his creator, God. He gave man value in that he has a soul and dignity in that he is a rational and morally responsible being (Woods 6). He demonstrated His goodness to man when He created him with the ability to think and be saved.

The Second For

"For the LORD has chosen Jacob for Himself, Israel for His special treasure" (v. 4). The psalmist says clearly that the Lord does whatever He pleases in heaven or on the earth (v. 6). He can act in whatever way He sees fit upon His creation. He chose in Genesis 5-7 to send a flood that killed all the wicked on the earth. He chose Jacob to Himself. He established a peculiar people through Jacob in the nation of Israel. And they became a powerful nation and a treasure to the Lord.

Jacob had an inauspicious introduction to the Bible reader. He was the supplanter, one who grabbed another by the heel. He was the second son who stole his older brother's birthright and blessing from their father, Isaac, through cunning and deceitful practices. Yet, God selected him and turned him into a value to Himself. God

can do what He wants.

He did something similar with a man named Saul. Acts 7:58-9:31 chronicles the transformation of Saul from Pharisee to preacher. He set out to destroy The Way, the new movement that was changing the world, by whatever means possible. He held the coats of those who stoned Stephen to death. He breathed threats and murder against the church. He received letters from the High Priest to go to Damascus and arrest Christians and bring them back to Jerusalem to face trial for their confession of Jesus Christ. The early Christians were afraid of Saul, whose reputation preceded him wherever he went. Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus and spoke to him. Saul was sent by the Lord into the city, and Ananias was sent to him to teach him what to do. After his baptism, Saul became a Gospel preacher, working hard to convert people to The Way, which he once persecuted vehemently. The Lord changed him from persecutor to preacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

That is the beauty of God's Word. Romans 1:16 says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." One of the definitions in *Webster's Desk Dictionary* for the term *power* is "control or influence" (709). Another way to look at this concept of influence is "the power to change." That is the power Jesus demonstrated in John 2. He took six water pots that each contained twenty or thirty gallons of water and turned the entire contents into wine, the best wine of the weekend. Since the human body is sixty percent water (Perlman), the Lord has proven He can make great changes to each person. His ability and willingness to change humans for the better is reason enough to praise the Lord.

The Third For

"For I know that the LORD is great, And our Lord is above all gods" (v. 5). The Lord is great. The greatness of the Lord in this instance is again in reference to His power. This time, the psalmist speaks of other powers than the ones listed above. He speaks of the power of God over creation and judgement. The prophet Isaiah pointed out the folly of man's pursuits of false gods, which the psalmist uses for illustration of God's greatness:

Those who make an image, all of them are useless,

And their precious things shall not profit;
They are their own witnesses;
They neither see nor know, that they may be ashamed.
Who would form a god or mold an image
That profits him nothing?
Surely all his companions would be ashamed;
And the workmen, they are mere men.
Let them all be gathered together,
Let them stand up;
Yet they shall fear,
They shall be ashamed together.

The blacksmith with the tongs works one in the coals,
Fashions it with hammers,
And works it with the strength of his arms.
Even so, he is hungry, and his strength fails;
He drinks no water and is faint.

The craftsman stretches out his rule,
He marks one out with chalk;
He fashions it with a plane,
He marks it out with the compass,
And makes it like the figure of a man,
According to the beauty of a man, that it may remain in the
house.
He cuts down cedars for himself,
And takes the cypress and the oak;
He secures it for himself among the trees of the forest.
He plants a pine, and the rain nourishes it.

Then it shall be for a man to burn,
For he will take some of it and warm himself;
Yes, he kindles it and bakes bread;
Indeed he makes a god and worships it;
He makes it a carved image, and falls down to it.
He burns half of it in the fire;
With this half he eats meat;
He roasts a roast, and is satisfied.

He even warms himself and says,
“Ah! I am warm, I have seen the fire.”
And the rest of it he makes into a god,
His carved image.
He falls down before it and worships it,
Prays to it and says,
“Deliver me, for you are my god!”

They do not know nor understand;
For He has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see,
And their hearts, so that they cannot understand.
And no one considers in his heart,
Nor is there knowledge nor understanding to say,
“I have burned half of it in the fire,
Yes, I have also baked bread on its coals;
I have roasted meat and eaten it;
And shall I make the rest of it an abomination?
Shall I fall down before a block of wood?”
He feeds on ashes;
A deceived heart has turned him aside;
And he cannot deliver his soul,
Nor say, “Is there not a lie in my right hand?” (44:9-20)

God created sticks and man. The created man took the created sticks and created gods to supplant the creating God. But the creating God can hear with His ears, see with His eyes, and act with His will on the creation while the created god has nothing beyond man-made aesthetics to offer. In fact, the remaining materials from the created god serve no other purpose than fuel for the fires of man’s physical needs.

God causes the “vapors to ascend” (v. 7). This is reference to the water cycle, in which a small portion of earth’s waters evaporate, form clouds of condensed water vapors, and return to earth as rain. This all happens at God’s command and by God’s design. Try as they might, the prophets of Baal could do nothing about the drought God brought on Israel, nor could they make Baal send a fire to the sacrifice they offered to him. After just a prayer offered by Elijah, God demonstrated His greatness. He sent a fire that consumed the animal, altar of wood and stone, and the dust, as well as the water in

the trench Elijah had dug and filled. The prophets of Baal cried, wailed, shouted, and cut themselves until the blood gushed out; Baal had no answer. “And so it was, at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, ‘Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened’” (1 Kings 18:27). With a single prayer, the difference between God and Baal was mightily demonstrated. No agency of human invention has power over the water cycle; no created or imagined god can make it rain a single drop. The God of heaven is responsible for every vapor and hint of moisture on the planet.

The God with this much power his wielded it on the earth:

He destroyed the firstborn of Egypt,

Both of man and beast.

He sent signs and wonders into the midst of you, O Egypt,

Upon Pharaoh and all his servants.

He defeated many nations

And slew mighty kings—Sihon king of the Amorites,

Og king of Bashan,

And all the kingdoms of Canaan (vv. 8-11)

God sent warnings to Pharaoh to let Israel go out of slavery. Pharaoh did not listen to God’s prophet, Moses; instead, he made life more difficult on God’s chosen nation. When the proper time came, God killed the firstborn of man and beast in Egypt, sending the final message, and Pharaoh let Israel go. Sihon and Og did not want to let Israel pass through their lands, Heshbon and Bashan, respectively.

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Do not fear him [Og], for I have delivered him into your hand, with all his people and his land; and you shall do to him as you did to Sihon king of the Amorites, who dwelt at Heshbon.” So they defeated him, his sons, and all his people, until there was no survivor left him; and they took possession of his land. (Num. 21:34-35)

God defeated the greatest of challenges man could make against Him and brushed aside with minimal effort his imaginary, created gods. God is great.

But His greatness is not limited to this earth, which He created, and its temporal nature. He is the God of heaven and of earth, and He is eternal. Spurgeon says, “JEHOVAH is a name which shall

outlive the ages, and retain the fullness of its glory and might forever” (186). “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). He was here to create things before the beginning of time and will be here when He brings time to a close (2 Peter 3:8-10).

His greatness resides in His eternity; He is not bound by the time He created for man to measure the passing of this earth. He is great in His power to create the world and command the world He created. He is great in that He can do all the things man wishes his imaginary gods could do. They have mouths, but cannot speak; eyes, but cannot see; and ears, but cannot hear; and they cannot act in any fashion. God speaks all truth, sees all things, and hears every whisper of a thought that man cannot even detect in his own mind. The Lord’s greatness is worthy of the highest praise of men.

The Fourth For

“For the LORD will judge His people, And He will have compassion on His servants” (v. 14). The Lord has seen fit to punish His people for their disobedience since the beginning of sin in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were removed from the Garden and never allowed to enter again. He still made provisions for them to make it through life and have a relationship with Him. He punishes His people’s disobedience and then has compassion when He sees their distress. “[B]ut as for His own [servants] He has mercy upon them, and returns to them in love after he has in the truest affection smitten them for their iniquities” (Spurgeon 187). This was the basic life cycle for the relationship with Israel and the Lord. Obedience, apostasy, discipline, repentance, and restoration were followed by another generation of apostates in need of discipline again. God continued to show His love through His patience with them. Hosea 3 sums up this relationship well:

Then the LORD said to me, “Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery, just like the love of the LORD for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans.”

So I bought her for myself for fifteen shekels of silver, and one and one-half homers of barley. And I said to her, “You shall stay with me many days; you shall not play the

harlot, nor shall you have a man—so, too, will I be toward you.”

For the children of Israel shall abide many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, without ephod or teraphim. Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They shall fear the LORD and His goodness in the latter days. (3:1-5)

It was love that kept Hosea coming back to Gomer, and it is love that keeps God coming back to sinful Israel (and Christians). Paul speaks of that same love in Romans 5:8: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” And John speaks of the greatest love to which man can aspire, the love that is willing to lay down its life for a friend (John 15:13). The love of the Lord goes well beyond man’s capability to measure or emulate. Man will often love and do good for those he loves and who love him back. God’s love is such that despite man’s willingness to repeatedly sin against Him, He died as a sacrifice anyway. Just as Hosea kept returning for and seeking Gomer when she left, the Lord continues to seek out sinful man in hopes of winning us back to Him. That is a love that is worthy to be praised.

Conclusion

The psalmist encourages and even insists that his reader praise the Lord. Praise is the use of the heart, body, and mouth, being both spontaneous and ordered in adoration, because of the value one places in another. The Lord is to be the object of the praise of men. He is worthy of praise because of His goodness. Goodness is grace, His desire to do good for man, and the vehicle for man’s salvation. God deserves man’s praise because He chose Israel as His special treasure. As often as they sinned, He tempered His judgment with mercy. The Lord is worthy of praise also because He is great. Not just better than good, but great in nature. He is great in power and majesty. He created the world and everything in it in just seven days. He maintains control over all things and has the ability to change even the most wretched of men from sinner to saint. He is praiseworthy because of His immense love for man. Despite the wickedness of sinful man, He sent Jesus to die in man’s place that

He might taste death once for all. Unbelievable power, grace, mercy, and love make the Lord the best object of praise ever known.

Verse 21: “Praise the LORD!”

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Biographical Sketch

Steven Haguewood was born in 1971 in Anderson, South Carolina. He graduated high school in 1990 and went to Freed-Hardeman University and studied psychology. He met Jennie Bang there, and they eventually married in 1993. They had four children: Christopher, Brandon, Rebeca, and Bethany. After spending several years doing commercial construction work, he went back to Freed-Hardeman and finished his B.S. in Bible and M.A. in the New Testament.

He has preached in local works in Theo, Mississippi, and at the North End congregation in Parkersburg, West Virginia, where he is currently located. Steven has preached meetings in Mississippi, West Virginia, Ohio, Tennessee, and South Carolina.

IN THE DEPTHS OF SIN

Psalm 130

Ed Melott

*Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD;
Lord, hear my voice!
Let Your ears be attentive
To the voice of my supplications.*

*If You, LORD, should mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?
But there is forgiveness with You,
That You may be feared.*

*I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
And in His word I do hope.
My soul waits for the Lord
More than those who watch for the morning—
Yes, more than those who watch for the morning.*

*O Israel, hope in the LORD;
For with the LORD there is mercy,
And with Him is abundant redemption.
And He shall redeem Israel
From all his iniquities.*

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

Psalm 130 outlined:

- I. The depths of a burdened soul (vv. 1-2)
- II. The demand of a forgiving sovereign (vv. 3-4)
- III. The determination of a patient supplicant (vv. 5-6)
- IV. The decree to a rebellious society (vv. 7-8)

Introduction

Psalm 130 is classified as one of the seven Penitential Psalms. “The **Penitential Psalms** or **Psalms of Confession**, so named in Cassiodorus’s commentary of the 6th century AD, are the Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143 . . .” (Wikipedia contributors). Five of these are identified in their headings as being authored by King David, and two are anonymous, Psalms 102 and 130. Psalm 51 is probably the best known of these seven to Bible students, as it records David’s repentance after his sins with Bathsheba and against her husband Uriah (cf. 2 Sam. 11). One may conclude that David wrote all seven and that each grew out of his penitence and great need of forgiveness for the same sins. It is wholly unnecessary to make such a conclusion. Perhaps, David wrote them all, or perhaps, he did not! Furthermore, even if David wrote all seven, we cannot definitively identify the occasion of each of their compositions.

A second preliminary to the study of this psalm is the uninspired classification of its heading, “A Song of Ascents.” Fifteen of the psalms carry this moniker (120-34). There is much variety and scholarly disagreement as to the meaning of this heading. Albert Barnes commented:

There has been a great diversity of opinion as to the meaning of the title, and the reason why it was prefixed to these psalms. Some have supposed that the title, “Song of Degrees,” or “Ascents,” was applied to them as being psalms which were sung during the periodical journeys or pilgrimages to Jerusalem at the times of the great yearly festivals—the *going up* to Jerusalem. Others have supposed that they were psalms which were composed or sung during the return from the exile—the *going up* again to Jerusalem after their long captivity in Babylon. Some of the Jewish rabbins supposed that they were psalms which were sung as the people ascended the fifteen steps—going up to the temple represented by Ezekiel, seven on one side and eight on the other, Ezek. XI. 22, 37. Others have supposed that the title refers to some peculiarity of structure in the psalms—a gradation or elevation of thought—approaching to a climax. (Barnes 227)

In his comments, Barnes further remarked, “In this variety of

conjecture—for it can be regarded as little more than conjecture—it is impossible now to determine with any degree of certainty what is the true meaning of the title, or why it was given to these psalms” (227).

In his final, studied analysis, Barnes concluded:

The remaining supposition seems to have much more plausibility than any one here suggested. It is that the term is a musical expression; that there was something peculiar in the “scale” of the music to which these psalms were sung, though that is now lost to us. . . . All that can be known is, that there was some reason why these psalms were, so to speak, bound up together, and designated by a common title. (228)

Our study of this hope-filled, awe-inspiring, and faith-building psalm will be an honest exposition of the text as it is set forth to us in our English Bibles. Whoever was the human instrument used—David, Hezekiah or some other writer—is both unknown to us and unneeded for our appreciation. A study of these eight verses, packed with meaning and great lessons, certainly will not be wanting for the discerning servant of God. Rotherham astutely spoke of Psalm 130’s simplistic yet profound beauty:

Reaching the present psalm thus, by a path which quickens our expectation of discovering something fresh and valuable, we are not disappointed. It is indeed a remarkable composition: simple, beautiful, profound. It says but little, but implies more than we can easily grasp. (336)

The Depths of a Burdened Soul (vv. 1-2)

“Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD; Lord, hear my voice! Let Your ears be attentive To the voice of my supplications” (vv. 1-2). The Hebrew word rendered *depths* is from “the verb *amak*—which means to be deep, then, to be unsearchable; then to make deep; and it would apply to anything low, deep, or profound . . .” (Barnes 258). “Flood waters, or **the depths**, may refer to distress brought on by enemies (cf. 68:22; 124:4-5), by illness (cf. 38:3-4a), by despondency (cf. 71:20), or by guilt (130:1). **Depths** can also depict forgiveness of sin (Mic. 7:19)” (Ash and Miller 410-11).

The word here is evidently used metaphorically of deep anguish or distress of the soul in need of forgiveness. The depths in one's life could be sorrow from loss, suffering, or death. One may struggle in the depths of depression and mental anguish. The psalmist, contextually, is in the depths of sin. Verses 3-4 help us understand his pressing need and overwhelming problem—the guilt of sin and need of forgiveness. The word *iniquities* is used twice in these eight verses (vv. 3, 8). Additionally, the writer speaks of forgiveness (v. 4), mercy (v. 7), and redemption (v. 7, 8).

Sin is often mocked in our world today. Like those of Jeremiah's day, "They were not at all ashamed; Nor did they know how to blush" (6:15). The psalmist was made to understand the enormity of his guilt and the only source of forgiveness, the LORD. David's sin with Bathsheba and subsequent lies and murder are easily seen as grievous and could be classified as an overwhelming depth in the soul of David. Could not our sins also be classified as such? "[F]or all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God . . ." (Rom. 3:23). "There is none righteous, no, not one . . ." (3:10). After commenting on the sin of Adam and Eve, Milligan made the following comments about sin and the flippant callousness of so many in its regard:

Now, if one sin, and that, too, in the estimation of most skeptics, quite a venial sin, has done all this,—has brought all this ruin upon mankind, under the government and administration of a just, and righteous, and merciful God, then I ask, O sinner, what must be the legitimate and necessary consequences of all the sins that any one of us has committed, unless indeed they be washed away through the efficacy of that blood which alone can take away our sins! You that make a mock of sin; that speak of it as a light and trivial matter, go to the death-bed of the old, of the young, and behold what sin has done. Go into the grave-yards and cemeteries of Earth—go among the skeletons and scattered fragments of the dead, and behold what sin has done. Lift up the curtain that separates Earth from Hades; the visible from the invisible; look upon the agonizing souls of the damned, and behold what sin has done. (411)

Each one of us should feel the burden and guilt associated with sin. Upon feeling that burden and those overwhelming depths, we

too must turn to God and Him alone for forgiveness. The psalmist approached God’s throne through prayer—“Lord hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications” (v. 2). The word *supplication* “has the meaning of favor, mercy (Josh. 11:20; Ezra 9:8); also prayer, i.e., a cry for mercy (I Kings 8:28, etc. . . .) . . . [I]n the New Testament, . . . [*deesis*] is the asking of favor in some special necessity” (Unger 1051).

One cannot help but see illustrative material in so many Bible accounts. Was not Joseph, the son of Jacob, in the depths both literally and metaphorically when thrown into the pit and then into the prison (Gen. 37, 39-40)? The three Hebrew youths, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, were literally overwhelmed in the depths of the fiery furnace of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 3:19-25). Daniel, the old prophet, when thrown into the den of lions (6:16ff), would undoubtedly be considered to be in great depths of peril. Jonah, cast into the Mediterranean Sea and swallowed by the great fish, vividly conveys and exemplifies to us the dire circumstances of which one may suffer (Jonah 1:15-2:10). Jonah’s prayer from the belly of the fish has such meaning, especially when coupled with Psalm 130:

I cried out to the LORD because of my affliction,
And He answered me.

Out of the belly of Sheol I cried,
And you heard my voice.
For you cast me into the deep,
Into the heart of the seas,
And the floods surrounded me;

.....
The earth with its bars closed behind me forever;

.....
When my soul fainted within me,
I remembered the LORD;
And my prayer went up to You,
Into Your holy temple. (Jonah 2:2-3, 6, 7)

These ones help us illustrate the calamitous conditions from which one may require God’s merciful deliverance. Some suffered from no fault of their own; others precipitated their punishments by their own sin. The psalmist, it seems from our text, brought about

the circumstances for which he is now seeking God's deliverance. The nation of Israel also suffered for its own sin (vv. 7-8).

The Demand of a Forgiving Sovereign (vv. 3-4)

"If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, That You may be feared" (vv. 3-4). These verses beautifully cause us to understand that God's forgiveness is absolutely essential. Let not the reader think that God overlooks sins or considers them unworthy of note. No indeed! No sin has been committed outside of the knowledge of the Omniscient One. David wrote, "For there is not a word on my tongue, But behold, O LORD, You know it altogether" (Psalm 139:4). ". . . You understand my thought afar off" (139:2). The writer of Hebrews revealed to us, "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (4:13). What does it mean, then, to "mark iniquities" (v. 3)?

The idea is, If God should thus look with a scrutinizing eye; if he should try to see all that he could see; if he should suffer nothing to escape his observation; if he should deal with us exactly as we are; if he should overlook nothing, forgive nothing, we could have no hope. . . . [T]his implies . . . that God had the power of bringing that to light if he choose to do it, so that the guilty man would be entirely overwhelmed; . . . that he who urged the prayer rested his only hope on the fact that God would not mark iniquity; would not develop what was in him; would not judge him by what he saw in his heart; but would deal with him otherwise, and show him mercy and compassion. Every man must feel that if God should "mark iniquity" as it is,—if he should judge us as we are,—we could have no hope. It is only on the ground that we may be forgiven, that we can hope to come before him. (Barnes 259)

Additionally, God's omnipotence is alluded to here, for, says the writer, ". . . O Lord, who could stand?" (v. 3). Robert Milligan reminded his readers of the suffering brought about for sin in his *Reason and Revelation*, and reminds us that when God marks iniquities, none shall stand:

If any of my readers are disposed to build on so uncertain a foundation, then let me refer you to the history of the deluge; to the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the other cities of the plain. Let me refer you to the history of God's chosen people; to their punishment in the wilderness and in Canaan; to their captivity in Assyria and Babylon; to their subjugation by the Romans; to the destruction of their city and their temple; and to their captivity and oppression in all nations for the last eighteen hundred years. Let me remind you of the ruins of Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, Greece, and Rome; and of the woes pronounced by our benevolent Redeemer on those cities in which most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not. "Woe," said he, "unto thee Chorazin; woe unto thee Bethsaida; for if the mighty works which have been done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago . . ." [KJV, Matt. 11:21]. (412)

The same God who is inescapable in our rebellious sin is He who offers forgiveness. The psalmist contrasted our inability to stand with unforgiven sin with that of our pardoning God. "But there is forgiveness with You . . ." (v. 4). Truly, forgiveness is available through God and His Son, Jesus the Christ (Psalm 32:1; 103:12; Isa. 1:18; 38:17; Micah 7:19; Eph. 1:7; Rev. 1:5, et. al.).

The writer used an interesting word to describe a sinner's response to God's forgiveness—*fear*: "That You may be feared." Another word, such as *loved*, may have been inserted by another writer; however the psalmist, by the oversight of God's Spirit, chose this one. The thought conveyed is, "That thou mayest be revered; or, that men may be brought to serve and worship thee—may be brought to a proper reverence for thy name" (Barnes 259).

The idea is, not that pardon produces *fear* or *terror*,—for the very reverse is true,—but that God, by forgiving the sinner, brings him to reverence him, to worship him, to serve him:—that is, the sinner is truly reconciled to God, and becomes a sincere worshipper. The offender is so pardoned that he is disposed to worship and honour God. . . . (259)

The Determination of a Patient Supplicant (vv. 5-6)

“I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, And in His word I do hope. My soul waits for the Lord More than those who watch for the morning—Yes, more than those who watch for the morning” (vv. 5-6). The writer has cried out to God in the depths of anguish and guilt. He confessed the seriousness of his condition in sin and also the awesome power of God. Now we see his patience in waiting for God’s response. His wait was not devoid of assurance and confidence, for it was based upon God’s Word. The supplicant believed in the veracity of God’s Word and His faithfulness in keeping His Word. We too, must trust that God will keep His promises to mankind (2 Peter 3:9; Mark 16:16; 1 John 5:13).

Biblical hope is based upon desire and expectation. The apostle Paul indicated the same confidence in the Christian’s hope when he wrote, “For we are saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly *wait* for it with perseverance” (Rom. 8:24-25, emphasis added). “This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil . . .” (Heb. 6:19).

“Waiting” on the Lord is a common theme in the Bible. There is great value in placing our trust in God and upon His manner and time of providing help and strength. Isaiah wrote, “But those who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength . . .” (40:31). Jeremiah added, “The LORD is good to those who wait for Him . . .” (Lam. 3:25). David sang, “My soul, wait silently for God alone, For my expectation is from Him” (Psalm 62:5).

The psalmist gives a parallel illustration, writing of those who watch for the morning. The picture is of those night watchmen who eagerly wait for the light of day.

As the watchman waits for the danger that lurks at night to be ended by the breaking of day, so the psalmist longs for his distress to pass by means of the light of God’s truth being brought to bear upon his circumstances. But his danger is not merely anticipatory like that of the watchman; his danger is real and present. Therefore, his longing for relief is more intense than that of the watchman. (Ash and Miller 411)

The Decree to a Rebellious Society (vv. 7-8)

“O Israel, hope in the LORD; For with the LORD there is mercy, And with Him is abundant redemption. And He shall redeem Israel From all his iniquities” (vv. 7-8). At this point in the psalm, its writer shifts attention from his condition to that of the nation of Israel, God’s people. What is true of the individual can also be true of a nation! The psalmist, suffering because of his sins, confesses his need, extols the loving pardon and mercy of God, and patiently waits on his deliverance. The nation, too, is suffering because of its sin. To His people, God warned:

But if you do not obey Me, and do not observe all these commandments, and if you despise My statutes, or if your soul abhors My judgments, so that you do not perform all My commandments, but break My covenant,

I also will do this to you:

I will even appoint terror over you, wasting disease and fever which shall consume the eyes and cause sorrow of heart.

.....

And after all this, if you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. (Lev. 26:14-16, 18)

God’s redemption is “abundant” (v. 7). “It is ample; it is full; it abounds. It is not limited; it is not exhausted; it cannot be exhausted” (Barnes 260). Spurgeon remarked about this text:

The attribute of mercy, and the fact of redemption, are two most sufficient reasons for hoping in Jehovah; and the fact that there is no mercy or deliverance elsewhere should effectually wean the soul from all idolatry. Are not these deep things of God a grand comfort for those who are crying out of the depths? (603-04)

“The Psalm begins with an earnest cry from the ‘depths;’ it closes with the triumphant hope of complete and eternal deliverance” (Barnes 261). What a blessing it is to have such a treasure in the collection of the Psalms! The Omnipotent and Omniscient God hears our supplications, offers forgiveness, extends mercy, and is abundant in redemption. “If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You . . .” (vv. 3-4).

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Biographical Sketch

Ed Melott and his wife, Kim, were married in 1996 and have been blessed with two children, Hunter and Kameron. After enrolling at the West Virginia School of Preaching in 1999, Ed began preaching every Sunday at the Proctor church of Christ in Proctor, West Virginia. After graduation in 2001, he worked with the congregation in Pike, West Virginia, where he worked for about 2½ years. Since January 2004, he has worked with the Steelton church of Christ in New Martinsville, West Virginia. Ed has also been supported to go on trips to India as a missionary to preach and teach the Word of God. Ed is on the faculty of the West Virginia School of Preaching, where he teaches Bible geography, I Corinthians, and New Testament Church.

WITH A HUMBLE MIND

Psalms 36

Charles J. Aebi

Introduction

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share with you in the study of Psalms in this lectureship. I appreciate the efforts of the elders and others at Hillview in establishing and maintaining the West Virginia School of Preaching and for giving me a part in helping to train young men here to teach and preach the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And my thanks also go to Emanuel Daugherty, Gene West, Denver Cooper, and Andy Robison for their work with everyone to maintain the school. Many saints will be in heaven because you cared enough to support this ministry.

My assigned topic was Enhancing My Prayers and Enriching My Worship with a Humble Mind, using Psalm 36 as the text. I read and reread Psalm 36 carefully and at first failed to see “humble mind” in it, but after studying it more, I could see *the need for humility* reflected in (1) the arrogance of the sinful person who thinks he can conceal his sins from God’s all-seeing eye and (2) in the attitude of the psalmist’s enemies who would trample him underfoot but for the LORD’s intervention. I also see humility in the psalmist’s own descriptions of the greatness of the God to whom he prays.

Psalm 36, attributed to David by its title, is relatively short, consisting of just twelve verses:

An oracle within my heart concerning the transgression of the wicked:

*There is no fear of God before his eyes.
For he flatters himself in his own eyes,
When he finds out his iniquity and when he hates.
The words of his mouth are wickedness and deceit;
He has ceased to be wise and to do good.
He devises wickedness on his bed;
He sets himself in a way that is not good;*

He does not abhor evil.

*Your mercy, O LORD, is in the heavens;
Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds.
Your righteousness is like the great mountains;
Your judgments are a great deep;
O LORD, You preserve man and beast.*

*How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God!
Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of
Your wings.*

*They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house,
And You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures.
For with You is the fountain of life;
In Your light we see light.*

*Oh, continue Your lovingkindness to those who know You,
And Your righteousness to the upright in heart.
Let not the foot of pride come against me
And let not the hand of the wicked drive me away.
There the workers of iniquity have fallen;
They have been cast down and are not able to rise.*

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

The wicked are described in verses 1-4, followed by the psalmist's prayer, in which God is contrasted to the wicked in glowing terms and acknowledged as righteous, faithful, kind, generous, and the provider of all things. The psalmist closes his prayer by asking God to continue His lovingkindness, righteousness, and protection to those who know Him. Delitzsch says that Psalm 36, like 12, 14, 37, and 53, are David's complaints "of the moral corruption of his generation. They are all merely reflections of the character of the time, not of particular occurrences" (2).

Exell (169-70), like Rawlinson (274) and most others, divides Psalm 36 into three sections: (1) Characteristics of a wicked life (vv. 1-4), (2) Attributes of the Lord (vv. 5-9), and (3) Prayer to God (vv.

10-12). I prefer dividing Psalm 36 into two sections, outlined as follows:

- I. Characteristics of the Wicked (vv. 1-4)
- II. Prayer of the Righteous Psalmist (vv. 5-12)
 - A. Attributes of THE LORD as He is addressed in prayer (vv. 5-9)
 - B. Requests of the psalmist as he prays to THE LORD (vv. 10-12)

Characteristics of the Wicked (vv. 1-4)

A quick check of several versions of Psalm 36 will show that there are some textual problems here that result in interpretation issues, but these need not affect the main thrusts of the psalm in the final analysis. Translations differ on in whose heart the ways of sinful persons are being thought of, how those thoughts are conveyed, and what the reaction to that information is, but the message of the psalm is not changed by these differences. Eight versions or translations of verse 1, including those most people use, are as follows, listed in order of date of publication:

- LXX or Septuagint: “The transgressor, that he may sin, says within himself, that there is no fear of God before his eyes. For he has dealt craftily before him, to discover his iniquity and hate it” (vv. 1-2; originally translated c. 150 B.C.).
- KJV: “The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes” (originally published 1611).
- ASV: “The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, There is no fear of God before his eyes” (1901).
- RSV: “Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart; there is no fear of God before his eyes” (1971).
- NKJV: “An oracle within my heart concerning the transgression of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes” (1982 ed.).
- NRSV: “Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in their hearts; there is no fear of God before their eyes” (1989).
- NASB: “Transgression speaks to the ungodly within his

- heart; There is no fear of God before his eyes” (1995 ed.).
- ESV: “Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart; there is no fear of God before his eyes” (2001).

Several other translations could be cited on either side of *my heart* versus *his/your heart*.

If verse 1 is understood as *my heart*, meaning the heart of the psalmist (David, according to the title), as read in the Hebrew text, KJV, 1901 ASV, and NKJV, the meaning depends on who or what is speaking in or to his heart. The KJV and 1901 ASV have the wicked one’s sins telling the psalmist—“Actions speak louder than words”—that the sinner does not fear God, but thinks his sins are hidden from God, who therefore will neither call him to account nor punish him. The NKJV has an oracle—God or someone representing God—revealing to the psalmist that the wicked one sins, does not fear God, and thinks God does not hate his sins.

As the above readings show, some translations of verse 1 (the Septuagint, ESV, RSV, NRSV, and NASB) have *the sinner’s own heart* devising these thoughts and acting accordingly. Five of these eight translations have the sins speaking within the sinner’s heart and three within the author’s heart, but the conclusion drawn from the message is basically the same: the sins he commits show that the sinner does not fear God. The Septuagint indicates that the sinner uses this fact to justify his decision to keep on sinning, though one might infer this from the other versions as well, so the minor translation differences do not greatly impact the outcome. They all suggest the sentiment of Exell on verses 1-4:

The picture of an ungodly man ought to be enough to save others from an imitation of his profane conduct. *A wicked life is characterized by practical atheism.* “There is no fear of God before his eyes.” Wicked men are virtually atheistic. They do not in reality recognise the existence of the Supreme Being, and this is evident from the feeling of their inner nature, from their speech, and from their methods of activity. They are without God in the world. (169)

Because the basic message is clear, this writer thinks Leupold has overstated his case when he says of verse 1, “This psalm has labored under the unusual handicap of having its first verse

translated so ambiguously, at least into English, that no man could have a reasonable conception of what it meant” (292). Leupold offers his own translation of verses 1-4 as:

1. A divine oracle about transgression has been heard in my heart with reference to the wicked:
There is no dread of God before his eyes.
2. For he flatters himself in his own thinking
That his iniquity will not be found out or hated.
3. The words of his mouth are falsehood and deceit;
He has abandoned acting wisely and doing good.
4. He devises falsehood upon his bed;
He sets himself in a way that is not good;
He spurns not evil. (293)

It is true that others feel (to a lesser extent) the problems in verse 1. Over a century ago, J. Glentworth Butler wrote of it, “This is one of the most difficult verses in the whole Book of Psalms. Amid various and doubtful explanations one thing is certain, that the wicked man is here described as one who fears not God, just as the fear of God is elsewhere put for godliness or piety” (263). Anthony Ash, who speculates about how *his heart* could get substituted for *my heart*, or vice versa, by copyists, says about it:

This text, especially the last part, is ambiguous enough that any translation must be tentative. As rendered here [*his heart* in the RSV, which Ash is using], we learn that the ‘inspiration’ of the inner evil has warped the wicked man’s view of God. Not only is God not feared, but he is believed to be either unconcerned about *iniquity* or impotent to deal with it” (133).

Leupold criticizes the RSV rendering of *his heart*, saying:

Now textual emendations should not be resorted to lightly in order to avoid difficulties. Nor must this one be made. The genitive may be regarded as an objective genitive: “a divine oracle about transgression.” . . . What did this divine disclosure reveal? “There is no dread of God before his eyes.” The word for “dread” is *páchadh*, which can mean fear of God in the wholesome sense, but here more likely refers to restraining dread of the power of God that could serve to check the impulses of wickedness. The wicked man

has completely lost that wholesome check. (294)

On verse 4, Leupold notes that the wicked man “does not drift into evil ways; he follows them by design” (294). Jamieson, Faucett, and Brown say on verse 1 that “[t]he general sense of this difficult verse is ‘that the wicked have no fear of God,’” and on verses 2-4, “The climax is that he deliberately adopts and patronizes evil” (420).

Eddie Cloer titles Psalm 36 “Good or Evil: Which?” and discusses as his first two points “The Choice of Sin” and “The Choice of God” (490, 492). My observation is that in the translations above there are two scenarios when looking at the wrong choices a sinner makes, one in the heart of the sinner and the other in the heart of the psalmist as he thinks about the sinner’s choices. In his heart, the psalmist sees the sinner’s way of life as denying God, as thinking God does not see or know about sinful deeds or does not care and will not punish the sinner for them. The sinner’s evil deeds tell the psalmist that the sinner is a practical atheist and has made a sinful way of life his religion. What do his evil deeds tell the sinner? That is the other scenario—that his evil lifestyle speaks to the sinner to convince him that God does not know or does not care about his transgressions. His sinful lifestyle persuades him of its acceptableness, and since God does not immediately punish him for it, he thinks that God is indifferent to it. Thus his way of life justifies itself and becomes his oracle, carrying (to him) something like the weight of prophecy or inspiration with it. Butler comments thus:

The Hebrew word answering to “saith” is not a verb, but a noun, meaning properly *an oracle*—an utterance either from God Himself, or from one supposed to be under special inspiration. It is almost distinctively the word by which the prophetic declarations of God are indicated and is commonly translated, “Thus *saith* the Lord.” In accordance with this usage we have here the sentiment, *Depravity is the sinner’s oracle*. Its impulses have to him an authority potent as the voice of God, or at least, as those oracular responses which are supposed to come from superhuman sources. . . . [T]his explains . . . how it is that a man can sin so fearlessly: he who listens to it loses altogether the sense of God’s presence and the fear of His judgments. (263)

That this is true can be seen by listening to sinners discuss with each

other their views of their sinful lifestyles. If you go among them and listen, you may hear them tell each other what is here being suggested as the voice of the transgressions urging the sinner on. “Everybody is doing it,” “Ten thousand Frenchmen can’t be wrong,” and “It can’t be wrong when it feels so right,” are three rationales I have heard being used to justify sin. My conclusion is that, while sinners may find ways to justify their lifestyles to themselves, sin is still sin, and as Paul said on Mars Hill:

Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead. (Acts 17:30-31)

The wicked need to repent of all their sins, including their arrogance and self-flattery in thinking that their way is better than God’s way, that evil is not to be rejected, and that God does not know or care about their sin and will not bring them into account for it. All who would enrich their worship or even have any meaningful relationship with God must be humble in recognizing God’s goodness and greatness as over against their own badness, weakness, and inadequacy. Sin cannot govern their lives if they are to have fellowship with God.

It is at least in part a lack of humility that causes the sinner to flatter himself that God will not require him to give account for his actions. This is obvious regardless of translation difficulties. This is the sinner’s reasoning, whether in the sinner’s own mind or as observed by the psalmist from the sinner’s actions or revealed to him by the Spirit of God.

This spirit of rebellion against God assures the sinner that he need have no *fear*; *i.e.* he need not dread any consequences of his conduct. This self-deception of the wicked is due to his deliberate blindness toward God: he shuts himself within himself and, by listening to the smooth words of his own oracle, persuades himself that he is immune from ultimate disgrace and dereliction. (M’Caw 473)

Prayer of the Righteous Psalmist (vv. 5-12)

In contrast to the proud, wicked person described in Psalm 36 as set on devising and enjoying evil is the psalmist, who prays to Jehovah and acknowledges the vastness and perfection of His mercy, faithfulness, righteousness, and judgments. As he addresses God in prayer, he sees Him in mercy (translated *lovingkindness* in the ASV and NKJV and *steadfast love* in the ESV) giving His children protection like birds sheltering their young ones under their wings. Jesus used a similar illustration in Matthew 23:37 to refer to His having tried to protect an unwilling Israel at various Old Testament times. The word translated *mercy* or *steadfast love* “is His covenant faithfulness (*chésedh*), which is not only seen everywhere on earth but also towers into the very heavens. Parallel with it is the other attribute of ‘faithfulness,’ God’s absolute dependability” (Leupold 295).

These two attributes of God—lovingkindness and faithfulness—bring before the reader the assurance that God will keep all the promises He has made to those who trust in Him. They tell us that all of God’s actions toward us are full of grace, comfort, and truth. (Cloer 493)

In verse 6, the author’s prayer extolls God’s righteousness as like the highest mountains and His judgments as like the depths of the oceans. All of God’s attributes “are set forth, by the figures used, as unbounded” (Jamieson et al. 420); they are unlimited, except as God Himself may choose or may have chosen to limit them, or as they are limited by the nature or character of God (for example, “[I]t is impossible for God to lie . . .” [Heb. 6:18] because truth is an indelible part of His nature).

Psalm 36 is not alone in its contrasts of evil and good people; Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown (406) classify Psalm 36 as among thirty-two psalms that they list that are didactic contrasts of good and bad men. While evil is limited in its ability to avoid the consequences of evil deeds, God’s lovingkindness, righteousness, and faithfulness are limited only by God’s own nature and choosing.

The wicked man does not know God as does David, who lists some of the attributes of THE LORD as He addresses Him in prayer (vv. 5-9) following his discussion of the motivations of the wicked. The psalmist sees God as having the fountain of life and being the

source of light to those who know Him, to the upright in heart, and prays that God's blessings will continue on them. Those who know God trust Him for protection from evil. God's people "are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, And You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures" (v. 8). With their LORD as the fountain of life—and He is the source of light both physical and spiritual—they need not flounder in darkness of any kind. "The **fountain of life** is a source for all that refreshes and sustains life. . . To **see light** is an idiom for 'experience life'" (Collins 982). Cloer comments on verse 9:

Those who drink of the fountain of life will have perpetual life. God is the source of life and whoever partakes of Him has real life in this world and eternal life in the world to come.

Likewise, God is described as light that begets light: **In Your light we see light**. Those who come to Him will have light, for they will be able to truly see. Those who do not come to Him live in continual darkness. As the sun provides light for our physical eyes, God provides light for our spiritual eyes. "Light" means life and understanding. (494)

Thus ends that part of David's prayer in which he acknowledges God's gracious attributes. He goes on to make a personal request for himself and others who know God. Some would suggest that only verses 10-12 are the psalmist's prayer, but it is evident that he begins to speak to God in verse 5 and addresses Him in pronouns and as *God* or *LORD* more than once in every verse of 5-9. When we speak directly to God, we call it *prayer*. In his prayer, the author has several times acknowledged God's blessings of life, light, protection, and providence; now, he prays for God to continue his lovingkindness to the upright. For himself, he prays protection from enemies who might try to destroy him or drive him away from God. It is usually agreed that the "foot of pride" (v. 11) refers to one who would try to conquer him in battle.

He asks that he might be delivered from the wicked man's oppression and be spared from having a proud victor's foot placed on his neck as one who has been vanquished. Further he prays, **And let not the hand of the wicked drive me away**. He does not want "the hand of the wicked" man to be

permitted to drive him from God, truth, and righteousness. He desires, as all righteous people should, to be free from the wicked man's fellowship, fruits, and influence. (Cloer 495)

This prayer does not get nearly as sharp against his enemies as David does in such requests as Psalms 69 and 109. Nevertheless, either by faith or by revelation, he sees by the end of his prayer that God has answered his prayer and his enemies have fallen and are unable to rise.

Enriching My Worship with a Humble Mind

At the outset, I raised the question of the connection of how my topic, *Enriching My Worship with a Humble Mind*, was supported by my assigned text, Psalm 36. I now see that the text supports the topic in at least three ways, two of them negative, showing how a lack of humility adversely affects one's spiritual life, including his worship. It is easy to see that the sinner follows a train of thought that leads him further and further into evil and that he gets more and more arrogant as he goes along his sinful route. He gets to the point where he tells himself that God does not know what he is doing and cannot find out what he is planning or what he has done—and that God either cannot do anything to stop him or does not care what he does. That “. . . [h]e has ceased to be wise and do good” (v. 3) implies that he once knew and did God's will, and that “[h]e devises wickedness on his bed; he sets himself in a way that is not good . . .” (v. 4) means that he did not just slip into evildoing, but planned it in advance. “He does not drift into evil ways; he follows them by design” (Leupold 294). “He has had opportunities to see the value of doing good, but he has chosen the way of evil instead” (Cloer 492). Rejecting God's way is rejecting God. Having rejected God, “he flatters himself in his own eyes . . .” (v. 2), his pride separating him from God, and becomes a practical atheist, thinking and living as though God does not really exist. He does not come to God with a humble mind, so he does not allow God a part in his life. Along with William Ernest Henley, he says, “I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.” Whether he goes all the way with Henley and embraces evolution as his explanation for the existence of the universe or not, he has separated himself from God. It takes a humble mind to allow God to direct your path or even to

acknowledge the reality of God as the Maker, Sustainer, and Director of life. Atheists, whether practical or theoretical, are not humble; there is no fear or respect of God before their eyes (v.1); they do not “walk humbly with [their] God” (Micah 6:8).

Another example of the need for a humble mind is seen in the attitude of the psalmist’s enemies, who would have brought “the foot of pride” against him and have driven him away (v. 11). One cannot help thinking of David’s enemies, including Saul (1 Sam. 21-26), who tried in many ways to destroy David. Saul was humble before and after he first became king, but he allowed jealousy of David’s blessings by God and pride of power to motivate him against David, who tried only to do him good. As it turned out in the history of Israel, David’s enemies were unable to prevent him from becoming the greatest of the kings of the united kingdom of Israel and a forerunner and type of the Messiah.

A third factor in Psalm 36 that shows the need for humility is the attitude of the psalmist in acknowledging the great attributes of God as he prays to Him after listening to the “oracle” (v. 1) in his heart about the transgression of the wicked. He honors God for His mercy, or steadfast love, or lovingkindness (*chésedh*), which, like His faithfulness, His righteousness, His judgments, and His abundant provision of life and light and delights, is unlimited. To realize that Jehovah is God—*is real*—is to come to grips with one’s own limitations and be forced to recognize one’s littleness and be humble. After all, if God *is really God*, what can we do but honor and worship Him? It is irrational to acknowledge that Jehovah is the God who created and gave life to every living being and then to act and speak in ways that show we are not humble before Him.

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Biographical Sketch

Charles J. Aebi is a native of southwestern Pennsylvania. He was raised with a denominational background but 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 as minister for churches in Ohio, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Texas and has preached and held workshops and preached Gospel meetings in several states and foreign countries.

He has served as an elder for several years each in three congregations. He currently serves as a minister and an elder for the Barlow-Vincent church of Christ in Vincent, Ohio, which he helped to start in February 2003. The congregation built a new meetinghouse in 2006, is building a bible classroom building, and now has attendance of about 120. He taught Bible for thirty-four years at Ohio Valley College (now University), serving fifteen years as academic dean and vice president and six years as chairman of the Bible Department. He retired from the college in 1998 and taught at the West Virginia School of Preaching from 1999-2014. He has authored eight books and has written chapters in several others. He writes for the *West Virginia Christian*, the *Gospel Advocate*, and some other brotherhood papers.

Charles and his wife, Imogene, have four children—Ruth, Joy, Mark, and Mary—and twelve grandchildren and five great-grandsons. All of the children, grandchildren, and their spouses are faithful Christians. All of the men in the family preach; all of the men and women teach Bible classes. All of the grandchildren have graduated from Christian colleges, and eight are married.

GOD'S WONDERFUL SALVATION

Psalm 106

Wade Webster

The 106th Psalm records man's sin and God's salvation. As you likely know, diamonds are often displayed on a dark cloth or background. The brilliance of the diamond is best seen with this kind of background. In like manner, the psalmist uses the dark background of man's sin to show the wonderful beauty of God's salvation. As we examine this psalm, we will see the singer's call, the sinner's confession, and the Savior's compassion.

The Singer's Call

"Praise ye the LORD. O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. Who can utter the mighty acts of the LORD? who can shew forth all his praise?" (vv. 1-2). [All Scripture references are from the KJV unless otherwise noted]. Psalm 106 is the first of eleven psalms that are commonly known as Hallelujah Psalms because they begin with the word *hallelujah* or a phrase that means that. "Praise ye the LORD" is the meaning of the word *hallelujah*. The other ten psalms so designated are Psalms 111, 112, 113, 117, 135, 146, 147, 148, 149, and 150. The 106th Psalm begins with a call for worshipers to worship God by praising Him, giving Him thanks, uttering His mighty acts, and showing forth His praise. The worshipper is to worship God because of His goodness, His mercy, and His mighty acts, or power. Truly, God is worthy of praise (Rev. 4:11). The psalm ends in the same way that it began; that is, with another call to worship. In fact, the same four words begin and end the psalm: "Praise ye the LORD" (vv. 1, 48). The psalmist wrote:

Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the heathen, to give thanks unto thy holy name, and to triumph in thy praise.

Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting: and let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the Lord. (vv. 47-48)

Man's response to being saved should be to praise God and to give thanks unto Him. I am reminded of the response of the lame man who was healed by Peter and John. In the third chapter of Acts, we read, "And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God . . ." (3:8-9). In addition to praising God for His goodness, mercy, and power, as encouraged at the start of the psalm, the psalmist now calls for saints to worship God for His holiness (holy name). Worshipers are not only encouraged to praise, but to "triumph" in praise (v. 47). Surely, this speaks of loud praise. It is the joyous praise of those who have been victorious in battle. In another psalm, David declared that God is "greatly to be praised" (145:3; cf. Neh. 9:5). I am not sure that our worship is all that triumphant. We have no difficulty raising our voices at a ballgame, but then we cannot be heard by the person next to us when we are singing in worship. "From everlasting to everlasting" (v. 48) suggests the duration of praise. There never has been a time and there never will be a time when God is not praised. Even in heaven, we will praise God. Those who do not like to worship on earth will be ill-suited for heaven. The fact that the psalmist speaks of "all the people" saying, "Amen," suggests that this was corporate worship.

The Sinner's Confession

"We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly" (v. 6). Several things stand out about this confession. First, the psalmist included himself in the confession. He included himself with the people. He said *we* and not *they* (v. 6). Second, he linked himself with prior generations. He said, "With our fathers." Sometimes, one generation looks back in disdain at prior generations. The psalmist did not do that. He did not think that his generation was better than the generation before him. They had sinned like their fathers. Third, the term *committed* makes clear that the psalmist was not talking about inherited sin. He did not say, "We have inherited iniquity." He said, "We have committed iniquity." By definition, sin is the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4). It is something that we commit. Fourth, the psalmist did not sugarcoat the wrong that had been done. He called it sin, iniquity, and

wickedness. The term *wickedly* especially shows the psalmist's frankness (v. 6).

Within the psalm, the psalmist mentioned a number of specific sins that had been committed. It is hard to give an exact number of sins. However, it seems clear that there were ten or more. Please consider a few of these sins:

Ingratitude

“Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt; they remembered not the multitude of thy mercies; but provoked him at the sea, even at the Red Sea” (v. 7). Please note that the people “remembered not the multitude” of God’s mercies (v. 7). In the thirteenth verse, David said that “they soon forgot” God’s work. Soon forgetting is a sign of ingratitude. Things that we appreciate, we do not soon forget. Not only did they not appreciate what God did for them, they actually despised it. In the twenty-fourth verse, they “despised the pleasant land” that God gave them. Canaan was a land flowing with milk and honey. It was a land with houses they did not build, wells they did not dig, and vineyards that they did not plant. In the twenty-fifth verse, he spoke of them as murmuring “in their tents.” Their murmuring was an outpouring of the ingratitude that filled their hearts. Being unthankful is an awful sin. It is listed as one of the sins for which God gave up the Gentiles. We read, “. . . Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened” (Rom. 1:21). By inspiration, God saw fit to include the phrase “neither were thankful.” Although we may consider ingratitude a small thing, God does not. God has commanded us to be thankful. In the 100th Psalm, we read, “Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name” (100:4). To the saints at Colosse, Paul wrote:

And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (3:15-16)

Impatience

“They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel:” (v. 13). The people did not wait on God. They did not wait on his counsel or direction. They rushed ahead of Him. In the long ago, Solomon wrote, *“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). Man is not able to direct his own steps (Jer. 10:23). A way can seem right to us and lead to death (Prov. 14:12).

Insubordination

“They envied Moses also in the camp, and Aaron the saint of the LORD. The earth opened and swallowed up Dathan, and covered the company of Abiram. And a fire was kindled in their company; the flame burned up the wicked” (vv. 16-18). As you recall, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were envious of the authority that Moses had. They accused Moses of giving this power or authority to himself. They thought that they should have some of this authority. Of course, God was the One who gave Moses this authority. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were insubordinate, and God declared so when He responded from heaven. As you recall, fire fell upon them from heaven and the earth opened up and swallowed them. Later, in the 106th Psalm, another example of insubordination is given. The people failed to destroy the nations as God commanded them to do, and they mingled among them as God commanded them not to do (vv. 34-35).

Idolatry

“They made a calf in Horeb, and worshipped the molten image. Thus they changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass” (vv. 19-20; cf. vv. 28-29). Amazingly, after God showed His power over the gods of Egypt, the children of Israel fashioned a god like unto the gods of the Egyptians. As someone once observed, it took God one night to get them out of Egypt, but over forty years to get Egypt out of them. Later within the 106th Psalm, the psalmist declared:

. . . But were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works.

And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them. Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils,

And shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood.

Thus they were defiled with their own works, and went a whoring with their own inventions. (vv. 35-39)

Not only did the children of Israel adopt and bow down to the gods of their pagan neighbors, they offered their children as sacrifices to them. They shed the innocent blood of their own children for idols that could not speak, hear, move, or do anything else.

Immorality

“Then stood up Phinehas, and executed judgment: and so the plague was stayed. And that was counted unto him for righteousness unto all generations for evermore” (vv. 30-31). If you are familiar with the story of Phinehas, then you know that Phinehas slew an Israelite man that was engaged in immorality with a Midianitish woman (Num. 25). Obviously, there were many other examples of immorality among the Israelites. However, this was one of the most brazen examples. The man entered the tent with this woman in the sight of all Israel. Everyone knew what he was doing.

The psalmist did not set out to give an exhaustive list of Israelite sins. He simply confessed some of the many sins that they and their fathers had committed.

The Savior’s Compassion

It is easy as we study this psalm to focus on man’s sin. Granted, man’s sin was great. However, God’s grace was greater. Man’s sins simply serve as the dark background to show us God’s compassion, mercy, and grace. The psalm opens with God’s mercy. We read, “Praise ye the LORD. O give thanks unto the LORD; for He is good: for His mercy endureth for ever” (v. 1). This chapter emphasizes two characteristics of God’s mercy. First, the duration of God’s

mercy is emphasized. It “endureth for ever.” Within the psalm, David traces man’s sins through several generations. God’s mercy has been with them through all of these years. Otherwise, they would have been consumed. Second, the scope of God’s mercy is emphasized. Twice, the psalmist spoke of the “multitude” of God’s mercies (vv. 7, 45). A multitude of sins required a multitude of mercies.

In the fourth verse, the psalmist mentioned God’s “favor,” or grace. We read, “Remember me, O LORD, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation. . . .” God showed His people unmerited favor. In His mercy, He did not give them the bad things that they deserved. In His grace, He did give them the good things that they did not deserve. His grace was greater than all of their sin.

In the forty-fourth verse, the psalmist recorded that God regarded their affliction and heard their cries. We read:

And He gave them into the hand of the heathen; and they that hated them ruled over them.

Their enemies also oppressed them, and they were brought into subjection under their hand.

Many times did He deliver them; but they provoked Him with their counsel, and were brought low for their iniquity.

Nevertheless He regarded their affliction, when He heard their cry:

And He remembered for them His covenant, and repented according to the multitude of his mercies.

He made them also to be pitied of all those that carried them captives. (vv. 41-46)

Someone has defined compassion as another person’s pain in your heart. Although God allowed His people to suffer the consequences of their actions, His heart remained soft toward them. Their pain was in His heart. Even when they were in captivity, He helped them by causing those who were in positions of power over them to pity them. No doubt, the Bible student is reminded of Joseph, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, Esther, and a host of others who enjoyed the compassion of their captors.

In the 106th psalm, we saw the singer’s call, the sinner’s confession, and the Savior’s compassion. Today, we are still being

called to worship God because of the wonderful salvation that He offers us from our sins.

Biographical Sketch

Wade Webster is a graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching. He also holds B.A. and M.A. degrees in English from Jacksonville State University. He has worked as an adjunct professor for Jacksonville State University and Faulkner University in Alabama.

Presently in full-time mission work to Central America and Mexico, Wade has been in full-time preaching since 1989 and preached for churches in Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi.

Wade and his wife, Jennifer, have been married for twenty-eight years. They have four children: Parker (18), Claire (15), Emma (15), and Sophie (9).

WHEN THE YEAR ENDS

Psalm 65

Rick Kelley

It is a privilege to be back to study the Psalms with you again. Thank you to the lectureship committee and the eldership for having us back and to the Hillview Terrace congregation and the director and faculty of West Virginia School of Preaching for all you do for the kingdom of our Lord.

Our assignment is the 65th Psalm, which is ascribed to David. We will put the psalm before us now in its entirety:

*Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Sion: and unto thee shall the
vow be performed.*

*O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.
Iniquities prevail against me: as for our transgressions, thou shalt
purge them away.*

*Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth, and causeth to approach
unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied
with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple.*

*By terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer us, O God of
our salvation; who art the confidence of all the ends of the earth,
and of them that are afar off upon the sea:*

*Which by his strength setteth fast the mountains; being girded with
power:*

*Which stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and
the tumult of the people.*

*They also that dwell in the uttermost parts are afraid at thy tokens:
thou makest the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice.*

*Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it: thou greatly enrichest it
with the river of God, which is full of water: thou preparest them
corn, when thou hast so provided for it.*

*Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly: thou settlest the
furrows thereof: thou makest it soft with showers: thou blessest the
springing thereof.*

Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop

fatness.

*They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness: and the little hills
rejoice on every side.*

*The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered
over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing.*

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

Background: The Significance of Harvest

My father used to say, “A lot of people are like squirrels. They gather the acorns but never stop to look up and consider from where they come.”

Each fall, the great Mountain State is full of dazzling beauty. The leaves change to create a divine canvas that simply cannot be duplicated by men’s hands. There are dozens of festivals held to celebrate the beauty of the season and the corresponding harvest. How many pause to give thanks to the great God of heaven and earth who makes it so?

Our nation’s founders also felt strongly about acknowledging the majesty and benevolence of God and chose the harvest season to do so. The Thanksgiving holiday was embedded into our culture from the beginning. It is a uniquely American concept. Here is an excerpt from President Washington’s Thanksgiving proclamation in 1789:

It is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits and humbly to implore His protection and favor . . .

And also that we may unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations, and beseech Him to pardon our national and other transgressions.

The founders knew the Bible. They knew the precedent God set for Israel through the observance of feasts. They were designed by God to coincide not only with significant historical events, but also the crop harvests. The 65th Psalm is one of several psalms—and passages within the Psalms—that speak of Israel’s unique connection to God through agriculture.

Jewish Feasts

Like any agrarian people, Israel's existence depended upon good agricultural fortune. Their religious practices also centered around such. How could Israel present grain offerings to the LORD from a land ravaged by blight and disease? How could Israel offer up first fruits when little fruit matured (cf. Joel 1:11; 2:14; Micah 6:15)? And what would become of Temple service when diseased and starving livestock littered the land (Amos 4:6-10)? Thus, the harvest was of profound importance, and famine was a dreaded enemy. It is easy to see why agricultural terms grew into familiar metaphors for spiritual life.

The Jewish feasts revolved around the agricultural year. For those of us in the west, these seasons take some getting used to. We mostly sow in late winter/early spring and harvest during late summer/fall. However, the Jewish New Year corresponds to our spring (April) and marks the first of three harvests:

- (1) *The barley harvest (Pesach)*. During this Jewish month (Nisan), Israel celebrated the Passover, her rescue from Egypt (Exod. 12:3-13). It is also referred to as "the Feast of Harvest" or the "Feast of Unleavened Bread" (23:16; Deut. 16:9, 16; Easton 524).
- (2) *The first fruits of the wheat harvest (Shavuot)*. This is also known as the Feast of Weeks (Exod. 34:22; Deut. 16:16). It falls seven weeks after Passover in the late spring. We know this in the New Testament as Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:1; Easton 533).
- (3) *The feast of in-gathering (Sukkot)*. This is also known as the Feast of Tabernacles, or Booths. It is a celebration both of God's provision for Israel during the forty-year wilderness wandering and the final harvest season of the year (Exod. 23:16; Deut. 16:1; Easton 651).

The Law required that "three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the LORD empty" (Deut. 16:16).

Two seasons of rain ("early and latter," cf. Deut. 11:11; Jer. 5:24; Joel 2:23; Zech. 10:1; James 5:27) were Israel's hope for a

good harvest. The early rain occurred around the time of the final olive harvest and the sowing of the grain (Marcheshvan, which corresponds to our October-November). The latter rain fell just prior to the grain harvest (Nisan, which corresponds to our March-April). If these rains failed, Israel faced drought, famine, and disease (cf. Jer. 14:10-12).

Israel's venture into the land of promise was accompanied with severe warning against the idolatry prevalent therein. For centuries, the land to which God brought Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3; 13:14-18) was inhabited by various Canaanite tribes, most all of whom were worshipers of Baal and Asherah. These were the Canaanite deities of fertility—not only human, but also agricultural. They were thought to bring about either abundance or catastrophe. When understood, while it is no excuse for Israel's idolatry, it provides a proper context for her inclination to beckon other deities in times of distress and for God's injunction to execute judgment against them via Joshua (cf. Deut. 12:1-3).

We are shocked when we learn that Israel has barely escaped the clutches of the Egyptian army when they construct a golden calf to honor another deity (Exod. 32:21-24). But to many of them, the so-called deities that flooded the Nile in Egypt were just as relevant as Yahweh, who parted the waters of the Red Sea before their eyes (16:1-3).

When in Canaan, Israel suffered from the same affliction, especially among her rulers and especially in the north. Many were willing to accept whatever deity would bring about the desired harvest, be it Baal or Yahweh—or both. Some rulers were willing to add the insurance of other deities to the worship of Yahweh, while some trusted in the worship of other deities and threw in the insurance of Yahweh, just in case. Yet others eliminated Yahweh altogether. No king gave such strict adherence to Yahweh as David (cf. 1 Kings 15:5; 1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22).

Ideally, Israel would have heeded the beautiful promises and ominous warnings God gave them through Moses:

Therefore shall ye keep all the commandments which I command you this day, that ye may be strong, and go in and possess the land, whither ye go to possess it; And that ye may prolong your days in the land, which the LORD sware unto

your fathers to give unto them and to their seed, a land that floweth with milk and honey. For the land, whither thou goest in to possess it, is not as the land of Egypt, from whence ye came out, where thou sowedst thy seed, and wateredst it with thy foot, as a garden of herbs: But the land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven: A land which the LORD thy God careth for: the eyes of the LORD thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year.

And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil. And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full. Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; And then the LORD's wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the LORD giveth you.

Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thine house, and upon thy gates: That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, in the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers to give them, as the days of heaven upon the earth.

For if ye shall diligently keep all these commandments which I command you, to do them, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, and to cleave unto him; Then will the LORD drive out all these nations from before you, and ye shall possess greater nations and mightier than

yourselves. 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. There shall no man be able to stand before you: for the LORD your God shall lay the fear of you and the dread of you upon all the land that ye shall tread upon, as he hath said unto you.

Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day: And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known. (Deut. 11:8-28)

Unfortunately, Israel often forgot and did not keep God's Law. Further, in panic and faithlessness, they were often willing to sell themselves to whatever deity they thought would heal their woes. This betrayal of their God led to many self-inflicted wounds (cf. Neh. 1:6; Psalm 106:6).

Nearly half of the 65th Psalm (vv. 9-13) is a recognition of God's providence and relates to the things He provides for the necessary harvest. It is the writer's basis for the praise being offered in the first verse. With that background in mind, we now look to the psalm itself.

A Reaction of Praise (v. 1)

The first verse is probably the most difficult of the whole psalm, but it sets the tone. Whatever is being spoken of here is the result of what is being considered in the rest of the Psalm.

The first phrase in the KJV is, "Praise waiteth for thee, O God . . ." The Hebrew word *dumiyah* is somewhat anomalous and is translated in various ways. For example, the NASB has, "There will be *silence before* You, and praise . . ." (emphasis added), while the ESV has, "Praise is *due* to you, O God . . ." (emphasis added). The ESV footnote here says, "Praise waits for you in silence." A rabbi we consulted wrote: "It [*dumiyah*] means silence. The root of the word is 'dom,' which means 'stoppage'—as in 'the sound stopped'" (Zalmanov).

What is stopped? What is silent? Is the psalmist saying that *he*

is silent? Is he saying that silence is a *form of praise*? Is praise a personification, as the KJV seems to express?

Barnes believed it indicated “the *silence* of the soul—when all is left with God” (167). Delitzsch added that this silence, this “submission or resignation to God which gives up its cause to God” is, in fact, “that which is given to God as praise in Zion” (226).

The psalmist is a worshiper whose heart is clearly in line with God’s. His praise is wound up like a spring in the heart, longing to burst forth. This word seems to reflect the most significant element of worship: the heart. Worship has always involved some physical ritual that answers to the revelation of God, but all worship is first a matter of the heart (cf. Prov. 4:23).

That being so, the heart that is resting in God will come forth in both praise and dedication. The psalmist continued, “and unto thee shall the vow be performed” (v. 1). A right relationship with God demands a right heart coupled with appropriate action. It is possible to carry out worship that is physically compliant yet have those motions rejected due to the condition of the heart (cf. Gen. 4:1-7; Isa. 1:11-15; 29:13; Amos 5:21-23; Matt. 15:8; et al.). “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (Isa. 57:15; cf. Psalm 34:18; 51:17).

In this opening verse, the worshiper (David) is prepared to praise God. He has so arranged his heart and life so as to do so. But his reasons for doing so are contained in the meditations of the remainder of the psalm.

Here are the matters on which the worshiper has meditated and now has reason to give praise to his God:

The Reasons for Praise (vv. 2-13)

The Reception of Prayer (vv. 2-4)

Verse two contains a beautiful laudatory statement about our God, “O thou that hearest prayer.” Indeed, “The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry. The face of the LORD is against them that do evil . . .” (Psalm 34:15-16; cf. 1 Pet. 3:12). There is a sense in which God “heareth not sinners” (John

9:31) and that in our sinful rebellion God “will not hear” (Isa. 59:2). But for those who love Him and seek to do His will, those He regards and answers their requests, to His own great pleasure and to our benefit (cf. 1 John 5:14-15).

There is none other who will hear but God. In the days of Elijah, the pagan prophets slaughtered a bull, begged and pleaded all day, jumped on their altar, cried aloud, even cut themselves and bled for Baal, but “there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded” (1 Kings 18:29). What a shallow, empty existence life is without the knowledge of God, who answers all our prayers according to His perfect will.

Further, though David is Jewish, he leaves off nationalistic sentiment in this statement by adding, “unto thee shall all flesh come” (v. 2) There are many such indications in the Old Testament that God is not just the God of the Jews, but the God of all nations (Psalm 67:2; 72:11, 17; 86:9; Isa. 2:2; 66:18; Jer. 27:7; et al.). If men are to find peace in prayer, it will be through their Creator alone, the Deity of Scripture.

David praises God not only for answering prayer, but also for pardoning sin: “[A]s for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away” (v. 3). God is to be praised, for He does that which no other can do. He has created us for communion with Him, and He hears our prayer. He has His eyes over all men and stands ready to give them comfort as they submit to His will. He will pardon our sins.

What does He want from us to repay Him for our transgressions? Does He want us to come to Him with “burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” (Micah 6:6-7).

Rather, God Himself provided His own lamb to pay for our sins (cf. Gen. 22:8; John 1:29; Rev. 13:8). He requires us to “do justly, . . . love mercy, and . . . walk humbly with [our] God” (Micah 6:8). Today, that involves confessing Jesus Christ as the Son of God (John 8:24; Matt. 10:32-33), repenting of our sins (Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 17:30-31), being immersed in water for the remission of our sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16), and walking humbly in the light of Christ’s example and word (1 John 1:7; Rev. 2:10).

Though we find forgiveness by looking back to the time when God provided His precious Lamb to atone for our sins, David found such by looking forward to the fulfillment of the promise (Heb. 9:15). In Christ, all generations of faithful ones find perfection together (11:39-40).

God is to be praised, for in Him alone do we find One who will hear and answer our prayer, forgive our transgressions, and welcome us into His eternal presence (v. 4).

Reflection of God's Power (vv. 5-8)

We often sing a song based on Revelation 4:10-11:

. . . The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying,
Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: *for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.* (emphasis added)

David praises God as he reflects on God's awesome power and mighty deeds. Not only is He powerful, but also God is trustworthy: "the trust of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest sea . . ." (NASB, v. 5). The staggering mountains are a testimony to His faithfulness and the "immutability of His counsel" (Heb. 6:17; cf. v. 6). He can stir or silence the seas and all those who dwell on earth (v. 7).

The longer we live, the more we are aware of the fickleness of man and the uncertainty of life. Even with the certainties of the cosmos—the profound orderliness of it—there is still chaos and unpredictability in most everything. Men cannot but be awestruck by the God who never changes (cf. v. 8; Mal. 3:6). David even describes the dawn and the sunset shouting for joy. We are reminded of the beautiful words written by Chesterton:

It is possible that God says every morning, "Do it again" to the sun; and every evening, "Do it again" to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we. (108-09)

Regardless of how far we advance in medicine or psychology or economics, we can never really trust men or our circumstances. They can change instantly, without warning, without prior pattern being detected (cf. James 4:13-17).

The only real rock—the real mountain—is God: “Because I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he” (Deut. 32:3-4). The only place in which our trust is never violated is our Creator. He is awesome in all He does, perfect in all His ways, and worthy of all our praise!

Recognition of His Providence (vv. 9-13)

Finally, David contemplated and thus offered praise to His God in recognition of His providential care. The term *visit* (v. 9) is a beautiful word that is used in Scripture to denote to us the condescension of God. It reminds us that while God is certainly above us in majesty and power, He is intimately concerned with us. To visit is not only to be concerned, but also to show concern (cf. James 1:27).

In verses 9-11, David recognized that the rains that flood the wadis of the lowlands, soften the fields, and enrich the valleys flow directly from “the river of God” (v. 9). Nine times in these few verses, David uses the pronoun *Thou*. David ascribes the watery gift from the heavens as being the handiwork of the true God of heaven and earth—and no other.

The crown of Israel’s year were the harvests (v. 11). God tied their faith and religion to His providence. They could not be faithful without a harvest, but they could not have a bountiful harvest without being faithful to Him and to their neighbor (Exod. 23:16; 34:21; Lev. 19:9; 23:10-16; Num. 18:12-13; Deut. 16:13-15; 24:19-21).

If you have ever had your own garden, you have probably watched the leaves begin to wilt while waiting for rain. You can hook up a garden hose and put water to it, but in an extremely dry season, even this is no match for the sun. The plants become stressed and begin to droop, as if in despair. But let a refreshing rain come upon them and they will spring forth again to life. They will stand

tall and reach for the sun. It is as if nature itself looks up in praise and thanksgiving to the true Source of all goodness, and it is most precious to see.

David no doubt had witnessed this very thing. The dry growing season of Palestine meant that crops were often pushed to the brink. The failure of either season of rain would signal very poor yield or near-total failure. Along with the crops, all Israel held its breath in anticipation of the Creator's hand to visit their land, filling their hearts with food and gladness (Acts 14:17), allowing them to feast with joy and thanksgiving.

The latter rain (spring) provided for the much-needed barley harvest—the backbone and staple of their diet. The early (fall) rain provided the final drink of moisture to allow the fruits to ripen, and prepared the ground for sowing the next season's grain. When all was right in Israel, there was enough and to spare for the sojourner, the poor, and the livestock for another season. Along with the people, even the land shouted for joy at the goodness of God (vv. 12-13).

Reaping and Prayer

As the year comes to an end, we have an opportunity, like David, to reflect on the handiwork of God throughout the year. The fall harvest is evidence of His power. The beauty of the season is a sweet reminder of His goodness. How can we not be overwhelmed with humility and gratitude?

The mountains are His faithfulness, the sun His brightness and power. The rains are His tender care. The seeds are the mystery of life; the ground is a reminder of the possibility of rebirth. Weeds remind us of the wicked one that must be defended against, while blight and disease remind us of sin that must be eradicated.

We are reminded that when God created Adam, He first employed him as a gardener (Gen. 2:15). A close connection with or even deep and meaningful contemplation of the earth's seasons and cycles connects us more closely to God. We are more likely to recognize our dependence upon Him. Reflecting on God's goodness as the year draws to a close will prompt us to prayer and gratitude at all seasons.

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Biographical Sketch

Rick Kelley was born in Akron, Ohio. He graduated from Lincoln High School in Shinnston, West Virginia, in 1995 and from the West Virginia School of Preaching in 2004.

Rick married the former Samantha Emerson in 1997. The couple has six children: Christian (20), Hannah (17), Noah (14), Emma (13), Evan (11), and Leah (9).

Since November 2000, Rick has preached full-time for the Proctor church of Christ in Proctor, West Virginia (2002-04, while in school); Prestonsburg church of Christ in Prestonsburg, Kentucky (2004-14); and Massillon church of Christ in Massillon, Ohio (2014-present). He has also been a contributing columnist for *Forthright Magazine* (www.forthright.net) since 2014.

In addition to spending time with family, Rick enjoys reading, writing, and playing/writing music.

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

Psalm 105

Steve Higginbotham

Several years ago, my wife went on a mission trip to Ica, Peru. The city of Ica had all but been destroyed by an earthquake. Many homes were still in rubble. Most of the homes had no roofs, not necessarily because of the earthquake, but because if they put a roof on their house, the government would tax them. Since they have only one inch of rainfall per year, many just choose to live with their houses unfinished. One day, when they went out into the city, going door to door with the Gospel, my wife spotted an elderly lady watching them intently as they were getting closer and closer to her house. When they finally arrived at this lady's home, she said, "Thank God you are here! I have been praying for someone to come and teach me about Jesus." Was this a coincidence, or was this God's direct answer to an elderly woman's prayer?

After several years into my first local work, my wife and I decided that it was time to relocate. We had heard of a church in Tennessee that was looking for a preacher, so we contacted them and expressed our interest. Eventually, we visited the congregation, met with the elders, and met with and preached for the congregation, and it seemed like a perfect fit. We were eager to begin a new work, but we were also cautious. For several months, my wife and I prayed about this move, asking the Lord to open doors to make this move work. But we also prayed that if it was not His will, that He would shut the doors. Eventually, the church offered us the job. They informed me that they promised to let one young man preach for them, but their decision was already made, and as soon as he preached, they would begin making plans for our move. We were ecstatic, and we waited for their phone call. A week passed. Two weeks passed. Three weeks passed, and we heard nothing. While we were waiting, we had already begun boxing up our belongings, getting ready for the move. Since we had not heard back from them, I decided to call them. The elder who answered the phone sounded rather sheepish and was very apologetic as he told me they had hired

the other young man. Their delay in notifying us was due to embarrassment for going back on their word. While we were disappointed, we were not devastated, because of our prayers. We were convinced that if it was right, it would happen, and if it was not, God would close the door. Within two days of this conversation, we learned, through an unsolicited source, of another church that was looking for a preacher, the congregation where we ended up spending the next twenty-one years of our lives. As for the other congregation, they had major internal problems and fired their preacher within the first five months of his arrival. Was this all just a coincidence, or was this the providence of God?

And of course, there are your stories, events that forever changed the course of your life. Were those events just the result of “time and chance” (Eccles. 9:11), or were they the purposeful providence of God at work in your life? [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.]

These questions introduce us to the biblical doctrine of Providence. Providence is the belief that God is working in the affairs of men, shaping and molding outcomes for the good of His children. Providence can be defined as “provide-ance.” Providence affirms that God provides for His children.

As is the case with almost any biblical truth, there are those who deny the providence of God. Deism is the belief that God created the world in the beginning but since that time simply stepped back and watched the affairs of men without interfering in the affairs of men.

But if the doctrine of providence were not true, then why would we bother to pray? If God does not affect the outcome of anything in this world today, then prayer would be meaningless, nothing more than a psychological crutch.

But the fact of the matter is that God has promised to be involved in our lives. While the word *providence* is not used in Scripture, the concept of providence is manifest throughout the entirety of the Bible.

Consider the promise of God’s providence in the following Scriptures:

- “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matt. 6:33).

- “Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows” (Matt. 10:29-31).
- “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).
- “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: ‘The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’” (Heb. 13:5-6).

The passage under consideration for this lecture is Psalm 105. Within this chapter, the doctrine of providence is affirmed. The psalmist affirms that God was active in Israel’s history. He affirms His activity in the life of Abraham (vv. 7-15), Joseph (vv. 16-25), and Moses (vv. 26-45) and thus concludes with this command, “Praise the LORD!” (v. 45).

The Nature of God’s Providence

God Is Faithful

We must never forget this truth. There will be times in our lives when we may wonder, “Where’s God?” but rest assured, He has not abandoned us. God is faithful. “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. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it” (1 Thess. 5:23-24). No matter how alone you may feel, you have God’s word that He is looking after you. This should be a great comfort to the believer.

God Is Good

It is one thing for God to promise to provide for us in life, but what He will provide is another matter. Will He provide us with things that are harmful, bad for us? Absolutely not! The reason the biblical doctrine of providence is such good news is that the God who provides is a good God. Jesus said it this way:

Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for

bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him! (Matt. 7:9-11)

God's Providence Is Not Always Pleasant

Just because God is working on your behalf and promises to work for your good does not mean that all pain, sorrow, and difficulty will be removed from your life. Through the years, I have repeatedly heard people express the mistaken notion that their troubles will go away if they buckle down and serve the Lord faithfully.

It is true that Hebrews 11 contains several amazing stories of faith and how God worked through the lives of the faithful to accomplish some great victorious feats. But have we stopped short when reading Hebrews 11? The text also says:

Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. 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. (11:35-38)

Consider the examples provided in Psalm 105. Do you think it was easy for Abraham to wait twenty-five years for the fulfillment of God's promise to give him a son? Do you think it was easy for Joseph to be sold into slavery so that he might eventually have a position of authority in Egypt? Do you think it was easy for Moses to spend forty years as a shepherd after having grown up in the palace before God called him to deliver His people? Of course not! These men experienced difficulties in their lives, challenges to their faith, but God was faithful.

God's Providence Is Sometimes "Late"

Have you ever asked yourself, "Where's God?" Have you ever

felt that God showed up too late or did not show up at all? If so, you have experienced a characteristic of God's providence. God is not bound by our time. He works in His own time, and the sooner we realize that, the more peace we can experience in our lives.

On several occasions, I have heard Jerrie Barber talk about God's "time zone." You see, those of us who live near a time zone must be very careful to acknowledge the difference between EST and CST. If you do not consider these two different time zones, you will either show up early or late. In addition to these time zones, we must give acknowledgement to GST (God's Sovereign Time). If we fail to acknowledge this "time zone," we will frequently think God is "late." When keeping time on GST, God is never late, but if we keep time by EST, we will frequently conclude that God failed us.

To Mary and Martha, God was late with reference to their brother, Lazarus (John 11:21, 32). Both of them accused Jesus of being "late." But was He? True, Lazarus had died, but Jesus' timing was perfect. Lazarus' death proved to be an opportunity to demonstrate the power of God (John 11:4, 42).

Abraham apparently thought that God was late, because he not once, but twice, tried to help God fulfill His promise (Gen. 15:2; 16:2). While we can all sympathize and understand why Abraham must have thought God was late and needed help, God had not forgotten His promise. He was working on GST rather than Abraham's time zone.

Was God late when Joseph was sold into slavery? Can you imagine how easy it would have been for Joseph to have questioned God and ask, "Why, God? Where were You when I needed You?" But God was not late. He knew exactly what He was doing, and He raised up Joseph at just the right time (Gen. 41:37-57).

And then there is your story. You, too, may be asking, "Where are You, God? Why are You allowing these things to happen to me?" When you feel this way, remember that God operates on a different time zone.

Remember This about God's Providence

God Knows All

Consequently, trust Him. After all, He is God. He has been holding the entire universe together since the day He created it. He

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is wise enough, powerful enough, and good enough to keep all of His promises to us.

The book of Job is a book about patience. Often, we say it is a book about the patience of Job, and that is correct, as far as it goes. But I believe it is far more about the patience of God! Have you considered God's perspective in this book? Have you considered how difficult it must have been for God to listen to all the poor theology espoused in this book? Have you considered how difficult it must have been to listen to Job's rash questions and accusations against God's activity? Yes, Job was patient, but God was even more so!

When difficulty enters your life, when your circumstances threaten to overwhelm you, remember: God knows and cares. Find solace in this truth. As difficult as your circumstances may be in the moment, God has promised to work a work in your life that will result in your good!

I have a friend who is a huge fan of Kentucky basketball. He also has high blood pressure. Consequently, he cannot watch the basketball games on television live. He gets too worked up, and that raises his blood pressure to an unhealthy level. So, what he does is he records the game and then busies himself during the game. Eventually, he checks his phone to see what the final score was, and then he watches the game. In so doing, no matter how close the game may have been, no matter how nail-biting the game may have been, he has no worries. Why? Because he knows how the game ends.

This principle should serve us well with reference to God's providence. We will all probably find ourselves in nail-biting circumstances in life. We will face challenges that we just do not know how we are going to deal with. But these challenges are tempered by this truth: While I do not know what is going to happen next in my life, I do know what is going to happen last! This knowledge of the future makes the present bearable.

Ask the Right Question

Much of the discomfort we feel when wondering about the providence of God is because we sometimes ask the wrong questions. How many times have you heard people whose faith has been shaken say, "Where was God when I needed him?"

I would affirm that this question is the wrong question. It is like asking, “How much does an hour weigh?” or, “What color is a mile?” Rather than asking, “Where is God?” we should be asking, “What did God say?”

You see, this is one of the differences between the true God of heaven and the pagan gods created by men. The way that these pagan gods revealed themselves is through their location. If you served a pagan deity, Baal, Dagon, Molech, etc., someone could point to the place where it was located. But God chose to reveal Himself differently. One does not find God by pointing to a location, but by listening to what He said. One can know where a pagan deity is located, but one will never hear him speak. On the contrary, one cannot pinpoint God on a map, but one can know what He has said.

When tragedy strikes, when we are heartbroken by circumstances, when we are afraid and confused about what tomorrow holds, do not ask, “Where’s God?” That is the wrong question. Rather ask, “What has God said?” It is in the answer to this question you will find comfort and peace.

Psalms 105 provides a powerful reminder to us of God’s providence. The same God who worked providentially in the lives of these men is still working today and, yes, even in my life! This truth gives me hope, renews my courage, and gives me the strength to face the uncertain future. While I do not know what will happen next in my life, I need not worry, for I know what will happen last!

Biographical Sketch

Steve Higginbotham is a native of West Virginia. He was born in Weirton, West Virginia, and raised in Chester, West Virginia, by his parents, Frank and Rose Higginbotham. Steve is a 1984 graduate of Freed-Hardeman College. Upon graduation from college, Steve married Kim (Pierce) Higginbotham, and together they have four children. Steve preached five years in Nitro, West Virginia, and twenty-one years in Glasgow, Kentucky, and is currently in his eighth year of work serving as the preaching minister for the Karns church of Christ in Knoxville, Tennessee. Steve has served as one of the editors of *THINK Magazine* and publishes a weekly email devotional entitled *MercEmail* (pronounced “Mercy-Mail”). In addition to preaching at Karns, Steve also serves as one of the

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GOD GIVES VICTORY

Psalm 21

Roger A. Rush

Introduction

Our focus is on Psalm 21. This psalm is attributed to David, and we have no reason to question his authorship. The text of the psalm follows:

*The king shall have joy in Your strength, O LORD;
And in Your salvation how greatly shall he rejoice!
You have given him his heart's desire,
And have not withheld the request of his lips.
Selah*

*For You meet him with the blessings of goodness;
You set a crown of pure gold on his head.
He asked life from You, and You gave it to him—
Length of days forever and ever.
His glory is great in Your salvation;
Honor and majesty You have placed upon him.
For You have made him most blessed forever;
You have made him exceedingly glad with Your presence.
For the king trusts in the LORD,
And through the mercy of the most High he shall not be moved.*

*Your hand will find all Your enemies;
Your right hand will find those who hate You.
You shall make them as a fiery oven in the time of Your anger;
The LORD shall swallow them up in his wrath,
And the fire shall devour them.
Their offspring You shall destroy from the earth,
And their descendants from among the sons of men.
For they intended evil against You;
They devised a plot which they are not able to perform.
Therefore You will make them turn their back;
You will make ready Your arrows on Your strings toward their*

faces.

Be exalted, O LORD, in Your own strength!

We will sing and praise Your power.

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

Adam Clarke offers four possibilities as to the occasion of the psalm and its interpretation. One school of thought is that the psalm was composed to celebrate the victory over Sennacherib. A second interpretation believes that it was made on the occasion of Hezekiah's recovery and subsequent addition of fifteen more years of life. A third interpretation considers it a song of rejoicing composed by David for his victory over the Ammonites resulting in the capture of Rabbah and the placing of the King of Rabbah's crown on David's head. In preparation for victory, David offered the sacrifices and prayers mentioned in Psalm 20. A fourth interpretation argues that the psalm in its entirety refers to the victories of the Messiah (287).

We will approach our study from the premise that Clarke's third interpretation is the primary one, with an acknowledgement that his fourth suggestion of Messianic overtones is also helpful. There are clearly times when we see in Scripture immediate and distant applications and fulfillments. God's promise to raise up a prophet like unto Moses (Deut. 18:15) had an immediate fulfillment in Joshua and a distant and more important fulfillment in Christ.

Charles Spurgeon says in his introduction of Psalm 21:

The title gives us but little information; it is simply, To the chief Musician, a Psalm of David. Probably written by David, sung by David, relating to David, and intended by David to refer in its fullest reach of meaning to David's Lord. It is evidently the fit companion of Psalm Twenty, and is in its proper position next to it. Psalm Twenty anticipates what this regards as realized. If we pray today for a benefit and receive it, we must, ere the sun goes down, praise God for that mercy, or we deserve to be denied the next time. It has been called David's triumphant song, and we may remember it as The Royal Triumphant Ode. "The king" is most

prominent throughout, and we shall read it to true profit if our meditation of him shall be sweet while perusing it. We must crown him with the glory of our salvation; singing of his love, and praising his power. The next psalm will take us to the foot of the cross, this introduces us to the steps of the throne. (351)

Our goal is to understand this psalm in its historical context, and also to see the deeper implications for the coming Messiah.

For the sake of our study, we will utilize the following outline for Psalm 21: verses 1-6 contain an expression of thanksgiving for victory; verses 7-12 offer an assertion of confidence in further victories; and verse 13 provides a concluding prayer in praise of God's glory.

Explanation

To fully appreciate the impact and importance of Psalm 21, it will prove helpful to note the preceding psalm, in which God's help is sought for the success of the king.

May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble;
May the name of the God of Jacob defend you;
May He send you help from the sanctuary,
And strengthen you out of Zion;
May He remember all your offerings,
And accept your burnt sacrifice. Selah

May He grant you according to your heart's desire,
And fulfill all your purpose.
We rejoice in your salvation,
And in the name of our God we will set up our banners!
May the Lord fulfill all your petitions.

Now I know that the Lord saves His anointed;
He will answer him from His holy heaven
With the saving strength of His right hand.

Some trust in chariots, and some in horses;
But we will remember the name of the LORD our God.
They have bowed down and fallen;

But we have risen and stand upright.

Save, LORD!

May the King answer us when we call.

This psalm sought God's protection and help for Israel's king, expressed strong confidence that the requested security and assistance would be forthcoming, and affirmed a commitment to trust in the Lord rather than military might (chariots and horses). God answered that prayer, and the psalm that followed it expressed the gratitude of the people and the king for the victory.

The historical background for both psalms may indeed be the capture of Rabbah, which is recorded in 2 Samuel 12:26-31. Sometime after David's sin with Bathsheba, the murder of Uriah, and the death of the child conceived in the adulterous affair, Joab led the army of Israel against Ammon and the royal city of Rabbah. When it appeared victory was near, Joab summoned King David and the people. David took charge of the final battle, and when victory was achieved, the king of Rabbah's gem-encrusted gold crown was placed on David's head. Ammon was defeated, the Ammonites were enslaved, and David and the people returned to Jerusalem.

When God hears and answers our prayers for help and deliverance, we should immediately respond with expressions of praise and thanksgiving. This is, in fact, precisely what occurs in Psalms 20 and 21.

Exegesis of Psalm 21

Thanksgiving for Victory (vv. 1-6)

"The king shall have joy in Your strength, O LORD; And in Your salvation how greatly shall he rejoice!" (v. 1). The success or failure of a monarch or an individual lies not in lands conquered or possessions obtained, but in a trusting relationship with the Almighty. Real joy and true strength come from God. It is one of the hardest lessons of life to be learned. Men will disappoint us, and wealth will never satisfy. One is fickle and the other fleeting, but God can always be counted on. The psalmist also wrote, "It is better to trust in the LORD Than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the LORD Than to put confidence in princes" (118:8-9).

We would be well served to remember that our first recourse

should always be to look upward to our Father in heaven. Too often, however, God is our last resort when all else fails. Asa sought not the Lord, but turned to his physicians, and he died (2 Chron. 16:12). Hezekiah, on the other hand, immediately prayed to God and was granted fifteen additional years of life (Isa. 38:2, 5).

God can be counted on to respond to the call of His people. Prince or pauper, the Lord is attentive to the prayers of His people (2 Chron. 7:14).

“You have given him his heart’s desire, And have not withheld the request of his lips. Selah” (v. 2). God is always attentive to the prayers of His saints. He had given the king his heart’s desire and responded favorably to his requests. David sought victory for the Lord’s people and had received it with God’s help. For David to succeed, he had to trust in the Lord. The true source of power lies with God and not with armies. God gives the victory, and He had not disappointed the king.

This is not a promise that everything desired will be granted. God knows our needs better than we know them ourselves. The Scriptures do not support a “Prosperity Gospel,” but rather assert the calm assurance that God’s people will not lack the necessities of life (Matt. 6:28-34). David later observed: “I have been young, and now am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his descendants begging bread. He is ever merciful, and lends; And his descendants are blessed” (Psalm 37:25-26).

James asserted that “[e]very 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). God is the source of every blessing. All that we have comes from His bountiful hand!

“For You meet him with the blessings of goodness; You set a crown of pure gold upon his head” (v. 3). God’s blessings came even before the king sought them. God poured His goodness upon him, and set a crown upon his head. This may indeed be an allusion to David’s victory over Ammon and his subsequent coronation with the crown of Rabbah’s king (2 Sam. 12:30). But, beyond that, there is another crown awaiting the righteous of far greater significance. In his final letter to Timothy, Paul asserted:

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good

fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. (4:6-8)

This crown awaits all of God's people. It is not the crown of royalty, but the victor's crown. It is a reminder of the value of every soul, the love of God who longs for us to be in His presence eternally, and of the Savior who makes it possible. We must never forget that we matter to our Maker. He gave His Son to give us life. Jesus gave His life to give us victory!

"He asked life from You, and You gave it to him—Length of days forever and ever" (v. 4). David asked for life, and God granted his request with length of days forever and ever. The historical narrative of King David concludes with the following summation:

So he died in a good old age, full of days and riches and honor; and Solomon his son reigned in his place. Now the acts of King David, first and last, indeed they are written in the book of Samuel the seer, in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the book of Gad the seer, with all his reign and his might, and the events that happened to him, to Israel, and to all the kingdoms of the lands. (1 Chron. 29:28-30)

The promise of "length of days forever and ever" (v. 4) clearly does not refer to David's physical existence in this earthly realm, but may be fulfilled in one of two ways. First, it may be an allusion to his descendants reigning over God's people through Solomon and subsequent successors. Second, and more likely, this passage has clear Messianic overtones that were fulfilled in Jesus, for it was readily apparent that the Messiah would be the Son of David (Matt. 22:42-45). He now reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords, over an eternal kingdom which cannot be shaken or moved (Heb. 12:28).

Regarding the nature and duration of His reign, Paul wrote:

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes

the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For “He has put all things under His feet.” But when He says “all things are put under Him,” it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all. (1 Cor. 15:20-28)

His was to be a spiritual kingdom (John 18:36), and it came in fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy (2:44). The church and kingdom are one and the same (Matt. 16:13-19). Those who anticipate the return of Christ to establish His kingdom upon earth are clinging to a promise already fulfilled and looking for a kingdom unlike any God envisioned for His Son!

“His glory is great in Your salvation; Honor and majesty You have placed upon him” (v. 5). The honor and majesty bestowed upon David were only a type of that which would come upon God’s Son.

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philip. 2:9-11)

There is salvation in no other name than that of Jesus (Acts 4:12). He is King of kings and Lord of lords. There is none beside Him.

“For You have made him most blessed forever; You have made him exceedingly glad with Your presence” (v. 6). God had looked upon David with great favor, and David found great joy in the knowledge that he was indeed a favored one. He was, after all, a man after God’s own heart (1 Sam. 13:15). Yet, like all men, David was flawed. And his life was tragically marred by sin—adultery and murder. But David sought and found forgiveness (2 Sam. 12:13). Forgiven, he still could not escape the consequences of his sin. It haunted him the remainder of his days (Psalm 51). But he learned a

valuable lesson from his transgression.

Shortly before his death, David gave the following charge to Solomon:

I go the way of all the earth; be strong, therefore, and prove yourself a man. And keep the charge of the LORD your God: to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His judgments, and His testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn; that the LORD may fulfill His word which He spoke concerning me, saying, "If your sons take heed to their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul," He said, "you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel." (1 Kings 2:2-4)

Will men ever come to terms with the fact that real joy and lasting peace can come only through faith and obedience to the Father above? Men continue to look for meaning, purpose, peace, and joy in all the wrong places. Jesus offered a formula that works for those who will obey Him and live by His blessed gospel (Matt. 5:1-12).

Confidence of Future Victories (vv. 7-12)

"For the king trusts in the LORD, And through the mercy of the Most High he shall not be moved" (v. 7). As long as David relied on God for help and victory, he would not be disappointed. God gives strength and courage to those who trust in Him. Joshua was promised success in the conquest if only he would follow the Law of God, putting his trust in the Almighty.

No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is

written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go. (Josh. 1:5-9)

Like Joshua and David, Christians must learn to “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). Putting on the whole armor of God, we can take our stand and not be moved (Eph. 6:10-17).

“Your hand will find all Your enemies; Your right hand will find those who hate You” (v. 8). Abraham Lincoln said, “You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time.” God can never be fooled. People live as though their secrets will never be discovered and they will never be called to account for their transgressions, but Moses warned, “. . . be sure your sin will find you out” (Num. 32:23).

The apostle Paul warned the churches of Galatia of the impending judgement of God and how futile it is to think that we can somehow fool Him. We ultimately reap what we sow (Gal. 6:7-10). God knows not only those who are His (2 Tim. 2:19), but also those who are enemies of the truth.

Judgment awaits the enemies of the Almighty. It is a fearful thing to face the judgment unprepared (2 Cor. 5:10-11). The writer of Hebrews offers a sobering warning to those who willfully turn away from Christ. God’s right hand will inevitably find all who hate Him.

For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. And again, “The LORD will judge His people.” It is a fearful thing to fall into the

hands of the living God. (10:26-31)

Wise men live life with death and judgment always in view (Heb. 9:27-28). No matter what may be achieved in this life, if we fail to prepare for the life to come, we have truly failed, and there will be no second chances!

“You shall make them as a fiery oven in the time of Your anger; The LORD shall swallow them up in His wrath, And the fire shall devour them” (v. 9). God’s judgment upon the unrighteous is depicted as a fiery oven swallowing up and devouring the wicked. It has become fashionable in our postmodern, secular society to deny the judgment of God. It is argued that a loving God would never allow lost men to be condemned to the eternal fires of torment, but the Bible paints a very different picture.

God’s judgment came upon wicked humanity in the Flood (Gen. 6-9). It came upon Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19). God’s judgment was depicted by Jesus (Matt. 25:31-46), declared by Paul (2 Thess. 1:7-10), and described by John (Rev. 20:11-15). It is folly to think that any will escape that judgment.

There are those who argue that the loving nature of God makes judgment and eternal damnation indefensible (such as Rob Bell in his book *Love Wins*), but that argument stands in opposition to the clear teaching of God’s Word.

No right-thinking person would dare to deny the love of God. “God is love . . .” (1 John 4:16). But even though God’s love is immeasurable, it cannot protect us from our own bad choices. Every parent understands this. In spite of the enormity of our love for our children, that love does not protect them from the consequences of their bad choices. The same principle holds true in relationship to God. He has made provisions for the salvation of every man, but not everyone will take advantage of His offer. The problem is not with God’s love for man, but man’s love for God. He is not only loving, but also just, and in judgment will simply honor our choices.

“Their offspring You shall destroy from the earth, And their descendants from among the sons of men” (v. 10). When men rebel against God, not only do they face the wrath of the Almighty, but also their rebellion will plague generations to follow. Hosea warned Israel: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest

for Me; Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children” (4:6).

Their willful ignorance of God’s Word would have a negative impact on their children and grandchildren. Ignorance cannot justify rebellion against God, nor excuse such rebellion at the Judgment. The apostle Peter wrote:

But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 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.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (2 Peter 3:8-13)

Paul acknowledged in his letter to the Romans that none of us lives to himself, or dies to himself (14:7). The choices we make not only affect us, but also they impact those closest to us. It is never accurate to defend a bad choice with the excuse, “I am hurting only myself.” Our actions impact the people around us for good or evil, depending on the nature of that action. We should make no important decision without reflection on how it will affect the people around us!

“For they intended evil against You; They devised a plot which they are not able to perform” (v. 11). The enemies of the Lord never cease to devise evil plots against Him, but all are doomed to ultimate failure. Many times in sacred history, it appeared that Satan had thwarted God’s plan, but success was never achieved. God’s will always wins out!

God’s power is such that no force can oppose Him. Many affirmations of that power are found in Scripture. Note these

observations from the Sacred Text:

- Abraham and Sarah—“Is anything too hard for the LORD?” (Gen. 18:14).
- In the wilderness to Moses—“Has the LORD’s arm been shortened?” (“Is the LORD’s power limited?” [NASB, NRSV]) (Num. 11:23).
- Job—“I know that you can do all things . . .” (ESV, Job 42:2).
- Jeremiah—“There is nothing too hard for You” (Jer. 32:17).
- Jesus and rich men entering the kingdom—“With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matt. 19:26; cf. Luke 18:27).
- Mary and the birth of Jesus—“For with God nothing will be impossible” (Luke 1:37).
- Jesus in the Garden—“Abba, Father, all things are possible for You” (Mark 14:36).

We can be confident as Christians that we are on the right side of history and that our future is secure in Him.

“Therefore You will make them turn their back; You will make ready Your arrows on Your string toward their faces” (v. 12). God is ever ready to step in on behalf of His people. This is demonstrated over and over again in the sacred narrative as He dealt with Israel. God will ultimately defeat all enemies of righteousness, and His saints will be vindicated.

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)

Prayer and Praise of God's Glory (v. 13)

“Be exalted, O LORD, in Your own strength! We will sing and praise Your power” (v. 13). Spurgeon noted, “A sweet concluding verse. Our hearts shall join in it. It is always right to praise the Lord when we call to remembrance his goodness to his Son, and the overthrow of His foes” (356).

To see the glory and power of God in the person of His Son, the fulfilment of His prophecies, and the establishment of His eternal kingdom should fill our hearts with joy and flow forth in songs of praise.

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (Col. 3:12-17)

Like David and the nation of Israel, we should thank God daily for the blessings He bestows and sing praises to His glorious name!

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Biographical Sketch

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GIVING FAITHFULNESS TO GOD

Psalm 141

Paolo Di Luca

Psalm 141 is a powerful prayer of King David, a true man of prayer. It is a prayer for sanctification and protection, crafted as a wisdom psalm where David asks the Lord for guidance and deliverance as he commits himself to seek a life of progressive, total faithfulness to God, aiming to live and act without any compromise to His glory.

This is a prayer that originates in one of the darkest moments of David's life. It is suggested that David writes this psalm either while he is a fugitive from Saul or when his son Absalom tries to kill him in the attempt to usurp the throne. In both situations, David is living in a situation of great peril that is leaving almost no hope for himself or for his followers and friends who are scattered and discouraged. He is under great pressure and many temptations are confronting him, both internal (vv. 3-4) and external (vv. 9-10). It is interesting to notice that almost every verse of Psalm 141 contains expressions of petition and urgency. According to Charles H. Spurgeon, David is

under suspicion, half afraid to speak lest he should speak unadvisedly while trying to clear himself; David slandered and beset by enemies; David censured even by saints, and taking it kindly; David deploring the condition of the godly party of whom he was the acknowledged head; David waiting upon God with confident expectation. The Psalm is one of a group of four, and it bears a striking likeness to the other three. Its meaning lies so deep as to be in places exceedingly obscure, yet even upon its surface it has dust of gold. In its commencement the Psalm is lighted up with the evening glow as the incense rises to heaven; then comes a night of language whose meaning we cannot see; and this gives place to morning light in which our eyes are unto the Lord. (307)

This is a prayer that deals with the conduct of a godly man in times

of trouble. David's deep desire is to remain faithful to God, but, as he analyzes his present condition, he recognizes his need of divine help in five different aspects. So, he prays the Lord for (1) *quick intervention of help* (vv. 1-2), (2) *wisdom* (vv. 3-4), (3) *good friends* (v. 5), (4) *vindication* (vv. 6-7), and (5) *protection* (vv. 8-10).

In Order to Be Faithful to God, David Asks the Lord for Help (vv. 1-2)

In his distress, David lifts up his voice and his heart to God in prayer. How often have we been in the same predicament and realized that prayer is our best resource because it never fails us! For how painful the situation can be, our prayer is the cry that the Lord hears and answers. David is well aware that he cannot go to anybody else for help and that he cannot do anything else other than totally trust in the Lord's intervention.

“LORD, I cry out to You; Make haste to me! Give ear to my voice when I cry out to You” (v. 1). [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] With great intensity, insistence, and eagerness, the supplication is elevated because of great agony. David asks the Lord to intervene quickly with His presence: “Make haste to me!” His case is urgent, and he pleads that urgency. Does David forget the fact that God is everywhere when he makes that supplication? If God is everywhere, how can David ask Him to hasten to him? Some might think that it is a matter of a lack of faith or of understanding, but it is not! The psalmist's intent and hope is for God to respond quickly to him since he feels troubled, and he knows that the ultimate purpose of prayer is not to get his personal will done, but for God's will to be done in his life. When he asks God to hear him, it is not because he believes that He is ignoring him and He is paying attention only when David is praying. It is about the spiritual realization that he is communicating with the God who knows all things and cares about his life. Therefore, this opening request is not to make God aware of his difficult situation of need or to catch His attention, but it is for David's own benefit and reassurance: he knows that God is willing to answer him, intervening quickly with the needed guidance and comfort.

David's confidence is proven in the formulation of verse 2, where he expresses his desire to worship the Lord: “Let my prayer be set

before You as incense, The lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.”

When God explained to the priests how He was to be worshipped by the Israelites, He commanded the daily offering of animal sacrifices as a reminder of God’s willingness to forgive sins. The incense was offered by the priests with their specific prayer requests to God (cf. Num. 28:1-8). These rituals were performed regularly, diligently, and meaningfully. David aims for his own prayer life to be as diligent, regular, and meaningful as those prescribed rituals, because prayer is more than just mere petition. Prayer is the outpouring of the soul toward God, and David really wants his life to be totally committed in serving God.

Therefore, the beginning of giving faithfulness to God is developing the proper communication with Him!

In Order to Be Faithful to God, David Asks the Lord for Wisdom (vv. 3-4)

Often, the best things we do in life happen when we are able to be quiet and to listen. In the business world, it is affirmed that 90% of the selling of a product is not due to the ability of the seller to present it, but it is because of his ability to listen to the customer. In other words, success can happen when we are quiet and we are listening to other people. Whenever we are suffering and we are feeling betrayed, listening to other people is not something we consider beneficial. Most of the time, evil actions are preceded by the evil thoughts of our wounded minds.

Lucian of Samosata, a satirist and rhetorician (who wrote in the Greek language during the Second Sophistic) penned this consideration: “Let a seal on words not to be spoken lie on the tongue. A careful watch over words is better than one over wealth” (qtd. in Williams xxi).

David knows this very well, and so he pleads: “Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips. Do not incline my heart to any evil thing, To practice wicked works With men who work iniquity; And do not let me eat of their delicacies” (vv. 3-4). It would be easy and logical to speak out whatever the angry mouth would like to say just to hurt the enemy and his supporters. However, David wants to remain faithful to God, and he

asks for the necessary help. Spurgeon points out:

That mouth had been used in prayer, it would be a pity it should ever be defiled with untruth, or pride, or wrath; yet so it will become unless carefully watched, for these intruders are ever lurking about the door. David feels that with all his own watchfulness he may be surprised into sin, and so he begs the Lord himself to keep him. When Jehovah sets the watch the city is well guarded: when the Lord becomes the guard of our mouth the whole man is well garrisoned. (308)

There is a common saying that goes: “Some people have something to say, and other people just need to say something.” Jesus preaches that “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45). David could just open his mouth and let his words come out as his human feelings would stimulate, but he wants to be one of those people who have something relevant to say, even in the most difficult moments. His heart is searching God and His will (cf. 1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22). David follows the counsel that James is inspired to give to all Christians: “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” (1:5).

In verse 3, David asks for God’s wisdom in his words, and in verse 4 he asks for God’s wisdom in his heart and in his actions. Being falsely accused of being evil brings the temptation to associate with those who are evil. After all, people already consider him wrong and wicked, well-deserving to be banned and run away. So, why not unite with them and just do as he is accused? The answer for David resides in his desire to give faithfulness to God, no matter what the cost!

His sincere and heartfelt request is not to be permitted to do anything that will be regarded as identifying with them and not to act on their principles. It is hard to resist the temptation of participating in the way of evil people who seem to enjoy the fullness of comfort and luxury! Good people are often tempted to do that and desire to enjoy what the rich enjoy, to live in the luxury and ease of the wicked ones, to be blinded by the circles of splendor and

fashion, to live practices inconsistent with a godly life, to indulge in sins that ruin both their spiritual and human character. David wants to continue to give faithfulness to God, but to do so, he needs His help and something else.

In Order to Be Faithful to God, David Asks the Lord for Good Friends (v. 5)

When trouble comes and when times are hard, we discover that good friends are few in number, valuable beyond words, and essential to a consistent walk of faithfulness with God. The fact that friends influence us is a well-known reality. It is a common experience to all! So, it is not surprising that in this situation David asks God: “Let the righteous strike me; It shall be a kindness. And let him rebuke me; It shall be as excellent oil; Let my head not refuse it. For still my prayer is against the deeds of the wicked” (v. 5). The psalmist values the help of the one whose life is habitually consistent with his profession of faith and who acts under the influence of proper, godly motives, even if it has to be a correction or a rebuke. Proverbs 27:6 affirms that “[f]aithful are the wounds of a friend. . . .”

Richard Baxter, English Puritan church leader, poet, hymn writer, theologian, and controversialist of the 1600s, writes:

If the righteous smite us by reproofs, it must be taken as a kindness, and as a precious balsam, which doth not break our head, but heal us. (Psalm cxli. 5.) Not that we are bound to belie ourselves in compliance with every man’s censorious humour that will accuse us; but we must be readier to censure ourselves than others, and readier to confess a fault than to expect a confession from others whom we reprove. Sincerity and serious repentance will be honourable in that person who is most careful to avoid sin, and most ready penitently to confess it when he hath been overcome, and truly thankful to those that call him to repentance; as being more desirous that God, and his laws and religion, should have the glory of their holiness, than that he himself should have the undue glory of innocency, and escape the deserved shame of his sin. (qtd. in Bacon 478)

David acknowledges that God could use righteous men to

answer his prayer, and he is willing to accept their correction. Here we find a great lesson for believers of today. In fact, most often, when things are going wrong in the life of Christians, there is the inclination to separate from other Christians and to isolate with the wrong assumption that there are things that we need to fix ourselves before we re-congregate with the Lord's church. How few are the ones that come back to the fold! Satan powerfully uses the temptation of self-reliance in solving the spiritual problems that we are facing. David, instead, knows well that the company and the fellowship of the righteous ones will help him to walk in the proper, godly way and correct any attitude or thought that might be against God's will. In the moment of weakness, they will support and encourage! In the moment of confusion, they will indicate the direction! In the moment of pain, they will comfort!

Spurgeon notes about David:

He prefers the bitters of gracious company to the dainties of the ungodly. He would rather be smitten by the righteous than feasted by the wicked. He gives a permit to faithful admonition, he even invites it—"let the righteous smite me." When the ungodly smile upon us their flattery is cruel; when the righteous smite us their faithfulness is kind. Sometimes godly men rap hard; they do not merely hint at evil, but hammer at it; and even then we are to receive the blows in love, and be thankful to the hand which smites so heavily. Fools resent reproof; wise men endeavor to profit by it. (309)

In Order to Be Faithful to God, David Asks the Lord for Vindication (vv. 6-7)

When we allow our feelings and our human thinking to determine the attitude and the actions of our life instead of giving faithfulness to God, we are dooming our future, and the imagery of verse 7 is graphic and frightening. David offers these considerations: "Their judges are overthrown by the sides of the cliff, And they hear my words, for they are sweet. Our bones are scattered at the mouth of the grave, As when one plows and breaks up the earth" (vv. 6-7). The reality is that, ultimately because of their evil thinking and doing, even the leaders of the people do not respect or appreciate the wisdom of God and they are destined to receive punishment. David

is still praying for his enemies, but knows there will come the time when God will judge them and vindicate him. For giving faithfulness to God, the man of God is willing to suffer and pay a heavy price.

David is confident that when God will judge the evil and unfaithful leaders, their followers will recognize the validity of David's words. The scattered bones proclaim the littleness of man. Yet, in his weakness, the man of God turns his eyes to the infinite God and reflects on the boundless and perfect One, the Creator of all. The child of God can always put his trust in the living, heavenly Father in any and all troubling times. Even when one is standing over the grave where the dearest ones lie, where the ruins of any hope are, still, the one who gives faithfulness to God can proclaim: "I believe in God; I trust in God; He will not leave my soul destitute." And that is the greatness of Christian faith. For how desperate might seem the situation, God is still in control and He is still trustable and dependable. For that, David proceeds to the hopeful proclamation of what he is going to continue to do.

In Order to Be Faithful to God, David Asks the Lord for Protection (vv. 8-10)

For how broken David might be, he is still aware of his need to focus his spirituality in the right direction and to keep his commitment to be faithful to God. He affirms: "But my eyes are upon You, O GOD the Lord; In You I take refuge; Do not leave my soul destitute. Keep me from the snares they have laid for me, And from the traps of the workers of iniquity. Let the wicked fall into their own nets, While I escape safely" (vv. 8-10).

Fixing our eyes on Almighty God implies living faithfully in His Word. Differently from Peter, who took his eyes away from Jesus while he was walking on the waters toward the Savior, David has learned not to make that mistake. His willingness to keep his eyes on God is because he has experienced how the heavenly Father is a strong refuge and His protection is effective! David looks upward and keeps his eyes fixed toward the throne of the majestic grace of God. He regards faithfulness more than circumstances, he considers the promises rather than the present situation, and he expects help and protection from God rather than from men. Even if there could

be a strong temptation to do that, he does not shut his eyes in indifference or despair, neither does he turn them toward the other creatures in vain confidence, but he gives his whole attention to God and sees that there is nothing to fear because Jehovah is also his real hope. It is not just a mere hope in the promises, even if it could be enough! David chooses to focus on God because of who He is! In Him, he trusted always, only, confidently, and wholeheartedly.

God's protection is practical and tangible. For how much the suffering and the difficulties can touch our material life, God will not let the soul of His faithful child to be destitute! The real comfort and assurance is that when I am giving faithfulness to God, He returns faithfulness to me: "For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we may boldly say: 'The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?'" (Heb. 13:5-6). "Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand" (Isa. 41:10).

It is evident that enemies are, and will continue, endangering David's life, and that is why he must be kept from their machinations and their plots.

These evil workers sought to catch David in his speech or acts. This was in itself a piece of in-equity, and so of a piece with the rest of their conduct. They were bad themselves, and they wished either to make him like themselves, or to cause him to seem so. If they could not catch the good man in one way, they would try another; snares and gins should be multiplied, for anyhow they were determined to work his ruin. Nobody could preserve David but the Omniscient and Omnipotent One: he also will preserve us. It is hard to keep out of snares which you cannot see, and to escape gins which you cannot discover. Well might the much-hunted Psalmist cry, "Keep me." (Spurgeon 310)

The psalmist understands that God can "turn the table around" and use the snares, the traps, and the nets of David's enemies against them!

Conclusion

Giving faithfulness to God is essential to living properly. It is

the only way in which we will not be compromising with the world and the evildoers in it. Psalm 141 is an encouraging prayer that all people can relate to and can learn from. In fact, the five requests of David to overcome his difficult situation apply so well to our lives. In times of trouble, as we are giving faithfulness to God, let us never forget to ask the Lord for *help, wisdom, good friends, vindication, and protection.*

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Biographical Sketch

Paolo Di Luca was born in Milan, Italy, and raised in Ferrara, Italy; moved to the States in 2007; and received his U.S. citizenship in 2010. He preached for various congregations in Italy from 1983 to 2007. Since June 2007, he has served the Bridge Street church of Christ in New Martinsville, West Virginia, as pulpit minister and since April 2009 as one of her elders. He is an instructor at the West Virginia School of Preaching, where he teaches Romans and Galatians.

Paolo's education and training have come from various courses

of study in Italy and the United States and from working with his father Gilberto (who preached the Gospel for fifty years in Italy) and other missionaries in Italy.

In addition to pulpit preaching and personal evangelism, Paolo has also prepared and recorded radio programs, participated in public debates, directed Bible camps for children and teenagers, worked (in Italy) with campaign groups from the United States, and participated in numerous other evangelical activities. He has been co-editor for various monthly papers, published both on paper and on the Internet, and has maintained two websites.

Paolo 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 a Master's degree in Economic Leadership from Freed-Hardeman University and is now living in Los Angeles, California. Paolo may be contacted at paolo05@gmail.com.

WHEN HELP IS NEEDED

Psalm 54, Psalm 70, and Psalm 123

Van Sprague

General Introduction

Of the psalms under consideration, two are attributed to David, and one is anonymous. Psalms 54 and 70 are found in Book Two of the Psalms, while Psalm 123 is within the fifth book. It is generally acknowledged that the order within the Psalter is not chronological. Still, there is a tendency toward older works being more prevalent earlier in the book and newer works later. With Moses as the earliest known author (Psalm 90) and Psalm 126 appearing to look back at the return from Babylonian captivity, this unique book has connections with writers from about 1400-525 BC (Smith 191).

In examining how we will approach these poems, as both unified and distinct, we must determine how we view the canonicity of the book of Psalms. This will influence the perspective from which we approach the purpose of the writing. If we view the Psalms as an amalgam of songs assembled for no purpose by a disreputable writer, we will see them as antiquated poems. In that regard, they will have no meaningful history and no bearing on our lives. On the other hand, if we see these works as an intentional collection selected by the hand of God and transmitted through His servants, we discover a vivid script. This becomes a book which exposes the hearts of the godly through suffering and success. It is this prospective which reveals the Psalms as a book of vitality and relevance today.

There are volumes referred to in Scripture which have not been preserved for us today. First Kings 4:32 mentions 1005 songs of Solomon. These are certainly not in our Bibles. Understanding why, we simultaneously learn of the importance of the presence of the 150 songs we do have. Henry listed about a dozen writings, with Solomon's psalms, that are only referred to in Scripture and not preserved for us. He concluded that all of them, even "if inspired, had no permanent importance in the context of redemptive revelation as complete books, and mere references or brief

quotations were adequate for scriptural purposes” (408). Following this reasoning, it can be further observed that revelation from God that was canonized is so preserved because it is of permanent importance in the context of redemptive revelation. In other words, “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) [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted].

Being part of the Bible, a necessary characteristic of the Psalms is their inspiration. Otherwise, they cannot be Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16). Unfortunately, the conclusions to which some arrive in attempts to explain how God’s songbook was assembled leave ample room for doubting their authenticity. One example of this flawed thinking is found in Rotherham’s thoughts about that which may have been practiced by those to whom psalms were dictated. He believed an amanuensis would

have liberty as to small details, since it may very well be that, as a confidential servant and a competent penman, he may have paid chief regard to his master’s habits and known wishes, and may occasionally have saved his master from himself—in matters of inadvertence. (12)

To say a man may inadvertently say or write something is to imply he is not speaking or writing as he is being moved by God (2 Peter 1:20-21; 1 Cor. 2:11-13). Even spokesmen and writers on behalf of inspired speakers were, themselves, miraculously guided to write and speak what was revealed (Exod. 4:15-16). Therefore, it could be said that what they presented was “all the words of the LORD which He had spoken . . .” (Jer. 36:4). Because of Tertius’ Spirit-moved sign-off (Rom. 16:12), we can know the inherent characteristics of an assistant’s work in Scripture. When a book was written with God utilizing a secretary on the behalf of the prophet, that writing is still considered to have originated from the prophet and by the authority of God (Rom. 1:1). A crowning mark of the place of the Psalms in Holy Writ is Jesus’ explicit appeal to Psalm 82 as Scripture (John 10:34-35) and His recognition that Psalms referred to Him in Luke 24:44.

Such an understanding logically excludes the thought that this grand tome is the product of over a millennium of editors making

their best attempts at accumulating a good songbook. It also provides satisfying answers to the challenges that arise from the divergence of ages of the songs therein. The seemingly anachronistic placement of many contributions to the book can be understood only as intentional and genuine if they were written and placed by one or more writers with God's aid. Some regard the Psalms as being assembled in stages by Spirit-led men of each period. Scroggie believed "the first book was compiled by Solomon, the second and third books after many years by 'the men of Hezekiah' (Proverbs 25:1; 2 Chronicles 29:30), and the fourth and fifth books later still in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah" (vol. 1, 15). Keil deduced that the book of Psalms "must have proceeded from one man alone, and it cannot have been prepared before the time of Nehemiah, to which the latest songs of the Psalter belong" (467). While we may not prove which view is more accurate, an essential quality of the correct answer is the inspiration of the penman or -men.

When we complete an exegete of the songs of this assignment, may it be said that we have echoed Thirtle's sentiment:

. . . I have treated the various books of the Old Testament as constituting one 'Divine Library'; in other words, I have recognized, as beyond doubt, a substantial uniformity in the language of the Law, the Prophets, and the Holy Writings. Hence I have been content to quote from one and all the books without such qualifications and reserve as have come into vogue during recent years. (*Titles* vi)

Before we approach our specific verses, we will consider the treatment the superscripts should receive. In most English Bibles, these appear above the first verse, hence their name. Many say these headings are probably "not original but reflect early reliable tradition" (Smith 200). With such a stance, any given introduction in the Psalms can provide someone with no more than a vague "It is likely" or "It is unlikely" regarding the probability of the accuracy of the events contained within. Anderson wrote based on the view that the pretexts were not authentic. Though Psalm 54's states it is "a meditation of David," he felt "there is no real need to regard the Psalmist as a king . . . , or the Psalm as a royal prayer" (408). Either these ancient texts are original, or they are not. Any doubt of their

validity leaves us to the mercies of insufferable claims, like Anderson's, with no way of logically refuting them.

Keil, on the other hand, argued that the precursors to each psalm are part of the inspired text. He declared that they are not "vague and uncertain conjectures, but they have proceeded from the authors themselves" (457). Citing 2 Samuel 22:1, he provided evidence of the recognized practice of prefacing songs with the details of the purpose for which they were written. In this case, the same purpose is reiterated for Psalm 18. The verses in Isaiah 38:9 and 2 Samuel 23 are constructed similarly.

A primary objection to the antiquity of the phrases in question is that some seem inconsistent. Thirtle used Habakkuk 3 as a guideline for the separation of the Psalms, noting that the Hebrew text before translators of old would have been "close and compact, the psalms following one another without break or division" (*Titles* 10). As such, there was not a distinction between what we call the superscripts and the psalms themselves. The order in Habakkuk, however, is not questioned. Before the poem, there is a declaration of the human author, "Habakkuk," and what some suppose is a musical term lost to us, the "Shigionoth" (3:1). The prayer is foot marked by an instruction regarding to whom it would go and how it was to be conducted. It concludes, "To the Chief Musician. With my stringed instruments" (3:19). Who has supposed that these sections in Habakkuk are not original to the book? There is no reason for such supposition. Based on this Bible-set standard, Thirtle suggested that, like Habakkuk, the Psalms with inscriptions should often begin with specifications regarding the type of song, the author, and the song's history and end with the instructions regarding how the psalm was to be used (*Titles* 12-13). In most cases, that would move phrases like "To the Chief Musician" from the beginning of one work to the end of the previous one.

When one consistently does this, it resolves what would have been inaccurate or difficult prefixes to the songs. Psalm 88, for instance, no longer appears as though it were written by the sons of Korah and Heman the Ezrahite, because everything before, and including, "To the Chief Musician" fits with the previous song, which begins, "A Psalm of the sons of Korah" (87:1). Also consider how appropriate it would be if Psalm 55 had the subscript which

currently rests at the head of Psalm 56. Then we would see that the song where David sighed, “Oh, that I had wings like a dove!” (55:6) was to be sung to the tune of “The Silent Dove in Distant Lands” (Psalm 56, subheading; Thirtle, *Titles* 15).

Until the preponderance of evidence would suggest otherwise, this writer holds a conclusion similar to what Thirtle expressed when defending the genuineness of the superscripts:

[W]e have trusted the headlines; but with reason. This formula, we repeat, is part of the material; and consequently, it has to be reckoned with. The headlines, as a body, are where they have been from time immemorial; and they submit themselves for sane criticism, not for contemptuous neglect. How can we brush them aside, and then retain as reputable literature the documents with which they are connected? (*Old Testament Problems* 82)

In this light, many psalms have a solid historic event and/or figure from which we may draw context. With the above in mind, we approach each song of our assignment.

Psalm 54

When King Saul heard the women of Israel sing a song in which they ascribed the slaying of ten thousand men to David and only one thousand to him, he “eyed David from that day forward” (1 Sam. 18:9). David fled from Saul after the king made repeated attempts on his life. In two instances, David hid in the wilderness of Ziph (23:15, 19; 26:1). This was located about “four miles southeast of Hebron” (Pfeiffer 135). We cannot argue with Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, who perceived, “One gets the best idea of the relative situation of these cities by looking at the map” (179). The Ziphites—inhabitants of the region which was inherited by Caleb and kin to the same (Josh. 14:13-14; 1 Chron. 2:42)—informed Saul of David’s whereabouts each time he hid there. Both times, they were recorded as saying nearly the same thing as the inscription at the head of Psalm 54. It reads, “A Contemplation of David when the Ziphites went and said to Saul, ‘Is David not hiding with us?’”

First Samuel 23 has record of the first instance. David fled after the Ziphites shared his whereabouts with Saul. In pursuit of David, Saul split his company to proceed on each side of the mountain in

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the wilderness of Moan. He was almost successful. Verses 26 and 27 record that “. . . Saul and his men were encircling David and his men to take them. But a messenger came to Saul, saying, ‘Hurry and come, for the Philistines have invaded the land!’” Given this news, Saul desisted.

The next time David hid there, he had an opportunity to kill Saul. He and Abishai snuck into Saul’s camp while the king’s army slept. Like in the cave in En Gedi (1 Sam. 24:1-5), Saul was at David’s mercy, but David did not permit any injury to him, saying, “Do not destroy him; for who can stretch out his hand against the LORD’s anointed, and be guiltless?” (26:9). David allowed only for the spear and water jug by Saul’s head to be taken (26:11). When these events came to light, Saul confessed his sin of pursuing David (26:21). David affirmed his own righteousness, shouting, “May the LORD repay every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness; for the LORD delivered you into my hand today, but I would not stretch out my hand against the LORD’s anointed” (26:23).

Given the similarities of the circumstances, the betrayal, the pursuers, and the outcomes, both events will be looked at as a historical context of Psalm 54. This Contemplation or “meditation psalm” (Cloer 57), provides invaluable insight to the characteristics of a heart which can make godly decisions under great duress. How could David resist forfeiting to despair? How did he refrain from murdering out of envy, retribution, or rage? David transcended these trappings. Of Jonathan and Saul, he even said, “The beauty of Israel is slain on your high places! How the mighty have fallen!” (2 Sam 1:19). How did David attain such self-control and grace? In this miniature meditation, we find the answers in David’s dependence upon God’s name (vv. 1-2), his recognition of his enemies’ faults (v. 3), his understanding of God’s part (vv. 4-5), and his gratitude for God’s nature (vv. 6-7).

In verse 1, David called on God to save him, paralleling *save* with *vindicate*. For *vindicate*, the King James Version has *judge*. The salvation for which David specifically called was to be justified before his enemies. “The word *judge* here is used in the sense of declaring a judgment in his favour” (Barnes 110). The word for *God* is from the word *Elohiym* here. First Samuel 2:25 clearly uses the word *elohiym* regarding a human judge. However, it is most often

used of God. This usage is consistent with David appealing to the Almighty Judge to declare him just. He was being treated as a criminal when he was a king.

Name and *strength* are paralleled in verse 1. The strength our Great Arbiter was going to use to accomplish this verdict was His name. Far from a collection of sounds that represent the identification of a person, God's name is comprised of the cumulative characteristics of Who He Is. Our Creator declared His name to Moses in Exodus 34:5-7:

Now the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

With David pondering such attributes of God, it is no wonder that he was drawn to call to Him for help, emphatically saying, "Hear my prayer, O God; Give ear to the words of my mouth" (v. 2). How much lighter was David's flight, having cast the burdens of his heart upon the heart of a God with such a name? He could trust that the Chief Magistrate would exalt him in due time (1 Peter 5:6-7).

After the first betrayal of the Ziph natives, David spared Saul's life. In 1 Samuel 24:17, Saul proclaimed, "You are more righteous than I . . ." In a way, this was an immediate fulfilment of David's petition to be proven right by God. In his lifetime, he was shown to be the rightful king. Ultimately, he was established as the predecessor of the One who would rule (Jer. 33:15-17)—Jesus—who was God in the flesh, justified by the Spirit (1 Tim. 3:16), and gave Himself to be both just and the Justifier of all (Rom. 3:26) who will be considered righteous by faith (4:3). Even today, the strength of being justified is found in that name at which "every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on the earth, and of those under the earth . . ." (Philip. 2:10). Jesus has such a name because of the combined characteristics of Who He Is. Philipians 2:5-9, when

paralleled with Exodus 34:5-7, shows that the characteristics of Jesus are similar to the name revealed by God. He is God—“in the form of God” (Philip. 2:5). He is merciful, gracious, longsuffering, abounding in goodness and truth—“made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant . . .” (2:6). He forgives iniquity and by no means clears the guilty—“And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (2:8). Therefore, given His combined attributes, Jesus has and deserves a great name (2:9).

David recognized the evil his enemies perpetrated. Verse 3 elaborates that the “strangers” are “oppressors.” They could have “risen up” against him to a variety of ends, but he clarified their intent was to take his life.

Here we find a challenge to the accuracy of the superscript. The word *strangers* would, typically, imply foreign enemies (Strong 194). There is Scripture, though, that indicates that it can also reference one who is behaving as separated, or estranged. Ezekiel 14:5 records that God sought to seize the house of Israel by their heart, “because they are all estranged from Me by their idols.” *Estranged* is a form of the same word as *strange* in our text. Clearly, Israel was not a foreign nation, but, through their idolatry, they behaved as one. The persecutors of David were Israelite brethren, but they behaved as strangers. They had profaned their covenant bond.

More than informing us of who was pursuing David and what they were doing, the third section of this verse analyzes the core of their corruption. “They have not set God before them. Selah” (v. 3). Regardless of whether *Selah* denotes a musical interlude or a pause for reflection, its placement acts as a punctuation that causes one to ask, “Why is it there?” Regarding this psalm, a satisfying answer would be that the enemies’ disposition toward God was the central reason for their actions. Everything surrounding this line is a symptom of what it says. Since God was not their leader, they could do nothing but go the wrong way. This would place them against David. As long as the world stands, those who do not follow our Master’s will are, of necessity, at odds with those who do (Matt. 12:30; John 3:20-21; 15:18-25; James 4:4).

Even with six hundred men against a king’s army (1 Sam.

25:13), David did not lose hope. He did not trust in any earthly means to deliver him, proclaiming, “Behold, God is my helper; The Lord is with those who uphold my life” (v. 4). David knew the part his Lord played in His life.

As we read the text, the particle *behold* calls our attention to the fact that, in contrast to his enemies, who did not place God before them, David had God as his helper. As a meditation, this serves as a reminder to oneself. It is reminiscent of Psalm 62:5, when David addressed his soul and told it to wait for God alone.

As the Helper, God was superior to a simple aid in war (1 Chron. 12:21). David said the Lord upheld his life. That it says God is “with those” (v. 4) who uphold David’s life “is not meant to imply that God is one out of many who upheld his threatened life; but rather that He comes within the category of such, and fills it up in Himself alone . . .” (Delitzsch 153). That is not to say that no one else supported David, but that he realized a sufficiency in God’s help, even without another (Rom. 8:31; 2 Tim. 4:16-17). David would not fall because his Savior would uphold him. The word expresses that “God ‘braces’ . . . him, props him up, and makes him stand straight” (Cloer 61).

God will not permit unrighteousness to go unpunished indefinitely. “He will repay my enemies for their evil” (v. 5). Often, this word is rendered *return*. In Genesis 43:18, *return* is used of the payment which was given back to Joseph’s brothers. The King James Version has *repay* in verse 5. What the Divine Prosecutor will return to the evil ones is nothing more than the fruit of what they first gave. “. . . God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (Gal. 6:7).

When David called the Lord, saying, “Cut them off in Your truth” (v. 5), he was appealing, again, to a quality of God from which his help would come. “The truth of God is not described as an instrumental agent of the cutting off, but as an impelling cause” (Delitzsch 153). Since our faithful God can have no fellowship with darkness (Titus 1:2; 1 John 1:5-6), one is cut off from Him if one is living evilly (Isa. 59:1-2). Since we understand that David was not calling on Jehovah to recognize the relationship He already had with the enemies, it follows that David’s plea was of an imprecatory nature.

Because of David's call for the destruction of his foes, Scroggie felt "he fell short of the level of the New Testament. . . . Jesus teaches us to pray for our enemies, which He Himself did, followed by Stephen" (vol. 2, 26). One should note, however, that David did not seek vengeance for himself, but left it in God's hands, as is proper (Deut. 32:34-35). In the New Testament, holy men declare God's judgment, or call for it, upon those who were found defying Him (Acts 5:9; 13:8-11). When David was calling for our Defender to cut his enemies off according to His truth, was it not similar to Paul wishing, "May the Lord repay him according to his works" (2 Tim. 4:14)? God does not change (Heb. 13:8; James 1:17).

In light of who the LORD is, David reacted with sincere worship (v. 6), as Moses did in Exodus 34:8. He promised to sacrifice "by or out of free impulse. These free-will sacrifices are not spiritual here in opposition to the ritual sacrifices . . . [Psalm 50:14], but ritual as an outward representation of the spiritual" (Delitzsch 153). David would not worship grudgingly or out of necessity, but in spirit and truth (John 4:24; 2 Cor. 9:7).

The praise he offered God was directed toward His name, "for it is good" (v. 6). *Good* is a general word that can mean anything pleasant, but this context gives it the loftiest connotation. It exalts the word the way Jesus did when He said, "No one is good but One, that is, God" (Matt. 19:17).

In verse 7, David personified the Name. That "[t]he Name is conceived as an attribute of Yahweh endowed with a personal identity" accounts for a sudden change from the second to third person, even though we are following the same reasoning in verses 6 and 7 (Dahood 27). Isaiah 30:27 referred to God's name similarly (Delitzsch 153). The prophet called to the readers, "Behold, the name of the LORD comes from afar. . . ." Likewise crediting the Name for deliverance from all trouble, David concludes this psalm parallel to how it began, "Save me, O God, by Your name . . ." (v. 1). David knew the Lord could because He had delivered him "out of all trouble" (v. 7).

How often would David witness the failure and frustration of his enemies? Verse 7b reads, ". . . And my eye has seen its desire upon my enemies." Here, "its desire" was supplied by the translators. Similar phrases are added in most translations in attempts to lend

relevance to what seems like an incomplete thought: “my eye has seen my enemies.” Grammatically, *seen* can be used intransitively but finds a sufficient object in *enemies*. The rest of the psalm provided what David had observed about his enemies. While his pursuers were powerful and evil, God had defeated them every time. David had seen it. Think of the memories David would have when reflecting on this song throughout his life. He had seen his enemies entirely vulnerable to him in a cave of En Gedi or asleep on the ground (1 Sam. 24:1-4; 26:7). In the second account, he looked upon his enemies from a mountaintop, having, effectively, defeated them with one man and no fighting. Ignoring the supplied words, this context embodies the fullest way to interpret the peace and confidence of the closing line of this psalm. “What David says is, that his eyes look calmly on his enemies: he views them without alarm; for he feels that the shield of God’s power and love is cast over him to protect him” (Moll 336). Psalm 118:7 places similar phrases to verses 4b and 7b together, tying them to trust in the Lord: “The LORD is for me among those who help me; Therefore I shall see my desire on those who hate me. It is better to trust in the LORD Than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes” (118:7-9).

Psalm 70

The most often observed trait of this psalm is that it appears to be an excerpt from Psalm 40:13-17. One can react in two ways to the information. One may marginalize the psalm because it is “redundant” or explore the significance of its repetition. Considering we accept this as God-breathed literature, we believe there is a benefit to further examination.

Attributed to David, these stanzas are headed with the purpose “To bring to remembrance.” This superscript

may mean more than it first appears. It is a personal heart-searching; It is also an appeal to Jehovah. The word . . . [*remembrance*] represents an act of worship; In [1 Chron. 16:4] we read that certain Levites appointed by David were to ‘celebrate [same word] and to thank and praise Jehovah.’ In such an act as this, man recalls his sin and weakness, and takes hold of God’s holiness and power. (Thirtle, *Titles* 119)

One could make the case for this psalm's relevance and purpose solely on the merit of it being such a call to remembrance. The reflections within are worthy of personal meditation. It is not unimportant because it is a quote. On the contrary, the significance of the psalm is enhanced because it is from Psalm 40. God found it worth repeating and gave it a fresh application. We should find it worth re-engaging.

Along with this, we must consider if this quote was an adaptation to a larger work. Cloer asked, "Is it possible that this psalm was once united with the next psalm (71)? The fact that this psalm possesses a superscription while Psalm 71 does not may suggest that they used to be joined" (340). We believe the answer to this question is affirmative. More than just being found together in the Psalter, they seem related. In Psalm 71:12, "The Davidic style is to be discerned here throughout in other points also" (Delitzsch 293). There are words in Psalm 70 which are almost unique to David in this song book. *Ashamed*, in verse 2, is used thirty-three other times in the book. Of its occurrences, David is noted as responsible for twenty. Three are in psalms by other writers, and eleven do not have an author attributed. Three of those are in Psalm 71, appearing to carry on a theme of shame from Psalm 70. Psalm 119 constitutes six usages of this word. Even more compelling is the fact that the word for "make haste" is used eight times in seven psalms—and only one is not Davidic. Interestingly, the writer of Psalm 119 is the only other one to use it. While Psalm 71 does not use the same word for *haste*, it uses another form of it in verse 12 that is found nowhere else in the Bible (Strong, "Hebrew" 38, 39). Its placement in the book, its language, and its contents point to David as the originator of these words.

So as not to enter into others' spheres of service, we will keep out comments relative to Psalm 70, specifically, and encourage the reader to seek the lectures on Psalms 40 and 71. However, it is notable that a petition which is meant "To bring to remembrance" is found attached to a section which refers to the age of the psalmist (71:9, 18). Could it be that David borrowed this song from the end of Psalm 40, a song he wrote when he was younger, as a fit introduction to a song praising the fidelity of the God upon whom he would call in his advanced age? If we view this psalm from the

perspective of a veteran man of God, we see he developed a keen understanding of his need for the Lord and his own place (vv. 1, 5). He also had a clear expectation of what should come of the enemies of God's people (vv. 2-3) and how the redeemed of God should react (v. 4).

The first part of verse one lacks the verb translated "make haste," but this interpretation is necessary and founded since "to deliver" calls for a predicate and the second line provides the parallel thought, which aids us in selecting a correct one. The appeal is repeated in the last verse of our psalm. This repetition does not contradict Jesus' condemnation of vain repetition (Matt. 6:7). David's words, while repeated, are not empty. He meant them. That places him in accord with the persistent widow, who was an example in a parable that taught "men always ought to pray and not lose heart . . ." (Luke 18:1). Jesus, Himself, fervently repeated a most torturous prayer: "Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will" (Mark 14:36; cf. Heb. 5:7). The call for God's haste is not indicative of a lack of hope or trust in God's help, but of the petitioner's dire position and his reliance upon God.

Let in verses 2-4 can give the English reader the impression that the writer is requesting permission for one to be allowed to do something. The context gives it a stronger force. Regarding verses 2-3, "This may be understood here rather as a confident expectation than a wish or desire. It implies the certainty that they would thus be ashamed and confounded; that is, that they would not be successful, or would be foiled in their purposes" (Barnes 364). Throughout Scripture, when *let* is not being used in the simple sense of losing or allowing something, it is used regarding how something ought to be. What we find is the writer's understanding of what ought to happen to those who were wanting his destruction.

He wanted them to be defeated by the consequences of their own actions. *Confounded* and *ashamed* can be synonyms of each other (Strong "Hebrew" 42, 19). Their use together would allude to the totality of the extent to which their evil intentions should be frustrated. They should suffer such consequences "because of their shame" (v. 3). He introduced another word that is translated *shame*, used as a substantive here (Dahood 168). The word is used in place

of *idol* in some verses, referring to it being the object which was a source of shame (Jer. 11:13; Hos. 9:10). Here, it is not referring to the shame they feel. It is concerning their conduct, which should have been a source of shame. David was praying that justice would be done, because they fought against the faithful of God and mocked them, saying “Aha, aha!” (v. 3).

It seems the composer seemed to soften the expected repercussions from the older psalm. We have “Let them be turned back . . .” here (v. 3), but Psalm 40:15 carries the idea, “Let them be struck dumb” (Perowne 555-56). If these are the words of an aged man, they do not communicate a compromise—sin must still be punished—but they might indicate a maturity in response. He was no longer calling on fire to fall from the sky, but on his enemies to retreat from their current path. Within this might also be the wish that his enemies would be so moved by their shame as to repent.

Like the two verses that precede it, verse 4 is more than a request or suggestion that those who seek the Lord should behave in a certain way, but it is the psalmist’s understanding that such is a reasonable action, considering what God has done (Rom. 12:1). A man seeking the true source of joy in his life should, himself, exhibit joy. It is a natural product of those who are striving for righteousness through faith (Philip. 4:4; Gal. 5:22-23). If one recognizes the magnificence of our Father’s deliverance, one will not cease talking about it but will say continually, “Let God be magnified!” (v. 4). Those who continue to grow in their knowledge and appreciation of such things will never be lacking in such fruits (2 Peter 1:5-9).

“But I am poor and needy . . .” written by a king (v. 5), seems contradictory, but such difficulty declares that the words should be understood metaphorically. David, in his wisdom, acknowledged what all must to inherit the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:3): namely, whether pauper or prince, we are all destitute apart from God. Such a beautiful attitude is what regularly and readily moved this king to his knees in prayer.

We sing the song “I Need Thee Every Hour” (Hawks). When considering the words of song 70 as from the aged mouth of a tried and true saint, we see a fierce yet calm dependence upon God. A God whom the psalmist, at first, knew to trust but, later, grew to trust, through the tempering from a life of trials (cf. Psalms 40 and

70). Oh, what testing of our faith it takes to turn our “I need Thee every hour” to “I know I have always needed and will need Thee.”

Psalm 123

The reason for which the fifteen psalms, each labeled “A Song of Ascents,” were collected is a mystery. There is no shortage of speculation surrounding it. Concerning all that Thirtle had to say about other difficulties and questions in Psalms, it is striking that of this topic he wrote, “The title is a problem; and the specific purpose of the songs still awaits satisfactory explanation” (*Titles* 361). In a later book, he attempted to give such an explanation. Based on the premise that “A Song of Ascents” is a superscript, and not a subscript, he believed it would not be indicative of musical instruction, but of further literary information (*Old Testament Problems* 14). Further, he translated the introduction, “‘A Song of THE Degrees’—THE steps, THE stairs” (14). Regarding the genitive relationship in the phrase, he deduced that the songs, then, came out of or originated from degrees, rather than being written for them (17). That would impugn the validity of the arguments that these songs were written for singing on the stairs of the temple or for travel to Jerusalem. It would not exclude, however, the idea of these being written *about* a sojourn to Jerusalem. Thirtle believed that the fifteen songs of degrees were songs that were contributed by King Hezekiah. He felt they were titled the way they were in reference to the degrees which God moved the shadow on the sundial to indicate He was adding fifteen years to Hezekiah’s life (2 Kings 20:8-11; *Old Testament Problems* 18).

Not including Thirtle’s, Barnes concisely elaborated five common theories of the headings’ significance. He considered that understanding them as a lost musical expression might be the most plausible guess. However, he concluded, “All that can be known is, that there was some reason why these psalms were, so to speak, bound up together, and designated by a common title. This does not prevent a special title being prefixed to some of them in regard to their author and design” (227-28). This summary is consistent with respecting the genuineness of the Psalms, while not venturing to uphold answers which must be constructed using some assumptions.

The interpretations of Psalm 123 are fraught with controversy.

Two understandings prevail. One may read this song as an expression of penitence from the humble heart of one returning to God. In this case, the petitioner repents on behalf of the nation. Another sees this as a humble cry for relief from persecution on behalf of a righteous people.

When we examine each view in light of a greater biblical context, the dynamic tension between them is relieved. That is, we see that both understandings portray acceptable, even encouraged, characteristics of a person of faith. If Psalm 123 is concerning repentance and a request for mercy from punishment, the humility represented and the appeal to God are consistent with other accounts (Matt. 18:3-4; Luke 15:17-20; Acts 8:22). Likewise, if it is the appeal of faithful, suffering servants, we find other examples of this principle in Scripture (Matt. 5:10-12; 1 Peter 4:12-19; Rev. 6:9-10).

There is a fervent tone to the plea that is achieved by the uncharacteristic rhyming effect given by the words ending in a *nun* and *yod*. This is found in *our eyes* (once in verse 1 and three times in verse 3), *our God* (v. 2), *mercy on us* (once in verse 2 and two times in verse 3), *filled* (v. 3), and *our soul* (v. 4). This ten-fold cadence within four verses leads to an audible climax at “Have mercy on us, O LORD, have mercy on us! For we are exceedingly filled . . .” in verse 3. We can emulate it in the transliteration, *Hannenu Yahweh hannenu: ki rab, sabanu*. This intensity should be kept in mind regardless of the perspective one has of the intention of the prayer.

When reading the psalm, considering the supplicant’s vantage point from each perspective, we can arrive at satisfying answers to the questions which arise for each view. What is the purpose of looking to the Master’s hand? What form of mercy is being requested? Whose contempt fills their souls? We will answer these questions based on each interpretation.

The first two verses establish the psalmist’s view regarding his place and God’s. He pictured the Lord as high above in His dwelling place and His station. The mention of servants and a maid gives the impression of emphatic humility. Ehrlich’s translation supplies the idea that the female servant was the most impoverished slave. He supported such an interpretation citing other places where the word for *maid* is used of a slave that is clearly the most subordinate (330).

In Exodus 11:5, for instance, the death of all the firstborn is announced. Explaining the scope of this plague, Moses began with the firstborn of Pharaoh as the highest and used the “firstborn of the female servant” as the lowest of the people to be affected. This position was higher only than the animals, which found themselves last on the list. Abigail, responding to a proposal from David, said, “Here is your maidservant, a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord” (1 Sam. 25:41). The first word she used as *servant* is the word used by our psalmist to intensify the expression of his lowly estate (Strong, “Hebrew” 120).

From this humble vantage point, the servant has his eyes fixed on the hand of the Lord. Some say this is due to the anticipation of punishment from God (Ehrlich 330). Our Master’s hand is spoken of in a punitive manner in plainer Scripture (Gen. 3:22; Exod. 6:1; Psalm 75:8). Concerning God’s punishment of Israel, we find the figure, “. . . He has stretched out His hand against them . . . His hand is stretched out still” (Isa. 5:25). With this interpretation, the psalmist is acknowledging the justice of an anticipated punishment. Clark believed this sense was supported by the next verse, “Have mercy upon us . . .” (v. 3; Clark 637).

Others disagree, arguing that we have “the hand which issues benefactions” (Dahood 209) under consideration here. Given the psalmist’s portrayal of the slave, we would add the idea that the servants are looking to God’s hand in ready obedience (Perowne 383). Eastern tradition has exemplified this practice. During his visit to Egypt, Savary wrote on the manner of the slaves in the presence of their masters. He observed, “Slaves, with their arms cro[ss]ed, remain [s]ilent at the far end of the chamber, with their eyes fixed on him, [s]eeking to anticipate his [s]malle[s]t want” (159-60). The Bible supports the interpretation of the Lord’s hand as a source of good and victory over enemies (Exod. 13:9; Psalm 20:6; 98:1).

Whether the supplicants were anxious about punishment from God or persecuted by surrounding heathen for good works, the following verses exhibit a fit expression for each. “Have mercy on us, O LORD . . .” (v. 3). For the penitent sinful, it is a call of repentance (Psalm 51:1). For the persecuted faithful, it is a call for relief (Psalm 6:2)

They were “exceedingly filled with contempt” (v. 3). Most
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often, this contempt is considered to be the mocking and general mistreatment of those around them. Nehemiah 4:1 bears record of Sanballat, who “mocked the Jews.” Further, God comforted Zechariah, saying he was angry with the Gentiles, the “nations at ease” (1:15). This phrase corresponds with verse 4, “Our soul is exceedingly filled With the scorn of those who are at ease. . . .” If this is concerning the troubles that came upon God’s people through the persecution of ungodly nations, this is a prayer of deliverance.

The words “at ease” (v. 4) mean “nonchalant” (Dahood 210). The ones under consideration may feel they have no cares, but it is because they do not care. “At ease” was used to describe Israel before they were taken into captivity (Amos 6:1). It further characterized their loss of zeal in captivity, as expressed in Daniel’s petition (9:1-19). Even after returning from captivity, they dwelt in their own paneled houses and the temple of God was in ruins (Hag. 1:4). If the psalmist was writing on behalf of the people in repentance for their own contempt for God, it would be consistent with their history.

We should learn from either interpretation of this song. When repenting, we should humbly accept God’s justice and seek His mercy with our eyes fixed on Him in obedience. When suffering on His behalf, we seek His deliverance and do not falter in our service. All the while, we ensure we do not allow a root of bitterness to creep into our own hearts (Heb. 12:15).

General Conclusion

Considering these three petitions at once, we are confronted with the principle that we best assess our trials when we view ourselves in respect to God correctly. David was not overwhelmed with terror or hatred for his enemies. He viewed God as his helper and judge (Psalm 54). He recognized his poverty and appealed to God for what he lacked (Psalm 70). No matter what earthly esteem he may have had, the writer of the 123rd Psalm realized he should have the attitude of a servant. This is essential in keeping a humble attitude of obedience and repentance. It also helps us forgive regardless of how we believe we have been wronged. Approaching our trials from such a perspective, we, too, will not be tempted to seek justice by our own hands. We will trust in the immovable God, giving us

unshakable faith in the face of the most tumultuous times.

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Biographical Sketch

Van Sprague began preaching as an assistant at the church of Christ in New Lexington, Ohio, in the summer of 2004. It was that summer he began his studies at the West Virginia School of Preaching, where he graduated in 2006. Having served as a preacher in Rio Grande, Ohio, from 2006-10 and Lubeck, West Virginia, from 2010-15, he currently evangelizes with the congregation at Berkeley Springs, West Virginia, where he began in the summer of 2015.

Whether away or at home, he considers it the best work to be able to teach the Gospel. He has been blessed to have engaged in mission works in Guyana, South America, and he stays busy with individual Bible studies in Berkeley Springs. He feels it is a privilege to serve as an instructor of Personal Evangelism and Prayer at the West Virginia School of Preaching.

The greatest earthly supporters of his work are his family. His wife, Jennifer, and three children, Victoria (10), Isabella (7), and Christopher (2), are a constant support and motivation.

WITH A GLAD HEART

Psalm 122

Jack Gilchrist

Imagine living in a time and land where one was not allowed to worship freely. Imagine being held away from God by strict regulations and ceremonies. Imagine having to wait until a prescribed three times a year to worship the Being that has blessed the world with every good and perfect gift (James 1:27). Imagine being able to approach the inner sanctuary of the presence of the Lord only through another imperfect man—and only being able to do that once a year. This was the situation when Psalm 122 was written.

Fearmongering aside, restrictions like these are far away from the current situation experienced in this country. While restrictions have been placed on worship at various times and places, worship was actually freed for all in the New Covenant. When Jesus told a Samaritan woman that God must be worshiped in spirit and truth (John 4:24), He was additionally informing her that location of practiced worship did not matter as long as the motivation and actions of worship were done in an acceptable manner towards God. He was removing some of the restrictions and limitations of the Old Law surrounding worship.

That is not to say that Jews were not allowed to approach God in other ways under the Old Law, but they had many more prescribed actions, especially when it came to Tabernacle and Temple worship. The author of this psalm displays a desire to worship, coming forth out of the idea that he cannot always freely approach the throne of God when he wants.

Just because Jesus removed the restrictions of worship in the Law of Moses, He did not remove all restrictions. Worship is not a free-for-all where any action can be done and called *worship*, nor is all of life worship, but worship is to be guided by the Word of God at all times. The point remains, however, that modern worshipers of God have fewer restrictions. This sometimes breeds familiarity. Because of this closer approach to be had, some are less excited by

regular worship. The challenge of this psalm is to develop the attitude of this psalmist, the attitude that states, “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go into the house of the LORD’” (v. 1). [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.]

Psalm 122 is labeled as a song of ascent. This is a group of fifteen psalms, Psalms 120-134, that are focused on worshipping God. Ten of these psalms have anonymous authors, while four are attributed to David. Solomon is also listed as an author of one of these psalms. These songs of ascent have sparked debate among scholars about when they were used and for what occasion.

Some have supposed that the title . . . was applied to them as being psalms which were sung during the periodical journeys or pilgrimages to Jerusalem at the times of the great yearly festivals—the *going up* to Jerusalem. Others have supposed that they were psalms which were composed or sung during the return from exile . . . Some of the Jewish rabbins supposed that they were psalms which were sung as the people ascended the fifteen steps—going up to the temple represented by Ezekiel . . . Others have supposed that the title refers to some peculiarity of structure in the psalms—a graduation or elevation of thought. . . . (Barnes 227)

Scroggie suggests that these psalms were used during Hezekiah’s restoration of the Temple and subsequently afterwards and that Hezekiah wrote two of the anonymous psalms (192 and 193). All these theories have strengths and weaknesses, but the occasion of original use does not take away from the fact that these psalms are still useable to express how the modern worshiper can and should feel when approaching God in worship.

This psalm is attributed to David. It is unknown when he wrote it and what circumstance prompted him, but go back to the fact that David loved to approach God. He saw the need to be close to God, and he knew his avenue was through Tabernacle worship. There is both an obligation to worship in this psalm and the excited approach David is taking. He wants to and has to approach God. There are suggestions that David did not write this psalm, especially from those who think these psalms were used in Hezekiah’s day or later, but there is no reason to create this theory; it is just as logical to

assume later worshipers used a psalm written by one of the heroes of the Jewish faith when they wanted to approach God, too. Willis suggests, “Psalm 122 was written by a pilgrim . . . who had gone to Jerusalem to worship God with a band of fellow believers” (100), and that is probably all the modern reader needs to know to set the context of this psalm.

The psalm opens with the familiar line “I was glad . . .” (v. 1). The word *glad* used here emphasizes that David was very glad (Wilson 188). He is excited to go and worship God. Others came to get David and take him to worship. There is a reminder here that worship is something to which one is to go. David was not worshipping yet, but he was going to start worshipping when he got to the correct place.

They were going to worship at the house of the Lord. During David’s days, that would be the Tabernacle, which David set up in Jerusalem for the Ark of the Covenant (1 Chron. 16:39-40). No doubt, eventually this psalm would be used to refer to going up to the Temple built by Solomon. Not only did the Temple become the center of Jewish life in many ways, but also the Temple was God’s chosen place to be worshiped. God filled it with His presence when it was completed (1 Kings 8:10-11), and God said it was His chosen spot (2 Chron. 33:7).

At times, the Temple was corrupted with the syncretistic religion of the Jews, which combined idolatry with true worship. Other times, the temple was restored to its original glory and just used to worship God in the true fashion. It would be exciting for righteous Jews to be able to go to the locale of the Temple when it was in a restoration period of devotion to God. There would be joy in knowing God can be approached correctly. Surely those who got to go to these ceremonies were able to say they were glad to go and worship here.

That is just the beginning of the psalm, though. The student of God’s Word reads on to discover the context of this great phrase. Essentially, the rest of the psalm answers the question “Why is the worshiper of God to be excited when he goes to the house of the Lord?”

In the second verse of the psalm, the worshipers have arrived in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was a city that became a central part of Jewish

life. When Jerusalem is first mentioned in Scripture, it is a Canaanite city ruled by Melchizedek and is called Salem. Eventually, Jerusalem becomes a center of resistance to the Israelites moving into the Promised Land. Known over the years as Jebus, Jebusalem, and Jerusalem, the Anakites and Philistines were able to use this city as an outpost to control southern Judah. Though the Canaanites would be chased out at times, the unfaithfulness and inconsistency of Israel allowed for Canaanites to move back in repeatedly. It was not until the days of David that Jerusalem was made his new capital and was built up to be a city centered on worshiping the true God. “King David had conquered the old stronghold of Salem, had made it his capital, built and fortified the city magnificently,” and “had brought the ark of the covenant to the site which David had purchased at great expense . . .” (Coffman 398).

Jerusalem was also a strategic city; verse 3 mentions some of the advantages it had in the ancient world. Jerusalem was easily fortified, being built on hills, and was an outpost of protection for its various occupants. It was “compact together” (v. 3), “[l]iterally, ‘joined itself together;’ that is when one part is, as it were, bound closely to another part” (Barnes 236). There was not much opportunity for the city of Jerusalem to grow, since it is surrounded by valleys and hills, except to the north (236). This small area was able to be defended from various armies, which may be another reason it took so many generations to finally make it an Israelite city.

When this psalm was written, Jerusalem had become the home to God’s representative presence: the Ark of the Covenant. David had moved the Ark into the city with much celebration. The celebration of David was so exuberant, it embarrassed one of his wives, Michal, Saul’s daughter (2 Sam. 6:12-16). She reprimanded David for his actions on this occasion, but David defended himself as being chosen over Saul to rule the kingdom (6:20-21). This may have been David getting down to the real issue behind Michal’s criticism, which was, “That is not how my father would have acted as king.” If this is the case, David would not want to act as Saul did as king, since Saul was unsuccessful in the most important part of his life, his spirituality. David wanted to make sure God came first during his term as king and therefore celebrated the ark’s placement in Jerusalem. In one more parting shot to Michal, David said that if

what he did to rejoice was undignified, then he was going to be even more undignified as he worshiped God (6:22).

If David wrote this psalm, his defense to Michal of his worship, as well as this psalm, shows how passionate he felt about the worship of God. He would defend his right to approach God. It obviously meant a lot for him to be able to approach God to praise Him, and David repeatedly expressed that throughout the psalms he wrote.

Jerusalem in many ways was built to be a capital of worshipping God. David sees it as being “no more a waste, or a mere collection of tents, or a city upon paper, commenced, but not completed” (Spurgeon 27). The city of Jerusalem is now seen as completed, not to the glory of men like David, but to the glory of God.

David states that it is Jerusalem where the tribes of Israel were to go up to worship God (v. 4). Three times a year, all the males of Israel were to appear before God during the prescribed feasts (Exod. 23:17), but when that command was given, Jerusalem was not in the picture as a center of worship to God. How did Jerusalem become this place? God stated in the Law that He would choose the place from where He would be worshiped (Deut. 12:5, 11). Again, this was not immediately Jerusalem. The Tabernacle and Ark stayed in many places during the period of the judges, including a time when the Ark was captive in the land of the Philistines. It seems God approved of some of these places, like Shiloh among possible others (Josh. 18:1). It also seems that eventually God chose Jerusalem. It is Solomon, David’s son, who quoted God confirming, “Yet I have chosen Jerusalem, that My name may be there . . .” (2 Chron. 6:6). The Chronicler confirms this by stating, “Now Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he became king; and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the LORD had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to put His name there” (12:13). During David’s day, Jerusalem, by God’s choice, became the center of the monotheistic worship of God.

Therefore, David calls for the tribes to come up to worship God on the hills of Jerusalem, where he set up the Tabernacle and brought back the Ark. They are called to come to the “Testimony of Israel” (v. 4), which may be a symbol of the whole Tabernacle. The Ark of the Covenant is also the Ark of the Testimony, especially since it

still contained the Ten Commandments. This represented all the laws of Moses to the people. Therefore, David calls all the tribes to come to Jerusalem to thank God for His law. The people of God have always been and still are blessed to have the Law of God to guide them. Parameters of law are a blessing to show where humanity can successfully go and illuminate the dangers of veering from God's righteous ways. Be thankful to the name of God for the standards He has eternally established.

Jerusalem became the central figure of judgment in David's day, also. Therefore, Jerusalem became the "place for administering justice" (Barnes 237). David seems to be saying, though, that Jerusalem was not just the civil headquarters of the kingdom, but also the spiritual. "The meaning here [in verse 5] is, that Jerusalem was the supreme seat of justice; the place where justice was dispensed for the nation. It was at once the religious and the civil capital of the union" (Barnes 237). The throne becomes a representation of the Law of God, as the throne is supposed to be the place for the law to actually come in contact with people and affect their lives through the rulings of the king.

Going to Jerusalem should have been an event for the worshipers of the Old Testament. It could have been like visiting a national capital, where there are many things to see pertaining to the history and administration of a nation. In addition, visiting Jerusalem was focused on the things pertaining to God. Israel was supposed to be a theocracy. God was to rule the nation though the kings. Therefore, Jerusalem was more than just the national capital, as it was also a spiritual capital. Though Jerusalem should have been visited three times a year, any occasion to visit for the followers of God in Israel should have been treated as a once-in-a-lifetime experience. They should have been glad when they were told it was time to go to the house of the Lord.

David's psalm now becomes a request on behalf of his capital city. He now wants people to pray for peace for Jerusalem. The rest of the psalm, verses 6-9, serve as a prayer to be recited for the worshipers traveling to Jerusalem. While it remains unknown exactly how these psalms of ascent were used, no doubt this prayer could have been repeated by those in the Old Testament who wanted to worship God. It seems plain that David desires for peace so people

can freely worship God. David wants to make sure that all those who desire can approach God without hindrance, and at David's time that meant peace in and around Jerusalem.

The ancient world was warlike. It was a daily occurrence during the majority of time covered in the Old Testament for raiding parties and thieves to run amok. Invasions that led to the rise and fall of many ungodly kingdoms seemed to be more common in the ancient world. Jerusalem, which has a word for *peace* in the name, was ironically a very un-peaceful city. David hoped and longed for a day that this would change, all with the ultimate motivation of making sure the worshiper could worship freely.

The prayer, though for a city, is also personal as it starts with the line "May they prosper who love you" (v. 6b). God blesses the just and unjust alike (Matt. 5:45). "Every good and perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the father of lights . . ." (James 1:17). This does not mean that those who pray to God should not ask for blessings, but rather they can ask with confidence. Specifically, David calls on the worshiper to pray that God blesses those that love Him while they are traveling to worship God in Jerusalem.

Verse 7 broadens the prayer from the individual to the city, asking for prayers for the city within the walls and the palaces. The word here translated *wall* signifies a rampart (Wilson 472). "It refers here to the fortifications or defenses around Jerusalem" (Barnes 238). So, the prayer is for the army protecting the city.

The prosperity for the palaces parallels to the peace for the walls. Again, the focus is not on the physical structure, but on the people represented by the physical structures. "The idea is, that such places abounded in Jerusalem; and the prayer is, that in those abodes of power, where the rulers of the land resided, there might be peace" (Barnes 238). Although these things can be prayed for at any time, the context still remains connected to worship. The prayer remains, "Let there peace for worship to continue."

David wants this peace for the sake of his brethren and companions. He is essentially asking for peace for his friends and family. He moves from the city and its structures to the people coming to the city to worship. Essentially, he is winding this prayer down by stating the desire for all humanity, especially worshipers of God, to have the blessings of God so they can approach God. All

along, the theme remains “May they have peace so they can come worship God.” David, as he is so well practiced at doing, is pointing people to God.

The last verse of the psalm is one more benediction about the site of worship. David wants to seek the good of the Lord because the presence of the Lord is among them. Because David can have a relationship with God and visit God—because God is available—David will seek Him.

While Christians today are not limited to the physical locales that David and the Hebrews were, they do still have the opportunity to approach God. In many ways, God is closer to His creation now than ever before. God reached down and tore away physical limitations on where to worship Him. Jesus put it best when He stated, “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). This was a response to a question about the proper location of worship, and Jesus ushered in the thought that a day would soon come when location would not matter. Christians do not have to be in a building or grand cathedral to approach God. The true Christian can worship God correctly anywhere at any time. Therefore, the Christian has the house of the Lord because he is the house of the Lord. Therefore, modern man all the more needs to seek God, worshiping his creator and giving his life over to Him.

Notice that David says he will seek God’s good (v. 9). This same idea is present in the stories of Nehemiah and Esther. Nehemiah was seeking the wellbeing of the Jews, which made the Samaritan leaders nervous (2:10). Mordecai spent the rest of his life seeking what was good for the Jewish people of his day (Esth. 10:3). David wanted to seek God’s good, or wellbeing, or what is best for God. Humanity can really do nothing for God, because of how much greater God is than His creatures; nevertheless, God has asked His creation to do things for Him. He has asked for worship. He has asked for love. He has asked for obedience. Therefore, humanity becomes the answer to David’s final thought: to seek God’s good, humanity needs to do what God has asked. Because God has reached down to His creation, it should want to reach back like a child reaching for a parent who will pick up the little one and make a fuss.

Because God can be sought, He should be. He should be sought in a rejoicing manner; He should be sought in worship. Mankind can

echo the voice of David and be glad when the opportunity to approach God in worship is made available. Let us rejoice all the more knowing that a required trip to Jerusalem and the limitations of the Old Law have been lifted and now God can be approached more readily; let us especially rejoice in the freedom to worship as God has commanded!

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Biographical Sketch

Jack Gilchrist is a 2002 graduate of Freed-Hardeman University; he holds a Bachelor's degree in history and vocational ministry. He is a 2005 graduate of the West Virginia School of Preaching.

Jack preaches for the Pine Grove church of Christ in Scott Depot, West Virginia, teaches Hebrew History I-IV at WVSOP, and co-directs Senior Week of West Virginia Christian Youth Camp. In addition to located work in Ohio and Pennsylvania and various speaking appointments and short-term mission trips in the United States, he has participated in short-term mission work in the Bahamas, Russia, Canada, and Costa Rica.

Jack and his wife, Katie, have one son, Andrew.

GOD'S WONDERFUL EXALTATION

Psalm 148

Steve Higginbotham

In 1927, the New York Yankees' "Babe" Ruth hit a record-setting sixty home runs in a single season. That record stood unchallenged for the next thirty-three years. However, in 1961, Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris, both of whom played for the New York Yankees, were in hot pursuit of Babe Ruth's home run record. The 1961 season was exciting for baseball fans everywhere, especially if you were a fan of the Yankees. But as the fan favorite, Mickey Mantle, eventually fell off the pace, Roger Maris was left alone in his pursuit to break this long-standing record.

That is when something unexpected began happening. Roger Maris, who was leading the team in home runs and who was helping the Yankees to a great season, began to be booed by the Yankees' fans. They apparently thought Maris was not their player of choice to eclipse their legend's home run record. Not only was Maris booed, he received hate mail and death threats and even received threats of kidnaping his children if he broke the record. The pressure Maris was under was so great that he had hives all over his body and his hair was beginning to fall out.

But as history has it, on the last day of the 1961 season, Maris hit his sixty-first home run, breaking Babe Ruth's home run record. Interestingly, the fans did not even fill the stadium that day, nor did the commissioner of baseball even bother to attend. In fact, the commissioner of baseball lobbied to have an asterisk placed after Maris's new record because he broke the record while playing in more games than Babe Ruth did.

All this hatred took its toll on Maris, and he struggled with bitterness until the day he died. That is when the next unexpected thing happened. After Maris' death in 1985, everyone praised him as a hero. Those who once booed him were now praising him as a great player. Those who wanted to place an asterisk next to his name in the record book were now wanting to build statues in honor of

him.

Have you ever noticed how differently we talk about people after they are deceased? We reserve our most flattering and edifying speech for the eulogy. Would life not be better if we went ahead and said the things that we typically reserve for a person's eulogy?

Eulogizing the Living God

Did you know that Paul commanded us to “eulogize” the living? Paul wrote, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ . . .” (Eph. 1:3). [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.]

Typically, when we read the word *blessed*, we think of the beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-12). But the word *blessed* in the beatitudes is the Greek word *makarios*, and it means “happy” (Vine et al. 290). But a different word is employed by Paul in Ephesians 1:3. The word that is translated *blessed* in Ephesians 1:3 comes from the Greek word *eulogeo*, which means “to speak well of” and “to celebrate with praises” (Vine et al. 69). This is the Greek word from which we get the word *eulogy*. So, in other words, what Paul was commanding in Ephesians 1:3 was for Christians to “eulogize” or “speak well of” the living God. What an amazing thought! Have you ever been called upon to offer a eulogy for a deceased friend? If so, what raced through your mind as you thought of kind words to say about your friend? What sort of things did you recall that you thought would be appropriate and that would help people to know what kind of person your friend was?

This is what Paul calls us to do. It is an incredible and challenging thought. How would you eulogize the Living God? What would you say? Upon what character traits, works, and attributes would you expound?

When Moses led the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage, God provided demonstrative proof that He was greater than any of the gods of Egypt through the deliverance of His people by the parting of the Red Sea and causing the sea to swallow up the pursuing Egyptian army. In fact, as Moses stood safely on the other side of the Sea, he sang a song in which he asked the question:

Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods?

Who is like You, glorious in holiness,
Fearful in praises, doing wonders?
You stretched out Your right hand;
The earth swallowed them.
You in Your mercy have led forth
The people whom You have redeemed;
You have guided them in Your strength
To Your holy habitation. (Exod. 15:11-13)

Moses was attempting to “eulogize” the living God. He was in utter amazement of His power and might, and the first eighteen verses of this chapter contain Moses’ attempt to praise Him in song.

Several centuries later, the prophet Micah wrote in almost identical wonderment when he wrote:

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.
He will again have compassion on us,
And will subdue our iniquities.

You will cast all our sins
Into the depths of the sea. (7:18-19)

While Moses attempted to “eulogize” the Living God by speaking of His power and might, the prophet Micah attempted to “eulogize” the Living God by speaking of the gracious redemption and forgiveness He offers His children.

The passage under consideration in this lesson is taken from Psalm 148. In this fourteen-verse chapter, the word *praise* is used thirteen times. The psalmist begins by stating that God is worthy of praise in the highest heavens, then moves to the earth, and ends with mankind. One expositor made the statement, “How anyone could trivialize the privilege and responsibility of worship after pondering this psalm is difficult to understand” (Wiersbe 380).

The Heavens Praise God

*Praise the LORD!
Praise the LORD from the heavens;
Praise Him in the heights!
Praise Him, all His angels;
Praise Him, all His hosts!
Praise Him, sun and moon;
Praise Him, all you stars of light!
Praise Him, you heavens of heavens,
And you waters above the heavens!*

*Let them praise the name of the LORD,
For He commanded and they were created.
He also established them forever and ever;
He made a decree which shall not pass away. (vv. 1-6)*

The psalmist begins this chapter by calling on the heavens and the beings contained therein to praise God. Why should they praise God? Because He commanded and they were created. Such power is breathtaking. Combine that power with His other characteristics, and the only appropriate response is praise.

Elsewhere, the psalmist said, “The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. . . . There is no speech nor language Where their voice is not heard” (19:1, 3). When a man gazes into the heavens and observes its beauty and design, no matter what continent he is on or what nation he is from, he cannot help but hear the heavens praise the Lord.

O LORD, our Lord,
How excellent is Your name in all the earth,
Who have set Your glory above the heavens!

.....
When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
The moon and the stars, which You have ordained,
What is man that You are mindful of him . . . ? (Psalm 8:1,
3-4).

To consider the greatness of the heavenly hosts and the vastness of the heavenly bodies, how can we not be driven to our knees and join them in offering up praise to God? Though we are but a speck

in this universe, we have the full attention of the God who made it all. Can you appreciate Moses' and Micah's bewildered question, "Who is a God like you . . . ?" (Micah 7:18; cf. Exod. 15:11).

The Earth Praises God

*Praise the LORD from the earth,
You great sea creatures and all the depths;
Fire and hail, snow and clouds;
Stormy wind, fulfilling His word;
Mountains and all hills;
Fruitful trees and all cedars;
Beasts and all cattle;
Creeping things and flying fowl. (vv. 7-10)*

After informing us that the heavens praise the Lord, the psalmist then turns his attention to the earth and affirms that it, too, and all its animals praise the Lord. But someone may ask, "How do the heavens, earth, and animals praise the Lord?" The answer is by doing what they were created to do. Every rock, every blade of grass, every form of life, and every star in the heavens praise the God who made them. They are a book without words written in a language all can understand, calling us to join them in their praise.

Mankind Praises God

*Kings of the earth and all peoples;
Princes and all judges of the earth;
Both young men and maidens;
Old men and children.*

*Let them praise the name of the LORD,
For His name alone is exalted;
His glory is above the earth and heaven.
And He has exalted the horn of His people,
The praise of all His saints—
Of the children of Israel,
A people near to Him.*

Praise the LORD! (vv. 11-14)

Finally, the psalmist calls on mankind to praise the Lord. One of the ironies of this chapter is the awareness that while heaven and earth praise the Lord, His crowning creation, mankind, often refuses to do so. While inanimate rocks and brute beasts all praise God, mankind, with all his intelligence and awareness, being created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26), often refuses to acknowledge and praise Him.

No wonder the psalmist wrote, “The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God”” (14:1). All of creation testifies to the contrary. In spite of all the evidence, the fool will say “in his heart” that there is no God.

I think this phrase is interesting. The Hebrew word that is translated *fool* in this passage does not suggest the person is lacking intellectually, but rather morally. In other words, the problem is not in his head; it is in his heart. That explains why he says “in his heart,” not “in his head,” “There is no God” (Psalm 14:1). Paul wrote:

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 . . . Professing to be wise, they became fools . . .

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 . . . (Rom. 1:20, 22, 28)

Herein Paul affirmed what the psalmist affirmed. It is not that the existence of God is outside our ability to know. On the contrary, the heavens and the earth declare him. The problem is that they do not like to retain him in their knowledge. In other words, it is not a matter of intellectual failure, but a moral failure.

I would also like to suggest one more thought for your consideration. Have you ever wondered what these foolish people look like who deny the existence of God and who refuse to praise Him along with the heavens and the earth? Do they look rough and rebellious? Do they drive cars with ACLU bumper stickers? Do they have a look of smug arrogance and intellectual superiority?

What if I told you that many of these fools look just like you and me? What if I told you that many “atheists” are frequently seen with folded hands, praying, or with open Bibles, reading? Yes, it is true.

Now, allow me to explain.

While we typically apply Psalm 14:1, “The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God,”” to atheists, we might find a broader application by taking a closer look.

The words “there is” in this passage are not in the Hebrew text and are an addition by the translators. Several Bible translations will italicize those words, denoting they were added by the translators. The significance is that instead of saying, “The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God,”” it could be saying, “The fool has said in his heart, ‘No, God.’”

I would call this “practical atheism.” While of course it is foolish not to believe in the existence of God, it is also foolish to believe in God but to say, “No,” to Him. In what practical or functional sense does saying, “No,” to God differ from saying there is no God?

Could it be that this passage is not about “them,” but about “us”? Do we, as believers, ever say, “No,” to God?

- What do we say when God calls upon us to make deep sacrifices? Do we ever say, “No, God”?
- What do we do when God calls us to pursue peace and unity within the church? Do we ever say, “No, God”?
- What do we do when God calls us to discipline the impenitent brother in Christ? Do we ever say, “No, God”?
- What do we do when God calls us to forgive one who has sinned against us? Do we ever say, “No, God”?
- What do we do when God calls us to speak up and be heard, to stand against our culture and the tide of public opinion? Do we ever say, “No, God”?
- What do we do when God calls us to seek Him and His kingdom ahead of our own lives and families? Do we ever say, “No, God”?

Whether one says, “No,” to God’s existence or says, “No,” to God’s commands, it results in the same thing—foolishness.

May we open our eyes and join in with the angels, the moon, the stars, the heavens, the sea creatures, beasts of the field, hail, snow, wind, and mountains and lift our voices in praise to the One who made it all, for He is worthy of praise (Psalm 145:3).

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