



DAYBREAK

Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Psalms

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Proverbs 1:1-33 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 1:1—4:8 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 81:1—83:18 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Proverbs 2:1—3:35 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 5:1—7:17 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 84:1—86:17 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Proverbs 4:1—5:23 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 8:1—9:20 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 87:1—88:18 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Proverbs 6:1-35 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 10:1—13:6 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 89:1-52 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Proverbs 7:1-27 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 14:1—17:15 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 90:1—91:16 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Proverbs 8:1—9:18 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 18:1-50 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 92:1—94:23 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Proverbs 10:1—11:31 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 19:1—21:13 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 95:1—97:12 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Proverbs 12:1—13:25 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 22:1—23:6 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 98:1—101:8 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Proverbs 14:1-35 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 24:1—26:12 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 102:1—103:22 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Proverbs 15:1-33 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 27:1—29:11 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 104:1-35 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Proverbs 16:1-33 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 30:1—32:11 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 105:1-45 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Proverbs 17:1—18:24 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 33:1—34:22 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 106:1-48 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Proverbs 19:1—20:30 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 35:1—36:12 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 107:1-43 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Proverbs 21:1—22:16 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 37:1-40 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 108:1—109:31 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Proverbs 22:17—23:35 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 38:1—39:13 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 110:1—114:8 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Proverbs 24:1-34 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 40:1—41:13 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 115:1—116:19 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Proverbs 25:1—26:28 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 42:1—44:26 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 117:1—118:29 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Proverbs 27:1—28:28 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 45:1—48:14 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 119:1-40 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Proverbs 29:1-27 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 49:1—50:23 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 119:41-88 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Proverbs 30:1-33 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 51:1—54:7 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 119:89-136 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Proverbs 31:1-31 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 55:1—57:11 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 119:137-176 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ecclesiastes 1:1—2:26 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 58:1—60:12 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 120:1—123:4 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ecclesiastes 3:1—4:16 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 61:1—64:10 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 124:1—129:8 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ecclesiastes 5:1—6:12 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 65:1—66:20 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 130:1—134:3 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ecclesiastes 7:1-29 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 67:1—68:35 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 135:1—136:26 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ecclesiastes 8:1—9:12 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 69:1—70:5 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 137:1—139:24 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ecclesiastes 9:13—10:20 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 71:1—72:20 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 140:1—143:12 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ecclesiastes 11:1—12:14 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 73:1—74:23 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 144:1—146:10 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Song of Solomon 1:1—2:17 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 75:1—77:20 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 147:1—150:6 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Song of Solomon 3:1—6:3 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 78:1-72 | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Song of Solomon 6:4—8:14 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms 79:1—80:19 | |

Daybreak is a personal Bible study continuum for the high school and adult levels. Scripture references are taken from the King James Version of the Bible. A companion series of Sunday school lessons, titled Discovery, is also available. All of the material is available on our website, as well as in printed form. The print version is designed as a tear apart, to be stored in a binder; subsequent modules can then be easily inserted. Daybreak is an official publication of the Apostolic Faith Church. All rights are reserved.



Overview for Proverbs

Purpose: To give maxims, practical advice, and counsel of a moral nature to the Hebrew people, instructing them on how to conduct themselves in light of God's principles of order.

Author: Internal evidence names King Solomon as the primary author (see Proverbs 1:1; 10:1; 25:1). The "men of Hezekiah" (Proverbs 25:1) seemingly compiled the material found in chapters 25 through 29, and the final chapters were contributed by Agur and Lemuel.

Date Written: Probably over a period of time during Solomon's reign, approximately 970 to 931 B.C.

History: During Solomon's reign, the nation of Israel reached its apex spiritually, politically, culturally, and economically. As Israel's reputation spread, so did King Solomon's, and dignitaries from throughout the known world traveled great distances to learn from the wisdom of this monarch. In 1 Kings 4:29-34, Solomon is credited with writing three thousand proverbs and over one thousand songs.

Key Verse: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction." (Proverbs 1:7)

Special Features: The Book of Proverbs is a collection of moral and philosophical statements and wise sayings which employ contrast—a common Semitic literary device—to present its message. Other literary techniques incorporated in the book include parables, pointed questions, poetic couplets, and personification.

The book is built around the theme of wisdom; the words *wise* and *wisdom* occur at least 125 times in its 31 chapters. The wisdom extolled goes far beyond just a high degree of intelligence; it is based upon moral virtue, and is synonymous with righteousness. Perhaps the greatest error in a correct understanding of Proverbs comes when the maxims are regarded as mere secular commentary rather than divinely-inspired instruction.

Setting: In the society of ancient Israel, the family played an important role in the upbringing and education of children. Some internal evidence suggests that the Proverbs were used in a family setting; the phrase "my son" appears some twenty times throughout the book, while the role of the mother is alluded to ten times. Although wisdom is the primary theme of the book, it covers a wide range of topics based on common experiences in the everyday world: morality and immorality, diligence and sloth, self-control and intemperance, wealth and poverty, child discipline, and discernment in choosing friends.

Summary: Unlike many other books of the Bible, there is no plot or storyline found in the Book of Proverbs, nor are there principal characters. Throughout the book, wisdom is compared and contrasted with foolishness, and the wise (or righteous) man with the fool (one who is devoid of morality and uninterested in correction). The wisdom of Proverbs rightly places God at the center of man's life, and establishes that even in down-to-earth matters, true wisdom is living in harmony with His divine purpose.

Outline

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A complete amplified outline of this book is available on our website at www.apostolicfaith.org.*

- I. Introduction (1:1-7)
 - A. The author of the book (1:1)
 - B. The purpose of the book (1:2-4)
 - C. The theme of the book (1:5-7)
- II. The superiority of the way of wisdom (1:8—9:18)
 - A. The teachings of wisdom (1:8-33)
 - B. The value of wisdom (2:1-22)
 - C. The rewards of wisdom (3:1-35)
 - D. The advice of wisdom (4:1-27)
 - E. The warnings of wisdom (5:1—7:27)
 - F. The worthiness of wisdom (8:1-36)
 - G. The invitation of wisdom (9:1-18)
- III. The sayings of the way of wisdom (10:1—31:31)
 - A. The 375 proverbs of Solomon (10:1—22:16)
 - B. The words of the wise (22:17—24:34)
 - C. The words of Solomon arranged by the men of Hezekiah (25:1—29:27)
 - D. The words of Agur (30:1-33)
 - E. The words of Lemuel (31:1-31)



Proverbs 1:1-33

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

**“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.”
(Proverbs 1:7)**

The last two years of high school and the following four in college were defining years in my life. Though I had little religious background, part way through high school I understood enough about the Gospel to yield my life to the Lord. As I began to live for Him, Christian role models were critically important to me. One person who had a great influence on my life was a man in our church we called Brother Mike.

By the time I knew him, Mike was an elderly gentleman. Because he had been born in another country, he spoke with a thick accent and had difficulty reading English. He worked as a janitor in the local high school, where I am confident he did a conscientious job.

Unquestionably my college professors and even many of my fellow students had more academic knowledge than Mike. Yet he possessed wisdom: he revered God and had committed his life to Him. When we met at church, he invariably had a big smile. He spent much time in prayer and testified often of the joy he felt in his heart. Many around me were searching for meaning in life—generally in all the wrong places—but Mike had found it in Christ.

My final memory of Mike is especially poignant. During a Sunday evening service, he suddenly suffered a serious heart attack. Several of the men carried him to a back room, while the rest of us went to prayer. In just a short time, he left this world for a far better place.

Today’s focus verse says that “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” Mike did not have much formal education, so some may have assumed he was not very smart. However, he had the kind of wisdom that is of eternal value because he revered the Lord and obeyed His Word. Meanwhile, many of my fellow students and teachers seemingly had no concern for God’s wisdom and instruction, which made them foolish in God’s sight.

Love for God and a determination to follow His teaching are attitudes that will benefit us now and throughout eternity. Mike knew that, and he is now in Heaven, experiencing eternal rewards. Let’s follow his example, and make sure our focus is on acquiring true wisdom.

BACKGROUND

A proverb can be defined as a concise saying that gives advice or a practical principle. The Book of Proverbs is a collection of these, mostly written and assembled by King Solomon. God met with him one night after he had presided over an immense sacrifice to the Lord in Gibeon (see accounts in 2 Chronicles 1 and 1 Kings 3). When asked what reward he would like from God, rather than riches or honor, Solomon requested wisdom so that he would know how to lead God’s people. God was so pleased with this response that He blessed Solomon with great wisdom, enabling him to acquire a vast amount of knowledge concerning the world in which he lived and giving him the ability to apply it astutely.

The first chapter of Proverbs sets the tone for the entire book. Verses 1-7 indicate that Proverbs was intended to educate, and those of any age or gender can profit by the instructions in this book. King Solomon wanted his people “to know wisdom”—to acquire it, not just to be aware of it. The four terms in verse 3—*wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity*—are different aspects of truth, a quality which God values highly. Verse 7 has been considered a key text for the whole book. In it, “the fear of the LORD” means to have awe and reverence for God.

Practical teaching begins in verses 8-9 with an exhortation to heed the guidance of one’s parents, and a promise of benefit for doing so. Verses 10-19 describe the lawless who try to entice others to join them. Robbery was common in the land of Israel through all the years of its history, and often there was no regard for the lives of the innocent. Great and quickly acquired wealth was the lure. However, the writer said such people were setting a trap for themselves. Even birds are able to avoid a net put out to snare them, but the evil people described would be caught because of their greediness.

Wisdom is often personified as a woman in the Book of Proverbs, and verse 20 is the first time this literary technique is used. In verses 20-23, wisdom earnestly calls for people to heed her. She calls the simple ones (those who listen to both good and evil), the scorners (those who defy God and scoff at godliness), and fools (those who have hardened their hearts and are stubborn). Her call is universal—it goes out to everyone.

Verses 24-33 show the results of refusing to heed wisdom. The determination not to follow wisdom’s counsel promises sure disaster. The implied spiritual

application is that those who refuse to heed God's call to yield to Him will one day regret their decision. In the last verse of the chapter, wisdom promises blessings to those who will abide by her instructions.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- I. Introduction (1:1-7)
 - A. The author of the book (1:1)
 - B. The purpose of the book (1:2-4)
 - C. The theme of the book (1:5-7)
- II. The superiority of the way of wisdom
 - A. The teachings of wisdom (1:8-33)
 - 1. The exhortation to listen to wisdom (1:8-9)
 - 2. The warning against evil companions (1:10-19)
 - 3. The invitation to wisdom (1:20-33)
 - a. The call of wisdom (1:20-23)
 - b. The dangers of rejecting wisdom (1:24-33)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Who will hear and increase learning?

2. What are some of the advantages of heeding the instructions of godly parents?

3. Besides having a sound knowledge of what God requires, what follow-through on our part might God want?

CONCLUSION

A proper reverence for God and obedience to His instructions will start us down the path of acquiring true knowledge.

NOTES



Proverbs 2:1 through 3:35

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.” (Proverbs 3:13-14)

In the mid-1800s, James Marshall was contracted to build Sutter’s Mill in Coloma, California. When the mill was nearly completed, it was found that the tailrace, which allowed the mill water to flow back into the South Fork of the American River, was not working correctly and had to be made deeper and wider. On January 24, 1848, while inspecting the tailrace, Marshall spotted shiny yellow flakes in the water—he had found gold! Although Marshall and his associates tried to keep their discovery a secret, the news leaked out, and the California Gold Rush of the late 1840s and 1850s began.

Soon, gold was found in other parts of California as well, and people from outside the region started making their way to the state to seek their fortune. They came by land and by boat, some from thousands of miles away, all hoping to strike it rich. The journey was difficult and dangerous, yet eighty thousand people came to California in the year of 1849 alone! Though gold worth billions in today’s dollars was eventually found, only a few individuals became wealthy. Most of those who came seeking gold had very little to show for their efforts in the end.

In today’s focus verses, Solomon told his listeners that wisdom and understanding were worth more than fine gold. In our society, people typically seek wisdom in a variety of ways. However, like the prospectors who came to California during the Gold Rush, most of them do not succeed in their quest, for true wisdom is found only in God.

God’s wisdom is essential in the walk of a Christian. He will help us make decisions both inconsequential and life-changing. Whether we seek His guidance concerning a small matter such as how to respond to an abrasive co-worker, or a major decision such as whom to marry, we will find He gladly gives wisdom and understanding to those who seek for it in Him.

Ultimately, gaining and applying God’s wisdom leads to eternal life, which is the greatest treasure we will ever find. When we dig into God’s Word and spend time on our knees in prayer, God will be faithful to give us the wisdom and understanding we need.

BACKGROUND

Proverbs chapters 1-9 are thought to be specifically addressed to the young men of Israel. While both chapters in today’s text begin with “my son,” Solomon was not only speaking to his own offspring, but to all those under his rule in Israel.

Chapter 2 gives instruction on how the wisdom of God will bring protection to those who seek after Him. Effort must be made in order to receive the blessing of God’s knowledge, and the first four verses lay out a formula for seeking God’s wisdom. Action words such as *receive*, *hide*, *incline*, *apply*, *cry*, *lift*, *seek*, and *search* make it clear that this endeavor is not to be taken lightly. In the original language, the word “heart” (verse 2) referred to the intellect and will in addition to feelings, so the whole of a person is to be involved in this action. Verse 5 relates the outcome for one who exerts such effort: he will “understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.”

The remainder of the chapter describes what God will protect from. Verse 12 tells of an evil man whose words are *froward*, which means “perverse” or “crooked.” Verses 16 and 17 tell of a strange woman who flatters with words but whose ways lead to death. Both of these individuals attempted to lead the follower of God astray through their words, but verse 11 makes it clear that discretion and understanding will protect one from being deceived.

Chapter 3 relates how God’s wisdom brings direction to the paths of those who follow Him. Verses 1, 3, and 5 are an admonition to apply God’s Word and wisdom to the heart. To “bind it about thy neck” is to keep it close, so that it is readily available. This indicates a need to go beyond knowledge that is only in the mind. God’s wisdom does a work on the soul of the person who applies it. Again, Solomon laid out a formula for how to receive God’s wisdom and benefit from it, this time using an “if . . . then” structure. “If” a person does what is admonished, “then” God will respond with positive results.

Both chapters 2 and 3 use a metaphor comparing searching for treasure with searching for wisdom. Solomon indicated that sinful men will lust after the treasures of this world, but the heart of the righteous will seek those things that are above. Both chapters promise many blessings to those who seek God’s wisdom, and both end with warnings of destruction and shame to the wicked and foolish.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- II. The superiority of the way of wisdom
 - B. The value of wisdom (2:1-22)
 - 1. The conditions of obtaining wisdom (2:1-4)
 - 2. The benefits of wisdom (2:5-22)
 - C. The rewards of wisdom (3:1-35)
 - 1. The rewards of wisdom (3:1-12)
 - 2. The superiority of wisdom (3:13-20)
 - 3. The application of wisdom (3:21-35)
 - a. The promise of blessing (3:21-26)
 - b. The obligations of wisdom to one's neighbor (3:27-35)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Proverbs 2 and 3 use many action verbs to urge the reader to find God's wisdom. What are some of these?

2. Solomon compared seeking and finding God's wisdom to seeking and finding earthly treasure. What is the Christian's method of "digging" for God's wisdom?

3. Chapter 3 lists many benefits for the one who seeks and finds God's wisdom. What are some of those benefits you personally have experienced?

CONCLUSION

Seeking for God's wisdom in our lives is not a casual activity. When we put the time and effort into our search for God's wisdom, we will find the benefits and blessings are immeasurable . . . and eternal!

NOTES



Proverbs 4:1 through 5:23

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life.” (Proverbs 4:13)

Vera Maksimova was born in Ukraine on January 1, 1930. When she was three years old, her mother abandoned her, so she was left with her father and grandmother. Ten years later, she and her grandmother received a notice that her father, who had been serving in the military, was missing in action and presumed dead.

Although Vera grew up during troublesome political times in the Soviet Union, her grandmother taught her about Christianity. Church services were held in homes of believers who risked losing everything—their homes, jobs, families, and freedom—for their belief in God. At the age of seventeen, Vera was walking home after one of the services and praying silently when overwhelming peace and love filled her heart. She knew at that moment that she was saved. She continued on with the Lord, seeking holiness, and then receiving the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Because of religious persecution, she was water baptized in a river at night, although it was late fall and brutally cold.

God made it possible for Vera to attend and graduate from medical college, and she was able to work as an emergency room nurse practitioner for forty-seven years. She married a Christian man, and they had four children, but when she was fifty-five years old, her husband was killed in a car accident.

Vera continued to trust God, and in 1997, immigrated to Portland, Oregon, where she mastered English. She became acquainted with our church and loved volunteering in our mailing department. She also enjoyed Sunday school and church services. However, the challenges of life were not all behind her; she had a bout with cancer. In the face of suffering and pain, she held on to what she had been taught. She had a peaceful attitude and radiant smile, and was loved by all who knew her until God took her to be with Him in 2011.

Vera took “fast hold of instruction” and indeed, it was her life. She heeded the teachings of her godly grandmother, and passed this heritage on to her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. She understood that there are spiritual guidelines which we must observe for our soul’s welfare or protection. In today’s text, Solomon alluded to the importance of learning these truths—which

he referred to as “wisdom,” “good doctrine,” and “understanding”—from our fathers and other godly elders. He reflected back on his own father’s encouragement to seek wisdom above all else, and clearly wanted to impart that same principle to his hearers.

Obtaining wisdom will require resolve and determination. We must purpose to hear the instruction and then follow through on what we hear. And we must consider the acquisition of understanding to be worth a lifetime of effort and unbroken vigilance. According to Solomon, the benefits of doing so are many. In our text, he points out that wisdom will preserve and keep us, and will bring the favor of God and man. It will build a reputation for good judgment, offer protection, promote health and vitality, and will result in a long and blessed life. Surely those results are worth striving for, and Vera experienced them.

We, too, can purpose to listen and learn, and then create a legacy of godly wisdom that we will be able to pass on to the generations who follow us.

BACKGROUND

The instruction in chapter 4 is divided into two distinct sections, each dealing with the supreme importance of wisdom. In the first section, verses 1-9, the author reflected on his father’s teachings and recalled the parental guidance and doctrine he had received in a loving home environment. While presenting the necessity of parents to instruct the younger generation, the emphasis is directed toward the youth, with the purpose of impressing upon them the importance of obtaining wisdom. Repetition of the verb “get” in verses 5 and 7 is significant, as the dual usage makes the injunction more emphatic.

In the second section, verses 10-27, one of Proverbs’ most dominant metaphors is employed: the illustration of a path. Two possible paths of life are set forth in sharp contrast to one another—the way of wisdom, and the ruinous path of the unrighteous. The picture is developed through a variety of carefully chosen words which extend the metaphor. These include verbs such as *led*, *go*, *run*, *stumble*, *enter*, *pass by*, *turn*, and *fall*. Within the ongoing theme of a path, two specific pitfalls are highlighted: violence (verses 10-17) and dishonesty (verses 20-27).

Also in this second group of verses, the teacher pled with his hearers to embrace purity of life with the whole person, bringing out how the physical

members of the body must participate in cooperation. The role of the ears, eyes, heart, mouth, eyelids, feet, and hands are all mentioned. He asserted that wisdom would lead to promotion, honor, grace, a crown of glory, length of life, and spiritual stability—a list which includes both temporal and eternal benefits.

Chapter 5 addresses the topic of marital fidelity, and the application of wisdom to the relationship between the sexes. In this section, Solomon described the types of individuals and behaviors which would lure someone down the path of destruction, and the proper response to keep one on the right path.

The “strange woman” described in verse 3 is a morally loose woman or adulteress who represents the allurements of sin. Solomon warned that her words are flattering and seductive, but the outcome of association with her would be “bitter as wormwood, and sharp as a twoedged sword” (verse 4). He advised that only through instruction, understanding, and the application of wisdom could right choices be made to prevent being entangled in her web of deceit, folly, and ultimate death.

“Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:23) is a central theme of these two chapters. They stress that diligence in obtaining wisdom is paramount, and diligence in discretion and stability is required in order to retain it.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- II. The superiority of the way of wisdom
 - D. The advice of wisdom (4:1-27)
 - 1. The instruction of the father (4:1-9)
 - 2. The two ways contrasted (4:10-19)
 - 3. The instruction regarding the right way (4:20-27)
 - E. The warnings of wisdom
 - 1. Concerning moral purity (5:1-23)
 - a. The plea for obedience (5:1-2)
 - b. The warning against adultery (5:3-14)
 - c. The plea for fidelity (5:15-23)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What are the outcomes named in these chapters of the path of the just and the path of the wicked?

2. What core instructions are given in Proverbs 4:20-27?

3. What are some specific ways that we can retain the teachings acquired through a godly upbringing?

CONCLUSION

It is vital for parents and grandparents to impart a love for God and His ways to their children, but it is also necessary for children to exercise diligence in order to acquire and retain it.

NOTES



Proverbs 6:1-35

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.”
(Proverbs 6:10-11)

Sleep is a precious commodity, especially for mothers of young children, but at times it can be dangerous. Recently I was trying to catch a few extra minutes of shut-eye after having been up several times in the night with my infant son. Suddenly I was awakened by a deluge of cold water gushing down my back. I sat up in a flash to see my two-year-old daughter standing by the bed, holding an empty glass. “Here go, Mommy!” she exclaimed brightly. I lifted the soaking blankets off and got up, water trickling off the bed and down my back. My opportunity to snooze for a few moments longer was over. Clearly, when my daughter is up, I had better be awake to make sure she doesn’t wreak havoc!

Of course I dried out quickly from my rude awakening, and no permanent damage was done. However, there are other ways we can “sleep” without shutting our eyes, and that is the kind of sleep that can be dangerous. Perhaps we are mentally asleep while we are supposed to be working. We may be zoned out while our college professor is outlining key concepts that we’ll be tested on later. Or we may be daydreaming while sitting in church on Sunday morning. Dozing off at the wrong time can cause a lot of problems, both in our temporal environment and in our Christian lives! In fact, if we’re not careful, we could lose the riches of God’s blessing in our lives simply because we’ve allowed ourselves to drift into a spiritual “snooze” instead of focusing on spiritual matters.

In our focus verse, Solomon warns against laziness—of sleeping when one should be working. Certainly our bodies need periods of physical rest, whether it is regular hours of sleep or a vacation from work. God rested on the seventh day of Creation, establishing a pattern for refreshment and restoration that we are to follow. Nevertheless, the warning Solomon gave has relevance in our lives. We might be awake physically, but sleeping our days away spiritually by neglecting to read the Bible and pray, doing our tasks of service half-heartedly, or failing to pay attention to the messages God is sending us.

If we have drifted into a pattern of spiritual sleep, God might have to startle us awake. And like my

daughter dumping water down my back, it probably will not be enjoyable! However, if we stay alert to His voice and keep our minds and hearts fully engaged with what He has given us to do, we will not need to fear physical or spiritual poverty—or an abrupt awakening.

BACKGROUND

The matter of personal conduct continues in this chapter. While chapter 5 dealt with the sin that Solomon believed was the immediate danger to the young men of Israel, chapter 6 moves to other matters that can also lead a young man to dishonor. The man who conducts himself as detailed by the instruction given here will be saved from many failures.

Verses 1-5 warn against suretyship—pledging to assume the obligations or debts of another person should he default. To the Hebrews, speech was extremely important, and spoken words could not be taken back. For that reason, Solomon warned that a person should not make promises lightly, especially in the place of another who may or may not take his obligation seriously. Such behavior could bring a great deal of trouble. It seems unlikely that these strong admonitions were intended to prohibit generosity or the direct lending of money to members of one’s community, although even that can lead to difficulties. Solomon seemingly wanted the young men under his influence to properly understand the complications that can accompany certain financial and business arrangements.

The ant illustration in verse 6 provided a model of industry for the foolish and lazy man. The ant instinctively prepares at harvest time for the cold months of winter, and Solomon was pointing out the advantages of thinking ahead, diligent work, self-directedness, and efficiency. When an ant finds a source of food, it returns to its colony and leaves a scented trail to alert other ants of the find. Over time, ants determine the shortest path to the food, and often carry fifty times their weight in food back to the colony.

In verses 12-19, Solomon warned against the evils of lying. Modern studies have proven a fact that Solomon understood: liars tend to give nonverbal indicators that they are lying. These indicators include blinking or winking the eyes and frequently touching the face. The seven things that the Lord hates were given as a climax to the instruction in verses 12-15. This form of proverb (listing a number of items and then increasing them by one) was later termed a

“middah” by Hebrew writers. It indicates that the list could go on and on.

In the last part of the chapter, verses 20-35, Solomon returned to warning against sexual sins. He specifically cautioned for alertness to the potential deceit of an older, married temptress. Verse 26 suggests that an adulteress seeking a relationship should be more feared than a prostitute who is only after monetary gain. In verses 29-31, the argument that those guilty of adultery should be excused because they had unmet needs is shown to be unacceptable. Solomon pointed out that a thief would not be excused if he argued that he could not feed himself.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- II. The superiority of the way of wisdom
 - E The warnings of wisdom
 - 2. Concerning other acts of folly
 - a. The folly of suretyship (6:1-5)
 - b. The folly of laziness (6:6-11)
 - c. The folly of deceit (6:12-15)
 - d. The folly of seven sins (6:16-19)
 - e. The folly of adultery (6:20-35)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What seven things are abominations to the Lord?

2. What did Solomon mean when he wrote, “Give not sleep to thine eyes, nor slumber to thine eyelids”?

3. How can we stay spiritually awake, so we don't lose the riches of God's blessing on our lives?

CONCLUSION

Solomon condemns the sluggard and warns against laziness and sleep, but a spiritual application can be made as well. It is vital to stay spiritually awake and focused on the things of God!

NOTES



Proverbs 7:1-27

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

**“My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee. Keep my commandments, and live; and my law as the apple of thine eye.”
(Proverbs 7:1-2)**

The value of God’s Word and His wisdom exceeds any other treasure. Don Wolfe, a long-time member of our Portland congregation, was taught that truth by his Christian father. He often testifies about how he was taught the Scriptures when he was just a small child being raised by a single parent after his mother left the home. His godly father was faithful to take him to church and Sunday school regularly. However, much of what he learned of the Word of God was based on a Scripture game he and his father often played. They would take turns quoting verses to each other until dropping off to sleep each night. A particular passage that always came up was, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1 John 2:15-16). Don never got away from those verses.

He relates, “Following graduation from high school, I got a job, married, and spent two years in the United States Navy during the Korean conflict. I drew the line on what I would and would not do: I never tried cigarettes, liquor, or drugs, but I had a lot of worldly ambitions. Shortly after I came home from the service, the Lord showed me that I had let the love of the world creep into my heart. I was living with an empty profession, and I didn’t see how I would ever have the courage to face up to the truth and get straightened out with the Lord.

“One night, as I sat in a young people’s meeting, it seemed as though the Lord shut me away from everything around me. His Spirit was dealing with me, and at the close of that service, I didn’t care what anybody thought about me. All I wanted was to make sure I was right with God. I made my way forward to the altar of prayer, and kneeling at the foot of the pulpit, I repented with bitter tears. I told the Lord I wanted to be a real Christian. The Lord was faithful to encourage me as I prayed, and that night He saved my soul, witnessing that I had been forgiven. When I rose to my feet I had peace in my heart at last. All the fear of death was gone, and the burden of condemnation was rolled away. What a joyful night that was!”

Don’s story changed from one of defeat to one of victory because he yielded his life to God. Although he had known the Word of God from early childhood, he began to treasure God’s commandments and to live according to God’s precepts, as instructed in today’s key verses. He went on to raise his family of seven children in the Gospel, worked for many years as a respected educator and musician in the Portland area, and served faithfully in a variety of roles in the church. Even in his senior years, he still rejoiced that he could report spiritual victory until he went to his reward in Heaven in 2019.

The story recorded in Proverbs 7 is a sad contrast to Don’s testimony. Solomon told of a young man who did not keep God’s commandments close to his heart, and his story did not have a happy ending.

God has laid out a plan in His Word that, if followed, will give us victory over sin. Studying the Bible, treasuring its commandments, and following through in obedience will help us remain victorious in spite of the challenges that life inevitably brings our way. Don Wolfe proved that, and we can do so as well.

BACKGROUND

Like prior chapters, today’s text continues the emphasis on the importance of wisdom. In chapter 7, wisdom is presented as the treasure that provides safety, including the preservation of moral purity. Conversely, ignoring wisdom will lead to destruction. As an illustration, Solomon told of a young man who was ensnared by the cunning ways of an adulterous woman. The chapter ends with another exhortation to take heed.

Like a father would teach a son or a teacher his pupils, Solomon directed his warning to young men. In verses 1-5, the words “commandments,” “words,” and “law” all refer to the wisdom of heeding God’s instructions. To keep wisdom as “the apple of thine eye” (verse 2) meant to care for it as one would the pupil of the eye, which is vital to seeing. If the pupil were injured, the individual would find himself living in darkness, and the person who does not hold the law dear will be in spiritual darkness. Jewish people wrote out Old Testament passages and wore them on their arms and foreheads as reminders, but in verse 3, Solomon said to bind God’s instructions on the heart, the seat of one’s will and being. Wisdom should be prized as a beloved sister or a relative who offers protection. This devotion to wisdom, Solomon counseled, would be a defense against immoral temptations.

An illustrative metaphor begins at verse 6. The word *casement* could be translated as “lattice.” In Solomon’s time, glass was not used in windows, but windows often had lattice, which gave some privacy and yet allowed ventilation. A person could stand inside and look out without being seen.

A young man, inexperienced and foolish, allowed himself to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Verse 7 uses the phrase “void of understanding” to describe the young man. Adam Clarke observes that he was “destitute of a heart; he had not wisdom to discern the evil intended nor courage to resist the flatteries of the seducer.” Whether by intent or accident, he came to the corner where the seductress lived, and she set about to trap him. A willful and uncontrolled woman, she used boldness and flattery. When she said in verse 14, “I have peace offerings with me; this day have I payed my vows,” she referred to religious sacrifices she had made. In such offerings, the priests kept some of the meat, but the Law required the giver to eat what remained that day or the next, so she was indicating that she was observant of the religious law. She claimed there was no need to be concerned about her husband because he had taken money and gone on a long trip.

Solomon gave graphic word pictures to describe the youth’s yielding: like an ox going to slaughter, a fool to the stocks, or a bird into a snare. Verse 23 refers to a dart striking through the liver. This could be a reference to the fact that the liver was considered the seat of sexual desire in ancient writings. It also could imply that the woman’s husband would carry out judgment on him and his wife by killing them both or having them both killed for their transgression.

In verses 24-27, Solomon concluded by again issuing a warning. He wanted others to learn from this youth’s example. They needed to work at keeping the wisdom of God in their hearts so they would avoid the temptations that destroyed this youth and many others as well.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- II. The superiority of the way of wisdom
 - E. The warnings of wisdom
 - 2. Concerning other acts of folly
 - f. The folly of harlotry (7:1-27)
 - (1) The call to obedience (7:1-5)
 - (2) The ways of a harlot (7:6-23)
 - (3) The conclusion (7:24-27)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What comparisons in verses 2-4 show the reader how wisdom should be treated?

2. How could the young man in Proverbs 7 have escaped his predicament?

3. When we find ourselves tempted, what steps can we take to resist that temptation?

CONCLUSION

We will benefit in this life and throughout eternity if we cherish God’s Word and follow His commandments.

NOTES



Proverbs 8:1 through 9:18

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.” (Proverbs 9:10)

Like many of my contemporaries, I attended college to obtain a degree. We live in an age where a good education is considered of paramount importance. People spend great sums of money and invest years of their lives to obtain diplomas certifying successful completion of a formal course of study.

Other individuals acquire knowledge through hands-on training. I grew up in a small coastal community in which a number of fishermen turned to boat building during the winter months. Using techniques handed down to them by their fathers, they were able to build beautiful and seaworthy boats. Not only were these men good craftsmen, but they were also keen observers of the weather and their environment. While most of them had little formal schooling, they were extremely knowledgeable about the forces of nature around them. At times, that understanding made the difference between life and death when they were out on the water.

Earthly knowledge, whether acquired through formal education, hands-on training, or personal experience, is unquestionably a valuable commodity. However, given society’s focus on learning, it is possible to mistake the acquisition of knowledge for wisdom. The truth is, godly wisdom goes far beyond any amount of worldly knowledge, skill, or understanding. It is of infinite and eternal value!

Our focus verse gives us the starting point for obtaining godly wisdom when it states that “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.” The type of fear referenced in this verse is not the distressing emotion caused by impending danger. The fear of the Lord means having a deep regard for God’s awesomeness, a rejection of anything that is ungodly, and a consistent purpose to obey God’s Word.

The last part of verse 10 offers further insight. It tells us that “knowledge of the holy is understanding.” This knowledge is received only when a person surrenders his life to God. We need to know God personally if we desire true understanding.

When I graduated from college as a computer draftsperson, I felt a measure of confidence in myself. Yet when I sat next to a person at work who had years of experience, I realized how little I knew and how

much I had to learn. So it is no wonder that when we truly realize how wise and mighty God is, we feel our need to follow Him closely.

BACKGROUND

In contrast to the previous chapter which graphically described the attitude and actions of a seductress, chapter 8 gives a masterful description of wisdom. As in chapter 1 of Proverbs, the writer characterized wisdom as a woman, and in this text, declared the benefits of following her instruction.

Unlike the woman in chapter 7 who lurked on a corner in the darkness, the personification of wisdom described in the first five verses of chapter 8 stood in a public place where many people could see and hear her. There she called out to those from every level of society and cultural background to heed her message. In verses 6-11, wisdom said she spoke of “excellent things” and that her words were true and righteous. The terms *froward* and *perverse* in verse 8 could be translated as “twisted” or “crooked,” and they referred again to the seductress of chapter 7. The instruction of wisdom was declared to be more valuable than gems and riches.

Wisdom proclaimed more of her attributes in verses 12-16. *Prudence* means “discretion or common sense,” and *witty inventions* allude to “thorough and careful planning.” Wisdom stated she was strong and able to help leaders rule well. Those who loved and sought her (verses 17-21) would receive benefits.

Bible scholars have varied opinions about the meaning of verses 22-31. Some believe they indicate that wisdom is an eternal attribute of God, so it was a part of His being from long before the Creation. Other scholars believe this passage is a description of Jesus Christ, illustrating His participation in the Creation. This second view is supported by the similarity of New Testament texts such as John 1:1-3, Colossians 1:15-17, and Hebrews 1:2. Whichever position is taken, the passage gives a superb description of the Creation.

The writer finished his exhortation in verses 32-36 with a reminder that each individual must chose whether or not to follow wisdom—God’s instructions. It is a life or death choice.

Chapter 9 contrasts wisdom and folly by presenting them both as women who had invited guests to their homes. Between the two invitations are a few verses of terse truisms.

In verses 1-6, wisdom had a fine home and had prepared a sumptuous banquet. Her maidens were sent

to herald the invitation to all, including those who lacked experience, good judgment, or courage.

The timeless truths in verses 7-12 may have been comments to help draw guests to wisdom’s banquet, or they may have been prompted by the varied responses of those who heard her summons. Those who were determined to pursue wickedness scoffed and rejected the invitation, but those who desired wisdom were instructed. Each person had to choose to heed or ignore, and then bear the consequences of his or her choice.

The invitation by folly is presented in verses 13-18. In many ways she tried to make her invitation similar to wisdom’s. However, she was “clamorous” (loud) and did the inviting herself. Although she used the same words as wisdom, her intent was far different. While heeding wisdom promised life, going with folly resulted in death.

Chapter 9 ends the first section of Proverbs.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- II. The superiority of the way of wisdom
 - F. The worthiness of wisdom (8:1-36)
 - 1. The call to wisdom (8:1-11)
 - 2. The character of wisdom (8:12-21)
 - 3. The preeminence of wisdom in Creation (8:22-31)
 - 4. The choice between life and death (8:32-36)
 - G. The invitation of wisdom (9:1-18)
 - 1. The invitation of wisdom (9:1-6)
 - 2. The instructions for scoffers (9:7-12)
 - 3. The invitation of folly (9:13-18)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to our text, what attributes go hand in hand with wisdom?

2. In your opinion, why is wisdom essential in our world today?

3. How can we use verse 33 of chapter 8 in our quest for wisdom?

CONCLUSION

Wisdom begins with a proper regard for God and obedience to His precepts, and knowledge of the holy comes through an intimate and personal relationship with Him.

NOTES



Proverbs 10:1 through 11:31

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“He is in the way of life that keepeth instruction: but he that refuseth reproof erreth.”
(Proverbs 10:17)

Our two-year-old daughter can be charming, sweet, and intelligent. And that’s not only a parent’s assessment—others comment from time to time that she seems like the perfect child. However, what most people are not aware of is that at home, our daughter can become a different girl altogether! While shy and quiet at church and around people she does not know well, at home she is often loud, rambunctious, and sometimes demanding. Like any toddler, she needs to be corrected quite often. In fact, her time-out chair might be the most used chair in our house!

Nevertheless, when my husband or I correct her, she is very contrite. She may have just yelled, “No!” and run the other direction in defiance, but after a few minutes in time out and a quiet discussion about what she did wrong, she sincerely apologizes and gives us a kiss. She is easily entreated after correction, and that eases the sometimes painful job of disciplining her.

As God’s children, on occasion our Father finds it necessary to correct or chastise us. When the Lord deals with us, are we as easily entreated and as accepting of His admonishment as a young child? Do we sincerely regret our mistakes and humbly ask forgiveness? Do we offer our love and devotion after we have been chastised?

In today’s focus verse, Solomon said, “He is in the way of life that keepeth instruction: but he that refuseth reproof erreth.” If we accept correction and apply it to our lives, God will ultimately bring us to eternal life. When Jesus was on earth, He indicated this by saying that His followers must become as little children if they were to inherit the kingdom of Heaven. Perhaps in part He was referencing the way a child responds to discipline.

As adults, it is not easy to admit we are wrong or to realize we need to improve in a particular area. However, the Lord can help us respond in the right way. If we continue to heed His correction, we will mature spiritually, and ultimately gain eternal life in Heaven.

BACKGROUND

Chapter 10 begins a new section of Proverbs. In contrast to the first nine chapters of the book, which contain exhortations of various lengths with the

theme of seeking wisdom and avoiding folly, most of Proverbs 10:1 through 22:16 consists of verses that stand alone. Each verse is a terse saying imparting common sense and spiritual wisdom for everyday matters. These maxims were composed by Solomon and are thought to be the portion of the book that was written first. In chapters 10-15, most of the proverbs show a contrast between people who are righteous and those who are wicked.

The rich metaphors throughout both chapters reinforce the truth of these observations. Several of the metaphors are humorous, such as Proverbs 10:26 and 11:22. In Solomon’s day, ladies often wore large nose rings, which were considered beautiful ornamentation. Not all verses use metaphors, however. In verse 4 of chapter 11, the “day of wrath” refers to the judgment of God which comes to the unrighteous after death.

Most of the verses in this passage are two-part antithetical observations (see below), with the two sections connected by the conjunction “but.” The major distinction of a Hebrew proverb is that it consists of two segments rather than only one. Hebrew poetry was not based on rhyme or rhythm, but on the relationship of the two segments (called parallelism). Below are examples of the various types of parallelism found in these chapters.

Synonymous: the second portion repeats the thought of the first with different words. (Example: “The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself”—Proverbs 11:25.)

Antithetical: the second portion states the same principle of the first, only from the opposite perspective. (Example: “A false balance is abomination to the LORD: but a just weight is his delight”—Proverbs 11:1.)

Synthetic: the second phrase augments and expands the meaning of the first. (Example: “He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool”—Proverbs 10:18.)

Comparative: the second phrase draws a comparison between some basic, ethical, or theological truth and some illustration, often nature. (Example: “As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more: but the righteous is an everlasting foundation”—Proverbs 10:25.)

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- III. The sayings of the way of wisdom
 - A. The 375 proverbs of Solomon
 - 1. The contrast of wisdom and folly in life (10:1 — 15:33)



Proverbs 12:1 through 13:25

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

**“In the way of righteousness is life; and in the pathway thereof there is no death.”
(Proverbs 12:28)**

I work for a school bus company, and one of my roles is to teach new employees how to drive buses. Usually, people who have never driven a forty-foot vehicle are primarily concerned about backing up the bus or learning how to make right and left turns without jumping the curb or sideswiping other vehicles. Those of us who have been doing this for a few years know that after mastering some simple techniques, the new drivers will be able to traverse narrow, winding roads or congested city traffic with no problem. Our highest priority is not in teaching technique, but in developing a profound commitment to safety. We know it is critical for bus drivers not only to be competent, but also cautious!

My goal is to instill in each of our new employees a passion for safety. If drivers really understand its importance, procedural guidelines will be followed even when no one is watching. They will be consistently alert when behind the wheel, will drive defensively, and will pay close attention to road and environmental conditions. They will not take what may seem like minor risks or skip routine safety procedures that they know should be performed, because they will be fully aware that such violations could threaten their livelihoods or even their lives.

In much the same way, I think the author of today’s chapters had a fervent desire to instill in his hearers a passion for righteousness. He knew that if they understood its vital importance, they would comply with the wise instructions for godly living that he was presenting. They would “love instruction” and take care to avoid the “counsels of the wicked.” They would turn away from those with a “perverse heart” and other “vain persons,” and take care not to fall into “the net of evil men” (Proverbs 12:1,5,8,11-12). They would heed the warning that “the soul of the transgressors shall eat violence” and find assurance in the fact that “righteousness keepeth him that is upright in the way” (Proverbs 13:2,6).

The admonition we read in these chapters is as profitable to people in our day as it was for those in Solomon’s time. To please God, it is still necessary to live righteously. Rather than thinking of this as a forced obligation, it should be our heart’s desire—our passion! We should want to live righteously because

we understand, as our focus verse states, that “in the way of righteousness is life; and in the pathway thereof there is no death” (Proverbs 12:28).

The path we choose has ultimate and eternal consequences. Let us choose to follow the way of righteousness!

BACKGROUND

Today’s text contains fifty-three verses. In at least eighteen of these, the results of “righteousness” (or closely related words like righteous, good, just, or truth) are distinctly contrasted with “wickedness” (or wicked, deceitful, lying, and sinners). In none is a third alternative offered; there is no category between righteousness and wickedness. The results of positive and the negative choices made are clearly defined and set in sharp contrast to each other.

In verse 3 of chapter 12, the word “established” refers to achieving success. Although people may rise to the top of their fields by unethical means, their achievements will be fleeting. The righteous person, on the other hand, is secure and content both in this life as well as in the life to come.

The obscure phrase in verse 12, “The wicked desireth the net of evil men,” likely means that the wicked want the easy way of acquiring wealth by taking away what others have achieved through hard work. However, the results of a righteous man’s efforts will be permanent. The following two verses reinforce the fact that a person’s words and deeds will have recompense.

The statement in verse 21, “There shall no evil happen to the just,” becomes more understandable when it is considered from an eternal perspective. While troubling events do occur to the righteous as well as the wicked, the one whose trust is in God understands that there is ultimate good in all circumstances because that is God’s promise to His followers. That good may not be discernible in this life, but it will be clear in eternity. The wicked—those who do not have God’s wisdom—are unable to grasp this perspective.

The meaning of verse 24 is that diligence will be rewarded, while laziness is costly. The assertion that “the slothful shall be under tribute” means that the lazy man will find himself put to forced labor.

In chapter 13, verse 4 is an example of the theme of “wisdom and work” which appears frequently in the Book of Proverbs. The statement that “the soul of the diligent shall be made fat” means that the diligent will prosper.



Proverbs 14:1-35

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

**“He that despiseth his neighbor sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he.”
(Proverbs 14:21)**

Mike Adkins wanted to be a blessing and a witness to the world around him. One day, as he was outside his house, he noticed his next-door neighbor, Norman. The other people on the block considered Norman to be messy and rather weird. He was a loner, and the neighbors were happy to keep it that way. However, the Spirit of God nudged Mike to reach out to this man and befriend him.

As Mike began to interact with Norman, he observed firsthand the mess and filth that Norman lived in. Though initially repulsed, Mike followed the leading of God and pitched in to help. He cleaned up Norman’s yard and house, even going into Norman’s filthy bathroom to pull out the toilet and replace the wax seal!

It would have been much easier for Mike to ignore the needs of his unappealing neighbor and focus on his own clean and orderly life, but he continued working with Norman and eventually had the opportunity to share God’s love and the hope of salvation with him. As a result of Mike’s caring concern, Norman was saved and lived many years for the Lord.¹

Serving God will not always be easy, neat, and tidy. We may be called to work in areas that are not the most pleasant. We may have to get our hands dirty. We may need to reach out to the unlovely people of this world. We may have to get out of our comfort zones to win someone for the Lord.

Sometimes following the Lord’s purpose for our lives will take large measures of patience, longsuffering, and love, along with a good sense of humor, grace, and forgiveness. It may mean going to a mission meeting in a disreputable part of town, ministering to the homeless, or reaching out to disadvantaged Sunday school children and their families. It may mean spending time with a feeble elderly person and tending to his or her needs. Or it could mean ministering in a foreign country where familiar foods and “creature comforts” are not available. In whatever way God chooses, we want to love others and show mercy, as the focus verse exhorts. As we apply ourselves wholeheartedly in reaching out to those God places in our paths, we will obtain sheaves to offer to God one day. It will be worth it all!

BACKGROUND

Chapter 14 continues with proverbs attributed to Solomon, which give practical and wise advice for everyday matters. In chapters 10-15, most of the proverbs show a contrast between people who are righteous and those who are wicked.

In chapter 14, Solomon gave varied observations on moral virtues and their contrary vices. He began by contrasting again the wise people and the foolish, and saying that fearing (or honoring) God shows obedience. The importance of choosing words carefully, stating the truth, and respecting God and His precepts are restated. Wise people receive instruction and do not mock sin.

Verse 4 speaks of the usefulness of an ox. When Proverbs was written, oxen were used to plow, water crops, harvest, and grind flour. These were valuable animals. More oxen meant more productivity, but also more care—the animals had to be fed and sheltered, and it was necessary to clean up after them. The point of the verse is that their value outweighed the effort needed to maintain them.

In verse 11, the word *tabernacle* could be translated “tent.” A tent would appear less stable than a house. However, Solomon pointed out that righteousness will last, while wickedness will fail, even though the wicked seem to have built a “house.” Both verses 11 and 12 show that the human perspective is often not the correct one.

Verses 15-18 contrast the gullible with the discerning, and the wise with the foolish. The phrase “soon angry” in verse 17 could be translated “short of nostrils,” meaning that anger is shown on the face and by more rapid breathing.

Verse 22 asks a question, which is unusual in Proverbs. The word *err* in the original language meant “go astray” or “cause to wander.” The writer wanted his readers to understand that devising evil would result in a person being lost.

Care for the poor is commanded. In Solomon’s time, many thought poverty indicated God’s disapproval, but verse 31 shows that God the Creator is concerned for the poor. This concept is taught throughout the Bible.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- III. The sayings of the way of wisdom
 - A. The 375 proverbs of Solomon
 - 1. The contrast of wisdom and folly in life (10:1 — 15:33)



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established.” (Proverbs 15:22)

As I stood nervously outside the door of our state assemblywoman’s office, the leader of my advocacy team nudged me and gave a last-minute reminder: “We’ve traveled all the way to our state capitol to have a few moments to speak with our elected representative about the importance of education. Don’t make her feel like you are wasting her time—choose your words wisely, and speak from your heart about the needs of our college district.” The assemblywoman’s door opened, and our group of five entered her office for a half-hour meeting. The minutes flew by as we shared our concerns about some upcoming legislation she had to vote on and she asked us about the needs of our local community college district.

When our advocacy team discussed our experience afterward, we were elated with how well the meeting had gone. We had prepared for several days prior to our visit, and we felt that our preparation had paid off. We thought that our well-chosen words had an impact, and we were proud that we could play a part and have a voice in our state’s political process. In short, we had experienced a Proverbs 15:22 moment: we had been among the “multitude of counsellors” for our assemblywoman.

Solomon recognized the importance of consulting with knowledgeable people, and that there is gain in combining expertise, experience, and perspectives. This is true at both an individual and a corporate level. However, this is especially true in spiritual matters. When we face a spiritual dilemma, seeking the advice of godly people can be helpful. Similarly, we want to be godly ourselves so that we might be able to help others.

Riding the Amtrak train home from our state capitol, I realized that as Christians, we have many opportunities to speak up for the Lord and for our Christian faith, and we should take these opportunities more seriously than giving input to a political representative. Every conversation we have—whether with a state assemblywoman, a coworker, a young child, or a stranger on the street—is fraught with importance when we consider that souls are at stake, and we want them to make decisions that lead to eternal life. We want to speak words that will help them make right decisions.

BACKGROUND

Continuing Solomon’s proverbs with his practical and wise advice, today’s text is the last of the grouping (chapters 10-15) where most of the verses show a contrast between the righteous and the wicked. Although there are several themes in this chapter, a major one is the importance of good words.

In verse 4, a “wholesome tongue” could also be translated as “healing words.” *Perverseness* has been defined as “viciousness” and as “deliberate lying.” The word *disperse* in verse 7 means “diffuse” and also “to winnow” and “to search out, to investigate.” Solomon was showing that wise people discern between the beneficial and the meaningless or unnecessary; they only say what is edifying and helpful.

Not many of the proverbs specifically address worship, but verse 8 makes a strong statement. In this usage, “sacrifice” refers to all the ceremonies of the Law. *Abomination* means “abhorrent, disgusting.” The writer wanted his readers to understand that the attitude of a person’s heart needed to be right when he brought his offerings to God.

The proverbs in verses 13 and 15 are both antithetical—each line gives a contrast to the other. In verse 13 the “merry heart” is mentioned first, while in verse 15 the “merry heart” is in the second phrase. Both illustrate the same point—what a person experiences impacts how he feels, but cheerfulness will help even in bad situations.

At the time these proverbs were given, a “dinner of herbs” (verse 17) meant the food of the poor. A “stalled ox” was an animal that had been specially fed and fattened, and was considered the most sumptuous fare. These opposites show the benefits of love over hatred.

Verse 24 has a three-part contrast. “The way” (or practices) of the wise is compared by implication with the practices of a foolish person. One way is above, the other is below. Finally, life and death are contrasted.

In Solomon’s time, some people defrauded others by relocating a property boundary landmark. God was especially concerned about the widows, who had little defense in that culture (verse 25). Verse 27 warns against greed and bribes. Political corruption is implied, and Solomon said it would bring sorrow.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- III. The sayings of the way of wisdom
 - A. The 375 proverbs of Solomon
 - 1. The contrast of wisdom and folly in life (10:1—15:33)



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.” (Proverbs 16:24)

Edward was interested in photography, and when he was sixteen years old, he saved up enough money to buy his first camera. Excited about his purchase, he took fifty pictures on the very first day. To his great disappointment, only one shot—a portrait of his sister at the piano—really amounted to anything. When Edward’s father declared that one out of fifty was a poor showing, the young camera enthusiast was so disheartened that he almost gave up his new hobby on the spot.

However, Edward’s mother insisted that the photograph of his sister was so beautiful that it more than compensated for the forty-nine failures. So the young man picked up his camera once more... and eventually became one of the world’s most renowned photographers. Concerning photography, there was not much that Edward Steichen didn’t do, and do extraordinarily well. Landscape, architecture, fashion, portrait, and war photography all appeared in his portfolio, and brought him international acclaim. He was published in a wide range of magazines, served as Director of the Department of Photography at New York’s Museum of Modern Art, and at one time was regarded as the best-known and highest-paid photographer in the world. And what was it that renewed his faltering spirit and started him down the road to success? The encouraging words of his mother!

There is great power in “pleasant words.” Solomon recognized that; scores of this wise king’s proverbs relate to speech. In our key verse, he stated that pleasant words bring sweetness to the soul and health to the bones. Kind words can encourage the disheartened, as they did for Edward. They can comfort the grief-stricken, and strengthen the weak. They can instruct, inspire, and invigorate.

Powerful, positive, life-giving words have an important place in our spiritual lives. Each one of us has the power to encourage or discourage others by what we say. When people leave our presence, are they spiritually uplifted? Carefully chosen words that are directed by the Spirit of God can heal wounded spirits, mend broken hearts, and strengthen the inner man. They can point souls to Calvary, and motivate fellow believers to persevere to the end.

Our prayer should be, “Lord, make my words an encouragement. Help me to uplift and strengthen

others in the way. Help me to tell what You have done in the past, and influence others to look forward to the things You will do for us in the future.” Let us share the message of Jesus Christ with pleasant words of spiritual hope. We will bring life and health to all who listen!

BACKGROUND

This chapter continues the section of Proverbs that is often called the “Proverbs of Solomon.” However, today’s text begins a portion that reflects a slight change in style. The pithy instructions contained in chapters 10-15 often taught by making an initial statement in the first half of the proverb, and then showing a contrast in the second portion. The maxims from 16:1 to 22:16 have a more parallel construction; the second part of the proverb generally further explains or repeats the first statement.

Throughout this chapter, Solomon often referred to the power and sovereignty of God. Since he was king, he knew the power that came with sovereignty, and also that with power came more responsibility (verses 10-12).

In verse 11, Solomon talked about a “weight and balance,” a metaphor that described God as being fair and just. In the days of King Solomon, business transactions easily could be skewed in favor of the merchant by weighting the scale deceptively. Solomon relayed that God is concerned about every part of business, and that every transaction should be fair.

The “hoary head” mentioned in verse 31 is a reference to the white hair of the elderly. The Hebrew people believed that longevity was a sign of God’s favor, so indicators of advanced age were good so long as the years had been spent in righteous living.

The phrase “the lot is cast into the lap” in the final verse of the chapter refers to the system of casting lots to determine a course of action. It refers to the practice of throwing lots into the folds of an individual’s robe, from which the deciding lot would then be drawn. A similar American maxim is the saying that a person has received “the luck of the draw.” However, this Scripture points out that the Lord decides the ultimate outcome. The word translated *disposing* is from the Hebrew word *mishpat*, which also means “verdict.” In spite of the many references to casting lots in the Old Testament, nothing is known about the actual lots themselves. They could have been sticks of various lengths, flat stones like coins, or some kind of dice. The closest modern practice to casting lots is likely flipping a coin.



Proverbs 17:1 through 18:24

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

**“The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge.”
(Proverbs 18:15)**

Almost every country of the world has proverbs — short, pithy sayings that state a general truth or piece of advice. Many regional proverbs reflect indigenous wisdom garnered from experience over a long period time within the local environment. Other proverbs are more applicable in any era or culture. Because proverbs are typically brief, colorful, and captivating, they are very quotable and are easily handed down orally.

A quick panoramic view of proverbs from around the world reveals a common thread of instructive guidance mixed with vivid word pictures.

- Norway: “In every woman there is a Queen. Speak to the Queen and the Queen will answer.”
- Japan: “A single arrow is easily broken, but not ten in a bundle.”
- Sweden: “Don’t throw away the old bucket until you know whether the new one holds water.”
- Nigeria: “He who is being carried does not realize how far the town is.”
- Romania: “If you wish for good advice, consult an old man.”
- Turkey: “Measure a thousand times and cut once.”
- Malaysia: “Don’t think there are no crocodiles because the water is calm.”
- Denmark: “God gives every bird its food, but does not always drop it into the nest.”
- United States Native Americans: “Don’t judge a man until you have walked two moons in his moccasins.”

The proverbs of Solomon employ the same mechanics of wit, color, brevity, and guidance as these examples, but that is where the comparison ends. Unlike secular proverbs, in which the only aim is to state a truism or make a point in a picturesque manner, Solomon’s proverbs were divinely inspired. They serve a dual purpose: first, to instill spiritual wisdom that will help his hearers navigate the world safely, and second, to encourage those of the younger generation to remain pure and pleasing to God. The fact that God caused this collection to be included in the Bible shows that this ingenious and “portable” method of passing on counsel was not only a

successful teaching strategy, but also a God-ordained method of presenting timeless truths.

While the method of delivery is important, our focus verse points out that the hearer also has a critical responsibility. The one who is “prudent” and “wise” will set himself to obtain knowledge, and make diligent search for it. For any good life, the desire to learn is indispensable. May we strive to cultivate a hunger for acquiring God’s divine truth!

BACKGROUND

These two chapters continue the section of Proverbs that is often called the “Proverbs of Solomon.” Most of the proverbs from 16:1 to 22:16 have a parallel construction, in which the second part of the verse further explains or repeats the first portion.

In chapter 17, the encouragement to seek wisdom moves into the personal realm as Solomon presented a variety of ways in which folly impacts family members (for examples, see verses 2, 6, 21 and 25). He showed that the strong family life portrayed in his writings could entail vulnerability, for the tightly knit bonds of the families of the ancient east would suffer immensely from the churlish behavior of one member.

While family was very important in that era, Solomon recognized that friends and associates also impacted personal success and societal stability, which he frequently alluded to as key aims of wisdom. With this in mind, he warned against wicked doers and liars (verse 4), mockers (verse 5), gossipers (verse 9), evil men (verse 11), fools (verse 12), those who justify wickedness and condemn justice (verse 15), men prone to strife (verse 19), and those with a froward heart and perverse tongue (verse 20).

Chapter 18 continues the theme of wisdom’s instruction regarding perils and blessings, with a recurring emphasis on peace in society and purity in speech.

Solomon’s proverbs generally assume a stable environment (in contrast to the prophets, who lived on the edge of calamity and warned of impending judgment), and offer frequent counsel as to how to maintain that stability. In this chapter, he asserted that selfish desires cause a man to insist upon his own way (verse 1). He also taught that contempt, dishonor, and disgrace are the companions of sin (verse 3), and instructed in how to settle disputes quickly (verses 18-19).

Many verses in chapter 18 allude to integrity in conversation, and Solomon stated boldly that “death

and life are in the power of the tongue” (verse 21). He pointed out that the characteristics of pure speech are consistent blessing (verse 4) and accurate reporting (verse 8), and summarized by saying that fruitfulness is the result of pure speech (verse 20). He warned against the fool who finds delight in speaking rather than listening and learning (verse 2), those who use contentious words (verse 6), those who speak before listening (verse 13), and those who offend and contend verbally with a brother (verse 19).

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- III. The sayings of the way of wisdom
 - A. The 375 proverbs of Solomon
 - 2. The call of submission to God (16:1 — 22:16)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What animal does Solomon say it would be better to meet than a fool?

2. What does Proverbs 17:22 teach us about the importance of attitudes?

3. Which proverb in this text do you think is the most applicable to you at this time? What specific steps could you take in your life to apply the injunction?

CONCLUSION

Proverbs from around the world may teach us about man and his ways, but the proverbs in the Word of God point us to true wisdom and the necessity of diligent effort to acquire and retain it.

NOTES



Proverbs 19:1 through 20:30

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

**“Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right.”
(Proverbs 20:11)**

Soon after I became a Christian, my five-year-old son told me he wanted to ask Jesus into his heart, as I had done. Assuming he was too young to really understand what that meant, I did not think God would answer his prayer. However, I did not want him worrying that he wouldn't go to Heaven, so I decided to humor him and we prayed together.

Several months later, my mother and sister were visiting and remarked that my son's behavior had changed. They said that in the past, he had only wanted to play by fighting with them, but now he was calm. I had noticed a change also. He had quit biting his sister, he was cooperating with me in the mornings, and he no longer gave up in frustration when something was difficult. My sister asked what had happened to bring about this change in his behavior and I thought back, trying to remember when I had first noticed it. Then I realized that it was when we had prayed together, and I knew that Jesus had come into his heart.

A few years later, I noticed that my son was beginning to be drawn towards the things of the world. After reading a book about cowboys, he announced that he wanted to learn to play poker. When I told him no, he started carrying a deck of cards in his pocket. He did not disobey me and play with them, but I could see that he wanted to. One day, he brought home a cassette of music that I had banned and asked if he could listen to it. When I said no, he added the cassette to his pocket.

After a few more things went into his pocket, I told him that if he would pray, God would take away his longing for the things of the world and he would be happier. A short time later, I observed a change in his behavior again. He no longer seemed to be drawn toward activities that were questionable, or that would not be good for him spiritually. I checked his pockets and found that they were empty. I realized that there had been a real change: God had sanctified him.

Our focus verse says that even a child is known by his doings. Just as my son's behavior reflected what was in his heart, our actions as adults reveal what is in our hearts. If we have received the life-changing experiences of salvation and sanctification, and we continue to seek God and be obedient to His

Word, our lives will be a reflection of Jesus in our hearts and a testimony to those around us.

BACKGROUND

The text today continues the proverbs with Solomon's spiritual wisdom. This portion was written in the parallel style; the initial thought is amplified or repeated by the latter part of the verse. Most of the proverbs from 16:1 to 22:16 have this construction.

Proverbs 19 offers instruction related to character, and has two primary themes. Learning to handle wealth and to heed instruction were essential requirements for Israel's youth, and the wisdom teachers of Israel did not overlook these topics. The couplets in verses 1-17 deal for the most part with poverty and wealth; for example, in verses 6 and 7, Solomon taught that wealth brings favor and friendships, but poverty often causes relatives and fair-weather friends to forget a person. Verses 18-29 focus on the importance of listening. The phrase "that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end" in verse 20 could be translated "that you may be wise the rest of your days," indicating the high value that Solomon placed on instruction. In many of these verses (see verse 23, for example), it is made clear that those who trust God are spared a great deal of harm. Although the fear of the Lord is not a guarantee of freedom from harm or loss, it does ensure that faithful followers of God will be under God's protection forever.

Proverbs 20 addresses means and ends related to the preservation of stability in the community, and like the preceding chapter, can be divided into two sections. The first section (verses 1-14) relates primarily to the character of the righteous, making it clear that the godly man will avoid strong drink and strife, will be industrious and faithful, and will walk in integrity. The second section (verses 15-30) includes the recurring themes of wisdom and lasting wealth. The sage's observations related to these themes bring out the peril of laziness (verse 13), the fact that knowledge is more valuable than wealth (verse 15), that obtaining one's inheritance by unjust means will cause the forfeiture of God's blessings (verse 21), and the abomination of cheating (verse 23).

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- III. The sayings of the way of wisdom
 - A. The 375 proverbs of Solomon
 2. The call of submission to God (16:1—22:16)



Proverbs 21:1 through 22:16

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold.” (Proverbs 22:1)

Bill Gaither, an American singer and songwriter of Southern Gospel and contemporary Christian music, tells a story which illustrates the importance of maintaining a good name. Bill and his wife, Gloria, wanted to build a home in the area where he grew up. They spotted a parcel of land on the outskirts of town, and found out the owner was a ninety-two-year-old retired banker. This gentleman owned a great deal of property in the area, but it was well known that he refused to sell any of it.

In spite of that fact, Bill and Gloria decided to visit the man in person, hoping to convince him to let them purchase a part of his holdings. The farmer listened politely to their request, and then responded the same way he always did: he was not interested in selling. However, after making that statement, he paused and then asked the Gaithers, “What did you say your name was?” Bill responded, “Gaither.” The farmer stared at him for a moment, and then asked, “Any relation to Grover Gaither?” Bill answered yes, that Grover was his grandfather. Nodding thoughtfully, the farmer commented, “Grover Gaither was the best worker I ever had on my farm. Full day’s work for a day’s pay. So honest...” He looked at Bill and Gloria again, “So, what piece of ground did you say you were interested in?” Just a few days later, the purchase agreement was finalized—the farmer sold the Gaithers the fifteen acres they wanted, and for substantially less than market value! In the following years, Bill and Gloria often told their children that they had the privilege of growing up on that beautiful, lush piece of property because of the good name of a great-grandfather they had never met.

What do people think when they hear your name? Are their recollections and impressions of you positive? Are qualities of graciousness, godliness, diligence, or kindness what come to mind? Today’s focus verse lets us know that if we are wise, we will not ignore these questions. Our names *matter*!

A good name is far more than just a unique identifier with a combination of syllables that sounds sophisticated, impressive, or classy. It is more than a parental choice to name us after a distinguished ancestor or beloved family member. Solomon used the phrase “a good name” to denote a good reputation,

which was of far more value than great riches. Winning the respect and approval of others requires careful rule of our conduct, making sure that it is consistently righteous and above reproach. That is the only way we will have the positive regard and trust of others.

If we are Christians, we represent our Father to others who are watching our lives. We want to make sure that we maintain a good name that will be a credit to the God we love!

BACKGROUND

Today’s text continues a section of Proverbs which began with chapter 10. This segment of the book is comprised primarily of stand-alone verses which impart common sense instruction and spiritual wisdom related to everyday matters. Many of these maxims have a parallel construction in which the second part of the verse further explains or repeats the first. The topics addressed in this text include God’s control, pride, diligence, violence, pleasure seeking, lying, covetousness, the training of children, generosity, and oppression of the poor.

The “corner of the housetop” mentioned in verse 9 refers to the Hebrew custom of building a small room on the house rooftop to accommodate guests. It was generally less commodious than the area below used by the family, and could only be accessed by a ladder. The contentious woman of this verse is also alluded to in verse 19.

The “scorner” referred to in verse 24 is one who is proud and arrogant, and whose unrestrained and contemptuous words prove his corrupt nature.

Proverbs 22:6 is a familiar Scripture which alludes to child-rearing. The verb translated *train up* indicates the earliest instruction given to a child in his formative years, and has the sense of restricting or narrowing forward movement into a prescribed path. This type of restraint directs the child into the manner of living which is intended for him. The writer likely had moral training primarily in mind, as the same word *train* is used elsewhere in Scripture with the sense of “dedicating.” While this verse offers reassurance to godly parents who are striving to teach their children the ways of God, it is not a guarantee of salvation; every individual has been given a free will and must approach God as a matter of personal choice in order to obtain salvation.

The Hebrew people took the discipline and instruction of children very seriously. Verse 15 of the same chapter is another admonition to parents

who seek to train their children correctly. Like many of Solomon’s proverbs, this one begins with an observation: he noted that foolishness (related to folly) is an integral part of every child’s heart. The Hebrew word translated as *foolishness* is *ivveleth*, and it includes the thought of stubbornness. The “rod of correction,” symbolic of parental restraint or discipline, is necessary for a child’s proper moral development (see also Proverbs 13:24). This verse is not a license for physical mistreatment of a child, but rather, it points out that a lack of discipline hinders the child’s moral development. It is the responsibility of parents to ensure that their children have a clear understanding of right and wrong, and loving discipline is a key factor in developing that understanding.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- III. The sayings of the way of wisdom
 - A. The 375 proverbs of Solomon
 - 2. The call of submission to God (16:1 — 22:16)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What does Proverbs 21:6 tell us about those who try to get ahead by dishonest means?

2. Why do you think Solomon so frequently addressed the proper handling of wealth and material possessions?

3. In reference to Proverbs 21:21, what are some specific ways we can follow after righteousness in our day?

CONCLUSION

A good reputation and the loving approval of others are far more important than other measures of success.

NOTES



Proverbs 22:17 through 23:35

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go: lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul.”
(Proverbs 22:24-25)

Some years ago, I remember seeing a skit at our church youth camp where a girl stood on a chair holding the hands of another person who was standing on the floor. As hard as she tried, the girl on the chair could not pull the person below up onto the chair. However, when the roles were reversed, the person on the floor was able to pull the girl off the chair with very little effort. It was a great demonstration of the fact that it is much easier to pull someone down than to lift someone up. That is not only true physically, but also spiritually.

Choosing to associate closely with people who are not where they should be spiritually will influence us in a downward direction. Often the negative “pulls” are subtle, at least at first. We might be influenced to be discouraged, careless about spiritual matters, or critical. Perhaps there is a temptation to gossip, shade the truth, or engage in questionable activities. Although we might not realize that we have been affected, we can gradually become desensitized, and wrong behavior patterns could become acceptable and allowed in our own lives. In time, that negative influence could even cause us to turn completely away from God.

Solomon was aware of that danger. Our focus verses admonish us to keep away from angry people—those whose lives are characterized by frustration and outbursts of temper. He pointed out that relationships with such individuals would put one’s personal stability and equilibrium in jeopardy, because an angry person’s path is full of “snares” that any misstep can trigger.

The people we spend time with help shape us into the people we become. Recently I read about a young musician who wanted to become more accomplished on her instrument. Her teacher advised her to “play up”—to practice with individuals who were highly skilled musicians. The teacher knew that playing along with them would help the young woman improve her own proficiency.

What about us? We may not be musicians striving for musical expertise, but the same principle applies to our personal relationships. Those we associate with will impact who we are. It is true that we live

in a world that needs to be reached for Christ, and we should not shirk our responsibility to reach out to those who need God. However, we must be cautious when developing close relationships. We need strong, spiritually encouraging friends to help keep us lifted up when the negativity around us threatens to get us down. We need associates who do not thrive on critical talk to maintain peace in our hearts. We need people who love and support God’s Word to keep us full of hope.

Are our friendships encouraging us toward a closer walk with God or pulling us away from Him? It is critical for us to answer that question honestly and make any needed adjustments.

BACKGROUND

This passage begins the third section of the Book of Proverbs, a portion known as “the words of the wise men.” Some commentators suggest that these proverbs, from Proverbs 22:17 through 23:11, were written by other sages and compiled by Solomon. The writing style has been associated with an ancient Egyptian wisdom book called “Instruction of Amenemope,” while the personal nature of the writings is reflective of parental instruction or a teacher’s tutoring of a student.

Proverbs 22:22-23 prohibit exploiting the poor. The phrase “in the gate” refers to the custom of having the judicial court located at the gate of the city. The teacher warned that God would judge those who oppress the poor and afflicted.

Referring to business practices in verses 26-29, a warning is given regarding the danger of assuming responsibility for someone else’s loan. The phrase “why should he take away thy bed from under thee?” points to the possibility of losing one’s possessions as a result.

Proverbs 23:10 admonishes against appropriating land from the fatherless. In Solomon’s era, it was customary for the next of kin to redeem land from a relative who could not afford to develop it, and the Hebrew word for “redeemer” in verse 11 indicates that God will be the substitute “kinsman” for orphaned landowners.

The Hebrew word for *hell* in verse 14 is *sheol*, meaning “the grave.” The inference in this verse is that proper discipline of a child can deter him from reckless choices and premature death.

Verses 19-21 warn against associating with drunkards or those who habitually over-indulge because their lifestyle leads to poverty and lethargy.

Verses 22-25 encourage a son to honor his parents and embrace instruction. Repeating the thought of verse 16, the author pointed out that the son who lives wisely and righteously brings joy to his parents.

A warning against sexual promiscuity is given in verses 27-28. Verses 29-35 describe the adverse physical, emotional, and mental effects of alcohol.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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III. The sayings of the way of wisdom

B. The words of the wise

1. The introduction (22:17-21)
2. The counsel
 - a. Concerning oppression (22:22-23)
 - b. Concerning companions (22:24-25)
 - c. Concerning pledges (22:26-27)
 - d. Concerning boundaries (22:28)
 - e. Concerning skilled labor (22:29)
 - f. Concerning conduct as a guest (23:1-3)
 - g. Concerning wealth (23:4-5)
 - h. Concerning evil hospitality (23:6-8)
 - i. Concerning guarded speech (23:9)
 - j. Concerning boundaries (23:10-12)
 - k. Concerning discipline (23:13-14)
 - l. Concerning correct speech (23:15-16)
 - m. Concerning evil companions (23:17-21)
 - n. Concerning respect for parents (23:22-25)
 - o. Concerning immoral women (23:26-28)
 - p. Concerning wine (23:29-35)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What does Proverbs 23:4 say should *not* be the purpose of our labor?

2. How do we buy the truth?

3. The admonition in Proverbs 22:28 is against removing ancient landmarks. How can we retain the landmarks of the Bible in our society today?

CONCLUSION

It is wise to be cautious in our choice of companions. We will be influenced most by those we associate with most, so it is important to choose friends with characteristics we would like to develop in our own lives.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction.” (Proverbs 24:30-32)

Last year while driving through our fishing community, I noticed the boat of a young family man who lives nearby. It was beached, neglected, and partly submerged in water, though we were in the peak of the fishing season. As far as I knew, the man was healthy, but he and his family were subsisting on a government allowance. With some initiative, he could have been engaged in commercial fishery and providing for his family, but he apparently was choosing not to, so his boat sat idle.

This scene reminded me of our focus verses, in which Solomon described the field and vineyard of the slothful. The land had been neglected; thorns and nettles flourished everywhere. As Solomon passed by, he observed that although the ground was fertile, the stone wall surrounding it was broken down and nothing useful was growing in the field.

Roman statesman Cato Major once said, “Wise men profit more by fools than fools by wise men; for wise men will avail [learn from] the faults of fools, but fools will not imitate the virtues of the wise.” In our text, Solomon not only observed the neglected field, but he “considered it” thoughtfully and “received instruction.” While Solomon did not state his conclusion, the implication is apparent. Wise individuals are diligent, make good use of potential at hand, and profit from their labors. The slothful have opportunities they do not take, obligations they do not fulfill, and potential they do not exercise—and in the end, will find that their field is “grown over with thorns.”

This proverb has a spiritual application. Our souls are our fields, and we have a responsibility. We can tend our souls diligently, making sure that we guard against encroaching “weeds,” or we can indifferently neglect our spiritual well-being. If the latter is our choice, in time our souls will be overgrown with “thorns and nettles”—the pride, covetousness, malice, and the inordinate lusts and passions which the fallen human nature produces. If no “fence” is erected, there is no safeguard to keep the enemy out.

For those of us who have been forgiven and saved by Jesus’ Blood, we have a cultivated field we are charged to occupy till our Lord returns. We need to produce crops instead of weeds, and fruit instead of thorns, but that will take diligence! May we take advantage of today and work our fields.

BACKGROUND

This chapter is a continuation of the third section of Proverbs referred to as “the words of the wise.” The first twenty-two verses offer wise counsel to a son, while the concluding verses contain further prudent advice from wise sages.

Verses 1-2 warn against associating with evil men because of the violence and trouble they devise. While some Bible scholars think the “house” referred to in verses 3-4 alludes to a family, others suggest it is symbolic of a man’s character. The “precious and pleasant riches” possibly refer to the blessings a man receives through wise living.

The implication of verses 5-6 is that the strength of wisdom is superior to brute force, and seeking wise counsel is advisable before entering into battle. This does not necessarily refer only to physical battles, but can also be applied to day-to-day challenges in general. The gate of the city was where judicial decisions and counsel were given, but verse 7 infers that wisdom is out of reach for the fool, because he has nothing worthwhile to offer.

Verses 11-12 indicate that declining to help a person who is in mortal danger and then pleading ignorance is not acceptable. God perceives the motive of every heart and will judge accordingly.

In verse 15 the wicked are warned against conspiring to harm the righteous. Verse 16 does not suggest that the righteous will sin, but rather that they may fall into difficult circumstances. The phrase “seven times” was a Hebrew adage for “frequently.” The implication is that the righteous, with God’s help, will rise up and keep going, while the calamity of the wicked will cause their lasting destruction.

“These things also belong to the wise” (verse 23) may indicate that this section of the Book of Proverbs continues a group of sayings from various sages of that era. An honest answer is likened to a kiss in verse 26, meaning it will win respect and affection.

The phrase “build thine house” in verse 27 could refer to marriage and having children. The implication is that it is needful for a man to prepare ahead of time so that he possesses the means to provide for his family.



Proverbs 25:1 through 26:28

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee.” (Proverbs 25:21-22)

When I was in my early twenties, I worked in the construction industry as a sheet metal apprentice. Just a week after I married, I was laid off from the shop where I had been working—something that was not uncommon for entry-level employees in the building trades at that time. This was stressful, of course, but after a few uncertain weeks, I was relieved to be summoned to work at a local fabrication shop. There I learned my assignment was to assist a guy named Larry in the most undesirable task in the entire shop. It was a dirty and strenuous job, and to make matters worse, Larry took exception to the fact that I was a Christian.

His harassment began with unkind verbal innuendos. Soon these became cruel and mocking remarks, often made in the presence of others. I began each day with the certain knowledge that I would have to endure another round of humiliating comments hurled in my direction. Then, to make matters worse, Larry began to look for ways to put me in harm’s way. One time he nearly ran over me with a forklift as we were moving pallets of metal from one area to another. What was initially just an embarrassing situation became one that was potentially dangerous. However, I did not report this. Larry had worked at the shop for a long time and was seemingly well-regarded by the senior shop workers. Since I was the newest member of the crew, it seemed prudent to remain silent or risk becoming unemployed again.

I made up my mind to follow instruction from God’s Word in dealing with Larry, determining that not only would I pray for him, but I would be as kind and helpful as possible. Every day became a new opportunity for me to be the best worker I knew how to be, and to make him look good to the supervisors, since he was technically in charge of our assigned duties. Of course this puzzled him. While he certainly was not receptive to my Christian convictions, in time he began to find fewer reasons to make my life miserable.

Then one day the shop foreman took me aside and informed me that while Larry and I had done great work, we were caught up, and it wasn’t feasible for the company to keep both of us as employees.

Larry had seniority so it was only right that he stay on; I needed to plan to be out of work in a few days. At the end of our conversation, he asked me what my trade experience had been prior to coming to his shop. Not supposing that my response was of particular importance, I told him I had worked in a much smaller shop doing metal fabrication. Although I did not know it at the time, that type of work was typically reserved for seasoned journeymen. The foreman’s eyes lit up when he realized that a lower-paid employee possibly possessed skills of a more highly compensated worker. Later that day, he reassigned me to another project where I worked alongside some of the best and most highly regarded men in the shop.

Looking back, I can see how the Lord blessed me for adhering to the principles of His Word. Our focus verse brings out that the most effective way to deal with those who do us harm is to do good in return. This can be challenging at times, even for those who have faith and confidence in the Lord. However, God will honor those who honor Him. When we choose to take the high road and live by God’s principles, He will bless us, and His name will be glorified by our actions.

BACKGROUND

Chapters 25 through 29 are the final collection of proverbs written by Solomon. These were preserved and copied by scribes under the direction of King Hezekiah, one of Judah’s most godly kings. Some of the most memorable statements in all of the Book of Proverbs are found in this section. The sequence and subject groupings of the statements indicate a careful editorial arrangement that is more observable than in other sections of the book.

Many of the sayings in chapters 25 and 26 were directed either toward the king or those who interacted with him in court matters. During the time of Hezekiah, Judah’s governmental structure was large and complex. (Insight regarding its complexity is found in 2 Kings 18-20.) Those in governmental positions needed wisdom, and that concern is reflected in this collection. The royal responsibilities spelled out in these proverbs provide helpful wisdom for leaders of every era.

Another theme with prominence in these chapters is that of proper speech. In Proverbs 25:11-14, Solomon offered four comparisons related to oral communication. He said timely words were as pleasing as golden apples in settings of silver. He

compared the one who listened to wise counsel and obeyed to ornaments of fine gold. Also, he likened a dependable and truthful messenger to a cold drink in hot weather. On the other hand, he said those who boasted falsely of oral skills were like clouds and wind without rain. The statement in verse 15 that “a soft tongue breaketh the bone,” means that gentle speech calms the most obstinate resistance. In chapter 26, verses 4, 5, 7, and 9 also allude to prudent speaking.

Paul quoted from Proverbs 25:21-22 in Romans 12:19-20. The precise meaning of this proverb has been debated, but most Bible scholars agree that it teaches one should respond with kindness rather than seeking vengeance against one who does evil.

The first 12 verses of chapter 26 summarize the folly of fools. The implication in verse 2 is that a baseless curse will have no effect. While verses 4-5 may seem contradictory, they bring out that answering a fool requires stooping to his level, while at other times a decisive response is necessary to expose foolishness. The implication in verse 8 is that giving honor to a fool is as ludicrous as binding a stone in a sling, thus eliminating the possibility of it being launched.

Verses 13-16 concern the lazy — those who make excuses for their inactivity, and prefer sleeping to working. Verses 17-28 refer to various types of troublemakers. The statement that “there are seven abominations in his heart” (verse 25) reflects the utmost degree of evil, as seven is the number of completeness.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- III. The sayings of the way of wisdom
 - C. The words of Solomon arranged by the men of Hezekiah
 - 1. The introduction (25:1)
 - 2. The 119 proverbs

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In Proverbs 25:28, to what does Solomon compare the one who has no rule over his own spirit?

2. How would you paraphrase the advice given in Proverbs 25:17?

3. What advice contained in Proverbs 25 and 26 would you consider to be most important or applicable to your life?

CONCLUSION

When we choose to return good for evil instead of seeking vengeance, we honor God through our obedience to His Word.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And thou shalt have goats’ milk enough for thy food, for the food of thy household, and for the maintenance for thy maidens.” (Proverbs 27:27)

Remembering how the Lord brought her family through distressing ordeals during the Great Depression in the United States, a Christian lady and her son related the following witness to how God provided for their family.

“When the children were still young, my husband had an attack of rheumatism, and was in great pain. He was so helpless that he could not even get his hands to his face. One day his pulse became so weak I thought he was dying. I gathered the children around his bed and we started praying for him. His pulse became stronger, and then each day he slowly began to improve. Eventually, he was able to get out of bed and walk and use his arms and hands.

“That same winter the weather was very severe. One blizzard after another came along, with temperatures well below zero. One day we did not have enough wood to last through the night, and there was no money to buy more. However, God was watching over us. About dusk that evening a young man drove into our yard and left a load of wood. We had no idea he would be bringing it! Many times the Lord helped us in situations that seemed hopeless.”

Her son recounted, “For years we had been very, very poor, and the future looked bleak. But after my father was saved, we could pray and ask God to help us. It seemed that the Lord allowed us to go through trials because of my father’s ill health, but He always answered our prayers and took us through.

“One winter, my father was very ill again. It was hard on the family. The summer before, we had planted potatoes. This was during the drought, and few people could get anything to grow. But from that one patch, we dug about sixty bushels of potatoes. During that winter, about all we had to eat were potatoes, but we knew the Lord had answered our prayers and had helped us again.

“On Thanksgiving one year, a situation happened that I would never forget, no matter how far I was from God. My father and a Christian man named Jack Hoover had gone to Minnesota to look for work. Mr. Hoover’s wife, Margaret, had raised some chickens that year. She had sold most of her chickens, but had kept one that she planned to fix for her family, and the Lord laid it on her heart to share that one

chicken with us. Although we were not destitute of food at this time, we did not have very much, and we certainly would not have had chicken for dinner. The Lord looked down that day and blessed us. There were thirteen of us in all—seven of us children, my mother, Mrs. Hoover, her three children, and her nephew who drove them to our house that day. And we were a hungry bunch! But after we had eaten all we wanted, there was chicken left over! Many years after that, Mrs. Hoover would tell about the time the Lord multiplied the chicken.”

While our focus verse is not intended to be a promise that will overrule circumstances, it is clear that God blesses and watches over His people. This family proved that He is ever mindful of our needs and attentive to our prayers when we do our best to follow Him. We can prove the same truth!

BACKGROUND

These two chapters continue the compilation of Solomon’s proverbs which were copied and preserved by King Hezekiah’s scribes.

In chapter 27, Solomon offered counsel concerning human relationships. Repeating a common theme among the proverbs, special attention is directed in this portion of text to how one’s words can be used for good or evil. Verses 2, 5, 14, 15, 17, and 21 all contain admonitions regarding speech.

Heavy rainfall in Solomon’s day caused the earthen roofs to spring numerous leaks, generating great exasperation. In verses 15-16, he compared this irritation with the continual ranting of an argumentative woman, inferring that she was annoying and impossible to restrain.

The proverbs in verses 23-27 are based upon the nomadic lifestyle of a large segment of Israel’s population from Solomon’s time. His point was that because life is fleeting and uncertain, one should be diligent and act with foresight, giving responsible attention to home, family, and occupation, just as a farmer must tend to his lands and herds.

Chapter 28 provides another series of comparisons between the rewards of walking uprightly and the judgments that will accrue to one who is evil. Several categories of wickedness are denounced: the oppressor, those who forsake the law, the perverse, the riotous, those who lead the righteous astray, wicked rulers, the greedy, the flatterer, and the proud.

The Book of Proverbs frequently reveals God’s compassion for the poor; verses 6, 8, 11 and 27 in this chapter are examples of this.



Proverbs 29:1-27

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

**“Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.”
(Proverbs 29:18)**

We may never fully understand the tremendous influence of a holy, Spirit-filled person who is committed to spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. David Brainerd was such a person; he was a man who was intensely aware that “where there is no vision [spiritual revelation or divine guidance], the people perish.”

Brainerd was born in a Connecticut village on April 20, 1718. Orphaned at the age of fourteen, he earned his living by working on farms, and eventually went to live with the pastor of a local church. Under that godly man’s teaching, he became a serious student of the Bible and began setting aside whole days to fast and pray as he sought God. Finally, on July 12, 1739, he had a glorious salvation experience. A longing for the whole world to see “this lovely, blessed, and excellent way” sprang up in his heart.

Brainerd was plagued by poor health. Tuberculosis (known as “consumption” in those days) was widespread in colonial New England, and he contracted the disease in his youth. In spite of this ailment, however, at the age of twenty-four he began a missionary career among the Native American tribes of the East Coast.

Shortly after the start of his missionary work, feeling that his first months had been woefully unproductive, Brainerd set aside a day “for secret fasting and praying from morning till night.” He was overwhelmed by a sense of his own unworthiness, the depravity of the tribes he was attempting to reach for Christ, and the weakened condition of his body. He read extensive passages from the Bible, dwelling especially on the accounts of men such as Elijah and Paul. Brainerd longed to be like them. From these times of intercession, the pattern of his life was formed, as he solemnly consecrated himself to walk in the footsteps of the heroes of the Bible. “O that I may be, as were they, aflame for God,” he wrote in his diary.

Brainerd’s first journey to the Delaware people resulted in a miracle that preserved his life and established him among the tribes in the region as a “prophet of God.” Encamped on the outskirts of a Native American settlement, Brainerd planned to enter the community the next morning to preach. He was

unaware that he was being watched by warriors who had been sent to kill him. However, when the men drew close to Brainerd’s tent, they saw the missionary on his knees. As he prayed, a rattlesnake slithered next to him and prepared to strike, flicking its forked tongue almost in the missionary’s face. Amazingly, the snake suddenly turned and glided away into the brush. “The Great Spirit is with the paleface!” the Indians said, and when he approached their village, they welcomed him.

For five years, Brainerd traveled from village to village, preaching with such tenderness and conviction that the inhabitants were frequently melted to tears. His efforts took a terrible toll on him physically, but he felt compelled to put his whole strength into evangelism.

Brainerd was only twenty-nine years of age when he passed away. His gravestone says simply, “A faithful and laborious missionary to the Stockbridge, Delaware, and Susquehanna Indians.” However, his life challenged many to dedicate themselves for Christian service. World-famous missionaries such as Henry Martyn, William Carey, and Adoniram Judson pointed to David Brainerd’s devotion as a source of personal inspiration.

As our focus verse states, Brainerd knew that where there is ignorance of God, the people perish in sin. Because of that compelling truth, he devoted his short life to doing everything in his power to spread God’s message.

Do we understand the importance of the vision that motivated David Brainerd? What are we doing to proclaim the Gospel?

BACKGROUND

This chapter, which offers counsel to both rulers and citizens, concludes the section of Solomon’s proverbs copied by Hezekiah’s scribes, which began at Proverbs 25.

Several negative categories of people are mentioned in this text: the defiant, the flatterer, the scornful, the bloodthirsty, the angry, and the thief. As is common throughout the Book of Proverbs, several contrasts are made between the wise and the foolish. Specific instruction is also given to parents, primarily related to proper discipline.

In this chapter, attitudes are addressed. Verse 1 states that those who stubbornly refuse to act upon reproof will be swiftly and suddenly destroyed. Verse 7 contrasts the person with a compassionate, caring heart to one who is unconcerned about

the poor. Verses 22-23 stress that anger stirs up conflict, and a prideful attitude ultimately results in humiliation.

Several of the verses relate to the responsibility of rulers. Verse 2 emphasizes that a righteous ruler brings gladness to the people, but a wicked ruler causes mourning. Verse 4 presents a parallel thought, bringing out that a king who practices justice establishes the land. Verse 12 points out that the servants of a king will likely adapt themselves to the practices of the sovereign; if he accepts falsehoods, those who serve him will become skillful in lying. In verse 14, the point is made that faithfulness to the poor will bring stability to the kingdom. Verse 26 acknowledges that while many will seek the favor of an earthly king, only God controls the destiny of men.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- III. The sayings of the way of wisdom
 - C. The words of Solomon arranged by the men of Hezekiah
 - 2. The 119 proverbs

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Many seek a ruler's favor, hoping for advantages in his decisions, but where does true judgment come from?

2. Verse 8 references "scornful men." In what ways might people speak scornfully of God in our day?

3. Verse 2 acknowledges the importance of righteous rulers. What are ways that we can support righteous authority?

CONCLUSION

If we fail to spread the message of salvation, those whose lives we might have influenced may perish in their sins. May God help each one of us to do our part to proclaim His truth!

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him.” (Proverbs 30:5)

One day in December of 1875, Ira Sankey, song leader for evangelist D. L. Moody, was traveling on a steamboat when some of the passengers recognized him and asked him to sing. Although they asked him to sing one of his own compositions, he chose instead William Bradbury’s well-known hymn “Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us.”

One of the stanzas of the song began, “We are Thine; do Thou befriend us. Be the Guardian of our way.” When he finished, a man stepped to his side and asked him, “Did you ever serve in the Union Army?” Mr. Sankey replied that he had. The man then inquired if he had been doing picket duty at a certain location on a night in 1862, and Mr. Sankey replied with surprise that he had. The man proceeded to tell him this amazing account.

“I was on patrol for the Confederate army that night. When I saw you standing at your post, I thought to myself, That fellow will never get away alive. I was standing in the shadow, completely concealed, while the full light of the moon was on you. I raised my musket and took aim, but at that instant, just as a moment ago, you raised your eyes to Heaven and began to sing. ‘Let him sing his song to the end,’ I said to myself, ‘I can shoot him afterwards. He’s my victim at all events, and my bullet cannot miss him.’

“The song you sang then was the song you sang just now. I heard the words perfectly: ‘We are Thine; do Thou befriend us. Be the Guardian of our way.’ Those words stirred up memories. I began to think of my childhood and my God-fearing mother, who had many times sung that song to me. When you had finished your song, it was impossible for me to take aim again. I thought, The Lord who is able to save that man from certain death must surely be great and mighty. And my arm of its own accord dropped limp at my side.”

What a beautiful illustration of the truth contained in our key verse—that God is a shield to them who put their trust in Him. While we may not always be preserved from physical harm as Mr. Sankey was, God always provides a spiritual shield of protection from Satan’s attacks. By putting our trust in Him, we will always experience deliverance.

There may come a time, when in the face of uncertainty or danger, we will need to simply make

a decision to place our trust in God regardless of the unknowns. God is faithful. When we put our trust unconditionally in Him, we can count on Him to be our Shield from the attempts of Satan.

BACKGROUND

This chapter contains the words of Agur. Since his name does not appear in any other Jewish literature, nothing is known about him except that he was a wise teacher. Some believe he may have been a profoundly wise person from a country other than Israel.

Some commentators suggest that Ithiel and Ucal, mentioned in verse 1, were proper names, perhaps identifying favorite pupils of Agur. Others assume they are Hebrew words pointing to Agur’s search to know God. They could be translated as, “I have wearied myself, O God, and come to an end.”

In verses 2-3, the author humbly acknowledged his lack of understanding concerning God’s ways; verse 4 continues his thought by emphasizing God’s sovereignty compared to man’s limitations. In verse 5, Agur stressed that man’s inadequacy can be surmounted by trusting in God’s sovereign Word. Verse 6 warns against supplementing God’s words.

In verses 7-9, Agur requested that God protect him from pointlessness and untruths, and that he would be allotted only that which permitted him to maintain his integrity.

Verses 10-33 offer a series of numerical proverbs—a style of Hebraic poetry which uses numerical sequences to aid in memorization and emphasize truths. In this section, each couplet gives four examples to support the author’s premise.

Verses 11-14 list four types of reprehensible transgressors: rebellious children, the self-righteous, the scornful, and cruel oppressors.

Verses 15-16 compare the horseleach (a bloodsucking parasite), with four insatiable entities: the grave, the barren womb, the dry earth, and fire.

Verses 18-19 associate four phenomena—the eagle gliding through the air, the snake slithering on a rock, a ship navigating the high seas, and a man’s enticement of a maid—with the incomprehensible way of an adulterous woman who fails to see the error of her ways (verse 20).

Verses 21-23 identify four unbearable types of people: a servant who has become a ruler, a fool who has acquired wealth, an unloved, rejected spinster who has obtained a husband, and a female servant who has supplanted her mistress.

Verses 24-28 describe four creatures which, although small in size, offer instruction for wise living: the ants that prepare and labor to provide for their future needs, the conies (or badgers) that hide in small crevices to protect themselves, the locusts that exemplify organization, and the spiders (or lizards) that resourcefully increase their quality of life.

In verses 29-31, the author cited four examples of boldness and power: the valor of the undaunted lion, the resoluteness of the greyhound (literally meaning “girt in the loins” and also translated as “rooster” or “war horse”), the mountain goat’s conquest of higher elevations, and the king’s triumph over his foes.

In verses 32-33, the author exhorted his hearers to acknowledge and repent of prideful conduct. He observed that just as churning milk produces butter, and wringing the nose causes bleeding, stirring up anger creates dissension and strife.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- III. The sayings of the way of wisdom
 - D. The words of Agur (30:1-33)
 - 1. His personal reflections (30:1-9)
 - a. Introduction (30:1-4)
 - b. Exhortation to reliance on divine revelation (30:5-6)
 - c. Requests (30:7-9)
 - 2. His proverbs (30:10-33)
 - a. Concerning slandering a slave (30:10)
 - b. Concerning four kinds of wicked persons (30:11-14)
 - c. Concerning four insatiable things (30:15-17)
 - d. Concerning four wonderful things (30:18-20)
 - e. Concerning four intolerable things (30:21-23)
 - f. Concerning four little things (30:24-28)
 - g. Concerning four stately things (30:29-31)
 - h. Concerning restraint (30:32-33)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What four living creatures does Agur say are small but wise?

2. Verses 11-14 refer to a generation that is proud and unjust. In what ways might these characteristics be evidenced?

3. Name some ways in which we might be shielded by putting our trust in God.

CONCLUSION

Do you feel like you need a shield in your life? Put your trust fully in God. He has promised to protect us from the enemy of our souls, and He will!

NOTES



Proverbs 31:1-31

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.” (Proverbs 31:10)

Natalie, a young woman in our congregation, often testifies about the tremendous spiritual influence her godly grandmother had on her life. She relates, “When I was a young child, my parents were divorced, and I lived with my grandmother for about a year. She was my shining example of what a Christian should be. Every morning when we woke up, and every evening before we went to sleep, we would read the Bible and pray—sometimes for longer than I could keep my eyes open! She always tried to do the right thing, and she impressed upon me to do the same. She witnessed to others at every opportunity, and had a prayer list filled with people she may have only met once, as well as those she loved and cared for most. What a gift God gave me to spend so much time with such a stalwart Christian! After my grandmother passed away, I purposed in my heart that if I could be even a portion of what she was for God, He would be pleased.”

Without question, Natalie’s grandmother was a virtuous woman. But Natalie’s story could be retold with thousands of variations. *Virtuous* means strength of character and a moral firmness. Many of us have known women of virtue—women with a determination to love and serve God faithfully. If they had children, nothing was more important to them than to instill in their children a devotion to God. They would find time to kneel in prayer, perhaps with their arms around those children, interceding for their souls. They made every effort to show by their lives the necessity of living for God.

Our focus verse declares that the value of such women is “far above rubies.” A woman of strong moral character who is unflinching in her devotion to God and family is priceless! All that she does contributes to the well-being of her household. Her industry, resourcefulness, and character are above reproach.

This portrayal could seem daunting. Most of us do not possess all the unusual attributes and abilities of this outstanding woman. Yet the characteristics pictured in this passage are achievable. We do not become virtuous by our own strength or determination: it is only through the grace of God imparted to our hearts that such a testimony of excellence is possible. Like Natalie’s grandmother, we can look to this Proverbs 31 woman as an example and inspiration

to be all that we can be in our devotion to God and others.

BACKGROUND

This chapter begins with words of wisdom from King Lemuel’s mother. There was no king of Israel by this name, so Lemuel was either a non-Jewish king or this name was symbolic for one of Israel’s rulers. In verse 2, Lemuel’s mother expressed loving concern for him, and indicated that she had previously pledged him to God. Then she went on to state three important lessons for her son. First, in verse 3, she warned against making sensual alliances with women, stating that doing so would ultimately cause his destruction. In verses 4-7, she admonished restraint from intoxicants, saying they hinder the ability to judge wisely. She also indicated that strong drink should be used only for medicinal purposes to deaden pain at the point of death, or when suffering from great distress. Finally, in verse 9 she exhorted her son to stand up for those who could not defend themselves, and to rule righteously, upholding the cause of the poor and needy.

Many Bible scholars believe verses 10-31 were authored by someone other than Lemuel. In the original language, they were written as an acrostic poem: each of the twenty-two verses started with a subsequent letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Each verse specifies a different trait possessed by a virtuous wife and mother, and concludes with verses portraying her as one who reveres God, and is praiseworthy in all she accomplishes.

This conclusion to the Book of Proverbs is especially notable because previous chapters graphically describe women who are contentious and sinful. In contrast, this text provides a striking example of a woman who portrays God’s wisdom and fulfills God’s purpose for her life.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- III. The sayings of the way of wisdom
 - E. The words of Lemuel (31:1-31)
 - 1. The appeal of Lemuel’s mother (31:1-9)
 - 2. The acrostic poem on a virtuous woman (31:10-31)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What are three of the activities performed by a virtuous woman?



Overview for Ecclesiastes

Purpose: To record the Wisdom Preacher’s own experiences and reflections on the meaning of life, and to lead the younger generation into the path of true wisdom.

Author: “The Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem” (Ecclesiastes 1:1). Although generally accepted to be Solomon, the writer never discloses his own name.

Date Written: Most likely during Solomon’s aging years (about 955 to 931 B.C.), since it is clearly the work of a mature individual.

To Whom Written: Though not specifically stated, internal evidence indicates it was directed toward the young men of Israel.

Unique Features: The title *Ecclesiastes* does not appear in the original manuscripts. It comes from the word translated *preacher* in the first verse. In Hebrew, that word is *goheleth*, meaning “a presiding officer or one who speaks to an assembly, school, or religious body such as a synagogue.” In the Septuagint (the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek), the Greek term *Ecclesiastes* was used, from the root word *ekklesia*, meaning “assembly.” That term was carried over into the English translation as the name of the book.

Literary Style: Ecclesiastes is one of five wisdom books (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon) in the Old Testament. These books represent a major shift in style from the historical books which precede them.

The content of Ecclesiastes is not logically or tightly organized. Rather, the book is a series of impressions, observations, positions, and emotional responses which fluctuate between faith and

pessimism. The book is particularly notable for its iconic phrases: “vanity of vanities; all is vanity,” “there is no new thing under the sun,” and “he who increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow.” Solomon’s stylistic methods are similar to methods used by teachers of his day. He employed literary forms that were also utilized in Proverbs and Job, such as proverbial sayings, admonitions, parables, allegories, and rhetorical questions.

Setting: Solomon ruled Israel for forty years, and during his reign the nation enjoyed a period of peace and prosperity. During this time frame, the nation of Israel was respected throughout the known world more than at any other point in its history. However, foreign influences, religions, and cultures began to filter into the nation which had been commanded to remain separate from the world and dedicated to the Lord.

God gave Solomon the opportunity to observe and explore every avenue of earthly life. Since royal power, prestige, wealth, and every conceivable pleasure were at his disposal, Solomon could and did gratify every desire. In Ecclesiastes 2:10 he stated, “And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy.” However, in spite of all his exploits and achievements, the predominant tone of this book is one of futility. Other than following God and His plan for mankind, Solomon concluded that all is vanity and vexation—no created good can satisfy the soul, and happiness is to be found in God alone.

Jewish tradition states that Solomon would gather together the young and old before the Temple and instruct them regarding the vanities and errors which would lead them away from God. Even to this current day, the Book of Ecclesiastes is read in Jewish synagogues during the Feast of Tabernacles.

Outline

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A complete amplified outline of this book is available on our website at www.apostolicfaith.org.*

- I. The theme stated (1:1-11)
 - A. The theme introduced (1:1-2)
 - B. The theme illustrated (1:3-11)
- II. The theme defended (1:12—6:12)
 - A. The emptiness of seeking for knowledge (1:12-18)
 - B. The emptiness of seeking for pleasure (2:1-11)
 - C. The meaninglessness of lifestyle (2:12-17)
 - D. The emptiness of human toil (2:18-23)
 - E. The basis of happiness is in God (2:24-26)
 - F. The realization that death stalks everyone (3:1-22)
 - G. The inequalities of life (4:1-16)
 - H. The emptiness of religious formalism (5:1-7)
 - I. The emptiness of the life of man (5:8—6:12)
- III. The theme applied (7:1—12:7)
 - A. Advice concerning one's life (7:1—9:12)
 - B. Advice concerning wisdom (9:13—12:7)
- IV. The theme concluded (12:8-14)
 - A. The theme rehearsed (12:8)
 - B. The preacher's activity (12:9-11)
 - C. The preacher's advice (12:12)
 - D. The preacher's conclusion (12:13-14)



Ecclesiastes 1:1 through 2:26

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.” (Ecclesiastes 2:11)

Barbara Hutton, granddaughter and heiress of the tycoon Frank W. Woolworth, the founder of a chain of retail stores, was often portrayed in news reports as a “lucky” young woman. On her twenty-first birthday in 1933, she inherited forty-two million dollars, making her one of the wealthiest women in the world. During her lifetime she had mansions built around the world, including a house in London’s Regent Park and a luxurious Japanese-style palace in Cuernavaca, Mexico. She bought Old Master paintings, important sculptures, and valuable jewelry, including the forty-carat Pasha Diamond. Her lavish spending habits often put her in the spotlight, and many people followed her extravagant lifestyle with fascination. If wealth and publicity could have brought happiness, she would have been a very happy woman.

However, she was not happy. Barbara married and divorced seven times, attempted suicide, and frequently appeared drunk in public. At times she would give total strangers expensive gifts and money to stay the night with her because she did not want to be alone. Although she had everything her heart could desire in terms of material goods, emptiness and loneliness seemed to fill her life. At her death in 1979 it was reported that only about \$3,500 was left of her fortune. A movie made about her life a few years after her death called her a “Poor Little Rich Girl.”

Barbara Hutton certainly could have identified with the author of Ecclesiastes, who described pleasure and material prosperity as simply “vexation of spirit.” Some translations render that phrase, “chasing of the wind,” and Barbara was no more successful at attaining happiness from position, pleasure, or possessions than one would be in attempting to catch the wind.

Where are we looking for satisfaction? A good starting point for finding the answer to that question is reviewing where we invest our time, energy, and resources. We want to make sure that we are not “chasing the wind,” but are focusing on what will bring lasting fulfillment—something that is found only in God.

BACKGROUND

The Book of Ecclesiastes begins with the author identifying himself as “the Preacher,” indicating that his words were intended to give instruction. The Hebrew word *goheleth*, translated *preacher*, means “a person who speaks to an assembly, school, or religious body.” While the writer never disclosed his own name, he identified himself as David’s son and the king, so he is generally accepted to have been Solomon, King of Israel.

In verse 2, Solomon stated his theme: “All is vanity.” The Hebrew word for *vanity* means “emptiness; something that is transitory like a vapor or a breath; vain or useless,” and the repetition was for emphasis. The writer was saying that life’s secular or earthly efforts and activities are meaningless because they pass away so quickly. This establishes the tone of futility that is characteristic of the book.

In verses 4-18, the vanity of life is illustrated by nature. Generations come and go, and the cycles of nature continue. Every thing a person does has been done before, and what a person accomplishes is soon forgotten. Earthly wisdom alone, though sought diligently, is not enough, for it cannot correct all that is “crooked” and “wanting.” The more one learns, the more sorrow he has.

In chapter 2, the writer recounted other areas where he searched for meaning and profit. He set himself to try pleasure (verses 1-3), looking to amusement and wine, although not to excess for he remembered wisdom in this matter. Then he pursued building and wealth (verses 4-11), constructing houses, vineyards, gardens, and irrigated orchards. He had servants and riches—anything he wanted, and his focus was completely on himself. Yet when he looked at all he had done and accumulated, it did not bring satisfaction.

Next, Solomon considered wisdom and folly (verses 12-17). He perceived that wisdom was better, “as light excelleth darkness,” but the advantages were short-lived. The lifespan of both learned and unlearned individuals ends at the moment of death. The writer observed that once a man died, he did not know whether the one who inherited the wealth he had worked so hard to obtain was using it wisely or not. Such thoughts brought despair to the writer and caused him to lose sleep.

Finally, Solomon noted that satisfaction in life comes only from God (verses 24-26). He realized that people should enjoy their food and drink and

also their labor, but this would happen only when they recognized that God made it possible. Verse 25 could be translated, "For who can eat and who can enjoy apart from him?" God decides everyone's circumstances in life. He gives those who follow Him wisdom, knowledge, and joy. However, if a person labors only for earthly things, his efforts eventually will be worthless to him.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- I. The theme stated (1:1-11)
 - A. The theme introduced (1:1-2)
 - B. The theme illustrated (1:3-11)
 - 1. The generations (1:3-4)
 - 2. The sun (1:5)
 - 3. The wind (1:6)
 - 4. The rivers (1:7)
 - 5. The life of man (1:8-11)
- II. The theme defended
 - A. The emptiness of seeking for knowledge (1:12-18)
 - B. The emptiness of seeking for pleasure (2:1-11)
 - C. The meaninglessness of lifestyle (2:12-17)
 - D. The emptiness of human toil (2:18-23)
 - E. The basis of happiness is in God (2:24-26)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. How did the author of Ecclesiastes identify himself?

2. What tone do you feel is predominant in these first two chapters of Ecclesiastes?

3. What steps can we take to make sure we seek for satisfaction from the right source?

CONCLUSION

A person who searches for satisfaction in earthly things eventually will find his efforts worthless, for true satisfaction cannot be obtained through prosperity or pleasure. True fulfillment can only be found in God.

NOTES



Ecclesiastes 3:1 through 4:16

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted.”
(Ecclesiastes 3:1-2)

On a beautiful day in early September, my husband and I drove to a local hospital with excitement in our hearts. The day we had been anticipating for many months was here! Just a few hours later, we held a new granddaughter in our arms. Our hearts had already made room for four precious grandchildren, but in one moment of time, this little girl nestled into her own spot in our hearts. What a joyous experience to welcome another tiny member into our family!

Six weeks later, as my husband and I were finishing dinner, I had a call from my father’s caregiver, asking me to come quickly. I had seen Dad just an hour earlier—I had stopped by on my way home from work to give him a quick hug and see how he was doing. At that point he was sitting up in his recliner, seemingly resting comfortably. But in the short space of time between my five o’clock visit and that dinner-time call, his physical condition had changed. When I stepped to his bedside a few minutes later and leaned over to kiss his cheek, I realized that my dear dad had stepped into the presence of the Savior he had served so faithfully for almost eighty years.

Those two events, juxtaposed as they were in a six-week segment of our family history, illustrate the point that Solomon made in our focus verse: there is a God-ordained season for everything, including a time to be born and a time to die. The original word translated *season* in this verse means “appointed time,” so in the eternal foreknowledge of God, the moments of our granddaughter’s birth and my father’s death were appointed before time began.

All of us have experienced our appointed moment of birth. One day, if the Lord tarries, we will all experience our appointed moment of death. But in between those two moments, we live life—a sacred gift from our Creator, and one that should be used carefully and thankfully.

Most of us will experience some things among the range of life events described in our text. These are not random happenings that occur by chance; they are all part of our Creator’s divine purpose. Let us

accept circumstances as they come to us, believing that throughout all our experiences, God has a plan. We want to do our best to spend the span of years allotted to us in a manner that will glorify Him. The secret to peace and contentment is to discover, accept, and thank God for His perfect purpose and timing in our lives.

BACKGROUND

In today’s text, the change in literary style from prose to poetry marks the beginning of a new segment of Ecclesiastes. This portion of the book continues Solomon’s probe of life’s meaning by focusing on God’s control over all events.

Chapter 3 begins with a well-known poem (verses 1-8) made up of fourteen pairs of contrasts that use twenty-eight repetitions of the word “time.” The writer declared his thesis statement in verse 1: “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” The word *season* means “appointed time.” Solomon recognized that God controls the universe and the cycles of life. The range of human activities identified in the passage expresses completeness, implying the inclusion of every similar activity that occurs between the “bookends” of each pair of contrasts. Mankind cannot change the pattern; for example, one cannot alter the seasons for planting and harvest. Man does, however, decide how he will respond to the order God has designed.

In verses 9-15, the writer noted that the cycles of life can bring frustration for those who focus wholly on earthly activities. He observed that people are often anxious about the future but they cannot control it. Therefore, he concluded (as he had in previous chapters) that people should find joy in the basic activities of life—eating and working—because God is the One who makes those activities possible. His works are eternal, and man should respect and honor Him.

Next Solomon addressed injustice and evil in the world. In verses 16-22, he observed that at times justice is perverted, but God would judge. He noted that like the beasts, a man’s body becomes dust after he dies. Commentators have varying opinions about the meaning of verse 21. Some feel the writer was declaring that man’s spirit went to God for judgment and the beasts’ spirits went to the earth. Others believe Solomon had a question about that when he said, “Who knoweth?” In verse 22, he concluded again that people simply should enjoy the basic activities of life that are given to them.

In chapter 4, Solomon reviewed areas of life that may be inequitable. He felt disheartened when he looked at those who were oppressed (verses 1-3). They had no one to help them when they were exploited by those who had power. At this point he concluded that it would have been better for the oppressed to have died or never been born at all (although he put forth a differing opinion in 9:4). He looked again at work (verses 4-6) and when considering that some who endeavored mightily were driven by envy and competitiveness, he pointed out that this was vanity. Others did nothing, and therefore used up what they had. Consequently, Solomon recommended a moderate position of making a calm, reasonable effort.

Solomon noted that companionship is better than being alone (verses 7-12). He said a person without “child or brother” who works obsessively because he is greedy will find his efforts to be vain, but those who work together will all benefit.

Scholars believe that verse 13 is a proverb that was known by the people of Solomon’s time. Verses 14-16 expand the proverb to add that a king eventually loses his position, admiration, and wealth in old age as he is replaced by the next generation. Solomon concluded that even a king’s reign amounts to “vanity” (nothing) in the end.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- II. The theme defended
 - F. The realization that death stalks everyone (3:1-22)
 - 1. The absoluteness of God’s program (3:1-15)
 - 2. The inevitability of God’s judgment (3:16-22)
 - G. The inequalities of life (4:1-16)
 - 1. The oppression of men (4:1-3)
 - 2. The futility of earthly endeavor (4:4-6)
 - 3. The value of companionship (4:7-12)
 - 4. The futility of high station (4:13-16)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What did Solomon say that God had made beautiful in His time? (Ecclesiastes 3:11)

2. Why do you think Solomon inferred in Ecclesiastes 4:9 that it is preferable to have companionship during one’s journey through life?

3. How can we prepare ourselves spiritually to endure the difficult life events which are common to the human family?

CONCLUSION

As we journey through the seasons and circumstances of life, we will experience both pleasant and adverse events. Trusting that God has ordained them all will bring peace and stability to our hearts.

NOTES



Ecclesiastes 5:1 through 6:12

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed.” (Ecclesiastes 5:4)

Marriage vows are an illustration of the sacred nature of vows made before God. For sixty years, David and Ruby Jordan of Suffolk, Virginia, lived by the wedding vows they had taken. They proved their adherence to the words “in sickness and in health, in adversity and in prosperity,” as well as their commitment to each other.

In March of 1998, Ruby suffered a stroke and it was discovered that she had the disease thrombocytopenic purpura syndrome, which kills brain cells. She spent six months in the hospital, and then was transferred to a skilled nursing facility. When Ruby did not respond to treatment there, David made the decision to bring her home. Amazingly, once she was back in familiar surroundings, a change began to take place. Although she could not speak, she started communicating with her family and friends through gestures and smiles.

The family was able to obtain in-home nursing help during the day, but David took care of Ruby from the time he arrived home from work at 4:00 each evening until 8:00 the following morning. He never complained, and he always wore a smile.

From the outset, David wanted to make life as normal as possible for his beloved wife. He had a special van equipped to accommodate her wheelchair, and he took her out and about—to church, shopping, and on other outings. In 2004, he took her on a four-day vacation to Myrtle Beach to celebrate their fiftieth wedding anniversary. Another time he rented a boat and arranged a fishing trip for her, because she had always loved fishing.

David once said, “I know what she needs and when she needs it, but I guess after being married for more than fifty years, that’s not hard to do. I cherish my wedding vows and I think everyone who takes them should honor them. If your spouse gets ill or becomes disabled, do what you can to help them. After all, I know that if the shoe were on the other foot, she would do the same for me.”¹ He proved those words until Ruby passed away in 2014.

David and Ruby’s vows, while taken before God, were made to each other. In today’s text, Solomon addressed the subject of vows made to God. He cautioned against being rash or hasty in speech, which

included the making of vows. He also pointed to the importance of keeping vows that are made, and warned against backing out of a vow by claiming it was a mistake. His three-part emphasis made it abundantly clear that any person who makes a vow before God will be held accountable to keep it.

Circumstances in life change. Adversities come. Feelings ebb and flow like the tide. However, vows are a solemn commitment, and they must be kept. We can purpose to follow the example of David and Ruby, and make sure that we keep our vows!

BACKGROUND

This portion of text can be separated into two segments. In verses 1-7 of chapter 5, Solomon offered words of advice on two topics: reverence in worship (verses 1-3), and caution regarding vows (verses 4-7). The remainder of chapter 5 (verses 8-20) and all of chapter 6 address how to adjust to economic problems.

In chapter 5, verse 1, the phrase “keep thy foot” alludes to exercising reverence when in God’s house, and being an obedient listener, rather than engaging in meaningless worship. In verse 2, the Preacher exhorted against speaking impulsively to God, indicating that prayers should be reverent and contemplative.

Verses 4-7 address the necessity of fulfilling vows, emphasizing that it is better not to make a vow at all than to fail to accomplish it. The word *angel* in verse 6 could be translated as “messenger of God,” and most likely refers to the priest. It was not uncommon during that time for the priest to be told that a certain vow was a mistake, and therefore unredeemable. Solomon emphasized that God took all vows seriously, and punishment could result if vows were not kept.

In verse 8, the writer stated that the oppression of the poor and perversion of those in government should come as no surprise, but there is a higher Power who ultimately would be the Judge over all. Verse 9 conveys that the harvest benefits everyone, and even the king is entitled to his fair share.

Verses 10-17 focus on the vanity of trusting in personal wealth. Those who put their confidence in riches are never satisfied, and the accumulation of wealth brings more responsibility. While the sleep of a laborer is peaceful, the rich are wakeful because of stress over their responsibilities and wealth.

In verses 18-20, Solomon said it is acceptable to enjoy the fruit of one’s labor as long as God is given the credit for providing it. He brought out that those who acknowledge their portion as a gift from God would experience joy and gladness.

In chapter 6, Solomon continued his practical counsel on the theme of material prosperity. In verses 1 and 2, he pondered the fate of a man whom God had allowed to obtain wealth, but who did not live to enjoy it. He concluded that the acquisition of riches as a purpose in life is vanity.

In Solomon's culture, living a long life and having many children were considered worthy goals. However, verses 3-6 indicate that if a man's life is not filled with goodly purpose or worthy fulfillment, or he is not honored with a proper burial, it would be preferable for him to never have been born.

Verses 7-9 emphasize that man's spiritual appetite cannot be satisfied with material gain. The wise man and the fool, the poor and the wealthy, will all end in the grave. Solomon also brought out that it is better to be content with what the eyes can see than to desire something that is unattainable.

Verses 10-12 point out that it is futile for man to contend with God. Man does not have the ability to know what is best in life, and can do little to determine what will happen in the world after he is dead.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- II. The theme defended
 - H. The emptiness of religious formalism (5:1-7)
 - I. The emptiness of the life of man (5:8—6:12)
 - 1. The oppression of the poor (5:8-9)
 - 2. The emptiness of wealth (5:10-17)
 - a. It does not satisfy (5:10-12)
 - b. It is temporal (5:13-17)
 - 3. The basis of happiness is in God (5:18-20)
 - 4. The emptiness of man's experience (6:1-9)
 - 5. The futile struggle against fate (6:10-12)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. How did Solomon say a fool's voice would be known? Ecclesiastes 5:3

2. Why is it short-sighted to focus all our time and efforts on material prosperity?

3. Since labor and possessions bring no lasting satisfaction, what should we focus on in this life?

CONCLUSION

A vow is a solemn commitment or contract made before or to God, and it is vital that we are very careful about keeping such commitments.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.” (Ecclesiastes 7:14)

For most of my life I have been blessed with good health, but there was a period of time when I had what seemed to be a serious internal disorder. One night when sleep was elusive, I remember standing in our darkened hallway, looking out at the lights of the city. Occasionally an airplane could be seen passing overhead. As I stood there, my thoughts turned to all those across our land (and around the world, for that matter) who were suffering from an incurable or terminal illness. Although God allowed my sickness to linger for a time before sending healing, during that period I found new appreciation for my usual good health, and a deeper compassion for those who suffered.

A number of years later, I was blindsided by the sudden loss of my job. I was at an age and in a specialized field where finding a new position would be difficult. In times like that, it is natural to experience a range of emotions: a feeling of failure, financial worries, or a temptation to be upset at the management who orchestrated the situation. However, I did not want to be angry or vindictive toward my former employer. I realized that God had allowed the circumstances that we were facing, and the godly response would be to leave the whole matter in His hands. The Lord helped me do that. I was able to say in my heart—and mean it—that nothing mattered, so long as one day I made Heaven my home. The Lord took good care of us. We came through that trial, and I grew spiritually through the experience.

Those two incidents were challenges for me, but they have been interspersed in periods of good health and stable employment. The fact is, sooner or later everyone goes through adversity—Christian and non-Christian alike. Our focus verse indicates that God allows challenges to be interwoven with times of joy in our lives so that we do not rely on our own wisdom or abilities to carry us through. Events occur that are beyond our control to alter or alleviate, and through them we learn the importance of relying on God and trusting in His divine plan for our lives.

Let us purpose in our hearts to accept the good and not-so-good in life as coming from God, and lean on Him to carry us through.

BACKGROUND

The proverbs and observations in this chapter seem to be a response to the question posed at the end of the preceding chapter, “What is good for man in this life?” (Ecclesiastes 6:12). A series of comparisons in the first twenty-two verses of this chapter, frequently employing the word “better,” offer practical wisdom for those living in a sinful world. The remainder of the chapter is an exhortation against self-righteousness, also emphasizing that while wisdom is a worthy attribute, it is limited, and insufficient to allow man to fully understand life.

In verses 1-4, Solomon made the observation that everyone eventually dies, so how one lives should be taken seriously. In verse 1, he stated that a person’s birthdate matters less than his day of death, and a good reputation is more valuable than costly perfume, which at that time was used at banquets to scent one’s head and garments. The reference to going to a “house of mourning” (funeral home) was a reminder to take occasion to reflect on life’s brevity and consider lifestyle choices. Verse 3 is not a condemnation of laughter, but rather conveys that taking life seriously is more beneficial than living for amusement.

In verses 5-6, Solomon pointed out that it is better to heed the rebuke of the wise than to be swayed by the flattery of the foolish. The “crackling of thorns” symbolized the noisome chatter of a person who has much to say but little of it has value.

Verses 7-10 are a warning against allowing judgment to be biased by personal circumstances, such as oppression. Caution is better than rashness, for anger hinders clear thinking and sound judgment. It is best to submit to God’s timing and will.

Verses 11-12 bring out that wisdom and an inheritance are both good, and both bring benefit to the recipient. However, wisdom is preferable because it can lead one to life.

Verses 13-14 address the thought that acceptance of the sovereignty of God is better than indignation at His works. God allows both prosperity and adversity for man’s benefit—prosperity causes rejoicing, while adversity prompts reflection and persuades man to trust in God.

Verses 15-22 point out that integrity is better than pretentiousness. Solomon stated that since the righteous sometimes die young while the wicked live long, judgment is not always evident in this life. He cautioned that self-righteousness could destroy one’s integrity and influence, and wickedness could

hasten one's death. Verse 20 speaks to the depravity of humanity. In the original Hebrew, it does not imply that it is impossible to live without sinning; rather, it states that no individual is born sinless, or just.

In verses 23-29, Solomon reflected on his quest to attain wisdom. He found that it was out of his reach, and he reasoned that the depth of wisdom was impossible for man to know. He also pointed out that a righteous man would be able to escape a provocative woman, but the sinner would be ensnared. The author's assumption was that only one man in a thousand was truly wise, while the number of wise women was even less. This sentiment aligns with 1 Kings 11:4, which states that in his latter years, Solomon's many wives influenced him to turn away from God.

This chapter concludes with an inference that God had originally created man upright, but sin caused man to flagrantly defy God's will and go astray.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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III. The theme applied

A. Advice concerning one's life

1. The statement of better things (7:1-14)
2. The need for moderation (7:15-22)
3. The futile desire for wisdom and women (7:23-29)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What visual picture did Solomon use to illustrate the laughter of the fool?

2. Why do you think Solomon stated in verse 8 that the end of a thing is better than its beginning?

3. What specific aspect of practical wisdom from this chapter can you apply most directly to your own life?

CONCLUSION

True wisdom will cause us to consider behavior options and choose those that will ultimately lead to eternal profit.

NOTES



Ecclesiastes 8:1 through 9:12

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.” (Ecclesiastes 9:10)

In today’s focus verse, Solomon challenged his hearers to work industriously because once a person passes from this earth there will be no more opportunity to do so. My father was one who modeled the counsel of that Scripture.

For as far back as I can remember, Dad was always busy with whatever tasks came his way—both in the work of the Lord, and in helping individuals who had problems that a good mechanic could assist with. Did your furnace go out? My dad was the man to call. Your car not running right? Ask him to take a look at it; he’d probably be able to figure out the problem. Water heater leaking? Need input on an air-conditioning system? Need duct work installed or some electrical work done in your branch church? It seemed there were always needs, but I never remember Dad showing the slightest hesitation in undertaking a task for someone else.

For years, we joked about Dad’s “job jar.” It was kind of a byword around our house that if we had something that needed fixing or a project that was awaiting his attention, we should put a note in his “job jar.” If such a jar had actually existed, I am certain it always would have been full! While there was no jar, he did carry a little notebook around in his front shirt pocket, so as needs were brought to his attention, he could make a note of them.

Dad’s “work” was not limited to mechanical challenges. He and my mom carried on a ministry among the seafaring men who visited our city. They invited the men to church, to our home, on picnics, and on countless outings around our area. Dad kept meticulous records of the men he met, and took literally thousands of photographs which he later mailed to the seafaring men’s homes as memories of their visits. He also faithfully shared a portion of his testimony with people whose lives intersected with his. Even in his final months, in a bedridden condition, he often would think of individuals he had known years before and would ask me to mail them a printed account telling of a time in his life when God had worked miraculously in his behalf.

Solomon’s words in our focus verse make me think of Annie Coghill’s old hymn, “Work for the

night is coming...when man’s work is o’er.” Dad was one who lived by that perspective, and it can be our way of living as well. Let’s make sure that we apply ourselves wholeheartedly to every task God gives us. We want to live and work with eternity in view!

BACKGROUND

Chapters 8 and 9 of Ecclesiastes continue Solomon’s practical applications on the theme of ultimate profit.

Chapter 8 addresses submission to authority, and conveys the thought that although the wicked appear to prosper, judgment comes to all, and in the end it will be well with those who fear God. In verses 1-6, the author advised obedience when serving under an autocratic ruler. Verse 1 may have been a familiar proverb at that time, implying that a man’s wisdom would light up his face and change his countenance. The “oath of God” in verse 2 possibly alludes to the oath of loyalty to the king. Verses 3-4 advise against rashness in one’s dealings with the king, stating that it is unwise to question his authority. Verses 5-6 indicate that submission will keep one from being chastised, and the wise will consider that, in the course of time, judgment will be rendered to everyone.

In verses 7-9, Solomon pointed out that life sometimes does not offer options. Man does not possess the ability to predict the future or the day of his death. Just as it is not feasible for a soldier to be discharged in time of war, it is not possible for one to avoid wickedness if his heart is evil. The author’s observation was that rulers at times govern in a way that warrants God’s judgment against them. The implication in verse 10 is that although wicked rulers are allowed to govern in spite of their abuse of power, they eventually die and are soon forgotten.

Verses 11-13 point out that when judgment is delayed, wicked individuals continue to sin without fear of punishment. The author reasoned that those who fear God and reject evil will be the benefactors of God’s favor. On the other hand, the days of the wicked are as a shadow, and it will not be well with them in the end.

In verses 14-15, the author wrestled with the concept that the righteous sometimes suffer, while the wicked appear to prosper. He concluded that the best one can do is to live and enjoy life to the fullest during the time God gives on earth.

In verses 16-17, Solomon surmised that even if one searched day and night, man’s earthly wisdom can never comprehend the purposes of God.

The text in chapter 9 indicates that since death happens to everyone, whether righteous or wicked, a person should make the best of the life he has. Verse 1 of chapter 9 indicates that the righteous and wise are in God's hands, and outward manifestation of a person's works is not indicative of how that one will be received by God when he dies. Verses 2-3 state that death comes to all, regardless of whether they are righteous or evil.

In verses 4-6, the author emphasized that life is better than death because there is hope. The living know that their day of death is coming, and can adjust their choices accordingly. However, the dead are soon forgotten, and can no longer experience either life's rewards or adversities.

In verses 7-10, Solomon gave his philosophy of life: enjoy life while you can. Bread and wine were common elements of a meal at that time, and the implication was that God approved of man's enjoyment of life. Wearing white garments for feasts and pouring oil on men's heads during celebratory events were customary symbols of pleasure. The author also urged man to live happily with his wife for the duration of his fleeting life, because that is the reward for his labor. His conclusion was that one should give his best to every endeavor during his lifetime, before death destroys all opportunity for achievement.

The inference in verses 11-12 is that man's fate is not determined by his strength, wisdom, or wealth, since the passage of time and misfortune comes to all. Just as fish and birds are caught unaware at the time of their entrapment, man is unable to foresee when adversity might come his way.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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III. The theme applied

- A. Advice concerning one's life
 - 4. The necessity of subjection to authority (8:1-9)
 - 5. The inability of man to solve all problems (8:10-17)
 - 6. The invitation to make the best use of this life (9:1-12)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In chapter 9, what two animals did Solomon compare to illustrate the importance of hope?

2. How would you paraphrase Solomon's words in Ecclesiastes 9:11?

3. What are some steps you could take to improve a skill or talent that could be used in the work of the Lord?

CONCLUSION

Our opportunities for service to God and others will end at the grave, so let us purpose to give our very best efforts to whatever we have opportunity and ability to do.

NOTES



Ecclesiastes 9:13 through 10:20

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and it seemed great unto me.” (Ecclesiastes 9:13)

Several years ago, when I was visiting my elderly father, I mentioned that our upcoming Sunday school lesson was on wisdom, and asked if he had any “words of wisdom” to share with me. Over the years, I had come to value my father’s sound reasoning, but I naturally did not expect a deep philosophical response to such a casual inquiry. My dad smiled a little and simply said, “Keep your powder dry.” We laughed at the old expression, and then our conversation turned to other topics.

Later, as I was contemplating the lesson on wisdom again, I reflected on Dad’s comment. Obviously, the warning he quoted had a specific application many years ago, when a person’s food supply or personal safety may have depended upon a usable supply of gunpowder. The origin of the phrase is not certain, but it may have been early in the English Civil War of 1642, when Oliver Cromwell admonished his troops, “Put your trust in God, my boys, but mind to keep your powder dry.” Whoever first voiced the phrase, the concept would have been well understood for centuries. Damp gunpowder could imperil those who discovered its unusable condition at a moment when it was urgently needed.

Dad was always one to consider the spiritual application of sound basic principles, and I cannot help but wonder what he may have shared if we had continued that conversation in earnest. Just as a military officer reminded his men of the necessity for caution in a basic matter, there certainly are spiritual concepts that have been well known for centuries, but we must be reminded to observe them for our spiritual welfare or protection.

That is precisely what Solomon was doing in the Book of Ecclesiastes—he was reminding his hearers of practical principles which they needed to observe for their own spiritual welfare. In today’s text, he highlighted one of the themes woven throughout the book: the value of true wisdom. Our focus verse introduces a historical incident which “seemed great” to Solomon, in which a poor man who was unrecognized as a leader delivered a city through wisdom.

Like the maxim my father quoted, Solomon’s proverbs, allegories, and admonitions were often reflective of the society in which he lived. But we

can all benefit by observing both the wise and foolish conduct of others, and learning by their actions. When we realize that God evaluates all we do, we see the necessity of living wisely, remembering that it is vital to obey His guidelines and follow His plan for mankind.

BACKGROUND

After deeming in chapter 9 that wisdom was greater than strength, the Preacher presented several contrasts in chapter 10 confirming the importance of being wise.

In verses 13-18 of chapter 9, the author cited a historical event, in which the counsel of a poor, wise man thwarted a powerful king from besieging a small city with few defenses. However, Solomon lamented that although wisdom was more effective than might, the poor man’s wisdom was no longer remembered. Still, he concluded that wisdom is better than strength, even if it goes unheeded by the masses.

The author used a common adage in verse 1 of chapter 10, pointing out that just as dead flies in the pharmacist’s ointment cause it to be useless, the honorable reputation of a wise man can be spoiled by one small character flaw or reckless deed. Some commentators think the right and left hands mentioned in verse 2 represent right and wrong courses. Others believe that the more expertly used right hand (if one were right-handed) symbolizes a wise man’s heart, while the clumsier left hand illustrates the fool’s heart. In verse 3, the author stressed that a fool is easily recognized by his actions and words.

Verse 4 brings out that one should not leave his post of duty just because the ruler offended him, for submission will bring calm to even the greatest offences. In Solomon’s day, riding horses denoted honor and prestige, and the writer used this as an analogy in verses 5-7 to point out that rulers often placed incompetent individuals in high positions, while the qualified were given a lower status.

Verses 8-10 teach that using wisdom when performing ordinary tasks can prevent one from being unnecessarily harmed. In verses 11-15, Solomon contrasted the words of the wise with those of the foolish. While the wise man’s words are gracious, the fool will ultimately be destroyed by his own words. Verse 15 is a proverb which may have been meant to denote that foolish behavior causes one to be ignorant of even the simplest things in life.

In verses 16-19, the author implied that when a ruler was immature or foolish, and allowed his

princes to feast in the morning rather than labor, the kingdom would suffer. Laziness and idleness only result in decay and neglect, but hard work provides the resources with which to enjoy the pleasures of good living.

Verse 20 may have initiated the saying, “A little bird told me.” It cautions against speaking or thinking evil of those in authority, because someone could repeat it.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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III. The theme applied

B. Advice concerning wisdom

1. The exaltation of wisdom (9:13-18)
2. The conduct of wisdom (10:1-20)
 - a. Wisdom and foolishness contrasted (10:1-3)
 - b. Wisdom and social status (10:4-7)
 - c. Wisdom advocated (10:8-10)
 - d. Wisdom and words (10:11-15)
 - e. Wisdom and the king (10:16-20)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What did Solomon say was better than weapons of war?

2. What do you think is meant by the words “wisdom is better than strength”?

3. How can we apply the principle taught in Ecclesiastes 10:1 to our own lives?

CONCLUSION

There are many nuggets of sagacious advice in Solomon’s proverbial statements. We want to pay attention to and learn from his observations and experiences.

NOTES



Ecclesiastes 11:1 through 12:14

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.” (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

I spent a number of years in the banking industry, where I had a colleague whose response to any proposed program or initiative was, “What’s the bottom line?” This question, framed in monetary terms, simply meant that when all the positives and negatives of the proposal were added together, would the bank profit? Of course there were non-financial aspects to consider as well, such as customer service, legality, and ethical issues, but the same question could be asked in each of those areas. Often our discussions would move into tangential areas of concern and gradually drift far from the issue at hand. Inevitably, my colleague would pull us back to the point by asking, “But what is the bottom line?” He was careful to keep us zeroed in on what really mattered.

Our lives can easily become sidetracked and our focus subtly shift from the things of God to things of little value. We are reminded by this text that there is a “bottom line,” and we must pay attention to it if we are to live life as God intended.

In the final two verses of Ecclesiastes, Solomon gives us the “bottom line” of life. All that he had said in his discourse to the young men of Israel reached a culmination in this passage—a principle he seemed to regard as the key to a fulfilling life. In essence, he was declaring that the entire responsibility of humanity can be condensed to two simple issues: our attitudes (fear God) and actions (keep His commandments).

Our attitudes should be marked by awe and reverence toward God, the Creator of the universe. It is interesting to note that the writer used the same Hebrew word for God (Elohim) in this passage that is used in the creation account of Genesis, rather than the Jewish national name for God (Yahweh) that is frequently used in other texts. Solomon’s point was that we should stand in awe at the power of the God who spoke the worlds into existence. It should take our breath away to consider that He takes personal interest in each individual on planet earth. Not a day should go by that we do not honor and revere God for His gracious love and care for all of creation and for us as individuals.

Flowing from our attitude of awe, reverence, and honor should be actions that are obedient to God’s instructions. He spoke through the Old Testament prophet Samuel, declaring that obedience is better than sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22), and Solomon’s instruction to “keep his commandments” reinforces that principle. Obedience from a pure heart is the highest form of worship we can offer God. Ecclesiastes 11:9-10 warns of the folly of excluding God and His expectations from our lives because someday all will be judged. God will measure every action, so we must be careful to “put away evil.”

Today, as in Solomon’s time, the “bottom line” for our lives can be simply stated in two questions. Do we fear, reverence, honor, and stand in awe of God? And have we set our hearts to worship Him supremely by following his commandments, instructions, principles, and precepts, making them the basis for our life’s purpose and decisions? Let’s make sure that our lives line up to these principles.

BACKGROUND

In previous chapters, Solomon explored the meaning and purpose of life from man’s perspective and found that it was often vanity. In today’s text, he exhorted his hearers to make good decisions because the result would determine future joy.

In chapter 11, he advised benevolence in giving to guard against an uncertain future. He also admonished the youth to enjoy life, but at the same time to remember God’s ultimate judgment. In chapter 12 he advised that the sensible time for turning to God was during one’s youth, before the adversities of life and the aging process would cause one to become disheartened. Solomon’s final assessment was that man’s duty in life is to fear God and keep His commandments.

The Hebrew idiom given in verse 1 of chapter 11 was based on the custom of spreading seeds from boats along the overflowing banks of the river. When the water receded, the grain settled in the soil and grew. The meaning was that whatever one gave to others would eventually be returned. Verse 2 infers that diversity in business assets is advisable since it is not possible to know what the future holds.

Verses 3-6 imply that it is not wise to wait for ideal circumstances or good weather in order to do one’s work. God is in control of the elements, and man cannot know ahead of time what will happen. Therefore, it is imperative to use one’s time wisely and reap the rewards that hard work brings.

The implication in verses 7-8 is that though a man lives a long life full of sweet and sunny days, death will eventually come with many “days of darkness” in the grave. In verses 9-10, the author encouraged young people to thrive in their youth, while bearing in mind that their every deed would be judged by God. The admonition was that they should live responsibly and maturely.

In verse 1 of chapter 12, the connotation of the word *remember* is to “consider and obey.” The author encouraged submission to God in one’s youth, before the darkening of the sun, moon, and stars, and before cloudy days (verse 2). This depiction may have been in reference to the grief and misery that sometimes accompanies old age.

Verses 3-8 are a descriptive portrayal of the aging process. Although translators differ in their interpretations, the essence is that life can become very difficult and dangerous as one grows older. The eventual end is eternity, and the mourning of one’s death. The visual images in verse 6 symbolize the end of life, offering no hope for restoration. Following one’s death, the body returns to dust, while the soul returns to God. Verse 8 stresses the futility of life without God.

In verses 9-11, Solomon stated that because he was wise, he endeavored to teach the issues of life through many orderly proverbs. He sought to find gracious words that portrayed uprightness and truth. The author said his words were as the prodding of goads and the piercing of nails.

In verses 12-14, the author signified that the continual study of books would not provide the meaning of life, which is to fear God and keep His commandments; for all man’s deeds, whether good or evil, will eventually be judged by God.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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III. The theme applied

- B. Advice concerning wisdom
 - 3. The instruction of wisdom (11:1 — 12:7)
 - a. Exhortation to do good (11:1-6)
 - b. Exhortation to youth (11:7 — 12:7)
 - (1) Avoid evil (11:7-10)
 - (2) Remember God and death (12:1-7)

IV. The theme concluded (12:8-14)

- A. The theme rehearsed (12:8)
- B. The preacher’s activity (12:9-11)
- C. The preacher’s advice (12:12)
- D. The preacher’s conclusion (12:13-14)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What did Solomon say was a pleasant thing for our eyes to behold? What did he mean by that statement?

2. Why do you think Solomon implied that it is easy to forget God when we are young?

3. What are the benefits of remembering our Creator early in life rather than later?

CONCLUSION

The only true profit in life is found in fearing God and keeping His commandments.

NOTES



Overview for Song of Solomon

Purpose: To portray the physical and emotional nature of true love between a man and a woman—a love which remains faithful in spite of all temptations to infidelity.

Author: Solomon is mentioned in the opening verse and in six other places throughout the book. Though he is commonly accepted to be the author, the book may have been written by someone *about* Solomon.

Date Written: Probably between 971 and 931 B.C. during the early years of Solomon’s life, based on the style of Hebrew used by the writer. References to geographical locations throughout the kingdom of Israel also suggest that the book was composed prior to 930 B.C. when the nation was divided into the northern and southern kingdoms.

Key People: King Solomon, the Shulamite maiden, the shepherd, the woman’s brothers, and the young women of Jerusalem.

Setting: The garden at the summer home of the king, and the king’s palace. Shulam, where the maiden was from, is thought by many historians to have been Shunem, a farming community about sixty miles north of Jerusalem.

Special Features: The Song of Solomon is one of the shortest books in the Bible, consisting of only 117 verses. Considered by many to be the greatest love song ever penned, it is comprised of seven poems (not necessarily in chronological order), which are examples of Hebrew lyric poetry—a type of verse that has no established rhyme or meter. In the original language, the lines were arranged to express a single thought in several ways through repetition, amplification, and/or contrast. The metaphors and descriptive language portraying the intimate relationship between a man and a woman were drawn from both country and urban life.

Interpretation: The book has been interpreted in a variety of ways:

Allegorical or Rabbinical view. From the time of the Talmud, Jewish tradition regarded the book as an allegorical picture of the love of God for Israel. However, accepting this approach would allow the possibility of deeming other portions of Scripture that were not clearly historical as being allegorical as well.

Typical View. This viewpoint interprets the Song of Solomon as a type of the love that Christ, the Bridegroom, has for the Church, His Bride. Since faithful earthly love is our most precious human relationship, it is understandable that some would see this beautiful description of a human love relationship as being symbolic of the much greater love that exists in the divine/human relationship. Taking this approach, however, could allow other Scriptural passages to be identified as a type, even in the absence of textual content that would suggest such an interpretation.

Lyrical View. Some commentators suggest that the book is a collection of love lyrics composed for use at weddings, or as a means for a person to express affection toward his beloved. However, this view fails to explain the sense of narrative and the evidences of unity throughout the book.

Literal or Dramatic View. Many Bible scholars support this interpretation, which views the book as a factual narrative. Adam Clarke suggests that the book concerns Solomon and his bride, who was the daughter of Pharaoh; this interpretation provides a framework for the passages which present intimate details of the physical relationship between a man and a woman. Another prominent holiness commentary views the narrative as a description of Solomon falling in love with a Shulamite maiden who had already given her heart to a young shepherd. In this approach, the intimate passages are considered to be the Shulamite’s dreams of her beloved. This approach is the one presented in the outline of *Daybreak and Discovery*.

In view of the wide range of explanations of this book, a dogmatic position as to its interpretation should not be taken. As Adam Clarke states, “Each of these opinions has its powerful supporters, and each of these has reasons to offer for the support of the opinion which is espoused; and nothing but a direct revelation from God can show us which of these opinions is the correct one, or whether any of them are correct. . . It is much better, therefore, if [the book is] explained or illustrated at all, to take it in its literal meaning, and explain it in its general sense. I say general sense, because there are many passages in it which should not be explained, if taken literally, the references being too delicate; and Eastern phraseology on such subjects is too vivid for European imaginations.”¹

History: This book is called *Shir Hashshirim* in Hebrew, which means “The Song of Songs.” Jewish worshipers cherished the Song and used it as a part of their ritual on the eighth day of the Passover, in memory of the Exodus when God, the Bridegroom, espoused Israel as His bride.

Summary: A young woman of Shunem fell in love with a shepherd and they were betrothed. King Solomon, on a visit to the area, saw the Shulamite maiden and was attracted to her beauty and grace. He took her to his palace and sought to win her love. However, his gifts, splendor, and the promise of

prestige failed to extinguish the Shulamite’s devotion to her beloved shepherd. Finally, recognizing that she would not be swayed, Solomon released her from his court and allowed her to return home to her betrothed.

One challenge in understanding the Song of Solomon is that there are no indicators within the narrative which identify the speaker of each portion of text, so decisions as to who is speaking are subjective. However, the outline in *Daybreak* and *Discovery* is based upon divisions generally agreed upon by Bible scholars who accept the three-character interpretation.

1. Adam Clark, *Commentary on the Bible*, (1831). www.sacred-texts.com.

Outline

Note: This is our complete amplified outline of this book, compiled from various sources.

- I. Introduction (1:1)
- II. The Shulamite’s longing for her beloved (1:2-4a)
- III. The initial meetings (1:4b—2:7)
 - A. Meeting of the Shulamite and the daughters of Jerusalem (1:4b-8)
 - B. Meeting of the Shulamite and the king (1:9—2:7)
 1. The king’s compliments (1:9-11)
 2. The Shulamite’s refusal (1:12-14)
 3. The king presses his case (1:15—2:2)
 4. The Shulamite references her true love (2:3-4)
 - C. The Shulamite’s plea to the daughters of Jerusalem (2:5-7)
- IV. Memories of the shepherd’s visit (2:8-17)
 - A. His approach (2:8-9)
 - B. His appeal (2:10-14)
 - C. Her response (2:15-17)
- V. The Shulamite’s dream of her beloved (3:1-5)
- VI. The king comes again (3:6—5:1)
 - A. The regal procession (3:6-11)
 - B. The second royal proposal (4:1—5:1)
- VII. A song of the beloved (5:2—6:3)
 - A. The Shulamite’s second dream (5:2-8)
 - B. The Shulamite’s description of her beloved (5:9—6:3)
- VIII. The king’s final approach (6:4—8:4)
 - A. His praise (6:4-7)
 - B. His invitation (6:8-10)
 - C. The Shulamite’s refusal (6:11-12)
 - D. The appeal of the daughters of Jerusalem (6:13—7:5)
 - E. The king’s final proposal (7:6-9)
 - F. The Shulamite declares her devotion to the shepherd (7:10—8:4)
- IX. Reunion of the Shulamite and the Shepherd (8:5-14)
 - A. The setting (8:5)
 - B. The Shulamite’s song (8:6-7)
 - C. The brothers’ interjection (8:8-9)
 - D. The Shulamite’s response (8:10-12)
 - E. The reward of love (8:13-14)



Song of Solomon 1:1 through 2:17

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.” (Song of Solomon 2:3)

As children, many of us heard fairy tales which featured a prince falling in love with a beautiful princess, overcoming obstacles to win her hand in marriage, and the two of them living happily ever after. However, love is more than just a fairy tale! Devotion and true love between a man and a woman can be a reality, and when it exists, it creates a bond that grows stronger with time.

Over twenty-five years ago I attended one of our church dedications. During the day, many of the young people gathered in a field outside the cabins where we were staying. One young lady in this group stood out to me. I was a shy individual and found it hard to converse with people I didn't know, but later that evening, as we sat in the swings, the two of us started to talk. We shared opinions and thoughts, and began to get acquainted. Though we did not date until five or six months later, a longing to be with her started to develop in me. By the end of the year, even though we lived about a four-hour drive apart, we were seeing each other regularly, and it wasn't long before we realized we were in love. Eventually that lovely lady became my wife, and we now have four wonderful children.

Were there romantic “sparks” in the early years of our relationship? Yes there were. Are we still deeply in love now? We certainly are! After more than twenty-four years of marriage, my wife and I still prefer each other's company to anyone else's. Sometimes I have gone to the airport to meet her after she has been away for a while. As the passengers disembark and start coming through the gate, I watch for her. Dozens of people pass by but I pay little attention to them. However, when I spot my wife, see her face light up with a smile, and she steps into my embrace, my world once again seems complete.

In today's text, we find a beautiful description of a relationship between a man and a woman that was alive with passion and love. The Shulamite maiden regarded her beloved as unique and desirable—as our focus verses reveals, he was the one who claimed her attention in the crowd.

True and committed love between a man and a woman is becoming less and less common in our

society today. Relationships commonly fizzle out and ultimately dissolve. In fact, many people even regard marriage as little more than a temporary social agreement. However, love and romance still exist. Faithful and committed love is still possible! Perhaps the Song of Solomon was placed in the Word of God to prove just that.

God's Word makes it clear that marriage is of divine origin and is a holy and binding covenant. Unchanging commitment, devotion, and faithfulness to one's spouse still is possible in our day, and that is God's intention for those who unite in marriage.

BACKGROUND

The first two chapters of Song of Solomon describe the Shulamite's arrival at the king's summer home, the first visit of the king, and the Shulamite's memories of a visit by her beloved.

Verse 1 of the first chapter lets us know that of the one thousand or more songs by or about King Solomon (see 1 Kings 4:32), this song perhaps was the greatest.

In the next two verses, as the Shulamite maiden arrived at the summer home of the king, she recounted memories of her shepherd's love. Her heart was filled with longing for him, and she referred to their love being better than wine. While verse 4 implies that wine can be memorable, the effects of true love are far more lasting.

Verses 4–8 are an exchange between the Shulamite and the “daughters of Jerusalem” (members of the king's harem). Then the king appeared on the scene (verses 9–11), paying the young woman a compliment on her beauty and grace by comparing her to one of his steeds. She seemingly shrank from the king's advances, letting him know that she loved another. (References in these chapters to “my beloved” always refer to the Shulamite's shepherd lover, and offer indicators throughout the text as to the proper interpretation of the dialogues.)

In Song of Solomon 1:15–17, and 2:1–7, Solomon continued to attempt to woo the young woman, but she responded by restating her longing for her absent lover. She then requested that the women of the harem bring her “flagons” (cakes of raisins and citron) as she felt in need of reviving.

In 2:8–14, the Shulamite addressed the court women who were trying to convince her to respond to the king's wooing, telling them of the beginnings of her love relationship with the shepherd. She compared her absent lover to a “bundle of myrrh” (verse 13),



Song of Solomon 3:1 through 6:3

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

**“Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee.”
(Song of Solomon 4:7)**

My father-in-law spent twenty years of his married life in a culture where at that time speaking favorably about one’s wife was considered improper, and compliments from others about her were immediately dismissed outright. Furthermore, men in that country never showed any public indicator of affection or appreciation toward their spouses—in fact, women typically walked three or four steps behind their husbands when together on the streets! You can imagine that this went against the grain of my loving and quite demonstrative father-in-law. In spite of cultural norms, he frequently admonished the men of his acquaintance there (as well as men here at home) to tell their wives, “I love you,” every single day!

Not only did my father-in-law verbalize his love for his wife, but he also demonstrated his regard for her in many visible ways. Rather than insisting that she walk behind him, he often took her hand or arm as they strolled together. He brought her little gifts “just because,” and wrote her touching poems. He was the first to compliment her, and made no secret of his appreciation for her cooking, her housekeeping skills, and her unwavering support of him. His example made an impression! To this day, more than a decade after his final trip to the country where the two of them had been missionaries, men who knew my father-in-law recall that he frequently told them to express their love for their wives on a daily basis.

Today’s text includes many beautiful compliments and tender expressions of love. Though unquestionably heartfelt, my father-in-law’s words were probably never as eloquent as those of Solomon or the Shulamite! The extravagant lyrics of this passage portray feelings of adoration and admiration in a manner many scholars consider unparalleled. Still, there is a lesson for all of us in this passage. When we love someone, we should not be hesitant to express our feelings, both in words and in actions.

After years of marriage, perhaps familiarity causes us to forget to verbalize our admiration or appreciation for our spouses. The same concept can extend to our children, other family members, and close friends. Loving words of affirmation, backed by thoughtful actions and caring concern, can enhance and strengthen any relationship!

BACKGROUND

This portion of the Song of Solomon describes the Shulamite’s dreams about her beloved, Solomon’s proposal and love songs, and the maiden’s rejection of his ardent efforts to win her hand.

Chapter 3:1-5 describes the Shulamite maiden telling the women of Jerusalem about her dreams which reflected her love for her shepherd sweetheart. In those dreams, she arose out of bed and went into the city streets searching for the object of her love. The inconvenience and danger of the hour were of no consequence to her because of her focus on her quest. In verse 5, she asked the women not to attempt to stir up love for the king. The inserted and italicized word *my* in this verse makes the reference seem personal, but without that addition to the original wording, the young woman was merely stating the principle that love must be handled with care and not aroused before its proper time.

Verses 6-11 give details of a royal procession which brought the Shulamite maiden and Solomon together. The word “bed” in verse 7 refers to a canopied couch, carried on men’s shoulders, and used by people of high status. The royal escort in verse 8 included armed guards which usually accompanied royal processions because of the danger of highway robbers in those times. Verse 11 refers to Solomon’s coronation day, in which his mother, Bathsheba, appealed to King David to make good his oath for Solomon to be his successor (1 Kings 1:15-40). The whole passage seems to be an attempt to promote Solomon and to persuade the young woman to accept his proposal.

Chapter 4 is a portrayal of Solomon as a suitor. The enamored Solomon described the maiden in words of admiration and praise, but in verse 6, the Shulamite demurred, and spoke instead of her longing for her mountain home. Solomon responded with his second song (verses 7-15), renewing his pursuit. Amana, Shenir, and Hermon in verse 8 refer to mountains in the Anti-Lebanon Range. The word “sister” in verse 9 is a term of affection showing that Solomon regarded the Shulamite with the respect and honor he would accord to one of his own blood.

The enclosed garden alluded to in verse 12 denotes sexual purity. In those days, the fields of the area were not fenced. While passersby were allowed to partake of crops for provender on their journeys, they were not permitted access to the walled gardens—those were for the pleasure of the owner

only. “Saffron” in verse 14 refers to a purple flower which yields a yellow dye and makes a fragrant ointment when mixed with olive oil. “Calamas” refers to an aromatic spice, and “aloes” is an aromatic wood which came from Bangladesh and China.

Chapter 5 describes a time of separation. The Shulamite was at the palace in Jerusalem, and the women of the court were with her once more. Verses 2-8 describe another dream, in which the Shulamite dreamed her shepherd lover had come seeking her in vain. In verse 4 the term “bowels” refers to the seat of emotion or deep affection, similar to current usage of the term “heart.” In verses 10 through 16, the Shulamite described her beloved shepherd with beautiful imagery.

The first three verses of chapter 6 seem to be an inquiry regarding the whereabouts of the shepherd by one or more of the “daughters of Jerusalem.” The women expressed their interest in helping the Shulamite find him, but she indicated that her beloved was hers alone.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

- V. The Shulamite’s dream of her beloved (3:1-5)
- VI. The king comes again (3:6 — 5:1)
 - A. The regal procession (3:6-11)
 - B. The second royal proposal (4:1 — 5:1)
- VII. A song of the beloved (5:2 — 6:3)
 - A. The Shulamite’s second dream (5:2-8)
 - B. The Shulamite’s description of her beloved (5:9 — 6:3)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In her dream, what did the Shulamite maiden do as soon as she realized her beloved was gone?

2. What lesson can we learn from the fact that the Shulamite rejected Solomon’s advances in spite of the pomp, glory, and splendor that accompanied his position?

3. How can heartfelt words of admiration refresh and revitalize a relationship?

CONCLUSION

We may not have the eloquence of Solomon or the Shulamite, but our relationships will be strengthened if we do not hesitate to incorporate words of praise and appreciation.

NOTES



Song of Solomon 6:4 through 8:14

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.” (Song of Solomon 8:7)

Many years ago, in a Newfoundland fishing settlement with less than one hundred people, God called a man named Noah to minister in the little church there. His assistant was a young woman named Rachel. During the course of time, as the two of them worked for the Lord together and prayed about their future, they felt the Lord’s approval for them to be joined in marriage. They became husband and wife, and for more than forty years, they labored together in God’s service.

Love is nourished with kind words and actions, and Noah and Rachel made those behaviors a part of their life together. Noah always addressed Rachel as “Honey,” and in turn, she called him “Lover.” Over the years, they became so close to each other that they could almost read each other’s minds and anticipate each other’s actions. When Honey was sick, Lover tenderly cared for her. Nothing had to be said aloud, it seemed they had a secret language of love that others did not understand.

Noah and Rachel grew old, but their love for each other did not diminish or become commonplace. As the Shulamite maiden stated in today’s focus verse, “Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it,” and Noah and Rachel certainly proved that to be true. One morning, the Lord suddenly called Noah to his heavenly reward. For the next eight years, Rachel lived with good, caring friends, but she longed to depart this world. One day she was diagnosed with terminal cancer. When she was given the doctor’s report, she rejoiced and said, “I’m going Home soon to be with Jesus, and I will see Lover again!” Her heart’s desire was granted just a short time later.

Though commitment, selfless devotion, and fidelity in marriage are becoming increasingly rare in our day, these are still God’s plan. Over the years our bodies change and we get old, but the husband and wife who demonstrate and express their love for each other will find their relationship continues to grow. Like a well-tended garden, it will thrive and blossom. No trial or adversity, even those which would seem overwhelming, can destroy love when it is pure and faithful.

BACKGROUND

This portion of text describes Solomon’s third visit and final proposal to the Shulamite maiden, her refusal of his invitation and declaration of fidelity toward her shepherd, and the eventual reunion between the Shulamite and her beloved.

In chapter 6, the king approached the Shulamite maiden for the third time with complimentary words and expressions of devotion, trying once more to win her affection. When Solomon stated in verse 4, “Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah,” he was referring to a city about thirty-five miles northeast of Jerusalem, in the maiden’s homeland. The city was remarkably beautiful and pleasantly situated; in fact, its name signifies “beautiful” or “delightful.” Her response must have been cool because in verse 5 the king, seemingly disconcerted, requested that the young woman “turn away” her eyes, which may have been flashing with anger or disdain. However, being accustomed to getting what he desired, he renewed his pursuit in verses 6-8, promising the Shulamite maiden a unique position among his many wives and concubines. She refused once more, reflecting back on her unwilling detention by the servants of the king.

In chapter 7, verses 1-5, the palace women attempted to intercede on behalf of the king, proclaiming the Shulamite’s beauty with a description of her form from foot to head. The imagery of a lover caught in the strands of hair of his beloved (verse 5) was a common figure in Eastern poetry of that era. Solomon’s final impassioned approach to the maiden is recorded in verses 6-9. Once again, the Shulamite rejected his advances. In the remainder of chapter 7 and the first four verses of chapter 8, she declared her devotion and fidelity to her beloved shepherd, perhaps in an attempt to tactfully cool the king’s ardor.

Verses 5-14 of chapter 8 provide the closing scene of the Song of Solomon. Verse 5 describes the Shulamite as “leaning upon her beloved,” having been reunited at last with her shepherd. Passing by the spot where their love had first sprung into being, the young man commented that the Shulamite was also born at that spot. Giving birth outdoors was not uncommon at that time. The maiden responded by poetically describing some of the significant characteristics of love.

Verses 8-9 may have been an interruption by the Shulamite’s older brothers. Seemingly regarding their sister as being too immature for marriage, they declared that they would protect and insulate her

from unworthy lovers. However, the maiden asserted that her recent experiences were proof of both her faithfulness and maturity.

The book closes with the triumph of true love. The Shulamite proclaimed her delight at being free from Solomon's vineyard, and summoned her beloved shepherd with words that perhaps were a fragment of a song that she had formerly sung to him.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

- VIII. The king's final approach (6:4—8:4)
 - A. His praise (6:4-7)
 - B. His invitation (6:8-10)
 - C. The Shulamite's refusal (6:11-12)
 - D. The appeal of the daughters of Jerusalem (6:13—7:5)
 - E. The king's final proposal (7:6-9)
 - F. The Shulamite declares her devotion to the shepherd (7:10—8:4)
- IX. Reunion of the Shulamite and the Shepherd (8:5-14)
 - A. The setting (8:5)
 - B. The Shulamite's song (8:6-7)
 - C. The brothers' interjection (8:8-9)
 - D. The Shulamite's response (8:10-12)
 - E. The reward of love (8:13-14)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What are some of the elements of creation employed as imagery in this portion of text?

2. What do you think Solomon meant when he said that love is as strong as death?

3. What are some factors that make for a strong marriage?

CONCLUSION

A marriage should be like a garden that is carefully cultivated and thoroughly enjoyed.

NOTES



Overview for Psalms

Purpose: The Psalms were written as expressions of praise, worship, and petition, forming a divinely inspired collection of devotions, meditations, and songs for the people of Israel.

Authors: David (seventy-three psalms), Asaph (twelve psalms), the sons of Korah (nine psalms), Solomon (two psalms), and several others. Fifty-one of the psalms are not attributed to any author.

Date Written: Over about one thousand years, between the time of Moses (approximately 1520 B.C.) until after the return of the Southern Kingdom from Babylonian captivity (approximately 445 B.C.).

History: The Psalms reflect the theology of Israel from the beginning of the nation until after the Babylonian exile. In terms of chronological sequence, the psalm attributed to Moses (Psalm 90) is the earliest. It likely provided a medium of praise and a form of prayer for the people of Israel during the nation's formative period. The Davidic psalms reflect different periods of the author's life. During Israel's golden age under King Solomon, the songs which David sang began to be a part of the nation's worship. The singing of the Psalms was a prominent feature in the celebration of the great national feasts. These were the praise songs of Isaiah and Jeremiah, along with the other prophets. It was with psalms that Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah inaugurated their reforms and celebrated their victories. The psalms brought comfort and hope to the exiles in Babylon. Chronologically, the last psalm is probably Psalm 137; it is a song of lament clearly written during the days when the Hebrews were being held captive by the Babylonians.

Unique Features: The Book of Psalms is the longest book in the Bible and it contains both the longest and shortest chapters (Psalms 119 and 117 respectively).

Setting: The Book of Psalms gives insight into the true nature of religion in Old Testament times, for this collection of songs were a vital part of the public and private worship of ancient Israel. Chanted by the Levitical choirs at the time of the morning and evening sacrifice, the people learned the lyrics and then repeated them in the less formal worship of the home. Handed down from father to son, they became a familiar thread binding the Jewish people together. God's people rejoiced and lamented through these poetic expressions, which mirrored real-life situations and spiritual

experience at every level of society. The psalms also offer meaningful insights into human nature.

Summary: The Hebrew title for the Book of Psalms is translated "Book of Praises." The Greek translation of the Old Testament (Septuagint) title used *Psalmos*, a word meaning "a poem sung to the accompaniment of a musical instrument."

The Book of Psalms contains 150 chapters which are divided into five sections or books, each ending with a doxology: Psalms 1-41 (Book I); Psalms 42-72 (Book II); Psalms 73-89 (Book III); Psalms 90-106 (Book IV), and Psalms 107-150 (Book V). Jewish tradition compares these five books to the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible, authored by Moses).

The Psalms deal with such subjects as God and His creation, war, worship, wisdom, sin and evil, judgment, justice, and the coming of the Messiah. Bible scholars have categorized the psalms in various ways. Most recognize these main groupings:

- Alphabetic or acrostic psalms, in which the initial letter of each stanza follows a certain pattern.
- Ethical psalms, which teach moral principles.
- Hallelujah psalms, which are songs of praise beginning and/or ending with "Hallelujah" or "Praise Jehovah."
- Historical psalms, which trace God's dealings with His people.
- Imprecatory psalms, which invoke God's judgment upon one's enemies.
- Messianic psalms, which point to the coming Redeemer.
- Penitential psalms, which express sorrow for sin.
- Songs of ascent or degrees, which some scholars suggest were sung by pilgrims on the way to Jerusalem to observe the feasts.
- Psalms of suffering or lament, which are the outpourings of authors who were enduring difficult circumstances.
- Psalms of thanksgiving, which express gratitude for blessings received.

Approximately two-thirds of the psalms have superscriptions, or titles, which were probably added at a later date by an editor or group of editors of the Psalms. Some describe the nature of the psalm (for example, "song," "prayer," "praise," or the Hebrew words such as "maschil," "michtam," and "shiggaion"). Some relate to the musical setting, such as a

dedication to the chief Musician, allusion to musical instrument on which the psalm was to be performed (“Neginoth,” “Gittih,” etc.), or a tune to which they were to be sung. Others refer to the liturgical use of the psalm—for example, that it was to be sung on the Sabbath or at a dedication. Some of the psalms indicate authorship in the title.

There are over four hundred quotes from, or allusions to, the Book of Psalms in the New Testament. Jesus quoted from the Psalms, and references are also found in the Book of Acts and in Paul’s writings.

Outline

*Hannah’s Bible Outlines used by permission per WORDsearch.
Note: This is the complete amplified outline of this book.*

- I. Book I (1:1—41:13)
- II. Book II (42:1—72:20)
- III. Book III (73:1—89:52)
- IV. Book IV (90:1—106:48)
- V. Book V (107:1—150:6)
 - A. Psalm 119 (119:1-176)
 - 1. Aleph (119:1-8)
 - 2. Beth (119:9-16)
 - 3. Gimel (119:17-24)
 - 4. Daleth (119:25-32)
 - 5. He (119:33-40)
 - 6. Vau (119:41-48)
 - 7. Zain (119:49-56)
 - 8. Cheth (119:57-64)
 - 9. Teth (119:65-72)
 - 10. Jod (119:73-80)
 - 11. Caph (119:81-88)
 - 12. Lamed (119:89-96)
 - 13. Mem (119:97-104)
 - 14. Nun (119:105-112)
 - 15. Samech (119:113-120)
 - 16. Ain (119:121-128)
 - 17. Pe (119:129-136)
 - 18. Tzaddi (119:137-144)
 - 19. Koph (119:145-152)
 - 20. Resh (119:153-160)
 - 21. Schin (119:161-168)
 - 22. Tau (119:169-176)



Psalms 1:1 through 4:8

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety.” (Psalm 4:8)

Have you ever had a night when you tossed and turned in bed for what seemed like hours? Perhaps you found yourself glancing repeatedly at the clock, wondering why you could not seem to doze off. Countless factors can interfere with a good night’s sleep—from pressure at work and family responsibilities to unexpected challenges such as layoffs, relationship issues, or illnesses. It’s no wonder that quality sleep is sometimes elusive. If we are troubled, anxious, or encumbered with cares, how can we truly rest?

Sleep plays an important role in our physical wellbeing. Studies have revealed that the human body typically needs seven to nine hours of sleep per night. If our bodies do not get enough rest, our metabolisms slow down and our appetites increase. Brain functions are also hindered: focus, physical energy, and mood all take a hit. Our days are much more difficult when our nights are restless! God made our bodies to require recharging, and that occurs during a night of good sleep. While proper nutrition, exercise, and other factors also influence the health of our bodies, nothing can take the place of proper rest.

In Psalm 4, David stated that he could lie down in peace and sleep because the Lord gave him security. When David wrote this song, he was experiencing trouble. Perhaps it was composed while he was suffering from the rebellion of his son Absalom, who was determined to destroy his own father and usurp David’s authority in the kingdom. Or it may have been written during a time of distress due to crop failures. Whatever the case, David proved that the godly can find peace in the Lord even when outward circumstances are perilous. The psalmist knew that he could trust God and this assurance allowed him to state, “I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety.”

Although we might not be able to control all of the factors that could interfere with our rest, we can adopt one habit that is sure to encourage better sleep. Like David, we can rejoice in God’s care for us. We can purpose to release our problems to God and choose not to dwell upon the troubles and “what ifs” of life. The Psalms are full of assurances of God’s presence, and what a basis that provides for restful sleep! As we

center our thoughts on Him, He can provide us with the security we need to sleep peacefully and well.

BACKGROUND

The Book of Psalms as originally written in Hebrew was divided into five subgroups, with Book I being comprised of Psalms 1-41. All of the psalms in Book I are attributed to David except Psalms 1, 10, and 33.

Psalm 1

Although Psalm 1 was not specifically written as an introduction to the whole collection of psalms, it sets the tone for them. It is a wisdom psalm, offering a sharp contrast between the righteous and the ungodly.

Verses 1-3 relate to the behavior of the righteous man, and emphasize that avoiding the influence of the ungodly will bring blessing. The meaning of the “law of the LORD” in verse 2 goes far beyond a set of rules or legal requirements. It indicates the whole manner of life taught by Moses and the prophets, and is synonymous with “the Word of the Lord.” In verses 4-6, the ungodly are contrasted with the righteous, and are compared to the worthless chaff scattered by the wind during harvest.

Psalm 2

Although Psalm 2 is untitled, Acts 4:25 attributes authorship to David. It is classified as a royal or Messianic psalm. While the psalms categorized in this manner may have been associated with coronation or other kingly ceremonies, in New Testament writings they are frequently linked to Jesus Christ, the King of kings. For example, the Hebrew meaning of the word translated “anointed” in verse 2 is “Messiah,” a clear reference to Jesus Christ. This meaning is supported by Acts 4:26.

The theme of Psalm 2 is man’s sinful rebellion against God. The “heathen” in verse 1 are the Gentile nations—non-Israelites who had assembled with the intent of insurrection against the true God. The psalmist’s reference to God’s laughter in verse 4 does not indicate humor, but rather, God’s derision at man’s willful rebellion against Him.

Verses 6-9 contain Messianic references to Jesus and His future Millennial Reign in Jerusalem, when He will rule supremely. In verses 10-11, the psalmist exhorted the rulers of the world to exercise wisdom by reverencing the Lord. In David’s time, a kiss indicated respect for one of superior rank, so verse 12 implies that honoring the Messiah’s supreme eminence will prevent His wrath from being poured out.

Psalm 3

Psalm 3 is classified as a song of lament, and is a morning prayer written by King David as he fled from his son Absalom’s treachery. It is divided into four stanzas, with all but the third stanza ending in the word *Selah*, which indicates a pause for contemplation.

Verses 1-2 provide David’s perspective regarding the dissension that surrounded him. Verses 3-4 mark a turning point in his song: David turned his eyes from his adversaries to the character of God, and affirmed his confidence that God had heard his prayer and would intervene. Verses 5-6 reveal the peace and sustenance the psalmist experienced during this difficult time. In verses 7-8, David reflected on previous victories, concluding that only God is able to provide deliverance. He also conveyed his belief that God would continue to bless His people even in times of rebellion.

Psalm 4

David addressed Psalm 4 “to the chief Musician on Neginoth.” This inscription gave direction for the musical accompaniment of the psalm, as “Neginoth” has been interpreted, “on stringed instruments.” It is an evening prayer, and is traditionally associated with Psalm 3, which was a morning prayer written during Absalom’s revolt. Like Psalm 3, Psalm 4 has four stanzas.

Verses 1-2 are a plea for God to hear David’s prayer and grant mercy, while acknowledging God’s provision in previous times of distress. The Hebrew phrase “ye sons of men” in verse 2 denoted men of prominent status; David questioned how long they would disgrace the kingdom with their treachery and falsehoods. Verses 3-6 express the psalmist’s confidence that God would respond to his prayers. He urged the reputable men to refrain from letting their emotions lead to sin, but rather to meditate on their deeds when pillowing their head at night, to obediently offer sacrifices, and to trust in the Lord. In verses 7-8, David stated that the gladness God had planted in his heart was greater than the joy of a bountiful harvest, and his sleep would be peaceful knowing that God would take care of him.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- IV. Book IV (90:1 — 106:48)
- V. Book V (107:1 — 150:6)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to Psalm 3:4, what did David do when he was in trouble?

2. In Psalm 4:4 David said to “commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.” Why do you think he recommended being still?

3. What might be some beneficial topics to meditate on as we lay down to sleep?

CONCLUSION

To enjoy the blessings and benefits of quality sleep, we need to be sure that we have handed over our cares to God and are resting securely in Him.

NOTES



Psalms 5:1 through 7:17

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“The LORD hath heard my supplication; the LORD will receive my prayer.” (Psalm 6:9)

On December 9, 1911, a terrible explosion roared through the Cross Mountain Mine in Coal Creek, Tennessee. Eighty-nine miners had gone into the mine that morning, and all were presumed dead.

When a local Methodist minister heard about the tragedy, he immediately went to the mine to offer prayer and spiritual support to the families who had assembled at the entrance. As he moved among the grieving families, the minister heard one woman praying that God would deliver her husband alive from the destroyed mine. She could be heard offering that same prayer many times as the hours went by and rescue workers tunneled through the collapsed shafts looking for survivors. In time, bodies began to be brought out and identified, and graves were dug in nearby cemeteries.

The families of the men who had been trapped inside the mine were consulted about funeral plans. Two-and-a-half days after the explosion, workers came to Mrs. Henderson, the woman who had been praying for her husband’s safe return. They asked her where she wanted her husband buried, explaining that they expected to soon reach the area where he had been working on the day of the explosion. She told them, “Bill is not dead. I haven’t been on my knees two-and-a-half days for nothing!” The workers told her no one had been found alive to that point, but she insisted that her husband had not been killed. In fact, knowing that the rescue team was about to reach Bill’s area, she went home and began heating water for him to wash with when he came out of the mine! Just a short time later, workers found Bill Henderson barricaded behind some boards deep within the mine—he was very much alive! Bill even gave the rescuers his light to use, as theirs had gone out just as they reached him.

David’s words in our focus verse reflect the same note of confidence that Mrs. Henderson had after she brought her petition to God. The psalmist was in a time of deep distress when he prayed the prayer recorded in Psalm 6. However, after he poured out his heart to the Lord, his tone changed; his words no longer reflected anguish. Instead, there was a ring of confidence as he asserted, “The LORD hath heard my supplication; the LORD will receive my prayer.”

What assurance we find in the knowledge that God hears our prayers! Just as God was mindful of

the supplications of David and Mrs. Henderson, He hears those who call upon His name today. The Lord may not respond when we want or by doing what we ask, but we can have confidence that He knows what we are facing. As we look His way in heartfelt and believing prayer, He will do what is best for us and will glorify His name, as David so often proved.

BACKGROUND

Psalm 5

Psalm 5 is a morning prayer associated with the Temple worship. Like the two preceding psalms, this song was composed in a time of peril and controversy. Commentators often classify it as an imprecatory psalm—one in which the writer invokes judgment, calamity, or curses upon his enemies or those perceived to be the enemies of God. Authored by David, this psalm was most likely written shortly after Absalom’s revolt.

David’s reverent sense of the holiness of God and His sovereignty is in stark contrast with the lying, bloodthirsty, and deceitful men described in verse 9. The descriptive phrases of that verse are repeated in Romans 3:13, where they depict the wickedness of the unsaved.

David was aware that lies were being spoken and conspiracies formed against him. However, he did not ask for justice on his own behalf; in verse 10 he related that his enemies “have rebelled against thee.” The psalmist concluded with a tone of confidence, giving a three-fold reason why those who have put their trust in God do not need to fear their enemies: God will defend, bless, and shield them.

Psalm 6

Also written by David, Psalm 6 is a prayer for deliverance. It is the first of the penitential psalms—psalms which express repentance and sorrow for sin. (The others are 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143.) This psalm can be divided into three sections: verses 1-5 relate to the psalmist’s physical condition; verses 6-7 describe his suffering and grief; and verses 8-10 reflect his conclusion of confident trust.

The psalmist’s deep spiritual distress is evident in his opening words. He felt his affliction was divine retribution for sin, and he pleaded for God’s mercy. In verses 6-7 he indicated that he was so burdened by guilt and grief that his tears had flooded his bed. Adding to his suffering was the fact that his enemies continued their unceasing opposition in spite of his serious illness.

The psalm concludes with a transition in tone from despair to relief. David declared that God had heard his cry, and as a result, his enemies would be vanquished.

Psalm 7

Psalm 7 is another song of lament written by David, this one centering on a plea for justice against those who slander the righteous. The word *Shiggaion* in the title may mean “a passionate or intense song.” While the identity of Cush the Benjamite (also in the title) cannot be assuredly stated, he most likely was a close associate of Saul who made slanderous accusations against David. This psalm is the first of eight psalms traditionally associated with David’s flight from Saul. (The others are 34, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59 and 142).

Rather than taking matters into his own hands, the psalmist asked God for deliverance and justice. He trusted that the Lord would protect him no matter what was said about him because he was innocent of the false accusations.

The word translated *reins* in verse 9 literally means “kidneys.” Throughout the Old Testament, this word is used to indicate the conscience.

At the conclusion of the psalm, David praised God. He did not express gratitude because those who did evil against him were going to be punished, but because God’s glory and righteousness was being magnified as a result of his prayer.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. What good example did David set for us at the conclusion of his prayer in Psalm 7?

2. Based on these three psalms, how do you think David viewed God?

3. What can we learn from David’s prayers that will benefit us in our own prayer life today?

CONCLUSION

When trials come, let us seek the Lord immediately and continually, remembering His wonderful promises and believing that He will hear and answer in the very best way.

NOTES



Psalms 8:1 through 9:20

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?” (Psalm 8:3-4)

While serving in the Air Force during World War II, John Peterson’s fellow airmen called him “Deacon” because of his habit of reading the Bible every morning. John did not resent that nickname because he knew it was God who sustained him in the months he was away from home and family.

As a pilot, John spent many hours in the air. His flights often took him over the famed “China Hump,” and those lengthy journeys provided opportunities for the young serviceman to meditate and pray. Somehow, it seemed the Lord was especially near whenever he guided his military transport plane over the rugged Himalayan Mountains. As he gazed down at the soaring peaks and mountain ranges separated by the deep green valleys of the Irrawaddy, Salween, and Mekong Rivers, he would marvel at the incredible beauty of the earth spread out beneath him.

One day as John scanned the mountainous terrain below and then the vast reaches of the horizon around him, he was overwhelmed by the awesomeness of God’s creation and the power that formed it. The words and melody of a song began to form in his heart, and when his flight was over, he put down on paper a song that has inspired thousands in the years since then:

*My Father is omnipotent
And that you can’t deny;
A God of might and miracles;
‘Tis written in the sky.
It took a miracle to put the stars in place;
It took a miracle to hang the world in space.
But when He saved my soul, cleansed and
made me whole,
It took a miracle of love and grace!*

John knew that the beauty he viewed from his aircraft was created by a miracle-working God. Even more, he recognized that the awesome and majestic Creator of this vast universe was mindful of *him!* He reached the same conclusion that the psalmist David recorded in today’s focus verses.

Today, more data is available than David had when he looked at the heavens and marveled. Thanks to technology, we know more about our universe than

when John Peterson flew over the Himalayas during World War II. While we may not be able to express our wonder in song, as John and David did, we should join them bowing in awe before our all-powerful Creator. Like them, we should magnify the One whose fingers molded the universe, and rejoice that He looks down across the expanses of space and thinks of us!

BACKGROUND

Psalm 8

Psalm 8, which is attributed to King David, has the superscription “To the chief Musician upon Gittith.” The precise meaning of “Gittith” is uncertain. Since the word is derived from the word *Gath*, some commentators suggest it refers to a song sung after the killing of the giant Goliath, or a type of musical instrument which originated in Gath. Others suggest the term references a musical style, perhaps of a joyous nature. The word is also used in the superscriptions of Psalms 81 and 84, so it possibly alludes to a hymn of delight. Since the focus of the song is the creative power of God, some have called it “Genesis 1 set to music.”

The dual reference to God in the first four words of the psalm, “O LORD our Lord,” uses two different names in the original Hebrew: Yahweh and Adonai. Yahweh is the sacred and personal name of the God of the Covenant with Israel, while Adonai means “lord, master, or sovereign.”

Psalm 8 begins with adoration of God. Verse 2 was quoted by Jesus in Matthew 21:16 to vindicate the children singing praises to God in the Temple. A wider application of this verse indicates that God uses things that are completely without strength or wisdom to frustrate the designs of those who oppose His kingdom.

In verse 3, the psalmist considered the heavens, specifically the sun, moon, and stars. As a shepherd, David would have had many opportunities to gaze upon the vastness of the sky, and to wonder at the condescension of the God who “visits” (attends to and observes) man. Although man is insignificant in comparison with the lofty grandeur of the heavens, verses 5-8 allude to man as the crown of God’s creation, to whom God has given power over all the creatures on the earth.

Verses 4-6 are quoted in Hebrews 2:6-8 and were applied directly to Jesus. Verse 6 is also quoted in 1 Corinthians 15:27 and Ephesians 1:22. The psalm concludes as it began: with the psalmist’s expression

of honor and glory to the Name which alone is worthy of praise.

Psalm 9

Psalm 9 and 10 are thought to have been one psalm originally; they appear that way in the ancient Greek and Latin translations of the Bible, although there are some stylistic differences. Psalm 9 is the first of the psalms to be presented in an acrostic form, in which the first letter of each verse or pair of verses are successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The superscription *Muthlabben* literally means “to die for the son.” This may have been the title of a popular song, possibly placed in the superscription to indicate that the psalm was to be sung to the same tune or musical styling.

In this psalm, David alternated between prayer and praises to God for His justice. Some commentators suggest that it was probably written after a victory over the Philistines. The psalmist brings out that God’s judgment is absolutely fair, and is final, whether He is judging a nation or an individual. However, God will also protect the oppressed and aid those who seek Him.

David stated in verse 5 that God would destroy the wicked and “put out their name for ever and ever.” Since the Hebrew people considered it very important to preserve their names for posterity, having their names blotted out of the record would have been a severe punishment. A similar retribution is described in verse 6, which states that “their memorial [or remembrance] is perished with them.”

The word *Higgion* in verse 16 means “meditation.” When combined with the next word, “Selah,” it indicates a dramatic pause to add emphases to the final four statements.

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to Psalm 8, what did God give man dominion over?

2. Why should knowledge of the vastness of the universe cause us to be amazed that God visits us?

3. In Psalm 9:1 David writes, “I will shew forth all thy marvellous works.” What are three ways we can do this?

CONCLUSION

When we view the immensity and grandeur of God’s universe, we should recognize how amazing it is that God is concerned about us, and glorify Him!

NOTES



Psalms 10:1 through 13:6

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Psalm 11:3)

In the early 1980s a series of earthquakes occurred in the Portland area, and my husband and I decided we should add earthquake coverage to our homeowner’s policy. We called our insurance company, and in a few days an appraiser came out to inspect our home. To our surprise, we were denied coverage! The company deemed the foundation of our three-story home not earthquake proof.

The foundation looked solid enough. It was made from rocks two to three feet in length and about eighteen inches square that had been mortared together. The house was built in 1904, so it had weathered some storms and even gone through a number of small earthquakes without damage. However, the inspector concluded that those massive rocks would not provide a secure enough basis for the dwelling in event of a major quake. Clearly, good foundations are important!

In the spiritual realm, good foundations are even more vital. Our focus verse asks the question, “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” Sadly, the foundational principles of the Word of God are becoming less and less tolerated in our day. At an ever-accelerating pace, society is putting its stamp of approval on practices that just a few decades ago were not only frowned upon but were actually illegal. Homosexuality and same-sex marriages are increasingly accepted. Euthanasia and physician assisted suicide is more and more common. Abortion has been legalized and millions of innocent babies have been murdered as a result.

Since its founding, the moral code of the United States has been based on the absolute truths of Scripture. The Ten Commandments were the basis for identifying right and wrong behaviors in the nation’s laws. References to God and principles from His Word are inscribed on many of its monuments and national landmarks. However, in America today, morality based on Biblical truth has all but disappeared. The Ten Commandments have been removed from many public buildings. Prayer has been taken out of the schools. The debate rages as to whether “In God We Trust” should be removed from coins and the words “under God” taken out of the Pledge of Allegiance. The fact is, God’s Word has been rejected as the ultimate authority. The foundations are being systematically destroyed!

It would be easy to look at these facts and feel hopeless. However, God’s power is not diminished by the changes in society. We must do as the psalmist did and take comfort in the fact that the Lord is in His holy Temple, and that “his eyes behold . . . the children of men” (Psalm 11:4).

When law and order seems to be collapsing around us, faith in God can be our anchor. The knowledge that He is still in control of every situation will keep our hearts at peace and help us resist fear. Remember, we have the blessed assurance that one day—perhaps very soon—He will restore justice and goodness on this earth!

BACKGROUND

Psalm 10

Psalm 10 has no title, and no author is cited, but most commentators agree it likely was composed by David. He was the author of Psalm 9, and many of the ancient manuscripts combine Psalms 9 and 10. Also, these verses continue the acrostic pattern established in the preceding psalm. The theme is God’s intervention in the time of oppression by the wicked.

The tone of Psalm 10 seems to portray God as being distant. The two questions which begin the passage indicate the concern of the psalmist: that the One who delivered their nation from bondage in Egypt has absented Himself and is no longer the Protector of Israel.

Verses 2 through 11 provide a verbal portrait of the wicked man, who is controlled by his passions and rules by arrogance and ego. The first section describes what the wicked man thinks and says; the second part tells what he does. In verses 12-15, the psalmist called upon God to intervene and remember the plight of the defenseless. The request for God to “break thou the arm of the wicked” (verse 15) is a prayer that the evil man will lose his strength and cease from tyranny. The psalm’s concluding verses are a song of thanksgiving to the Lord, who will ultimately destroy the wicked and deliver the oppressed.

Psalm 11

This psalm was composed by David, and is inscribed to the chief Musician. Though there is no definitive record of the circumstances under which it was created, it is clear that David was in great distress. It may have been written during the hazardous period when David was serving in Saul’s court and experiencing the king’s jealous rages, or during the time of Absalom’s rebellion. Whatever the exact

setting, David retained his firm faith in the Lord’s protection—the theme of this psalm is that God will defend the righteous.

The phrase “Flee as a bird to your mountain” in verse 1 was probably a proverbial expression related to seeking shelter and safety. The hill country of the area, with its many caves and strongholds, was a natural retreat for fugitives.

The psalm concludes with the assurance that God is present even amidst the chaos of this world, and although He allows the righteous to be tested, He will ultimately recompense the wicked. If perfect justice is not attained in this life, it will be in the next.

Psalm 12

Like Psalm 11, this psalm was composed by David and is inscribed to the chief Musician. The superscription “upon Sheminith” signifies “eighth” and may be an indicator that the psalm was to be played by octaves, or to be sung in a lower octave or bass range. Commentators identify this psalm as a lament designed to be sung either individually or in community.

This psalm contrasts the arrogant and untruthful words of wicked men to the pure and true words of God, and implores God’s protection from treachery. Silver which has been refined seven times (verse 6) is without dross and thus very costly. Since the number seven frequently represents perfection in Scripture, David’s vivid simile clearly portrays God’s words as being pure and of great value.

Psalm 13

This psalm of lament, traditionally ascribed to David, may have been written while the psalmist was a hunted fugitive being pursued by Saul. It follows the typical pattern of despair, desire, and deliverance.

David began his lament with four questions: the first two center on God, and the second two relate to his own feelings. They reveal the psalmist’s impression that the Lord was absent. In verses 3-4, David offered up his petition requesting deliverance. In the final two verses, a complete reversal from the psalmist’s first plaintive cry is evident. The song concludes with a note of praise, in which David affirmed his trust in the mercy of God and His eventual salvation.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- I. Book I (1:1 — 41:13)
- II. Book II (42:1 — 72:20)
- III. Book III (73:1 — 89:52)
- IV. Book IV (90:1 — 106:48)
- V. Book V (107:1 — 150:6)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What three illustrations did the psalmist use in Psalm 11:6 to portray the wrath of God?

2. Why do you think God allows times in our lives when He seems to be silent? What should we do in such times?

3. What are some of the positive results of praising God even in a time of trouble?

CONCLUSION

Trust and confidence in God will hold us steady, even when it seems we are surrounded by evil.

NOTES



Psalms 14:1 through 17:15

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” (Psalm 16:11)

What do you need to survive? Beyond that, what do you need to feel fulfilled? Most people would answer the first question similarly: food, water, and shelter. To the second question, however, the answers would vary.

In the 1950s, American psychologist Abraham Maslow studied a group of mentally healthy individuals to develop his theory regarding man’s supposed “hierarchy of needs.” First, basic physiological needs for food, water, and shelter must be fulfilled. When those have been satisfied, Maslow asserted, human needs progress to safety, then love and belonging, then esteem, and finally, to “self-actualization”—a desire to fully realize one’s potential, becoming everything one is capable of becoming.

However, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs totally ignores the most fundamental need of all—the need for a relationship with God and the “fullness of joy” and “pleasures for evermore” that are found only in God’s presence. From Maslow’s humanistic perspective, fulfillment of one’s potential is a purely human endeavor; he makes no reference to God’s involvement. However, mankind was created to know and worship our Creator, so a godless existence will never lead to long-term satisfaction. In contrast, a life directed by God and lived in His presence will be full of joy, even during hard times.

The Hebrew words translated “fullness” and “pleasures” in our focus verse can also be translated as “satisfaction” and “delightfulness.” These are not merely casual, transitory feelings that momentarily make life more bearable; they describe what we were made for! The deep satisfaction found in God’s presence supersedes any feeling or contentment that we could generate within ourselves or that could result from external sources or achievements. Work, family, money, power, influence, and fame will never fill the God-shaped void inside each of us; that place can only be filled by God himself.

God’s promise is to show us the path of life. Not only will He satisfy the desires of our hearts in this life, but His path will also lead us to eternal life in His presence. And without question, eternity with Him will be “fullness of joy” and “pleasures for evermore”!

BACKGROUND

Psalm 14

This psalm is virtually identical to Psalm 53, which is a teaching psalm that was set to a tune known as “Mahalath.” There is some debate regarding whether Psalm 14 was authored by David, or by someone else during the time of the captivity. The superscription directs it to the chief Musician, so it may have been used by the Levites in the context of corporate worship. The theme is the foolishness of rejecting God. In Scripture, the word translated *folly* does not refer to mental limitations, but to moral perversity.

The psalm begins with an indictment of Israel and all of humanity. The verb translated *filthy* in verse 3 means “tainted morally.” The psalm concludes with an impassioned cry for the salvation of Israel, a proclamation of David’s confidence that God would indeed bring His people back from captivity, and the response expected to spring from grateful hearts at that occurrence.

Psalm 15

Psalm 15 is a didactic (intended for instruction) wisdom poem that establishes guidelines for living a blameless life. It is also classified as a liturgical psalm, as it was connected with public worship. Since the first verse references access to the Tabernacle and the Holy Hill (interchangeable words denoting the dwelling place of God and the focal point of Jewish worship), it may have been sung as an entrance liturgy. Written by David, some commentators feel it was composed around the time when the Ark of the Covenant was restored to Jerusalem. (See 2 Samuel 6 for a description of that event.)

The psalm opens with a question. Verses 2-5 provide the answer by describing the person who may dwell with God, offering both positive and negative characteristics. The psalm concludes with the assertion that an individual who fits this character profile will prove to be steadfast.

Psalm 16

Psalm 16 is the first of six psalms designated as a “Michtam of David” (the other five psalms are 56 through 60). The word *michtam* is derived from a root word meaning “gold” and may indicate that these songs are jewel-like in their beauty. Other commentators suggest the word refers to a hidden or mysterious meaning.

The psalm indicates great distress, which probably was a result of Saul’s persecution following David’s

anointing as king. While it opens with a cry for preservation, and includes a meditation on saints and sinners, the general tone is that of triumph and hope.

This psalm is characterized as a Messianic psalm, as it points prophetically to Christ. It was quoted by Peter in his Pentecost sermon (see Acts 2:25-28) and by Paul in Antioch (Acts 13:35). Peter and Paul both pointed back to Jesus, not David, as the fulfillment of the prophecy in verse 10, Peter by saying, “For David speaketh concerning him,” and Paul by noting that David died just like every other person.

Psalm 17

The title of Psalm 17, “A Prayer of David,” is found only on two other psalms (86 and 142). In this petition, the psalmist called upon God to come and preside as Judge while he presented his cause, and pleaded for protection, vindication, and judgment against his enemy (presumed by most scholars to be Saul). According to verse 11, David’s dangerous plight in this case was shared by others, so it may have been written in the context of 1 Samuel 23:25-26, which describes David and his men as being surrounded by Saul. Deliverance came when Saul’s pursuit was interrupted by a Philistine invasion.

The sincerity and desperation of David’s plea is immediately apparent in verse 1, where the Hebrew word translated *cry* means “a shrill, piercing shout or outcry.” David confidently based his plea upon two facts: that his cause was *just* (meaning “legally right”) and that he himself was innocent of wrong purpose (verse 3).

The Hebrew phrase translated “apple of the eye” in verse 8 referred to the pupil, or central part of the eye that is protected by the eyelid, eyelashes, and eyebrows. David understood that God had set hedges of protection around him, despite his frightening circumstances.

In verses 10-12, David offered a descriptive catalog of complaints against his enemies. The phrase “inclosed in their own fat” (verse 10) meant they were in prideful rebellion against God and resistant to all influences for good or compassion.

As in many other psalms, David concluded his prayer with a confident statement which reflected his deep trust in God and his assurance of a blessed life hereafter.

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. In Psalm 14, what are three ways in which David described the ungodly?

2. What are some of the advantages of a “goodly heritage” like the one David referenced in Psalm 16:6?

3. In what way do you enter God’s presence, and what do you enjoy most about being near to God?

CONCLUSION

True fulfillment is found only when we have a right relationship with God. He is the ultimate Source of joy and satisfaction, not only in this life but for all eternity!

NOTES



Psalm 18:1-50

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.” (Psalm 18:2)

Our family went camping every summer when I was growing up, and over the years we visited many scenic locations around the country. My favorite area was Yosemite Valley in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California—in fact, I still consider that to be the most beautiful place I have ever visited. While the valley is filled with incredible, postcard-type scenery, to me the most awe-inspiring features are the gigantic granite monoliths. The largest of these, fittingly referred to as El Capitan, rises almost three thousand feet above the valley floor. That towering rock formation is so huge and impressive that you really do need to see it to believe it! Any effort I would make to describe it here would never do it justice.

I suspect the psalmist felt that same limitation of human language when he used a series of descriptive phrases in our focus verse in an attempt to describe God. Words are simply inadequate! However, David’s comparisons help us comprehend the very real stability and security he had found in the Lord.

When David described God as “my rock,” I visualize something immense—perhaps a monolith like El Capitan. It was a picturesque way to convey that God is solid, stable, and unchangeable—the One David knew he could always count on.

David also referred to God as “my fortress.” This comparison of God to a fortified, natural stronghold denotes protection and safety in the most profound way. A hand-held shield provides some protection, but nothing like that of a fortress! The psalmist had found that place of true security which exists in God alone.

The word *deliverer* means “one who rescues or liberates.” David knew that God had not only rescued him from his physical enemies, but also from afflictions and temptations. A “buckler” in David’s time was a type of shield—again, this referred to protection not only from those who pursued him, but also from the fiery darts of Satan. The “horn of my salvation” is a metaphor relating to horned beasts that push, scatter, and destroy their enemies; David knew that God was his Savior and the One who could and would triumph over every foe. The “high tower” pictured a place of refuge far out of the reach of any who would attempt harm.

This collection of visual images lets us know the amazing security that God was to David. However, these verses are for us too. His words and descriptions of God can be ours as well! God is there to be our strength, our fortress, and our rock. He is ever present to deliver us from our spiritual foe and secure us from danger. Like the psalmist, we can and should put our trust in Him!

BACKGROUND

Psalm 18

Written by David after he became king of Israel, Psalm 18 is a thankful song which reflects upon the goodness of God. This is the longest psalm in Book I (comprised of Psalms 1 through 41) and is nearly identical to 2 Samuel 22. Though the psalmist was at the height of his royal dominion at the time of this writing (see verses 43-45), he referred to himself as “the servant of the LORD” in the superscription, and took no glory for himself. Rather, he focused entirely on joyful praise for God’s power and majesty.

The structure of this psalm is not tightly knit, but moves from one thought to the next in an extemporaneous manner. David alternated between addressing God directly in statements of love and devotion, and reminiscing about times when he faced extreme peril but was delivered by God’s supernatural power.

In verses 7-15, dramatic aspects of natural forces symbolize the wrath and vengeance of God. The “smoke out of his nostrils” and “fire out of his mouth” (verse 8) may have referred to a volcano, forest fire, or meteor shower. God is pictured as riding upon a “cherub” and flying upon “the wings of the wind” (verse 10). Cherubim in Scripture typically are associated with the throne and sovereignty of God; they often function as guardians. “The Highest” in verse 13 reveals God as the supreme Sovereign of the universe, who can unleash His power at any moment.

Verses 16-24 are a reflection on God’s deliverance. The king relied upon the fact that the Lord delivers and vindicates His own, and he knew he had been innocent of wrongdoing. Although David’s foes had been too strong for him, they were not too strong for God. David pondered the mercy of the Lord in verses 25-29, and then returned to his prior theme of God’s perfect deliverance (verses 30-45). As a result of the victory God had given him in battle, surrounding nations had capitulated to him and become subservient. Verse 43, with its reference to the “people” (the Jews) and “heathen” (the Gentiles)

is a prophetic foreshadowing of Christ's kingdom. One day both Jew and Gentile alike will submit to the sovereign rule of the Lord Jesus.

The psalm concludes with David's proclamation of praise to the living God, and expressions of praise for His deliverance and mercy.

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. How many names for God are used in Psalm 18:2? What are they?

2. In considering verses 26-27 of this psalm, why does God turn away some people?

3. Based on your own experiences and what God has done in your life, what words would you use to describe God?

CONCLUSION

Like David, we can have absolute confidence in our all-powerful God. He is our unfailing place of refuge and security!

NOTES



Psalms 19:1 through 21:13

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.” (Psalm 19:1)

Some years ago, my brother-in-law inherited a box of family heirlooms, and among the items was an impressive painting signed by his great-grandfather, Charles Heberer. The painting sparked his interest and he began doing research. He learned that Heberer had been a well-known artist in Paris and the United States beginning in the 1890s. His work had appeared in art exhibits and newspapers, and he had been commissioned to paint murals and portraits of government officials.

Excited about this discovery, my brother-in-law set out to locate as many of his great-grandfather’s paintings as he could. He devoted several pages of his family website to this pursuit, and began communicating with art galleries, auction houses, historians, and distant relatives. Through this, he received many leads and photographs of paintings.

Several of the photos that came in were of paintings that were unsigned, so my brother-in-law needed another way to determine if these were really the work of Charles Heberer. He soon learned that an artist can be identified by his technique. Heberer painted landscapes in the impressionist style, using short brush strokes and bright colors. His works were often bathed in softly diffused light. By looking for these techniques, my brother-in-law has been able to identify many of his great-grandfather’s paintings.

Just as a person can look at a painting, examine the technique, and know who the artist is, we can look at creation, examine the handiwork, and know who the Creator is. Who else but the Divine Creator could give every snowflake a different pattern? Who else could pass white sunlight through raindrops to form a colorful rainbow? Who else but the all-powerful God could hold the earth on its axis and in its orbit around the sun to create the seasons? Who else is capable of keeping the oceans from overreaching their bounds?

Recently, I visited my brother-in-law’s website and found this statement posted under a new photo, “Here is a newly found painting. It is unsigned, but it is clearly Charles’ work!” While others debate the origin of our magnificent world, I look at the oranges and reds of a sunset and think, It is unsigned, but it is clearly God’s creation. Without doubt, the psalmist was right when he proclaimed, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his

handywork”!

BACKGROUND

Psalm 19

Psalm 19, like many other of David’s psalms, is ascribed to the chief Musician. Many commentators suggest that this is one of the most magnificent of the psalms, both for its poetic elegance and its theological depth. Its theme is that there can be no excuse for those who do not believe in God’s existence, for God has revealed Himself to mankind through His creation and through His Word.

The first portion of the psalm, verses 1-6, uses the example of the heavens (universe) and the firmament (sky) to illustrate that creation serves as a witness to God’s existence. The parallel construction of the words “day unto day” and “night unto night” implies a continuum; the evidences of God are always present. The phrase “Their line is gone out through all the earth” (verse 4), refers to a measuring line marking boundaries, indicating that knowledge of God has spread throughout the world.

Verses 7-14 turn from the glory of God apparent in nature, to the glory of God revealed in His Word. The “law of the LORD” refers to more than just the direct commandments of God; it represents the revealed will of God throughout Scripture. Five synonyms for the Word of God are given in these verses: the “law of the LORD,” the “testimony,” the “statutes,” the “commandment,” and the “judgments.” The psalmist made seven statements about the Word of God: it is perfect, it is sure, it is right, it is pure, it is clean, it is true and righteous, and it is of infinite value. David may also have been emphasizing the completeness of God’s Word by using seven descriptions; the number seven has been used throughout the Bible to represent completeness.

The chapter ends with a prayer. In verses 12 and 13, David asked God to cleanse him from “secret faults” (possibly referring to inbred sin) and “presumptuous sins” (deliberate violations of God’s law). He concluded with a plea that his words and the meditations of his heart would be “acceptable” to God, in much the same way as a right sacrifice under the Levitical law would have been acceptable (see Leviticus 1:3-4).

Psalm 20

Psalm 20 is considered to be a royal psalm, as it concerns the king as a representative of the people. Composed as a prayer offered prior to battle, this

psalm is often grouped with Psalm 21, which is a prayer of thanksgiving for victory. Sung in combination, these two psalms may have formed an antiphonal or responsive war anthem; they are both classified as liturgical psalms because they were associated with worship.

With the exception of verse 6, all of the verses in Psalm 20 were written from the perspective of a group (“we”) praying for a single person (“thee”). Therefore, most of the psalm would have been sung as a chorus by the congregation on behalf of the king. Verse 6 is the only verse that was written in the first person singular (“I”). It would have been sung by the king as a solo in response to the congregation.

The “banners” in verse 5 refer to raising the victory flag. The congregation stated that their flag would be raised in God’s name rather than the name of their king or their country. The inference is that those who rely on earthly might will fail, but those who depend upon the Lord will ultimately triumph.

Psalm 21

Psalm 21 is a prayer of thanksgiving and praise for victory after battle, attributing the destruction of the enemy to the abundance of God’s help. Some of the answered prayers referred to in its verses correspond to the prayer requests in the previous psalm. For example, Psalm 20:4 requests, “Grant thee according to thine own heart...” The response given in Psalm 21:2 is, “Thou has given him his heart’s desire...” Also, the structure is very similar to that of Psalm 20, with two main stanzas and a concluding prayer.

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to Psalm 20:5, in whose name did the congregation say they would set up their banners?

2. Psalm 21:2 states, “Thou hast given him his heart’s desire, and hast not withholden the request of his lips.” Does God always give us our heart’s desire? Why or why not?

3. In what ways has God revealed Himself to you?

CONCLUSION

We do not need to look far to find evidence of God. Let’s take time to observe the witness of God’s creative work all around us.

NOTES



Psalms 22:1 through 23:6

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

**“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”
(Psalm 23:4)**

At the start of the Thirty Years’ War of 1618-1648, Martin Rinkart, the son of a poor coppersmith, was called to be a pastor in his hometown of Eilenburg, Germany. Because Eilenburg was a walled city, it became a refuge for political and military fugitives. As a result, it was terribly overcrowded, and the people suffered from famine and disease. In addition, armies overran the city three times, leaving death and destruction in their wake.

In 1637, a devastating plague swept through the area. Some eight thousand people died, including Martin Rinkart’s beloved wife. At that time he was the only minister in Eilenburg because the others had either perished or fled from their posts. Rinkart conducted the funeral services of 4,480 people that year, and sometimes as many as forty or fifty in a single day! By the end of the year, the dead had to be buried in trenches without services.

Rinkart brought some of the suffering individuals into his own home, even though he was often hard pressed to provide for his own family. One day, while surrounded by war and death, with cries of despair sounding just outside his dwelling, Rinkart sat down and wrote this table grace for his children. Now set to music, it remains an enduring testimony of gratitude and hope.

*Now thank we all our God,
With heart and hands and voices;
Who wondrous things has done,
In whom His world rejoices.
Who, from our mothers’ arms,
Has blessed us on our way,
With countless gifts of love,
And still is ours today.¹*

Why were the pain and suffering which surrounded Rinkart not reflected in his hymn? Had the good pastor seen so much stark tragedy that he had become insensitive? No, the reason for his peace and gratitude was simple: like the psalmist who composed our focus verse, he believed that God’s providence is always good. He realized that the “paths of righteousness” will sometimes take us through the valley, but he was assured that God would walk with him even when darkness surrounded him and death hovered near.

In the hardest of all life’s difficult places, the Lord can give perfect comfort and security. Fear can be eclipsed by the presence of God. Both the psalmist David and Martin Rinkart grasped that truth, and so can we!

BACKGROUND

Psalm 22

Psalm 22 was composed by David and addressed to the chief Musician “upon Aijeleth Shahar.” The precise meaning of this phrase is unknown, but it may have been the name of a melody to which the song was to be sung. The psalm combines personal lament, prayer, and thanksgiving, and possibly was composed to be used in worship as a liturgy for healing. Many commentators group this psalm with Psalms 23 and 24, viewing them as a trilogy depicting three roles of Jesus Christ: Savior, Shepherd, and Sovereign.

This psalm has historically been classified as prophetic and Messianic, as its opening lines were spoken by Jesus on the Cross (see Mark 15:34), and it is quoted seven times in the New Testament in relation to Christ. Verses 12-21 include descriptions of experiences that clearly can be identified with Christ the Sin-bearer as He suffered upon the Cross: “all my bones are out of joint” (verse 14), “they pierced my hands and my feet” (verse 16), and “they part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture” (verse 18). Since these descriptions were not part of David’s personal experience, scholars agree that the Spirit of God constrained David to write prophetically of Jesus Christ’s crucifixion.

Psalm 22 has two sections. The first (verses 1-21) centers on suffering: it portrays a sense of abandonment, along with the reality of physical abuse and emotional exhaustion. The second (verses 22-31) is a song of joy for deliverance: it reveals the victor’s public witness and his purpose to magnify the God who provided the deliverance.

The concluding verses depict the universality of Christ’s kingdom, and indicate that those yet unborn (the “seed,” or posterity) will also receive His work of salvation and will “declare his righteousness.”

Psalm 23

Psalm 23 is frequently referred to as “The Shepherd Psalm,” and is one of the most well-known passages in all of Scripture. Authored by David, this psalm evidences both the psalmist’s vocation as a shepherd and his close personal relationship with God. Bible scholars classify this as a “psalm

of confidence” and agree that its literary beauty and spiritual insight are unsurpassed.

One outstanding feature of this psalm is the skillful use of contrasted imagery. David’s words describe both pastoral peace and passage through peril, the potential of evil and the prospect of good. Seven activities of the Lord are described in verses 2-5: He makes a place of rest, He leads, He restores, He guides, He is present, He prepares a table, and He anoints. The sheep of the Lord’s pasture enjoy five freedoms: from want, depletion, fear of evil, fear of death, and desertion.

Through these six verses, the concept of the complete supply of every need is developed. In the first four verses, David wrote from personal experience of the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep. In verses 5-6, the comparison changes from shepherd to host, and from the fields to the home. The psalmist concludes his beautiful meditation with the thought that after a lifetime filled with goodness and mercy, he will dwell forever in the presence of God.

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. What does Psalm 22:30-31 indicate about how God intends the Good News to be passed on?

2. Why do you think the psalmist praised God “in the great congregation” (Psalm 22:25)?

3. What are some of the ways that the Lord has restored your soul?

CONCLUSION

When our trust is anchored in God, we can face life’s greatest challenges with complete assurance that He will always be with us.

NOTES



Psalms 24:1 through 26:12

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

**“Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness’ sake, O LORD.”
(Psalm 25:7)**

In that lovely season when the warmth of summer cools to autumn, there eventually comes a time when the tomato plants catch a fatal chill. The fruit left on the vine turns to mushy, soft globs—and those globs are quite tantalizing to young boys.

One beautiful fall Sunday, as my parents took a Sunday afternoon snooze, my brothers gave in to the temptation those tomatoes presented. The fruit was still firm enough to throw, but not so firm as to cause any damage...or so they thought.

There was a garden across the country road from our house, but out of sight behind a row of lilac bushes. Now and then, people on Sunday afternoon drives would pass our house, and on that afternoon, several of them were likely surprised to see tomato missiles fly over the lilacs toward their cars. As a girl, I was not inclined to toss the mushy softballs, but I remember watching my brothers with a mixture of worry and awe. It became a memorable day.

As one nice car came down the hill behind our house, a tomato flew over the hedge. Usually the boys could hear a “plop” when the missile hit its target, but this was one of those disappointing ones with no sound. In just a minute, however, all of us were horrified to see the car backing up the road. It stopped at our house, and a very unhappy man got out to have a chat. It seemed that his wife’s window had been open to catch some fresh air, and her lap caught a very mushy tomato! Needless to say, Dad’s nap was shorter than usual, and as a result, my brothers were sorrier than usual. They had to apologize to the couple and clean up their car. As you can imagine, that was the end of tomato bombs!

While we may never have engaged in flinging overripe fruit at passing cars, every one of us can look back on youthful misdemeanors that we would rather forget. In our focus verse, the psalmist David prayed that the “sins” and “transgressions” of his youth would not be held against him. The word translated *sins* in this passage refers to the thoughtless failures and offenses of youth, while *transgressions* literally means “rebellions” and denotes willful and deliberate offenses, perhaps of later years. Thankfully, the mercy and grace of God are sufficient to cover both! David

knew that, and he pleaded with the Lord on the basis of His goodness of character, to remember *him* rather than his misdeeds.

How grateful we should be for the loving-kindness of our God! Like David, let us look to the Lord with confidence and thank Him that the sins of the past, once repented of and forgiven, are covered by His tender mercies. We can move forward, assured that our past misdeeds need not affect our present determination to walk closely with God.

BACKGROUND

Psalm 24

Many Bible scholars group this psalm with Psalms 22 and 23, viewing them as a trilogy depicting three roles of Jesus Christ: Savior, Shepherd, and Sovereign. It was written by David, most likely as a liturgical chorus to be sung by the people of Israel as they accompanied the return of the Ark of the Covenant from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of Jerusalem (see 2 Samuel 6:12-17; 1 Chronicles 15:25-29). It may have been sung antiphonally, with one choir asking the questions and a second choir responding with the appropriate answers. The psalm follows a similar theme as Psalm 68, which is superscribed “A prayer at the removing of the ark,” and the psalm in 1 Chronicles 16:7-36, which was written to thank the Lord for the Ark’s return. This theme is also found in Psalm 15, 30, 87, and 132.

Sometimes referred to as “The Ascension Psalm,” this song is generally considered as a prophetic view of Christ after His victory over death and sin, and His ultimate sovereignty over all. It can be divided into two main sections: verses 1-6 describe the character of true worship, and verses 7-10 describe the crowning of the King.

Psalm 25

Psalm 25 is a prayer of David. It is often classified as a wisdom psalm, and is the second of the seven penitential psalms. Also, it is one of nine psalms written in acrostic form, in which each verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. (In this psalm, there are minor modifications from the pattern.)

The theme is a cry to God for forgiveness of sin and help in a time of affliction. The psalm begins with a prayer (verses 1-7), the second stanza (verses 8-15) is a contemplation of the goodness of God, and the concluding section (verses 16-21) is once again a petition. The closing verse (22) does not fit into the

alphabetical sequence, so some commentators suggest that this concluding prayer was inserted during the time of Israel's captivity.

Psalm 26

Psalm 26, like Psalms 25, 27, and 28, is simply titled "of David." Commentators debate its setting and form; some consider it an individual lament, while others suggest it was used as a liturgy upon entrance into the place of worship. It is a plea in which David, in confidence of his integrity, asked God for vindication from a false accusation. The psalmist began with a presentation of his case (verses 1-5), moved to a promise of worship (verses 6-8), requested protection (verses 9-10), and closed with a statement of assurance (verses 11-12).

David's opening petition, "Judge me, O LORD; for I have walked in mine integrity," has the tone of a formal oath of innocence. The psalmist's expressed intent to "wash [his] hands" (verse 6) was a ceremonial act signifying purity or innocence. The "bloody men" in verse 9 referenced bloodthirsty and violent evildoers such as assassins, murderers, etc.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- I. Book I (1:1 — 41:13)
- II. Book II (42:1 — 72:20)
- III. Book III (73:1 — 89:52)
- IV. Book IV (90:1 — 106:48)
- V. Book V (107:1 — 150:6)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What qualifications did David list in Psalm 24:4 for the one who desires to ascend the hill of the Lord, or stand in His holy place?

2. In Psalm 25:4, David prayed, "Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths." Why is it so important to seek God's guidance?

3. In Psalm 26, David listed a number of steps he had taken to preserve his integrity. What safeguards can we put in place to help ensure that we stay faithful to God?

CONCLUSION

Once we repent of our sins, God covers them with His grace and never remembers them against us again. How grateful we should be for His mercy and loving-kindness toward us!

NOTES



Psalms 27:1 through 29:11

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Blessed be the LORD, because he hath heard the voice of my supplications. The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him.” (Psalm 28:6-7)

Dwight L. Moody, noted American evangelist, was one who found that prayer can bring peace, even in the midst of terrifying circumstances. In November of 1892, Moody was sailing home to America after an extended campaign in England. During the voyage, rough seas caused the ship’s shaft to break, and the lower part of the vessel began filling with water. The passengers and crew were gripped with foreboding as the crippled ship began lurching violently from side to side. As night set in, foreboding turned to terror among many of those on board.

Moody was not immune to fear. As he faced the very real prospect of perishing at sea, his thoughts flew to his wife and children, his friends on both sides of the Atlantic, and the various enterprises he had begun in the work of the Lord. He later recounted: “It was the darkest hour of my life. I could not endure it. I must have relief, and relief came in prayer. God heard my cry, and enabled me to say, from the depth of my soul, ‘Thy will be done!’ Sweet peace came to my heart. I went to bed, fell asleep almost immediately, and never slept more soundly in all my life...I can no more doubt that God gave answer to my prayer for relief than I can doubt my own existence.”¹

The next day, another ship spotted the damaged vessel, and towed it one thousand miles to safety.

Like Dwight L. Moody, the psalmist David found that God can bring peace in life’s most serious challenges. The first verses of Psalm 28 are a desperate plea for help, but in our focus verses, David thanks God for hearing his prayer. The psalmist’s assurance rings through his words—God is the saving strength of those who trust in Him.

What a beautiful truth! We may not face vicious attacks by enemies as David did, or physical peril like that encountered by Moody. However, it is certain that we will face challenges of some sort in life! In those times, we can cling to the words of this psalm, and know without doubt that our all-powerful God will be our strength and shield if we will put our trust in Him. He is the One who gives peace in the storm!

BACKGROUND

Psalm 27

Psalm 27 has two distinct and contrasting sections. Verses 1-6 are an affirmation of faith and confidence in God. Verses 7-14 are a petition by the psalmist for God to hear his cry and provide instruction, guidance, and protection. Some suggest that because of the difference in content, the two sections may have originally been composed at different times. However, a transition from one theme or tone to another is not uncommon in the psalms; many times such a progression indicates the movement in the author’s heart as he communed with God in prayer.

Because of the warfare imagery and use of words such as *enemies*, *foes*, *army*, and *war*, the psalm is traditionally ascribed to David. Although the exact setting is unknown, Bible scholars agree that it may have been composed during the period of David’s flight from Absalom.

In addition to expressing his need for physical deliverance, the psalmist declared his deep spiritual longing in three ways: he desired to “dwell” in the Lord’s house, to “behold” the Lord’s beauty, and to “enquire” in the Lord’s Temple. After meditating on the Lord, David addressed Him directly, calling on Him by name. Held steady by the hope of God’s intervention in his behalf, David concluded the psalm with an exhortation, seemingly to himself, to wait upon God with courage, secure in the knowledge that God would surely answer.

Psalm 28

Psalm 28 is a prayer for God’s help in a time of trouble, progressing to thanksgiving for God’s deliverance in a simple conflict-to-resolution structure. The superscription credits authorship to David.

The psalm begins with a plea of great emotional intensity, reflecting David’s anxiety in a time of peril. It possibly was written during the time when Absalom rose up in rebellion against his father. The word translated *mischievous* in verse 3 has a much stronger meaning in the original language; it implies “the intention of unmitigated evil.” The psalmist’s outraged sense of justice is apparent as he pled with God to render deserved judgment upon the wicked, both for their evil actions and their disregard for the “works of the LORD” (verse 5).

As in the preceding psalm, there is an abrupt change of tone midway. Beginning with verse 6,

David rejoiced in the security, power, and protection God gives. Some commentators suggest these words may have been added after deliverance had come; alternatively, they were an expression of David's faith that deliverance *would* come after he presented his request to God. In a closing doxology (a short hymn of praise to God sung at the conclusion of a psalm or hymn) the psalmist expressed his profound appreciation and adoration for the God who helps and delivers those who trust in Him.

Psalm 29

Psalm 29 was traditionally sung on the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles. Titled by various commentators as "The Thunder Psalm" or "The Thunder of God," it depicts a symphony of praise to the Creator by natural forces, rather than simply a demonstration of His power. Traditionally ascribed to David, the song reflects the awe that a shepherd would feel as he observed a great storm.

After an opening call to worship, verses 3-9 describe the approach, onset, and passing of the storm. A unique feature of this psalm is the repeated references to the "voice of the LORD." Though this phrase alludes directly to the thunder and wind, it has a wider meaning as the power of the Word of God.

The heart of the poem is a description of a storm that moves from the sea to the west of Israel, across the forested hills of Lebanon in northern Israel to the more desolate southern regions of Kadesh, and then to the far borders of Edom. "Lebanon and Sirion" in verse 6 are the principal mountains of Israel. The "flames of fire" in verse 7 allude to forked lightning. The violence of the storm made the "hinds to calve" (verse 9) or to birth their young prematurely.

These manifestations of God's power evoke the fitting response of giving glory to God. Psalm 29 concludes with a plea for God to continue to save and bless His people with peace.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. What did the psalmist ask "the mighty" to give unto the Lord in Psalm 29?

2. Psalm 28:8-9 reflect that others benefited when David received an answer to prayer. How might others benefit when we receive an answer?

3. How can we encourage ourselves to wait patiently upon God?

CONCLUSION

God gives peace and security to those who put their trust in Him.

NOTES



Psalms 30:1 through 32:11

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee.” (Psalm 32:8-9)

When Papa rode into the yard on Old Jim, a dapple-gray horse, my siblings and I thought he had finally lost his mind. Unlike Papa’s earlier equine purchases, this animal was clearly past his prime. However, my father loved horses, and he had saved this one from the glue factory to live out his last days in comfort and pleasure on our farm.

Old Jim quickly became a part of the family, and we children loved to ride him; he seemed to know we were young and was very careful with us. My ten-year-old brother, being the oldest of the five of us, would lead Jim next to a stump that stood in the front yard, and we would all pile onto his back. Then our gentle giant would slowly plod around the yard as each of us, entertained by our imaginations, rode in rodeos, roped cattle on a round-up, or entered the bronco-busting arena. We were happy. We would holler, “Yippie ki-yi,” and swing imaginary ropes at phantom cows for an hour without growing weary.

When Old Jim got bored and tired of the games and the noise, he would head to the backyard and carefully but firmly dump us into a howling heap on the ground. He would then stand there with his eyes closed. Old he may have been, but that horse had a mind of his own!

We chuckle at the thought of a horse with a mindset. However, in our focus verses we are admonished not to be stubborn like a horse or mule that must be forced to go in the right direction by the control of a bit or bridle. As children of God, we should be led by the Spirit of God and be responsive to His teachings. He is faithful to instruct us, but we must be willing to submit and follow His leading.

God watches over us and is concerned about each step we take. He will never lead us in a wrong direction. Let us be pliable, teachable, and willing to follow.

BACKGROUND

Psalm 30

The superscription of Psalm 30 indicates that it was sung during the dedication of a house of David.

There were two instances in which David dedicated a house: after the building of his palace (2 Samuel 5:11) and at the return of the Ark of the Covenant from the house of Obed-edom to the Tabernacle (1 Chronicles 16:1-7). This psalm could have been written for either of these two occasions.

It is also possible that the subtitle was added to the already existing psalm at the time of the dedication of the Temple built by King Solomon. This psalm and the Temple have a connecting thread. Some Bible scholars suggest that Psalm 30 may have been written by David after God halted the plague at the threshing floor of Araunah (see 2 Samuel 24:15). The threshing floor later became the site of King Solomon’s Temple. If this setting is accepted, David’s description of healing in verses 2-3 would refer to the plague that came upon the Children of Israel as a result of his sin of numbering the people; David’s healing would have been the removal of that plague.

Other commentators suggest that the psalm is David’s personal expression of praise for divine healing following a crisis of physical sickness. Whatever the case, the dire nature of the psalmist’s condition is apparent in the strength of his language. He felt his soul had been on the verge of death. “The pit” in verse 3 was translated from a word that is a common synonym for *Sheol*, the place of the dead. As the psalmist expressed gratitude for the divine touch, he cited the lesson learned: while sorrow and distress may last temporarily, ultimately God restores (verse 5). Though prosperity had made him self-confident, David had realized the folly of his ways and had cried unto the Lord, who brought deliverance.

As often occurs in the psalms, David moved from prayer and praise to expectation, concluding this song by contrasting “mourning” and “sackcloth” to “dancing” and “gladness,” and expressing his desire to give thanks to God “for ever.”

Psalm 31

Psalm 31 is dedicated to the chief Musician and is ascribed to David in the title. A prayer for deliverance from the effects of slander and a murderous plot, the psalm may have been written at the time of David’s escape from the treacherous men of Keilah (see 1 Samuel 23), or during the rebellion of Absalom. As a result of the plot against him, described as a “net that they have laid privily for me” (verse 4), David experienced grief and fear, and this affected him both spiritually and physically. His words alternate between lament and praise.

David’s allusion to “lying vanities” in verse 6 refers to idols. “Vanity” is a common Old Testament name for false gods.

Verses 9-13 describe the crisis David faced, and the despair he felt as a result. Verse 10 seems to indicate that a sense of guilt contributed to the psalmist’s distress; he may have been reflecting back to the time of his sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:4-17). In verses 14-18, however, David affirmed his confidence in God and committed his case to Him. Verses 19-24 are an expression of praise, and a concluding call to the “saints” to love God and be of good courage.

Psalm 32

Psalm 32 is the second of the seven poems identified as penitential psalms; it relates closely to Psalm 51. The superscription *Maschil*, which means “to instruct,” indicates that it was a meditation designed to teach. The theme of the psalm is the joy of forgiveness; it is a lesson in salvation based upon David’s own experience.

The word translated *transgression* in verse 1 is the strongest and most serious of Old Testament words used to indicate personal wrongdoing; the inherent meaning is “rebellion” against divine authority. The word *sin* (in Hebrew, *chattah*) means “missing the mark,” while *iniquity* (*avon*) refers to depravity or the distortion of morals.

When God forgives transgressions, the literal meaning is that He “bears” or “carries away” the sin. The word “covered” implies that sin is purposefully hidden or concealed by God (not by personal effort) as one would cover up something repulsive or offensive to one’s sight. The phrase “imputeth not” means guilt is not charged or placed on the account of the doer; God has absolved it by His grace.

The phrase “when I kept silence” (verse 3) refers to a state of unrepentance, or refusal to confess. The result was that the writer was depleted both physically and mentally, and the hand of God was “heavy” upon him—he felt the convicting hand of God. The only cure was confession, which is described in verse 5.

In verses 8-11, the psalmist assumed the role of instructor, admonishing his hearers to follow the guiding of God. The psalm concludes with an encouragement for the righteous to rejoice and shout for joy.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. What two actions in David’s song of instruction in Psalm 32 brought forgiveness for sin?

2. How does the behavior differ between people who attribute their prosperity to God and those who attribute it to themselves?

3. David’s final exhortation in Psalm 31 was to “be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart.” What are some ways we can help others to have courage when they face life’s challenges?

CONCLUSION

We want to be sensitive to God’s instruction, and quick to obey His leadings.

NOTES



Psalms 33:1 through 34:22

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together.” (Psalm 34:3)

My husband and I live next door to four of our grandchildren. Some months ago when the oldest two were at our house visiting, they found a magnifying glass in my desk drawer. They were curious about what it was, so I took them outside and introduced them to the wonders of inspecting our environment close up. We studied a leaf, scrutinized the root of a dandelion (yes, we do have a few of those in our yard), and examined the fine filament of a spider web strung from our deck to a nearby bush. Flowers that seemed ordinary at first glance proved to be stunningly intricate and beautiful when magnified. My grandchildren were fascinated!

From that afternoon on, the two of them have knocked frequently on our door and asked to borrow the magnifying glass in order to check out some new discovery in the backyard. They’ve found that the tiniest of items, when observed through the magnifying glass, become awesome! Minute details are suddenly visible, and new beauty appears. I can’t count how many times they have summoned us, “Grandma, Papa, come and look! You need to see this!”

In our focus verse, the psalmist David said, “O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together.” What does it mean to magnify the Lord? Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) preached that it meant to “greaten God.” That fits with the original Hebrew word translated *magnify*, which means “to make large.” Spurgeon was not suggesting that we can make God greater than He is, any more than the magnifying glass will enlarge a flower. Rather, it is our perspective that changes. A close study reveals details we never saw before.

Spurgeon was teaching that we should promote God, lift Him up, and make Him known. When we take time to carefully read God’s Word and do our best to study the heart and mind of God, we make new discoveries about Him. We see Him in a new way. We realize He is bigger, better, more wonderful, and more able to solve any of the problems that face us. And our natural response is to exclaim in wonder, to share our discoveries, and to call others to come and see—in short, to magnify Him!

Today, we can purpose to closely focus on our amazing God—and then be prepared to share our discoveries!

BACKGROUND

Psalm 33

The author of Psalm 33 is not identified, nor is there a title. This psalm takes the form of a meditation, and may have been sung as a hymn of rejoicing and adoration. It opens with a call to worship, and has three main sections: praise to God for His Word and works in creation (verses 1-9), in history (verses 10-17), and in redemptive power (verses 18-22).

The stringed instruments mentioned in verse 2 differed only in form; they were all handheld and plucked with the fingers. The harp is one of the oldest known musical instruments; in that era it had a wooden framework with seven, eight, or ten strings, and was small enough to be easily carried (see 1 Samuel 10:5). The psaltery (or lyre) may have been of Phoenician origin. It likely was slightly larger than the harp and probably provided the lower tones in the music.

The “heathen” referred to in verse 10 were the Gentiles. These were set in contrast to “the nation whose God is the LORD” (verse 12), which was the Jewish nation.

Psalm 34

Psalm 34 is classified as an individual lament. According to the superscription, it was written by David after he “changed his behavior before Abimelech.” This refers to 1 Samuel 21:12-13 where David, because of his fear of Achish the king of Gath, “changed his behaviour before them, and feigned himself mad.” An explanation for the differing names of the king is that Abimelech (cited in the superscription), means “my father is king,” and was most likely a title denoting royal lineage, while Achish was the actual name of the king.

Similar in many ways to Psalm 25, Psalm 34 was written in acrostic form with each verse beginning with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. However, a letter (and therefore a verse) is missing between verses 5 and 6, and verse 22 does not follow the pattern. Adam Clarke’s commentary suggests that placing verse 22 between verse 5 and 6 would give the psalm a better flow.

A well-loved psalm, the theme is that of praise for God’s gracious treatment. The exhortation to praise is reinforced by the psalmist’s personal testimony of deliverance from fear, danger, trouble, and affliction.

Verse 7 is the first reference to “the angel of the LORD” in the Psalms. This is the Old Testament phrase for the Divine Presence which is both identified with God and distinct from Him.

Verse 20 is a prophetic look ahead to Jesus' crucifixion. Although Roman soldiers typically broke the legs of criminals who were crucified in order to hasten death, Jesus' bones were not broken.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to Psalm 34:7, who does the angel of the Lord encamp round about?

2. What are some of the results and benefits of magnifying the Lord?

3. Singing and playing musical instruments are often referenced in the Psalms. What are some other ways we can praise the Lord?

CONCLUSION

David recognized that the God who commanded the world into existence is concerned with our everyday needs, and magnified Him with song and public testimony. We want to do the same!

NOTES



Psalms 35:1 through 36:12

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.” (Psalm 36:7)

The Bolivar Point Lighthouse in Texas was put into service on November 19, 1872. Through the years, the light atop the 117-foot iron fortress guided many ships safely through storms and hurricanes.

Harry Claiborne was the lighthouse keeper at Bolivar Point when the Great Hurricane of 1900 inundated Galveston Island with five feet of water. During the height of the storm, which occurred on September 8, over 120 people sought protection inside the strong walls of the lighthouse. They seated themselves by twos on the tower’s spiral staircase, huddling together as 140 miles-per-hour winds raged around them. When the flood waters receded from the base of the lighthouse, it was found that the hurricane had destroyed most of the city of Galveston, and many in the surrounding area had died. However, all those in the tower were safe.

A similar type of hurricane hit Bolivar Point on August 16-17 of 1915. That time, sixty people found protection in the mighty sea fortress. The assistant keeper reported that the top of the tower “shook and swayed in the wind like a giant reed.” Although significant damage was done to the lens mechanism and the keeper’s dwelling, once again all those in the lighthouse were protected.

In our focus verse, David extolled the steadfast love of God. Just as the Bolivar Point Lighthouse offered protection from the storm to those who took shelter within its strong walls, God offers protection from the storms of life for all those who put their trust under the shadow of His wings.

Like David of old, one contemporary songwriter put this thought into words.

*So let the storms rage high,
The dark clouds rise,
They won't worry me;
For I'm sheltered safe within the arms of God.
He walks with me,
And naught of earth shall harm me,
For I'm sheltered in the arms of God.¹*

Are you facing peril today? Many types of storms can come into our lives. Whether the “winds” that buffet us are physical, emotional, or spiritual in nature, we have a sure refuge we can flee to. David proved that truth, and so can we!

BACKGROUND

Psalm 35

Psalm 35 is an imprecatory psalm (a psalm that invokes judgment, calamity, or curses, upon one’s enemies, or upon those perceived as the enemies of God). It is identified as a psalm of David, and is a prayer in the time of personal peril. David prayed for God to intervene on his behalf and defend him as he faced three threats that were beyond his control: physical danger, false accusation, and betrayal.

In these first three verses, David may have been referring to opposition in general. However, as the psalm progresses, the specifics become increasingly personal. The description of the enemy in verse 4 as those who sought after his soul and devised his hurt suggests that individuals close to the psalmist had developed bitter enmity against him.

The graphic imagery, use of military terms, and sudden transitions of this psalm are all typical of David’s style, especially in his earlier days. This may indicate that it was written during the time when David was being pursued by King Saul and his men (1 Samuel 20-26). Verse 7 may allude to King Saul, as it describes an enemy who without cause set a snare for David.

In verse 15, the exact meaning of the “abjects” who gathered themselves together against David has been debated and variously translated as “outcasts,” “smiters,” and “slanderers.” Whatever the precise meaning, the sense of the passage is obvious: those whom David once had considered as friends had turned on him with slanderous lies. David’s plea in verse 17 for God to “rescue... my darling” could be literally translated as “rescue... my only one,” in reference to David’s one and only life. In verse 19, the phrase “wink with the eye” refers to a victor who in this manner shows gleeful satisfaction at his triumph over the one he conquered.

David ended the psalm with a plea for God to vindicate him and respond with justice to his enemies, and pledged once again to praise God upon his deliverance.

Psalm 36

Psalm 36 is classified as a wisdom psalm which contrasts the wickedness of man with the steadfastness of God. Described by Bible scholars as an individual lament, the psalm is dedicated to the chief Musician. David is traditionally credited with authorship.

The first four verses tell of the corruption that exists in the heart of the godless, while verses 5-9

relate to the character of God. In the last section of the psalm, verses 10-12, David asked the Lord to continue His goodness towards the upright and to keep him from pride, which caused the downfall of the wicked.

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. In Psalm 35:11-12, what three things did David say his accusers did?

2. Why is being deceived or accused by people we regarded as friends so hard to endure?

3. What actions of David can we emulate in order to triumph over hard circumstances?

CONCLUSION

As David proved, God's faithfulness, protection, lovingkindness, and care are always available for those who trust Him.

NOTES



Psalm 37:1-40

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.” (Psalm 37:5)

In my daughter’s freshman year at college, she was not allowed to choose whom she would room with, and ended up sharing a dorm with two girls where the atmosphere was so unappealing that she often did her homework while sitting on the floor in the hallway. While God was with her and she knew He was in control, that experience made her especially concerned about whom she would live with the following year.

As her sophomore year approached, she was allowed to choose a roommate, but she was reluctant to depend upon her own limited knowledge of the other students. She knew the best way was to ask the Lord to find a roommate for her. After she prayed, however, several weeks passed with no sign of a roommate. Many times my daughter thought of someone she could ask, but when she considered taking action, the Lord checked her heart by asking, “Didn’t you say that I could choose a roommate for you?”

As the deadline approached, it became more and more difficult to wait and hold on to her trust that the Lord would bring someone to her in time. Also, she experienced pressure from others who thought she was being foolish in taking such a passive role. She had committed to waiting on God, though, and less than two weeks before the deadline, a girl she barely knew asked to room with her.

The two girls quickly found that they had much in common, including a shared interest in athletics, hobbies, and religion. They even speak the same second language! They received the same honors at graduation, and both received the baptism of the Holy Ghost during their college years. Now, several years later, they are still the best of friends.

My daughter could have relied on her own judgment to find a roommate, but the outcome would not have been as good. She did not know every girl on campus who needed a roommate, but God did, and He sent one who was easy to room with. My daughter could not see the future and know that she would need encouragement during that year, but God could, and He sent a Christian roommate for fellowship. If we will commit our ways to God and place our trust in Him, we can be assured that He will bring about the best outcome for us as well.

BACKGROUND

Psalm 37

Psalm 37, another wisdom psalm, was written by David in his old age (see verse 25). From the vantage point of a long life of experience, he meditated upon a theme that is frequently considered in wisdom literature: a contrast between the wicked and the righteous. The point is made that while the unrighteous frequently are prosperous and enjoy great power, the righteous are secure because they are held in God’s hand and thus have no need to fret over their fate. Psalms 49 and 73 also address this topic, as does much of the Book of Job.

This psalm is written in acrostic form, with every third verse beginning with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Its sententious style, which is characterized by terse sayings embodying general truths, is similar to that of Proverbs.

The statement, “The arms of the wicked shall be broken” (verse 17), means that the strength of the wicked will be destroyed. In verse 20, the declaration that the enemies of the Lord shall be “as the fat of lambs” indicates that the life of a wicked person will be as fleeting as the smoke of a sacrifice. The “seed” of the righteous, alluded to in verses 25, 26, and 28, are his children. The “green bay tree” in verse 35 is supposed by several commentators to be a reference to the cedars of Lebanon; others suggest it simply alludes to a tree that thrives in its own native soil.

The psalm concludes with a reassurance that to the righteous, the Lord provides salvation, strength in the time of trouble, and deliverance from the wicked.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- I. Book I (1:1 — 41:13)
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- III. Book III (73:1 — 89:52)
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- V. Book V (107:1 — 150:6)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 23, who orders the steps of a good man?

2. What are some ways we can delight ourselves in the Lord (see verse 4)?

3. How can we keep our focus on our own relationship with God and not on the lives of others?

CONCLUSION

It pays to entrust everything in our lives to the Lord's control and guidance.

NOTES



Psalms 38:1 through 39:13

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“They also that seek after my life lay snares for me: and they that seek my hurt speak mischievous things, and imagine deceits all the day long. But I, as a deaf man, heard not; and I was as a dumb man that openeth not his mouth. Thus I was as a man that heareth not, and in whose mouth are no reproofs.” (Psalm 38:12-14)

It is not easy to keep silent when others speak ill of us. William Booth (1829–1912), the British Methodist preacher who founded The Salvation Army, was a man who endured vicious assaults by both the government and religious leaders of his day. Described publicly at various times as being dishonest, sanctimonious, and evil, Booth was labeled as a “hypocritical scoundrel,” a “brazen-faced charlatan,” a “pious rogue,” an “impossible dreamer,” and even as the Antichrist! His efforts in the fields of evangelism and social reform were blasted as being “prostitution of the mind,” and as nothing more than a ruse to herd sheep into his “narrow theological fold.” He was scorned frequently in newspapers, ridiculed in magazine articles, and criticized by public speakers. One professor, a staunch proponent of Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution, wrote twelve brusque letters blasting Booth that were published in the *London Times*, giving detailed reasons why the author found everything about William Booth and his Salvation Army so detestable.

The attacks and controversy were difficult for Booth’s wife and children to bear. Many times Bramwell, Booth’s oldest son, would burst into his father’s office with an offensive newspaper or magazine article in hand. Protesting the libelous assaults, he would tell his father, “You really must respond to this! You need to do something to combat this awful gossip.” William Booth always gave him the same answer: “Bramwell, fifty years from now it will matter very little indeed how these people treated us. It will matter a great deal how we dealt with the work of God.”¹

In our focus verses, the psalmist David exhibited a similar response to those who rejected him and verbally assailed him. Unlike William Booth, David knew that he was guilty of sin and was suffering as a result of his misdeeds. Still, he refused to respond to his attackers, but rather brought the matter before God alone.

In our super-charged, high-stress society, hasty and unkind speech is something that can catch us

unawares. At some point, we likely all will be on the receiving end of false accusations, gossip, or lies. We learn from experience that words can hurt. While accepting such attacks meekly and refusing to retaliate is a challenge, we want others to see the beauty of Christ shining through us. How carefully we need to monitor our responses! Consistent control of the tongue may not be easy, but it is possible with the Lord’s help, and it is an effort that pays real spiritual dividends.

BACKGROUND

Psalm 38

Psalm 38 bears the superscription, “A Psalm of David, to bring to remembrance.” It is classified as a penitential psalm, and has the form of an individual lament; it chronicles the physical, emotional, and spiritual sufferings David endured as a result of committing a sin. The sin is not named, but most likely it was the killing of Bathsheba’s husband, Uriah (see 2 Samuel 11). Psalms 6, 32, and 51 also are traditionally associated with that event.

Of all the penitential psalms, commentators agree that this one expresses David’s anguished state most graphically. His vivid descriptions reveal a man who was sick in soul and body, forsaken by his friends, beset by his enemies, and overwhelmed by a sense of guilt. In his distress, he cried out to God.

David’s assertion that “thine arrows stick fast in me” was a metaphorical way of referring to God’s chastisement; the symbolism of arrows as representations of God’s wrath also occurs in other places in Scripture. The images of no “soundness” in his flesh, wounds that “stink” and “are corrupt,” and loins that are filled with a “loathsome disease” all express in vivid metaphor the corruption of sin. The psalmist’s statement that he “roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart” meant that he groaned aloud because of his burden of guilt.

As David agonized over his terrible state, he presented his condition fully to God, holding nothing back. The psalm concludes with three final petitions: David pleaded with God not to forsake him, not to be far from him, and to quickly help him.

Psalm 39

Some commentators consider Psalm 39 to be a sequel to Psalm 38, although it is not penitential in nature. It is dedicated to Jeduthun, one of the chief musicians who served under David. This is the first of four psalms which identify Jeduthun. (He is also

named in the titles of Psalm 62 and 77, and in Psalm 88, where he is identified as Heman the Ezrahite; his name was changed after the appointments at Gibeon which are described in 1 Chronicles 16.)

Psalm 39 is classified as an individual lament, and includes both direct prayer and meditation. Within its thirteen verses, a range of emotions and moods are reflected: faith, rebellion, despair, repentance, resignation, and trust.

In verses 8-11, with his health gone, the psalmist associates forgiveness of sin with the removal of physical affliction. (In the Old Testament, sickness was often viewed as a sign of God's judgment.) The psalm concludes with a prayer that reflected David's awareness that life here is temporal and fleeting, and he would soon "be no more."

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. In Psalm 38:20, whom did David identify as his adversaries?

2. David had placed his hope in the Lord. Given the fact that he had so grievously sinned, why do you think he felt that God would hear and help him?

3. Two important steps toward spiritual restoration are identified in Psalm 38:18. Why are these steps so vital?

CONCLUSION

When we suffer from the words of others, we can leave our case in God's hands. It is best to focus on Him, rather than on responding to those who speak against us.

NOTES



Psalms 40:1 through 41:13

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“But I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me: thou art my help and my deliverer; make no tarrying, O my God.” (Psalm 40:17)

Corrie ten Boom (1892–1983) was a Dutch Christian who, along with her father and other family members, helped many Jews escape the Nazi Holocaust during World War II, and was imprisoned for it. Corrie and her sister, Betsie, were sent to the Vught transit concentration camp in the Netherlands, and from there to the Ravensbrück death camp in Germany. Toward the end of the war, the camp population at Ravensbrück grew to more than ten times the originally planned number. Imprisoned women were forced to work in many kinds of slave labor, inmates were hardly fed, and living conditions in the barracks for prisoners were deplorable almost beyond description.

One morning, Corrie awoke with a bad cold. Without so much as a handkerchief for her runny nose, she felt she simply could not bear it. “Why don’t you pray for a hankie?” Betsie asked. Corrie almost laughed! Here they were, surrounded by unspeakable suffering and death, and her sister suggested praying for a *handkerchief*! Betsie, however, was not deterred by her sister’s lack of faith. She prayed a simple prayer in the Name of Jesus, asking for a hankie because Corrie had a bad cold. Corrie just shook her head and walked away.

A short time later, a fellow prisoner who worked in the camp hospital approached Corrie and held out a small package, saying, “I bring you a little present.” When Corrie opened it, she found a handkerchief! She asked the woman, “Did Betsie tell you? Did you know I had a cold?” The woman responded, “I know nothing. I was busy sewing handkerchiefs out of an old piece of sheet, and there was a voice in my heart saying, ‘Take a hankie to Corrie ten Boom.’ So, there is your gift, from God.”

When telling this story later, Corrie commented, “That pocket handkerchief, made from an old piece of sheet, was a message from Heaven for me. It told me that there is a heavenly Father who hears if one of His children on this planet prays for even just a little thing like a hankie.”¹

God does hear our prayers, and He has ways of communicating that precious truth to His own. In today’s focus verse, the psalmist expressed a similar perspective when he stated that in spite of the

innumerable evils which surrounded him, the Lord was mindful of him and would be his Help and Deliverer.

Consider, for a moment, the magnitude of that thought. Most likely the mayor of your town does not know your name. The governor of your state never heard of you. The president of the country has no knowledge that you exist. Yet the God of Heaven, the Creator of the whole universe, knows you by name! Not only that, He is aware of your every need. You matter to Him—in fact, He is thinking about you at this very moment!

There may be times when evil surrounds us, trials sweep through our lives, and our hearts nearly fail from fear. In those moments, we can do as David did and pray, “O LORD: let thy lovingkindness and thy truth continually preserve me...O LORD, make haste to help me” (Psalm 40:11,13). He will never fail to be our Help and Deliverer!

BACKGROUND

Psalm 40

Traditionally ascribed to David, Psalm 40 is dedicated to the chief Musician, indicating that it was probably sung. It has two distinct parts: verses 1-10 are a song of praise, while verses 11-17 are a personal lament. Verses 13-17 are nearly identical to Psalm 70, so possibly this section was detached for liturgical use and later became a separate psalm. Some commentators suggest that this song was written after David was restored to the throne following Absalom’s rebellion.

The psalm provides a beautiful picture of God’s concern for His children. The Hebrew word translated *inclined* in verse 1 literally means “stretched out, bent down towards.” The same word is translated in other parts of the Old Testament as “stretched out” (see Exodus 7:5,19, 14:21, etc.)

Psalm 40 is classified as a Messianic psalm, as verses 6-10 are quoted in Hebrews 10:5-7 as having been spoken by Jesus. The phrase “innumerable evils” in verse 12 in the original Hebrew is the most comprehensive term describing the bad or harmful aspects of life. Though David’s words in verses 6-12 refer to his own experience, they prophetically look ahead to Christ’s suffering at the time of His crucifixion. For this reason, portions of this psalm are often read in Christian churches on Good Friday.

Psalm 41

Psalm 41 is dedicated to the chief Musician. While primarily a song of lament, the psalm addresses a

variety of subjects: compassion for the poor, sorrow for sin, abandonment, and healing.

Jesus quoted verse 9 in John 13:18 saying that one close to Him (Judas) would betray Him. David’s betrayer was someone who pretended to be his friend (“he speaketh vanity”) in order to gather information about his condition and spread it to his enemies. This may have been a reference to Ahithophel (see 2 Samuel 15:12,31).

In verse 10, David pleaded with God to heal him so that he could “requite them,” seemingly in reference to those who had plotted evil against him. While the psalmist usually left vengeance in the hand of God, he may have felt it was his duty as king to dispense justice to those who were guilty of insurrection and betrayal.

Psalm 41 completes Book I of the Psalms. Verse 13 is a doxology—an expression of praise. The other four books of the Psalms also conclude with praise.

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to Psalm 41:1, what has the Lord promised to those who consider the poor?

2. What are some of the “new songs”—or new reasons to praise—that the Lord has put in your mouth since He saved you?

3. The word *poor* in Psalm 41 references more than just those who need financial assistance; it means “weak” or “helpless.” Given that definition, what are some specific ways we can minister to the poor?

CONCLUSION

We can be assured that in every situation and in every trial we face, God is mindful of us and our needs.

NOTES



Psalms 42:1 through 44:26

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“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?” (Psalm 42:1-2)

Those who thirst for God will be satisfied. Jim Seely proved that! Jim grew up being taught the Word of God; his parents came in contact with the Apostolic Faith Church when he was just four years old. Though Jim turned his back on God for a time, he gave his life to the Lord on March 4, 1923, after a church service in Medford, Oregon. Later, God sanctified him.

Often Jim would testify about the thirst for God that sprang up in his heart when he was seeking for the baptism of the Holy Ghost. He said, “I sought for a long time—longer than I should have. I was so thirsty for more of Him! He would bless me abundantly and thrill me with His power, but I would get up and leave without an assurance of having received that experience. I did that time after time, but God was faithful to me.

“I was working as a truck driver for the U.S. Forest Service at the time. One day I stopped for my lunch break at the summit of Hayes Mountain out of Grants Pass, Oregon, and climbed up among the scrub oak. With a rotting log for an altar, I began to pour out my heart to God. I did not get my baptism there, but I want to tell you, when I got into my truck, I was a thirsty soul. Something had happened inside, and I had the assurance I would get my baptism that night at the church service.

“As I was sitting in the meeting, God really blessed me. At the end of the service, I got down to pray. I told the Lord, ‘If You will come down and bless me again as You have in the past, I am going to believe that You have rewarded my faith.’ As I continued to pray, that sweet Spirit of God came once more into my heart. I just reached up by faith and took hold of God’s promise. I can’t tell you how I did it, but I did. That night the Lord filled my vessel to overflowing and gave me the wonderful experience of the baptism of the Holy Ghost.”

The author of Psalm 42 also knew what it was to have a consuming desire for God. In our focus verses, he cried, “My soul thirsteth for God,” and compared his longing to a deer who instinctively seeks to slake its thirst at a mountain stream.

Today, are you longing for something from God? Is there an insatiable desire in your heart to receive

from Him? Be assured that God sees that desire, and in His own time and way, He will respond and satisfy your heart.

BACKGROUND

Psalm 42

Psalm 42 is the start of Book II of Psalms (the “Exodus Book”), which is comprised of Psalms 42 through 72. Bible scholars generally agree that this psalm was originally grouped with Psalm 43, forming one poem. The author of these psalms is unknown; it may have been David, during the time of his flight from Absalom, when he took refuge in Mahanaim (see 2 Samuel 17:24).

Along with ten other psalms, this one is dedicated to the sons of Korah, who probably were Temple musicians and assistants. (Korah was a Levite who, according to Numbers 16:1-35, led a rebellion against Moses. He was killed, but his descendants remained faithful to God and continued to serve Him in the Temple.)

Psalm 42 is a psalm of encouragement in times of spiritual depression, when God seems far away. It opens with an expression of desire for God. The “water brooks” mentioned in verse 1 are springs which flow continually from subterranean rivers. The author’s reminiscence in verse 4 of his former unrestricted access to the house of God lends credence to David’s authorship and the setting described above. The refrain in verse 5 is repeated in verse 11, and also in Psalm 43:5; it expresses the psalmist’s hope that his situation would be reversed by the help of God.

Psalm 43

Psalm 43 is generally regarded as an extension of Psalm 42; in many Hebrew manuscripts the two appear as one psalm. Although it is a continuation of the author’s personal lament, the glimmer of hope in God grows stronger in these verses.

In verse 1, the psalmist pleaded with God to “judge” or vindicate him; in the original Hebrew, this is a legal term. Though he felt far from God, he affirmed an awareness that his strength was in God. “Thy holy hill” (verse 3) could be translated “the mountain of thy holiness.” “Thy tabernacles” referred to the dwelling place of God.

Psalm 44

Psalm 44 is classified as a communal lament. Like the two previous psalms, Psalm 44 is dedicated to “the chief Musician for the sons of Korah,” and identified as a Maschil—a song instructing some



Psalms 45:1 through 48:14

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” (Psalm 46:1)

The little farm where my wife grew up was nestled in a valley between the hills of Southern Oregon. To get to the farm, vehicles had to turn off the winding mountain highway and cross a creek by way of a rickety wooden bridge. The road split on the far side of the bridge, going north to where my wife’s family lived and south to the farm of some not-so-friendly neighbors. These neighbors felt they had exclusive rights to the road across the bridge, even though both households legally shared the access. The elderly farmer even placed a no trespassing sign along the road! The sight of my wife’s family driving across the bridge would bring both the man and his wife out to their front porch where they would scream threats and accusations of trespassing. They wanted no one else using what they mistakenly assumed was their exclusive property.

One day while the old man was working around his place, he lifted the lid off his well and peered down into the deep dark hole. As he did so, his glasses suddenly slipped off his face and fell into the depths of the well with a distant splash. Without his glasses, his vision was very poor, and he simply could not see to retrieve them. After a number of unsuccessful attempts, he realized that he needed help. The only person close by was my father-in-law — the very person he had done his best to keep away! However, there was no alternative, so the farmer haltingly made his way up the road to the house of the one who could help. He was not turned away; my father-in-law graciously came to his assistance, and the glasses were retrieved.

Just as that old farmer refused to acknowledge the rights of his neighbor until he was forced to ask for help, many people exclude God from their lives until they face trouble. Then, in desperation, they turn His way. While God always hears our cry, and we know He is merciful, how much better it is to have a relationship with Him before a crisis occurs rather than presuming on that mercy!

The author of Psalm 46 clearly had a connection with God. He knew from prior experience that God is a “refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” As a result, he could say he would not fear, “though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea” (Psalm 46:2).

Even horrific calamities could be faced with courage because of God’s protecting presence and power.

How is your relationship with God today? Can you say with confidence that He is your Friend? Do you communicate with Him on a regular basis, sharing your ongoing joys and concerns? Don’t wait until trouble strikes to look His way and access the help and security He offers.

BACKGROUND

Psalm 45

According to the lengthy superscription, Psalm 45 was composed as a wedding song (“a song of loves”) to celebrate the king’s wedding. The word *Shoshannim* means “lilies,” and either indicates that the song was played on a lily-shaped instrument, or that it was to be sung to the tune of a song titled, “Lilies.” Classified as a royal psalm, Psalm 45 is a Maschil, or psalm designed for instruction. It is addressed to the chief Musician, who was the leader of the tabernacle choir. The author is not identified by name but he may have been a court scribe since he alluded to himself in the first verse as a “ready writer.”

Many Bible scholars suggest that this psalm, while specifically directed to the king of that day and his bride, also alludes prophetically to Christ and His Bride, the Church. This view is supported by the fact that verses 6-7 are quoted in Hebrews 1:8-9 as applicable to Christ. The psalm can be divided into three parts: verses 1-9 concern the royal bridegroom, verses 10-15 describe the bride, and verses 16-17 are a prophetic blessing regarding the generations to come.

Psalm 46

The word “Alamoth,” appearing in the superscription of Psalm 46, can be translated as “young woman,” and probably indicates that the psalm was to be sung by high voices or played upon a high-pitched instrument. Like many other psalms, it is ascribed to the chief Musician for the sons of Korah.

This psalm is the first of three poems dealing with the greatness of God and His sufficiency for current and future circumstances. It is an expression of confidence in God by the inhabitants of Jerusalem following a miraculous deliverance. The context may have been the defeat of the King of Assyria when he besieged Jerusalem and the angel of the Lord killed 185,000 of his soldiers during the night (see 2 Kings 19:35-36). The psalmist described the miraculous delivery in three stanzas, each of which contains the central theme that God is present during times of

trouble and provides safety (stanzas begin at verses 1, 7, and 11). Each stanza ends with the word “selah”—a word with a variety of interpretations. “Selah” occurs seventy-one times in the Psalms and three times in Habakkuk, and is generally thought to indicate a pause to stop and reflect.

Psalm 46 possibly was the inspiration for Martin Luther’s hymn, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.”

Psalm 47

Psalm 47 continues the theme of the greatness and sufficiency of God begun in Psalm 46. Like the previous psalm, it is ascribed to the chief Musician for the sons of Korah. While the tone of the psalm is Davidic, no author is cited.

For the most part, Psalm 47 is considered as being Messianic. It is viewed as a prophetic allusion to the ascension of Christ and His kingly rule “over all the earth” (verse 2).

Psalm 48

Psalm 48 completes the trilogy of three psalms extolling God. The superscription identifies this poem as “A Song and Psalm for the sons of Korah.” Some commentators suggest that, like Psalm 46, this psalm was composed after the deliverance of Jerusalem from Sennacherib’s assault (see 2 Kings 19). Others see it as a prophetic view of Christ’s future kingdom. Both interpretations may be correct; frequently in Scripture a historical event provides the basis for a passage with both immediate and future applications.

This psalm magnifies the greatness of God and Mount Zion, His dwelling place. The psalm opens with a description of who is to be worshipped (God), and where He is to be worshipped (in the “mountain of his holiness”). Verses 2-13 are a description of Zion.

The “ships of Tarshish” alluded to in verse 7 were the largest and most skillfully fashioned seagoing vessels of Old Testament times. They carried trade goods to and from Tarshish (Tartessus) in Spain. In spite of their strong construction, the natural forces commanded by God were far stronger; one instance when the ships of Tarshish were “broken” is recorded in 1 Kings 22:48.

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. How many times in Psalm 47 did the psalmist call on all people to sing praises to God?

2. In Psalm 45, the bride was advised to leave her friends and family to join the king. In what ways might God require Christians to “leave” their friends and family to follow Him, and why?

3. What are some steps we can take to ensure that the next generation will remember what God has done on their behalf?

CONCLUSION

Let us be sure to maintain a close relationship with God. Then when we face problems or perplexing situations, we can turn to Him in confidence, knowing that He will help.

NOTES



Psalms 49:1 through 50:23

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“For he seeth that wise men die, likewise the fool and the brutish person perish, and leave their wealth to others.” (Psalm 49:10)

More than a century has gone by since the luxury passenger liner RMS *Titanic* met its catastrophic end. One of the largest and most luxurious passenger ships of its day, the *Titanic* was considered by many to be unsinkable. However, on April 14, 1912, just four days into its maiden voyage, the ship collided with an iceberg. Within a few short hours, the vessel sank to the ocean floor, and more than 1,500 lives were lost in what has been termed one of the deadliest maritime disasters in history.

The *Titanic*'s passengers were divided into three separate classes, determined not only by the price of their tickets, but also by wealth and social status. The first-class passenger list was a “who’s who” of the rich and famous in 1912. They included members of the British aristocracy, millionaire businessmen, railroad presidents, actresses, politicians, high-ranking military personnel, industrialists, bankers, and professional athletes. Second-class passengers were predominantly leisure tourists. Some were academic scholars or members of the clergy. This group also included the ship’s musicians and many middle class English and American families. The third-class or steerage passengers were of diverse nationalities and ethnic groups, and were primarily people who had left England hoping to start new lives in the United States and Canada. Some were mothers travelling alone with their young children—most going to join their husbands who had already traveled to America to find jobs, and having saved up enough money, had finally sent for their families.

While those who perished in the *Titanic* disaster were diverse in wealth, social class, educational level, and occupation, they had one similarity: they all stepped into eternity empty-handed. Inequalities may exist in this life, but death equalizes all. In today’s focus verse, the psalmist alluded to that fact, saying that the wise man, the fool, and the brutish (or senseless) person all perish in the same manner. Earlier he reflected that the rich man with all his wealth could not buy off death (“redeem his brother”) nor provide a way to “live for ever, and not see corruption” (Psalm 49:7, 9).

One day, each of us will stand before our Maker. The only riches that will be ours in that moment are

the “deposits” we made toward our eternal heritage during our lives here on this earth. Today is a good time to consider our spiritual investments. We can grow in closeness to God as we commune with Him, and accept with praise the rich gifts of love and wisdom that He lavishes upon us. We can look for ways to grow in kindness and thoughtfulness. We can do our best to make life better and happier for the people around us. We can cause our relationships to grow closer and more loving as we exemplify willingness to care about the other person as much as we care about ourselves.

If we make the effort to live daily lives of commitment, love, and service to God, our spiritual investments will grow, and when we pass from this life, we will be welcomed as faithful servants.

BACKGROUND

Psalm 49

Psalm 49 is a wisdom psalm with a dual theme: riches are not sufficient, and death is certain. Though traditionally credited to the “sons of Korah,” this psalm is a proverbial teaching for all people, rather than a song or a prayer. The conclusion reached is that while life often is inequitable, all are equal at death.

The psalm begins with a universal call to consider wisdom (verses 1-4), and the announcement of the psalmist that he will share his wisdom in a parable. The phrase “dark saying” in verse 4 denotes a statement that is profound or hard to understand.

Verses 5-13 point out the folly of those who trust in wealth, for human riches cannot delay death or purchase immortality. In contrast, the godly are assured of triumph “in the morning” of Christ’s return; this theme is developed in verses 14-15. Redemption, though it cannot be purchased by human riches, is purchased by God, who delivers the righteous from “the power of the grave.” The word translated “receive” in verse 15 indicates being taken up into the heavens in the same manner as Enoch was (see Genesis 5:24). This verse is one of the strongest allusions to immortality found in the Book of Psalms.

In verses 16-20, the writer goes back to his initial theme, asserting that the righteous need not fear when the wicked prosper. Death ultimately will strip the proud of their glory, because they cannot take their honor and possessions with them.

Psalm 50

Psalm 50 presents God as the Judge of all the earth, and gives a scathing condemnation of

formalism and hypocrisy in worship. It is possible that this psalm was written for an event held every seventh year during the annual Feast of Tabernacles, when the priests were commanded to read the Law and explain its meaning to the people.

This is the first psalm titled “A Psalm of Asaph.” According to 1 Chronicles 15:16-19, Asaph sounded cymbals before the Ark of the Covenant when it was moved from the house of Obed-edom to Jerusalem. Asaph was appointed by David to be the Chief Musician; his duty was to preside over the choral renditions that were part of the Temple worship (1 Chronicles 16:5). He was not only a musician, but also a celebrated poet (see 2 Chronicles 29:30 and Nehemiah 12:46), and was the author or transcriber of twelve psalms. (Some scholars suggest that he may not have written the psalms himself, but rather, transcribed the words of David.) The Books of Chronicles give other biographical details as well. He was the son of Berechiah, brother to Zechariah, and a descendant of Gershom the son of Levi, so he was identified as a member of the Levites. His descendants were one of the three families given responsibility for music and song in the Temple (1 Chronicles 25:1-9).

In verses 1-6 of Psalm 50, God called all the earth to witness His judgment of His people, Israel. The combination of three of God’s names indicates the awesome nature of God. The command to “gather my saints,” refers to people bound to God through a covenant. The “heavens” were called to declare God’s righteousness, giving witness to the fact that His judgment would be absolutely just.

Retaining the courtroom imagery, verses 7-15 outline God’s complaint against His people: their devotion to Him had degenerated into hypocritical routine. Scholars note the emphasis on inward rather than outward religion in this psalm; it reflected an understanding that became more prominent in the prophetic books of the Old Testament.

In verses 16-21, God addressed the wicked, citing point-by-point indictments against them and condemning them for reciting His law with their lips, but deliberately disobeying Him in their actions. In verses 22-23, the writer summarized the kind of worshiper God is seeking — the one who honors God rightly through genuine worship and obedience.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- I. Book I (1:1 — 41:13)
- II. Book II (42:1 — 72:20)
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- IV. Book IV (90:1 — 106:48)
- V. Book V (107:1 — 150:6)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In Psalm 49, what did the psalmist say that those who trusted in their riches could *not* do?

2. In Psalm 50:14, why do you think the psalmist grouped these two commands together? What relationship exists between them?

3. What will be some indicators in our daily lives if our focus is on spiritual investments rather than worldly riches?

CONCLUSION

There are temporal advantages in acquiring wealth, but those advantages will all disappear when we stand before God at the end of life. For that reason, we should focus on making spiritual investments which will last for all eternity.

NOTES



Psalms 51:1 through 54:7

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

**“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.”
(Psalm 51:1)**

God always responds with mercy and forgiveness to those who come to Him with a truly repentant heart. Walter Janeway, an ex-convict who was once a drug addict, often testified of how God extended mercy to him. “My home was among the dope fiends, saloons, gambling dens, and behind the prison walls,” he would say. “My heart was as hard as stone. It was no trouble for me to hold up a man and take his money. I ran bars and dives all over this country, but I never knew a day or an hour of happiness.”

One day while Walter was awaiting trial in a jail in Spokane, Washington, a woman came into the prison with some Apostolic Faith Gospel papers. Walter asked for one, and in it he read the testimonies of a criminal and a drug addict who had been delivered from sin. “I was trembling like a leaf,” he later related. Although he had never read a chapter in the Bible, hope sprang up in his heart. He told his cellmate, “I have never prayed a prayer in my life, but I am going to pray. If God can save that kind of man, I believe there is hope for me.” He knelt down right there on the steel floor of his cell and poured out his heart to God. The men outside his cell cursed at him, kicked the door, and threw cigarette butts on him, and Walter was tempted to quit, but he prayed, “O God, don’t let me get up until You do something for me!” Pleading for God’s mercy, he stayed on his knees until the answer came and peace flooded his heart.

“That prayer changed my whole life,” he would say. “Before that I had gotten out of jail almost every way a man could. I had been bailed out and paroled out. I had sawed out and shot my way out. But that day I prayed my way out, and I have stayed out.” The next day was his trial, and for the first time in his life, he pleaded guilty. He also gave his right name—something he had not done for years. Amazingly, he was released! A few nights later, he attended a meeting at the Apostolic Faith Church. He told the people there that he had so many crimes to confess that he would likely spend the rest of his life behind bars. However, God went before him. Though Walter confessed and made restitution for a life of crime that stretched from coast to coast, he never

had to serve a day of prison time. On every count, he received full and free forgiveness! For the rest of his life, he rejoiced in the mercy of God who responded to the desperate prayer of a sinner.

Like Walter Janeway, David acknowledged his sin before God and cried out for mercy and forgiveness. In today’s focus verse, he pleaded with God to “blot out my transgressions,” brokenly admitting, “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight” (verse 4).

When a sinner approaches God with a repentant spirit, God is merciful. No sin is too great to be forgiven! Today, no matter what our past, we can thank God for His amazing grace. What peace and assurance we have in knowing that when He forgives, the sins we have committed are blotted out!

BACKGROUND

Psalm 51

Psalm 51 is a penitential prayer for pardon and renewal, offered by David after Nathan the prophet confronted him regarding his sin with Bathsheba. It provides one of the clearest views in the Old Testament of sin and its remedy.

This psalm is addressed entirely to God. It opens with an impassioned plea from a deeply convicted heart. In verses 1-4, David cried out to God for mercy and pardon. He made no attempt to shift responsibility for his actions, but spoke of “my transgressions...mine iniquity...my sin.”

David recognized that his sin was rooted in a sinful nature, and so in verses 5-13 he also petitioned God to cleanse his heart. The word translated *purge* in verse 7 is intense, meaning “un-sin” or “purify from uncleanness.” Under the Law of Moses, hyssop (an herbaceous, aromatic plant with medicinal properties) was used in the ritual of cleansing for leprosy, and for purification after contact with a dead body. The concept of sacrificial blood is also present, as hyssop was used to sprinkle the blood of the Passover lamb before the plague of death (see Exodus 12:22).

David knew that this purging would bring about not only a clean heart, but also a right spirit—one that is fixed and resolute in its allegiance to God, and unmoved by temptation. The word “create” in verse 10 denotes bringing into being what was non-existent before, so David was requesting a radical inward transformation. Verse 11 is the first time the phrase “Holy Spirit” appears in the Bible. In verses 14-19, the psalmist concluded his prayer with a promise that he would teach sinners the way of God, and offer

sacrifices of thanksgiving from a heart made right with God.

Psalm 52

Psalm 52 is a wisdom psalm written by David that presents a sharp contrast between the righteous and the wicked. Composed in context of the events described in 1 Samuel 21:1 through 22:19, David expressed his deep resentment toward Doeg the Edomite, who had betrayed him to Saul. It may also have been directed toward Saul himself, as he fit David’s description of a proud, powerful tyrant.

In verses 1-4, the psalmist portrayed the man who lives for destruction, deceit, and wickedness. The word “mischief” in verse 1 comes from the Hebrew *ra*, a generic term for evil. In verses 5-7, David described the judgment that would fall on one who trusts in riches and wickedness rather than God. He concluded the psalm with a comparison between himself and Doeg. David, though persecuted, was sustained by God and kept as fresh as a green olive tree, and for that reason he determined to praise God’s name forever.

Psalm 53

Apart from a few details and a variation in verse 5, Psalm 53 is nearly identical in content to Psalm 14. This psalm, which was authored by David, may have been modified for some special occasion. It is identified in the title as a Maschil or a teaching psalm. The word *Mahalath* means “suffering” or “sickness,” and is believed to reference a well-known tune to which the words were sung.

This psalm deals with the character and conduct of the atheist, labeling him a “fool” and a “worker of iniquity.” The term “fool” does not mean one who is mentally deficient, but one who is lacking in moral judgment. Verse 5 indicates that the time will come when circumstances will change, and those who have denied the existence of God will be in great fear. David concluded by expressing his heartfelt longing for God’s salvation for His people. This psalm is referenced by Paul in Romans 3:10-12.

Psalm 54

Psalm 54 is a short song of lament, and a call for God to overcome enemies. Also described in its title as a Maschil, it is dedicated to the Chief Musician “on Neginoth,” which was a stringed instrument. The author, David, began in verses 1-3 by beseeching God to save him in a time when he had been betrayed by the men of Ziph (see 1 Samuel 23:19-26; 26:1-4). There is a pause at the end of verse 3, indicated by the word “selah.” Then the author shifted his focus from his enemies to God. In verses 4-5, he acknowledged his dependence upon God. In the final two verses, anticipating the answer to his prayers, David made a commitment to worship from his heart.

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. In Psalm 51:17, what types of sacrifices did David say God would not despise?

2. In Psalm 51:12, David asked God to restore to him the joy of salvation. What is implied by the word “restore”?

3. Psalm 54 is a call for God to help in a time of hurt and betrayal. What principles can we learn from this psalm regarding how to handle a situation of that nature?

CONCLUSION

God is unfailingly merciful and forgiving when a sinner approaches Him with a contrite and repentant heart.

NOTES



Psalms 55:1 through 57:11

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

**“What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.”
(Psalm 56:3)**

One evening when my daughter was young, she went to spend the night at her cousin’s house. She told me later that she had a good time until she got into bed and the lights were turned out. When the room went dark, she became afraid. She knew to pray, so she closed her eyes and asked God to help her not to be afraid. When she opened her eyes, the room was still dark, but the words of our focus verse were illuminated on the wall beside the bed: “What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.” She had not known that her cousin had previously put that verse up on the wall using glow-in-the-dark letters. As soon as my daughter read the verse, she knew that God had heard her prayer and was with her, and she was able to fall asleep in peace. When she came home and told me about the incident, I too felt at peace, because I knew God would be with my daughter when I couldn’t be.

Years later, as a college student, my daughter made plans to spend four months of her junior year in Mexico as an exchange student. Though I knew God would be with her, I had many concerns about her living so far away from home. I prayed and told the Lord my apprehensions that my daughter would be housed with people who were opposed to the Gospel and that she would not have a private place to pray. I was also worried that someone in the household might harm her, or that the house would not be secure from intruders.

My daughter was placed with a single woman who had converted to Christianity three years earlier. She was given her own bedroom and bathroom, and the house she stayed in was surrounded by a high iron gate that was always kept locked.

Another of my concerns was that my daughter would get homesick. I told the Lord that I hoped some of the food would be familiar to her. She called me on her first day and said that for breakfast, her host mom had served oatmeal, fruit, and eggs—exactly what she ate at home each morning!

The Lord specifically answered each of my concerns, because He cares about me. He watched over my daughter, because He cares about her. When we are afraid, our natural inclination toward apprehension can be stilled as we put our trust in God. We can find peace and security in the knowledge that He is able and eager to help us.

BACKGROUND

Psalm 55

Psalm 55 is designated as an instructional song (a Maschil) to be played by the “stringed instruments” (Neginoth). David wrote this psalm of lament during the period of time when his son, Absalom, was attempting to take his throne. His pain was profound as the “terrors of death” closed in around him and he was surrounded by violence and treachery. He had been betrayed by a confidant and fellow-worshiper of God (verses 12-14). This was likely Ahithophel, David’s trusted counselor, who secretly advised Absalom regarding David’s overthrow (see 2 Samuel 15:12). The psalmist asked God to “divide their tongues” (verse 9), or cause confusion in his enemy’s counsels of war. According to 2 Samuel 17:14, God sent Hushai to give opposing advice, and this became Absalom’s undoing.

In spite of his distressing situation, the psalmist concluded the psalm by asserting his confidence in God. In verse 22, the Hebrew word translated *burden* literally means “portion.” David knew that his portion—the events that had befallen him—had been assigned by God. Just as a well-rooted tree remains stable in spite of being assaulted by the wind, David had confidence that God would never “suffer” (or allow) the righteous to be overcome by circumstances.

Psalm 56

According to its superscription, Psalm 56 is the second “golden psalm” of David (the first is Psalm 16, which has a similar content). It is titled, “The silent dove in foreign places” (*Jonath-elem-rechokim*). This title could refer either to a melody to which the psalm was sung or to the content of the psalm. Psalm 56 was written when David fled from King Saul to the refuge of Achish, the King of Gath, only to find himself also in danger there (1 Samuel 21:10-15).

The psalm divides naturally into two parts. Verses 1-7 describe the psalmist’s trouble. As in many of the psalms of lament, verse 1 is a plea for God’s mercy. David’s complaint that his enemies attempted daily to “swallow me up” alludes to his enemies’ continual oppression. His question in verse 7, “Shall they escape by iniquity?” means “Shall they get away with their evil?”

Verses 8-13 convey the psalmist’s trust in God. In verse 8 he stated that God “telles” (knows) his “wanderings”—a word which also could be translated as “evidence of grief” or “lamentation.” His request for God to “put thou my tears into thy bottle”



Psalms 58:1 through 60:12

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God: defend me from them that rise up against me. Deliver me from the workers of iniquity, and save me from bloody men.” (Psalm 59:1-2)

John G. Paton (1824-1907) was a Scottish missionary. In 1858, he and his young wife sailed to Tanna, an island in the New Hebrides that was inhabited by cannibals. Surrounded by violence and fierce opposition to his message, Paton found in God the antidote to fear. He had a deep assurance that his life would be preserved until his work on earth was accomplished.

One night around 10:00 o'clock, Paton's faithful little dog, Clutha, jumped on him and woke him up. Looking out the window, he saw that the mission house was surrounded by cannibals, some with blazing torches and the rest armed with various weapons. As he watched, they set fire to the nearby church and the reed fence which connected the church to their dwelling. Paton realized that in a matter of moments their house, too, would be in flames.

Knowing that infuriated men were poised to kill them as soon as they attempted to escape, the missionaries knelt in prayer and committed themselves to God. Then Paton rushed outside to cut down the reed fence. Instantly he was surrounded by a company of savages who raised their clubs and screamed, “Kill him! Kill him!”

At that very moment, a roaring sound came from the south and a fierce wind began to blow. If the wind had come from the north, the flames from the church would have quickly engulfed the mission house. However, the wind blew from the opposite direction. In seconds, a torrential rain began falling. Terrified, the savages fled, shouting: “This is Jehovah's rain! Truly their God is fighting for them!”

The fright of the natives was short-lived. The storm abated, and early the next morning, the violent men returned to finish what they had begun the night before. With wild shrieks they approached the mission house. God was still on the scene, though, and suddenly amid the rising crescendo of threatening shrieks, the missionaries heard the natives yell, “Sail O! Sail O!” A vessel was sailing into the harbor just when all hope seemed lost! The missionaries were soon rescued and taken to another island.

Like John Paton and his wife, David knew what it was to suffer from the attacks of ruthless enemies

who were determined to take his life. In today's focus verses, the psalmist cried out for deliverance, urgently imploring God to rescue him from peril. David knew that he was not being assailed because of sin, but because his enemies had hearts full of violence. He was also confident that God would be his defense and would preserve him from the assault of those who rose up against him.

We live in an era in which crime and violence are far too common. Our world is full of trouble, and at times we may feel vulnerable. However, like John Paton and the psalmist David, we can depend upon God for protection and deliverance. We have the assurance of His Word that He never forsakes His own!

BACKGROUND

Psalm 58

Psalm 58 is classified as an imprecatory psalm (psalms that invoke judgment, calamity, or curses, upon one's enemies or the enemies of God), primarily due to the seven-fold denunciation of unjust judges found in verses 6-9. David's bold and indignant outcry against judicial corruption was not based upon wrong done to him personally, but upon the fact that those with governing authority were failing to administer justice to the people or serve righteously. The psalm includes a call for a public demonstration of God's righteous judgment.

The words *Al-taschith* and *Michtam* of David could be translated “Destroy not” and “A golden psalm” of David. The setting for this psalm is not identified, but Bible scholars suggest that it relates to some event which occurred during the time of Absalom's rebellion.

While the opening verse addresses the congregation, the psalmist was alluding to unjust judges. The word “congregation” could also be translated “silent ones,” and may have initially meant “gods” or “mighty ones.” The “sons of men” mentioned in verse 1 was another way of referring to “human beings.” David identified the evildoers as those who purported to speak and judge righteously, while devising wicked plots in their hearts and following through with wicked actions.

In verses 6-9, David revealed the depth of his contempt for the judges in a series of imprecations against them which are presented in vivid, figurative language. The request for God to “break their teeth” (verse 6) was a plea for God to render the wicked judiciary powerless. He continued to call for the wrath of God to be poured out upon them in six further

depictions of God’s righteous intervention. The phrase “before your pots can feel the thorns” meant that judgment would be poured out before the evildoers could kindle a fire of green wood beneath their celebratory meal.

The psalmist concluded with an affirmation that the righteous will rejoice when divine justice prevails and the wicked judges are condemned.

Psalm 59

Psalm 59 is the final psalm in a trilogy which bear the same title: “To the chief Musician, Al-taschitith, Michtam of David.” Classified as a lament, it recounts David’s prayer during the incident recorded in 1 Samuel 19:11-17, in which King Saul twice sent men to watch his house during the night so they could seize and kill him in the morning.

The theme of this psalm, like many others, is a cry for deliverance. In verse 3, the psalmist expressed his confidence that his oppressors were not instruments of divine judgment, as he knew that he had not transgressed against God. The refrain, “God is my defense” (verses 9 and 17) points to David’s faith—a faith that, though tested, overcame fear.

David compared Saul’s cohorts to the packs of wild dogs who prowled about Eastern cities of that day. The statement that “they belch out with their mouth” (verse 7) indicated that these evil men poured forth words of venom. The psalmist’s unusual request, “Slay them not, lest my people forget” (verse 11), meant that David did not want the wicked to be destroyed immediately; he seemingly feared that their quick destruction might allow the people to forget God’s judgment.

Expressing confidence that God would indeed deliver, David concluded the psalm with a promise to “sing of thy power...of thy mercy in the morning” (verse 16).

Psalm 60

Psalm 60 bears the second longest superscription of all the psalms; only that of Psalm 18 is longer. The phrase *Shushan-eduth* means “Lily of the Testimony” and likely refers to a familiar tune to which the psalm was to be sung. As a Michtam or teaching psalm, the words were intended to be preserved in Israel’s memory. Verses 5-12 of Psalm 60 are repeated in Psalm 108:6-13.

This psalm was written during a time of war; descriptions in 2 Samuel 8:13-14, 1 Kings 11:15-16, and 1 Chronicles 18:12-13 provide the historical setting. These passages reveal that David wrote this psalm as Israel was invaded from the south by the Edomites while he and his army were fighting in the north against the Ammonites and Syrians. While David felt that the calamity Israel faced was the result of God’s displeasure with them, he expressed his desire to rally around God’s banner. The fierce battle with

the army of Edom, which occurred near the southern end of the Dead Sea, ended with a decisive victory for Israel, and the Edomites never recovered from their defeat.

Verses 6-8 declare God’s intention toward the nations involved in the conflict. Gilead, Manasseh, Ephraim, and Judah, (mentioned in verse 7), are the areas that together comprised the nation of Israel. Moab, Edom, and Philistia (verse 8) were neighboring countries which were hostile to God’s people. The phrase “Moab is my washpot” refers to the custom of slaves washing the feet of the master, and thus indicated demeaning humiliation. Similarly, the statement “Over Edom will I cast out my shoe,” related to being treated as a slave. The “strong city” of verse 9 was possibly a reference to the hidden stronghold of Sela in Moab, known in modern Jordan as Petra.

The psalm ends with an assertion that alliances with other nations would not ensure success, but God would bring victory to those who put their trust in Him.

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. What reassurance does Psalm 58:9-11 offer the righteous?

2. Why should we obey the Lord even when we do not see any short-term advantages in doing so?

3. How can we use what the psalmist went through to help us live a victorious Christian life today so we will not have regrets about our choices?

CONCLUSION

We can have confidence that God is able to protect and deliver us, no matter how troubling our immediate circumstances!



Psalms 61:1 through 64:10

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I.” (Psalm 61:2)

Throughout history, people have fought being overwhelmed by fear. The ancient Greek tragedian Sophocles (497-405 B.C.) wrote, “To him who is in fear, everything rustles.” In the 1700s, the Irish statesman Edmund Burke noted, “No passion so effectively robs the mind of its powers of acting and reasoning as fear.” Ferdinand Foch, Commander in Chief of the Allied Armies during World War I, once declared, “None but a coward dares to boast that he has never known fear.” On March 4, 1933, at the height of the Great Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt stated, “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”

Dealing with fear is one of the toughest problems humans face, partially because there are so many types of fear. Some people struggle with a fear of death, serious illness, or injury. Others fear being separated from people they love, or of losing control. There is fear of commitment, of failure, of rejection, or of job loss. The list could go on and on!

Whatever type of fear threatens to overwhelm us, our success in dealing with it depends upon the approach we take. Throughout the Bible, God frequently told people, “Fear not.” In fact, that command (or similar phrases such as “do not be afraid”) occurs more than one hundred times in Scripture! God never commands us to do something we are incapable of doing. He either equips us to follow through in obedience, or steps in to help us accomplish His directive.

So, how do we go about overcoming fear? We find the answer in today’s focus verse. When the psalmist’s life was in danger and his heart was overwhelmed, he turned to “the rock that is higher than I”—the living God himself. Like David, we can deal with fear by acknowledging that it is too strong for us to handle on our own. We must turn our concerns and apprehensions over to God, remembering that He is all-powerful, all-knowing, and always in control. Not only that, He knows the future, and He wants what is best for us.

Fear-inducing circumstances will come to each of us at some point in life. We may feel vulnerable and overwhelmed, but we must remember that God is our lifelong Protector. He has promised never to abandon

or forsake us. When we are secure in His love and salvation, we can be assured that nothing will come our way that He has not allowed. In Him we will find help to triumph over fear!

BACKGROUND

Psalm 61

Psalm 61 is the prayer of a banished ruler. The most probable historical setting is 2 Samuel 17:27, when David fled for refuge to Mahanaim from his rebellious son, Absalom. The psalm is identified by commentators as either a personal lament (because of its plea to God for security and assurance) or a royal psalm (based on the prayer for the king found in verses 6-7). The theme of Psalm 61 is trust in God’s strength and protection. It is divided into two parts, which are separated by the word “selah.” The first section (verses 1-4) contains an opening prayer and an avowal of trust in God. In verses 5-8, David expressed confidence that God had heard his vows, and concluded with an affirmation of his commitment.

Psalm 62

The theme for Psalm 62, a song of trust, is that God is a sure refuge in times of trouble. The title indicates it was given to the Jeduthun family to perform (see 1 Chronicles 25). Psalm 39 is the first psalm which identifies Jeduthun; he is also referenced in the superscriptions to Psalms 77 and 89. (In Psalm 89 he is identified as Ethan the Ezrahite; his name was changed from Heman after the appointments at Gibeon which are described in 1 Chronicles 16).

While verse 4 indicates that Psalm 62 was written during a period when David was threatened by enemies who used lies and deception, no specific setting is given. The phrase translated “imagine mischief” (verse 3) literally means “to rush upon” as in an attack or assault. In verse 4, the verb “curse” may have a demonic or magical connotation, implying a hex or spell. Yet the last verses of the psalm indicate that David knew God could defend against all of these.

Psalm 63

David wrote Psalm 63 while in the wilderness of Judah. A hymn-type poem, it is entirely addressed to God rather than being *about* Him. The psalmist began by describing his longing for God, expressed his determination to worship Him, pondered God’s care, and concluded with an expression of confidence in God’s eventual victory. The theme is David’s sure knowledge that God had been his “help” and

protection—an assurance that brought deep spiritual satisfaction. Historical records indicate that early church leaders decreed no day should pass without the public singing of this psalm.

Psalm 64

The theme of Psalm 64 is divine judgment of the wicked. It is a personal lament against the psalmist's enemies, whose primary form of opposition was malicious slander. There are two possibilities as to setting: Doeg's criticism of David which is described in 1 Samuel 22, or Ahithophel's evil counsel, as related in 2 Samuel chapters 15-17.

This psalm follows the typical pattern of a song of lament. It opens with a complaint or cry to God, describes the "workers of iniquity" who were aligned against the psalmist and the methods they employed, reflects upon the response of the righteous, and closes with a confident prediction of God's avenging.

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. In Psalm 61:3-4, what are three ways David described God which alluded to His protection?

2. Why do you think the psalmist used the word "thirst" in Psalm 63 to describe his longing for God?

3. When trouble comes, what are some steps we can take to make sure our faith and trust are anchored in God?

CONCLUSION

When we face circumstances which could cause fear, we can follow the example of David and place our trust in God.

NOTES



Psalms 65:1 through 66:20

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

**“Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.”
(Psalm 66:16)**

When I was young, my family went to a church where I learned about Jesus and became familiar with simple Bible stories. However, in high school I stopped attending church, not seeing any particular value in religion. For quite a number of years I had nothing to do with God.

In my thirties, I was invited to an Apostolic Faith Church service. Thankfully, I didn’t brush the invitation aside, because during that service I heard people stand up and share what God had done in their lives. I had never heard a testimony before, and the fact that people could have a real connection with God impressed me. I remember thinking, There is an aspect of religion I had no idea existed! The testimonies caused me to want to find out more.

Although I didn’t immediately comprehend salvation, in time God saved me. Then I truly understood what those who testified were talking about. Looking back at my childhood church attendance, it became clear that while I had obtained some knowledge *about* God in my early years, I had never experienced a real connection *with* God. A change in one’s heart is critical, and salvation makes that change.

The personal accounts I heard given in that first service, as well as in the many services I have attended since, exemplify the message of today’s focus verse. Testimonies are declarations of what God has done for us personally. There is great potential in these declarations! Our words can draw others toward God and encourage fellow believers.

As Christians, we are instructed to witness to others. As we do our best to faithfully communicate what God has done in our hearts and lives, God will bless us for our obedience. And who knows, our words may be the tool that God uses to draw another soul to Himself!

BACKGROUND

Psalm 65

Psalm 65 is a composition of David expressing worship and adoration. The superscription indicates that it was both a psalm (in Hebrew, a *mizmor*) and a song (*shir*); while the words are similar in meaning, the word *mizmor* likely indicates a musical

accompaniment. Addressed to the Chief Musician, this psalm was probably sung during harvest time.

The theme of Psalm 65 is gratitude to God. In the first section (verses 1-4), David highlighted the public worship of God in Sion (a variant spelling of Zion) and in His “holy temple.” David pointed ahead to the provision of atonement in his statement that “thou shalt purge them [our transgressions] away” (verse 3). In the next section, David spoke of God’s awesome deeds in nature and in all the nations (verses 5-8). In the last portion of the psalm (verses 9-13), David told of God’s provision for a bountiful harvest.

Psalm 66

Psalm 66 issues a call for all to worship God for His deliverance at the time of the exodus from Egypt, and for His more recent provisions. Like Psalm 65, it is addressed to the Chief Musician and is designated as both a psalm and a song, but in this case no author is named.

This psalm of thanksgiving has two clear sections; the division is indicated at verse 13 by a change of pronoun from the plural to the singular. This suggests that the first section was a national liturgy (relating to public or corporate worship), while the second section reflected the author’s personal devotion to God.

The statement in verse 4, “All the earth shall worship thee,” is a prophetic allusion to God’s final triumph over His enemies and the uniting of all people in worship of Him. The word “nations” in verse 7 is a translation of the Hebrew word *goyim*, and refers to the Gentiles.

In the second section of the psalm (verses 13-20), the specific offerings named in verse 15 were all acceptable peace offerings—a type of sacrifice that denoted thanksgiving and love for God (see Leviticus 3:1-17). The author’s public testimony of “what he hath done for my soul” (verse 16) is summarized in his closing praise for answered prayer.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- I. Book I (1:1 — 41:13)
- II. Book II (42:1 — 72:20)
- III. Book III (73:1 — 89:52)
- IV. Book IV (90:1 — 106:48)
- V. Book V (107:1 — 150:6)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What descriptive phrase did David use regarding God in the opening verses of Psalm 65? Why do you think this aspect of God was significant to David?



Psalms 67:1 through 68:35

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us; Selah. That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations.” (Psalm 67:1-2)

One of the great precepts of Scripture is that all peoples of the world must be told of the true and living God. As suggested by our focus verses, when God blesses us and causes His “face to shine upon us,” a desire to share the good news springs up in our hearts. Through the outreach efforts of those who have experienced God’s personal touch in their lives, souls are reached one by one and God’s “saving health” (also translated “salvation”) is declared among the nations.

The expansion of the Apostolic Faith work in Africa is a great example of this. Around 1915, a missionary named Frank Hein received Gospel tracts from the church headquarters while living in Nigeria. Upon returning to America, he came to visit the people who published those tracts. He loved what he found, and God called him to stay and work with us. He translated our literature into the language of northern Nigeria, and many thousands of tracts were sent to that region of Africa.

A single tract fell into the hands of a Christian man named Peter van der Puije in Gold Coast (now Ghana), and he wrote to the Portland headquarters. As a result of Gospel literature sent him, he sought and received sanctification and the baptism of the Holy Ghost, and began establishing Apostolic Faith churches in his area. In 1948, he attended the Portland camp meeting and presented the needs of his people, pleading for someone to come and help them understand God’s ways more perfectly.

George Hughes heard Brother van der Puije’s impassioned plea, and during that 1948 camp meeting he noted in his diary, “Volunteered for service in Africa—or anywhere in the world.” God saw the desire of Brother Hughes’ heart to tell others, and opened the door for him to make a seven-month trip to Africa later that same year. Holding meetings in mud-walled huts, thatch-roofed churches, in a village chief’s home, or wherever an opportunity arose, Brother Hughes shared the Gospel story, and souls were saved. He wrote home, “Oh, that we had a thousand lives, each one of us, that we could lay them at the Lord’s feet to serve Him where the need is the greatest!”

Together, Brother Hughes and Brother van der Puije contacted many in a several-hundred-mile radius who had previously corresponded with our headquarters church. One of those visited was Timothy Oshokoya, who lived in Lagos, Nigeria. Brother Oshokoya had received Apostolic Faith literature some years earlier and found in those tracts and papers the answer to the longings of his heart for holiness and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. He began to distribute our literature and soon established a place of worship.

Brother Oshokoya visited the Portland camp meeting in 1951 and 1956. Upon returning home after his second trip, the vision of “Africa for Christ” began to grow in his heart, and the work in Nigeria expanded. Soon, a printing plant was built, and construction begun on a tabernacle.

In our focus verses, the psalmist looked across the years and envisioned the Gospel going throughout the world. Frank Hein, Peter van der Puije, George Hughes, and Timothy Oshokoya did their parts. As a result of their efforts, and the efforts of those who followed them, today there are many hundreds of Apostolic Faith churches in that part of Africa.

Has God caused His face to shine upon you? Has He forgiven your sins and blessed you with salvation? If so, you have a privilege and a responsibility to reach out to others.

BACKGROUND

Psalm 67

Psalm 67, meant to be played on *neginoth* or “the stringed instruments,” was written by an unknown author, and is an elaboration of a blessing recorded in Numbers 6:22-27. The original blessing was dictated by God to be pronounced by the priests over the Israelites signifying that they belonged to Him. It contains three lines invoking the following blessings: that God would bless and keep the Israelites, that He would grant favor and grace to them, and that He would acknowledge them and give them peace. Some scholars suggest this psalm was a harvest prayer that was presented at a major feast.

This psalm is separated into three parts by a simple chorus (verses 3, 5) of “let all the people [of the earth] praise thee.” The first section, verses 1-2, asks that God be merciful, bless, and grant favor to Israel, so that the surrounding nations would see His goodness and come to know His “saving health” (or salvation). The second part (verse 4) looks to the future, calling on all the nations of the earth to be

glad that when they submit to God, He will rule them fairly, bringing them spiritual and political peace. The final portion of the psalm, verses 6-7, summarizes that the whole world will come to know God through Israel, so the land and people will be blessed and will prosper.

Psalms 68

Psalms 68 was written by David as a song, likely to be sung in the processional which accompanied the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem from the house of Obed-edom (2 Samuel 6:12). Throughout the psalm, David interspersed descriptions of a procession approaching Jerusalem with bursts of praise, reflections on Israel’s past, and references to future events.

David began the psalm by recalling the words Moses spoke in the wilderness the first time the Ark was taken up by the priests and followed by the Israelites (Numbers 10:35). In verses 4-6, he erupted in praise for Jehovah (“JAH”), who is above all (He “rideth upon the heavens”). Then, quoting from the victory song of Deborah recorded in Judges 5:4-5, David reflected in the next four verses on how God brought them on their journey through the wilderness, His appearing to them at Mt. Sinai, and His abundant provision for their needs.

When they entered the Promised Land, God gave a battle cry, and women (the word “company” in verse 11 is feminine) such as Deborah, declared it. Thus, when the kings of Canaan fled, the women shared in the spoils. The spoils were so great that those who stayed behind in the kitchen (“among the pots” in verse 13) were arrayed like doves with wings of silver and feathers of gold. The land, too, glistened (either was clean or covered in jewels) like the snow on Mt. Salmon, which was a hill near Shechem according to Judges 9:48.

In verses 15-17, David pictured the processional approaching the hill of Jerusalem. Bashan was the mountainous area northeast of Galilee, which includes Mount Hermon. The psalmist paralleled the Ark’s ascent with Jesus’ ascension into Heaven after conquering death and captivity (or sin). According to verses 24-29, as the Ark moved toward the city it was surrounded by singers, musicians, and timbrel (tambourine) players. Representatives of the twelve tribes of Israel followed the Ark, with Benjamin going first as the tribe of Saul, Israel’s first king. Judah went second as the tribe of Israel’s second king (David) and the future Messiah. Zebulun and Naphtali were last, as the tribes located furthest from the Tabernacle.

In Psalm 68:19, the phrase “daily loadeth us with benefits” literally means “day by day He bears us up” or “day by day He carries us.” A New Testament parallel denoting God’s sustaining power is found in 1 Peter 5:7, “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.”

In verses 30-35, David foretold that when God establishes His reign at Jerusalem, all nations will bring gifts and pay tribute. These will include Egypt (the “spearmen,” or crocodiles), Assyria (the “bulls” among the weaker “calves”), and Ethiopia. David concluded by calling on all nations to praise God.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to Psalm 68:5-6, who can count on God for help?

2. In Psalm 68:11-12, those who stayed behind during battle shared in the spoils. In what ways might this be paralleled in the work of the Lord today?

3. How did you hear the Gospel? What are some ways you can spread the Good News to those around you?

CONCLUSION

As recipients of God’s abundant mercy, we have a responsibility to make known His salvation among all the nations of the world.

NOTES



Psalms 69:1 through 70:5

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Make haste, O God, to deliver me; make haste to help me, O LORD.” (Psalm 70:1)

In the United States, 911 is the number to call in case of emergency. Doing so connects the caller to an emergency-response system designed to quickly dispatch police, fire, or medical assistance to the scene.

The system of providing an easy-to-remember, national number for emergencies was implemented in 1967 when Congress legislated 911 as the national emergency number. The first-ever 911 call was placed at 2 p.m., on Friday, February 16, 1968 by Alabama Speaker of the House, Rankin Fite, from the Haleyville City Hall to U.S. Representative Tom Bevill at the city’s police station.

Since that day, much publicity and training has been invested in an effort to ensure that people nationwide know how to summon help when emergencies occur. Even very young children are taught this easy, three-digit number. Adults are reminded in management seminars, emergency training sessions, and various other venues that calling 911 should be an immediate step in any crisis situation. In fact, the system has been so effective that a call to any *other* number in search of emergency assistance is likely to be fruitless or frustrating at best, and at worst, could result in loss of life.

As effective as the 911 system has been, our focus verse describes a far more immediate and effective way to summon help from a capable Source when an emergency arises. God is not only instantly available when we cry out to Him, but He is infinitely powerful—more than able to offer help and deliverance, no matter what we are facing.

David, the author of this psalm, was a man who had experienced many crises in his lifetime. He knew what it was to face desperate circumstances, to live in mortal danger, and to feel overwhelmed by fear. Many times he cried out to his divine “emergency-response” Provider, and never once did God fail to answer him. When he wrote this psalm, he was oppressed by enemies who apparently were assailing him with cruel persecution and mockery. Fearing that he might be overwhelmed by their attacks, he cried out once again for God to deliver him. It is notable that he never questioned God’s ability to intervene. His primary plea was that God would “make haste.”

Whether the challenges we face are physical, emotional, or spiritual, we need never hesitate to call

out to God. He stands ready to come to our assistance, just as He did for David.

BACKGROUND

Psalms 69 and 70 were compiled for Tabernacle worship, and were part of Book II, the subdivided portion of the Book of Psalms often referred to as the “Exodus Book.”

Psalm 69

Traditionally ascribed to David, the authorship of Psalm 69 is verified in Romans 11:9-10, where the Apostle Paul quoted verses 22 and 23 and indicated they were spoken by David. Psalm 69 is a cry of distress which describes the psalmist’s unmerited suffering at the hand of his enemies. While David’s agony of spirit was personal, his words also had Messianic implications. There are several New Testament allusions to the psalm (compare verse 4 with John 15:25, and verse 25 with Matthew 23:38). With the exception of Psalm 22, Psalm 69 is the psalm most often quoted in the New Testament.

Like Psalm 45, this psalm is dedicated to the “chief Musician.” The phrase “upon Shoshannim” either indicates that the song was to be sung to the tune of a song titled “Lilies” or played on a lily-shaped instrument. There is no clear internal indicator of the precise time frame in which the psalm was written; several periods in David’s life could correspond with the sentiments expressed.

In this plaintive song, David pleaded for divine deliverance from the hands of his enemies, using the metaphor of rising waters in the first two verses to portray his desperate sense of peril. In verses 5-6, David made it clear that his concern was not only personal, but also for those who might have been impacted by his “foolishness” or lack of wisdom. His statement in verse 10 that when he wept and chastened his soul with fasting “that was to my reproach” indicates his adversaries had jeered at him for his sorrow and for donning sackcloth, the traditional symbol of deep mourning. David again employed the metaphor of water in verses 14-15 to describe his sense of being overcome by those who hated him.

In verses 21-28, one of the strongest imprecatory passages in the Word of God, David pleaded for the justice of divine punishment upon his adversaries. While verse 21 may have inferred that oppression had rendered David’s food and drink unpalatable, it was also a Messianic reference to Jesus, alluding to the

vinegar mixed with gall that was offered to Christ as He hung on the Cross (Matthew 27:34).

Starting with verse 29, the psalmist's tone moderated and he began to incorporate thankfulness and praise into his song. The final three verses are a doxology of praise and confidence in God. Most scholars deem verses 35-36 as a reference to the expansion of Jerusalem and Israel during the future Millennial Kingdom, culminating in the finality of God's blessings and prosperity on His chosen people, the Jews.

Psalm 70

Psalm 70 was also ascribed to David and was a replication of the last five verses of Psalm 40, with slight variations. The superscription "to bring to remembrance" may have alluded to a memorial of some specific event. Commentators agree that Psalm 40 was likely the original work, and that the verses in this psalm were separated out for liturgical usage in the Temple worship. The tone of this psalm conveys desperate urgency, as David pleaded for speedy deliverance and retribution against his enemies.

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. In Psalm 69:1-3, what are some of the descriptive words and phrases David used to indicate his distress?

2. According to Psalm 69:8, who rejected and persecuted David? Why would the rejection of these individuals be so hurtful?

3. What actions did David take in these psalms that we could also take when facing times of crisis?

CONCLUSION

A child of God can rest in the knowledge that the personal and sovereign God is near and will unfailingly respond to his prayer.

NOTES



Psalms 71:1 through 72:20

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth.” (Psalm 71:9)

We are blessed in our church family to have many elderly folks who daily are proving God’s nearness and provision in “the time of old age.” As I considered the words of our focus verse, my mind went to my aunt, Ruth Ashwell.

Auntie was saved when she was a girl of just seventeen years. At the age of twenty-three, God called her to full-time service for Him, and she began working at the Apostolic Faith headquarters office. In 1953, after the death of her cousin, George Hughes, she was asked to assume the responsibility of directing the Africa correspondence department, and faithfully labored in that position for more than forty years. Although she had no birth children, she was a spiritual “mother” to many in Africa, where her loving and encouraging letters played a vital role in the growth of the Apostolic Faith work there.

Since Auntie’s husband, Lloyd, predeceased her, her nieces and nephews watched out for her as her physical health and mental acuity began to decline. God opened a way for Auntie to be able to stay in her own home. When her condition necessitated live-in help, we were able to find a lovely lady who moved into a vacant bedroom there and gently cared for Aunt Ruth’s personal needs, made sure she had nourishing meals, and generally watched over her. When Auntie broke her hip, surgery and rehabilitation in a care facility was necessary. While she was there, a fire destroyed her home—but she was safe and sound! Her caregiver was able to exit the house when the fire was discovered, but it would have been a challenge to get Auntie out had she been there. Aunt Ruth’s physical condition deteriorated quickly as a result of her fall, and we never had to tell her that her home of many years had been consumed by a fire. She went home to Heaven before that was necessary.

Just a few short months before the fire, one nephew had felt led to encourage my aunt to update her homeowner’s insurance—so the house and its contents were fully covered. We simply made a list of contents as best we could remember. The insurance company even sent people to look through the rubble after the fire to try to inventory the items lost. Auntie had left her estate to the church, and we knew she would be thrilled that, because of the fire, the church

received considerably more than it would have if we had disposed of her belongings in the normal way.

In the years since Aunt Ruth passed away, my cousins and I have often reminisced about how beautifully God took care of the details of her situation in the closing months of her earthly life. We had firsthand proof of the fact that God is good, and ever mindful of the needs and circumstances surrounding His children. When physical strength wanes, He is there to support. When needs arise, He provides. When problems arise, He always has a solution.

What a wonderful blessing when those who are well advanced in years can look back upon their past with an assurance that they have served God to the best of their ability and that, in spite of the challenges of aging, God has been with them each step of the way! If we hold fast to our purpose to serve Him, some day that can be our testimony as well.

BACKGROUND

These two psalms conclude Book II of Psalms, often referred to as the “Exodus Book.”

Psalm 71

No inscription or author for Psalm 71 is recorded, but this psalm clearly expresses the recollections and prayers of an aged man who had experienced God’s sustaining help in years gone by, and who was entreating God for continuing help in the twilight of life. This psalm is classified as an individual lament.

In the first section of the psalm, verses 1-8, the psalmist combined a cry to God with an affirmation of trust and a recollection of how God had been a strong refuge in all of his life. The Hebrew word translated *confusion* in verse 1 has a literal meaning of “pale,” and implies “shame, disappointment, or delay.” The word “wonder” in verse 7 indicates a supernatural display of divine power that may inspire terror or worship, and is often associated with signs that reveal God’s purposes. The author acknowledged the perils of advancing years (verses 9-16), and related that his enemies claimed his failing physical strength proved God had forsaken him. He prayed that God would “let them be confounded [be ashamed when God refuted their suppositions] and consumed [destroyed].” He concluded by expressing his confidence in the One who had taught him from his youth and was now the hope of his old age (verses 17-24).

Psalm 72

Psalm 72 is traditionally ascribed to Solomon, though not all scholars concur on its authorship. Some believe that David may have uttered this psalm on his deathbed as a prayer for Solomon’s reign. While it is set in the context of ceremonies surrounding a monarchy, and summarizes an ideal kingship, no earthly human could have realized all its aspirations. This substantiates a prophetic interpretation of the psalm, and coincides with the perspective that its implications are Messianic.

In the opening call for God to “give the king thy judgments,” the word translated *judgments* means “statutes” or “ordinances,” and refers to the Torah or law which the King (Jesus) was to uphold. The description of the extent of the King’s dominion is given in verses 7-11. The King’s redemptive power is described in verses 12-14 and the honor that will be given Him in verses 15-17.

“Amen, and Amen” (verse 19) could be translated as a heartfelt declaration of “So be it!” Many believe that verse 20 indicates that this was David’s final psalm, and that later psalms attributed to him were written at an earlier time. Since each of the books within the Book of Psalms closes with a doxology, others view these verses as a doxology (a short, concluding hymn of praise) for Book II.

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. What word picture did the psalmist use in Psalm 71:3 to portray the fact that God is a secure place of refuge?

2. Since the author of Psalm 71 had trusted God from his youth, why do you think he cried unto God to be near him and “make haste” to help him?

3. Why is it so important to maintain our purpose to show “thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come” (Psalm 71:18)? What are some ways we can do that?

CONCLUSION

Advancing years may curtail our ability to take as active a role in God’s service as we once did. However, reflecting upon God’s provision in the past will encourage us to keep trusting that He will be with us each step of our journey on earth.

NOTES



Psalms 73:1 through 74:23

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all thy works.” (Psalm 73:28)

In the summer of 1949, Reverend Billy Graham had a well-loved and respected preaching partner who started doubting the authority of the Scriptures. This man told Reverend Graham that the evangelist was fifty years out-of-date, and that informed scholars no longer accepted the Bible as being inspired by God. As a result, Reverend Graham began wondering if the Bible really could be trusted completely. He searched the Scriptures and pondered the attitude of Christ regarding them, realizing that never once did Christ indicate doubt as to their veracity in any way. Still, the questions lingered. At last Reverend Graham concluded that he had to know if he could trust the Bible or he could not go on preaching.

One evening he took a walk in the moonlight near the San Bernardo Mountains. Coming to a private woodsy area, he dropped to his knees with his Bible open in front of him. There, at his makeshift altar, he poured out all his frustrations and doubts to God. As he prayed, the Holy Spirit came and emphatically witnessed to his spirit that the Bible can be wholly trusted and is indeed the inspired Word of God. With tears flowing, he sensed the presence of God like he had not felt in a long time. When he got up from his knees, he knew the spiritual battle in his soul had been fought and won.

Reverend Graham’s former preaching partner went on to take many classes in theology. After a long struggle with doubt, he eventually declared himself an agnostic—and his spiritual failure caused many to stumble and fall spiritually. Near the end of his life he stated that there was no way to be sure about the fact that God exists. In contrast, Billy Graham went on to preach the inspired Word of God around the world. In the years since then, his preaching has reached millions and undoubtedly many have made Heaven as a result of his ministry.

Asaph, the author of our focus verse, also had a struggle believing God’s promises when he saw the wicked prospering and God’s people suffering. He began to wonder if he had wasted his time in his attempts to keep a pure heart before God. However, before giving up on his faith he decided to spend time in the sanctuary with God, just as Reverend Graham did at his altar in the woods. Asaph and Reverend

Graham both regained their spiritual balance and were firmly grounded in the faith.

The devil would like to create doubt in the mind of every child of God. If he can insert a question here and there, he knows he has gained a foothold. His goal is to eventually flood our souls with confusion and uncertainty, and overwhelm us. Let us purpose to guard against every attempt by the enemy of our souls! When he assails, we must do what Asaph and Billy Graham did: draw near to God and ask for His divine help to overcome, that we may confidently declare all His works to those around us.

BACKGROUND

These two psalms begin Book III (the “Leviticus Book”), which is comprised of seventeen psalms. The titles of each of the psalms in Book III include personal names; eleven of them are accredited or dedicated to Asaph, who authored the two psalms in today’s text. Asaph was a priest from the tribe of Levi who served in Jerusalem as the chief worship leader during David’s reign, through the reign of Solomon, and into the reign of Rehoboam. He probably composed much of the music for David’s psalms. Ezra identifies him as the ancestor of the Temple singers (Ezra 2:41).

Psalm 73

Psalm 73 expresses Asaph’s spiritual struggle when he observed how the wicked prospered, and concludes with his changed viewpoint after receiving a divine perspective. Its theme is similar to that of Psalms 37 and 49. Psalm 73 is identified as a wisdom psalm, comparable to the wisdom literature in the Books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job.

Asaph began by acknowledging that he found his spiritual footing threatened. Verses 4-9 record his troubling observation: that the wicked were well-nourished and strong, their deaths seemingly painless, and they experienced fewer troubles and afflictions. They wore their pride like a chain around the neck, and their acts of violence encompassed them like a garment. Their speech was lofty and corrupt, including threats of oppression against the inhabitants of Heaven and earth.

Based on what he had seen, Asaph wondered if he had “cleansed his heart in vain” (verse 13)—if his efforts to live upright and holy had been futile, since he was continually plagued by trials and afflictions. Seemingly his inward conflict had become almost unbearable. However, his perspective changed after he

entered the sanctuary and comprehended that God’s judgment was just. The Hebrew meaning for the word *awakest* in verse 20 denoted God’s “beginning to act,” and inferred that the prosperity of the wicked would only be a lingering dream when God initiated judgment against them. In verses 21-22, Asaph’s enlightenment brought immediate and humble confession of his lack of faith. He expressed a renewed determination to place His trust in God, ensuring a place in glory at the end of his life. The psalm closes with Asaph’s conclusion that drawing close to God was spiritually beneficial, and would result in him declaring God’s mighty works.

Psalm 74

Psalm 74 is a lament for the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and is reminiscent of Jeremiah’s Lamentations. This psalm was one of thirteen Maschil songs, which means “causing to understand.” The superscription in Psalm 74 does not cite the historical setting, and commentators differ on when the stated events occurred. Some suggest that if it was authored by the Asaph who was a contemporary of David, it could be prophetic in nature. (This is not improbable, since Asaph was also a “seer” or prophet.) Others believe it may have been written by an Asaph from a later time period. Whatever the time frame, the fact that these words were uttered as a prayer to God indicates a deep faith in the face of terrible adversity.

Verse 7 declares that the Temple had been set on fire and the place where God’s name was glorified had been brought low. Many scholars believe this may have been a reference to the destruction of the first Temple by Nebuchadnezzar’s army in 586 B.C. The word translated “synagogues” in verse 8 was the same Hebrew word used for “congregations” in verse 4, and may have signified the various places where people worshiped throughout the land.

The garments of that time had folds instead of sleeves, making it possible to conceal the hands within the folds. In verse 11, the psalmist implied that God had concealed His right hand and needed to “pluck” it out on Israel’s behalf.

The “dividing of the sea” (verse 13) was a reference to the Red Sea, while the “dragons in the waters” and “leviathan” were symbolic of Egypt. The “fountain and the flood” may have referenced the flow of water that God provided from the rocks at Horeb and Kadesh. “Thou driedst up mighty rivers” alluded to the parting of the Jordan River when the Israelites marched into the Promised Land. The word “turtledove” in verse 19 was a term of endearment, and the psalmist beseeched God not to deliver His beloved people into the hands of a savage enemy.

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to Psalm 73:2-5, what caused Asaph to say that his steps had “well nigh slipped”?

2. In Psalm 74, why did the psalmist expound on God’s previous deliverances of Israel?

3. As Christians today, in what ways do we face some of the same problems that Asaph faced? What can we learn from Asaph’s prayers in these two psalms?

CONCLUSION

When we seek the Lord in times of doubt or troubling circumstances and draw near to Him in prayer, our faith is strengthened and we are enabled to hold on.

NOTES



Psalms 75:1 through 77:20

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And I said, This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High. I will remember the works of the LORD: surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings.” (Psalm 77:10-12)

For many years it has been my privilege to watch my now ninety-year-old aunt model the words of today’s focus verses. For example, some months ago when health problems made it clear that she needed 24/7 help, we persuaded her to move temporarily to an adult foster care home. Then the doctor broke the news that she needed to stay in such a facility permanently. Her face fell, and she looked so distressed for a moment that my heart ached. Yet after a brief interval, she said, “Well, I have a lot to be thankful for...,” and began reciting blessings and remembering “the works of the LORD” in her past.

My aunt regularly approaches disappointments in this way. She acknowledges that she misses the independence of driving, but always adds that she has so much to be thankful for. She was sad to leave her apartment where she could look out the window at the Portland church campground, but she has so much to be thankful for. And the list goes on.

This pattern is one my aunt has practiced for many years, and I suspect she may have begun thinking this way when she was quite young. The challenges of aging are not her first bumps in life. Over thirty years ago, she needed neck surgery, and it left her unable to use the index finger of her left hand. That meant no more viola playing in the church orchestra, which made her sad, but she was thankful to still be able to type at the church office in spite of the stiff finger. Her husband had Parkinson’s disease and suffered a lengthy physical decline, yet she expresses gratitude for the fact she was able to help him until he passed away. My aunt has chosen to dwell upon what God has done in all situations, and the result has been a life of contentment.

In Psalm 77, part of today’s text, Asaph cried out to God in a hard time when he felt overwhelmed. However, as he expressed his requests to God, his focus changed from his problems to gratitude for God’s miracles and previous works. Memories of divine goodness sustained him and reminded the psalmist that God was not only able to help, but also was completely trustworthy.

Do you have concerns today that are burdening your heart? Are you facing perplexing situations for which you see no solution? Review the good things God has done for you, and meditate on how He has come to your aid in times past. Thank Him for His awareness of your needs, and for being a God who hears and answers prayer. Verbalize to others your trust in God and appreciation for His help. You will find strength for the journey, peace for your fears, and renewed confidence that God is on the scene and walking with you through the situations you face.

BACKGROUND

Psalm 75

Asaph was the author of Psalm 75. The Hebrew word *Al-taschith* in the psalm’s superscription literally means “destroy not.” It may refer to a particular tune or chant. Bible scholars identify the form of the psalm as a hymn of praise which includes prophetic allusions.

In verses 4-7, “fools” means those who boast, the “horn” is indicative of strength, while a “stiff neck” denotes arrogance. The inference is that the wicked should not brag about their accomplishments or arrogantly use their might to intimidate because it is God who determines who is exalted or put down.

The psalm closes with a focus on divine retribution, bringing out that those who maintain their sinful ways will face a time of accounting. In verse 8, the “red wine” signifies God’s wrath, and “full of mixture” indicates its intoxicating strength. The “dregs” represent the most potent portion of God’s judgment, and are reserved for the wicked. In contrast, the righteous will declare God’s goodness and will be exalted.

Psalm 76

The word *Neginoth* in the superscription of this psalm means “stringed instruments.” Although no historical setting is identified for this hymn of celebration, it commemorates a mighty deliverance in Salem (a reference to Jerusalem). It may have been associated with Judah’s victory over Sennacherib, the Assyrian, described in 2 Kings 19. This would have placed the origin after Israel’s division into two kingdoms, with verse 1 indicating that God was especially known in Judah, but His Name was great throughout all of Israel.

In verses 2-3, the word translated *tabernacle* means “pavilion” or “dwelling place,” affirming that it was God’s presence in Jerusalem and Mount

Zion which caused the enemy to be defeated. Commentators offer varying interpretations of verse 4. The “mountains of prey” may be a reference to the mountains surrounding the city, which offered a haven of hiding places for the enemy. Alternatively, it may be a metaphorical reference to the invading armies, who were comparable to mountains in greatness, but less glorious and excellent than the God of Israel.

After a description of the defeat of the foe and the awesomeness of God’s wrath upon the wicked, the psalm concludes with the psalmist exhorting Israel to fulfill their vows to God, and the surrounding nations to bring gifts to the One who should be respected and feared.

Psalm 77

Psalm 77 is dedicated to Jeduthun, one of the chief musicians who served under David. (He is also named in the titles of Psalm 39 and 62, and in Psalm 88, where he is identified as Heman the Ezrahite; his name was changed after the appointments at Gibeon which are described in 1 Chronicles 16.) Although this was a personal lament, it may also express the sentiments of the nation of Israel.

The phrase “my sore ran in the night” in verse 2 could be rendered as “my hand was stretched out in the night,” indicating that although the psalmist continually prayed, it did not bring the comfort he desired. In verses 7-9, he posed six heart-rending questions regarding whether God’s favor and mercy would ever be extended on his behalf. Commentators interpret verse 10 in various ways, but many feel it meant that in the midst of personal trial, the author was determined to meditate on God’s previous deliverances. Then the author proclaimed a series of commitments to God, indicated by the repeated phrase, “I will...”

In recollecting the past faithfulness of God, the psalmist found assurance for the future. He concluded his lament with the realization that the Good Shepherd who successfully led His flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron would also be his Shepherd in his time of trial.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- I. Book I (1:1 — 41:13)
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- IV. Book IV (90:1 — 106:48)
- V. Book V (107:1 — 150:6)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In Psalm 75, where does the psalmist say promotion does *not* come from? Who, then, sets down one and puts up another?

2. Though we know God is merciful and loving to those who trust in Him, Psalm 76 speaks of God being angry. Why is it so important to recognize this aspect of God’s nature as well as His mercy and kindness?

3. After Asaph voiced a series of questions in Psalm 77:7-9 that reflected his discouraged and overwhelmed state, what steps did he take to move from distress to faith? What can we learn from his actions that will help us when we face overwhelming circumstances?

CONCLUSION

Looking back to God’s blessings and deliverances in the past will help us stand strong in the midst of the problems and adversities we face today.

NOTES



Psalm 78:1-72

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“For he [God] established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children.” (Psalm 78:5-6)

Ten-year-old Patrick was blessed to be born into a Christian home where both parents are serving the Lord. His grandparents also are Christians, and his great-grandparents and great-great-grandparents were also followers of Christ. Each generation in the family has been careful to pass on their Christian heritage.

Recently, Patrick and his classmates were instructed to write an essay about someone they admire. Patrick titled his composition, “I Admire Jesus.” He wrote, in part [original spelling retained]:

“I admire Jesus because He is who I follow. Along time ago, Adam and Eve sinned to the lord. Adam and Eve were the first human beings on Earth. God created Earth. When Adam and Eve sinned, It made everyone have Sin in there heart when they are born. Its our duty to pray and ask forgiveness from Jesus for your sins. Then He knows that you are sorry. At the end of time, Jesus will be bringing everyone who is saved to Heaven. The most wonderful place in life! When people do not get saved and die then they go to Hell. A place that is a big lake of lava and you do not die, but you feel the pain. You can't exscape Hell. You live there forever...When you have Jesus in your heart, your life will be way better and not much problems. Jesus has a lot of stories and there all in the Bible. You do not put anything on the bible. It's the Lords word. Do not stack away the bible. You need to be close to the lord. So get saved and closer to the lord. You will have a good life. Read the Bible and pray every day!”

That is a lot of theology expressed in one short essay! Clearly, Patrick has been absorbing what is taught him.

In our focus verse, the psalmist reminded Israel that each generation should make known to their children God's commandments so they would not be lost or forgotten from generation to generation. God's statutes are designed to bring happiness and fulfillment through righteous living. His desire is for parents to instruct their children in how to implement God's will in their daily lives. If parents will strive to fulfill this responsibility, their children and

grandchildren will learn about God's plan of salvation and the blessings that come with obeying His commandments. Patrick's essay is clear proof of that!

Children learn a great deal from the example their parents set before them, in both word and deed. Repetition also plays a big role, making it essential to regularly take them to Sunday school and church, and to point to God's Word as the guideline for making decisions and choices.

Repeat it often. Live it before them. Our children are the most important mission field we have!

BACKGROUND

Psalm 78

Psalm 78 is attributed to Asaph, and is a Maschil, or teaching psalm, in the form of a hymn. The first and lengthiest of the historical psalms, it recaps highlights from Israel's history from the time of slavery in Egypt to David's reign. Because of the distinctive references to Ephraim and Judah, this psalm may have been written after the twelve tribes split into two kingdoms, but before the Babylonian captivity since the Temple still existed in Jerusalem. The psalm stresses that disobedience always results in judgment, and that each generation must pass on God's commandments to the next, so they will not forget God and repeat the failures of their ancestors.

The opening verses are a call to instruction. In them, the psalmist pled with his people to pay close attention as he recounted the “parable” (comparison) of Israel's history to make known the “dark sayings” (riddles or allegorical stories) of ancient wisdom imparted by their forefathers. Verse 5 establishes the authority for the psalmist's teaching: “He” (God) was the One who appointed the Law for Israel. Verses 6-8 provide six reasons why parents are to teach their children the things of God.

Verses 9-11 single out the “children of Ephraim” for special rebuke. (Since Ephraim was the leading tribe of the Northern Kingdom, it was often used to reference the entire nation.) Three reasons are given: they fled in the day of battle, they rejected the covenant of God, and they forgot what He had done for them.

Verse 12 begins the summary of God's awe-inspiring works on Israel's behalf when He delivered them from bondage in Egypt. The “field of Zoan” likely referred to the region in lower Egypt where the Israelites lived. The psalmist then recited a litany of occurrences in which Israel's conduct was faithless and vacillating, although at times divine judgment

brought temporary repentance. Verses 40-64 revert back to the events surrounding the Exodus from Egypt. Despite the repeated manifestations of God’s power, the people “provoked the most high God, and kept not his testimonies” (verse 56).

Because of Israel’s rejection of Him, God forsook the Tabernacle in Shiloh (located in the land possessed by the tribe of Ephraim), and delivered the Ark of the Covenant—called His “strength and glory”—into enemy hands. This occurred when the Ark was taken by the Philistines and never returned to Shiloh (see 1 Samuel 4). Israel’s disobedience caused them to be defeated in battle and their young men to be killed. Israel’s priests were also killed, and due to the dire circumstances, there were no opportunities for the public mourning which was a common practice in those days (verse 64).

In verses 65-72, the psalmist described a revival of Israel’s blessings. The victories alluded to in verse 66 may have been the series of conquests over the Philistines by Samuel, Saul, and David. God rejected Ephraim as the location for His Tabernacle, and instead chose Mount Zion (Jerusalem) located in Judah, where He established His sanctuary.

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. In verses 6-8, why did the psalmist say it was so vital for parents to diligently teach God’s precepts to their children?

2. Why do you think Israel continued to reject God after He had performed so many miracles on their behalf?

3. What are some ways you can pass on the teachings of God’s Word to the next generation?

CONCLUSION

If we set a godly example and faithfully teach our children from the Word of God, they will understand the necessity of following His will in their lives, and will be prepared to transmit the same instruction to the next generation.

NOTES



Psalms 79:1 through 80:19

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name: and deliver us, and purge away our sins, for thy name’s sake.” (Psalm 79:9)

“Need help!” came the call. Then louder, “Need help!” The persistent little voice that claimed my attention was the call of my three-year-old nephew. When my assistance did not arrive quickly enough to satisfy him, he called even more urgently, “NEED HELP!” Since these repeated cries came in rapid succession, by the time I had dropped what I was doing and crossed the room, the request had been shouted at least four times. Happily, his problem was easily solved. Although he had managed to open the door to the art supplies closet, his little legs and arms were not long enough to reach the “needed” item. His insistent pleas to the one he knew could help brought him a solution.

On a daily basis, adults also encounter situations in which we “need help” for circumstances beyond our control. These range from insignificant, soon-forgotten needs to life-altering dilemmas. We pray for a parking place, misplaced keys, lost paperwork, guidance in a purchase, or ability to solve a computer problem. We also look heavenward with urgent appeals for wisdom in raising our children, help in resolving relationship issues, healing for serious illness, or comfort in the death of a loved one. These major, real-life concerns can distract us, and at times impact our ability to concentrate, because a portion of our brains continually seem to be grappling with the problem. How wonderful in such situations to remember that our Helper is closer than a brother (or auntie!) and hears even our first cry! And not only is He readily available, He can do anything! No circumstance is too difficult for Him to handle.

In today’s focus verse, the psalmist Asaph cried out to God on behalf of his nation, urgently voicing the cause of his distress: their fractured relationship with God. As a result, enemies had come into his city, defiled the Temple, and slain great numbers of the people. What a desperate situation! No wonder Asaph pleaded, “Help us, O God of our salvation!”

What a great blessing it is to know that God is standing by, waiting for us to turn to Him, ask Him, and trust Him. As we do, we can be assured that His solutions are exactly right for our spiritual development, and that His timing is impeccable.

BACKGROUND

Psalm 79

Psalm 79 was authored by Asaph, although many scholars believe it was a later Asaph than the contemporary of David (perhaps one of his descendants). If written during the time of David, the author was speaking prophetically; a later Asaph would have been giving a historical account.

Psalm 79 is considered a companion to Psalm 74 in that both psalms lament the destruction of Jerusalem and beseech God to render vengeance. Since Jerusalem was destroyed more than one time, opinions differ concerning the exact historical setting, though many believe the psalm referred to the destruction of Jerusalem during the Babylonian captivity. Verses 1-4 reflect the horror the inhabitants of Israel felt as their territorial boundaries were obliterated and their holy places desecrated by the “heathen” (or “foreign nations”). So many were slain that it was impossible to give all the bodies a proper burial, and God’s people were mocked and disdained by the surrounding nations because of Jerusalem’s defeat.

The request that God’s tender mercies would “speedily prevent us” in verse 8 was a plea that God would not remember Israel’s previous transgressions, but would quickly impart His mercies and deliverance on their behalf. He also requested that God would render to Israel’s invaders seven times more retribution than the reproach they had heaped upon God’s people. The number seven symbolized “completeness,” so verse 12 denotes the psalmist’s desire for total vengeance upon Israel’s enemies. The psalm concludes with a proclamation that God’s punishment on the nations responsible for Jerusalem’s reproach would cause His people to offer praise and thanksgiving for generations to come.

Psalm 80

Psalm 80, also ascribed to Asaph, is a plea for God to manifest His power and bring restoration to Israel. The word *Shoshannim* in the superscription means “lilies,” and may refer to an instrument or style of music. *Eduth* means “testimony.” While classified as a lament, this psalm differs from the majority of other psalms of its type in that it focuses more on God than on circumstances.

In the first verse, the phrase “Thou that leadest Joseph like a flock” alludes to the ten northern tribes after Israel’s division into two kingdoms.

“Thou that dwellest between the cherubim” refers to God’s presence upon the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant. Although the tribe of Benjamin remained with the southern kingdom, it may have been mentioned in conjunction with Ephraim and Manasseh because of their relationship to Jacob’s beloved wife, Rachel, and their being placed together behind the Ark of the Covenant during Israel’s wilderness trek.

In verse 5, the Hebrew word translated “measure” actually refers to a specific amount: the third part of an ephah, which was an amount several times larger than the average drinking glass could contain. Used thus, it indicates the abundance of tears shed by the people. The psalmist bemoaned that Israel’s calamities had caused them to become an object of mockery by their enemies.

From verse 8, the remainder of the psalm compares Israel to a vine. In verses 8-11, the psalmist rehearsed how God brought Israel out of Egypt, drove out the Gentile nations in Canaan, and planted Israel in the midst of the land. As Israel’s roots grew deep, the thickness of the vine shaded the hills and appeared like majestic cedar trees. Eventually, Israel’s descendants spread from the Mediterranean Sea to the Euphrates River. In verses 12-13, the psalmist mourned because God had allowed Israel’s walls to be broken down, making the nation vulnerable to the “plucking” of her oppressors. The “boar out of the wood” may refer to the savage armies who came to devour Israel.

The psalm concludes with the repeated plea for God to turn Israel back to Him, and grant them His favor, so they would be saved from oppression.

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to Psalm 79:1, what serious problem prompted the psalmist to cry out to God for help?

2. Why do you think the writer of Psalm 80 pleaded with God three times to “turn us again” (verses 3,7,19)? What occurs when people turn to God?

3. Asaph anguished over the fact that the heathen were mocking God. In our day as well, sinners at times scoff at us and scorn our beliefs. How should we respond when that happens?

CONCLUSION

When we face perplexing or troubling situations in life, we can and should always turn to the One with real answers to life’s challenges.

NOTES



Psalms 81:1 through 83:18

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“They have taken crafty counsel against thy people, and consulted against thy hidden ones. They have said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance.” (Psalm 83:3-4)

Antagonism toward Israel has been a reality since God delivered the Children of Israel from Egypt and established them as a nation. In Bible times, the Egyptians were not the Israelites’ only enemies. The Amalekites, Midianites, Moabites, Ammonites, Amorites, Philistines, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, and Romans all fought against the Children of Israel and sought their destruction.

In today’s focus verses, the psalmist Asaph cried out to God, urging Him to protect Israel from those who had “taken crafty counsel against thy people” and united in a confederacy with the goal of ensuring that “the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance.”

During World War II, Hitler and Nazi Germany wiped out six million Jews in an effort to exterminate the Jewish people. When Israel was established as a nation in 1948, a new wave of persecution and oppression nearly submerged the infant state. Today, many decades later, Israel is still surrounded by enemies — Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Iran — and Islamic extremists vow publicly to wipe the nation of Israel from the face of the earth.

Why has such animosity been directed against God’s chosen people through the ages? According to the Bible, God has a special purpose for the nation of Israel. They rejected God, yet He still has a plan for them, and Satan wants to defeat that plan. Satanically influenced hatred of Israel is the reason their neighbors have always wanted to see Israel destroyed. However, attempts to annihilate this nation will always fail. We know Israel will suffer more in the days ahead; the persecution of Israel will continue until the Revelation of Christ. However, someday the nation will be finally and completely delivered from her enemies. Jesus will set up His Millennial Kingdom and will reign in peace from Jerusalem.

When we read the news about the tensions in Israel and the Middle East, we do not need to fear. We can look to God with complete assurance that He has the situation under control and nothing which occurs in that region will catch Him by surprise. His divine plan is being unfolded! We can and should pray for the peace of Jerusalem. While we wait for that

peace to come, we can be confident that one day, in His perfect timing, Christ will defeat Satan and bring peace to Israel and the whole earth. And just as God will continue to watch out for Israel, we have many promises in His Word of how He watches out for each individual who places his or her trust in Him.

BACKGROUND

All three of today’s psalms are credited to Asaph, or perhaps his descendants.

Psalm 81

Psalm 81 likely was written for use at Israel’s feasts. Many scholars believe it was used for the observance of the Feast of Trumpets, which was part of the Feast of Tabernacles. These celebrations took place near the harvest time and at the start of the Jewish year — the last part of September and beginning of October by the Gregorian calendar used by most western nations. The psalm rehearses Israel’s history and then gives God’s message and warnings.

In verses 1-5, the writer called for worship, including music that was hearty (“sing aloud”) and joyous (“joyful noise”). A “timbrel” referenced a tambourine; the “harp” was similar to a lyre; a “psaltery” was an early guitar or zither; and the “trumpet” was a ram’s horn.

Beginning at verse 6, God’s instructions were given. Verses 6-10 spoke of God’s deliverance of Israel from Egypt where they had been slaves, His help after they escaped, and His commandments for them. Verses 11-16 focus on the rebellion of the Israelites and how God desired for them to follow Him so He could bless them.

Psalm 82

Psalm 82 was a cry against Israel’s judges who had become corrupt. The writer declared that God is the Judge of all, and therefore those in authority should act justly. Scholars interpret the word “gods” in “he judgeth among the gods” (verse 1) and “Ye are gods” (verse 6) to mean the rulers of the people. The psalmist was stating that these leaders would be accountable for their corruption.

Psalm 83

The time period when Psalm 83 was written cannot be firmly established because throughout their history, the nation of Israel had numerous enemies, including those named here. This psalm has two sections. Verses 1-8 describe the problems of the Jewish people and list their foes, which surrounded

them on every side. Verses 9-18 are a plea for God to defeat those enemies as He had done before. Specific examples were cited in verse 9—deliverance from the Midianites either in Moses’ or Gideon’s time, and the defeat of Sisera in Deborah’s time. The writer desired that God would be glorified by Israel’s deliverance (verses 17-18).

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. In Psalm 81, beginning at verse 6, the psalmist spoke as the voice of God to the people. Where did God state that He had “proved” the people?

2. How do you think thanksgiving and praise affect our spiritual hunger?

3. In Psalm 82, God condemns corruption and injustice, particularly to the poor, orphaned, afflicted, and needy. What are some ways we can show compassion to groups such as these in our communities?

CONCLUSION

Though Israel has suffered greatly at the hand of its enemies throughout history, someday God’s plan will be completed and Israel—and all the world—will enjoy perfect peace.

NOTES



Psalms 84:1 through 86:17

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee: for thou wilt answer me.” (Psalm 86:7)

I have always been a person who likes to seek out advice. Every Saturday morning, I tune in to a local talk-radio station and pick up tips from “The Garden Doctor.” “Mr. Fix-It” is another of my favorites. When our children were very young, I would ask other mothers for advice on potty training, when to start allowances, how to train first-graders to pick up after themselves, and so on. As my children grew older, I was thankful for a friend who would lend an ear whenever I was concerned about their choice of friends or grades at school. There was always someone I could turn to when I needed counsel or consolation. That probably reinforced my tendency to assume that if I talked to the right person and asked the right questions, I could find a solution to whatever I faced.

Then one day my father called to say that my mother had been diagnosed with an incurable type of cancer. The only thing that could be done was treatment to slow its spread. As soon as I hung up the phone, I fell apart emotionally. I needed help! My mom needed help! Who could I call?

My mind raced through a list of friends and acquaintances, but part of me realized that there was no advice that could make this situation better. There was no one who could provide a solution to the challenge facing us. Then, from the depths of my soul, I cried out to God, “Lord, only You can help. Only You understand.” I will never forget the wave of peace and the assurance of God’s love that came over me. All I needed was Him. I knew He would be with us through whatever lay ahead.

That experience taught me the profound truth stated in our focus verse: God will answer us when we call upon Him in the time of trouble. No doubt at some point in life, each one of us will face a situation that seems hopeless and for which any human remedy is beyond reach. However, God is more than just a friend who will listen and offer some advice. He is a Friend who will take the burden from our hearts and give us peace and comfort!

If what you face today is a rough and stormy ride, you can do what the psalmist did and acknowledge the greatness of God. The assurance that God answers prayer and will sustain you is an invaluable consolation and source of strength.

BACKGROUND

Psalm 84

Psalm 84 was written for the “sons of Korah,” who were singers and keepers of the Temple gates. It is an eloquent expression of love and appreciation for God’s sanctuary. While no author is cited, in all probability it was written by David. The Syriac version of the Psalms points to his authorship.

Psalm 84 is typically associated with the Feast of Tabernacles, an autumn celebration of gratitude for God’s provision. It may have been a song that conveyed the pilgrims’ rejoicing as they traveled to the Temple in Jerusalem.

In verse 1, the plural form of “tabernacles” indicates the psalmist’s love for all areas of the Temple, referred to as “courts” in verse 2. In verses 3-4, he conveyed envy for the birds that freely nested in the vicinity of the Temple, while he was only rarely privileged to visit the place where God’s glory dwelt. The word *Baca* in verse 6 means “weeping,” inferring that the “valley of weeping” would become a place of refreshing wells and pools of blessings as the pilgrims renewed their strength there during their journey to appear before God in the Temple. The joys of attendance in God’s house are only surpassed by the joy of His presence with those who “walk uprightly” (verse 11)—a phrase which means literally “in perfectness” or “whole, entire, in integrity.”

Psalm 85

Psalm 85, like the preceding psalm, is dedicated to the sons of Korah. Its theme is praise for Israel’s deliverance from captivity, and includes a prayer for Israel to turn their hearts back to God. Although the only specific allusion to historical events is the reference to captivity in verse 1, it indicates a time of nationwide humiliation. Many believe the psalm was written after the captives returned from Babylonian captivity; others suggest it could have been related to any national calamity in Israel’s history. Still others interpret these verses from a prophetic viewpoint, proposing they refer to Israel’s future restoration and the establishment of Christ’s Millennial Reign.

Psalm 86

The psalmist’s prayer in Psalm 86 petitions God to grant mercy and help, and is intermingled with adoration and thanksgiving for God’s wondrous works. This is the only psalm in Book III directly ascribed to David. His prayer is comprised of four

sections which are divided by avowals of God's greatness (verses 5, 10, 15, 17). No historical setting is clear. Many scholars consider this psalm to be a mosaic work compiled from Psalms 25-28 and 54-57, and the Books of Exodus, Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and Jeremiah.

In verses 1-5, the psalmist pleaded with God to heed his prayer because he was oppressed and desperately needed God's intervention. The Hebrew meaning for the word *holy* in verse 2 is "pious," "true," or "godly," all of which indicate that the psalmist believed his righteous living should be a reason for God to protect him. The phrase "Rejoice the soul" (verse 4) was a petition for God to fill his soul with joy. "Unite my heart to fear thy name" in verse 11 was a supplication for God to give the psalmist a heart that was single-minded in praising and glorifying His Name for ever.

David concluded his psalm in verses 16-17 with a series of requests entreating God to give him strength to triumph. He pointed out that his deliverance would confound his enemies and validate Jehovah's greatness and power over all the earth.

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. What comparison did the psalmist make in Psalm 84:10?

2. Why do you think the writer of Psalm 85 implored Israel to seek for salvation after God had already shown favor and delivered them from captivity?

3. In times of adversity, how can you use David's prayer in Psalm 86 as an example for seeking God's help?

CONCLUSION

Challenging situations may come our way that cause us to feel weak and helpless. However, like David, we can call out to God to sustain and deliver us in such times.

NOTES



Psalms 87:1 through 88:18

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“O LORD God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee: let my prayer come before thee: incline thine ear unto my cry.” (Psalm 88:1-2)

An Amish proverb states, “Sometimes God calms the storm, but sometimes God lets the storm rage and calms his child.” Some years ago, I saw that statement illustrated in the life of a friend of mine who had received a terrible personal blow.

After my friend had been married for many years and had devoted her life to her home and family, her husband told her one day that he was leaving. She was heartbroken. I recall many times seeing her weep before the Lord at an altar of prayer, reaching out to the God of her salvation. Life was not easy for her, and many people would have become embittered in this situation, but my friend did not. She simply continued to call upon God.

After a period of some months, I began to see a change in my friend’s demeanor. Her circumstances had not changed, but she did. Acceptance and peace began to pervade her spirit. She still prayed earnestly for her husband but the evidences of anguish over the betrayal and broken trust began to dissipate. In their place, a quiet serenity developed, even though many difficult adjustments had been necessary in her life. God did not answer my friend’s prayer in the way she had thought might happen. Yet He *did* answer it—He gave her peace in the midst of the storm.

If my friend had not chosen to seek the Lord during this time, she could have developed a bitter and unforgiving spirit. Then not only would she have suffered the initial blow, but she would have had a heavy weight to carry around with her. Years have gone by now, but my friend is at peace and has enjoyed a good and happy life—thanks to God and the peace He alone can give.

Today’s focus verses, which are the opening lines of the most sorrowful passage in the whole Book of Psalms, reveal that the author was in a time of deep distress. Still, his reference to the “God of my salvation” offers a ray of hope, teaching us that the saint of God is never in utter despair. When we are serving God, there is always a place of refuge and a reason to hope, no matter how alarming or heartbreaking our circumstances.

We may face times of trial or loss when it seems that God is ignoring our prayers. It is then that we have a choice. We can challenge and blame God, we

can blame others and become bitter, or we can cry unto the God of our salvation and ultimately find a place of peace and joy.

BACKGROUND

Psalm 87

Psalm 87 is an eloquent expression of praise and delight in Zion, the holy City of God. It was written for the sons of Korah, who administered a portion of the Temple music. It possibly was composed during the rule of Hezekiah. Alternatively, the reference to Gentile nations in verse 4 may be a historical indicator that the psalm was composed in a post-exilic period. Whatever the date of composition, it provides a prophetic view of nations coming to Jerusalem during Christ’s Millennial Reign, and the glories of the Messiah’s kingdom.

The psalm has a mixed form, with elements of a hymn of praise, an oracle, and a meditation. The reference in verse 7 to “singers” and “players on instruments” indicate that it may have been used in processions to the Temple or festival worship within it.

Verse 6 is a Messianic reference to the New Jerusalem, where the final census of all the names written in the Lamb’s Book of Life will be taken. The word translated “man” in this verse is not the Hebrew word *’adam*, which is the common designation for a human being, but is a different Hebrew word, *’ish*, used to designate a person of distinction and honor. All whose names are listed will have experienced the new birth that qualifies them as citizens of New Jerusalem. Verse 7 signifies the rejoicing that will be felt in this Heavenly city, where God will be the springs of life for every inhabitant.

Psalm 88

Psalm 88 is considered the most mournful of all the psalms. *Mahalath Leannoth* in the superscription could be translated “concerning sickness, to be sung.” *Maschil* means “causing to understand” and relates to the teaching of wisdom or piety. The only hopeful expression in this psalm occurs at the beginning in the phrase “O LORD God of my salvation.” However, even the act of prayer is an indicator of lingering hope.

The identity of the author—likely Heman the Ezrahite, who is named in the superscription—is not absolutely certain. One possibility is that he was the wise man Heman mentioned in 1 Kings 4:31, who was a son of Zerah and grandson of Judah (1 Chronicles 2:6), and hence was called the Ezrahite. Another possibility is that he was one of the three

chief musicians of David's day, who is mentioned as a singer in 1 Chronicles 6:33 and other verses as well.

Verses 3-4 indicate that the author of the psalm was gravely ill, physically weak, and close to death. In verse 5, the phrase translated as "free among the dead" means "set apart" in the original Hebrew. In verses 10-12, the psalmist made a plea for healing by asking rhetorically if God could be appreciated by the dead. What makes this the most mournful of all the Psalms is that there is no answering response from God, no surge of renewed faith, nor any mitigation of the author's despair: the last word of the psalm is "darkness."

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- II. Book II (42:1 — 72:20)
- III. Book III (73:1 — 89:52)
- IV. Book IV (90:1 — 106:48)
- V. Book V (107:1 — 150:6)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to Psalm 87:1-2, where did God lay the foundations of Zion?

2. What verses in Psalm 88 reveal that the author's affliction had affected him emotionally as well as physically?

3. What steps can we take to hold on to God in a time of trouble, even when it seems He is not answering our prayers?

CONCLUSION

Although we long for resolution to the trials that come our way, we can be anchored in the God of our salvation. Knowing that He is there and hears our prayers will provide comfort.

NOTES



Psalm 89:1-52

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.” (Psalm 89:33-34)

All of us believe in many things. Even people who deny God’s existence believe in God’s natural laws! We are confident the sun will rise in the morning, though it may be covered by clouds. We know that the earth will continue to spin on its axis at just the right angle to bring summer, fall, winter, and spring each year. We anticipate that although the leaves fall after turning color, the trees are still alive, buds will form, and new leaves will appear in the spring.

Our beliefs extend beyond nature. In our society, we presume that restaurants will provide what we order, grocery stores will stock food for purchase, and contractors will follow through by doing their promised work. We do not wonder whether the elevator will go up when we press the button for the floor above us. When we flick the light switch, we assume the light will go on. When we turn the key in our car’s ignition, we expect to hear the engine start.

It’s true that our expectations regarding man and his inventions are sometimes disappointed. At times, trust is broken and assumptions are proven faulty. However, God *always* keeps His word. He never breaks a promise; He never fails or disappoints. He is faithful whether man believes Him or not.

Psalm 89 is all about God’s covenant faithfulness, proved over the centuries of time. The word “faithfulness” appears fourteen times in the Book of Psalms, and almost half of those instances are in this chapter. In our focus verse, the psalmist pronounced God’s own assurance that He would not break His covenant nor change what He had spoken regarding David. Although David’s descendants, the Children of Israel, failed God and the kingdom was taken from them, the promises He made concerning them are still true. Someday Jesus Christ—the seed of David—will rule over all the earth. God’s everlasting Kingdom will be eternal and His covenant with David will be everlastingly fulfilled. And even if one fails God today, His promises of redemption and help still are available if one turns back to them.

What a comfort it is to know that we can rely on God’s promises, no matter what happens around us! That assurance is the solid ground of our faith. Trials will come, and we will face times when the

enemy of our souls will wage an all-out attempt to overthrow our confidence in God. Yet even when our faith wavers, God is unchanging, because faithfulness is part of His character. We can *always* trust Him to remain faithful.

Challenges and trouble do not last forever, and in the midst of such times, our most sustaining hope is the faithfulness of our Heavenly Father. God can be trusted with every situation of life!

BACKGROUND

Psalm 89

This psalm was a Maschil (Hebrew for “to instruct” or “causing to understand”), indicating it was designed to teach. The final psalm in Book III, it is attributed to Ethan the Ezrahite. Bible scholars offer various suggestions regarding the date and setting of its writing. Some propose that the psalmist’s expression of grief over the perceived annulment of the Davidic covenant indicates that he composed the psalm during a time of captivity, such as after the fall of Jerusalem. Others suggest a period when the Davidic line was merely threatened and not dethroned. Whatever the date, commentators agree that this psalm is Messianic, based upon its use in the New Testament in reference to Christ (see Luke 1:51 and Acts 13:22).

The psalm is divided into three segments: a consideration of God’s past blessings and promises to David (verses 1-37), a lament over present circumstances and God’s seeming abandonment (verses 38-45), and a plea for God to once again honor His covenant with David (verses 46-51). It concludes with a doxology of praise (verse 52).

In verses 3-4, the author spoke of God’s covenant words to David. The Hebrew word *b’rit*, translated *covenant*, was likely derived from a word meaning “to clasp or fetter,” thus indicating the strength of the bond. “Tabor” and “Hermon,” referred to in verse 12, were conspicuous mountains in Israel and were used poetically to indicate the universality of God’s creation. Verses 20-29 are Messianic promises related to God’s eternal covenant with David. Through Jesus, a descendant of David, David’s seed and throne will be eternally established.

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. In verse 7, where did the psalmist say that God was to be feared (viewed with great awe)? Why do you think he specified this location?

2. Why do you think the author of Psalm 89 (as well as the authors of many of the other psalms) chose to illustrate his points with examples from nature?

3. What circumstances or events in your life remind you of God's faithfulness?

CONCLUSION

Our greatest source of assurance and security is the fact that God is faithful. He always keeps His promises!

NOTES



Psalms 90:1 through 91:16

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.” (Psalm 91:11)

One of the greatest pleasures of my life is being a grandfather. When my first grandson was born, we became good buddies, and the two of us would go out to breakfast now and then. When his cousin was old enough, he joined our party, and the three of us enjoyed those occasions together.

After one of our pleasant breakfast outings, we went to a local department store to check out the toys. When we finally returned to the car, I instructed one grandson to stand by the door and wait while I placed the other boy in his booster seat. While strapping the first grandson into his seat, I accidentally shoved the front seat forward so it bumped the horn. Moving out of the car to get my other grandchild, I bumped the horn again. I was upset at my awkwardness, and hoped the unnecessary noise had not attracted any attention.

Then I noticed that there were two people inside the car next to me, and their motor was running. They clearly were waiting to see why I kept honking the horn! I motioned for them to wait as I looked around for my younger grandson. My heart nearly stopped beating when I realized he was bent over directly behind the neighboring car, trying to read the license plate! After I pulled him to safety at my side, I wholeheartedly thanked the ladies for patiently waiting. And you can be sure that I thanked God for allowing me to honk the horn twice, even though doing so was not intentional!

I am sure that God’s angels were on the scene that day—they were there to keep us in all our ways, and it was no accident that I honked that horn. Had the driver of the other car not heard it and paused to find out the reason, I am sure my grandson would have been injured.

In today’s focus verse, the psalmist reveals that angels watch over believers. I suspect that we really have no idea how often God’s angelic messengers are standing by, ready to intervene on our behalf. However, I am convinced the experience with my grandsons was one such instance. Let’s not lose an opportunity to thank Him for the protection He provides—both seen and unseen!

BACKGROUND

Book IV of the Psalms encompasses Psalms 90-106 and includes both the royal praise psalms (95-100)

and the historical psalms (104-106), as well as others. This cluster of seventeen psalms was collected about two to three hundred years after the first three books, and probably was added during the time when Israel returned to their homeland under Ezra (458 B.C.) and Nehemiah (445 B.C.). This section focuses on Israel’s failure and time spent in the wilderness, echoing the theme of the Book of Numbers.

Psalm 90

This song is classified as a communal lament—a psalm that expresses the anguish or sorrow of the worshiper. It also contains some elements of wisdom language (see verse 12 as an example).

According to its superscription, Psalm 90 is a prayer of Moses. This makes it the oldest of the psalms, as none of the others were written prior to the time of David. It is the only psalm ascribed to the great leader of Israel who delivered God’s chosen people from bondage in Egypt. Since the psalm is primarily a plea for God to restore the Israelites to favor, it likely was composed as the forty years of wandering in the wilderness came to a close. The psalm emphasizes the brevity of human life, and for that reason, it is often included in funeral programs.

Some scholars suggest that verse 10 (which establishes man’s normal lifespan as being seventy years) negates Moses’ authorship, since according to Deuteronomy 34:7 he lived to the age of 120. However, other Scriptures in the early books of the Bible indicate that Moses’ longevity was unusual. For example, in Joshua 14:10-11, Caleb alluded to his strength at the age of eighty-five as being out of the ordinary.

Psalm 90 is considered by many to be one of the greatest prayers of Israel, and one of the most precious “gems” in the Psalter (the compendium of Israel’s lyrical songs). It contains many great theological truths: that God is eternal and everlasting (verse 2), God calls sinful mankind to repentance (verse 3), God’s wrath is His moral response to disobedience (verse 11), and God extends mercy (verse 14). The psalm concludes with an appeal for God’s compassion and favor to rest upon His people.

Psalm 91

Like most of the psalms in Book IV, the author of Psalm 91 is not given, and no specific setting is established in the text. This psalm is considered to be a wisdom poem, followed by a word from God (verses 14-16). It may have been used in the Temple liturgy.

The words of Psalm 91 express the security found in trusting the living God. Since it is not designated to any individual or restricted to any specific group of people, it is applicable to all who dwell “in the secret place of the most High” (verse 1) and who look to God as their refuge and fortress.

The author drew upon military imagery in several verses. He recognized that God was his defensive position (described as a “refuge” and “fortress” in verse 2) where security was found from the threats of the enemy. Allusion to weaponry provides another metaphor—God’s truth had proved to be a “shield and buckler” (verse 4). Although the enemy attacked with “arrows” (verse 5), verse 7 proclaims that destruction will not come near the one whose trust is in God. While on the surface this may appear to be a description of deliverance from human assault, the psalmist also may have been portraying the believers’ victory over demonic agents. (A parallel thought is expressed in Ephesians 6, where Paul instructed believers in how to stand against the “wiles of the devil.”) Jesus quoted verse 11 when resisting Satan in the wilderness (see Matthew 4:6).

The “snare of the fowler” and the “noisome pestilence” referenced in verse 3 are figures of speech which emphasize the elements of surprise and danger. A snare is not seen until it is too late to avoid entrapment; a pestilence is fatal. The point is that even when the danger is invisible or incurable, God’s protection avails.

In verses 14-16, God himself speaks, giving divine assurance to the person who dwells in intimacy with Him. These verses do not mean that the people of God will never suffer. The promise of help, honor, and hope are for those in peril, but Satan’s attempts do not need to be feared when one is under the divine protection of the Almighty. That one is safe in God’s keeping, even in the midst of danger.

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. In Psalm 90:5-6, what type of vegetation did the psalmist use in his illustration of the brevity of life?

2. Given the promises in Psalm 91, how would you explain the fact that God’s people suffer affliction, trouble, and death?

3. Based upon Psalm 90:12, what are some habits we could develop that would help make every day count?

CONCLUSION

We will all face difficulties — some more serious than others — but we have no reason to fear if we are abiding in the “secret place of the most High.”

NOTES



Psalms 92:1 through 94:23

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High: to shew forth thy lovingkindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night.” (Psalm 92:1-2)

The last little bit of food in our house was on the table. Mother looked at the meager provision before us, and we children looked toward her, our faces expectant. She bowed her head and in her quiet voice, began to thank the Lord for the lunch. She ended her prayer with the words, “We also thank You, Lord, for the food that You will provide for us today.”

Before the afternoon was over, God had rewarded the faith and trust implicit in that simple prayer. Neighbors called, saying vegetables were starting to rot in their garden, and asked if one of us would like to come over and pick whatever we could use. A friend stopped by with a catch of fish—there were too many for his family, and he wondered if we would like some for dinner.

My mother was following the admonition inherent in our focus verse. It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, no matter what circumstances we face! It is not hard to feel gratitude when the table is heaped high and the bounty is spread before us, but can we thank God when the cupboard is empty? We should! Our thankfulness to God should not fluctuate with our circumstances or feelings.

Thankfulness combined with faith will bring results from Heaven. However, we do not express gratitude to God in order to “earn” His beneficence or to maneuver Him into providing what we want. Possessing a spirit of thankfulness simply opens a way for God to work on our behalf. It is not a guarantee that we will never experience a need, but rather a guarantee that we will never have to go through a difficult time without Him. We can accept whatever circumstances life brings with perfect confidence that though we may face temporary adversity or problems, He is mindful of our situation and will supply our needs in His own way and time.

When a spirit of gratitude becomes an integral part of our lives, it will not be hard to do as the psalmist suggests in these verses: to “bracket” our day with worship. As we meditate on and declare God’s lovingkindness in the morning we will find the security and strength to face the hours ahead. As we close our day with gratitude for His faithfulness which has kept us through the day, we will have peace in our

hearts and a renewed faith in His mindful attentiveness to our situation.

BACKGROUND

Psalm 92

According to its superscription, Psalm 92 was to be sung in the Temple on the Sabbath day as part of the worship service. Nothing is known about the composer of the psalm, nor the setting or circumstances related to its writing. It is classified as a wisdom psalm.

The theme centers on God’s sovereign justice—a topic also developed in Psalms 37, 49, and 73, and the Book of Job. It brings out that while the ungodly may appear to prosper, divine justice ultimately will occur, and this should cause the righteous to praise God unceasingly. The psalmist pointed out that in contrast to the outcome prepared for the wicked, the righteous will flourish in God’s care; they will have longevity like the palm tree and strength like the cedar, and in their old age, they will continue to be blessed and bear spiritual fruit.

Psalm 93

Psalm 93 is sometimes included with other short praise psalms (95-100) that refer to the sovereignty of God over nature and mankind. The date of its writing is unknown, as is its author, although ancient versions of the Old Testament ascribe authorship to David. This psalm is considered to be a hymn of praise.

The theme of Psalm 93 is that in the midst of change in this world, the one fixed point of stability is the living God. He is all-powerful, His Kingdom is eternal, and His testimonies are certain. In verses 3-4, the psalmist introduced the metaphor of floods to portray a swelling rebellion against God. Although the “noise of many waters” and the “mighty waves of the sea” arise up against God, He is mightier. None can thwart His plan.

Psalm 94

It is not known who wrote Psalm 94, but as with Psalm 93, ancient versions of the Old Testament ascribe authorship to David. The occasion of writing is also unknown, although it may have been composed during Israel’s captivity in Babylon since it contains a plea for God to punish oppressors. This psalm is classified as an individual or national lament which includes both wisdom words and prophetic views.

The psalm opens with a complaint to God, referring to Him as the “God of vengeance” (in the original language, the form is plural, indicating ultimate and final vengeance). The psalmist appealed

to God to judge the proud and insolent ones who had used the legal system to afflict the righteous, widows, strangers, and the fatherless. According to verse 7, these wicked individuals insisted that “the LORD shall not see,” implying that like any lifeless idol, God had no regard for what they did. The psalmist asserted that those who held that position were “brutish” (foolish or senseless) and called them to “be wise” (to have insight) regarding the obvious truth that the One who created ears can hear, and the One who created eyes is able to see.

In verses 12-15, the psalmist went on to pronounce a blessing upon those who were instructed by the Lord, noting that even times of adversity are only temporary. He was assured that deliverance would come and “the pit [or grave] be digged” for the law breakers. He was well aware that without God’s help, there was no cause for optimism, but with God’s strength holding him steady, he found consolation in spite of the anxious thoughts that assailed his mind.

The last four verses are considered by some Bible scholars to be a prophetic allusion to Christ when He was brought before the high priest and falsely accused (see Matthew 26:59-60).

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to Psalm 93, when was God’s throne established?

2. In Psalm 92:13, reference is made to “those that be planted in the house of the LORD.” What do you think is meant by that phrase?

3. In Psalm 94:19, God’s “comforts” provide joy in the midst of the psalmist’s anxieties. What are some of the comforts God provides when we are troubled?

CONCLUSION

If we maintain a spirit of gratitude in our hearts and regularly express our appreciation to God for His faithfulness to us, we will have peace and comfort no matter what circumstances we face.

NOTES



Psalms 95:1 through 97:12

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.” (Psalm 95:7)

Several years ago, my husband and I had the opportunity to visit Romania, the country where I was born. While we were traveling from place to place to visit family, my attention was caught by the flocks of sheep on the hillside. It had been some years since I had been around sheep, so I took special note of these pastoral settings. Often we saw shepherds carrying lambs, walking among the sheep, or just watching over their flocks. I was impressed by the peace and tranquility that seemed a part of each scene.

Numerous places in Scripture liken Christ to a good shepherd. Our Shepherd’s concern for us is alluded to in today’s focus verse. If we stop and read it thoughtfully, we will see a caring God behind the words. The picture here is of One who watches over His people as a shepherd—One who furnishes their needs, protects from danger, and is ever mindful of their concerns. David, the author of this psalm, understood the relationship between sheep and their shepherds. In claiming that the Lord is “our God,” he indicated that the Lord looks on us with love and tenderness, just as David looked after his flock. When he referred to “the sheep of his hand” he was conveying the reality of the bond that exists between a shepherd and his flock. The word “hand” indicates being close enough to touch, or perhaps being held or carried. The overall image is one of tenderness, caring, and watchfulness.

As I gazed upon the serene beauty of sheep grazing on the hillsides in Romania, I thought what a great picture they provided of how the Lord cares for us. I am not an expert regarding sheep, but I know that they are helpless creatures who are very dependent upon the shepherd to make sure they find sufficient food. They do not learn easily, and tend to follow one another into danger. They are easy prey for predators because they have no natural weapons such as teeth or claws to defend themselves.

Like sheep, we too need a Shepherd. We are totally dependent upon the Lord to provide spiritual nourishment, to care for us, and to protect us from the wiles of the enemy. Without Him, we are no match for the devices of Satan, for we can easily be led astray and have no ability to defend ourselves. However, when we are under the tender care of our Great Shepherd, we can be at peace and content. He is aware

of our needs and has promised to provide for them. What a blessing it is to rely upon Him, and know that He is watching over us! When the Eternal God is our Shepherd, we are safe from every danger.

BACKGROUND

Psalm 95

Psalms 95-100 are part of a collection of royal psalms that emphasize praise to God as the Sovereign of all creation, as well as the God of Israel. The author of Psalm 95 is not named, but in Hebrews 4:7, the writer of the epistle referred to verse eight as being located “in David.” This psalm is classified as a prophetic hymn, based upon the exhortation beginning with the second part of verse 7.

In this psalm, a two-part invitation is extended: the Jewish people are asked to come and praise God, and to come and submit to Him. The inclusion of the word “today” in verse 7 indicates that God still speaks to hearts; the same exhortation is repeated in Hebrews 3:7-11. The psalm also includes a warning against following the example of Israel’s forefathers, who because of unbelief were compelled to wander for forty years in the wilderness. The reference to “a people that do err in their heart” (verse 10) literally means “a nation of wandering hearts.”

Psalm 96

Psalm 96 was taken from a section of a psalm written by David for the dedication of the Ark when it was placed in the Tabernacle tent at Jerusalem (see 1 Chronicles 16:23-33). Several verses are also repeated in Psalm 98.

Like the other short psalms in this collection, Psalm 96 focuses on praise to God. In this series of verses, however, the scope is broadened: worship is not only for Israel alone but for all nations. David looked ahead prophetically to the advent of Christ and the calling of Gentile nations, and said that “all the earth” should join in singing a “new song” (also referred to in Revelation 5:9). His viewpoint encompassed the end time when Christ will come to judge the earth and set up His Millennial Kingdom (verse 13).

Psalm 97

No author is cited for Psalm 97, although the Syriac version of the Bible credits its composition to David. Commentators agree that this psalm is Messianic in nature, as it contains clear prophetic reference to Christ’s Second Coming to this earth to set up His Millennial Kingdom. That theme is established in the first three words, “The LORD reigneth,” for only

when Christ rules will the “earth rejoice” and the “multitude of isles be glad.”

The psalmist foretold that the fire of God’s wrath (a reference to the Great Tribulation) will precede the righteous reign of Christ and will obliterate the enemies of righteousness (verse 3). The “lightnings” mentioned in verse 4 are referenced four times in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 4:5; 8:5; 11:19; and 16:18). The hills which will melt like wax at the presence of the Lord (verse 5) are also described by the Apostle Peter (2 Peter 3:10-12). David’s prophetic utterance that “Zion heard, and was glad; and the daughters of Judah rejoiced” (verse 8) alludes to the time yet to come when the Jews will acknowledge Jesus as their Messiah and King.

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. In Psalm 96:4, why did the psalmist say the Lord is to be greatly praised?

2. Psalm 97:2-3 tells us that the Lord will come with righteous judgment. Why is God’s judgment righteous and fair even when it is severe?

3. Sheep recognize the voice of their master. In reference to Psalm 95:7-8, what steps can we take to make sure we are able to hear God’s voice?

CONCLUSION

How blessed we are to have a Shepherd who tenderly cares for us, provides for our needs, and defends us against every source of danger!

NOTES



Psalms 98:1 through 101:8

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

**“Moses and Aaron among his priests, and Samuel among them that call upon his name; they called upon the LORD, and he answered them.”
(Psalm 99:6)**

When God’s people call upon Him in a time of need, He responds. A veteran pastor of the Apostolic Faith work in Norway, Odd Bruvøll, often testified about God’s answers to his prayers at various times in his life.

One such instance occurred after he was injured while working on a church project in Tromsø. Brother Bruvøll and some of the men from the congregation were expanding the church there, and they needed to build a retaining wall against the neighbor’s house. He related, “I was working alone on a big scaffold, lifting blocks, when I slipped and fell, injuring my back. I was in terrible pain. X-rays were taken and it was found that my back was broken and the spinal cord and nerves were severely damaged. The doctors could do very little. They said I would always have a stiff back because it could not be repaired. I told my wife, Solveig, that I believed the Lord would heal me, but as time went on, the pain grew worse and worse, and it was difficult for me to sleep.

“The church people prayed for me many times but nothing seemed to help. Then one Sunday evening after almost everyone had gone home following the service, I felt I could not stand the pain anymore. Those who were still there anointed me and prayed for me again. Satan told me that they had prayed for me before and nothing had happened, and nothing would happen this time. But I heard a tender Voice saying, ‘You believe and you will see the glory of God.’ I held my hands up and said, ‘Lord, I believe I have been healed now.’ At that exact instant I was healed! It was as if I instantly received a brand new back. That was fifteen years ago, and I have never had pain in my back since. God did the job well.”

Like Moses, Aaron, Samuel, and the others referenced in our focus verse who “call upon his name,” Brother Bruvøll proved that God does answer prayer. That fact is substantiated by many Scriptures, as well as the personal experiences of believers through the ages of time. However, we should understand that the God of the universe is not under any obligation to say “yes” to every prayer. (That actually is a good thing, considering man’s lack of understanding and wisdom compared to God’s.)

Sometimes He may not answer in the way we hope or expect. And while we all want immediate answers, there may be times when we must wait in faith before the Lord until the answer comes, as in Brother Bruvøll’s case.

God knows what is best for us in each circumstance that we face. If we bring Him our petitions with true willingness to accept whatever answer He sends, we can be assured that He *will* answer according to His will.

BACKGROUND

Psalm 98

Psalm 98, with its theme of God’s mercy and salvation, has the same opening and closing verses as Psalm 96. The author is not identified. The Hebrew word translated “psalm” in the title is *mizmor*, which literally means “to make music,” and probably indicates this psalm was to be sung with instrumental accompaniment. As in Psalm 96, reference is made to a “new song.” In this case, the theme of praise to the Lord is developed in ever-increasing dimensions: first it is to occur in Israel (verses 1-3a), then in all the earth (verses 3b-6), and finally in all of nature (verses 7-8).

The phrase “all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God” (verse 3), is an example of what Bible scholars term “the prophetic perfect” tense, which is used when the prophesied event is spoken of as having already happened. (Another example of this is found in Isaiah 9:6, where seven centuries before the advent of Christ, His birth is spoken of in the past tense.)

The instrument identified in verse 6 as a “cornet” is the shofar. It is translated in other Scriptures as a “trumpet” or “ram’s horn,” and was blown in a variety of situations: to call worshipers to Jerusalem (Isaiah 27:13), during coronations (1 Kings 1:34), to signal an attack of the enemy (Judges 3:27), to announce important news (1 Samuel 13:3), and during holy celebrations such as the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 25:9).

Psalm 99

Psalm 99 is classified as a hymn to the God of holiness: it points to God’s holiness in power, in justice, and in mercy, with each section concluding with a statement about God’s holiness (verses 3, 5, and 9). Like other psalms in this grouping, the author is not cited.

The phrase “he sitteth between the cherubims” (verse 1) is an allusion to God’s throne. While royal

thrones of the ancient east were usually made from wood overlaid with precious metals and inlaid with gems, God’s throne was portrayed as a living entity which is positioned above the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant. “Cherubim” are divine or angelic beings who are involved in sacred work before God. They are generally described as winged creatures with feet and hands.

Psalm 100

Similar to Psalm 95 in theme, Psalm 100 probably was sung by worshipers as they traveled in festive procession to the Temple. Some regard it as the doxology or concluding hymn of praise in the collection of royal psalms which begin with Psalm 95.

The “gates” and “courts” in verse 4 refer to God’s house, the place of public worship. The admonition to enter into His gates “with thanksgiving” may indicate that the worshipers brought a thanksgiving offering, and accompanied its presentation with praise to God. Three distinct reasons are given for worship: “he is God” (implying a renunciation of all other gods), “he that hath made us” (and thus we are dependent upon Him for everything), and “we are his people” (those who are called to be His own, and thus are the objects of His tender care).

Psalm 101

Psalm 101 was written by David as a resolution of how he would conduct himself, his household, and his kingdom in the sight of God. It was likely composed around the time that he came to the throne, and states the overall policy that he planned to put in place. It also affirms David’s purpose to maintain moral integrity and to rule righteously.

The word translated *perfect* (verse 2) means “without a blemish or defect.” This term is also used in Scripture to describe God’s blameless character, suggesting that man should strive toward the goal of resembling God. In the following verses, David specified how he resolved to do this. He would not look with pleasure on things displeasing to God. When judging the people, he would not listen to any who slandered their neighbors or were proud. Within his household and government (those who “tarry in my sight”), he would not hire those who plotted or lied, but would seek out people who were upright and faithful. He would daily (an alternate translation of “early”) seek out and punish those who committed wicked acts within his kingdom.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- III. Book III (73:1 — 89:52)
- IV. Book IV (90:1 — 106:48)
- V. Book V (107:1 — 150:6)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to Psalm 99, what three leaders of Israel called upon God for guidance?

2. In Psalm 100:3, the author pointed out that we did not give ourselves life. What bearing does this fact have on the debate in contemporary society over individual so-called “rights” such as suicide and abortion?

3. As part of his plan to live a godly life, David said he would avoid temptation by setting no wicked thing before his eyes. What are some other ways we can avoid temptation?

CONCLUSION

Just as God answered the prayers of godly men of old, He will answer our prayers when we come to Him in faith and submission.

NOTES



Psalms 102:1 through 103:22

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.” (Psalm 103:2)

How easy it is to forget details that once were important in our lives! A while back, I was trying to locate some maps my wife and I had brought with us when we moved into our current home. As I went through box after box searching for them, it was like looking at an archeological dig of my life. One box had some cassette tapes that my wife and I were given when we were attending birthing classes more than twenty-five years ago. There were certificates of education and coursework that I had completed at various times in my career. I even came across a pair of gym shorts from my high school years—it was amazing how much they had shrunk! All of these items were part of my history, and they brought back many memories.

In one of those boxes I found a copy of my testimony which I had typed up right after I was saved in 1994. Reading it, I was surprised at how some of the smaller details were already starting to escape me. Getting saved was the most momentous event of my life, yet some of the particulars were fading somewhat in my memory. Yes, I could remember where and when I prayed through, the day, and the circumstances which brought me to that point, but other details that seemed unforgettable at the time were starting to disappear. The fact is, with the passing of time, our memories dim.

It is vital to preserve godly memories. Memories give confidence and build trust. They are one of our best aids to heartfelt worship. When we recall and rehearse the things God has done in the past, those memories become the foundation for believing that He can take care of anything that comes our way in the future.

Our focus verse reveals that the psalmist David clearly was aware of the importance of remembering God’s benefits. He went on to provide a list of specific blessings that God bestows: pardon for sin—first on his list, and obviously the most important—healing, protection, provision of our needs, and assurance for the future.

Along with remembering God’s blessings comes the responsibility of passing on our memories. Once we are gone from this life, our recollections of God’s blessings will be gone as well unless we have passed them on to others. Our children, our grandchildren,

our church family, and those we work with or meet along life’s way all should be told. We want the accounts of God’s faithfulness to live on! When I go home to Heaven, I want someone to be able to say, “He is gone, but I remember him telling about how he got saved. I remember hearing him recount times when God intervened in his life and answered specific prayers.” I want someone else to look at the blessings God gave me along my spiritual journey and be blessed.

Let your family know! Let your fellow church members know! Let your friends and acquaintances know! It is a blessing to remember, and to rehearse to others what God has done in our lives.

BACKGROUND

Psalm 102

The superscription for Psalm 102 is very different from all other psalms. It makes no reference to musical accompaniment, names no author, gives no indication of the historical setting, and offers no instruction as to when or how it was to be presented. Within the context, verses 13-16, 20, and 22 could imply that it was written during the period of Israel’s exile. Although Bible scholars classify Psalm 102 as a penitential psalm, the author does not point to sin as the cause of his miseries, but rather, to his personal circumstances and physical weakness. The psalm includes clear references to the Messiah, so some expositors believe it is entirely prophetic, portraying the anguish of the suffering Christ.

The psalmist enumerated his many complaints in the first eleven verses of the psalm, listing a variety of situations that brought pain. He was heartbroken, had a physical illness, felt lonely, and could not sleep. He faced human opposition, was sorrowful, and most troubling of all, he felt God had deserted him.

In verse 12, the focus shifts from the psalmist’s pitiful circumstances to what God can do: He will hear and have compassion (verses 13, 17, 20) and will restore (verses 16, 21). These verses are prophetic as they were “written for the generation to come” (verse 18); the psalmist’s personal situation was not addressed directly. Instead, he looked forward to the day when God would hear the complaints of all His people, have compassion on them, and restore Zion (Jerusalem).

The prophetic portion of the psalm seems to point to the Millennial Reign, based on the reference in verse 22 to the gathering together of the people. The writer also spoke of the day when the current heavens

and earth will pass away and a new heaven and earth will be created (verses 25-26). Verses 25-27 from the Greek translation of the Old Testament are quoted in Hebrews 1:10-12.

Psalm 103

Psalm 103, a composition of David, is a song of praise to the covenant God of Israel. It has been universally acclaimed for its beauty of expression. Beginning and ending with the words, “Bless the LORD, O my soul,” it does not contain one sad or negative phrase in all its twenty-two verses.

This psalm is very personal. It is apparent that David had experienced God’s goodness personally. It is also universal in application; David made it known that the goodness he had experienced was available to all who fear God and keep His commandments (verses 11, 17, and 18).

While Psalm 102 begins with a list of the afflictions of man, Psalm 103 begins with the remedy for those afflictions. The first five verses are a call to worship God for the benefits He bestows on those who serve Him—benefits which provide for all of man’s needs from spiritual to physical and emotional, and which culminate in being crowned by God’s lovingkindness (covenant love) and tender mercies (intense compassion).

Verses 6-14 center on God’s great mercy for sinners. Mercy’s dimensions are described both vertically (“as the heaven is high above the earth”—verse 11) and horizontally (God removes sin “as far as the east is from the west”—verse 12). The verb translated *pitieth* in verse 13 means “to have compassion.” Verses 15-18 continue the focus on mercy, pointing out that God’s mercy is eternal toward those who fear Him and keep His commandments.

The psalm concludes with a grand finale of praise and a call to all of creation to join in blessing God.

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. What are three of the afflictions that troubled the author of Psalm 102? What are three of the benefits David listed in Psalm 103?

2. The word translated *destitute* in Psalm 102:17 means “stripped of all resources; poor.” Why do you think God particularly regards the prayer of the destitute?

3. What are some ways we might go about cultivating and maintaining a spirit of gratitude for God’s benefits?

CONCLUSION

Like David, we should purpose to remember all that God has done in our lives. Godly memories will be a strong foundation for the future, and are something we can and should pass on to the next generation.

NOTES



Psalm 104:1-35

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Bless the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, thou art very great; thou art clothed with honour and majesty. Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain.” (Psalm 104:1-2)

“Look at the sky, kids!” Dad exclaimed, drawing our attention to the heavenly scene. Leaving our car and heading toward the house after returning from church, we paused in the yard for as long as our little fingers and toes could stand the cold and gazed at the brilliant light show in the heavens. It was a cold, clear autumn night, and the sky to the north was vibrantly alive with swirls of color—a shining curtain of light that was never the same for more than a few moments.

This single detail of God’s creation, the aurora borealis (or Northern Lights), is caused by a complicated set of interactions between the solar wind and earth’s magnetic field. The colors of the aurora range from white and yellow/green to purple/red hues. Its lights often shift and shimmer with a freedom similar to sunlight on a rippling lake, as the auroras arrive and depart in random fashion. Sometimes the movement is stately and sometimes whimsical, but every time it is impressive! On one occasion I saw a steady display of magenta light in a single spot in the sky. My friends and I thought surely the Lord would return at any second through that beautiful splash of vibrant color.

The aurora borealis is still one of my favorite sights. I like to imagine God moving among its beautiful lights. Today’s focus verses relate that God covers Himself with light “as with a garment” and is “clothed with honour and majesty.” When we read that He stretched out the heavens like a curtain, it is not hard to picture Him moving between the shifting folds of glorious light and color in the aurora borealis!

God is able to stand where nothing exists—on ethereal, insubstantial clouds, vapor, and wind. He laid the foundations of the earth in space, where there was nothing. He created this world with all its varied beauties in that void. God’s voice can control water and make it stand up or stay in its borders. He appointed the moon for seasons, and created darkness, when nocturnal creatures creep out. The earth’s foliage grows as He sends rain and sunshine. The fowls of the air survive in the resulting treetops, the large beasts of the sea are fed by the bounty of the seas.

Along with all of nature, we benefit from what God supplies. And of all God’s creatures, we are the only ones who can fully appreciate and give God praise and thanksgiving for His magnificent world. Our debt of gratitude is great, so when we view the wonders around us, let us pause and give praise to our Creator!

BACKGROUND

Psalm 104

Psalm 104 is the natural progression of the preceding psalm. While no title is given, it continues in the same style as Psalm 103, beginning and ending with, “Bless the LORD, O my soul.” It follows the same theme—blessing the Lord for His interaction with His creation—although Psalm 103 focuses on God’s interaction with man, while Psalm 104 focuses on God’s interaction with nature. The last verse of Psalm 103 provides the transition to this psalm in its closing statement: “Bless the LORD, all his works in all places of his dominion.”

Psalm 104 is a poetic account of creation that loosely follows the same outline as Genesis 1. However, instead of focusing on *how* God created, it focuses on the relationship of God to His creation (His works). For example, while Genesis 1:3 states, “And God said, Let there be light: and there was light,” Psalm 104:2 says, “Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment.”

The character of God is shown through this perspective of creation. Three attributes which are unique to God stand out in this psalm: God is omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), and omnipresent (present everywhere).

The omnipotence of God is brought out in verses 1-9. This section of the psalm begins with, “Thou art very great,” and emphasizes God’s greatness as revealed through the first three days of Creation. In these verses, each of God’s created works is shown to be subject to Him.

The next section of the psalm, verses 10-20, continues a focus on the third day of Creation and into the fourth. It conveys the omniscience of God through the design that is seen in the natural world. Water serves as an example of how nature works in harmony: water nourishes the earth, which brings forth grass, which feeds the cattle and provides crops for man. This example also shows that God has provided for every need of man—water, shelter, and food. The latter verses of this section show that everything created has a purpose. For example, the

trees provide habitation for birds, the hills serve as a refuge for goats, and the moon is appointed for seasons.

Verses 21-35 highlight the omnipresence of God through all creatures' dependence upon Him. Living creatures rely on God for their daily needs—"these wait all upon thee; that thou mayest give them their meat in due season" (verse 27), and are dependent upon God for sustained life, for when He "takest away their breath, they die" (verse 29).

In light of all that the psalmist had observed in nature, he realized his need to give praise to God as long as he lived. His oft-repeated injunction to "Bless the LORD, O my soul" changes to a new phrase of thanksgiving: "Praise ye the LORD." The original Hebrew for this phrase is *halelu-yah*; this is the first time the word "hallelujah" occurs in the Book of Psalms.

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. What are three of the ways God has provided for the animals? (See verses 11, 12, 14, 17, 18, and 21.)

2. What aspects of creation especially speak to your heart?

3. What are some ways we can honor and praise God for His creative powers?

CONCLUSION

God designed the various elements of creation to work together beautifully, and we are amazed, captivated, and delighted with His handiwork.

NOTES



Psalm 105:1-45

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the LORD. Seek the LORD, and his strength: seek his face evermore.” (Psalm 105:3-4)

Sometimes seeking becomes an urgent priority. Recently when I came home one evening, my wife greeted me with the words, “I have some bad news for you.” (A husband just loves to hear that!) She went on, “I lost a needle today. I think it is somewhere in the master bedroom...on your side of the bed. It might be on the bed, or in the chair where you read, or on the floor. I looked for it, but couldn’t find it.” Well, it was fine that she had looked for the needle, but I determined to *find* it. I wasn’t going to wait until I located it with my bare foot!

I went to the bedroom and started my search, carefully reaching down inside the edge of the cushion on my chair. No needle. I ran my hand gently across the cover on the bed. No needle. Finally, I went out to the garage and got a flashlight, then put my nose right down on the carpet while shining the light this way and that. It took a while, but at last a glimmer caught my eye. I had found the needle!

In our focus verses, the psalmist instructs us to “seek the LORD.” In today’s vernacular, to *seek* means “to go in search of.” In the original Hebrew, the word translated *seek* means “to inquire for.” Both definitions are appropriate, and in both there is a sense of the need to invest diligent effort.

We do not set ourselves to seek God because He is in hiding or trying to get away from us. In one sense, we are always in God’s presence because if we are His children, He has said he would never leave us or forsake us. We set ourselves to seek God because there are many distractions in the world around us. It is easy to get sidetracked by duties and details that occupy our time, and neglect the opportunity—the all-important *necessity*—of drawing nigh to God and communing with Him. The enemy of our souls will try to hinder us, and one area he will work on is our prayer life. However, we can prevail! We can seek the Lord with all of our hearts.

There is a great blessing in seeking God. The psalmist said, “Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the LORD.” Rejoicing is the natural result of seeking God—even if nothing visibly changes in the circumstances around us, God promises that He will reward those who diligently seek Him. Let us

purpose today to find that spirit of rejoicing as we apply ourselves to seeking the face of God.

BACKGROUND

Psalm 105

No author is cited for Psalm 105. However, at least the first portion may have been composed by David as the first fifteen verses are also found in 1 Chronicles 16:8-22, the psalm David delivered to “Asaph and his brethren” on the day that the Ark of the Covenant was returned to the Tabernacle tent in Jerusalem. It is unknown if David wrote the remainder of the psalm. The psalm is in the form of a hymn, and was probably used in the Temple worship.

In this psalm, the writer demonstrated God’s faithfulness and marvelous works by narrating a historical account of Israel’s history from the time of Abraham to the conquest of Canaan. Verses 7-22 concern the patriarchs. God protected the patriarchs when they were few in number and “strangers” in the land of Canaan. When the psalmist said God “reproved kings for their sakes” (verse 14), he probably was referencing Pharaoh (Genesis 12:14-20) and Abimelech (Genesis 20:1-16 and 26:6-11). Verses 23-26 describe the Israelites’ sojourn in Egypt; the “land of Ham” mentioned in verse 23 is a poetic designation for Egypt. Verses 37-45 focus on the Exodus from Egypt. “Not one feeble person” (verse 37) means that there were no stragglers; not one Israelite was left behind in Egypt.

The psalmist made no mention in this psalm of Israel’s unfaithfulness to God. The question as to why God was long-suffering to such a rebellious people is found in the final verse: “That they might observe his statutes, and keep his laws.” Pondering such great mercy led the psalmist to conclude the hymn with an expression of spontaneous thanksgiving: “Praise ye the LORD.”

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. In verses 1-5, what are three of the specific instructions the psalmist gave?
-



Psalm 106:1-48

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“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. Nevertheless, he saved them for his name’s sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known.” (Psalm 106:7-8)

Just as God was merciful to Israel in spite of the people’s repeated rebellion, He continues to call individuals who resist Him. Jim Parr was one who experienced God’s mercy in that regard. He often related that he was the wayward one in his family. He would testify, “I was a slave to a life of sin for years—the terror of the community where I was brought up, a drunken miner in England, Scotland, and Wales. On Sundays you would find me gambling and drinking, trying to numb the pain inside. Jail bars failed to reform me. I even meditated upon committing suicide, but fear of God’s judgment stopped me from taking my own life. Many times I nearly went into a devil’s Hell when the mines where I was working would fall in, but I would just blaspheme God’s name.

“I was in Wales during the Welsh revival from 1904 to 1906, where one hundred thousand people were converted in about two years, and witnessed people being converted all around me. Some of those people had been my drinking companions. They had prayer meetings fifteen hundred feet down in the mines but I would curse and swear and have nothing to do with them. At the same time, there was something in my heart that was hungering for reality.

“One Sunday night I decided to attend a church where a Welsh man, Evan Roberts, was holding a revival meeting. The church was packed so I went across the street to a Salvation Army service. God was talking to me, and He put life and death before me. However, I deliberately stepped out of that place without yielding.

“The next day, three of us went shooting in the mountains. As I was firing a gun, it broke apart and shot my hand all to pieces. It was only the mercy of God that I was not killed, but I was in awful shape for about three months. I figured it was God’s judgment upon me because I did not yield my heart to Him. I made a vow during that time, saying, ‘God, if You will spare my life, I will surrender to You.’ However, I did not keep that vow.

“After a couple of years, I decided to come to America. I worked in several places, and then God in

His mercy permitted me to take work at a coal mining camp in Harrisburg, Illinois. One evening as I came out of the mines, I met a couple of Welshmen who invited me to a revival service. As I sat in the back of that meeting hall, God spoke to my soul. I was polluted by the powers of Hell and diseased from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet, but thank God, a lifeline was thrown out. At the close of that service, I walked up the aisle and dropped on my knees. There I made an unconditional surrender. God blotted out my sins and came into my life. He rescued my Hell-deserving soul from a life of defeat, healed my body, and made me a new creature. From the bottom of my heart I thank Him that He had mercy on my Hell-bound soul!”

Psalm 106 is a sad record of how Israel “remembered not” the multitude of God’s mercies toward them but rebelled against Him. Jim Parr also spurned God’s mercy for a time. However, in both cases, God continued to extend mercy “that he might make his mighty power to be known.” For thousands of years now, the Bible has made known the account of God’s faithfulness to Israel. Jim Parr became a pioneer minister in the Apostolic Faith organization shortly after its founding in 1906, and testified until his death in 1949 of God’s faithfulness to him.

Today, God’s mercy is still extended. The path to God is still the same, regardless of the past or what amount of spiritual light one has. If we have experienced God’s love and forgiveness, our part is to continue to make His mighty power known, and encourage others to respond to Him.

BACKGROUND

Psalm 106

Psalm 106 is the closing psalm in Book IV—a section which began with Psalm 90. This psalm begins in a similar manner as Psalms 105 and 107; the words “O give thanks unto the LORD” appear in the first verse of each. The three psalms are also similar in that each contains historical accounts of Israel.

Psalm 106 offers a counterpart to Psalm 105. Whereas the previous psalm spoke of God’s faithfulness in keeping His covenant with Abraham’s descendants, this psalm tells how the Jewish people broke their side of the covenant agreement through repeated disobedience and unbelief. No author is cited, but the opening and closing verses of this psalm may indicate that it was written from exile by someone looking forward to the day when God would return His people to their land. The psalm is classified as a



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!” (Psalm 107:8)

Several months ago I read an interesting book titled *One Thousand Gifts*. The author, Ann Voskamp, related how she had faced some tragic situations in her life, and had many hidden fears. Then a friend challenged her to write down one thing she was thankful for each day. At first Ann wondered if she could do it. Wouldn't she run out of reasons for gratitude in a few weeks? And if she did think of something to write down every day, could that single action possibly make a difference in her life? Still, she agreed to give it a try...and what a discovery she made! Through the process of identifying and noting reasons for thankfulness, she became more and more grateful. In the simple exercise of expressing gratitude for what she already had, she discovered the life she'd always wanted—a life full of thanksgiving and deep-seated joy.

The dictionary defines the word *grateful* as “warmly or deeply appreciative of benefits received.” Studying the word a bit more closely, we find that gratitude is made up of three parts: acknowledgement of the benefit, recognition of its value, and an appreciation for the intent of the giver.

Although we've probably all been negligent at times in voicing appreciation, gratitude is most beneficial when it is expressed. There is a great deal of focus in contemporary society on the transformational power of appreciation. Countless essays, articles, and books have been written on the subject. Seminars and workshops have been held with the aim of helping people tap into the positive emotional, psychological, and physical benefits resulting from verbalizing our gratitude. The prevailing wisdom is that employers and employees, teachers and students, parents and children—in fact, individuals from the whole spectrum of human relationships—benefit by thankfulness.

If it is important and beneficial to express gratitude to those around us, consider how important it is to express gratitude to God for His immeasurable goodness! That is the point the psalmist was making in today's focus verse. And he did not state this truth just once: three more times in this psalm he urged again, “Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his

wonderful works to the children of men.” Clearly, the psalmist understood that heartfelt gratitude is the only appropriate response for the benefits God has given to us.

God had bestowed multiple blessings upon the Children of Israel: a homeland, freedom, health, protection, and provision of daily needs. These were granted out of God's mercy, not because of the Israelites' goodness or wisdom. This is also true for those of us who have been born again. We did not deserve God's mercy. And certainly the value of having our sins forgiven is beyond our ability to fathom! Let us praise God today, not only for the temporal blessings He gives, but for His amazing and merciful provision for our eternal well-being.

BACKGROUND

Psalm 107

Although closely related in theme and style to the two psalms preceding it, Psalm 107 opens Book V, the final and longest section of Psalms. Most of the psalms in Book V are oriented toward public worship. This psalm highlights the providential goodness of God towards the Israelites throughout their history, and expresses—perhaps in greater detail than any other psalm—a belief in God's intervention in the affairs of men. A stylistic shift occurs at verse 33, with the first portion being a thanksgiving and the second section, a wisdom hymn.

Based on verse 3, this psalm was probably written after Israel's return from Babylonian exile. The phrase “a city of habitation” (verse 7) could be translated as “a place where they could establish their homes.”

Psalm 107 has the form of a poem in which each of its stanzas concludes with a refrain. The themes expressed are: God gave the Israelites a spiritual and physical home (verses 2-9); God delivered Israel from spiritual and physical captivity (verses 10-16); God healed and delivered the Israelites from destruction (verses 17-22); God protects those at sea during storms (verses 23-32); and God provides for mankind's needs (verses 33-42).

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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Psalms 108:1 through 109:31

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man. Through God we shall do valiantly: for he it is that shall tread down our enemies.”

(Psalm 108:12-13)

During World War II, the compassionate and devout family of watchmaker Casper ten Boom provided refuge for people fleeing the Nazi secret police in Holland. A small secret area was created behind one wall of daughter Corrie’s tiny bedroom on the uppermost story of the family home. Access to this thirty-inch deep hiding place was gained by crawling on hands and knees through a cupboard’s panel, which was carefully stained on the exterior to blend with its surroundings. With ventilation to the outside, this tiny cubicle could temporarily hold a handful of refugees. Often as many as seven people—Jews and members of the Dutch underground—were housed in the ten Boom home. The family and their associated contacts within the network of the Haarlem underground saved the lives of an estimated eight hundred Jews, and protected many Dutch underground workers.

Because of their involvement in sheltering “enemies” of the Third Reich, the ten Boom home was raided in early 1944, and all members of the family were imprisoned. When Corrie’s eighty-four-year-old father was asked if he knew he could be killed for helping Jews, he replied, “It would be an honor to give my life for God’s ancient people.” He died after only ten days in prison. Some family members were subsequently released, but Corrie and her sister, Betsie, remained incarcerated. During their imprisonment they were moved to three different prisons, the last being the infamous Ravensbrück concentration camp near Berlin, Germany.

While incarcerated, Corrie and Betsie shared God’s love with their fellow prisoners, reading Scriptures and praying with them, and many were led to Christ. Through their spiritual focus and steadfast commitment to God, the two encouraged their fellow prisoners and were able to avoid sinking to the level of their captors.

Corrie and her sister proved the truth of our focus verse: that “through God we shall do valiantly.” Although Betsie died at Ravensbrück, she never relinquished her trust in God. And Corrie survived. After her miraculous release, Corrie realized that life was a gift, and she needed to share what she and Betsie had learned. She began an international

ministry that took her into more than sixty countries in the next thirty-two years. She testified frequently that their strength and courage came from the power of God—He was the divine Source which enabled them to endure and triumph over the evil of their enemies. She was tireless in proclaiming the message that “Jesus is Victor!”

Though we may go through trials here in this life, God can give us strength and courage to “do valiantly” in the face of every foe. Like Corrie and Betsie ten Boom, we can be confident that our ultimate deliverance is sure!

BACKGROUND

Psalm 108

Psalm 108 is comprised of the endings of two previous psalms. Verses 1-5 are taken from Psalm 57:7-11, which tells of David’s determination to trust God while fleeing from King Saul in the desert of En-Gedi (1 Samuel 24). Verse 5, which concludes this portion, gives the purpose of this psalm: to exalt God with the highest praise and honor.

Verses 6-13 are from Psalm 60:5-12, in which David expressed his confidence in God’s deliverance in spite of troubling military circumstances. (Comparing the historical accounts in 2 Samuel 8:13-14, 1 Kings 11:15-16, and 1 Chronicles 18:12-13 reveals that while David was fighting with his army in the north against the Ammonites and Syrians, he received word that the Edomites had attacked their nation from the south.) In verses 7-9, David related that God had said He would conquer all the land of Canaan, including the nations within (“Shechem”) and the nations without (“Succoth”). He had also said He would bring back those who followed Saul (Gilead and Manasseh), make Ephraim His army, and establish Judah as the seat of His government. Moab would be a servant (one who washes feet), Edom a slave (one who carries shoes), and Philistia a trophy. In verses 10-13, David acknowledged that such a victory could not be accomplished by man alone, but he was certain that with God’s help, they would prevail.

Psalm 109

Psalm 109 is a prayer ascribed to David, in which he asked God to defend him against his enemies and reward them according to their sinful deeds. It is dedicated to the Chief Musician; the term “natsach” (translated as “chief Musician”) occurs in the titles of fifty-five psalms, all but two of which were authored by David.

Psalm 109 is the last of the imprecatory psalms, and expresses special indignation against liars and slanderers. The background for this psalm is not established, but it may have been Saul's persecution of David instigated by Doeg, or Absalom's rebellion and the treachery of Ahithophel. In either case, the psalmist's complaint clearly was set in historical circumstances and was not just a general cry to God for the punishment of the wicked.

The maledictions (curses or calling down of judgment) in this psalm must be understood in context of the Old Testament revelation of God and His ways, compared to Christ's New Testament teachings of love and justice. For example, David asked in verse 6 that his enemy be ruled by a "wicked man" and that Satan would "stand at his right hand," a position typically taken by a trusted counselor or advisor. In verse 11, he pleaded that the extortioner would "catch" (or seize) all that his enemy had. The statement that strangers would "spoil" his enemy's labor could be translated "plunder the fruits of his toil."

In verses 21-31, the psalmist turned from contemplating vengeance upon his enemies to a consideration of the goodness of God and his hope for vindication. As is often the case in psalms of lament, David ended with a vow to praise God, his great Defender.

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. In Psalm 108:1, what do you think the phrase "My heart is fixed" means?

2. In Psalm 109:21, how does the psalmist seek justice?

3. David's calls for vengeance against his enemies were based upon the Old Testament revelation of God and His ways. In the light of our New Testament dispensation and Christ's teachings of love and justice, how should we treat those who falsely accuse or persecute us?

CONCLUSION

We may encounter cruel people or face unjust persecution along life's pathway. However, we know that God will mete out ultimate justice. In the meantime, He can give us strength and grace to endure!

NOTES



Psalms 110:1 through 114:8

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

**“Surely he shall not be moved for ever: the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance.”
(Psalm 112:6)**

My parents are buried in a lovely cemetery that is spread across rolling hills and surrounded by beautifully manicured gardens. From time to time, my brother and I go there to honor and reminisce about our mom and dad. Recently we brought flowers they both had loved. As I laid the blooms across the names on their tombstones, I thought of how insignificant my offering seemed compared to the years they had put into loving and caring for me.

Throughout my parents’ lives, everything they did reflected God’s love. Psalm 112:9 commends the good man who “hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor.” That certainly could be said about my parents! Kindness and generosity flowed from them. We lived on a farm, so they gave produce and homegrown vegetables to acquaintances with large families, people who had little or no income, and even to those they did not know who came to them—no one was ever turned away. The bushels of fruit and vegetables they harvested each fall could never be compared to the bushels of love they willingly gave when they saw a need. They labored hard to keep our family happy, healthy, and comfortable, but they were never too busy to lend a helping hand to a neighbor. They taught us to work hard and to never give up when things did not go well.

In spiritual matters, my parents were examples as well. Mom and Dad held God in reverence, and delighted in obeying His commandments and passing them on to the next generations. They served the Lord faithfully for many years, daily reading the Bible with us, and praying for each of their children. They especially loved their six granddaughters once they joined our family, and prayed for them daily too. Though Mom and Dad are in Heaven now, they are cherished in my memory and in the memories of many others as well. And as our focus verse indicates, I know that their generous and compassionate righteousness will be kept in “everlasting remembrance” in the annals of Heaven.

As we remember godly individuals who have gone on before, let us purpose in our hearts to faithfully serve the Lord so that one day we can have a part in God’s everlasting remembrance also, and dwell eternally with Him.

BACKGROUND

Psalm 110

Psalm 110 was written by David and is a Messianic prophecy, a fact confirmed by Jesus himself in Matthew 22:41-45. David foretold the day when Christ would be resurrected from the dead, ascend to Heaven victorious over sin, and take a place of honor on the throne beside God to serve as King and High Priest for eternity. The psalm also alludes to the end of the tribulation period, when Christ’s people will come forth arrayed in the beauty of holiness to willingly fight with Him.

In verse 1, the phrase “The LORD said unto my Lord” could be translated “Jehovah said unto Adonai” (“Adonai” is the Hebrew word for any potentate). Since David was the ruler of Israel, his master or potentate could only be the Messiah. The phrase “until I make thine enemies thy footstool” referred to a common practice in that era in which a conqueror would place his foot on the neck of the one he had defeated as a symbol of complete mastery.

This psalm is quoted more frequently in the New Testament than any other psalm.

Psalm 111

Psalm 111 is an acrostic psalm, with each sentence beginning with the successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Psalms 111 and 112 make up a pair, as they are parallel in both structure and theme: Psalm 111 focuses on the character of God, while Psalm 112 considers the character of a godly man. This psalm is classified as a hymn of praise or thanksgiving.

The psalmist, who is not named, described God’s “works” (or deeds) in a series of superlatives: they are “great,” “honorable,” “glorious,” “powerful,” “true,” and “fair.” Throughout the psalm, he stressed that God’s works would endure eternally, and therefore God’s praise would continue forever.

Psalm 112

Psalm 112 was most likely written by the same person who wrote Psalm 111. It follows the same acrostic form; each psalm has ten verses with the first eight being couplets, and the last two being triplets. Psalm 112 begins where Psalm 111 left off, with a statement about the fear of the Lord. This psalm tells of the blessings that result from following God’s precepts. As with Psalm 111, no author is cited.

Psalm 113

Like Psalms 111 and 112, Psalm 113 has no title, and the authorship is unknown. It is traditionally sung

by the Jewish people at the beginning of Passover. This psalm is the first in a group of six (113-118) known as the Egyptian Hallel, which are used as a unit in synagogue worship on joyous occasions. (The allusion to Egypt is based upon the opening verse of Psalm 114.) Psalm 113 begins with an exhortation to the servants of God to praise Him. The Hebrew word *halal*, which means “praise,” is used seventy-six times in the Book of Psalms. This likely was included in the hymn sung by Christ and His disciples just before they went together to the Garden of Gethsemane (see Matthew 26:30).

Psalm 114

As with other psalms in the Egyptian Hallel, Psalm 114 is anonymous and no title is given. Psalm 114 highlights the power of God through the miracles He did while delivering the Israelites from Egypt and leading them to the Promised Land. Two specific acts of deliverance are mentioned in verse 3: the parting of the water at the Red Sea, and the later crossing of Jordan into Canaan. The psalmist celebrated the fact that even nature is subject to the commands of God.

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. Which of the Psalms in today's text describes Israel's exodus from Egypt?

2. Psalm 112 says, “Blessed is the man that feareth the LORD.” How might a proper reverence and awe of God show itself in our daily actions?

3. Psalms 111, 112, and 113 all begin with the injunction, “Praise ye the LORD.” What are some ways we can praise God outside of church?

CONCLUSION

Even when the memory of godly people fades on this earth, their remembrance in Heaven is truly everlasting. Their righteousness and reward will endure forever!

NOTES



Psalms 115:1 through 116:19

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.” (Psalm 116:15)

John Clasper, known to many as “Brother Scotty,” was a beloved minister in the Apostolic Faith work. When he was about to pass into eternity, the nurse in attendance asked if she could do anything for him. He said, “Just roll back the roof, and let me go!” There was no fear in his heart as he approached the end of life on earth.

Many people shrink from the thought of death, viewing it with apprehension or even fear. As humans, we contemplate death from an earthly perspective. However, our focus verse indicates that from the viewpoint of Heaven, the death of a saint is not troubling, tragic, or terrible. Rather, God regards that moment as precious. In the original Hebrew, the word *precious* means “valuable; prized.” In other Scriptures, the same word is translated “honorable.” What a comforting perspective!

The statement “in the sight of the LORD” infers that a dying saint is an object of special notice to God. While we know that the eyes of the Lord are always upon His children, it appears that at death, He observes and cares for the saint of God in a special manner. This is one of His redeemed—a member of His Body and an individual who is loved intensely! Because he is precious to the Lord, his death is precious as well.

Perhaps another reason God views the death of a saint as being precious is the fact that it brings to an end the individual’s trials and sufferings. Those who step into eternity are forever free of the assaults of the enemy. They emerge from the shadows of this world into the glorious brightness of God’s presence, and from temporary residence on earth into the eternal home that He has prepared especially for them. When viewed from that perspective—that the child of God is home at last, safe from danger, and free of all pain and suffering—it is perfectly understandable that the Lord regards that moment as precious.

We also know that the Lord delights in having His people with Himself. He prayed to the Father while on earth that those who had been given Him would “be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory” (John 17:24). When a child of God gains entrance into Heaven, Christ sees an answer to that prayer and is glad. Think of the joy of the Lord as He receives His cherished loved ones—His beloved treasure!

Yes, we miss those who step from our sight into the world beyond. We will grieve our loss; that is to be expected. However, as we prayerfully study what the Word says about the departure of the godly, we will find comfort. The sting of death is gone when we contemplate the joy that awaits those who are faithful!

BACKGROUND

The two psalms in today’s text are the middle two in a group of six (113-118) that are called The Hallel or the Egyptian Hallel. (The allusion to Egypt is based upon the opening verse of Psalm 114.) The word *halal* means “praise.” Psalms 115 and 116 may have been part of the hymn that Jesus and His disciples sang following the Last Supper, just before going to Gethsemane (see Matthew 26:30).

Psalm 115

As with other psalms in the Egyptian Hallel, Psalm 115 is anonymous and no title is given. The theme of this psalm contrasts the greatness of God with the inefficacy of the idols of the heathen. Psalm 115 begins by glorifying God, even though unbelievers had scoffed, “Where is now their God?” (verse 2). Three groups of people were addressed—the people of Israel (verse 9), the priests (“house of Aaron” in verse 10), and “ye that fear the Lord” (verse 11). The latter may have meant Gentiles who had converted to Judaism, or the Jewish people who were wholeheartedly devoted to God. The psalmist’s overriding desire was for God to prove His existence so that the heathen would have no basis for their derisive taunts. In the final verses, he called upon Israel to trust in God as their help and shield.

Psalm 116

Psalm 116 is written in the first person and is the testimony of someone who had been near death. It was probably included with the hymns for public worship because many people can identify with the experiences of the author. The author’s reference to “the sacrifice of thanksgiving” and his pledge to “pay my vows” (verses 17-18) may indicate that the setting was the giving of a thank offering for deliverance from the affliction described in the first verses of the psalm.

In verses 1-9, the writer expressed praise and love for God because He had answered prayer and provided deliverance. Verse 8 specifically mentions three ways God had delivered: the soul from death, eyes from tears, and feet from falling. There was a spiritual battle involved with this writer’s experience;

though his faith had been assailed, he had remained steadfast. The phrase “All men are liars” (verse 11) likely meant that all his friends and associates had failed him. However, he determined to set aside his concern over the failure of men, and consider how he could repay God (verses 12-14). In the closing verses, the psalmist proclaimed his grateful resolution to devote his renewed strength to God’s service and worship.

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to Psalm 116:1, why did the psalmist love the Lord?

2. In Psalm 116:17, the psalmist mentions “the sacrifice of thanksgiving.” What are some sacrifices of thanksgiving that we might offer to the Lord?

3. Psalm 115:12 says, “The LORD hath been mindful of us.” In what ways has God proved that He is mindful of you?

CONCLUSION

Believers are dearly beloved by God, and He regards the time when they are called from this world into His presence as a notable and precious event.

NOTES



Psalms 117:1 through 118:29

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.” (Psalm 118:24)

It was the day after Thanksgiving and I was tired. My head was throbbing, and adding to my woes, I discovered the drain for the kitchen sink had plugged, creating a pool of dirty water several feet wide in the basement. What a mess! It took way too many trips up and down stairs, three excursions to the hardware store, and five hours of precious time to get that issue resolved.

Just a few days earlier, I had read our focus verse from Psalm 118. As I mopped up pools of water and battled mounting frustration, the thought came to me: How can I “rejoice and be glad” in a day like this? As I worked, the Holy Spirit began to remind me of some of the things God has promised through His Word. I thought about His love—that He has pledged to love me with an everlasting love. Proof of His love is that He sent His Son to be my Savior. I pondered His promise to never leave me or forsake me. Yes, that would include a day like this one, when everything seemed to go wrong! I truly wanted God to show me how to be joyful in spite of depressing circumstances, and as I thought about that, I recalled His promise to instruct me and teach me in the way which I should go.

The soggy mess in our basement didn’t miraculously evaporate, and I was *really* tired when the clean-up task was eventually accomplished. However, I ended my day with a renewed appreciation for the truth of God’s Word and the reality of His care for me. Focusing on Him instead of my woes made all the difference!

That experience taught me that if we want to follow the psalmist’s example and purpose to rejoice in every day that the Lord grants us, He will help us do so. The source of our joy does not depend upon our circumstances, our physical state, or our feelings. We find our reason to rejoice in God. If we look to Him, He will give us grace to meet whatever challenges come our way. God is with us, and He is completely aware of our situation. And for that reason, every day of our walk with God can be one of rejoicing!

BACKGROUND

Psalm 117

Psalm 117 is the shortest chapter in the Bible, but it contains a great deal of meaning. Noted preacher and author Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) said, “This

Psalm, which is very little in its letter, is exceedingly large in its spirit; for, bursting beyond all bounds of race or nationality, it calls upon all mankind to praise the name of the Lord.”¹ The content is prophetic, pointing ahead to the time when Jesus will come to save all people. The phrase “all ye nations” in verse 1 is translated in other places as “Gentiles”; a different Hebrew word is used in the phrase “all ye people.” The Apostle Paul referred to verse 1 in Romans 15:11.

Psalm 118

Psalm 118, another song of worship and praise, is the final psalm in the Egyptian Hallel. Some scholars believe this Psalm was used at the Feast of Tabernacles. Its design indicates that portions of it were used as a litany, where a leader recited a phrase and the choir or congregation responded.

The first four verses urge the giving of thanks to God for His enduring mercy. The groups addressed are the same as those mentioned in Psalm 115: all the Nation of Israel, the priests, and the devout (those who “fear the LORD”).

Verses 5-14 declare how God had helped and strengthened His people. Verse 14 is a quote from Exodus 15:2, the Song of Moses. “The gates of righteousness” and “This gate of the LORD” in verses 19-20 probably refer to the gates of the Temple where the Israelites went to worship God.

In verses 22-24 the writer referred to the Messiah who would come to the Jewish people. The New Testament contains four references to verses 22-23 (Matthew 21:42, Mark 12:10-11, Luke 20:17, and 1 Peter 2:7). Some scholars believe verse 23 relates to the miracle of the Resurrection, and verse 24 can be interpreted to mean the day Jesus arose.

The final passage, verses 25-29, combines prayer and thanksgiving. Verse 26 was quoted on Palm Sunday when Jesus rode into Jerusalem (see Mark 11:9).

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. In the first four verses of Psalm 118, the psalmist pointed to an attribute of God as a reason for thanksgiving. What is that attribute?



Psalm 119:1-40

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.” (Psalm 119:36)

Covetousness—a greedy, acquisitive, avaricious love of money—is an insidious evil. To many individuals who build their lives around acquiring and accumulating wealth, money represents success, power, and prestige; to others, it represents security. John G. Wendel and his sisters may have been in the latter category, although no one knows for sure. Whatever their reasons, they are considered to be among the most tight-fisted people of all time.

Each of the Wendel children received a huge inheritance from their parents’ real estate ventures (the family wealth in the early 1900s was estimated at \$50 million), but they hoarded what they had and spent only what was absolutely necessary to maintain life. They shunned society and lived like paupers on the most expensive residential property in New York City, making virtually no improvements to their dwelling. Spouses could have meant a dispersal of the family fortune, so John and five of his six sisters remained single. They never took a streetcar or rode in a taxi. They walked to business appointments where—surrounded by the twenty or more safety deposit boxes containing deeds to their properties—they discussed financial matters with the executive who handled their affairs. As the years passed and the siblings died one by one, each left their portion to the survivors in the family. When the last sister died in 1931, her estate was valued at more than \$100 million. Her only dress was one that she had made herself, and she had worn it for twenty-five years.

The author of our key verse recognized the danger of covetousness; he prayed that God would incline his heart toward God’s Law rather than toward material gain. He regarded the love of money as a lure which could potentially entice his heart away from God. To emphasize the request made in our key verse, he followed it by entreating, “Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity [or worthless things], and quicken thou me in thy way” (Psalm 119:37). He clearly knew that obedience and love for God’s Law are more valuable than the wealth of this world.

The covetousness alluded to in our focus verse is no less a peril in our day than it was three thousand years ago. The desire to acquire wealth is subtle,

and its danger often unrecognized. Money can easily become more than just a benign medium of exchange—it can become a god that bids us worship it! And covetousness can encompass far more than just monetary wealth; it can be an inordinate desire for another person’s possessions, property, or even another person’s spouse.

Let us purpose to make spiritual values paramount in our lives, and be sure we do not open the door to covetousness.

BACKGROUND

Psalm 119, Stanzas 1-5

The author of Psalm 119 is unknown. Many of the stanzas have a Davidic tone, and some references in the psalm could be associated with events in David’s life. However, contemporary scholarship suggests it was likely composed sometime after the construction of the second Temple in Jerusalem in 515 B.C. The best evidence for this conclusion is linguistic: Psalm 119 uses late Biblical Hebrew, as opposed to the classical form of the language.

Psalm 119 is both the longest psalm and the longest chapter in the entire Bible; it is also the most intricate of Biblical acrostic poems. It is divided into twenty-two stanzas, each comprised of eight verses and titled with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. In the original Hebrew, each of these verses begins with the same letter as the stanza title.

Although each stanza has a different emphasis, they are connected by a central theme: appreciation for the Law of God—specifically the *torah* which is a Hebrew word referring to the will of God as it was made known to Israel. Every verse, with the exception of verses 122 and 132, contains a reference to God’s Law in one or more of the following words: “commandments,” “judgments,” “law,” “precepts,” “statutes,” “testimonies,” “ordinances,” “way,” “truth,” and “word.” Today’s text covers the first five stanzas: *Aleph, Beth, Gimel, Daleth, and He*.

In the first stanza, *Aleph*, the psalmist spoke of the blessings of salvation and obedience to God’s Law. *Beth* focuses on how being obedient to God’s Word can help maintain salvation. In the third stanza, *Gimel*, the psalmist encountered adversity and at first longed for God’s Law, and then took refuge in it; he may have been in exile when it was written. *Daleth*, the fourth stanza, relates to the conversion of the psalmist and his subsequent inclination towards God’s Law. *He*, the fifth stanza, describes his willingness to learn of God’s Law.

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 - A. Psalm 119
 - 1. Aleph (119:1-8)
 - 2. Beth (119:9-16)
 - 3. Gimel (119:17-24)
 - 4. Daleth (119:25-32)
 - 5. He (119:33-40)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In verse 9, how did the psalmist say that a young man could “cleanse his way”?

2. What do you think the psalmist meant in verse 19 when he said, “I am a stranger in the earth”?

3. Other than salvation, what are some of the blessings we receive when we seek God with all of our hearts?

CONCLUSION

The psalmist asked God to help him withstand the lure of prosperity, and instead to value God’s Law. That is still a good prayer for us to pray.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Let thy mercies come also unto me, O LORD, even thy salvation, according to thy word. So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me: for I trust in thy word.” (Psalm 119:41-42)

When we lean upon God and put our trust in His Word, He gives us courage to face those who “reproach” us for our faith. A brother in our Lagos church is one of the many who have experienced how God supports His own in the face of opposition. Brother Babatope Makun, known to his friends as T-Mak, relates how he was saved as a nine-year-old boy. However, very soon after his conversion, he faced a tremendous spiritual challenge.

T-Mak’s father had been exposed to religious teaching but had become disillusioned because he did not find the truth. He moved his family to a rural area, and there came in contact with people from the Apostolic Faith who gave him some Gospel literature. Impressed by what he read, he attended their church services and was saved. Not long after, T-Mak was also saved.

Unexpectedly, T-Mak’s father died just six months after he had given his heart to God. It fell to T-Mak’s elder brother, who was not a believer, to assume responsibility for the household. This brother would have nothing to do with the church, and he told T-Mak that he could no longer attend worship services. In fact, he issued an ultimatum: either T-Mak would give up attending church or his education would not be paid for. That was a very serious matter, as a child obviously would have no way to obtain funds for schooling on his own.

However, God gave T-Mak courage. He related, “The song says, ‘I will serve Thee because I love Thee’ and that is my testimony. As a small boy, I couldn’t really explain what I was doing, but I knew that for all the pressure that was on me, the Lord drew my heart close to Him.” T-Mak chose to stand firm in the face of his brother’s opposition, and continued to worship the One who had saved his soul. Miraculously, God provided for T-Mak’s schooling. Today, he serves the Lord as assistant youth leader and youth music leader in our Lagos church. He says, “God has led me step by step. I have had a very tremendous time worshipping the Lord, and I intend to serve Him until I die.”

We may never be called upon to make a decision like the one T-Mak made. In fact, we may never face

direct opposition for our faith. But make no mistake, there is a battle going on! The combat may not be visible, but Satan is *always* trying to pull us away from our commitment to God. Like the psalmist who authored our focus verses, we must depend upon God’s mercies and strength from Him in order to withstand our spiritual enemy. As we fill our lives with His Word and obey His precepts, we can stay true in spite of all opposition—whether seen or unseen!

BACKGROUND

Psalm 119, Stanzas 6-11

Today’s text is the second portion of Psalm 119, the longest of all the Psalms and the most intricate in style. As with the first five stanzas, these six contain eight verses each, are titled with consecutive letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and continue the theme of appreciation for God’s Law. The sections covered in this portion of text are *Vau, Zain, Cheth, Teth, Jod, and Caph*.

In stanza six, *Vau*, the psalmist reflected upon one who reproached him because of his love for God; through the Word of God he found help and guidance to face his revilers. The theme of these verses is being unashamed of God’s Law.

In the next stanza, titled *Zain*, the psalmist told how God’s Law brought comfort during times of distress. When he was afflicted and fearful, he looked to God’s Law for hope, comfort, and stability. One way in which he comforted himself during his spiritual journey was to put God’s laws to music and sing them.

In the stanza titled *Cheth*, the psalmist showed the effects of salvation and God’s Law on his behavior. He said when he considered the way he was living and turned toward God, God became his inheritance. His immediate obedience to God’s Law brought stability, a desire to be around godly people, and a hunger for instruction. The phrase “bands of the wicked” (verse 61) is a figure of speech based upon the practice of snaring game in a noose.

Teth focuses on the disciplinary value of affliction. In this group of verses, the psalmist expressed an appreciation for God’s Word after being restored to God. Affliction had taught him obedience. The phrase “as fat as grease” (verse 70) is a metaphor expressing that the “proud” (or godless) individuals were as dull or insensible as lard.

In the stanza titled *Jod*, the psalmist continued the theme of the benefits accrued through affliction.

He acknowledged that God had a right to allow the affliction, and had done so out of faithfulness. He found comfort and joy in the divine Word, and concluded with a plea that his heart would be “sound” (or healthy) due to his obedience.

Caph centers on support under pressure. In it, the psalmist described how he had clung to God’s Law during extreme distress caused by people plotting against him. Though he waited for an answer so long that he became disheartened, instead of forsaking or forgetting God’s Word, he continued to hope in it.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- I. Book I (1:1 — 41:13)
- II. Book II (42:1 — 72:20)
- III. Book III (73:1 — 89:52)
- IV. Book IV (90:1 — 106:48)
- V. Book V (107:1 — 150:6)
 - A. Psalm 119
 - 6. Vau (119:41-48)
 - 7. Zain (119:49-56)
 - 8. Cheth (119:57-64)
 - 9. Teth (119:65-72)
 - 10. Jod (119:73-80)
 - 11. Caph (119:81-88)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In the stanza titled *Zain*, what did the psalmist say he remembered in the night?

2. What do you think the psalmist meant in verse 45 when he spoke of walking “in liberty”?

3. How do you think the concept stated in verse 71 could help you in a time of affliction?

CONCLUSION

When we face opposition to our faith, we must depend upon the mercies of our loving God, and rely on Him for the courage and wisdom to stand for the truth.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.” (Psalm 119:130)

While visiting a small town on the picturesque Southern Oregon Coast, my wife and I decided to travel a different road back over the mountains to our home. Though the coastline offers many gorgeous scenic vistas, the high country has its own type of beauty, and enjoying the scenery and the fresh mountain air in that area seemed like a nice way to conclude our trip. We knew it would be necessary to get proper directions, so we stopped to speak to an elderly gentleman whom we supposed to be a resident of the area.

When we asked about the road which winds through a rugged river canyon and up over a mountain pass, we were surprised by his reply. That route was one to be avoided, he warned us—it was a very problematic stretch to traverse. He stated we should not even think about attempting it without a four-wheel drive vehicle with plenty of clearance underneath. His reason was that part way up the canyon we would have to cross the river at a point where no bridge existed. By that time my wife and I were envisioning getting stuck in the river, maybe having to swim out...and then what? As the man went on painting a grim picture of the road, though, he made a statement that *really* caught our attention: he had never traveled through the area himself. His information was based solely on what had been told him by someone else!

Thanking him politely, we decided to go where we could find someone who had traveled that road and was personally familiar with the area—the local sheriff’s office. The information we received there was completely different! The deputy gave us good directions and informed us that even though the road had many curves, it was well-maintained and had much to offer the traveler. We were encouraged to enjoy our trip. This source of information was one of authority: he had driven that road many times and knew everything about it.

Maintaining a correct spiritual course can be only as effective as the source from which we get our directions. We should not be alarmed by the negative viewpoints of those who have never followed God’s way. Rather, we must look to the ultimate directional resource: the Word of God.

In our key verse, the psalmist stated, “The entrance of [unfolding or exposition of] thy words giveth light;

it giveth understanding unto the simple [those who are teachable].” The Bible’s pages are filled with numerous examples of those who successfully traveled the road to the “high country” of God’s will and blessing. We can do the same, as we rely upon the Word for guidance, and apply its precepts to our daily tasks and concerns.

BACKGROUND

Psalm 119, Stanzas 12-17

These six stanzas continue in the same pattern as the previous stanzas of Psalm 119; they contain eight verses each, are titled with consecutive letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and carry the theme of appreciation for and reliance upon God’s Law. The titles in this third section are *Lamed*, *Mem*, *Nun*, *Samech*, *Ain*, and *Pe*.

In the stanza titled *Lamed*, the focus is the unchanging permanence of God’s Word. The psalmist recounted that he had found earthly perfection was limited, but God’s Word knows no bounds. It will last forever because just as God established the earth and caused it to remain, He has appointed His Word to do the same.

Mem addresses how God’s Law imparts wisdom and understanding to the obedient. The key point is that more spiritual insight will be gained from it than from instruction by others, however brilliant they may be. The psalmist pointed out that knowing the Word of God restrained him from “every evil way.”

In the stanza titled *Nun*, the psalmist focused on the concept that the Word is light. Though surrounded by bleak circumstances, he determined to keep God’s Law. The psalmist may have been in exile and unable to make a physical sacrifice when these words were written.

Samech is a comparison of the way of life to the way of death. In it, the psalmist demonstrated that God is a refuge for those who love His Law and are obedient to it. The statement that God has “trodden down” the wicked (verse 118) literally means He caused them to be “set at nought” or “come to nothing.”

In the stanza titled *Ain*, the psalmist testified to his loyalty to God’s Word, though surrounded by oppression and tribulation. He pleaded with God to take action against those who ignored His Law, but said he would submit to His will no matter the outcome.

The concluding stanza of this section of text, titled *Pe*, highlights freedom in the light of the Law. The psalmist thirsted after God’s Law, and asked God to

help him keep the Law by guiding him, shielding him from temptation, delivering him, and blessing him. Verse 132 is one of only two verses in Psalm 119 that bears no reference to God’s Law. In it, the author asked God to answer his prayers as had been done for others in the past.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- I. Book I (1:1 — 41:13)
- II. Book II (42:1 — 72:20)
- III. Book III (73:1 — 89:52)
- IV. Book IV (90:1 — 106:48)
- V. Book V (107:1 — 150:6)
 - A. Psalm 119
 - 12. Lamed (119:89-96)
 - 13. Mem (119:97-104)
 - 14. Nun (119:105-112)
 - 15. Samech (119:113-120)
 - 16. Ain (119:121-128)
 - 17. Pe (119:129-136)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to the stanza titled *Mem*, the psalmist studied and applied God’s Law to gain wisdom and understanding. How does the act of obeying God’s Law make one wiser?

2. In the stanza titled *Samech*, what did the psalmist say God was to him?

3. Like the psalmist, we need the desire and understanding to apply Scripture to our own lives. What are some principles related to Bible study that can help us in that quest?

CONCLUSION

The Bible is our source of direction, but it can only guide us if we know what it says and obey it. The psalmist received guidance through reading, obeying, and meditating on God’s Word. If we follow his example, we will reach our goal.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

**“Many are my persecutors and mine enemies; yet do I not decline from thy testimonies.”
(Psalm 119:157)**

Ivan Moiseyev — or Vanya, as he was called by his friends — entered the Soviet Army in 1970 at the age of eighteen to fulfill his two-year term of required military service. Though he had been taught Communist philosophy and atheistic beliefs in school, Vanya’s parents were Christians, and in his teen years he had been wonderfully saved. From that point on, he was sold out to God, fearlessly sharing God’s love with others whenever he had an opportunity. Even in the military he openly spoke of his faith, an action which was forbidden under the atheistic regime. Consequently he was often punished and persecuted by his supervisors.

On one occasion, Vanya was punished for sharing God’s Word with several soldiers. He was forced to stand outside his barracks for the whole night wearing only his lightweight summer uniform, though the temperature was thirteen degrees below zero. As he stood there hour after hour, he prayed for his persecutors and quoted Scripture. Miraculously, he did not freeze to death. But his ordeal was not over — the same punishment continued for twelve more nights! Throughout that excruciating time, Vanya did not freeze, beg for mercy, or renounce God.

Afterward, though he knew further punishment was certain, Vanya continued to share his faith. His commanders tried to get him to deny Jesus but he would not turn his back on his Savior. At one point he told his interrogators, “I have one higher allegiance, and that is to Jesus Christ. He has given me certain orders, and these I cannot disobey.” The persecution intensified. Vanya was put in refrigerated cells for long periods of time. Food was withheld from him. He was placed in a cell where icy water from overhead pipes rained on him continually. Time after time, God brought him through and gave him strength and courage for the next round.

Ultimately, Vanya gave his life for his faith. Shortly before his death — seemingly knowing that it was imminent — he wrote to his family, “You will not see me anymore.” He then described a vision of angels and Heaven which God had sent to strengthen him for the last trial. Because of his ardent testimony and his faithfulness in standing for his beliefs, many of his military comrades were converted. After his

death, his commander stated: “Moiseyev died as a Christian.”

We do not know precisely what persecution the psalmist endured, but we do know that like Vanya, he did not turn away from God. In our focus verse he declared, “Many are my persecutors and mine enemies; yet do I not decline from thy testimonies.” The Bible abounds with accounts of those who faced tremendous opposition, yet stood true. As we read of God’s faithfulness to His own, we are encouraged and strengthened. We can learn from their examples that when we take a stand for Christ, He will be with us. And whether our deliverance comes in this life or the next, ultimate victory will be ours!

BACKGROUND

Psalm 119, Stanzas 18-22

Continuing in the same pattern as the previous sections of Psalm 119, these five concluding stanzas contain eight verses each, are titled with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and have a central theme of appreciation for God’s Law. The sections covered in this portion of text are *Tzaddi*, *Koph*, *Resh*, *Schin*, and *Tau*.

In the stanza titled *Tzaddi*, after the eighteenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the psalmist proclaimed the righteousness, purity, and truth of God’s Law. He concluded that understanding it was the very basis of his life.

The emphasis of the stanza titled *Koph* is that through the truth of God’s Word, trouble can be overcome. The psalmist stood on the promises of God when he was in peril, and God’s Law sustained him.

Resh records the psalmist’s prayer for revival and deliverance. The phrase “quicken me” (to “make alive” or “revive”) is repeated three times in these eight verses. Though embattled and persecuted by his enemies, the psalmist held fast to his loyalty to the Law of the Lord.

In the stanza titled *Schin*, the topic is the paradox of peace in the midst of persecution and turmoil. The psalmist said he praised God “seven times a day” (a poetic expression for “continually”) for God’s righteous judgments because they brought him great peace and stability.

The final stanza, *Tau*, is a prayer for help and guidance. The psalmist pleaded, “Let thy judgments help me” (verse 175), and rehearsed the blessings that can be attained through God’s Law. Because he obeyed the Law and delighted in it, he was assured that God would extend help.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- I. Book I (1:1 — 41:13)
- II. Book II (42:1 — 72:20)
- III. Book III (73:1 — 89:52)
- IV. Book IV (90:1 — 106:48)
- V. Book V (107:1 — 150:6)
 - A. Psalm 119
 - 18. Tzaddi (119:137-144)
 - 19. Koph (119:145-152)
 - 20. Resh (119:153-160)
 - 21. Schin (119:161-168)
 - 22. Tau (119:169-176)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In the stanza titled *Tzaddi*, what did the psalmist say he needed in order to live? Why do you think he felt this acquisition was so vital?

2. Verse 159 reminds us that as we serve the Lord from day to day, we need His quickening in our souls. What does the word “quicken” mean in this verse?

3. In verse 165, the psalmist pointed to what is necessary in order to have “great peace.” What are some steps we can take to cultivate that state of mind and spirit?

CONCLUSION

When we look to God, He can and will give us courage to stand up for Him and cling to our faith in spite of persecution.

NOTES



Psalms 120:1 through 123:4

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“In my distress I cried unto the LORD, and he heard me.” (Psalm 120:1)

Occasionally a pleasant event is interrupted by bad news, and in just a matter of minutes we find ourselves feeling burdened and distressed instead of happy and excited. At such times, our instinct as Christians is to turn to God in prayer.

I had that experience a couple of years ago when a friend and I were about to leave Florida on a Gospel cruise to the Bahamas—a longtime dream that had become a reality for me. After boarding our ship and having a wonderful lunch on the deck, I called my family one last time before our ship sailed from port. Expecting good wishes, what I heard instead was that a serious problem had arisen in my family on the West Coast. I was on the other side of the country, our cruise ship was pulling out momentarily, and even if I had been home, I would not have been able to change the situation. All I could do was tell them I would pray.

As our ship left Jacksonville, my friend and I went up to one of the decks to listen to the music being performed, but my joy and excitement about the cruise was gone. I hardly heard the songs because of my distress about the situation at home. Throughout the evening, the excellent music continued, but my heart was focused on pouring out my concerns to God.

The next morning, still feeling burdened, I went to breakfast and then to hear another of the quartets on board perform. The lyrics of the first song that group sang were, “Calvary wins again, hallelujah! Calvary wins again, praise His Name.” As I listened, my burden began to melt away and peace flooded through me. The Lord had heard me in my distress! An assurance slowly arose in my heart that He was on the scene and would be watching over the situation I could do nothing about. The rest of my cruise was amazing and left me feeling refreshed and renewed. Later I learned that at the same time I felt the burden lift that morning, Calvary had won again at home and the situation started to improve.

In Psalm 120, the writer was greatly distressed because others were telling lies about him. He knew God had heard his cries in the past, and he had confidence God would hear him again. The psalmist did not need to fight against these dishonest people because God was going to fight for him.

Distress can come to us in many forms—family situations, opposition, financial problems, illness,

grief, or various other difficulties. When it does, like the psalmist, we can cry out to the Lord. God is the same as He was when these Scriptures were written. He is listening when we pray. Often in the past He has answered for us, and we can remember how He has helped others. God will help with our distressing situations when we trust and wait on Him.

BACKGROUND

The fifteen psalms from 120 to 134 are each classified as “A Song of Degrees.” The word *degrees* means “goings-up, steps, and ascents.” While the reason for this classification is unknown, several possible explanations have been suggested. One is that the title indicated the style in which these psalms were written, with one thought building upon another, or a musical style that is now unknown. Another possibility is that these psalms were sung by the Israelites as they ascended the hill of Jerusalem or climbed the steps of the Temple to worship God during national feasts. Whatever the reason for the superscription, these psalms are concise and descriptive.

Psalm 120

In Psalm 120, the writer lamented that he lived among people who deceived and slandered, and he requested God’s deliverance. Juniper wood (“coals of juniper”) put off intense heat and burned for a long time, so weapons made with its charcoal were fierce. When the psalmist said he lived among Mesech and Kedar, he may have been speaking figuratively of being a wanderer, for people of Kedar were Arabic nomads. He may also have meant that those around him were warlike and cruel.

Psalm 121

The key thought of Psalm 121 is the concept of being kept by God. “From whence cometh my help” could be considered a question, which is answered by the next phrase, “from the LORD.” The psalmist knew that God, who made all things, would watch over His people, and that He is vigilant and faithful in His care. The words *keepeth*, *keeper*, and *preserve* all come from the same Hebrew root word, *shâmar*, which means to “guard” or “protect.” The promises in this psalm are well known and have been loved by many generations.

Psalm 122

Psalm 122 is credited to David. It expresses the anticipation of a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the opportunity to worship God in His house. These

words have been quoted by people through the ages as they have come together to honor and praise the Lord. The hills and valleys about Jerusalem cause it to be “compact together,” so its homes and walls were joined or unbroken. Not only was Jerusalem the center of Israel’s worship, but it was also the seat of government. The psalmist exhorted people to “pray for the peace of Jerusalem.” The original word translated as *peace* is *shalom*, which means “welfare, health, and prosperity.” David longed for the safety and blessing of the city, its inhabitants, and all who loved it.

Psalm 123

The writer of Psalm 123 knew the importance of looking to God for mercy. In this psalm, he looked to God because he felt those about him displayed such contempt for others that he could no longer bear it.

In ancient times, servants and slaves attentively watched for any gesture or look indicating the desire of their master, so they could instantly perform it. In the same way, the psalmist waited to discern God’s will.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- V. Book V (107:1 — 150:6)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What are two of the promises given to those who turn to God for help? (Psalm 121)

2. Why should we be glad when we go into the house of the Lord? (Psalm 122:1)

3. What might be some benefits of looking to God as ancient servants looked to their masters? (Psalm 123:2)

CONCLUSION

God hears our cries and comes to our aid with grace and mercy for each situation as we trust in Him.

NOTES



Psalms 124:1 through 129:8

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.” (Psalm 124:8)

As Christians, part of our walk with God—and one of the ways we grow spiritually—is going through periods of trial. Some time ago, I faced a prolonged situation that not only caused emotional pain, but began to affect me physically as well. As it began to weigh me down, I turned to the Lord regarding the matter. He answered my prayers and encouraged me in a simple yet effective way.

I have the privilege of being an usher, and as God’s people entered the sanctuary before each service, God would remind me of their testimonies. He had delivered one from addiction to drugs. Another had received a miraculous healing just recently. One had a spouse leave the marriage, but was continuing to serve God faithfully.

Meeting after meeting, week after week, and finally stretching into months, this quiet encouragement continued. Through it, God guided me to an understanding that He was taking me through my trial, even though the situation was painful and seemed to last a long time. He had helped all of these others, and He certainly was not overlooking my troubles! Gradually I began thinking less about the situation I was in, and more about God’s goodness, faithfulness, and power to help. After a time, I realized that God had used this source of encouragement to completely deliver me from the effects of that trial.

In today’s focus verse, David expressed a truth that he had proved in his own personal life: our help is in God. This psalm may have been written after David had twice defeated the Philistines in the Valley of Rephaim (as recorded in 2 Samuel 5:17-25). The Philistines were Israel’s most powerful enemy, but when David looked to God, he found the help he needed to go against them and win the victory.

Our enemy will not be an army of Philistine soldiers, but whatever it is, we must not be bound by fear nor overcome by the trial we face. As we trust in God and look to Him for help and strength, we will find that He will protect, deliver, and bless us. No challenge is too difficult for the Lord “who made heaven and earth.” We can *always* find help in Him!

BACKGROUND

These six psalms are a portion of Book V, sometimes referred to as the “Deuteronomy Book,”

which centers on the importance of God and His Word. They are also included in the fifteen “Songs of Degrees” (Psalms 120-134) related to Israel’s return from captivity.

Psalm 124

Psalm 124 is a song of praise for deliverance which is ascribed to David. The psalmist acknowledged that without God on their side, Israel would have been overcome by its enemies. The phrase “then they had swallowed us up quick” indicates his certainty that the people would have been immediately devoured had it not been for God’s intervention. The metaphor of water in verses 4-5 pictures Israel’s enemies as an overwhelming flood, inferring that Israel would have gone under in defeat without God’s help. The phrase “a prey to their teeth” (verse 6) could be translated, “a prey for them to devour.”

Psalm 125

The security of God’s defense is the theme of Psalm 125. The author is not cited for this song of lament. In the first two verses, “Mount Zion” was a symbol of stability and endurance in Old Testament times, and the mountains “round about Jerusalem” were emblematic of God’s protection for His people. Two types of people are described in verses 4-5: “those that be good” are contrasted with those who “turn aside unto the crooked ways.” The psalmist concluded with the assurance that God’s peace would be granted to His chosen people.

Psalm 126

Although the author and time frame of Psalm 126 is uncertain, most scholars believe it was a song of thanksgiving and rejoicing for Judah’s restoration from Babylonian captivity after the decree of Cyrus made that possible. Verses 1-3 convey that the captives’ joyous return to Jerusalem was so momentous it seemed like a dream; even the heathen proclaimed that God had done great things for the Jewish people. In verse 4, the psalmist pleaded for God to bring back the remaining exiles who had been left behind in Babylon. The “streams in the south” was a reference to the dry streambeds in the southern Negev desert region, which became torrential rivers during the rainy season; he longed for God to flood Zion with the residual captives in Babylon. The well-known adage in verse 5, “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy,” indicates that while planting and tending crops often involves sweat and tears, the resulting harvest is well worth the effort.

Psalm 127

Psalm 127 is attributed to Solomon and focuses on the importance of relying on God, and the blessings of family. Because it deals with the issues of practical daily life, it is classified as a wisdom psalm. Verses 1-2 emphasize that both personal and civic endeavors are ineffective without God’s help, and that days of toil are valueless if one does not depend on God for daily needs. Verses 3-6 establish that children are a gift from God and gratifying to their parents; in society of that day, offspring were a source of security and protection in their parents’ elderly years. “They shall speak with the enemies in the gate” indicated that sons would represent their fathers in the city gate, where most business was conducted, in order to see that their fathers’ interests were protected.

Psalm 128

In Psalm 128, the psalmist extolled the rewards of revering God and walking in His ways. He proclaimed that the man who revered God would live peaceably and securely, and would enjoy the fruit of his labors. His wife would be like a thriving and productive vine, and his children would be as plentiful as the ever-producing olive plant. He stated that the man who feared God would reap blessings from Jerusalem (the earthly dwelling place of God). In a time when early death was common, the godly man would enjoy a lengthy life, and would experience the pleasure of knowing his grandchildren. “Peace upon Israel” was a benediction.

Psalm 129

Psalm 129 was an anonymous song of thanksgiving for God’s preservation of Israel. Although the nation had been assailed by adversaries, those adversaries had been unsuccessful in triumphing over God’s people. In verse 3, the psalmist used the analogy of fields being furrowed by plowmen to illustrate how the nation of Israel had been scourged by enemies. The phrase “cut asunder the cords of the wicked” referred to the cords connecting plowmen to their oxen, and inferred that a just God had severed the “cords” of Israel’s enemies to render their efforts ineffective.

In verse 6, the psalmist referred to the fact that wild grass often sprouted on the sod roofs of houses in Palestine, but the shallow depth of soil and the heat of the sun caused the grass to wither and die before it reached maturity. The psalmist asked God to make the efforts of Israel’s enemies as unproductive as the withered grass which never reached the stage of maturity where it could be bound into sheaves. It was customary for people to express blessings to one another, but verse 8 implies that this blessing would not be extended to the wicked.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

- I. Book I (1:1 — 41:13)
- II. Book II (42:1 — 72:20)
- III. Book III (73:1 — 89:52)
- IV. Book IV (90:1 — 106:48)
- V. Book V (107:1 — 150:6)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In Psalm 125, what did the psalmist say would not “rest upon the lot of the righteous”? What do you think this meant to Israel?

2. How would you explain the statement found in Psalm 126:5, “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy”?

3. In reference to Psalm 124, in what circumstances of life has the Lord been on your side and brought deliverance? How might you be able to share that event with someone else with the goal of encouraging that one in a time of trial?

CONCLUSION

No problem is beyond God’s ability to solve. When we acknowledge Him as the psalmist did, we will find that “the LORD, who made heaven and earth” will help us!

NOTES



Psalms 130:1 through 134:3

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the LORD, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob.” (Psalm 132:3-5)

As a college student, I forfeited many a night’s sleep in order to complete some paper or prepare for a final exam. My purpose was to graduate, and papers and exams were a necessary part of that process. One particular incident stands out in my memory. As a requirement in a music history class, I had to submit a biography about a composer of my choice. At five or six in the morning of the day the paper was due, I was still sitting at my computer, doing my best to compile sentences that not only communicated the facts accurately, but also made sense! The word “tired” simply doesn’t do justice to how I felt. My brain seemed full of cement, and my fingers were having an increasingly hard time finding the right keys. However, it was not an option to give up and say, “The paper will just have to be late.” I *had* to finish it that morning! Thankfully, the task was done at last, and I was even able to sleep for an hour or so before going to class. I cannot forget how relieved I felt when the task I had set out to do was finally accomplished.

In our focus verses, David had a purpose he was determined to realize. As king, his dwelling was a beautiful palace. However, it troubled him that the Ark of the Covenant—the symbol of God’s dwelling among His people—had no permanent resting place. David could not settle comfortably into his own residence until he did his part to correct that situation. Even though David was not the one called to actually build the Temple for God, he fulfilled his purpose by preparing all of the materials necessary for his son, Solomon, to complete the work.

Has the Lord laid something on your heart that you need to do for Him? Has He given you a task to accomplish for His Kingdom? Sometimes we know we have a commission from the Lord and yet we find ourselves distracted from committing ourselves fully to our assigned task. Let us learn a lesson from David! His commitment and zeal were so wholehearted that he was willing to deny himself the basic comforts of life in order to fulfill his purpose. May David’s words encourage us not to procrastinate regarding anything God would have us do for Him. We will find the

benefits far outweigh the time and effort we exert to achieve the goal.

BACKGROUND

These five psalms conclude the fifteen “Songs of Degrees,” also known as “Songs of Ascents” or “Pilgrim Songs.”

Psalm 130

Psalm 130 was the sixth of seven penitential psalms in the Book of Psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 106, 130, 143); it is classified as an individual lament. The author and setting are unknown. The eight verses express two themes: a cry of penitence (verses 1-4), and the hope of pardon (verses 5-8). This psalm is unique in that the focus is the awful nature of sin rather than sin’s consequences, though references to redemption and forgiveness are included in its content.

This psalm negates the teaching that God grants perpetual forgiveness for ongoing sinning. According to verses 3 and 4, one who is sinning cannot stand before God. Forgiveness is granted so those who receive it will serve God in reverence and awe.

Psalm 131

Psalm 131 is a short gem of a psalm which expresses David’s deeply personal sense of humility. In three short verses, the psalmist established the condition of his heart, repudiated pride, and reposed in tranquil trust upon God. He concluded by admonishing Israel to rely upon God with the same serene faith.

Psalm 132

Psalm 132 is the lengthiest of the “Songs of Degrees” and centers on a petition that God’s promises to David would not go unfulfilled. “Ephratah” (verse 6) was a reference to Bethlehem, David’s hometown, where he presumably first heard of the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark was confiscated in battle by the Philistines, and was recovered at Kirjath-jearim (referred to as “the fields of the wood”) many years later during David’s reign. In verse 7, “his footstool” likely meant the Ark of the Covenant or its dwelling place in the Holy of Holies. Verses 11-12 point to God’s promise that David’s seed would reign forever. Although most of David’s descendants refused to obey God’s commandments, resulting in the destruction of his earthly kingdom, God fulfilled His covenant with David through His Son, Jesus, who was born of the lineage of David. Verses 17-18



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“The moon and stars to rule by night: for his mercy endureth for ever.” (Psalm 136:9)

As I gazed up at the moon showing half of its beaming face, I was struck with awe at how it resembled a frosted dome hanging from a dark blue ceiling. It shone boldly in the heavens while day slipped quietly into darkness. It was as if this ruler of the night sky was coming on the late shift to make sure the heavens continued to declare the glory of God.

Viewing the heavens on another clear evening, I saw the stars and planets begin poking through a soft navy blue blanket of sky. Darkness settled in, and the moon became brighter, appearing to look contentedly over the kingdom God had given it. As its radiance shed a mellow glow around me, I thought, How could anything be lovelier?

In verses 5-9 of Psalm 136, the psalmist focused on the wonders of creation. We easily sense that his pen could have filled many more pages with adoration for our Creator! Consider that everything we see around us was made by God. From the ocean depths to the vast sky above, from the rolling desert sands to the wooded mountainside, the awesome handiwork of God is a continual testimony to His creative nature.

However, the psalmist did not call Israel to praise God solely for His creation, as awe-inspiring as the wonders of creation are. He also admonished Israel to give thanks to God for His character. He did this by linking each example from nature to God’s “mercy”—a Hebrew word that includes the thought of love, kindness, and faithfulness. The psalmist’s repetition of the phrase, “for his mercy endureth for ever,” seems to indicate that his heart was swelling with an ever-increasing sense of gratitude to the One who made all things, and whose mercy reaches out to man. In fact, His mercy is even more constant than creation—someday this earth will pass away, but God’s Word tells us that God’s mercy will endure forever!

When you see the moon glowing in the night sky, praise the Lord! When you trace the stars, making patterns in the black of night, praise the Lord! When you watch the sunrise climbing over the horizon, praise the Lord! Give thanks not only for the beautiful world around you, but also for the blessed assurance that His mercy endures forever.

BACKGROUND

Psalm 135

Psalm 135 is a collection of phrases and thoughts taken from other psalms and books of the Bible. For example, the opening verse is a rearrangement of Psalm 113:1; verse 4 references the “peculiar treasure” of Exodus 19:5; and verse 7 quotes Jeremiah 10:13. One reason authors compiled verses was to commemorate a special event. Psalm 135 may have been composed for use at the dedication of the second Temple, because it follows the pattern of dedication psalms—a theme of praise with a brief history of Israel. It is classified as a hallelujah psalm, and contrasts the greatness of God with the vanity of heathen idols.

The psalmist offered three examples of God’s love: His love for and choosing of Israel, His creative power, and His sovereignty in history. The “tokens” referred to in verse 9 were the plagues God sent upon Egypt. Sihon and Og, mentioned in verse 11, were notable Amorite kings who were conquered by Israel (see Numbers 21:24, 35; Deuteronomy 2:33; 3:3).

This psalm begins with a triple call to praise Jehovah in verse 1, and concludes with a four-fold call to bless Jehovah (verses 19-20).

Psalm 136

In Jewish writings, Psalm 136 is frequently referred to as “The Great Hallel.” It is a companion psalm to 135, sharing a similar theme. Where Psalm 135 begins with an exhortation to “Praise ye the LORD,” this psalm begins with an exhortation to “Give thanks unto the LORD.” Both psalms then list reasons to praise or thank the Lord, following the same order of topics and utilizing some identical phrases.

A unique aspect of Psalm 136 is the repeated refrain, “his mercy endureth for ever.” This phrase may have been sung or chanted responsively by the congregation after a priest or the Levitical choir recited the first half of each verse.

In summary, the psalmist said that God had remembered the Israelites when they were slaves in Egypt, He delivered them from their enemies in Canaan, and He provides sustenance for all the living, so thanks are due to Him.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- I. Book I (1:1 — 41:13)
- II. Book II (42:1 — 72:20)
- III. Book III (73:1 — 89:52)
- IV. Book IV (90:1 — 106:48)
- V. Book V (107:1 — 150:6)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to Psalm 136:5, what did God use to make the heavens?

2. In what ways were the idols of Psalm 135 similar to the idols that people worship today?

3. If you were to review your personal history as the psalmist did Israel's history, what specific events would you praise and thank God for?

CONCLUSION

God is more than worthy of our praise. We can show our appreciation by remembering, as the psalmist did, to praise and thank Him for who He is, what He has created, and His goodness toward us.

NOTES



Psalms 137:1 through 139:24

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.” (Psalm 138:3)

Our daughter was just a few weeks old when she was admitted to the hospital with a high fever. My husband and I hoped and prayed that the cause was some minor and quickly-dealt-with virus, but that was not the case. After a series of tests and many anxious hours, we learned that our baby had congenital rubella syndrome. She was (as they called it back then) a “rubella baby.” I had somehow contracted rubella while I was carrying her and had passed it on to her before she was born. The doctors told us that the syndrome can entail a number of serious incurable conditions including deafness, eye abnormalities, heart disease, and mental impairment. In our baby’s case, the initial manifestation was spinal meningitis. We did not know what the future would hold regarding other possible effects.

Our baby’s diagnosis began a difficult time in our lives. During my daily trips to the hospital, I realized there was nothing I personally could do to make her condition go away, but I reached out to God continually for reassurance. How I leaned on Him to give me strength and courage to face whatever lay ahead for us and our baby!

When I read today’s focus verse, I think about that time in our lives, because God certainly did strengthen us. On one trip to the hospital, I recall how the Lord brought a song to my mind that spoke of our Heavenly Father’s care and how He watches over us as a mother tenderly watches over her baby. While my husband and I could do very little for our tiny daughter, it was such a comfort to know that God was watching over her!

More than thirty years later, I look at our healthy, beautiful daughter and know she is our miracle. God heard our prayers and those of the family of God who also prayed for our little one. He touched her, and today there are no residual effects of the physical challenges she had as an infant.

When we face times of crisis in our lives, we may not know what lies ahead, but our Heavenly Father does. We can trust Him! When we cry out to Him, He will answer and provide what we need. What an assurance it is to know that we are never alone, and can always reach out to the One who is waiting to lend a helping hand.

BACKGROUND

Psalm 137

Psalm 137 probably was written during the Babylonian captivity. While some Bible scholars consider its nine verses to be prophetic and attribute authorship to David, most conclude that the words expressed exilic grief. The author pledged never to forget Jerusalem, and pleaded for God to render judgment upon Israel’s captors.

Verses 1-2 of Psalm 137 describe the exiles gathering by the rivers in Babylon to mourn their absence from Jerusalem. Harps were used for Temple worship, and the captives may have brought them to Babylon hoping to find solace in music. However, their sorrow was too overwhelming, so they hung them on the branches of the willow trees. Verses 3-4 imply both the insult of being plundered by the Babylonians, and the oppressors’ taunting demand that the exiles sing the songs of Zion which were reserved for Temple worship—an action the exiles would have considered blasphemous.

The mournful tone of the first six verses changes abruptly at verse 7, and becomes a fierce indictment of Israel’s enemies. Although Edom had not participated in the Babylonian conquest, they had rejoiced in Judah’s destruction, and the psalmist beseeched God not to forget.

Psalm 138

Psalm 138 is a song of thanksgiving attributed to David. It conveys both individual and universal praise, and concludes with a statement of assurance that God would deliver in time of trouble.

In verses 1-3, David vowed that “before the gods” he would sing praise to the true God. The word “gods” has been interpreted in a variety of ways. Some early translations of the Bible render the word as “angels.” Others use the word “judges” or “kings.” Perhaps the psalmist’s resolve was to praise the true God in the sight of those who worshiped heathen idols. Since the Temple had not yet been built during David’s time, the “holy temple” may have referred to the Tabernacle, signifying the place where God’s presence dwelt.

Verses 4-5 infer that when the kings of the earth learn of God’s marvelous works toward Israel, they will praise God and sing of His wondrous deeds. Some scholars believe the ultimate fulfillment of this verse is prophetic in nature, pointing to the time when all the rulers of the world will worship Christ during the Millennial Reign.

Psalm 139

Psalm 139 is considered one of David’s finest psalms. It beautifully portrays God’s omniscience (universal knowledge), omnipresence (universal presence), omnipotence (universal power), and the psalmist’s desire for harmony with God.

In verses 7-12, David emphasized the futility of trying to evade God’s omniscience or omnipresence. The words “heaven” and “hell” in verse 8 denote the skies above or the depths of the dead beneath, and infer that neither are a hiding place from God. In verse 9, “take the wings of the morning” is a figurative picture of flying to the farthest oceans as swiftly as the morning light moves across the sky.

Verses 13-16 are a clear indicator that God directs the creation of life in the womb from the unperfected embryonic stage to the time of birth. The Hebrew word translated *reins* in verse 13 literally means “kidneys,” and was used poetically to signify the inner nature. The word *covered* could be translated “woven,” and denotes that God knits the unborn together in the womb.

In verses 19-22, David affirmed his hatred for evil and those who despised and blasphemed God. “Bloody men” were those who committed violent acts of murder. “Perfect hatred” indicated absolute abhorrence of all the deeds of the wicked.

The psalm concludes with David’s beautiful prayer that God would search his heart and reveal anything that would hinder him from the “way everlasting.”

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- I. Book I (1:1 — 41:13)
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- IV. Book IV (90:1 — 106:48)
- V. Book V (107:1 — 150:6)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In Psalm 137:3, what two things did the captors require of the exiles?

2. The practice of abortion is an evil that has claimed the lives of millions of innocent babies. What does Psalm 139:13-16 teach us about how God regards life?

3. Psalm 138:8 contains two statements of confidence. In what way do these statements offer comfort and encouragement to us?

CONCLUSION

If we trust God with our whole hearts, we can have faith that He will hear us when we call, and give us strength to face each trial that comes our way.

NOTES



Psalms 140:1 through 143:12

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“I cried unto the LORD with my voice; with my voice unto the LORD did I make my supplication.” (Psalm 142:1)

Shortly after starting a new job, I noticed that one of my co-worker’s eyes were frequently red and watery, she was constantly blowing her nose, and she often excused herself from helping customers by saying that her allergies were acting up again.

On a hunch that something more than allergies was the cause, one day I asked her if something was bothering her. She opened up to me, acknowledging that she had been through several traumatic experiences recently. Among other things, a close friend had died, one of her sons had moved to another country, she had lost contact with her only grandchild through her other son’s divorce, and she was being forced to leave her home.

She told me that she had tried to address each problem as it had occurred. However, as they continued to stack up, she had become overwhelmed. Though she had turned to relatives, friends, and a therapist for help, the comfort and support they gave was only temporary. She admitted that she was even contemplating suicide, and asked if I knew of any way out of her troubles.

An illustration I remembered hearing one of our ministers tell came to mind, and I related it to her. A mouse had fallen into a bucket that contained several inches of water. The water was too deep for the mouse to stand on the bottom, and the sides of the bucket were too steep for the mouse to climb, so it was swimming in circles with just its teeny nose above the water. The minister commented that the mouse had found a solution to its problem, but it was not sustainable. I told my co-worker that she didn’t need another person to help her swim a while longer; she needed someone bigger who was capable of “knocking over” the bucket and setting her free. I told her she needed God! He was the only One who could truly bring a solution.

She went home that weekend and prayed. When she came back to work the following week, she was different. Her “allergies” were gone and she had hope. In the days that followed, God responded to her prayers with mercy and resolved her problems one by one. Her son moved back into the area after receiving a job offer, she was granted ample time with her grandchild, and she found a new home that was perfect

for her. She had looked to God for help and He had answered.

In today’s focus verse, David looked to the right source for help: he cried aloud to God, who was his only hope of preservation. With urgency born of desperation, he acknowledged that his spirit was overwhelmed. He had looked, but there was no one to help him—no refuge to be found, no counselor or defender to come to his aid. In distress, he pleaded, “Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low” (verse 6).

When life’s troubles begin to stack up and threaten to overwhelm us, we can turn them over to God. He is greater than any problem that comes our way. Naturally, the very first help God wants to give each of us is His wonderful salvation; this is the greatest help of all. Then He has promised to guide and support us in every concern of life. Like David, we can be confident that God will “deal bountifully” with us, giving us strength and deliverance in His own way and time.

BACKGROUND

Psalm 140

Although the historical context of Psalm 140 is unclear, it refers to evil and violent men who stirred up animosity against David. Verses 1-11 describe David’s persecution and his resultant entreaty for God to rescue him, while verses 12-13 portray his confidence that God would answer his prayer. This psalm is classified as a personal lament.

In verse 3, the psalmist compared the enemy’s malicious words to a serpent’s darting tongue and poisonous fangs. In verse 5, the words *snare*, *cords*, *net*, and *gins* all describe equipment used by hunters to catch wild animals. The phrase “O GOD the Lord” in verse 7 combining the Hebrew words *Yahweh* (GOD) and *Adonai* (Lord) was unusual; its usage reflects David’s acknowledgment of God’s supreme salvation and protection. The “burning coals” alluded to in verse 10 may have been a reference to Sodom’s destruction, while the “deep pits” depicted total and utter destruction for evildoers which would have no remedy.

Psalm 141

Psalm 141 is a psalm of lament. The general framework and setting are the same as the previous psalm. David’s prayer in these ten verses contains three supplications: for God to speedily answer (verses 1-2), for God to help him show restraint (verses 3-6), and for God to give him refuge (verses 7-10).

The phrase *set forth* in verse 2 means “firm” or “established.” In verse 5, the psalmist inferred that if he did not shun evil works, rebuke from the righteous would not “break his head” (or wound in any adverse sense) but would be a kindness that brought healing to his soul. David also implied that he would pray for the righteous in their time of calamity.

Since the occasion of this psalm is not known, the interpretation of verses 6-7 is uncertain. Some think it may have been written during David’s flight from Saul, with verse 6 inferring that Saul’s downfall would result in the people respecting David’s words. Verse 7 indicates the psalmist’s helpless situation. However, in verse 8 he affirmed that his hope and trust was in God. As in Psalm 140, the words *snare*s, *gins*, and *nets* (verses 9-10) refer to the equipment of hunters.

Psalm 142

The superscription in Psalm 142 indicates that this psalm is a *maschil* written by David when he was in a cave. The word “*maschil*” denotes a teaching psalm with moral and practical application. The Bible documents two occasions when David hid from Saul in a cave: 1 Samuel 22 and 24. This is another psalm of lament in which the psalmist poured out his distress to the Lord in prayer.

In verse 4, David indicated that there were no like-minded individuals who would come along side him or consider his spiritual needs. Although he was surrounded by loyal followers, David may have felt that he was the only one with a righteous perspective.

It is notable that although the psalmist clearly was in deep trouble and was feeling hopeless and depressed, he did not express a vindictive spirit toward his enemies.

Psalm 143

Psalm 143 is the final of seven penitential psalms expressing sorrow for sin and beseeching God to render mercy, rather than judgment. (The other psalms are Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, and 130.) It begins with David’s plea for God to hear and answer his prayers.

The statement in verse 2 that “in thy sight shall no man living be justified” is a foundational theology of Scripture. Paul stated the same truth in Romans 3:23, “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” Other passages which state this doctrine include Romans 11:32 and 1 John 1:10. The meaning of the word *smitten* in verse 3 is “beaten or broken to pieces.”

In verses 7-12, David expressed his sincere desire to live in a manner pleasing to the Lord—an indicator of genuine penitence, which is always accompanied by a desire to do right. *Quicken* in verse 11 means “to revive” or “keep alive.”

In contrast to the preceding psalm, David concluded this one with a request for the destruction of his enemies.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

- I. Book I (1:1 — 41:13)
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- IV. Book IV (90:1 — 106:48)
- V. Book V (107:1 — 150:6)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In Psalm 143:5, what did David meditate upon to soothe his spirit when he was overwhelmed?

2. Psalm 141:5 gives counsel regarding criticism or reproof. How should we respond to correction by another Christian?

3. In Psalm 140:7, David said God “covered his head” (protected him) during battle. What are some of the battles you have faced, and how did God cover your head during those times?

CONCLUSION

When David became overwhelmed with the trials that came his way, he cried to God for help. When we face challenges in our day, we too should look to God. We can be confident that He will respond to our cries!

NOTES



Psalms 144:1 through 146:10

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Happy is that people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people, whose God is the LORD.”
(Psalm 144:15)

When I was a little girl, my mom would often read aloud bits and pieces of letters she received from her family in New York. Whenever she would send a picture of us, a letter always came back saying how impressed our faraway relatives were that every picture was filled with smiling faces. Each time, I would wait for this part of the letter to be read, and then I would ask, “Why are we always smiling in our pictures?” My mom would chuckle and say, “It’s because we love Jesus, and He is our Savior.”

Sometime back I received a card from my bank. I puzzled briefly over the envelope before opening it, since my birthday had already passed and Christmas was months away. Inside I found this note, “Thank you for being a smiling, happy customer. It is people like you who make my job great!” It brought back memories of those family letters.

As Christians we are a blessed people. Of course we know that even non-believers can be happy. They can smile for the camera, laugh at jokes, and enjoy themselves. But followers of Christ have a deep-seated joy that is not tied to circumstances. We have God’s wonderful love in our hearts, His peace flowing through us, and the reality of His presence surrounding us each moment of the day—and that is definitely something to smile about!

In Psalm 144, David contemplated the blessings that come to a nation or society founded upon the solid rock of God’s teachings. He painted a picture of full “garners” (storage bins), increasing flocks of sheep, and strong oxen—all images that would have been familiar in an agricultural society where prosperity was measured in terms of crops and livestock. However, the principle the psalmist voiced in our focus verse is applicable to individuals as well. Those of us “whose God is the LORD” are unquestionably blessed! While our blessings may not be measured in full garners and ever-expanding flocks, God fills our lives with innumerable benefits, and this should be reflected in our joyous attitude toward life and those around us.

Certainly, challenges will come along that could threaten to take away our smiles. During such times, we need to turn our focus to our blessings. We can all

find things to be thankful for if we look back through the pages of our lives!

Today, how is your smile? Has it been absent for a while? Try praising the Lord and reflecting on His loving presence in your life. Others will notice and be drawn to the God you serve.

BACKGROUND

Psalm 144

Psalm 144, which credits God as the sole Source of victory and deliverance, is attributed to David. However, this psalm was likely compiled from other Davidic writings; it bears a close resemblance to Psalm 18, and includes quotes from Psalms 8, 33, and 102-104.

Categorized as one of the royal psalms, Psalm 144 deals with the issues of national life. It presents some of the moral and spiritual conditions that nations and individuals must adhere to if they desire the blessing of God. Based on verses 7, 8, and 11, the setting was apparently a time when Israel was attempting to repel a foreign invasion.

Warfare is a prominent theme in the Book of Psalms, and Psalm 144 is an example. The reference in verse 1 to the Lord God of Israel who “teacheth... my fingers to fight” was likely a reference to using a bow as a weapon. In the next verse, the metaphors of a “fortress,” “high tower,” “deliverer,” and “shield” are all indicative of warfare in a rocky and mountainous land. The Hebrew word *metsudah* translated as “fortress” in this verse is translated as “hold” in 1 Samuel 24:22 and 1 Chronicles 12:8, and may have been a reference to the fortress at Masada, an ancient fortification located about two-and-a-half miles from the western side of the Dead Sea.

In verses 7-8, David pleaded with God to deliver him from his flood of troubles and foreign enemies. The “right hand of falsehood” implies making a false oath, and depicts the deceitfulness of David’s foes. Verses 11-15 concern the well-being of a nation “whose God is the LORD,” and establish that God’s blessing will be evident in the attributes of the nation’s sons and daughters, and in the temporal prosperity evidenced by full storage bins and expanding herds.

Psalm 145

Psalm 145, the last Davidic psalm, proclaims that God is King, and His dominion endures throughout all generations. This is David’s only psalm to be given the superscription “psalm of praise.” It is the

final acrostic psalm in the Book of Psalms, meaning that each verse begins with a subsequent letter of the Hebrew alphabet. (In this psalm, as in several others, the acrostic form is incomplete; one letter is missing.)

This psalm is identified as an imperatival type of hymn, meaning that the community calls upon all of its members to praise the Lord for His acts of goodness. In Jewish worship, this song is used in the daily prayers, being read twice in the morning and once in the evening service. The concluding verses assert that because God will save those who love Him and destroy those who are wicked, everyone should be persuaded to “bless his holy name for ever and ever.”

Psalm 146

Psalms 146-150 are known as hallelujah psalms, since each psalm begins and ends with the phrase, “Praise ye the LORD.” The Hebrew expression from which “hallelujah” is translated is *hallelu-Yah*, meaning “Praise ye Yahweh.” These five psalms have been sung during morning worship at Jewish synagogues for centuries. Psalm 146 exhorts reliance on God rather than man. The author is unknown, as is the date of composition. The psalm is classified as a congregational hymn.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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A CLOSER LOOK

1. In Psalm 145, David referenced several of God’s character qualities. What are three of the attributes he ascribed to God?

2. Why do you think David described God’s greatness as “unsearchable?” (Psalm 145:3)

3. How does the psalmist’s admonition in Psalm 146:3 apply to us today?

CONCLUSION

As followers of Christ, His joy should radiate from us. When it does, others will notice!

NOTES



Psalms 147:1 through 150:6

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD.” (Psalm 150:6)

The journalistic strategy informally deemed the “five Ws and an H” is frequently used to ensure thorough investigation of a topic. The simple, one-word questions *Who? What? Where? When? Why?* and *How?* are designed to cover all the bases and assist a writer in obtaining critical details for a news story or report. In Psalm 150, the author answers each of these questions, thus providing in six short verses a fitting conclusion to the Book of Psalms. The prayers, tears, laments, exhortations, songs, and meditations of the previous psalms all lead to this final call: to praise the Lord God of Heaven and earth.

Who? Verse 6 specifies that nothing with breath is exempted from the duty of praise. That includes us! Every person in the history of the world has been impacted by the greatness of God. While some people are blessed with extensive and personal knowledge of God, everyone can see His greatness through His mighty acts of creation.

What? Praise! The psalm opens with an injunction to praise. And its conclusion—and the final statement of the Book of Psalms which was written over a period of many years and by many authors—admonishes once again that we are to praise the Lord. An attempt to define the word *praise* brings to mind synonyms such as *commend*, *applaud*, *pay tribute to*, and *acclaim*. However, none of these are sufficient to describe the glory and honor due to our Creator.

Where? Verse 1 describes two places where praise should be offered to the Lord: in the sanctuary and in the “firmament of His power.” The sanctuary is the holy place set aside for worship. In Old Testament times, this was the Tabernacle and Temple. In this New Testament dispensation, God’s people—those who have been made holy by the Blood of Jesus—are His temples (see 1 Corinthians 3:16-17). The “firmament of His power” could also be translated as “the expanse of His strength.” All around us, God displays His majesty and power through creation. In response, we are to praise Him.

When? God’s excellent greatness (verse 2) surrounds us at every moment, so the implication is that praise is due His great Name at every moment as well. The Psalms teach us that when things are going well and life is easy, we are to praise the Lord. And

when things are hard and there seems no end to the problems, we are still to praise the Lord!

Why? Verse 2 says that we are to praise God for His mighty acts. Consider how He died on Calvary, delivering all who come to Him in repentance and believe on His Name. Consider how He calls lost sinners to Himself, raising them to new life and freedom from sin. Consider His mighty works in your own life! The more we meditate on His goodness, the more we sense the need to praise Him.

How? Verses 3-5 give directions for praising God with instruments. You may not be a trumpet player. Perhaps you have never touched a psaltery or harp. You can still praise God! The author of this psalm fairly bursts with enthusiasm, and he directs us to participate in praise as fully as we can. This is not a time of private reflection or personal prayer, although other psalms encourage both of those. This is a challenge to exuberant and audible expressions of glory to God. To all who will listen, let us join in joyous declaration that our God is great and worthy of praise!

BACKGROUND

Psalm 147

The theme of Psalm 147 is the extensive span of God’s gracious works in creation. Both animate and inanimate creations are called to praise Him. The verses are divided into three sections, each providing both a reason to praise the Lord and direct instruction to do so. Verses 1-6 describe God’s redemptive involvement with humanity, both corporately and individually. Verses 7-11 show God’s power in nature, evidenced by His provision for His creation. Verses 12-20 announce the goodness of the Lord as revealed in historical events and in His provision for His people.

This psalm takes the form of a hymn. While its date and author are not known, it may have been a post-exilic composition (based on verse 2), and likely was written after the rebuilding of Jerusalem (see verse 13).

Psalm 148

Psalm 148, sometimes referred to as “The Creation Chorus,” continues the counsel to praise the Lord. This psalm begins with the heavens praising God (verses 1-6), moves down to earth (verses 7-12), and concludes with a universal encouragement to all things to praise the Lord (verses 13-14). This structure follows the pattern God established at

