



# PSALMS

*Part One*

Forum Terrace Church of Christ

**Adult Class Wednesday Evening - Fall Quarter 2024**

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# An Introduction to the Psalms

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So important are the Psalms considered in relation to Christians, this Old Testament book has often been included in copies of the New Testament. This is especially true of the small Gideon Bibles that once were handed out to school children. Many scholars throughout the ages have given high praise for the Book of Psalms.

Matthew Henry, a commentator, wrote concerning his interpretation of the Psalms, "We have now before us one of the choicest parts of the Old Testament, wherein there is so much of Christ and his gospel, as well as of God and his law, that it has been called the summary of both Testaments."

Charles Spurgeon, penned extensive expository notes on each of the 150 Psalms. He titled this monumental study, *The Treasury of David*. In the preface he wrote, "The delightful study of the Psalms has yielded me boundless profit and ever-growing pleasure; common gratitude constrains me to communicate to others a portion of the benefit, with the prayer that it may induce them to search further for themselves."

The Reformation leader, Martin Luther, called the Psalms "a Little Bible, wherein everything contained in the entire Bible is beautifully and briefly comprehended."

C.S. Lewis described the personal appeal of the Psalms by saying, "The most valuable thing the Psalms do for me is to express the same delight in God which made David dance."

C. John Collins explained the unique influence of the Psalms when he wrote, "The psalms do not simply express emotions: when sung in faith, they actually shape the emotions of the godly."

C. Hassell Bullock: "...the Psalms will seize us and compel us into an honesty about ourselves before God" (Bullock 86).

Leroy Brownlow praised the Psalms for their continued relevancy for humanity throughout the ages, when he wrote, "Psalms is a stupendous and marvelous book, enormous in teaching, amazing in faith, astonishing in trust and astounding in relevancy. It is something! It covers the whole scope of living: everything that accompanies the farflung and eventful life of man. Its extensive, up-to-date thoughts testify that man has ever had to face the same problems. How little man changes through the ages! And as we read them, we realize that - with slight variations of circumstances - the author could be speaking of us this very hour."

## **Psalms Divisions**

In our English Bibles there are a total of 150 psalms. These are divided into five books or collections of psalms. The psalms were collected through an editorial process into five books. Why did the editors settle on a total of 150 psalms? Perhaps it was to aid in the 150 divisions of the Law for public reading on the Sabbaths. Each Psalm may have accompanied each reading. Some hold to the view that the five books represent a corresponding book of Moses in the Pentateuch. The Midrah says, "Moses gave to the Israelites the five books of the law, and as a counterpart to these, David gave them the Psalms, which consist of five books." They most likely represent an editorial collection of five

separate Psalters into one book of Psalms around the time of Ezra.

### Structure of the Psalms

No one knows who the editor was who shaped the final 150 psalms into five books, but it has been confirmed by Jewish literature dating back to post-exilic times in Palestine. The Books are:

- ▶ Book One: Psalms 1-41
- ▶ Book Two: Psalms 42-72
- ▶ Book Three: Psalms 73-89
- ▶ Book Four: Psalms 90-106
- ▶ Book Five: Psalms 107-150

Each of these books ends with a doxology (41:13; 72:18-19; 89:52; 106:48) or doxologies (146-150). Psalms 1 and 2 serve as a general introduction to the entire collection. The closing psalm is the doxology found in Psalm 150.

All of the psalms in Book One are authored by David except Psalms 1,2,10, and 33. For the most part the historical setting of this first collection appears to be during the days of conflict between King Saul and David. The names of God clearly contrast this set of psalms with those of Book Two. Yahweh is found 273 times and Elohim only 15. Whereas in Book Two Elohim is found 164 times and Yahweh is recorded only thirty times. Many of these psalms are from David. Perhaps they deal with the period of time when he was King over all Israel. Psalms 42-49 except for 43 are attributed to the sons of Korah. The sons of Korah have another set of Psalms in Book Three (Psalms 84-88 except 86). And Psalms 73-83 belong to Asaph. David authored another twenty-six Psalms in this Book. These Psalms were collected during the time of the Assyrian crisis threatening both the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Yahweh and Elohim are equally represented here with 44 times and 43 times respectively. In Book Four only Psalms 101 and 103 are attributed to David. One is said to be authored by Moses (Psalm 90) while all the others are anonymous. Yahweh is used 104 times whereas Elohim is found only seven times. Perhaps these were collected during the time of the Babylonian threat to Jerusalem. Book Five may have been collected after the remnant returned from Babylonian exile. In these psalms Yahweh appears 236 times while only seven times can the Divine title Elohim be found. Psalms 138-145 are Davidic prayers. The Books of the Psalms concludes with a doxology in each of Psalms 146-150. These hallelujah psalms begin with *"praise the Lord."*

With each of the five books are separate groupings of Psalms. The Asaph psalms include Psalms 50; 73-83. They are characterized by the predominate use of Elohim for God; are mostly prophetic; and focus on the nations in contrast with God and His people, Israel. Psalms 120-134 are called "Songs of Ascents." These were likely sung by pilgrims going up to Jerusalem to attend one of the annual festivals.

### Psalm Titles

The Jews gave it the title of *Tehillim* to the Book of Psalms meaning "praises" found in the title of Psalm 145. The Jews called the psalms the *Sepher Tehillim* meaning Book of Praises. The Septuagint called the book *Psalterion* from which the English title *Psalter* was derived. In the Septuagint the Greek word *psalmos* means "to pluck." New Testament Christians are instructed to sing the psalms with the accompaniment of the heart not a harp. *"Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord"* (Eph. 5:19).

Not only does the book have various titles each individual psalm s has a title or superscription, except in thirty-four . When these titles were attached to the Psalms is unknown. Some of the titles point to authorship by use the preposition "by" or "of" in the Hebrew. The Hebrew term "le" has been found on clay jars meaning "belonging to" a certain named individual. This term could also have been used to denote the Psalm was dedicated to someone in the sense the psalm is "to" a specific individual. Other titles tell of the historical setting of the psalm (Psalms 3,7,18,34,51,52,54,56,57,59,60,63, and 142).

The titles also included descriptions as to the characteristics of the Psalm. Some psalms are didactic in nature or psalms of instruction such as Psalms 32,42-45,52-55, 74,78,88.,89,and 142. These are identified with the Hebrew word *maskil* meaning a meditation or instruction. There are thirteen psalms whose title use a term which distinguishes them from songs with instrumental accompaniment. In contrast a *mizmor* is "a psalm to be sung with musical accompaniment" (Pulpit). It is found in the titles of fifty-seven psalms. *Miktam* is found in Psalms 16,56,57,58,59 and 60 which are all authored by David. The term means a "secret" or "song of deep import" (Fausset's Bible Dictionary) "A silent prayer' might be the best translation" (Bullock 28). *Shiggaion* "is a penitential psalm or strictly a lament" (Bullock 28). Psalm 7 is an example of this. Psalms 17,86,90,102 and 142 use the term *Tefillah* which means "prayer."

In the titles of various psalms instruction is given to direct the musicians as to which tune the psalm is to be sung or played. Gittith is used in Psalms 8, 81, and 84. The term "gath" means a wine-press, thus, the term references a specific vintage song. Others believe it is in reference to a type of harp. The term *al-shoshannim* is a term referring to the lilies of the morning, a well known tune. "The words *aiyeleth hashshachar* are translated in the margin, 'the hind of the morning'" (Clarke) in Psalm 22 also indicating it was to be sung by this tune. Several of the superscriptions indicated the psalms were to be sung according to a specified tune (Psalm 9; 22; 45; 53; 56; 57-59; 60; 62; 69; 75; 77; 80; and 88).

The titles of various psalms may indicate the genre of the Psalm. Psalms 120-134 are called Songs of Ascents or Degrees. "These 15 psalms were song by bands of pilgrims on their way to the yearly feasts in Jerusalem" (ISBE). Psalm 45 is a "Song of Love" which "is appropriate as a literary title to a marriage song" (ISBE). Musical and literary notations are found in the titles of some psalms. The Hebrew term *shir* means ode or song. Fifty-five psalms include the musical term *lamenatstsekh* often referencing the Chief Musician. "It comes from the root meaning literally, 'to shine' ...who is pre-eminent, and therefore occupying a leading position" (Oesterley). *Neginoth* is found in Psalms 4,6,54,55,67,and 76. "It means to take the lead in the playing" (Delitzsh). Psalm 46 is to be song by soprano voices due to the Hebrew term *alomoth* meaning "maidens." Two Psalms are to be song by the bass voices (Psalms 6 and 12). The meaning *sheminith* is "the eighth" and corresponds to octave and related to the range of the bass voice.

The term *selah* is a very common side note in many of the psalms. It is found seventy-one times in the Psalms and three times in Habakkuk. Although it is not found in the titles of the Psalms. it is found between lines and stanzas. It is from the Hebrew root meaning "to lift" and is believed to refer to *forte* meaning loud. Thus, a musical interlude by instruments for dramatic effect. Others think it is added for confirmation like an "amen" or for a break in the singing for meditation. It may mean, "pause, ponder, and profit."

### **Authorship of the Psalms**

Although the Talmud attributes the entire book of Psalms to David he only authored just less than half. There are only seventy-three Davidic psalms. Surely David could easily have been the author of some of the anonymous psalms. David was a musical composer, player, and singer (1 Sam. 16:16-18). Three of his psalms are included in 2 Samuel (1:17-27; 212:1-51; 23:1-7). In 2 Samuel 23:1 he is called "*the sweet psalmist of Israel.*" He started and organized the Levites who played and sang music in the Temple (1 Chr. 15:1-16:43, 25:1-31; 2 Chr. 29:25-30). Most of his psalms appear in the first two books which conclude with this end note: "*The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended*" (Ps. 72:20). Although David is clearly not the author of all the psalms, the New Testament recognizes it was predominately a book which belongs to him.

Psalms: 42-49 except 43; 84-88 except 86 are the eleven psalms attributed to the sons of Korah. They were a group of Levites who served as musicians in the Temple (1 Chr. 9:19 ; 15:17). Heman the Ezrahite is another son of Korah who wrote Psalm 88. He was a contemporary of David and Asaph (1 Kgs. 4:31; 1 Chr. 4:31; 15:19). Asaph wrote twelve psalms (Psalms 50; 73-83). He was the choir leader for David. The "sons of Asaph" are mentioned in Nehemiah 7:44. Another choir leader was the Levite, Jehuthan who wrote three Psalms (Psalms 39, 62, 77). It is stated that Solomon wrote many psalms in 1 Kings 4:29-32. However, only Psalms 72 and 127 are found by the wise King who was known better

for his proverbs. Psalm 90 was written by Moses. Two other Psalms of Moses are found in Exodus 15:1-15 and Deuteronomy 32 and 33. A man by the name of Ethan wrote Psalm 89. The authors of some 48 psalms remain unknown (Psalms 1,2,10,33,43,71,91,93-97,104-107,118-119,135,137, and 146-150).

### Dates of the Various Psalms

Psalm 79:2,3 are quotes in 1 Maccabees 7:17 and referred to as Scripture. The latest psalms would have been post-exilic and close to the time of Ezra. The earliest is Psalm 90 authored by Moses about 1400 B.C. Individual psalms may have information the title or the body of the psalm which would assist in identifying the time period it was written. Many of these do not include an author or historical information to aid in attaching a date.

### Psalms and Musical Instruments

God permitted the use of instrumental music in the worship of the Temple. They had percussion instruments such as “the timbrel *toph*; some kind of drum or tom tom” (Clarke). Also cymbals (*tsilselim*) were used (Ps. 150:5). “In Psalm 150 two types of cymbals are mentioned. The larger clashing cymbals were played with two hands. The resounding cymbals were much smaller and were played with one hand - the cymbals being attached to the thumb and the middle finger” (Halley 298). The Hebrew orchestra also had stringed instruments. Psalms 4,6,54,55,67, and 76 include the instruction *neginoth* meaning “with stringed instruments” (ISBE). The lyre was popular stringed instrument (Ps. 144:9). Wind instruments were mentioned in the psalms. The horn (Ps. 150:3), the trumpet (Ps. 98:6), and the flute (Ps. 150:4) are some of them.

### Genres of the Psalms

“Genre refers to a group of texts similar in their mood, content, structure or phraseology” (Longman 20). Modern man deals with types or genre of writing everyday. Man will get up and read the *newspaper* over breakfast. As a salesman he uses a *map* to find a store to sell *textbooks* and *novels*. He uses a *grocery list* to pick up supplies for meals. At home he will consult an automotive *instruction manual* to figure out what is wrong with his car. Knowing the particular genre of a psalm will assist greatly in correctly interpreting its meaning. Although all psalms are in the literary genre of poetry, they can be further organized in several sub-genres and those can even be sub-divided again. Keep in mind that some Psalms are hard to place into any specific genre and others may be listed under several.

First, many of the psalms are **Hymns of Praise**. They often begin with a summons to worship. Next, they give reasons to praise God. And conclude with further appeals to praise the Lord. These psalms will frequently open with “Praise the Lord!” According to such a psalm God should be praise because He is the Creator or King or Rock, etc. These hymns would also include the Hallelujah Hymns, some of the liturgical psalms, such as, Psalms 15,24,50,68,81,82,115, and 134). etc. Psalms included in this are 8,19,33, 66,100,103,104,111,113,114,117,145-150.

Next, there are Psalms which appear to be just the opposite of a Hymn of Praise. These psalms are dismal and gloomy and filled with dark emotions. The psalmist feels abandoned by God. He is surrounded by his enemies. He has many open and bold complaints before God. However, most of these **Laments** end with confidence in God’s willingness to help and a blessing. This genre can be further divided into individual laments (Psalms 3,4,5,6,7,9,10,13,14,17,22,25,26,27,28,31,35,38, 39,40,41,42,43,51,52,54,55,56,57,59,61,64,69, 70,71,77,86,88,89,102, 109,120,130,139,141,142, and 143) and corporate laments (Psalms 12,44,58,60, 74,79,80,83,85,90,94,123,126,129, and 137). Part of this genre are the imprecatory psalms which call upon God to destroy one’s enemies.

Some psalms are a **Thanksgiving**. Often associated with Hymns of Praise they are mostly a prayer of thanks for answered prayer. They begin with a praise of God or a blessing. It may also include a complaint which God has answered. “The remainder of the thanksgiving psalm continues to praise the Lord and to call on others to praise him” (Longman 31). Psalms 18,30,32,34,40,65,66,67,75,92, 107,116,118,124,136, and 138 are included in this genre.

Psalms 11,16,23,27,62,63,91,121,125,and 131 are all considered **Songs of Trust**. This genre



of Psalms expressed the psalmist's confidence in God. It used metaphors referring to God as a Rock or Shepherd. In times of trial and attack by enemies one can submit to the power of God.

The **Wisdom Psalms** are very didactic in nature. They follow the down-to-earth instruction found in such books as Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes. They will contrast the wicked with the righteous and the wise with the fool. Often the Law becomes the focus of their praise. Good examples of this genre are Psalms 1, 19, 36, 37, 49, 73, 78, 112, 119, 127, and 128.

**Royal Psalms** are of two groupings. First, there are the psalms which focus on the king of Israel as a man (Psalms 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 78, 89, 101, 110, 132, and 144). The second group focuses on the kingship of God (Psalms 29, 47, 93, and 95-99).

The final genre have are called **Zion Hymns**. They included Psalms 46, 48, 76, 84, 87, and 122.

### Characteristics Of Hebrew Poetry

In his *Bible Class Notes* on the Psalms, Homer Hailey "found in poetry a means of expressing the deepest, most profound and intensive feelings of the human heart." Much of the Old Testament is composed of poetry as well as prose. Although more difficult to interpret, poetry excites the emotions and imagination more than prose. To attempt to understand Hebrew poetry by looking for metered lines and word rhymes is to suffer grave frustration. The Jews did not use either of these devices in their poems.

#### ◆ Parallelism

Although there is a lack of rhyme and rhythm in the psalms, Hebrew poetry makes abundant use of parallelism or thought rhyme and rhythm. As a singer holds a note on a word for accentuation, the poetry in the Psalms hold or repeat thoughts for emphasis. So, if you did not get the point of the first line, just read the second line.

The most abundant form of parallelism in Psalms is *synonymous parallelism*. In this form of parallelism "thought pattern in one line conforms to the pattern in the successive line...The movement is normally from the general to the specific, or from the less specific to the more specific" (Bullock 36).

*For He has founded it upon the seas,  
And established it upon the waters.*

– Psalm 24:2

*Antithetical parallelism* "is a method of saying contrasting things in different lines and in different ways" (Bullock 39). It is found frequently among Solomon's Proverbs.

*For You will save the humble people,  
But will bring down haughty looks.*

– Psalm 1:6

*Synthetic parallelism* is where the first line mentions the cause while the second line completes the idea with an effect.

*Your word I have hidden in my heart,  
That I might not sin against You!*

– Psalm 119:11

*Progressive parallelism* is also referred to as Stair-step parallelism. Each proceeding line takes the thought of the first line a step further.

*Blessed is the man...  
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,*

*Nor stands in the path of sinners,  
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;*

– Psalm 1:1

*Chiastic Parallelism* is also found throughout the Psalms and the Bible. Sometimes it is called introverted parallelism. All of Psalm 8 is a representation of a chiasm. It is a form of parallelism which takes the form of the Greek letter chi that is X.

*A Because he has set his love upon Me,  
B' I will set him on high,*

*B therefore I will deliver him;  
A' because he has known My name.*

– Psalm 91:14

#### ◆ **Figurative Expression**

David claimed, *“the Lord is my Shepherd.”* This of course is not to be taken literally. It is a figure of speech like a metaphor. God is like a shepherd to David, who is in turn like a sheep. The first clue to the use of figurative phrase is the great unlikelihood of interpreting it as a literal statement. To correctly interpret any figure of speech one must consider the context, who is speaking to whom, how the terms were used in the writer’s day, etc. Other figures of speech common in the psalms are simile, personification, etc.

#### ◆ **Inclusio**

Repetition of a word or phrase which binds two parts together. For example, Psalm 8 has the same line in verse nine as it does in verse one: *“O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth!”*

#### ◆ **Alphabetic or Acrostic**

The Hebrew alphabet consisted of twenty-two letters. The best example of an alphabetic acrostic is found in Psalm 119. Each letter of the Hebrew alphabet is used in each of twenty-two stanzas. Each stanza has eight verses and each verse begins with the same letter. This may have been done to aid in the memorization of the psalm. Although other psalms use this device none of them are as involved or complete as Psalm 119. Other alphabetic/acrostics are Psalms 9,10,25,34,111,112,119,and 145.

#### ◆ **Typology**

Typology is a literary feature used throughout the Bible which “looks back to a person or event as representative of a future event or person.” The original event or person is the type and the corresponding application is the antitype. When Jesus cleansed the temple John quotes the Psalms and applies the emotion and motive to Jesus’ action. *“Then His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up”* (John 2:17; quoting Psalm 26:9).

### **Interpretive Techniques**

“Interpretation is part science and part art” and involves some level of spirituality (Bullock 49). All of these factors are enhanced by each individuals level of age and experience. “The diverse nature of the Book of Psalms, with its multiple authorship, numerous literary types, assorted content, and long history of compilation, poses a challenge for the interpreter of this book” (Bullock 58).

Asking a series of questions about a given Psalm is more effective in arriving at a fair and accurate interpretation. 1) Who is speaking? Is it the Psalmists, is it God, is it someone else such as the psalmist’s enemies or a combination of speakers? Who is speaking in Psalm 14:1: *“There is no God?”* 2) Does the Psalm involve the nation of Israel or an individual (David as king of Israel)? There are both individual laments (Psalm 51) and community laments in the scriptures. 3) What is the historical context or purpose of the psalm? For example, the title or superscription of Psalm 54 reads: *“To the Chief Musician. With stringed instruments. A Contemplation of David when the Ziphites went and said to Saul, ‘Is David not hiding with us?’”* This psalm involves the context surrounding the statement made in 1 Samuel 23:19. 4) What is the emotional bearing of the psalm? This focuses on genre. Is the psalm one of praise and worship, thanksgiving with joy, feelings of loneliness, anger, despair, grief over sins or a complaint to God concerning the abuse by enemies? Sometimes a psalm will combine several

emotions as it progresses. 5) What is the particular genre of the psalm? Again some psalms may fit into several genres. 6) Are there any reappearing words or phrases or patterns in the psalm? 7) How are these psalms used in the New Testament? The New Testament quotes more from this Old Testament book than any other. Only Isaiah comes close. "Of the 283 quotations from the Old Testament in the New Testament, 116 (more than 40 percent) are from the Psalms" (Halley 298). 35 out of 150 psalms are quoted from in the New Testament. Both Jesus and the Hebrew writer treat Psalms 110 as messianic. In fact, "the New Testament writers take for granted that the psalms prefigure New Testament realities" (Bullock 92).

One particular method of interpretation should be avoided, that is, allegorizing. Allegorizing disregards the unmistakable literal sense of the text only to read into the text what they think it should mean. The Epistle of Barnabas associates the three phrases of Psalm 1:1 with three kinds of meat forbidden by Moses: 'the counsel of the wicked' with forbidden seafood, 'the way of sinners' with pork, and 'the seat of mockers with forbidden birds" (Bullock 45). There is no way anyone can derive this view from a reading of Psalms 1 and anywhere else in scripture. This is an example of someone reading their thoughts into a passage.

### **Purpose of the Psalms**

Why study the Psalms? Obviously, the Psalms are the word of God and "*all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work*" (2 Tim. 3:16,17).

The Book of Psalms is composed of five Psalters or hymnals. These collections represented the song books of ancient Israel. The early Christians also used the psalms to sing praises to God. Paul wrote, "*let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord*" (Col. 3:16). James advises, "*is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms*" (James 5:13). Several of our modern hymnals include psalms rearranged to be sung. Many of the spiritual songs are based upon the psalms. Martin Luther's "A Mighty Fortress is our God" is based on Psalm 46. The twenty-third Psalm is a popular source for several songs.

Although psalms are poetry to be sung, they contain truths which must be learned. Paul said of the Old Testament in general, "*for whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope*" (Rom. 15:4). Ray C. Stedman spoke of the didactic nature of the psalms, "the Psalms are much more than poetry. Many of them bear the title, Maskil, or teaching psalm. They are thus intended to instruct the mind as well as to encourage the heart. They are designed not only to reflect a mood, but to show us also how to handle that mood; how to escape from depression or how to balance exaltation with wisdom."

In the Book of Psalms a picture is developed in the New Testament of the Messiah of promise and prophecy. After His resurrection Jesus spoke with two of His disciples as they traveled to Emmaus. They did not recognize them but Jesus tries to open their eyes. "*Then He said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?' And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself*" (Luke 24:25-27). The evidence of His claim to be the Messiah of the Old Testament included the Psalms. "*Then He said to them, These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me*" (Luke 24:44). The first Gospel sermon on the Day of Pentecost made use of the Psalms as proof Jesus was the Son of David and the Son of God (Acts 2:25-28,34-35).

Many of the Psalms help the student of scripture to gain a clearer more precise picture of the multifaceted character of God. They are filled with individual expressions of one's personal faith and relationship with God. R.C. Sproul admitted, "whenever I read the psalms, I feel like I am eavesdropping on a saint having a personal conversation with God."

If a Christian finds it difficult to find the words to express his heart before God in prayer all he has

to do is go to the psalms for guidance. Many of the Psalms are prayers set to poetry and music. They are prayer manuals to instruct one how to pray with the fervency and confidence of David. Dietrich Bonhoeffer spoke of the influence the Psalms would have on a Christian's prayer life: "The more deeply we grow into the psalms and the more often we pray them as our own, the more simple and rich will our prayers become."

The Psalms can be used as the believer's hymnal to sing praises to God, a book of evidences for the Creator and the Savior, an instruction manual on prayer, and a photo album of various pictures of God's nature.

### Questions:

1. How are the Psalms divided?
2. What information is given in the titles of the Psalms?
3. Matching:

_____ tefillah	a. a lament
_____ shiggaion	b. a meditation
_____ miskil	c. bass
_____ miktam	d. Chief Musician
_____ al-shoshannim	e. lilies of the morning
_____ lamematstsekh	f. pause, ponder, and profit
_____ alomoth	g. prayer
_____ sheminith	h. silent prayer
_____ selah	i. soprano
4. How many psalms are attributed to David?
5. Who were the sons of Korah?
6. Which is the oldest known psalm? How old is it? Who wrote it?
7. What three types of musical instrument made up the Hebrew orchestra?

8. What is genre?
9. What is a lament? What are the two categories of laments?
10. What are Royal Psalms? How are they divided?
11. T F Hebrew poetry often used metered lines and word rhymes.
12. What is progressive parallelism?
13. Give an example of an inclusio?
14. Who is speaking in Psalm 14:1: "*There is no God*"?

**Application and Discussion:**

1. How should one use the Psalms today?
2. According to Romans 15:4, why was the Old Testament written? How does this relate to a study of the Psalms?

**Homework:** Find a Psalm that speaks to your spiritual life today?

# The Way of Saint and Sinner in Contrast

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## Psalm 1

*1 Blessed is the man  
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,  
Nor stands in the path of sinners,  
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;  
2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord,  
And in His law he meditates day and night.  
3 He shall be like a tree  
Planted by the rivers of water,  
That brings forth its fruit in its season,  
Whose leaf also shall not wither;  
And whatever he does shall prosper.  
4 The ungodly are not so,  
But are like the chaff which the wind drives away.  
5 Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment,  
Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.  
6 For the Lord knows the way of the righteous,  
But the way of the ungodly shall perish.*

Psalm 1 and 2 are considered introductory psalms. It is the preface to the Book of Psalms. The author is unknown and is likely the editor who compiled the five Books of the Psalms into its final version. This Psalm is one of the most widely known and studied psalms with only the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm as a rival. People will naturally begin their study of the Psalms with the first. It is short and easy to understand.

As an introduction it sums up the two types of men in the world, their relationship to God and sin, and their distinct destinies. It points to the contrasting paths, happiness, fruitfulness, and future of the sinner and the saint. Consequently, the message is clear there are only two ways to travel in life. Jesus echoed this teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. *“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it”* (Matt. 7:13,14). Thus, this Psalm is among the Wisdom Psalms. A genre which includes Psalms 19:7f and 119.

### Delights of the Saint

The very first verse of the Psalms is a beatitude. There are nearly twenty beatitudes throughout the Psalms (Psalm 1:1; 2:12; 32:1,2; 33:12; 34:8; 40:4; 41:1; 65:4; 84:4,5,12; 89:15; 94:12; 106:3; 112:1; 119:1,2; 128:1). The term “blessed” is actually plural meaning the blessednesses of the righteous man. He is not just happy his life is filled with blessings. It speaks to a state of being where a man is content with real happiness. The kind of blessed life which cannot be bought with riches or maintained with myriads of friends or walls full of degrees or full calendars filled with days of amusement. Thus, the wicked will not find this state of blessedness in their pursuit of sin.

### Divergent Direction of the Saint

The blessed man’s righteousness is described negatively in contrast with the wicked. Sometimes that best way to describe what something is, is to know what it is not. The psalmist uses a triad of triplets

to show the wide separation between the lifestyles of the sinner with the saint. The righteous man finds the path to happiness is found in not following the broad way of the masses.

- **Not Strolling by the Advice of the Ungodly**

The direction one walks will determine his destination. The world loves to give directions. The advice of the wise sages of the world fill the self-help shelves at the local bookstore. King Rehoboam followed the advice of his peers instead of the elder counselors in Israel and he was left with just two tribes out of twelve. He was none too happy after that little stroll. Paul warns, *“and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them”* (Eph. 5:11). The ungodly here may merely denote those who are just irreligious men in general. They could be for the most part “good” people everyone lives near and works with. They do not do bad things. They are just not into the “religion thing.”

- **Not Standing With the Actions of Sinners**

It is one thing to take the advice of the worldly wicked, but to take action on it is just foolishness in action. The sinner is one who literally has missed the mark on the target. Walking by and seeing what they are up to is one thing, stopping and joining in the activities of the sinner is another. All men must choose a direction to walk and all must determine an action to take. Joshua challenged his generation to make a stand for God and not with the pagans. *“And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord”* (Josh. 24:15). In contrast Peter stood with those who warmed themselves and denied the Lord three times (Matt. 26:73f).

- **Not Sitting in the Abode of Scorners**

First, he chooses to follow the advice of the wicked. Next, he is standing with the sinner acting on that advice. Now, he is sitting down buddy-buddy with the ones who are laughing and mocking the things of God. Those who scoff are the most extreme sinners. They show contempt and blaspheme the things of God. The Hebrew term for *“scornful”* is *letsiyim* from the root word *luwts* “properly, to make mouths at” (Strong's Hebrew Dictionary). *“This word properly means those who mock, deride, scoff; those who treat virtue and religion with contempt and scorn”* (Barnes). They mock that which is holy and hold in derision the people and things of God. The term is often found in the book of Proverbs which helps describe their foolish attitude and actions. *“Fools mock at sin”* (Prov. 14:9). The wise are warned *“do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you”* (Prov. 9:8; cf. 19:28). *“A proud and haughty man— ‘Scoffer’ is his name, he acts with arrogant pride”* (Prov. 21:24). They are of the tribe of young men who mock the prophet of God, Elisha, when they cried out, *“Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!”* (2 Kings 2:23). Many professor’s chairs and the student who take their classes are illustrative of this situation. These atheist love to destroy the faith of young college students with their Darwinism and relativism.

This verse is an example of *progressive parallelism* which is also referred to as stair-step parallelism. As the man moved from walking, to standing, and finally sitting he becomes more involved by first just following their advice, choosing their course of action, and abiding with them in their attitude. There is also a progression of those who live without a proper relationship with God to those who are living in sin to those who actively attacking all things righteous. They go from bad to worse.

Course of Action	Closeness to Sin	Character of the Wicked
Walk	Counsel	Ungodly
Stand	Way	Sinner
Sit	Seat	Scorner

The above chart illustrates the progressive nature of choosing the wrong advice, practicing the wrong actions, and displaying the wrong attitudes. The righteous man is blessed because he does not choose to listen, linger, or laugh with the wicked. He gives no room for compromise. The blessed man

will avoid the expert opinions, not follow the crowd to the bars, and join them in making fun of the truth. The saint stays as far away from sin as possible. They are like Lot who pitch his tent toward Sodom (Gen. 13:11; 12,13; 19:1), but like Joseph who fled from Potiphar's wife (Gen. 39:1-12).

### **Devoted to God's Word**

#### ▶ **Rejoices in Truth**

The happy saint is now described positively in relationship to his wholesome attitude toward God's Word. "*His delight is in the law of the LORD*" The 19<sup>th</sup> and 119<sup>th</sup> Psalms demonstrates all the reasons for this delight. Instead of listening to the advice of the ungodly, he will listen to the wisdom from above. He has a desire and affection for what God has said. He is not ashamed of the Truth (Rom. 1:16). He celebrates the freedom found in God's Word (John 8:32).

#### ▶ **Ruminates over the Truth**

The next positive attribute of the saint which shows is devotion to the truth: "*in His law he meditates day and night.*" The term for meditate is used to describe what a cow does when it eats grass and then sets in the shade in the afternoon and brings the grass out of the first stomach to ruminate or chew the cud. The saint will take in the Word of God and as he goes about his day to day or night to night life ponder these things. He has a happy attitude and habit of Bible study and contemplation. What one loves the most, he thinks upon the most (Acts 17:11; 2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Pet. 2:2).

### **Described as a Top-quality Tree**

Next, the happy man devoted to the Word is described figuratively. He is like a "*tree.*" This is not just any tree in the forest but one which has a blessed position in God's world.

The blessed man has *stability* in that he has been planted. He is not a wild tree. The saint has been transplanted to a choice location. This is in part due his choice to follow God and not the wicked. He is grounded and rooted in the Lord (Col. 1:23; 2:7). He is like the branch that has been grafted into the Vine (John 15:1-8). He has a good heart where the seed of the Word of God can take root and grow and produce an abundance of fruit (Luke 8:11). Jesus warned, "*every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted*" (Matt. 15:13).

The blessed believer has *provisions*. He is planted "*by the rivers of water.*" Some scholars believe this to refer to "canals for irrigation." Special irrigation for constant perfect supply of all we need to produce fruit. There is plenty of moisture for the tree's longevity, growth, and productivity.

The happy saint has *productivity* in that he "*brings forth its fruit.*" Eden was bounded by four rivers and abounded in fruit. This is where God commanded the first couple to be fruitful and multiply. Christians are to bear the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22,23). Those who do not "*bear fruits worthy of repentance*" or "*good fruit*" will be "*cut down and thrown into the fire*" (Matt. 3:8-10).

The tree God has planted has *maturity*. It will bring forth fruit "*in its season.*" Unlike trees in the natural world saints are to continue to grow and be productive.

What God plants has *longevity*: "*whose leaf also shall not wither.*" The saint is an evergreen that is ever fruitful. When the winter storms of life come he will not lose his beauty and fruit. In times of drought and great winds he will stand firmly rooted where God planted him. Perhaps, this speaks of his eternal life with God.

Finally, the saint is blessed with *prosperity*: "*and whatever he does shall prosper.*" He may never be rich in this world, but he will succeed in being rich toward God. This blessing man's condition may echo what is found in Joshua 1:8: "*this Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.*"

### **Dissimilarity to the Righteous**

Now the Psalmist turns the attention of the reader to the character of the wicked. In contrast with the righteous, verse four explains that "*the ungodly are not so.*" As verse one contrasted the saint with the sinner, so now, the sinner is shown not to be blessed like the saint. The Septuagint shows the



double negative in the phrase by translating it: "Not so the ungodly, not so" (Phillips 20).

**Described as Chaff**

The wicked are not like the blessed man, *"but are like the chaff which the wind drives away."* Chaff is another agricultural metaphor in contrast to the saint who is like a tree. According to the New Bible Dictionary chaff "denotes worthless husks and broken straw blown away by the wind during the winnowing" (203). When the wheat has been harvested a good winnowing location is found on a hill where after the sheaves of wheat have been crushed on the threshing floor to break away the wheat seed from the husks, the farmer can cast it into the air and have the wind blow away the worthless chaff while the heavier wheat will fall back to the ground and be collected.

**Destiny of the Ungodly**

Whereas the blessed man will not stand in the path with the sinners, the sinners will not stand with the righteous in the assembly of the blessed on the day of judgment. They will one day be convicted by God and condemned for their guilt. After the Judgment there will not be a sinner left standing or a scoffer seated. They will be blown away at judgment, like chaff at winnowing.

The sinner will be finally segregated from the blessed man: *"nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous."* Just as the goats will be separated from the sheep and the tares separated from the wheat so will sinners be separated. In the last Day the Lord *"will say to the reapers, 'First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn'"* (Matt. 13:24-30) God knows how to reserve the wicked for a day of retribution. As the flood destroyed the old world when Noah left. As Sodom was destroyed by fire when Lot left that city which continually vexed his righteous soul. So the sinner may choose his own path, but he will never be the master of his own destiny.

**Difference for the Saint**

This psalm now informs us concerning the major difference between the happy saint and the doomed sinner. The number one reason saints are blessed is the God knows them. *"For the LORD knows the way of the righteous."* Jesus said, *"I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own"* (John 10:14). God knows about the sinners but knows the righteous in an intimate relationship. In the end He will say to them, *"well done thou good and faithful servant...enter thou into the joy of thy Lord,"* (Matt. 25:21). But the Lord will declare to the ungodly, *"depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels"* (Matt. 25:41). This contrast in destinies will last throughout eternity.

**Destruction for the Wicked**

The final path of the ungodly will be their destruction like the chaff: *"but the way of the ungodly shall perish."* Jesus had warned His disciples of this outcome (Matt. 7:13,14; 7:23; 25:30). These foolish scoffers have built their lives on the foundation of sand.

<b>Godly</b>	<b>Ungodly</b>
Blessings upon blessings	not so
planted by the waters	driven by the wind
delight in Truth	counsel of sinners
fruitful trees	worthless chaff
stand	not stand
way known by God	perish

Psalm one calls upon on readers to make a choice. They can be "blessed" or they can "perish"; they can seek the wisdom of sinners or they can "delight in the law of the Lord". They can be fruitful trees or worthless chaff. Remember, "there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Prov. 14:12).

### Questions:

1. What is significant about the first psalm?
2. What is the genre of this psalm?
3. How many beatitudes are in the Psalms? What does "blessed" mean?
4. Who are the ungodly? What about them does the blessed man avoid?
5. What does standing with sinners imply?
6. Who are the scornful?
7. What literary or poetic device is employed in verse one?
8. What does the blessed man do in relationship to God's Word?
9. The righteous man is compared to a tree. What are the various characteristics of this top-quality tree?
10. What is chaff? Why is it a apt description of the wicked?
11. What is the destiny of the wicked?

12. What is the main reason for the differing fates of the blessed man and the wicked?

**Application and Discussion:**

1. Who are the ungodly, sinners, and scornful of our time? How can they be avoided?

2. What are ways we can demonstrate our delight in God's Word today?

**Homework:** Find another psalm to study and meditate on it for an hour.

# The Extraordinary God of Ordinary Man

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## Psalm 8

1 O Lord, our Lord,  
How excellent is Your name in all the earth,  
Who have set Your glory above the heavens!  
2 Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants  
You have ordained strength,  
Because of Your enemies,  
That You may silence the enemy and the avenger.  
3 When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,  
The moon and the stars, which You have ordained,  
4 What is man that You are mindful of him,  
And the son of man that You visit him?  
5 For You have made him a little lower than the angels,  
And You have crowned him with glory and honor.  
6 You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands;  
You have put all things under his feet,  
7 All sheep and oxen—  
Even the beasts of the field,  
8 The birds of the air,  
And the fish of the sea  
That pass through the paths of the seas.  
9 O Lord, our Lord,  
How excellent is Your name in all the earth!

The title affixed to this Psalm is: “To the Chief Musician. On the instrument of Gath. A Psalm of David.” The title is also found in Psalms 81:1 and 84:1. The Hebrew term *gittith* for “instrument of Gath” is “also is supposed to be the name of a tune, or song, or instrument so called, because it was either invented or much used in Gath. Some render it for the wine-presses and say it was to be sung at the time of vintage” (Poole).

This one of the creation psalms. Some have compared this psalm to Genesis 1. It is a significant address about the insignificance about the crown and center of God’s creation: man. As individuals man often has a feeling of insignificance. Do we really make much of a difference in this world? If we were gone today would many people even notice? The late Carl Sagan wrote, “as long as there have been humans we have searched for our place in the cosmos. Where are we? Who are we? We find that we live on an insignificant planet of a humdrum star lost in a galaxy tucked away in some forgotten corner of a universe in which there are far more galaxies the people.” Evolutionists wonder about the significance of the human race, but the Creator does not. Is not man, every man, special in the eyes of his Maker?

### God’s Greatness

This psalms begins with a doxology and ends with the same forming an *inclusio*. This literary device is used here to illustrate the truths which lie in between in verses 2-8. Verse nine brings one back

to consider God's greatness once more.

★ **Sovereign Master**

God is not only Lord of all, He is Lord of all His servants. Those who sing the psalm are servants of the universal Master. His power is unlimited and He answers to no power above Him. He has power over life. He is the ultimate Lawgiver. He does whatever He desires. His rule is never weakened.

★ **Superior Name**

The excellence of God identifies His unmatched and unlimited power. His name tells us who God is. Although billions in this world do not know Him, He is still known as God by His creation. It is like the name of the artist of a great painting found signed in the corner of the canvas. David's strength to face Goliath in battle was not his own stature or weaponry or skill, but the name of God. *"You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied"* (1 Sam. 17:45).

★ **Spherical Dominion**

God's name is glorified throughout the world He created. He did not just make the world, He still rules over it.

### God's Glory

★ **Visualized in Creation**

God's excellence can be seen in the global creation and also the starry *"heavens"* (8:1-3,8). As a shepherd boy with his sheep at night the stars of the heavens would have been visible on the hillside where he lay. This would have been his opportunity to contemplate the grandness of creation and see the glory of the Creator. In another Creation Hymn David wrote, *"the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork"* (Ps. 19:1). It is through the visible creation the invisible Creator is made evident. Paul wrote, *"for since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse"* (Rom. 1:20). The silent message of the heavens is "God has made the great universe and all that is in it. He must be greater still."

★ **Vocalized By His Children**

*"Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants"* God's glory is heard. These children do not have the ability to speak but listen to what you can learn from them. From the grand expanse of the heavens to the smallest humans on earth God's excellence is seen. The psalmist says concerning the children, *"You have ordained strength."* God put great strength in the small children. They are able to counter the scornful language of the enemies of God. Consider a situation where two enemies are going at it and fighting to avenge one another. Small children show up and by their mere presence silence the men and their hostilities. God made them just that strong. Ever see a big, mean, boisterous guy overwhelmed by a small speechless child. Babies have the power to take an otherwise strong, intelligent man and turn him instantly into a babbling idiot.

After He cleansed the Temple, Jesus made reference to this passage in a conflict with the chief priests and scribes in the Temple. *"Then the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' they were indignant and said to Him, 'Do You hear what these are saying?' And Jesus said to them, 'Yes. Have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise'?" Then He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and He lodged there"* (Matt. 21:14-17). These children were old enough to praise Jesus for His good works, but the religious leaders were His enemies and vindictive against Him for moving the hearts of the people away from them. God's glory may not come often from the lips of the wealthy, the statesmen, the philosophers and professors, but they follow freely out of the mouths of the lowly. Jesus told His disciples, *"assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven"* (Matt. 18:3-4). God does not depend upon the wise, powerful, and wealthy of this world to declare His excellence. Paul said, *"but God has chosen*

*the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty” (1 Cor. 1:27).*

### **God’s Goodness**

#### ★ **Amazement Over Man’s Insignificance**

Light travels at the rate of 186,000 miles per second. In a year light will travel some six trillion miles. The known universe is nearly twenty billion light years across. Contemplating these figures would make any man feel insignificant. David looks into the starry skies and as a shepherd boy would have felt pretty insignificant. What with all the stars and planets, galaxies and supergalaxies in this great universe would God look down on puny earth and focus His time, emotions, and energies on David? *“What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?” (8:4).* The Hebrew term for “man” is *enosh* meaning mortal or weak man.

#### ★ **Awe Over Man’s Exalted Position**

David continues his amazement over what God is willing to do for mankind. *“For You have made him a little lower than the angels” (8:5).* This is quoted in Hebrews 2:7 demonstrating that Jesus when He was incarnated was made a little lower than the angels. It is not man’s significance that makes him so important in this universe. It is the position God’s has created for Him which gives man an exalted place in Creation. A golf ball is small compared to a basketball. However, compared to the neutron of an atom the golf ball is enormous. Compared to God’s view of man, all of the created universe is less significant than scientists would imagine. Man is in contrast with the rest of creation in that he was made in the image of God. *“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth’”(Gen. 1:26).* The image of Caesar was on a coin and thus Jesus declared The Pharisees wanted to trap Jesus in His encouragement toward the Jews tax evasion. He pointed out the coin had Caesar image upon it. *“And He said to them, ‘Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s’” (Matt. 22:21).* Man is great compared to the rest of creation because God is great.

God’s goodness is further identified by His crowning of man with *“glory and honor.”* These two *“are the attributes of royal dignity” (Jamieson).* Man has a free-will to serve God. He is the one creature that can chose to say “yes” or “no” to the Creator. If he chooses to follow God’s will, he can become a king or royalty in the family of God through Jesus the King of kings. His ultimate glory and honor will be when God blesses him with a home in Heaven.

#### ★ **Assignment of Rulership**

Man was given dominion over all the earth. God has given man a job. The whole global creation and then some is under the control of man. He is clearly not on the same level as a dog or a frog. The creatures were made for man to use. He may use them for food, clothing, transportation, etc. The same is true of plants. Six things are said to be under man’s feet or in subjection to him: *“All sheep and oxen— Even the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea” (8:7-8a).* This is not a blank check for man to use and abuse creation anyway he so please. Man has been given a stewardship of the planet and all it contains and will have to answer to the Creator for any maltreatment.

Matthew Fountaine Murray was a naval officer in the early 1800s. His duties included the oversight of the charts and records of the Navy. Maury studied ships’ records and logs. While sick in bed he had his son read Psalm 8. When he heard him read verse 8: *“...that pass through the paths of the seas”* he came up with an idea to research. He made up forms for ships to fill out has they voyaged across the oceans. Thousands of these were collected over the next twenty years. Corked bottles were also dropped into the sea which carried the date and location where they were dropped. Ship captains were told to pick up any bottles they came across dropped from other ships. They were to record the day and location these were found. He discovered there is indeed paths in the sea. Today these ocean currents are caused by strong steady winds blowing from east to west and make for ocean going sea lanes which enable ships to travel faster while using less fuel. Murray became known as the father of modern oceanography.

A study of Psalm 8 gives the student a better understanding of the wonders of God's creation, a greater appreciation for man's place in creation, and a sense of identity as the crown of creation.

**Questions:**

1. What is the main question of this Psalm?
2. What literary device is found in verse 1 and 9 of the psalm? Why?
3. What three things show the greatness of God in verse one?
4. What shows man the great glory of God?
5. How can children sing God's praises before the enemies of God?
6. What makes man stand out from the rest of creation?
7. What job has God given man?
8. How should man treat the creation of God?
9. What did a reading of Psalm 8 lead Matthew Fountaine Murray to discover?





## Entrance Exam to Zion

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### Psalm 15

*1 Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle?  
Who may dwell in Your holy hill?  
2 He who walks uprightly,  
And works righteousness,  
And speaks the truth in his heart;  
3 He who does not backbite with his tongue,  
Nor does evil to his neighbor,  
Nor does he take up a reproach against his friend;  
4 In whose eyes a vile person is despised,  
But he honors those who fear the Lord;  
He who swears to his own hurt and does not change;  
5 He who does not put out his money at usury,  
Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent.  
He who does these things shall never be moved.*

On March 5, 1938, President Franklin Roosevelt went to church. On his mind were two of the greatest crisis that had ever hit the American people: the Great Depression and World War II. That morning he heard an inspiring sermon. After the service he met with the press, "I ask that every newspaper in the country print the text of the FIFTEENTH PSALM... There could be no better lead for your story."

Those five simple verses of Psalm 15 are as applicable today as when they were written 3,000 years ago by a shepherd boy who became a king. The Psalm begins with the question in verse one: "LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?". The answer follows in verses 2 through 5: "He who walks uprightly,...". And it concludes with a promise: "He who does these things shall never be moved."

### The Enquiry

Just who can gain entrance into God's habitation? What qualities must he possess? If you wished to become a citizen of the US you would not enquire of the authorities of Spain, but the US government, and by obedience to its rules would one become a citizen of this nation. You can contact creed books, denominations or "religious" leaders, however, only God knows the terms of access (Jer. 10:23).

Outside of God's city are wild beasts, thieves, and darkness. Without the tent of God is the wilderness. Likewise, outside the church there is no Savior. Without heaven is hell. Seeing the consequences of being without God motivates men to pass His entrance exam.

Do you long to dwell with God? Do you wish to dwell with Him or make a token visit from time to time. Some have suggested that this desire to live with God in His tent is the temporal abiding with Him in this world whereas dwelling on His Holy Hill is Heaven. Of course, only those who long to live with God on earth will ever be a resident of Heaven.

Only the right kind of person will be admitted into the presence of the Holy God on His Holy Hill. Mormons do the same thing. No one gets into a temple unless they put in writing they have abstained

from alcohol and caffeine and have tithed. These qualities for admittance are eleven in all with six positives and five negatives. Life is like that; composed of negative and positive. Benjamin Franklin once called this song the "Gentlemen's Psalm." To him, it represented the standard of life after which a gentleman should pattern his walk. It doesn't deal with how someone becomes a Christian, but rather how a Christian should maintain a life of integrity.

## The Exam

### ◆ He Who Walks Uprightly

Literally, it is the man "*who walks without spot.*" The phrase applies to lambs being offered for sacrifice, that is, without spot. This of course, refers to a man's integrity.

This man walks throughout life upright. Like one who carries a basket carried with fragile commodities. If he loses his upright walk he will lose his basket of goods. An upright man does not slither like a snake or crouch like a thief. Like Noah or Abraham he lives his life right before God (Gen. 6:9; 17:1).

Those who walk upright are becoming more rare in our society. Business leaders typified men without integrity within the Enron and WorldCom's corruption. Most workers admit to goofing off for an average of seven hours a week - almost one whole day. Half admit that they regularly call in sick when they are perfectly well. In James Patterson and Peter Kims' book, *The Day America Told the Truth*, they polled the American public asking, "What are you willing to do for \$10,000,000? They found that:

- 25% would abandon their entire family
- 25% would abandon their church
- 23% would become prostitutes for a week or more
- 16 % would give up their American citizenship
- 16% would leave their spouses
- 10% would withhold testimony and let a murderer go free
- 7% would kill a stranger
- 3% would put their children up for adoption

According to their findings if you are among 100 fellow Americans seven of these strangers would kill you for the right price.

### ◆ He Who Works Righteousness

Christians were created by God in Christ to do works of righteousness (Eph. 2:10). Righteous men are not known just by their relationship with God, but by the way they conduct themselves because of this spiritual relationship. He does what is right.

### ◆ He Who Speaks the Truth in His Heart

God is looking for men whose mouth matches their minds. They speak the truth in public, but also speak truth in their hearts. God wants nothing to do with those who say one thing out loud and something different under their breath. His speech must be sincere. Our word "sincere" comes from *sine* and *cera*. Together, they mean "without wax". When a potter fired his wares in the oven back then, it was common for the clay to crack. An unscrupulous potter would then take some wax and use it to fill in the cracks, then paint over it all and try to pass it off as a good piece of pottery. A shrewd buyer of pottery knew that a simple test could show him if the pot was truly good or not. He held it up to the sunlight. Spots filled with wax would be plainly evident then as the light penetrated and shone through. A pot with no wax was thus a "sincere" pot. It had no wax. It really was consistent with its advertising.

### ◆ He Who Does Not Backbite with His Tongue

Is a man a man if he has no honor? In the movie *Rob Roy*, the hero Rob would say "no". To one of his sons he says, "Honor is a gift a man gives to himself, which no other man can take from him." He goes on to say that a man of honor must never slander another.

It is interesting that in the list of seven things God hates (Prov. 6:16-19) three have to do with the tongue. God is concerned in what a man says. If you wish to dwell with God you must not use your

tongue to harm others. The Hebrew word for “backbite” means to play the spy. One who searches out anything in a man’s life in order to defame him.

Answering four simple questions can help you avoid misusing your tongue. Is it confidential? Is it true? Is it necessary? Is it kind? And if you ever have to say, “I really shouldn’t say this...” than you shouldn’t.

◆ **He Who Does No Evil to His Neighbor**

A citizen of God’s city will remember the second law, “*Love thy neighbor as thyself*” and the golden rule (Matt. 7:12). He will be a good neighbor no matter which hood he lives in. He must get along with others therefore God will let Him in His neighborhood. On God’s Holy Hill it is always “a beautiful day in the neighborhood”, because God admits no bad neighbors.

◆ **He Who Does Not Take up a Reproach Against a Friend**

God rejects the sin of tale-bearing. Anyone who picks up and harbors stolen goods is as guilty as the thief. Anyone who picks up a tale and spreads it around is just as guilty as a thief. An upright man does not say sharp, cutting, and scornful things about others. There is honesty yet gentleness in his character.

◆ **He Who Despises a Vile Person in His Eyes**

Charlie Jones notes, “What you read and who you associate with will determine who you become.” Remember, “*God is not mocked, evil companionship corrupts good morals*” (1 Cor. 15:33). If your associates are evil you will not move toward responsible integrity. This does not mean that you hate the sinner, but the sin. In order to dwell with God you cannot fraternize with those who despise godliness.

◆ **He Honors Those Who Fear the Lord**

Our allegiance should be clear-cut. We respect God, not men. Not famous athletes or corporate leaders who may be rich and gifted, but have a godless character. Friendship with God is promoted by choosing good role models. A Christlike friend needs to be sought out for companionship.

◆ **He Swears to His Own Hurt and Does Not Change**

◆ God is looking for men who will make a promise and never go back on it. He is true to his word even if it is to his benefit to forget his vows. God desires this kind of devotion, because He always keeps His promises.

◆ **He Does Not Put out His Money at Usury**

God is not against lending or making money. The Law of Moses was clear concerning charging interest. Interest was not to be charged to poor brethren (Ex. 22:25,26) or the poor stranger (Lev. 25:35-37), but they could charge interest of a stranger (Dt. 23:20). God is against charging interest at intolerable rates. Those who take advantage of people in need. However, not every financial need among believers is a “need”. Some “needs” stem from careless spending or mere wants.

Some may think, “This doesn’t apply to me, I don’t lend or have money to lend.” However, God’s friends don’t hit people when they are down. They engage in no rip-offs or take unfair advantage. Our dealing with money is quite an important factor in our assessment of God and God’s assessment of us.

◆ **He Does Not Take a Bribe Against the Innocent**

Again, both how one treats his fellow man and his view of money will determine whether we are fit candidates for fellowship with God.

### **The Reward**

Those who have these qualities will not be moved. Not like Adam and Eve who were moved out of the garden of Eden. An upright man will abide in God’s tent and he will remain on God’s Holy Hill. Friendship with God is like a shelter in the time of storm.

This reward is conditional. It is conditioned upon obedience to God’s Will and having the qualities listed above. Only those that are doers of God’s Will will enter the kingdom of God (Mt. 7:21).

In this short Psalm is the answer to the question. To dwell on God’s Holy Hill one must exemplify these eleven qualities in his life. Character still counts. If you wish to dwell with God now and forever

your life will be as the one described above.

**Questions:**

1. What is the psalmist's enquiry?
2. What would an upright man NOT do?
3. How does one work righteousness?
4. What does it mean to be sincere?
5. How does a citizen of Zion use his tongue?
6. What two New Testament commands of Jesus would help a man be good to his neighbor?
7. Give an example of a reproach against a friend?
8. How does an upright man view a vile man?
9. Who does the upright honor?
10. What is usury? What does it have to do with the one who is upright?
11. What is the reward of the upright man?



# The Two Great Books of God: Creation

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## Psalm 19:1-6

*1 The heavens declare the glory of God;  
And the firmament shows His handiwork.  
2 Day unto day utters speech,  
And night unto night reveals knowledge.  
3 There is no speech nor language  
Where their voice is not heard.  
4 Their line has gone out through all the earth,  
And their words to the end of the world.  
In them He has set a tabernacle for the sun,  
5 Which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,  
And rejoices like a strong man to run its race.  
6 Its rising is from one end of heaven,  
And its circuit to the other end;  
And there is nothing hidden from its heat.*

– Psalm 19:1-6

### General Revelation - God's Glory

David was an out of doors man. As a shepherd or an anointed King running in the wilderness from King Saul's murderous wrath, he viewed the Heavens and God's earthly creation. Many of the psalms reflect his observations about the Creator from his view of His creation (Ps. 8; 146-150). God has chosen to reveal Himself to man through nature and the starry expanse. Erwin Lutzer writes: "In creation, God went public." While preaching to the Gentiles Paul would often direct them to the Gospel after pointing them to the Creator (Acts 14:14-18; 17:22-31). "Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17). Like Paul, David in this psalm is at first focusing on the general revelation of Himself through His glorious creation and then moves to speak of God.

### The General Revelation of God's Glory is...

★ **Unmistakable:** *The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. (19:1).*

Although some may refer to this as a creation hymn it is really a song praising the Creator. David uses the name "El" to show God to be the Mighty One in creation. Unlike the pagans who worshiped the heavenly bodies, the psalmist is using them to point to the need to worship their Creator.

When you are looking to store something you hope to find a shelf with an empty space. Outer space is not empty. God has filled it with hundreds of billions of stars in countless galaxies. These are not arranged chaotically across the universe. Instead, they work on a perfect timetable more sophisticated than the inner workings of any Swiss watch. Any one who argues that the universe is not the result of intelligent design from the Intelligent Mind might as well claim that billion dollar cruise ship is the result of a hurricane crossing over the state of Florida.

The purpose of the heavens is to manifest the glory of God. It is not assigning to God His glorious nature and attributes, God would be glorious even with Him creating anything. Yet, when man looks at God's creation, he knows that it's Creator enjoys beauty, has great power, possess a matchless intellect.

etc. As the firmament goes on and on it constantly declares that greatness to a limitless God. The complex design of creation demands an Intelligent Designer. If the earth were one degree closer to the sun, all the world would be set ablaze. If we were one degree further, all of mankind would soon freeze to death. The tides would destroy the coastline everyday if the moon was too close. If the gravitational pull of the earth was too strong the atmosphere would contain a lethal amount of ammonia and methane. If it were weaker, not enough water would remain in the atmosphere to support life. Even something as simple as the water molecule (H<sub>2</sub>O) shows the detail of design. If its polarity was too great all of it would evaporate and if was any less, ice would not float causing the planet to freeze over.

The Hebrew word for “firmament” is *raqia* (Gen. 1:6; Dan. 12:3). During the week of creation God set up the firmament to separate the waters from one another. It is where the hydrological cycle occurs to make our weather (Ps. 147:8). The information about the Creator is so abundantly unmistakable that Paul declares that mankind is without any excuse for not believing in God (Rom. 1:18-20). Years ago a French infidel strutted and bragged that infidels would tear down the churches and destroy everything that reminded the people of God. A poor peasant replied, “But you will leave us the sun, the moon, and the stars; and as long as they shine, we shall have a reminder of God.”

★ **Unceasing:** *Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge* (19:2)

God’s general revelation of Himself to mankind through His Creation is not an intermittent or temporary transmission of information. Like a message on a continuous playback loop God is sending His message from outer space too mankind. This phrase could be translated: “keep on declaring...keep on proclaiming.” Mankind has been spending millions and billions of dollars sending messages into the far reaches of space and unmanned space vehicles across the solar system in search of extraterrestrial life. When all the time day and night God the giver of all life has been sending mankind information from the Heavens to the earth without ceasing.

Notice the use of parallelism by David to make the point:

day to day	they pour forth	speech
night to night	they display	knowledge

God’s message about Him is not limited to looking at the starry heavens on a dark night but the message is also on display throughout the daylight hours. The word used here for “speech” and “reveals” in the text mean to announce or inform someone with information so they can have knowledge. God transmits this without intermission. One may not read or have a Bible to read and see God’s revelation of Himself and His will, but they are surrounded by this general revelation of God from creation 24/7.

★ **Abundant:** *utters speech* (19:2a)

Another way of translating “*utters speech*” is “pour forth speech.” “Utter” means “to bubble up, pour forth” like a gushing spring. The Creation is pouring out the overflow of glory for its Creator. Every part of creation points out the glory of its Creator whether it be the snowflake, the cells of the human body, the exact movements of the stars, etc. Furthermore, there is no end to the gushing forth of knowledge from the universe. Its source never runs dry. The term “*knowledge*” speaks of what we would call observable scientific data. The creation that is visible to the human eye as well as that which is so small that it is invisible to our sight without special optical equipment. World famous biologist Edward O. Wilson claims there may be as many as 1.6 million species of fungi in the world today, 10,000 species of ants, 300,000 species of flowering plants, between 4,000 and 5,000 species of mammals, and approximately 10,000 species of birds. Albert Einstein once said, “the scientist is possessed by the sense of universal causation. . . His religious feelings takes the form of a rapturous amazement at the harmony of natural law, which reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, compared with it, all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection.” The point Einstein claimed is that the cosmos is so complex that it reveals a being of super intelligence and it does so with super abundance.

★ **Unspoken:** *There is no speech nor language Where their voice is not heard (19:3)*

David now addresses the silent character of the proclamation of God's glory from all of creation. Literally, he means that the proclamation is inaudible. Nature and the Heavens can be a "wordless book." Yet it uses a common language that everyone can read because it has no need of a translator.

Yes, the heavens utter speech but its communication is not with words. Its message does not need verbalization and inscribed with words because it transcends human communication which is limited by terrestrial languages. So God uses celestial speech a speechless speech.

★ **Universal:** *Their line has gone out through all the earth, And their words to the end of the world (19:4)*

The term "*line*" means "call, sound, proclamation." Their sound or tune or voice has gone forth to every corner of the earth and every spot on the globe with a proclamation: God is God and God is Great. So that everyone in every land and of every human language has "heard." Whatever a man's language and wherever he abides and whoever he is this message can be heard from the creation which has been made and sent by the Creator. People in Taiwan, Tahiti, and Tanzania see. Humanity from Moscow to Memphis, from Rome to the rainforest, from Albania to Antarctica can hear the communication from creation that there is a Creator. The proclamation can be heard in the rain or thunder of a storm. Jesus said, "*that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust*" (Matt. 5:45).

As missionaries have spread out over the face of the earth to the four corners of the globe they have found men of every tribe and civilization that believe in some kind of divine beings or gods. Don Richardson in his book *Eternity in the Their Hearts* tells of his missionary journeys which have documented many tribes who have anticipated the coming of someone bringing a story about a Savior. Helen Keller, who was blind and deaf, said she had always known there was a God but didn't know what His name was. Paul even applies this verse to the worldwide spread of the gospel (Rom. 10:18). Can people be lost without hearing or seeing proof concerning God the Creator? No. But they will be lost without believing in Christ (John 3:16). God has sent his message out through His creation so that all men will be without excuse for not believing in Him. It is up to us to sound forth the Good News about His Son to all the peoples of the world.

★ **Undiminished:** *In them He has set a tabernacle for the sun, Which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, And rejoices like a strong man to run its race (19:4b,5)*

Next, David speaks of the undiminished power and light of the sun to glorify God. God made the sun where it is: "*In them He has set a tabernacle for the sun.*" This "tabernacle" or tent is a poetic way of telling about the location of the sun as it disappears each night on the edge of the earth.

The sun is also like a glowing bridegroom: "*which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber.*" As a bridegroom leaves his place and comes quickly with joy and enthusiasm to meet his bride so the sun burst forth upon the horizon to greet each day.

David mixes his metaphors by showing the sun to be like a strong champion. A warrior who is strong, tireless, enduring, always moving forward and never retreating or growing weary and stopping. It is the champion who enjoys the challenge and cannot be turned back or stopped, he will run his course. Notice the psalmist moves from night to morning to day as he describes the course of the sun in a twenty-four hour period. Jews counted the new day starting as sun down and going on till the next setting of the sun. Every day the sun goes into its tent and rests. Man knows that it will burst forth like a bridegroom heading out to see his bride at daybreak. He will press on across the sky without slowing down or stopping.

★ **Unresting:** *Its rising is from one end of heaven (19:6a)*

The sun is always making its circuit. Like the saying, "as sure as the sun will set." Just as the sun is always at work in all places so is God its Creator. The all-seeing sun was made by an all-seeing Creator. This may not a scientifically sound description of the sun, but here its an apt metaphorical portrayal of an unresting part of creation.

★ **Influencing:** *And there is nothing hidden from its heat (19:6b)*

Its size, temperature, and distance from the earth provides just the right level of heat and light



for the purpose of life. Without a sun there would be no life on earth. Without our the sun mankind would not see the silent sermon proclaimed daily across the sky which tells of the glory of God. The sun is like a circuit riding preacher in the sky whose message can be preached to every nation and language every day.

### **Why Are There So Many Unbelievers?**

With all this information being declared by the creation everywhere, in every way to everyone it makes us wonder why some do not believe in God. Surely, *"the fool has said in his heart, "There is no God"* (Psalm 14:1; Psalm 53:1). We call these "fools" atheists or agnostics. An atheist is one who believes that God does not exist. While an agnostic is someone who does not know whether God exists. Paul says that man has been given so much information by creation about the Creator *"so that they are without excuse"* (Rom. 1:20).

Once a college philosophy professor asked a student, "Using everything we have learned this semester, prove that this chair does not exist." The student responded, "What chair?" Two men were standing at the Grand Canyon. One man exclaimed, "this is the hand of God. I am amazed!" The other man said, "I'm amazed too. That's the first time I ever spit a mile." Men see and observe what they want to. An atheist cannot find God in the same way that a tax evader cannot find the IRS: they don't want to find them. The "theory" of evolution is being claimed as fact in some of our public schools. Therefore, young men and young women are being brain washed into repudiating the unmistakable fact: *"in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"* (Gen. 1:1). Soon people are blind to all the proof of God in all the universe. They are like a family that moved into a home next to the airport every fifteen minutes a jumbo jet would shake their little wood frame home to its very foundation as it roared a few dozen yards over their roof. Believe it or not, they soon became blind to the effects and deaf to the sound and went on living there day after day as if the airport with its air traffic did not even exist. Today, man has become equally blind and deaf to the evidence of God's existence from all of creation.

The Heavens will not always proclaim the Glory of God, one day they will cease. *"Lift up your eyes to the heavens, And look on the earth beneath. For the heavens will vanish away like smoke, The earth will grow old like a garment, And those who dwell in it will die in like manner; But My salvation will be forever, And My righteousness will not be abolished"* (Is. 51:6). Peter wrote, *"looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?"* (2 Pet. 3:12). After this, mankind will either experience the existence and glory of God firsthand in Heaven or be eternally separated from God and His glory.

### **Questions:**

1. How do the Heavens manifest the glory of God?
2. What is the firmament?
3. How frequent is the evidence of the Creator being transmitted?
4. What does the phrase *"utters speech"* imply about the work of creation showing the Creator?
5. How does creation have a voice without speech or language?

6. Where can one go where the message of the Creator cannot be seen or heard from creation?
7. What is the sun's tabernacle?
8. How is the sun like a bridegroom?
9. How is the sun like a strong man?
10. T F Without the sun mankind would not see the silent sermon proclaimed daily across the sky which tells of the glory of God.

**Application and Discussion:**

1. In light of so much creation evidence for the creator, why are there so many unbelievers?
2. List some examples of evidence of the Creator seen in everyday creation.

**Homework:** Find someone who does not believe God is the Creator of the world and point out some evidence from creation.

# The Two Great Books of God: The Law

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## Psalm 19:7-14

### Special Revelation - God's Word

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

– Psalm 19:7-9

Concerning Psalm nineteen Charles Haddon Spurgeon wrote, "He is wisest who reads both the world-book and the Word book as two volumes of the same work and feels concerning them, 'My Father wrote them both'" (Spurgeon). This psalm speaks of the two great books created by God. In the first six verses He wrote about Himself in the creation of the universe. It is the big book which represents a general revelation of Him to all mankind. It is available to all and can be read by all. However, it is a limited revelation in that it cannot tell man how to deal with specific problems in his relationship with his creator which were created by sin. This calls for a smaller book which is a special revelation of God's will to man through the written word - the Bible. It was by His Word that He created the worlds (33:0), and it is by His Word that He controls the worlds (33:11; 148:8). It is by His written word that He can reconcile sinful man back to Himself.

The Bible is a necessary sequel to God's general revelation in creation. The heavens may declare God's power and glory, but they do not declare His will or His plan and promise of salvation. Without this special revelation man could never know the answers to such questions as: What is behind all this? Why am I here? Why is there suffering? What does the future hold? What is the meaning of life?

The Psalms are not written like our standard English poetry. Hebrew poetry relies on the symmetry of concepts and reiterations of ideas. For example, note the use of "El" for God in the first six verses showing Yahweh to be the God of creation whereas the phrase "of the Lord" appears seven times demonstrating that Yahweh is Lord of the inspired Word. The importance of the written revelation is magnified by the use of six parallel phrases each contains a title, a characteristic, and a result. The essence of this part of the psalm is to inform us that the Word of God is perfect.

*7a The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul;*

#### **Title: Law**

"*The law*" is from the Hebrew *tora* in English "torah" meaning "instruction, direction, teaching." Today, Christians think of the word "law" in a negative light. They envision legalistic restrictions which demand obedience under strict penalty for failure to comply. God is also the author of the law of gravitation. It is a good and wholesome law, but if not respected could cause serious injury or death. The "thou shalt not"s of the Law are just and perfect as any other commandment.

#### **Characteristic: perfect**

The term "*perfect*" means that which is without blemish or complete so as to be lacking nothing. The New Testament calls it the "*perfect law of liberty...*"; (Js. 1:25). God's Law so adequate that it will be always able to accomplish its goal. This special revelation is so comprehensive that it will provide for

man's every spiritual need. Unlike our Constitution the Bible never is in need of being amended. Paul tells us that the Bible is all-sufficient: *"all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness"* (2 Tim. 3:16). Human laws are subject to the whims of human nature and the changing political winds. God's Law is so perfect that it never needs to be changed, added to or reformed in anyway by anyone.

**Effect: converting the soul**

When it comes to converting standard to metric measurements, converting files from one type to another on a computer or converting a garage into a family room all of us understand the meaning of such. It all involves a process of change from one substance into another. When the Law converts the soul it involves a change of heart so that one thinks differently, a change of life so that one lives differently, and a change of relationship so that one is a child and friend of God. The same Hebrew word is used in Psalm 23:3 and translated *"restore."* The converting of the soul back into what it should have been before sin distorted man's heart, life, and divine relationship. Jesus told His would-be disciples *"that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven"* (Matt. 5:20).

*7b The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;*

**Title: testimony**

A legal term that has a sense of *"witness."* When going to court one gives his testimony based on their own experience. Here God is giving a personal testimony as to truth. The Ten Commandments referred to as the testimony of the Lord in Exodus 25:21. These commands of God are not just the demands of a tyrant not wanting to let his subjects have any fun, but they represent the very character of God. These are a witness or self-disclosure of God's character. For example, it is wrong to bear false witness because God is Truth and it is wrong to murder because God is the giver of all life.

**Characteristic: sure**

Spurgeon defines *"sure"* as *"no mixture of error defiles it."* As gold is pure because it is free from all impurities so are the testimonies of God. They are faithful, trustworthy, and reliable. As God the author is without fault so are His writings.

**Effect: making wise the simple**

When we think of *"simple"* it is often construed to mean *"simple-minded."* However, it merely refers to the untrained and the uneducated. Literally, it comes from a root term in Hebrew meaning *"an open door"* thus referring to one who is open-minded and thus open to instruction. It is a childlike spirit with a yearning for learning. A door is a point of discrimination. A door will let something out or in depending on what it is. An ignoramus may have an open mind to be educated where as a know-it-all will have a closed mind and become ignorant. The man who thinks himself too wise to adhere to God's wisdom will show himself soon to be a fool. Paul told the Corinthians, *"For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.' Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe"* (1 Cor.2:19-21).

*8a The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;*

**Title: statutes**

The term *"statutes"* is found twenty-one times in Psalm 119. It involves particular instructions from God concerning practical matters of day to day life. These laws work to unison to form a legal code telling them what to eat, how to dress, how to keep clean, and so on. The term also implies repetition so as to make something clear again and again.

**Characteristic: right**

*"Right"* is similar to the idea of a road map. Literally, it has the original concept of straight. Thus to set out on the straight path. The statutes of God can put a man going in the right direction and keep him on the right path. The Lord's statutes act as road signs in life to keep one from leaving the highway

and crashing their life on the crooked paths of unrighteousness.

**Effect: rejoicing the heart**

Some of the statutes that legislators have passed are not right and have brought grief, but the statutes of the Lord bring joy. Commands are seen as demands on our sense of freedom keeping us from enjoying our life. How can the statutes of the Lord bring joy and delight? How can restrictions make our heart happy? When traveling it is reassuring to know you are on the right road, nearing our destination, and traveling their safely, etc.

8b *The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;*

**Title: commandment**

Have you ever been lost? You need to stop and let your wife out so she can ask for directions. The term “*commandment*” means “orders” or “directions.” These guide with direction that allow you to find a place you have never visited. Yet these orders are not mere suggestions but commandments to be obeyed.

**Characteristic: pure**

The commandments are “*pure*” in that they lead to a pure life, if obeyed. The Bible is the Holy or pure scriptures. The term means transparent or translucent. In other words God’s Word is crystal clear. His commandments are not too difficult to comprehend. God has commanded us to obey, yet if He has failed to make these commands clear enough to be obeyed He comes across as cruel or inept. “*The words of the Lord are pure words, Like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times*” (Ps. 12:6).

**Effect: enlightening the eyes**

Jesus said, “*blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God*” (Matt. 5:8). The eyes need light in order to work. The sun is bright. But if one looks directly into the sun he is blinded with sun spots. The pure white snow of winter is known to produce snow blindness. Yet looking at God’s commands gives us the light needed to see. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps. 119:105). “*For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light*” (Eph. 5:8). Not only is the Bible clear and not mysterious, it is bright not dark.

9a *The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;*

**Title: fear**

“*Fear*” refers to the parts of God’s law that evoke fear (reverence) it means “reverential trust.” When God revealed the Law at Mount Sinai the mountain thundered with smoke and fire. The children of Israel were afraid. This is not the fear of the criminal before the executioner, but the fear of a child for disobeying the father. I loved my Dad, but I sure was afraid of him. He kept me in line. The scriptures are the reverent and respectable and awesome Words of God Himself.

**Characteristic: clean**

The Word of God is without spot and is unblemished. Scripture is flawless, unadulterated truth, without any error. It is completely uncontaminated by our dirty human minds. The Bible is without any admixture of error or unrighteousness. Furthermore, the Word will never need amending, updating or editing.

**Effect: enduring forever**

“*For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled*” (Matt. 5:18). “*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away*” (Matt. 24:35). The Word of God is always in fashion. It never becomes outdated or obsolete.

9b *The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.*

**Title: judgments**

The verdicts of a judge are “*judgments.*” God is the Judge of all and His verdicts are the final judgments which can never be repelled. The Lord’s judicial decisions are binding as law. They represent

the precedents which man must follow or find himself being judged by God for his failure.

**Characteristic: true**

Pilate asked Jesus "...*What is truth? ...*" (Jn. 18:38). The Word of God is truth (Jn. 17:17). The term "*true*" is the opposite of "wishy-washy" or subject to change. Truth, therefore, is not a temporary statement but a permanent fact.

**Effect: righteous altogether**

These judgments of God will produce comprehensive righteousness. The term "*righteous*" is a legal one, meaning "judged to have performed what is appropriate in a case under consideration." The judgments themselves are righteous.

**Summary**

These six parallel attributes of the written Word of God show that it is not like anything man has written. John Wesley noted, "man could not have written the Bible if he would and would not if he could."

**Response to God's Revelation**

*More to be desired are they than gold,  
Yea, than much fine gold;  
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.  
11 Moreover by them Your servant is warned,  
And in keeping them there is great reward.  
12 Who can understand his errors?  
Cleanse me from secret faults.  
13 Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins;  
Let them not have dominion over me.  
Then I shall be blameless,  
And I shall be innocent of great transgression.  
14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart  
Be acceptable in Your sight,  
O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.*

– Psalm 19:10-14

The nineteenth psalm is unparalleled in its poetic potency and spiritual profoundness. Of it C. S. Lewis wrote, "I take this to be the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world" (Reflections on the Psalms, 63). The number of songs based upon this text attest to its popularity. These hymns include:

- The specious firmament on high (Joseph Addison)
- The heavens declare thy glory (Thomas Birks)
- The heavens declare thy glory (Lord Isaac Watts)
- Lord, thy Word abideth (Henry Baker)
- Jehovah's perfect law restores the soul again" (psalter, 1912)
- The law of God is good and wise (Matthias Loy)
- Most perfect is the law of God (psalter 1912)

David begins this psalm with a description of God's general revelation of Himself to the world through His creation and then reveals His Will through the inspired Word. Now he focuses on the correct personal response to the God's revelation of Himself through the written Word.

**God's Word is Precious**

David first points out the precious value of God's Word, as it is "*more to be desired are they than*

gold, *Yea, than much fine gold*" (19:10a). God's Word is our treasure, it is our delight. The precepts of God are desired because they are for our own good. The commandments are not just more valuable than gold but priceless. They are better than fine gold. Fine gold is that which had been melted down with of maximum of the impurities and alloys removed. It is highly refined and purified.

Next, David wrote the scriptures were "*sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb*" (19:10b). Honey and gold are valuable and share the same color. When God told Israel of the Promised Land He described it as a land flowing "*with milk and honey.*" As gold was the most valuable material known, honey was the sweetest. So a man who truly understands the value of the Word will not work overtime for gold or money so he can spend time in study and he will skip the sweetest desserts to have time to mediate on the scriptures. "*Oh how I love your law*" (Ps. 119:97).

### **God's Word is Pertinent**

The priceless value of the Word is not seen only by who authored it, but the written Word's practical value to the souls of men. First, the scriptures alert the reader to spiritual dangers. "*Moreover by them Your servant is warned*" (19:11a). The Bible tells man what to do and what not to do, where he can go and what to avoid, what he should say and what he should not. The Bible also has warning signs telling the disciple not to transgress. This is true of all God's laws both natural and written. God is Creator of all men leaving him cautions in nature. The Lord is lawgiver to all men warning them not to commit lawlessness. As warning lights keep drivers safe so the light of God's Word lightens the way so we can safely travel in life. Second, the written laws of God speak of rewards for those who are obedient. "*And in keeping them there is great reward*" (19:11b). Philips tells us that the Hebrew word for "reward" indicates the final outcome of an deed. God warns and He rewards those who are obedient. When man respects the laws of nature he finds a reward in the end. For example, the farmer reaps as he sows. An obedient child of God is rewarded for his obedience in the last Harvest as well as in life.

### **Seeking God's Purification**

God's Word is precious and pertinent to those who read it and live by it. Man is in need of it because he sins and seeks purification from God.

#### **◆ Convicting**

The psalmist begins this section with a rhetorical question: "*who can understand his errors?*" (19:12a). The man who reads, studies, and meditates on the Bible will comprehend that he has transgressed God's laws. The Word has a way of removing man's blind spots so he can see himself as a sinner. God has revealed man's true condition. Knowing his errors man can now seek forgiveness. Paul wrote, "*what shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet'*" (Rom. 7:7).

#### **◆ Cleansing**

The Lateran Council of the Church issued a decree that all would confess all their sins once a year to a priest, then they would receive forgiveness. Nether the "church" or its officers has the power to forgive one minute of sinning much less a whole year's worth of sin. Only God can wash our sins so that they are as white as snow (Is. 1:18). The Psalmist ask God to "*cleanse me from secret faults*" (19:12b). So scholars have suggested that these are the secret sins that have been kept hidden from others. Others say they are the sins of ignorance committed by the sinner without his realization. "Secret sin is the stepping stone to presumptuous sin."

#### **◆ Curbing**

The psalmist seeks divine assistance to avoid both "hidden faults" as well as "willful sins." "*Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins*" (19:13a). These sins are premeditated and willful sins. As when David committed adultery and arranged to have Uriah murdered (2 Sam. 11-12), he sinned insolently with his eyes wide open and therefore could bring no sacrifice (Ps. 51:16,17). The Word of God can keep us from committing these intentional sins.

#### **◆ Controlling**

Sin is a taskmaster to be feared. *“Let them not have dominion over me”* (19:13b). The devil may have strongholds of sin in our lives. As Jesus used the written Word to combat Satan’s temptations so the scriptures can help us. *“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds”* (2 Cor. 10:4). According to modern psychology man is not in control as a “pathological liar,” a sex addict” or “incurably greedy”. Yet as a song we sing asking God to: “take away the love of sinning.”

◆ **Clearing**

Note the Hebrew poetic parallelism in the words “errors” and “secret sin” also the “willful sins” and “great transgressions.” *“Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression”* (19:13c). The transgressions are “great” in the significance of a continual, deliberate pattern of life. David may have had his adultery and murder in mind. But through His prophet, Nathan, God told David that his sins were cleared: *“the Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die”* (2 Sam. 12:13b).

◆ **Conforming**

The Word of God should result in a submissive conforming of lips and mind to the Will of God. *“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart”* (19:14a). The desire to conform one’s thoughts and words to the Word. It is not enough to clear oneself of errors, secret sins, presumptuous sins, and great sins. The good must replace the bad (Matt. 12:43-45). *“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things”* (Phil. 4:8).

◆ **Confirming**

David wants his words and thoughts to *“be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer”* (19:14b). The word translated “acceptable” refers to the priest’s examination of the sacrifices to make sure they were without blemish. In responding to the Law of God the saint will see God’s pleasure and His acceptance. Notice he appeals to God as his Rock (“strength”) and Redeemer.

In referring to the Bible John Bunyan said it well, “this Book will keep you from sin, and sin will keep you from this book.” John Bunyan

**Questions:**

1. The first six verses of Psalm nineteen praise the...
  - a. Law of the Lord
  - b. The special revelation from God
  - c. The general revelation from God
  - d. baby Jesus
2. If God has revealed Himself in creation, why is the Word of God necessary?
3. What Hebrew word was used for God in the first six verse and which Hebrew words for God was used in verse seven through nine? Explain why?
4. Each line in verse seven through nine can be divided into three categories?



5. How does the law convert the soul?
6. Who is the simple? How are they made wise?
7. What does "pure" mean?
8. What does it mean God's Word endures forever?
9. What does "judgments," "true," and "righteous" mean?
10. According to verse eleven in what two ways is God's Word pertinent?
11. List seven things dealing with seeking God's purification?

**Application and Discussion:**

1. How can the statutes of the Lord bring joy and delight? How can restrictions make our heart happy?
2. How is a person able to "understand his errors"?

**Homework:** Make of list of what sort of things the Bible is more precious or what it is better than.

# An Evil Tongue's Demise

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## Psalm 52

*1 Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man?  
The goodness of God endures continually.*

*2 Your tongue devises destruction,  
Like a sharp razor, working deceitfully.*

*3 You love evil more than good,  
Lying rather than speaking righteousness. Selah*

*4 You love all devouring words,  
You deceitful tongue.*

*5 God shall likewise destroy you forever;  
He shall take you away, and pluck you out of your dwelling place,  
And uproot you from the land of the living. Selah*

*6 The righteous also shall see and fear,  
And shall laugh at him, saying,*

*7 "Here is the man who did not make God his strength,  
But trusted in the abundance of his riches,  
And strengthened himself in his wickedness."*

*8 But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God;  
I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever.*

*9 I will praise You forever,  
Because You have done it;  
And in the presence of Your saints  
I will wait on Your name, for it is good.*

In one of Aesop's Fables, a trumpeter during a battle ventured too near the enemy and was captured by them. They were about to proceed to put him to death when he begged them to hear his plea for mercy. "I do not fight," said he, "and indeed carry no weapon; I only blow this trumpet, and surely that cannot harm you; then why should you kill me?" "You may not fight yourself," said the others, "but you encourage and guide your men to the fight."

The 52<sup>nd</sup> Psalm tells of the danger of an evil tongue. One man's tongue sounded like a trumpet causing the sword to fall upon and kill many innocent men, women, and children.

This particular psalm has a superscription which reads: "A contemplation of David when Doeg the Edomite went and told Saul, and said to him, 'David has gone to the house of Ahimelech.'" If we accept this as the background to the writing of this psalm we have a definite historical context. King Saul jealous over David's recent victories and knowing how the people loved him more than himself, he tried to end David's life. Jonathan had just made a pact with David and warned him that his father Saul wanted him dead. Therefore, David fled the city and went to a town called Nob where we pick up the story in 1 Samuel 21:8-22. Doeg comes forth and tells the king how David had got some bread and a sword from the priests in Nob. The sword actually was David's and belonged originally to the giant Goliath. Doeg was an important man. He worked for Saul at Saul's farm. He was the leader (or boss) of all the men that kept Saul's animals. He got a lot of money for his job. He became a rich and powerful man. Yet, he was also a very vicious man. He used his tongue to provoke the wrath of the king against the priests. After bringing the priests before Saul and finding no confession of wrong, Saul slanders them

and then commands his men to kill them. When they had a chance to say something, they simply said, "How did we know David was not King Saul's friend?" David indeed was Saul's guard, music player, and a captain in the army. None of the men dared to touch the priests of the Lord. However, the accuser Doeg the Edomite comes forward to slay them. After that he goes to Nob and wipes out every living person, including wives and young children. Saul stoops so low in his jealousy and self pity to let a heathen kill God's innocent priests and their families.

David heard the story from Abiathar. David lamented, "*I should have known that he would surely tell Saul. I have brought about the death of every person...*" (22). Psalm 52 is an agonizing poem and prayer from a man who felt responsible for the evil that was thrust upon others, causing their deaths.

### **Six Characteristics of an Evil Tongue**

Initially, the psalm focuses on the destructive nature of Doeg's evil tongue. In all, David lists six characteristics of an evil tongue.

First, an evil tongue is *boastful*. The mighty man blows his own trumpet, toots his own horn, and sounds his own praise. Their opinion of themselves is inflated. Note the sarcasm - "*O mighty one*". A mighty man indeed to kill men who never touched a sword! Doeg ought to have been ashamed of his cowardice. The might of Doeg will wane in old age. His genocide will be exposed. In time the temporary triumph of Doeg against God's priests will end, yet the "*goodness of God endures continually*".

The second aspect of an evil tongue is that it *devises deceitful destruction*. The tongue like a razor which misses the beard and cuts the throat. Doeg's tongue moved Saul to order the execution of 85 priests and destroy a village of innocent people. Truly, the tongue is a sharp and deadly weapon.

The story is told of a sailor who was in charge of the ship's log. The sailor was a seasoned seaman, having spent many years in the royal navy. His record was spotless until one evening after liberty he had drunk too much and returned to the ship drunk. The ship's lieutenant, fresh out of officers school, logged in the ship's diary "Seaman 1st class Jones drunk today." Well, Jones was really disturbed about that so he planned his strategy. You see, the next day he was on the log and entered "Lt. J.G. Smith, sober today." Such a simple remark could have ruined the officer's navy career.

The type of tongue under investigation *loves evil more than good*. Doeg did not have to tell Saul about David and the priests. His love for stirring up evil motivated him. Like the gossip's anthem: "I love to tell the story". This reminds me of a cartoon where one lady is leaning over her fence whispering to her next door neighbor: "I never repeat anything unless it is good...and boy is this good."

A tongue like Doeg's *loves lying more than truth*. He was more eager to please Saul, than he was to please God. Lying is the ultimate assassin's tool or weapon. A survey says: 57% of American teens believe that lying is sometimes necessary. 45% of Christian teens surveyed also believe this. Why, then do people do it: 1) we fear the consequences of telling the truth 2) lying can be more convenient than telling the truth and 3) lying can make us look good.

The fifth characteristic of an evil tongue is that *it loves all devouring words*. "*in his lips is a burning fire*" (Prov. 16:27,28). "*Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit*" (Prov. 18:21). Paul warned the Galatians not to "*bite and devour one another*" (5:15). He loves to use his tongue as a wrecking ball to tear down not as a tool to build up another.

Finally, an evil tongue is *deceitful*. Saul thought that Ahimelech was giving David help to kill Saul. Doeg knew that this was not true, but he did not tell Saul. Just like Satan lied to Eve in the garden by deception.

### **Divine Revenge upon Evil Tongues**

David warns that God will have vengeance upon the evil tongue. He will cut the wicked down to size. He will break it utterly into pieces as one might destroy an altar. This destruction will be eternal. Second, a Hebrew word is used which means to twist or pluck up by twisting around. They will be taken away like one takes hold of a small tree and twist it in order to uproot it. Next, the Lord will pluck them up, that is, sweep them away like dust or chaff is swept aside on the floor. The fourth term also refers to plants that are uprooted. The wicked will be removed from the land of the living. Doeg will die. A

billboard once read.. "he who throws dirt, loses ground".

## Selah

A very common side note in many of the psalms. It may mean, "pause, ponder and profit". In the case of this psalm the reader or singer is asked to linger in order to observe that divine justice will be meted out to Doeg and all those who have such an evil tongue. The profit derived from this is the reminder that all of us must give account of every idle word at judgment

### Mistakes of the Evil Tongue

David now turns our attention to the common mistakes made by the evil tongue. First, they are self-reliant. A person makes a practical denial of his dependence upon God. Instead, He relies on the power of his tongue to be his strength. He needs to remember that it is God who "*gives to all life, and breath and all things*" (Ac. 17:25). Next, the wicked trusts in riches. They have a strong tendency to trust in material things. Another psalm warns: "*If riches increase, set not your heart thereon*" (Ps. 62:10). The tongue serves its master mammon (Matt. 6:24). He should keep in mind that a truckload of cash will not be able to purchase from him a thimble full of sin. Third, someone like Doeg is obstinate in his wickedness. The wicked man makes his own will his law. He turns a deaf ear to all the Divine reproofs.

### Reaction of the Righteous

Finally, the psalm becomes a contrast between Doeg and David. David has already describe God's reaction to the wicked tongue. Now he shows us the proper reaction of the righteous. First, the righteous man will learn from the mistakes of Doeg and avoid evil tongues (v. 6). The righteous shall outlive his enmity, and also shall see, before his own face the end of the ungodly oppressor. For example, God permitted Mordecai to see Haman hanging on the gallows. The righteous will laugh in the end because evil has met its match. The tables will turn on evildoers, evil is on its last leg. Such, reminds me of the prayer of a little four year old who got a little confused as he prayed the model prayer. Yet, he spoke truth when he prayed, "Forgive us our trash baskets as we forgive those who trash basket us."

Next, we see the first of David's four "I" statements: "*I am like a green olive tree in the house of God*". In reality this is not a reference to the color, but to the flourishing, vigorous, and thriving state of the plant; the poet does not refer to olive trees in God's house, but compares himself in the house of God to an olive tree. The olive tree has leaves all the time and can live for a very long time, perhaps over 2000 years. Whereas Doeg is like a dead tree dug out and the righteous is like a green olive tree. David trusted in the mercy of God in contrast to Doeg who trusted in the riches he could gain by his destructive words. Riches are temporary, but the mercy of God is "*forever and ever*". Because God has vindicated the righteous and punished the wicked, David will praise Him forever. The final reaction of David is to wait upon God's name. In contrast, Doeg did not know it. Although Doeg may have still been alive and well at the time David pen this poem, David believed God's justice so firmly it is as if it had already been executed. As when we have entrusted a reliable friend with a task so as to consider it good as done even before he has finished. God's name is Good. In fact, "good" is shortened to "god". Doeg used his tongue to make a name for himself. The righteous are concerned with glorifying the name of God. This man's name (Doeg) like the names Cain, the Judas Iscariot, have never been used in naming children. Instead, their names will live on in infamy.

What "I" statements have you made in response to evil? It is said, "Dogs have many friends because they wag their tails and not their tongues." Doeg wagged his tongue and told a tell proving him to be a friend to no one.

### Questions:

1. What is the historical context of this psalm?

2. Who was Doeg? What did he do?
3. Why did David feel guilty about what Doeg had done?
4. How was Doeg's tongue like a sharp and deadly weapon?
5. T F Doeg had to tell Saul about David and the priests.
6. Why do people lie?
7. What are "*devouring words*"?
8. What is the reward of an evil tongue?
9. What are the three mistakes of an evil tongue?
10. What can the righteous learn from evil tongues?
11. Why is David like a green olive tree?



# Prayer of Trust in God's Protection

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## Psalm 61

1 Hear my cry, O God;  
Attend to my prayer.  
2 From the end of the earth I will cry to You,  
When my heart is overwhelmed;  
Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.  
3 For You have been a shelter for me,  
A strong tower from the enemy.  
4 I will abide in Your tabernacle forever;  
I will trust in the shelter of Your wings.  
Selah  
5 For You, O God, have heard my vows;  
You have given me the heritage of those who fear Your name.  
6 You will prolong the king's life,  
His years as many generations.  
7 He shall abide before God forever.  
Oh, prepare mercy and truth, which may preserve him!  
8 So I will sing praise to Your name forever,  
That I may daily perform my vows.

When drowning in and overwhelming flood of trouble and turmoil David turns to God in prayer has his shelter from the storm. Many men give up on God when threatened. How do you handle your troubles? The stop petition, praising and performing their duties before God. They have forgotten all the past benefits from God, lost hope in all future blessings, and cannot see the present help available to them.

This psalm has supplied the lyrics to many modern hymns, such as, *To the Rock that is Higher Than I:*

Oh! sometimes the shadows are deep,  
And rough seems the path to the goal,  
And sorrows, sometimes how they sweep  
Like tempests down over the soul.

Who were the enemies the king was facing? When did this overwhelming of the heart take place? The specifics are not made known. The superscription to this psalm only says: "To the Chief Musician. On a stringed instrument. A Psalm of David." Since David calls himself king in this psalm it could have been pinned in response to King Saul chasing the king anointed or even Absalom's rebellion toward the end of David's reign.

Note the Hebrew word *neginah* is translated "stringed instrument" in the psalm's title. The Holman Bible Dictionary defines this term to be "the plural form of *Neginah*, is used as a technical term in the superscriptions of several psalms (Psalm 4:1, Psalm 6:1, Psalm 54-55, Psalm 61:1, Psalm 67:1, Psalm 76:1) and as the subscription of Habakkuk 3:19. The term is generally understood to specify the instrumentation needed for performance, "with stringed instruments" (compare Isaiah 38:20;

Lamentations 5:14 ). Other references suggest that neginah designates a taunt song ( Job 30:9; Psalm 69:12; Lamentations 3:14 )”.

### **Prayer for Divine Protection**

- **Fervency of Prayer**

David addresses his prayer to God. Many pagans have cried out to false gods whom they made with their own hands. In contrast, the saints lift up hands in prayer to the God to created them. Modern man has his own idols he will petition and appeal to for help in times of crisis. Some seek out the expert wisdom of atheistic psychiatrist and self-help gurus. Some will turn to a life of hedonism through drinking and drugs.

Troubles have a way of driving men toward God. Others turn away from the Lord in times of adversity. David does not have a falling out with God or speaks out to blaspheme Him. To pour his heart out to God made him closer to God.

David desperately desires for Deity to hear him. *“Attend to my prayer”* (61:1b). The pharisees did not care if God heard them. They wanted to be seen praying before their fellow man. They did not perceive God as their Father and they His children. As a father attends to the cries of his children, so God will not fail to be moved by the prayers of His. The tears of the saints will not go unnoticed.

David was in peril and wanted God to do something about his plight. In the parable of the persistent widow the judge is unjust but moved by the widow’s relentless pleas for justice (Luke 18:1-11). When the children of Israel were suffering under the yoke of Egyptian bondage God heard their cries and sent a deliverer in Moses.

- **Location of Prayer**

Heaven is equally responsive to prayer from anywhere. *“From the end of the earth I will cry to You”* (61:2a). In the wilderness David would find himself far from the Tabernacle but no further from God than if he were standing in the Holy of Holies right next to the ark of the covenant. Prayer is powerful. Saints can pray from any place, any time, about any thing, in any posture. Jonah was curled up in the belly of a great sea creature deep in the ocean and yet was able to pray the best prayer of his life. Paul wrote, *“I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting”* (1 Tim. 2:8).

- **Time of Prayer**

At what time did David utter this prayer? He said, *“when my heart is overwhelmed”* (61:2b). Prayers are most often offered more fervently when troubles are greatest. It is as if David had been cast into the sea and the waves were sweeping over him and drowning his heart. His heart is covered up with sorrow and pain. The hardest times to pray is when one is faced with the hardest times. He has been hit with a tidal wave of tribulation and a tsunami of sorrow. *“Is any afflicted? Let him pray”* (Js. 5:13).

- **Purpose of Prayer**

A man drowning in the ocean needs to be pulled to solid ground. David’s prayer was for God to *“lead me to the rock that is higher than I”* (61:2c). David may be exhausted from trying to keep his head above water. Like Peter who began to sink when he began to doubt while walking upon the waves. *“But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, ‘Lord, save me!’”* (Matt. 14:30). David’s rock of safety is none other than God. To be safe the rock of safety had to be the Rock that was high than himself. In fact, it must be higher than the security provided by any man. Those who come to God He had promised them, *“I will put thee in the cleft of the rock”* (Ex. 23:22).

- **Confidence in Prayer**

The confidence in prayer is based upon the trustworthiness of God. The reason for his request for God to save him is *“for You have been a shelter for me, a strong tower from the enemy”* (61:3). David’s confidence is not just wishful thinking but is based on the evidence of God’s faithful protection in the past. When caught in the storms of life David looked to God as his shelter. God had saved David from many a peril, and David had confidence that he could now: As a shepherd boy from the lion and the bear; from Goliath, From Saul's spear and army; from the Philistine king Achish, from his sin, and



from Absalom. As a city with a strong tower can protect its citizens so God is a strong tower for those seeking refuge. Daniel found God's protection when surrounded by hungry lions. His three friends found shelter in God from a burning fiery furnace. God is truly the only impregnable fortress. All those designed by men will sooner or later fall. A mighty fortress is our God.

### **Pledges to the Divine Protector**

In response to his petitioning of His God David pledges two things: continual abiding with God and confidence in God as his sanctuary. Man's relationship with God is not a one way avenue of blessings flowing in man's favor with no reciprocation on man's part. If security is found in the Father, His children are obligated to stay with Him and trust in Him. As in marriage or in family the fulfilling of mutual obligations is essential in order for the relationships to work. Fellowship with God has its benefits and its responsibilities.

#### ■ **Continual Abiding With God**

First, David has obligated himself to dwell in God's presence continually. Before the building of Solomon's Temple, the tabernacle embodied the heart of worship. It stood as a symbol of God's presence. Although he could not literally live in the Tabernacle since he was not of the tribe of Levi, David vowed to remain in the fellowship of God and never to leave. The tabernacle is also a type of heaven where God is and Christ is ruling over His Kingdom (Heb. 9:8,9,24.).

#### ■ **Confidence in the Protection of God**

David's second promise to God in this prayer: "*I will trust in the shelter of Your wings*" (61:4b). Envision a hen with her clutch of baby chicks. A hawk circles above in search of easy prey. The hen calls out a warning and all the chicks coming running and gathering for shelter under the safety of her wings. When troubles threaten, men will run to the wealth, depend on their inner strength, turned to friends and family, clutch a bottle of booze or down a handful of pills. All this can be as vain and useless as little chicks running into a foxes den to escape the chicken hawk. Jesus longed to help the Jews in Jerusalem who are about to cry out for His crucifixion. However, they were unwilling to heed His warnings. He lamented, "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling*" (Mt. 23:37).

### **Pause-Ponder-Profit: Selah**

The psalmist desires the singing to pause for a moment in order for the worshiper to meditate on what has been said thus far in this prayer. The worshiper may at this point examine his own relationship with God by asking himself: "When I am overwhelmed and drowning in the threatening storms of life do I plead with God hear my prayers?" "Do I trust God to be my rock of refuge, my shelter of safety, and my firm fortress against foes?" "Will I continually maintain fellowship with God through it all?" "Do I have confidence in God's ability to protect?"

### **Past, Prospective, and Present Hope in Divine Promises**

David's faith in God's ability to hear and answer his prayer is founded upon the past, prospect, and present blessings of God.

#### ▶ **Past Hearing of Prayers**

David knows from his past dealings with God that his vows have been met with Divine approval. "*For You, O God, have heard my vows*" (61:5a). Sincere and lawful promises to serve God according to His will have been accepted. Whenever one prays and promises God something he needs to keep that vow. First all God always keeps His promises and He will remember and hold us accountable for ours. The day one became a Christian they made a commitment to Christ. Anytime anyone enters into fellowship with God he is vowing to keep the terms of fellowship: obedience.

#### ▶ **Past Fellowship for Obedience**

God has in the past given David a place of fellowship because he is among those who are God-

fearing. *"You have given me the heritage of those who fear Your name"* (61:5b). God is the one who gives fellowship and then only when the recipient has met the conditions. All those who respect God's name are in fellowship with Him. When one obeys the Gospel plan of salvation God adds them to His church, they are born again into His family, become members of His body, etc. Paul said this of the Gentiles who were baptized into Christ, *"that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel"* (Eph. 3:6). This of the saints heritage has been made possible by the blood of Christ which reconciles us back to God.

▶ **Prospect of a Long Life**

Not only does David have confidence in the prospect of God keeping him alive but has hope in a long life. *"You will prolong the king's life, His years as many generations"* (61:6). Many may have sought the life of David, God would not only protect him now but long enough for him to see his grand children and even perhaps the birth of great-grandchildren. In general the blessing for the righteous is a long life whereas the wicked have the prospect of an early grave. *"Hear, my son, and receive my sayings, and the years of your life will be many"* (Prov. 4:10).

▶ **Prospect of Eternal Life**

The Christian as part of the royal priesthood has the hope of living and reigning with Christ forever (Rev. 1:5). Speaking of himself, David, hoped *"He shall abide before God forever"* (61:7a). Even if a saint is to die he has the hope of living forever

▶ **Present Hope**

Finally, David expresses his current hope in God's blessings. *"Oh, prepare mercy and truth, which may preserve him!"* (61:7b). This current treat to David would not being the last. He knew God had already prepared to save and assist him in the future. God has prepared a great deal of mercy for those in fellowship with him. The blood of Christ cleanses us continually. *"But if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin"* (1 Jn. 1:7). God has prepared all truth for us so we need not look elsewhere (2 Tim. 3:16,17; 2 Pet. 1:3). The children of God are under the protection and preservation of God's mercy and truth.

### **Promises to the Divine Protector**

◆ **Praising of the Divine Name**

Based upon what David knows God has done, will do and is presently doing for him, he will in turn make to promises to God. First, *"So I will sing praise to Your name forever"* (61:8a). Joshua made his resolution to serve God and encouraged others to join him. *"And if it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord"* (Josh. 24:15). Because his prayer will be answered, David's singing will be perpetual. Eternal praise for an eternal God who will give eternal life. Praising God forever in heaven comes from a resolve to praise him continually on earth.

◆ **Performing Vows Daily**

Talk is cheap, but David plans to back up his praise of God with performance of his duties to God. *"That I may daily perform my vows"* (61:8b). Life is filled with daily duties. This is very true of the Christian life. He must pray requesting his daily bread, pray daily, take up his cross daily, etc. Jesus told His disciples, *"If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me"* (Luke 9:23). The saint has no days off and cannot go on vacation from the Lord. As God is at every moment doing His part, His children must be hard a work every day.

This psalm opens with cries to be heard and helped in a present time of need and ends with a present praising and performing of duties to God who hears and helps. This is a perfect prayer for all the saints of all ages who find themselves in need of the Divine Protector.

**Questions:**

1. Who is the author of this psalm? Under what circumstances was it written?
2. What does the Hebrew term *neginah* mean?
3. From where did this prayer emanate?
4. What three metaphors does David use to describe God's ability to be his Protector?
5. At what times in the life David was God there to protect him? List the events.
6. How did David pledge to respond to God's protection?
7. What two past hopes does David recognize concerning his relationship with God?
8. What two things did God hope for from God in the future?
9. What does David hope God will do for him at present?
10. What two promises does David make to God at the end of his prayer?



# Prayer of Confidence in God's Lovingkindness

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## *Psalm 63*

1 O God, You are my God;  
Early will I seek You;  
My soul thirsts for You;  
My flesh longs for You  
In a dry and thirsty land  
Where there is no water.

2 So I have looked for You in the sanctuary,  
To see Your power and Your glory.

3 Because Your lovingkindness is better than life,  
My lips shall praise You.

4 Thus I will bless You while I live;  
I will lift up my hands in Your name.

5 My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness,  
And my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips.

6 When I remember You on my bed,  
I meditate on You in the night watches.

7 Because You have been my help,  
Therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice.

8 My soul follows close behind You;  
Your right hand upholds me.

9 But those who seek my life, to destroy it,  
Shall go into the lower parts of the earth.

10 They shall fall by the sword;  
They shall be a portion for jackals.

11 But the king shall rejoice in God;  
Everyone who swears by Him shall glory;  
But the mouth of those who speak lies shall be stopped.

Psalm 63 has long been a favorite of many throughout the ages. The ancient Christian writer, Chrysostom, wrote of this psalm, "that it was decreed and ordained by the primitive Fathers, that no day should pass without the public singing of this Psalm." J. J. Stewart Perowne said of it, "this is unquestionably one of the most beautiful and touching Psalms in the whole Psalter" (Spurgeon). "There may be other songs that equal this outpouring of devotion; few if any that surpass it" (Kidner 224).

This psalm has been placed into various genres by commentators and scholars. Due to the mention of the "*king*" in verse eleven some believe this to be one of the royal psalms referring to David. Verses 9 and 10 are similar to imprecations against David's enemies, but lack the form of a petition asking for Divine judgment but instead trust God will judge them. C. Hassell Bullock believes Psalm 63 to be an individual lament. More specifically he places it in the sub-category of a prayer of the persecuted along with psalms 3,4,5,7,11,17,23,27 and 57. Some of the elements characteristic in this type of lament are found in this psalm. The elements found here are 1) a problem: David's enemies 2)

who are attempting to destroy David (63:9,10). 3) Verses 3-5 show trust in the Lord. 4) Another element found in verses 1 and 2 is David's solution to the threat: trust and worship of God. 5) Finally, he vows to praise God (63:3-8). However, three of the elements of this category of individual laments are missing: a complaint against God, a complaint against self, and a petition (Bullock 144).

In our study of Psalm 63 it will be treated as if it belongs in the genre of Songs of Trust. Found in this song is a declaration of trust (63:7,8); a basis for confidence (63:3a,7a,8b); a vow to praise (63:3b-6); and an implied interior lament (63:2,9). The only element missing is a petition of God in this psalm. Although these songs of trust fall into categories of individual (Psalms 4,16,23,27,62,73) or community (Psalms 90,115,123,124,125,126), this particular psalm is an example of David's song of trust like Psalm 62. In fact, "a certain similarity of style, form, and contents between this piece and Psalms 61 and 62 has been observed" (Terrien 461). A further connection between these Davidic psalms is seen in that "Ps 61 is an individual lament, Pss 62 and 63 are psalms of confidence, and Ps 64 is an individual lament...It is also worth noting that Pss 62 and 63 are joined consecutively in a Qumran psalm manuscript fragment" (Tate 125).

The superscription of this psalm reads: "A Psalm of David when he was in the wilderness of Judah." Because the psalmist references himself in third person in verse eleven some class this was one of the historical psalms (Psalms 3,34,51,52,54,57,59,60, and 142). It may have been a reference to David's flight from Saul (1 Sam. 23:14,15; 24:1) or from Absalom (2 Sam. 15-19). The later situation fits the content of this psalm best.

Although David was fearful of his life and on the run from his enemies, he did not despair but wrote this psalm to sing about his constant trust in the hand of God. Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness (Mark 1:12,13) and did not sin. David spent his youth and part of his old age in the wilderness without losing confidence in his God.

### **Confidence in Personal Relationship with God**

The psalm opens with an affirmation of David's intimate relationship with God. "O God, You are my God" (63:1a). The trustworthiness of God is the basis of his confidence. He is the All-mighty God. He is not the Romans' Jupiter or the Canaanites' Baal who have their sins and weaknesses. Furthermore, no pagan would lay claim to a close relationship with these false, man-made deities. David has no doubts about who is his God and source of his strength. He has faith there is a God and not many gods. His God can be trusted at all times.

### **Confidence in Finding God**

#### **▶ Seeking**

Many men of God have arose up early to spend time with God. Jesus was in the habit of doing so. A good morning routine which starts with devotion is the ideal way for a saint to start his day. The Hebrew verb for "seek" could be describing the intensity of the seeking instead of the time of day. It is however, a powerful desire to be close to God. Those who have a close relationship with God wake up with a longing to be with the Lord and stay up late remembering and meditating (63:6).. Those who long for God as did David will find it easy to rise early and seek God in prayer, reading of His Word, studying the scriptures, and meditating on His will.

#### **▶ Thirsting**

"My soul" here is the word *nephesh*, meaning the whole person" (Barclay 288). This longing is not just within the soul, it is a desire felt physically. "My flesh longs for You." Being away from a loved one can result in feeling physically weak or even ill.

The phrases: "in a dry and thirsty" and "where there is no water" both describe the "land" where David has this thirst. This may have reference to the wilderness where the psalm was penned by David. J.P. Lange gives information about this wilderness based on the Hebrew word, "the term wilderness *rkd*, as distinguished from *hdre*, (a steppe) was given to a district which was not regularly cultivated and inhabited, but used for pasturage being generally without wood and defective in water, but not entirely destitute of vegetation." Thirst is an insatiable longing after that which is one of the most

essential sustenance of life. David does not thirst for water, power, revenge, his throne, Jerusalem, but he thirst for God.

▶ **Looking**

David longed not so much to see the tabernacle as he wanted to see his God. *"I have looked"* for God "refers to a past even (Hb. Perfect) and may point to the speaker's previous participation in the regular festivals" (Broyles 261). An appetite for God can only be found by first knowing and then worshipping God. "It is our regular worship that prepares us for the crisis experiences of life. What life does to us depends on what life finds in us, and David had in him a deep love for the Lord and a desire to please Him. Because David had seen God's power and glory in His house, he was able to see it in the wilderness as well!" (Wiersbe 206).

When banished by his enemies from Jerusalem, He did not miss his palace or his armory or his treasures or his storehouses. He missed being near the place of prayer and worship. It is not so much the place of worship either, but a longing to see the invisible One.

**Confidence in God's Praiseworthy Lovingkindness**

*"Because Your lovingkindness is better than life"* (63:3a). This is David's reason for confidence in God which results in seven responses from David. Everything we have as a blessing of life depends on having life to begin with. However, having God is eternal life and gives real meaning to this life. Compare David's thirst for God with his value of God's lovingkindness over that of his physical existence. In fact without water to satisfy one's thirst, a man will die. Thirst and the pursuit of its satisfaction is needed for life. Unless David can find satisfaction for the thirst of his soul his spiritual life will end. Paul understood this well when he wrote, *"for to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better"* (Phil. 1:21-23).

Man will do anything to keep alive. Satan understood this need for self-preservation and tried to use it against Christ by tempting Him to turn stone into bread, as well as his attacks on Job. *"Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life"* (Job 2:4). What difference is there between the life of a worm and a man? Man is in the image of God and has a relationship with the Eternal One. Life is swift and soon spent on this earth. A relationship with God is death proof. In fact the Hebrew word for life is plural meaning God's lovingkindness is better than many lives or all aspects of one's life.

All men will face the end of physical life on this planet just like the animals. Yet, no man needs to be separated from the love of God. Paul wrote *"for I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Rom. 8:38-39).

✓ **I Will Praise With Lips**

Notice the context of David's longing to respond to God's love by blessing him with his total being: lips, life, hands, soul, mouth, etc. The only proper response coming from our lips when contemplating the lovingkindnesses of God is to praise him. David may have been running for his life like Elijah ran from wicked Queen Jezebel, but he was not ready to utter from his lips that it was better to die. He left all behind and had lost so much, but David was not ready to curse God and die.

✓ **I Will Bless With My Life**

David was not a fair weather saint. He was committed to praise God for a lifetime. Being a Christian is a lifetime commitment to bless the Lord. Paul wrote, *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me"* (Gal. 2:20)

✓ **I Will Lift Up My Hands**

Lifting of the hands in devotion and prayer to God is found throughout the psalms (Ps. 28:1,2; 88:9; 119:48; 134:2; 141:1,2; 146:6); and the rest of the Old Testament (2 Chron. 6:12,13; Ezra 9:5; Neh. 8:6; Lam. 3:41). It is even mentioned in the New Testament (1 Tim. 2:8).

The name of God stands for all that He is: His lovingkindness, His power, His mercy, etc. This may be in reference to praying to God or worshiping him. David would continue without fail and not shake his fists at God.

✓ **I Will Be Satisfied in My Soul**

The marrow and fatness were the favorite parts of the sacrificial animal. These represent the richest of foods. Jesus has the ability to give the citizens of His kingdom the bread of life and the water of life (Jn. 4:1ff; 7:37-39). He promised *"I have food to eat of which you do not know"* (Jn. 4:32). *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. For they shall be filled"* (Matt. 5:6). The result of this powerful thirst for God is satiated with the nourishment only finding God and being close to Him can provide.

✓ **I Will Joyfully Praise With My Mouth**

Next, David's mouth joins his joyful lips in praising God.

✓ **I Will Remember on My Bed**

David did not just seek God early in the morning but also at night in bed and during the dark hours of the night. Perhaps the wilderness helped to keep him awake. In time of distress he was able to recall the memories of God's protection of him in the past. God was with him when he defended the sheepfold from a lion and even a bear. Goliath with all his strength, stature, and armor was no match for David and His God. David also knew the protection of God from King Saul in the wilderness.

✓ **I Will Meditate in the Night**

The Jews had three watches. The first watch was from 6:00 to 10:00 pm (Lam. 2:19); the second watch was from ten at night till two in the morning (Judges 7:19); and the final or morning watch lasted from two till six am (1Sam. 2:11). The quiet times of the night can be fruitful seasons of recalling God's help in times past and meditating on them throughout long sleepless nights. "The memory is like the ark in which the manna was laid up; meditation is like Israel's eating of the manna" (Spurgeon).

### **Confidence in Divine Help**

The first reason to have confidence in God is His lovingkindness. Now the second reason is trusting in God's protection. David responds with a desire to be close to his Protector. First, David responds to God's lovingkindness by praising Him and now he responds to God's help by staying close to Him. Consider the outline of verses seven and eight below, it will demonstrate the psalm's use of a chiasm to show both the reason and the response are repeated twice for clarity and emphasis.

Reason A: *Because You have been my help,*

Response B: *Therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice.*

Response b: *My soul follows close behind You;*

Reason a: *Your right hand upholds me.*

God is often described as having carnal characteristics. Often these metaphors compare Him with the fleshly attributes of man but here He is has powerful wings like that of a bird. Wings in this case would be a symbol of God's power and protection. However, it may be in reference to the wings of the cherubim which sat upon the ark. The priests and Levites followed David out of Jerusalem and carried the ark of the covenant with them. David had them return (2 Sam. 15:24f). He had the shadow of God's wings to rejoice in and follow closely. He did not need a mere tangible symbol when he had the real thing.

The term in the Hebrew for *"upholds"* is used of a lover holding one who is the object of their love. It is a play on words with the Hebrew word translated "follows close" which means to pursue until he could cling fast to God. This strong response to God reflects a commitment to pursuing hard after Him. God will not get away from David. The same Hebrew word is used to describe Ruth's attachment to her mother-in-law Naomi. *"Ruth clung to her...Ruth said: 'Entreat me not to leave you, Or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God'"* (Ruth 1:14,16). Christians are able to sing:



Safe in the arms of Jesus,  
Safe from corroding care,  
Safe from the world's temptations;  
Sin cannot harm me there.  
Free from the blight of sorrow,  
Free from my doubts and fears;  
Only a few more trials,  
Only a few more tears!

– Fanny J. Crosby

In order for David's enemies to get to David and destroy Him, they would first have to remove the protective power of God. To take the throne away from his father, David, Absalom would have to first take David from God. Nothing can remove a saint from His God. *"If us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"* (Rom. 8:32-35).

### **Confidence in Victory Over Enemies**

#### **X Enemies' Design**

David is in danger of death and his kingdom destroyed. After David sinned with Bathsheba and had her husband killed, God promised that the sword would not depart from his house. *"And David said to Abishai and all his servants, 'See how my son who came from my own body seeks my life'"* (2 Sam. 16:11). Now Absalom and others were seeking to kill David and destroy his royal line forever. Yet God had promised David (2 Sam. 7), he would have a royal line which would last forever. This was fulfilled in Christ when He sat down upon the throne of David at the beginning of His eternal kingdom, the church (Acts 2). David has full confidence in the ultimate defeat of his enemies.

#### **X Enemies' Destiny**

*"Shall go into the lower parts of the earth"* (63:9b). This is referencing their deaths of David's foes. They will go down into Sheol. These enemies will never be heard from again. Destroyers shall be destroyed. Absalom had no state burial. His lifeless body was cast into a pit in the woods and covered up and forgotten.

#### **X Enemies' Death**

The mention of the *"sword"* clearly points to his enemies' defeat in warfare. Those who strive to live and take life by the sword shall perish with the sword. The term for *"fall"* is often used to describe the action of water. Just as certain water will fall downward so will David's enemies.

#### **X Enemies Devoured**

The disposition of the bodies of both Queen Jezebel and King Ahab was that wild dogs ate their carcasses and lapped up their blood (1 Kings 21;23; 24:9,10). Many of the followers of Absalom met their fate in the woods that day. Twenty thousand fell. *"For the battle there was scattered over the face of the whole countryside, and the woods devoured more people that day than the sword devoured"* (1 Sam. 18:8). The jackals would have feasted upon the decaying and abandoned corpses of the rebellious host who attacked David. As a man of war David no doubt had seen this grisly scene after a battle.

### **Confidence in the King's Triumph**

Verse eleven lists the final confidence of David. The psalm concludes with the completion of events for three groups: the king, his loyal subjects, and his rebellious enemies.

#### **◆ King Will Rejoice**

David is not rejoicing over his enemies and in his victories over them, but he will rejoice in God who gives the victory. This joy is an event in the future. David has seen God in the past when

worshipping Him in the sanctuary. He presently possess God's lovingkindness and protection. Now he anticipates future victory over his foes.

◆ **Loyal Subjects Will Glory**

Swearing by Him could refer to an oath to God but more likely it is an oath of loyalty given to King David. The pagans swore by their gods, and the Jews called upon God as their witness. This finds approval in the Law of Moses (Deut. 6:13). At the beginning of David's flight from Absalom, David's loyal subjects promised David, *"we are your servants, ready to do whatever my lord the king commands"* (2 Sam. 15:15). The term *"glory"* means to boast. The loyal subjects do not glorify King David, but God in whom David had placed his total confidence.

◆ **Rebels Will Be Stopped**

Part of the rebellion against David would have included the spreading of propaganda against David's kingdom and kingship. One of David's most trusted and wise advisors betrayed him. *"Then someone told David, saying, 'Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom.' And David said, 'O Lord, I pray, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness!'"* (2 Sam. 15:31). In addition to him was a man of the house of Saul named Shimei. *"He came out, cursing continuously as he came. And he threw stones at David and at all the servants of King David. And all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left. Also Shimei said thus when he cursed: 'Come out! Come out! You bloodthirsty man, you rogue! The Lord has brought upon you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the Lord has delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom your son. So now you are caught in your own evil, because you are a bloodthirsty man!'"* (2 Sam. 16:6-7). David was returned to his throne and Absalom, Ahithophel, and Shimei were all silenced once and for all. But the mouth of David continued to joyfully praise God.

May all God's loyal subjects overcome their foes with the help of the lovingkindness of God. *"To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne"* (Rev. 3:21).

**Questions:**

1. What are the various genres in which scholars have placed this psalm?
2. Who is the author? What is the occasion of this psalm?
3. At what times does David seek or remember God?
4. How is the land in which David is writing this psalm described?
5. T F David longed not so much to see the tabernacle as he wanted to see his God.
6. Why is the lovingkindness of God more valuable to David than his life?

7. Matching: Praiseworthiness of God's Lovingkindness

- |                              |                  |
|------------------------------|------------------|
| _____ I will praise          | a. in my soul    |
| _____ I will bless           | b. in the night  |
| _____ I will lift up         | c. my life       |
| _____ I will be satisfied    | d. my hands      |
| _____ I will joyfully praise | e. on my bed     |
| _____ I will remember        | f. with lips     |
| _____ I will meditate        | g. with my mouth |

8. Verses seven and eight are examples of what literary device?

9. What is the significance of the meaning of the Hebrew terms "*upholds*" and "*follows close behind*" in this context?

10. What would become of David's enemies? Why was David so confident in his victory over his enemies?

11. Who will glory? Why?

12. Which enemies of David were permanently silenced?

**Application and Discussion:**

1. What can Christians do to develop an appetite for God like David longed for Him?
2. What will become of our enemies according to the New Testament?

**Homework:** Develop a thirst for God which cannot go unsatisfied until you find Him and praise Him.

# Psalm of Moses: The Brevity of Life

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## Psalm 90

1 Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations.  
2 Before the mountains were brought forth,  
Or ever You had formed the earth and the world,  
Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.  
3 You turn man to destruction,  
And say, "Return, O children of men."  
4 For a thousand years in Your sight  
Are like yesterday when it is past,  
And like a watch in the night.  
5 You carry them away like a flood;  
They are like a sleep.  
In the morning they are like grass which grows up:  
6 In the morning it flourishes and grows up;  
In the evening it is cut down and withers.  
7 For we have been consumed by Your anger,  
And by Your wrath we are terrified.  
8 You have set our iniquities before You,  
Our secret sins in the light of Your countenance.  
9 For all our days have passed away in Your wrath;  
We finish our years like a sigh.  
10 The days of our lives are seventy years;  
And if by reason of strength they are eighty years,  
Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow;  
For it is soon cut off, and we fly away.  
11 Who knows the power of Your anger?  
For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath.  
12 So teach us to number our days,  
That we may gain a heart of wisdom.  
13 Return, O Lord!  
How long?  
And have compassion on Your servants.  
14 Oh, satisfy us early with Your mercy,  
That we may rejoice and be glad all our days!  
15 Make us glad according to the days in which You have afflicted us,  
The years in which we have seen evil.  
16 Let Your work appear to Your servants,  
And Your glory to their children.  
17 And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us,  
And establish the work of our hands for us;  
Yes, establish the work of our hands.

Psalm 90 is the first in Book four of the Psalms which ends with Psalm 106. According to the

Septuagint (Greek, translation of the Old Testament) David is said to have written eleven of the psalms in this section of the Psalms. These include Psalms 91, 93-99, 101, 103 and 104.

According to the title the author of Psalm 90 is Moses: "A Prayer of Moses the man of God". It might seem strange that this deliverer, lawgiver, and leader of the Israelites was also a psalm composer. Moses also wrote two other psalms found in Exodus 15 and in Deuteronomy 32. The title of Moses as "the man of God" is also found in Deuteronomy 33:1; Joshua 14:6; and Ezra 3:2. Only a few men are given this title in the Bible: Samuel, David, Elijah, Elisha, Shemaiah, Iddaliah, and Timothy.

The psalm is most likely the oldest out of the collection of one hundred and fifty psalms. It may be one of the oldest writings found in the Old Testament behind the Song of Moses found in Exodus 15 and perhaps the book of Job.

It is not uncommon to hear Psalm 90 read at funerals. Or recognize it as the basis of Isaac Watts' famous hymn: "Our God, Our Help in Ages Past." The subject matter of the Psalm is given in its title: "The Eternity of God, and Man's Frailty."

This psalm is composed of many genres. Verses one and two are praising the eternal God for being man's continual refuge. The next section (90:3-6) are reminiscent of wisdom literature found in Ecclesiastes and Proverbs. Then comes a lament over the sinful and sorrowful short life of man (90:7-11). Finally, the Psalm ends with a prayer petitioning God for mercy (90:12-17).

When did Moses compose this psalm? Two possibilities seem to fit the content of this psalm. First, when the spies returned from their forty days of scouting out the Promise Land. Ten spies gave a bad report at Kadesh Barnea (Num. 13-14). The people were discouraged from going up and taking the land, even with the encouragement of the two other spies: Caleb and Joshua. As a result God condemned the Israelites to wander in the wilderness for the next forty years until the generation of men and women who were age twenty and above when they left Egypt had died. Life would be brief and difficult as they spent forty years dying in the wilderness. The second possibility is the events recorded in Numbers chapters twenty and twenty-one. By this time the only people left from the generation that left Egypt twenty years old an older had died. Only Moses, Aaron, Miriam, Caleb and Joshua had survived. In Numbers twenty Miriam dies, Moses and Aaron sin at the rock which was to give water. God would not let them live to go into the Promise Land. Aaron dies and next Moses.

### **Praising the Eternal God Our Refuge**

- **God is Our Refuge**

This psalm begins with Moses addressing God as *Adonai* "the Sovereign Lord." "*Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations*" (90:1). Moses recognizes that the Lord has always been the dwelling place of His people. The same Hebrew term is rendered "refuge" in Deuteronomy 33:27 and is also means a "den". This has been true of every generation going all the way back to Adam and Eve in the Garden and of the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who lived in tents. Abraham lived in tents and lived a nomadic lifestyle without land ownership, but "*he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God*" (Heb. 11:10). Generation after generation must recognize that the real place of our residence is with God. "Metaphorically to the Lord who is the refuge or shelter of his people. As the refuge of his people the Lord protect them from peril, because with him they are in an inaccessible place for safety" (Estes 176). Today, as Christians we "abide" in Christ (John 15:1-11).

- **God is Eternal**

Just as Moses began the psalm by addressing God as *Adonai* he ends this portion of the Psalm praising God as *Elohim*, the powerful God of creation. "*Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God*" (90:2). God was around before the mountains were "brought forth" or birthed. This makes God "older than dirt." Evolution claims that nature gave birth to life, but God gave birth to nature. Matter is not eternal. God has always existed. Everything else but God has a beginning and an end. He is the Uncaused, First Cause of all. There has never been a time when God was not. If you were to jump in a time machine and travel back to the beginning to time when you got off there would be God. This is why He is man's

dwelling place throughout every generation.

### **Wisdom: Brevity of Life & Certainty of Death**

#### ▶ **Mortality of Man**

The next section of Psalm 90 reads like wisdom literature. *"You turn man to destruction, and say, 'Return, O children of men.'" (90:3).* The term "destruction" is "crushing". God has crushed man with the dust which is crushed under one's feet. *"The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Gen. 2:7).* Because of man's sin God condemned man to return to the dust in death. *"For dust you are, and to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:19).* *"For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust" (Ps. 103:14).* *"All go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust" (Eccl. 3:20).* *"Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it" (Eccl. 12:7).* Many eulogies at the grave side proclaim: "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

#### ▶ **Timelessness of God**

The eternal nature of God is compared to the frailty of man whose brief life ends in death. Man was created to live forever but sin faltered God's perfect creation. Man would die. *"All the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years; and he died" (Gen. 5:5).* In fact, Genesis chapter five is "and he died" chapter of the Bible. The man who lived the longest was Methuselah. He almost lived to be a thousand years old having died at age 969. What is the longest life lived in the eyes of God? Moses gives several metaphors which help us understand God's view of time.

*"For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past" (90:4a).* The longest life of about a thousand years is like a day. God created time to govern Creation but He is not controlled by time. Peter quotes this verse in 2 Peter 3:8. This does not mean God is incapable of telling time as in the argument that a day of creation could equal a millions or billions of years (Gen. 1). Instead man is warned about the limitations on how long he can live. Life goes by fast. We say things like, "It seems just like yesterday I was attending my first day of kindergarten or "It was only yesterday and I was bringing my daughter home from the hospital and now I am sending her off to college".

Next, a long life is *"like a watch in the night" (90:4b).* A watch lasted about a third of the night which was about four hours.

Verse five shows God sweeping away the years with flood waters. *"You carry them away like a flood" (90:5a).* Man is a frail, time bound creature whose years are quickly swept down the streams of time.

The years of a man's life are *"like a sleep" (90:5c).* A man goes to sleep and awakes to discover that eight hours have passed without his realization.

Finally the longest life of a thousand years could be as fleeting as the grass of the field. *"In the morning they are like grass which grows up: In the morning it flourishes and grows up; in the evening it is cut down and withers" (90:5d,6).* The history of grass in the arid regions of the wilderness began with a rain causing grass to spring up overnight. But soon the sun would return and the dry, hot desert winds and scorching sun would burn it to brown. This one of the most popular metaphors in the Bible. *"The grass withers, the flower fades, because the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass" (Is. 40:7).* *"Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?" (Matthew 6:30).* *"But the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits" (James 1:10-11).* *"All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away" (1 Peter 1:24).*

### **Lament: Difficulty of Man's Short & Sinful Life**

The third section is a lament over the sinfulness and subsequent sorrows which fill a man's short

life. "Moses drops the use of the third person and picks up the first person, and now he cast his verse in the past tense" (Phillips 22).

◆ **Wrath of God**

Man faces certain death because God's wrath upon sin. *"For we have been consumed by Your anger, and by Your wrath we are terrified"* (90:7). God's response to sin is just wrath. Not only does sin bring God's wrath, sin brings death. Adam sinned and Adam died. Death came into the world because of sin. Death comes to all men who sin. *"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned"* (Rom. 5:12). The cause of man's mortality has to do with the lack of man's morality. God has the Divine right to be angry and to punish. "The root of the noun anger is 'nose.' When God is angry He snorts like a wild horse (see Ps. 18:15)" (Williams 162).

Sin not only brings death, life is short because of sin. When Israel started their wilderness journey there were 603,000 men of war over the age of twenty. All these men and women who were twenty and over were to die in the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. If they were twenty their life expectancy was that of sixty. Those who were thirty could only expect to live up to seventy years of age. Eighty years was the life expectancy of those who were forty when coming out of Egypt. God's wrath gave a death sentence upon that whole generation.

◆ **Wickedness of Man**

The sinfulness of man cannot be hidden from God. It does not make a difference whether one's sins are in plain sight or done in secret God see them. *"You have set our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your countenance"* (90:8). Adam and Eve tried to hide but God knew.

◆ **Wasting Away of Life**

*"For all our days have passed away in Your wrath"* (90:9a). This describes the events of the wilderness journey. They made a total of forty-two stops in the wilderness according to Numbers 42. Every camp they departed left behind a graveyard. Moses observed the passing away of that generation due to the wrath of God. Moses who had delivered them out of Egypt was now leading a long funeral procession throughout the wilderness.

◆ **Whimpering End of Life**

The end of life in the wilderness was an inglorious whimper. *"We finish our years like a sigh"* (90:9b).

◆ **Weighing the Limits**

Moses lived to be 120 and Aaron 123. But the life of others who came out of Egypt was much shorter. *"The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years"* (90:10). Notice Joshua lived to be 110. Moses was obviously not explaining in terms of medical science the age limits of humanity. He was speaking of the upper limits of the specific generation that came up out of Egypt.

◆ **Working and Weeping**

Life is short but also difficult. *"Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow"* (90:11a). The Israelites suffered hardships in the desert wanderings. The only thing they had to show for their short life was daily duties, disappointments and death. The patriarch Jacob, lived 130 years which he summed up as *"few and evil"* (Gen. 47:9),

◆ **Whisked Away**

Life is fleeting and suddenly death comes and life is over. *"For it is soon cut off, and we fly away"* (90:10b). From the day one is born he begins a quick countdown to death. Everybody is terminal. Life is a one-way dead-end street permitting no u-turns. Man is "here today, and gone tomorrow." *"Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away"* (James 4:14)

◆ **Wrath's Extent**

Moses ends his lament on man's pained short life with a rhetorical questions: *"Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath"* (90:11). The answer is that God alone

knows the extent of His powerful anger? His anger is omnipotent and He is omniscient. *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"* (Heb. 10:31).

### **Prayer Petitioning God's Mercy**

Moses ends the psalm with a prayer requesting God's loving favor. Notice he does not request a longer life. After all the time has been set for that generation. They were given only forty years to live.

Moses' first petition is for God to *"teach us to number our days"* (90:12a). Man has a desire to number everything. Numbering our years is one of the most difficult mathematical and accounting challenges ever to be undertaken. He is not asking about help determining how old a man is or how long he has lived thus far. He is not looking for an expiration date on one's length of life. Death is inescapable. Moses wants God to help us estimate or appraise the true value of our days on earth. Time is too valuable to be wasted. Time is in short supply and runs out very quickly.

The reasons for the request for help in numbering the days of a man's life is *"that we may gain a heart of wisdom"* (90:12b). Paul wrote, *"see then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil"* (Eph. 5:15-16; see Eccl. 8:5). What are ways we can wisely use our time? First, realize you could die at any moment or Christ could return this very second (Heb. 9:27; Eccl. 9:5; Matt. 24:36ff). Pray for wisdom as Moses is doing in this very psalm (James 1:5). Aging helps with gaining wisdom. The older one becomes the more they value the time they have to live and how fast time flies by. Live today and everyday as if it were your last. And live one day at a time. *"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble"* (Matt. 6:34). Keep your priorities straight every day you live. *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you"* (Matt. 6:33). "Only one life! 'Twill soon be past. Only what's done for Christ will last." Wisdom is found in laying up treasures in heaven instead of piling up toys on earth (Matt. 6:19-20). Study God's road map of life, the Bible, every day. "Just as an orchestra plays beautiful music when it stays in time with its conductor but only noise when it fails to follow his baton, so the wise life follows the direction given by the Lord" (Estes 182).

Once a preacher invited his members to a special funeral. No one knew who had died. When they all past by the open casket and looked down there was not corpse only a mirror. The lesson was clear. One day they were going to be the face everyone saw at their funeral. Knowing you will die one day is not as important as making wise use of you days before you die. Solomon suggests it is better to attend a funeral than go to a birthday party. *"Better to go to the house of mourning Than to go to the house of feasting, For that is the end of all men; And the living will take it to heart"* (Eccl. 7:2).

The next plea was for God to turn from wrath to mercy. *"Return, O Lord! How long? And have compassion on Your servants"* (90:13). Just as God called for sinful man to return to the dust, Moses asks God to relent from his wrath.

*"Oh, satisfy us early with Your mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days!"* (90:14) is the next request. The long night of God's wrath is to give way to a morning of gladness and rejoicing. *"For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning"* (Ps. 30:5).

The gladness and joy is asked to be in proportion to the sufferings they endured. *"Make us glad according to the days in which You have afflicted us, the years in which we have seen evil"* (90:15). Forty years of sorrow and death in the wilderness is balanced out with the blessings for the future generation. The glad blessings which bring joy are requested for the current generation and the next. *"Let Your work appear to Your servants, and Your glory to their children"* (90:16). Every nineteen year old that left Egypt had the hope of reaching the promise land. Moses wanted them to experience God's goodness as well as their children.

*"And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us"* (90:17a). "Beauty" could be translated "splendor" or "pleasantness". It is a request to see the loveliness of God's character through His blessings. But only the penitent heart can expect to have any hope of seeing this side of God. The impenitent can expect to witness his wrath.

Moses' seventh and final petition to God in this prayer is: *"And establish the work of our hands"*



*for us; yes, establish the work of our hands” (90:17b). It is a redundant request. Moses needs to see that his forty years of hard work leading the Israelites through the wilderness was going to mean something. Death came and cut short his journey to the Promise Land. He looked for a lasting legacy among the next generation. The Israelites need to know that the forty years were going to have an lasting accomplishment in the Promise Land. We do not have to come to the end of life’s journey only to have wasted our life serving God in vain. “We know that our labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58). And even death is not going erase the impact of our labors. “Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them”(Revelation 14:13).*

The rich farmer in Jesus parable planned to spend his final days building bigger barns for his bumper crop. He was not wise enough to realize that the measure of one’s life is not the amount of treasure he lays up for himself on earth (Luke 12:15-22). Are you living wisely? Or will you die a fool?

Make your life count for eternity. Jesus came. Jesus died. Jesus left an empty tomb. Jesus conquered death.

Moses may have not lived to cross over into the Promise Land, but he did get to the Promised Land with Jesus (Matt. 17:1–8).

### **Questions:**

1. What is unique about the 90th Psalm?
2. What other psalms did Moses write?
3. What are two possible historical settings for this psalm?
4. From what was man made and to what will his body return?
5. List several metaphors used to describe how God views the passing of a thousand years.
6. Why is God angry?
7. Why does man die? Why is his life short?
8. Moses explains in verse 10 of Psalm 90 that the upper limits of man's life span will be seventy years and if fortunate eighty. Was he describing man’s life span today? Explain.

9. How can man wisely number his days?
10. From what does Moses ask God to relent?
11. To what extent does Moses request God show His work of compassion?
12. What is the beauty of the Lord?
13. What was the lasting legacy of Moses' labors?

**Application & Discussion:**

1. What does the eternal nature of God have to do with Him being our refuge?
2. How can you have a longer and more joyful life?

**Homework:** Learn to wisely redeem the days you have to live.

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# Beatitude of a God-Fearing Man

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## Psalm 112

*1 Praise the Lord!*

*Blessed is the man who fears the Lord,  
Who delights greatly in His commandments.*

*2 His descendants will be mighty on earth;  
The generation of the upright will be blessed.*

*3 Wealth and riches will be in his house,  
And his righteousness endures forever.*

*4 Unto the upright there arises light in the darkness;  
He is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous.*

*5 A good man deals graciously and lends;  
He will guide his affairs with discretion.*

*6 Surely he will never be shaken;  
The righteous will be in everlasting remembrance.*

*7 He will not be afraid of evil tidings;  
His heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord.*

*8 His heart is established;  
He will not be afraid,*

*Until he sees his desire upon his enemies.*

*9 He has dispersed abroad,  
He has given to the poor;*

*His righteousness endures forever;  
His horn will be exalted with honor.*

*10 The wicked will see it and be grieved;  
He will gnash his teeth and melt away;  
The desire of the wicked shall perish.*

Today, as much as any other time in history this world needs blessed fathers. Blessed are the fathers who can hug their children when they bring them a bad news from school or wreck the car, so his children can grow up knowing unconditional love. Blessed are the fathers who bring children into this world only after first marrying their mothers and then stick with the family, so their children do not have to wander around the rest of their life in search of a father figure. Blessed are the fathers who can change diapers as well as patch up a child's broken heart, so their children do not have to suffer neglect. The 112<sup>th</sup> Psalm represents a beatitude of a father and a good man.

Many of the psalms can be paired up with another, such as, Psalms 1 with 2, 9 with 10, and 42 with 43. Psalms 111 and 112 represent a pair of twin psalms. They are about the same length, have parallel stanzas, similar phrases, corresponding vocabulary, such as, "delight", "righteousness", "established", "grace", and "compassion." Together they represent a complete alphabetic acrostic. All twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet are represented. The theme of Psalm 112 is represented in the last verse of Psalm 111: "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever*" (111:10).

These two psalms are of the wisdom genre. Some of the trademarks of this genre are the use of a beatitude, proverbial statements, differing life choices, contrasting metaphors, and the reward of the

righteous who fear God in contrast with the wicked who will be punished. Neither one of these psalms have a superscription.

### **A Call to Worship God**

The psalm opens with a call to worship God: *"Praise the Lord!"* This is a common feature of a hallelujah hymn.

### **Beatitude: Who is Blessed?**

A beatitude is a blessing that is often a promise. Blessed means joyous, fulfilled, gratified, whole. It is also in the plural, which enhances its fullness. This man not just blessed, he has blessednesses due to his fear of the Lord. Everyone wants to be happy. Many feel God and His rules stand in the way of them and their pursuit of happiness. Yet, true contentment and pleasure in life cannot be found apart from a close relationship with and a healthy attitude toward the Lord. What are the characteristics of this blessed man?

#### **▶ Fear the Lord**

To fear God is to stand in wonderment of Him, who He is, what He has done, will do, etc. God is to be taken seriously. It is a reverent reliance on God with a repulsion for iniquity. Many fears tend to immobilize man. This fear motivates men in a positive way. Those who fear God will keep His commandments. *"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all"* (Eccl. 12:13). Some fears are healthy and protect from danger. This is why a good father will instruct his children not to play with matches to create in them a healthy fear of the dangers associated with fire. Yet, it is better to have a fear of God than fear the enemy. *"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell"* (Matt. 10:28).

#### **▶ Delights in Commandments**

Fear does not seem to go with *"delight."* Those who love God find His commandments delightful and not overbearing. *"For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome"* (1 John 5:3). A blessed man will delight in learning of God's will, gladly practice God's commandments, and enjoy sharing the Lord's instructions with others. The moral anarchist hates any kind of absolutes from the Lord. They want to love God while being free from His rules. The God-fearing man will be a cheerful, obedient servant without complying out of necessity.

### **The Blessedness of Fearing God**

#### **✓ Descendants Will Be Blessed**

The man who is blessed is one who fears the Lord and delights in His commandments. Now the psalmist lists the blessing which come to this man. *"His descendants will be mighty on earth; the generation of the upright will be blessed"* (112:2). The word *"mighty"* is used of a *"mighty man."* He is a man of courage and spirit. The father who is righteous will have children who are courageous and blessed. A father will leave a spiritual legacy behind in the character and the blessedness of his children. *"Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it"* (Prov. 22:6). Not only does a father control his own happiness and destiny, he has a great influence over the direction and joy of his children. Fathers, if you want to leave you children with great riches and blessings, do not work hard at making a bunch of money to leave behind. Instead, fear God and keep his commandments for in doing so you will be blessed and so will your children after you. As the father is blessed, so will be his children.

The opposite is true concerning fathers who are worldly and ungodly. Children who are raised by a father who does not respect God will most likely grow up disobeying God's will. If the parents divorce the children of the family are more likely to end their marriages in divorce. Daughters of alcoholics tend to grow up and marry drunks. There is a way to stop this cursed cycle. Fathers need to show their children their love for God and reverential obedience to Him.

✓ **Blessed With Prosperity**

Prosperity and godly living are not polar opposites. *"Wealth and riches will be in his house, and his righteousness endures forever"* (112:3). Serving God will not deplete a man's house but enrich it both materially and spiritually. Jesus said, *"assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time--houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions--and in the age to come, eternal life"* (Mark 10:19,30). This is not teaching the concept that if a man is righteous he will be rich or if a man is rich he will be godly. The Health/Wealth Gospel is not supported by either the teaches of the Old Testament or the New. Many wicked men are wealthy and quite a few righteous men are not rich. When Job lost everything, his three "friends" claimed it was proof he had not been living righteously. They insisted he repent. Wealth is a blessing, though it is not proof of godliness. Not all who live godly lives are prospered financially.

A principle taught in both Testaments is that a righteous work ethic will promote prosperity. *"If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat"* (2 Th. 3:10). *"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going"* (Eccl. 9:10). *"Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, Which, having no captain, Overseer or ruler, Provides her supplies in the summer, And gathers her food in the harvest"* (Prov. 6:6-8). *"So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, 'Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost'"* (John 6:12). *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you"* (Matt. 6:33).

✓ **Light in Time of Darkness**

As in the wisdom psalms contrasting metaphors like light and darkness appear in verse four. *"Unto the upright there arises light in the darkness; He is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous"* (112:4). Light and darkness are traits of moral conditions. *"Darkness"* is a metaphor for misfortune. *"Light"* is a metaphor for righteous living and cheerfulness. His godly character is a *"light"* shining in darkness. The wicked *"love the darkness"* (Jn. 3:19f) and the righteous *"walk in the light"* (1 John 1:7f). His fear of God and obedience has translated him out of the darkness and into the light. It is his relationship with God which brings light to his world. *"God is light and in Him is no darkness at all"* (1 John 1:5). This in turn has changed him into a man who is *"gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous."* After all, God has these characteristics in Himself. *"The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth"* (Ex. 34:6). *"God himself is the light which arises in darkness for those who are sincere in their dealings with him"* (Delitzsch).

The light of the upright results in the blessed man in becoming *"gracious."* He is a man full of kindness and patience toward those around him. He is also compassionate, that is, he feels sympathy for others. Because of walking in the light he is righteous. *"But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin"* (1 John 1:7).

✓ **Wise and Kind in Business**

*"A good man deals graciously and lends; He will guide his affairs with discretion"* (112:5). He has wealth and is generous in lending to others. He is not a hoarder. He is like the Good Samaritan who was gracious in his dealing with a stranger in need. *"Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back"* (Luke 6:30). This good man will conduct his business dealings with wisdom and close attention.

✓ **Forever Known for Stability**

His blessedness will extend to times of adversity and time without end. *"Surely he will never be shaken; the righteous will be in everlasting remembrance"* (112:6). No matter what trials and temptations come his way, the blessed man will not be moved from his steadfast position of obedient fear of God. His children will remember his strong character in the face of adversity. His legacy of stability will not be forgotten. Many memorials lose their significance in the hearts of observers and monuments deteriorate in time. His reputation for righteousness is made of incorruptible materials which will endure long after he has gone on to his reward.

✓ **Steady in the Face of Bad News**

In one day Job lost five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys to the Sabeans, seven thousand sheep to lightning; three thousand camels to the Chaldeans; the servants who were caring for the livestock were all killed; and to top it off, all Job's children, seven sons and three daughters, were destroyed in a single evening when a tornado hit the house where they were feasting. How did Job respond in the face of this bad news. *"Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said: 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord'"* (Job 1:21,22).

Job's response is an example of the next characteristic of the blessed man. *"He will not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord"* (112:7). The righteous man will be secure. Since the trust the Lord is in control of it all, they will remain firm in their mind in the midst of displeasing tidings. He does not worry about possible trouble which may be lurking unseen in the future. The past troubles are behind him. And the present adversities are in the hands of God. A man with more powerful allies in the face of weak enemies has nothing to fear. When evil threatens he is prepared. The shocking effect of bad news will not catch him off guard or knock him off his feet. His trust in God is an anchor. His heart will not be intimidated by a menacing crisis.

✓ **Fearless in Face of His Enemies**

*"His heart is established; he will not be afraid, until he sees his desire upon his enemies"* (112:8). Not only is he fearless in the face of bad threats, he is not afraid of evil enemies. His heart is just as steadfast when facing the foes as he is in dealing with disastrous news. To give someone your heart is to make yourself vulnerable. Confidence in God is never misplaced or regretted. His experience with God's trustworthiness throughout the years had given him a calm reassurance to face the future justice of God upon his enemies. Vengeance is in God's hands. He will one day see God make things right.

✓ **Righteous Benevolence is Honored**

Paul quotes this verse in 2 Cor. 9:9. Paul applies it in the sense of seed-sowing. *"He has dispersed abroad, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever; his horn will be exalted with honor"* (112:9). Generosity reflects in an outcome of benefits. He is not stingy like Nabal or Laban. Instead he is like a farmer who scatters his seed of good deeds like throwing coin out to a crowd of needy souls. This passage reflects the law of sowing and reaping. *"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life"* (Gal. 6:7,8). The basis of his generosity is his unending righteousness which stands for the honorable motive. The term *"horn"* epitomizes his reputation before God and the godly. He is not doing this to be seen and rewarded by mere men.

### Woe of the Wicked

X **Contradistinction of the Wicked**

As in the wisdom psalms the characteristic contrast between the goodness of the righteous and the folly and destruction of the wicked is seen in verse ten. This gives us the choice of two opposite alternatives. The final destination of two paths.

X **Inspection of the Wicked**

*"The wicked will see"* the blessed state of the righteous. The righteous has a view of the past, present, and future. The wicked are not complete fools or completely fooled. They thought they had chosen a life that would have led to their happiness. The righteous life is filled with blessednesses while his life will not bring enduring joys, a lasting legacy or everlasting reward. One day the eyes of the enemies of the righteous will be opened to the truth like Saul of Tarsus' eyes were opened to see the Lord the day he lost his sight.

X **Lamentation of the Wicked**

At the sight of the blessings coming to the God-fearing man the wicked are *"grieved."* As in Jesus' parable of the Rich man and Lazarus the rich man opened his eyes in torment and was grieved.

The rich man was sorrowful that he was in such a place, grieved he had mistreated Lazarus, and distressed his brothers will soon join him. The end for those shut out of heaven will be weeping and "gnash of his teeth." "But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 8:12).

**X Destruction of the Wicked**

The psalm ends with a two-fold description of the destruction for the wicked: "melt away...shall perish." The wicked man shall die and his name shall depart with him. He will not realize his objective of the good life or see his dreams become reality. He will face death with disappointment in his life. Every man must ask himself: "What do I really want out of life and/or eternity?"

**Questions:**

1. Why is this psalm paired up with Psalm 111 as a twin psalm?
2. What are the characteristics of a wisdom psalm?
3. Define the Hebrew term "*blessed*."
4. T F The "*fear of Lord*" is a reverent reliance on God with a repulsion for iniquity.
5. What kind of legacy will a God-fearing father leave? Who?
6. What kind of work ethic is promoted in the Bible?
7. What are the metaphors "*light*" and "*darkness*"? How do they related to the blessed man?
8. What of this good man will be remembered?

9. How does he respond to bad news?

10. How does he respond to his enemies?

11. What sort of things will the wicked see in the life of the righteous man? How do they react?

**Application and Discussion:**

1. What kind of legacy do you wish to be remembered? How do you plan to accomplish this?

2. What can a Christian do ahead of time to be prepared when suddenly faced with bad news?

**Homework:** Meditate on this psalm and find someone you know or have known who exemplifies this blessed man or woman.



# The Family Psalms

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## Psalms 127 & 128

In the fifth and final Book of Psalms is a sub-group of fifteen psalms (120-134) known as Songs of Ascents or Songs of Degrees. This descriptive title is translated from the Hebrew *shir hamma'aloth*. The superscript of each of these psalms identifies them as such. These same titles also identify David as the author of four and Solomon one of these psalms.

Songs of Ascents share several common features. A high concentration of the terms “*Jerusalem*” and “*Zion*” occur in these psalms. “*Israel*” is found nine times. The reoccurring themes of happiness of blessedness, “*peace*” and goodness are found in several of the psalms. It would appear there is a high concentration of communal psalms. Also, the poetic literary device known as progressive or stair-step parallelism is found more abundantly in the Songs of Ascents. Additionally, several of the psalms in this section can be paired together as twin psalms, such as Psalms 127 and 128. Both have similarities which couple them together, such as, fearing God and receiving of His blessings and gifts.

Equally unique in this grouping of psalms is the diversity of genres represented. Psalms 127 and 128 are wisdom psalms. One royal psalm is found among the Songs of Ascents (Ps. 132). Appropriately two Zion psalms are included (Pss. 129, 133). Psalm 124 is a hymn of praise designed to be sung by the group. The genre of Songs of Trust are two psalms: one is communal (Ps. 129) and the other is individual (Ps. 131). Several other psalms belong to the Laments (Pss. 123-126, 133).

Similarities with the book of Nehemiah are found in these psalms. Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem and encouraged the rebuilding of the homes in the city by Jewish families. He had watchmen guard the city from attack. Along with Ezra they encouraged a covenant between their generation and the Lord. Some scholars have gone so far as to sync up these psalms with the book of Nehemiah. Others have identified these psalms as the ‘songs of the stairway’ refer(ring) to the stairway of Neh 12:37 at the Fountain Gate, which was included in the processional route leading to the Temple” (Allen 194).

An understanding of the purpose of this category of psalms will assist greatly in interpreting their meaning. Three main views have been advanced for the purpose of this collection of psalms. First, the Jewish Mishnah speaks of a total of fifteen steps in the Temple which lead to the court of the women to the court of the men. It has been speculated these hymns were sung in correspondence to these steps. Yet, there is no evidence to support this theory. Second, due to the use of the Hebrew word translated “*go up, or ascend*” in Ezra 7:9 some surmise these psalms were song by the Jews returning from Babylonian captivity to Jerusalem. However, the term used in the superscription of these psalms is plural indicating they were for continued use not just once. Additionally, the context of these fifteen psalms presume post-exilic conditions. “*The verb ‘go up, ascend’ is used to speak of the journey to Jerusalem in one of these psalms*” (Mays 386). “*Where the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, to the Testimony of Israel, to give thanks to the name of the Lord*” (122:4). Third, these were pilgrimage songs sung by worshipers traveling up to Jerusalem for one of three agricultural feasts (Ex. 23:14:17; 34:18-24; Lev. 23:4-44). The three annual feast occurred in the spring (Passover), the summer (Pentecost), and the fall (Tabernacles). “*Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed*” (Deut. 16:16). The Jewish families would travel from their homes all over the world and ascend to Jerusalem and more specifically Zion, the Temple mount. Perhaps, Jesus and his parents sung these as they traveled up to Jerusalem for the Passover when he was twelve (Luke 2:41). Later, He may have sung these with His disciples when they traveled up to Jerusalem for the Passover or for other feasts.

According to the superscription of Psalm 127, Solomon was the author: "A Song of Ascents. Of Solomon." Psalm 72 is the only other one directly attributed to him. Perhaps, he also authored 128. This would place the writing of these Psalms around 950 B.C. Some consider Psalm 127 to be the focal point of the Songs of Ascents, because it is found in the middle of these fifteen psalms. Solomon was the builder of the Temple and built a large family. He knew the great blessings of God from both and how both the Temple and the family promoted the peace of Israel. The structure and content of these two psalms are somewhat unique. Some of this uniqueness compares to Solomonic wisdom literature. "The composition does appear to reflect standard wisdom literature outside the Psalter fairly closely" (Allen 236).

One common theme runs throughout both Psalm 127 and 128. It is the blessings of the home or family. It speaks of the great role played by the father, mother, and the children and grandchildren. Yet without God as a central part of each family, all is futile. Today's need for these psalms is great.

### **God Blesses the Family With His Help**

*1 Unless the Lord builds the house,  
They labor in vain who build it;  
Unless the Lord guards the city,  
The watchman stays awake in vain.  
2 It is vain for you to rise up early,  
To sit up late,  
To eat the bread of sorrows;  
For so He gives His beloved sleep.*

- **Vanity of Working Without God**

In the first two verses the term "*in vain*" is used three times to describe five empty quests: building, guarding, raising up early, staying up late, and eating of the harvest. Solomon knew about vain pursuits. He wrote, "*Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity'*" (Eccl. 1:2).

To build a house could refer to a literal building, the Temple or a family. Although all three could be applicable, the context supports the idea of a young man starting a family. No matter how smart he is the husband/father must make God a central part of his effort. When building his home he must start with God as the foundation. When making plans to build he must use the blueprints revealed in God's Word. Without God all his labor is futile, fruitless, worthless, etc.

A tree removal service was called upon to cut down a tree. When they began to cut away the branches one of the men noticed a mother bird had several fledglings in a nest. It was decided to wait a week or two to allow the birds time to reach maturity and fly off. Once the nest was abandoned, the tree came down. When they examined the nest, it was discovered the parents had built a nest using pages from an old Bible. The message is clear: do not work hard to build a home unless you build it with the help of God. The tower of Babel may have been one of the greatest ambitions of the ancient world, but they labored in vain without God and against His Will.

- **Vanity of Watching Without God**

Only God can provide a blueprint for building the family. To guard the city only God's security system will work. Man's wisdom and effort is no substitute for God's. When Nehemiah and the Jews were rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem they needed to pray and set a watch. "*Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night*" (Neh. 4:9). Their effort was not in vain. They were able to finish the wall in a mere fifty-two days. All saints in every endeavor every day must watch and pray to God. Parents will have sleepless nights. But if God is watching over their home, they will be able to sleep much easier.

- **Vanity of Waking Early Without God**

Though there is nothing wrong with waking up early to go to work for our family, without starting your day with God the father's efforts are useless. They have been warned against having a self-reliant

overconfidence. Now, the admonition concerns being workaholics to become self-sufficient apart from the provisions of God. Solomon's experiment on the meaning of life supports the veracity of this idea. Jesus told His disciples, *"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing"* (John 15:5).

- **Vanity of Working Late Without God**

In order to provide for one's family fathers and mothers will work long, hard hours. They will come home exhausted with no time for each other, for their children or even God. Working harder is not working smarter. Wise parents will work for the Lord not mammon (Mt. 6:19,10). Providing a happy home for one's family is not providing the family with things to make them happy. Money cannot replace the Master. Having fortune cannot take the place of the heavenly Father. There is nothing wrong with working hard, just working hard without God. *"And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ"* (Col. 3:23-24).

- **Vanity of Wealth Without God**

Perhaps the parents do provide an abundance of wealth for their family to enjoy. Without God can they really find enjoyment in even the good food they eat? Paul wrote to Timothy, *"command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy"* (1 Tim. 6:17). Eating the harvest of one's hard work is far better than working hard in vain. Solomon spoke of the value of enjoying the fruit of one's labor in Ecclesiastes (2;24; 8:15; 11:9,10). Yet he was well aware of vain pursuits robbing man of this enjoyment.

- **God Gives Rest**

First, notice the phrase *"his beloved."* God's beloved in this case may be a reference to Solomon. He was called Jedidiah by God (2 Sam. 12:25) which means "Beloved of Jehovah."

It is only by their recognizing their dependence upon God, they find real rest and enjoyment of their wealth. The watchman of verse one stays awake in vain. In verse two the father wakes early to go to work in vain and works late resulting in less rest and more sorrow. Worry is a sleep-robber.

The good life with God includes times of rest and relaxation. The *"rest"* is what comes as a reward for a long day of work. This is especially true when God is left out of our lives and our efforts. The saint can sleep and sleep well knowing God is in control of the results and reward of his labors for the day. Jesus could work hard all day for the Lord in the harvest fields of the world of men and sleep in a boat during a storm at night. Peter could preaching by day and sleep in Herod's prison at night.

In his "Speech to the convention Forming a Constitution for the United States" presented in 1787 at Philadelphia, Benjamin Franklin said, "I have lived, Sir, a long time and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth -- that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the sacred writings that 'except the Lord build they labor in vain that build it.' I firmly believe this; and I also believe that without his concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better than the Builders of Babel" (Boice 1118).

### **God Blesses the Family with Children**

*3 Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord,  
The fruit of the womb is a reward.  
4 Like arrows in the hand of a warrior,  
So are the children of one's youth.  
5 Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them;  
They shall not be ashamed,  
But shall speak with their enemies in the gate.*

Some scholars have been tempted to divide this psalm into two separate parts seeing no connection between the two. However, the author uses a pun or paronomasia which exist between

“builders” (bonayw] in verse one and “sons” or “children” (banim) in verse three.

The term for “children” is masculine meaning “sons” although daughters would be a blessing. Sons would work to generate produce and protection. Men were required to go up to Jerusalem during these festivals. Daughters are honored for the fruit of their womb rewarding the family.

### **Children are...**

#### ⇒ **God’s Gift**

Solomon tells fathers to pay attention or listen up by using the term “*behold.*” He gives three metaphors describing children and three blessings they bring to the father. First, children or sons are a “heritage” or inheritance. Inheritance normally works in the direction of father’s leaving a heritage for their children. In this verse fathers receive as an inheritance of children from their heavenly Father. Parenting represents a stewardship where the souls of children are on loan from God. A possession assigned to them to care for and shared with God.

#### ⇒ **Womb’s Reward**

A child born into the family is not just a financial tax deduction or the burden of another mouth to feed. They are a reward to the father and mother. If more children conceived in this world were viewed as such there would be less unwanted children and fewer abortions. Every time a baby is born God is expressing His hope and desire that the human race continues to grow and prosper from His blessings. Children are a blessing and not a burden. This is true even of the rebellious ones.

#### ⇒ **Warrior’s Arrow**

Children make the home a treasury and an armory. Archery is one of the most difficult sports to master. Archery requires skills which only comes by practice, practice, practice. This requires discipline. Before one can discipline his children, he must learn to discipline himself. Like an arrow needs the thrust and guidance provided by the bow, children need direction and encouragement from their parents. Arrows are unable to direct themselves toward the target. *“Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him”* (Pr 22:15). *“The rod and rebuke give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother”* (Pr 29:15). *“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it”* (Prov. 22:6).

#### ⇒ **A Father’s Fortune**

Modern students of these psalms would not have the same sense of values in regard to these blessings. In ages past a large family helped the family fortune especially in an agrarian society.

What is a quiver full? I use to tell my wife, Beverley, it was six. The Lord determined it was two. An archer on the battlefield needs plenty of arrows. Children are ammunition against a father’s enemies at the city gate. A hunter or warrior has a greater chance of success when he has a quiver full of arrows.

#### ⇒ **A Dad’s Dignity**

These fathers will *“not be ashamed.”* They will have a sense of honor and pride in their children. Having children represents to the world God has blessed this man, he is a father. Sons will grow up to take the place of their fathers in the city gate and daughters as fruitful mothers.

#### ⇒ **A Parents Protection**

The city gate was the location where court was held and where all public transactions took place. Sons were God-given weapons to protect fathers and mothers. Children provide couples with the cohesion to turn them into a family. The husband and wife become united as a father and mother.

### **God Blesses Family which Fears and Obeys**

*1 Blessed is every one who fears the Lord,  
Who walks in His ways.*

Upon leaving Walgreens with my purchase the cashier told me, “have a blessed day.” Three times the psalmist describes God’s blessings upon the god-fearing fathers. Blessings from above are not found in self-acquired rewards from labor or fame of name but through the family. Four times this

psalm uses a form of the word “bless” from two different Hebrew terms. In verses one and two the term *asher* is used. The Hebrew word *barak* is found in verse four and five meaning: “blessed of the Lord.” “Blessed” is plural meaning “happy, happy” is the god-fearing man.

Two requirements are necessary for a man to be multiply blessed: “*fear God and keep His commandments*” (Eccl. 12:13). Fear involves total obedience and loyalty to the Lord. Fear is in the sense of awe. Awe or respect for God’s power, wrath, and judgement can result in a healthy fear or terror of sinning against God. It can still be compatible with a love for God in the same way one is afraid to disappoint their parents or lover because of consequences to a loving relationship. It is an attitude which takes God seriously. “The fear of the Lord does not mean we are afraid of him or cower in the corner at the sound of his approach. The fear of God is, instead, an attitude of trust in and commitment to the God who loves us, and is expressed in our desire to live by his Word” (Kaiser 95).

### **God Blesses Family Labor with Enjoyment**

*2 When you eat the labor of your hands,  
You shall be happy, and it shall be well with you.*

John Howard Payne said, “Be it ever so humble, there’s no place like home.” Home is a haven for those who wish to find a God-given happiness and well-being (Jer. 29:5-7). Today, eating three square meals a day is often taken for granted. In ancient Israel hard-working farmers could easily be robbed of enjoying the very food they planted because of pestilence, war, natural disasters, thieves, etc.

### **God Blesses Family Full House**

*3 Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine  
In the very heart of your house,  
Your children like olive plants  
All around your table.*

Two agricultural metaphors are used to show the blessings of a wife and children in the family. The vine and olive tree were the two most important agricultural products in Israel. A wife is like a fruitful vine. Solomon wrote, “*he who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord*” (Prov. 18:22). Fruitfulness is obviously in reference to more than just being a good, hardworking wife, but to the womb. Sarah, Rachel, Hannah, and Elizabeth all knew the pain of being barren. God is seen not only as one who blesses the labor of the family, but blesses the wives with fertility.

Olive trees take a long time to mature. It is several years before they can produce a cash crop. They can live and be productive for many years. A father, therefore, must be very patient in raising children. In time the olive tree will require little maintenance. It will become self-sufficient.

The table in the home is a symbol of family fellowship. The father looks around the supper table. He sees his dear wife and children. Today’s, family can hardly be found around the table. They have diverse pursuits.

### **God Blesses the God-Fearing Father**

*4 Behold, thus shall the man be blessed  
Who fears the Lord.*

The repeating of this phrase forms an inclusio with verse one. The repeating of verse one is like placing a *selah* for the singer to ponder what type of man is to be so blessed. However, a different Hebrew word is used for “blessed.”

## **God Blesses Via a Good City**

*5 The Lord bless you out of Zion,  
And may you see the good of Jerusalem  
All the days of your life.*

Blessings come from Zion, the Temple mount. The civic benefits come to the family who benefit the city. Jerusalem was the capital. Zion was the Temple mount which was the religious center of Israel. They will be prospered by the city and the city will prosper them. May they live long enough to witness this and partake of the benefits. Abraham *“waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God”* (Heb. 11:10). All of God’s kingdom citizens today are looking forward to the same city of God, Heaven.

## **God Blesses with Grandchildren**

*6a Yes, may you see your children’s children.*

Three generations are mentioned in this psalm. The God-fearing father may be blessed to live long enough to see his grand-children. These promises of blessing are based on generalizations of what may come. They do not represent absolute guarantees. Not all couples are blessed children, not all men will live to see their grandchildren. Having grandchildren is one of the greatest joys in life. Solomon said, *“children’s children are the crown of old men”* (Pr. 17:6).

## **God Blesses the Nation**

*6b Peace be upon Israel!!*

*“Peace be upon Israel”* is also found in Psalm 125:5. Notice the increasing circle of blessing from the man who builds a family to a wife to bears the children, to the full house, to the city and now a nation. A nation maintains her strength through her families. The break up of home life is one of the indices of a disintegrating civilization. A genuine patriot is one who knows the blessed love of God, family, and country. The greatest blessings to the nation of Israel were special children born none were as great a blessing as one born to a virgin and a carpenter from Nazareth. He was the Prince of Peace.

Ronald Reagan wrote: The family has always been the cornerstone of American society. Our families nurture, preserve and pass on to each succeeding generation the values we share and cherish, values that are the foundation for our freedoms. In the family, we learn our first lessons of god and man, love and discipline, rights and responsibilities, human dignity and human frailty. Our families give us daily examples of these lessons being put into practice. In raising and instructing our children, in providing personal and compassionate care for the elderly, in maintaining the spiritual strength of religious commitment among our people - in these and other ways, America's families make immeasurable contributions to American's well-being. Today more than ever, it is essential that these contributions not be taken for granted and that each of us remember that the strength of our families is vital to the strength of our nation.”

## **Questions:**

1. What are the three main views as to the purpose of the Songs of Ascents?

2. What are some of the common features found in this group of psalms?
3. What genres are found among these fifteen psalms?
4. What five things are vain without God?
5. Who provides rest and how?
6. What three metaphors is used in Psalms 127 to describe children?
7. What are the three benefits children provide to the father and family?
8. What are the two requirements for a father to be blessed?
9. What metaphors are used to describe the wife and the children in 128:3?
10. How do good families benefit the society and nation they live in?
11. What will fathers be blessed to enjoy if they live long enough?
12. What are the increasing circles of blessings found in these psalms?

**Application and Discussion:**

1. What are some things which can be done or changed to help families increase their “table time” together?
  
2. What can good families do today to have a positive effect upon the society and nation in which they live?

**Homework:** Spend some quality quantity of time this week with family.



# Prayer for Preservation From Enemies

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## Psalm 140

*1 Deliver me, O Lord, from evil men;  
Preserve me from violent men,*

*2 Who plan evil things in their hearts;  
They continually gather together for war.*

*3 They sharpen their tongues like a serpent;  
The poison of asps is under their lips.*

*Selah*

*4 Keep me, O Lord, from the hands of the wicked;  
Preserve me from violent men,  
Who have purposed to make my steps stumble.*

*5 The proud have hidden a snare for me, and cords;  
They have spread a net by the wayside;  
They have set traps for me.*

*Selah*

*6 I said to the Lord: "You are my God;  
Hear the voice of my supplications, O Lord.  
7 O GOD the Lord, the strength of my salvation,  
You have covered my head in the day of battle.  
8 Do not grant, O Lord, the desires of the wicked;  
Do not further his wicked scheme,  
Lest they be exalted.*

*Selah*

*9 "As for the head of those who surround me,  
Let the evil of their lips cover them;  
10 Let burning coals fall upon them;  
Let them be cast into the fire,  
Into deep pits, that they rise not up again.*

*11 Let not a slanderer be established in the earth;  
Let evil hunt the violent man to overthrow him."*

*12 I know that the Lord will maintain  
The cause of the afflicted,  
And justice for the poor.*

*13 Surely the righteous shall give thanks to Your name;  
The upright shall dwell in Your presence.*

A couple of dozen verses scattered throughout Psalms are referred to as imprecations meaning "curses or an invocation of judgment, calamity, or curses uttered against one's enemies, or the enemies of God" (Laney 36). The psalms themselves are laments which are categorized as Imprecatory Psalms. Psalm 140 is in the major genre considered a lament. The Lament psalms are in turn sub-divided into community and individual laments. So, this psalm is an individual lament which contains an imprecatory section in verses nine through eleven. The ferocity, vengefulness, and rancor expressed in these verses seem out of place in an inspired Hebrew hymnal. Below are a few examples of these imprecations:

- ◆ *“Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous”* (Psalm 69:28).
- ◆ *“Let his children continually be vagabonds, and beg; let them seek their bread also from their desolate places”* (Psalm 109:10).
- ◆ *“O daughter of Babylon, who are to be destroyed, happy the one who repays you as you have served us! Happy the one who takes and dashes your little ones against the rock!”* (Psalm 137:8-9).

In the New Testament Christians are instructed to love their enemies (Mt. 5:43-45). When they are struck on the right cheek they are to turn to them the left cheek. They are to count it all joy when they are persecuted. Saints are required to be peacemakers and share with them the Gospel. Trials are said to improve one's faith. For those persecutors who do not repent the children of God are encouraged to trust in the providence of God to protect them and to look forward to the Day of Judgment for Divine justice.

How can one reconcile these imprecations with an author like David who was inspired and a man after God's own heart? Still how can these have any place in the life of New Testament Christians? Several possible answers to this issue has been suggested by various scholars. 1) Psalms are poetry and thus use hyperbole or exaggeration to make a point. 2) The psalmist was using the pagan practice of magic by calling upon God to actually curse these enemies for him. Yet this practice was condemned by the Law of Moses and carried the death penalty. 3) Perhaps the Old Testament was a covenant of hate and vengeance while New Testament is one of love and mercy. However, the New Testament quotes these imprecations (Ps. 69:25 quoted in Acts 1:20; Psalm 69:22-28 quoted in Rom. 11:9,10; and Psalm 137:9 quoted in Luke 19:44). The Pentateuch prohibits individual retaliation (Lev. 19:18; Deut. 32:35). In fact, the Old Testament teaches love (Deut. 6:4; Lev. 19:18) and kind treatment of enemies (Ex. 23:4-5). 4) Others regard these passages of predictions of future judgments. Yet no one can prove it from their usage in the New Testament. Many are of a personal nature from the life of David. 5) Akin to the previous view is the possibility these verses are Messianic. 6) Another view is the “psalmists are literally expressing their own vindictiveness toward their enemies, and God had nothing to do with inspiring their words” (Bullock 231). 7) It is suggested that these are national instead of individual comments. This is simply not true. In this psalm David is dealing with personal enemies. 8) These psalms most certainly are turning to God to punish and/or stop the enemies of righteousness by rendering Divine judgments. Vengeance belongs to God (Rom. 12:14f). God has appointed the government to punish evil doers (Rom 13:1-8). “When we pray for Christ to come again, we are praying for the final destruction of Satan and his followers, both human and spiritual” (Longman 140). 9) In addition to the pervious solution, these imprecations demonstrate a hatred of the sin with a holy hatred.

The title informs us this is a prayer of David. Although some suggest it is only a psalm in the style of David.

The three-fold use of “*selah*” helps divided this Psalm into distinct parts. When the singer comes to the “*selah*” he is to pause, ponder, and profit before the singing continues to the next point. Interestingly, the previous mention of *selah* occurred back in Psalm 89.

The last part of verse three is quoted in Romans 3:13. Paul gives acceptance of this Psalm as inspired proof in his argument that both Jews and Gentiles are “*under sin.*”

This psalm shares several common points with the previous Psalm 139. First, David pleads in the previous Psalm for God to slay his enemies and in Psalm 140 calls upon God to turn their evil back upon their own heads. The slanderers attack God in 139:19-21. In this psalm it is David who is maligned by their evil tongues.

John Phillips sees a connection with the psalms which follow this psalm. “Clearly Psalms 140, 141, 142, and 143 are bound together by common composition, common circumstances, and common characteristics. For instance, several Hebrew words occur only in these psalms” (Phillips 602).

### **Preservation from Evil Men**

The psalmist begins his prayer with three analogous pleads to the Lord: deliver me, preserve me,

and keep me from my enemy. When David was facing a dead end with his enemies trapping him from behind, he could depend on the Lord for deliverance. *“The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment”* (2 Peter 2:9).

▶ **Violent Hearts**

All that David is facing is a premeditation on that part of evil men planning evil things against him. The examples of these types of planned attacks against David in his lifetime are too numerous to list. The scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees were often making plans in their hearts to trap Jesus.

▶ **Vigorous Confederacy**

King Saul should have been at times warring against the Philistines or other enemies of God’s people. Instead he was chasing David with his army around and around in the wilderness. *“Then Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel, and went to seek David and his men on the Rocks of the Wild Goats”* (1Sam. 24:2). John Calvin wrote, “they stirred up general enmity by their false information which acted as a trumpet sounding to battle.”

▶ **Verminous Tongues**

The historical setting of this psalm is not known. Some believe it may have been when Doeg killed the eighty-five priests at Nob because the High Priest helped David by giving him the sword of Goliath and fed his men with the old shewbread from the Tabernacle. Perhaps, it was when King Saul’s men spread lies about David’s ambitions for Saul’s throne. It could have also been a reference to the time David’s son, Absalom, rebelled and seized Jerusalem.

The fangs of the serpent may be what is being referenced by term *“tongues.”* It is more likely the actions of the snake’s tongue which rapidly moves in and out of its mouth to “smell” its environment and locate its victim. It is as if the asp is sharpening it for the strike. Obviously, the psalmist is using poetic license to metaphorically describe the characteristics of the wicked. Shakespeare’s “King Lear” reads:

She struck me with her tongue,  
Most serpent like, upon the very heart.

The Hebrew word for asp is *acshub* also rendered adder. The exact species of snake is unknown as the term is only found here in the Bible.

▶ **Pause-Ponder-Profit: Selah**

Spurgeon observed, “David’s enemies were as violent as they were evil, as crafty as they were violent, and as persistent as they were crafty.” God can deliver the upright from their enemies no matter how violent their plans, united their attacks or verminous their tongues.

### **Preservation From Wicked Hands**

Verse four is a repeat of verse one using synonymous parallelism. In this case David asked the Lord to “keep” him or guard him from his enemies’ action not just their plans and slanderous words.

■ **Stumbling Steps**

Those who set a trap for Daniel are a good example of the type of enemies David was alluding to in this passage. *“The governors and satraps sought to find some charge against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him. Then these men said, ‘We shall not find any charge against this Daniel unless we find it against him concerning the law of his God’”* (Dan. 6:4-5). So they set him up, so he could be caught practicing his religion and breaking a new law.

■ **Surprising Snares**

The evil men have planned, spoke, and now are practicing evil against David. King Saul laid many snares to catch David. “Cords” may refer to ropes used to capture and hold a prey.

■ **Spreading Nets**

The Hebrew term translated *“wayside”* here means “by the hand of the paths” (Phillips 607). The idea seems to be that if David were to deviate his walk on the path, he will fall victim to their nets.

■ **Setting Traps**

As if stumbling blocks, snares, cords, nets are not quite efficient enough David must face “traps” set for him.

■ **Pause-Ponder-Profit:** *Selah*

Many modern-day saints have experienced persecutions in the form of oral and emotional abuse. God is still able to deliver the saint out any type of trial planned by evil men.

### **Privileges of God’s Servant**

Four times the psalmist references God as Lord. Thus demonstrating his relationship to God as Master and he is the humble servant. David recognizes he has certain privileges because of this relationship.

• **Possession**

It is a very common part of an individual’s prayer by the psalmist to claim of the Lord: “*You are my God.*” All men belong to the Creator who is their Progenitor. God is the God of Israel and Jesus is the Savior of the church. All the saints belong to the Lord as His possession. However, David claims that God is his possession. As Thomas claimed concerning Jesus, “*My Lord and my God!*” (John 20:28).

• **Petition**

David has heard the venomous tongues of the evil men, now he calls upon God to hear him. The best way to respond to your enemies is by turning the battle plans over to God and requisition from heavenly headquarters for the supplies needed for victory.

• **Power**

Ancient kings and warriors like Saul and Goliath, had armorbearers. David had the strength of the Lord to bring him victory. “*Then David said to the Philistine, ‘You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. Then all this assembly shall know that the Lord does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord’s, and He will give you into our hands’*”(1Sam. 17:45-47).

• **Protection**

This warlike metaphor corresponds to the enemies of David who plan and carry out a war against him. It is not David’s intention to ask God to stop the war and end all battles. David knows he is at war with the enemies of God and must trust in the strength of the helmet of salvation. The helmet of salvation is part of the armor of God covering or protecting the Christian (Eph. 6:17).

• **Prevention**

This is the segue into the next section. The singers are told to pause and ponder what the relationship the wicked have in contrast to the righteous’ relationship with God. David has consistently seen a grave injustice of the wicked being exalted or victorious over the righteous. Only God can be the perfect Almighty Judge in order to stop this from happening. Surely David is not asking God not to help his enemies, but to stop them from succeeding in trapping him.

Consider the traps Daniel’s enemies set for him. Their plans were like a boomerang coming back at them. “*And the king gave the command, and they brought those men who had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions—them, their children, and their wives; and the lions overpowered them, and broke all their bones in pieces before they ever came to the bottom of the den*” (Dan. 6:24).

• **Pause-Ponder-Profit:** *Selah*

God is Lord and Master over His servants. There are many benefits of being a slave of the most powerful Master. He is available to hear the servants petitions for supplies needed, can empower them, provide protection, and prevent their enemies for hindering them.

### **Plea for Divine Retribution**

✓ **“Let the evil of their lips cover them”**

Like hunters surrounding their prey David felt trapped by his enemies on every side. He had no

were to turn and no way to escape. Whereas his head is protected by the helmet of salvation from the Lord, he asks the Lord to let the evil words of his enemies cover them with destruction. The stones they cast at David will ricochet and hit them in the head.

✓ ***“Let burning coals fall upon them; Let them be cast into the fire”***

This sounds like what God did to Sodom and the cities of the plain. Daniel’s three friends were cast into the burning fiery furnace because they would not worship Nebuchadnezzar’s idol (Dan. 3). They were rescued by God. However, God will cast His enemies who do not worship Him into hell. The Beast and the False Prophet, two great enemies of the saints, *“these two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone”* (Rev. 19:19-20). Yet, for the Christian he is told to deal with his enemies in a way to accomplish the same, but in a way which can result in a win/win solution. *“If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good”* (Rom. 12:20,21).

The *“deep pits”* could be a reference to traps dug by them to catch David or to sheol, meaning the grave. David calls upon God to see to their complete destruction *“that they rise not up again.”* Whether he had in mind eternal death in Hell or more likely a final end to hostilities toward David is hard to say with great certainty.

✓ ***“Let not a slanderer be established in the earth”***

The Hebrew term *“slanderer”* literally means *“a man of the tongue”* (Broyles 489). The success of the slanderer would defile the land. Satan is a murderer and liar (John 8:44). He is a slanderer (Rev. 12:10) and deceiver (2 Cor. 11:3). Haman planned to malign the Jews and have them exterminated from the Medo-Persian empire. He had a gallows built from Mordecai. In the end Esther by the providence of God confounded those plans and Haman was hung upon those very gallows he had built for the righteous.

✓ ***“Let evil hunt the violent man to overthrow him.”***

*“They have tried to get him to fall into traps they set for him, so they too should be plunged into pits of destruction. They have hunted him with their snares, and they should be hounded in their turn”* (Allen 337). Judas searched for an opportunity to betray the Lord and ended up hanging himself in the end.

This is not to be confused with karma. It is the maxim of creation which seeds reproduce after their kind in both the physical and spiritual kingdom. *“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life”* (Gal. 6:7,8). By hunting down David with evil, evil will hunt down and destroy them. It is not David doing the hunting but the evil they have shown toward David. *“Take note, you have sinned against the Lord; and be sure your sin will find you out”* (Num. 32:23).

### **Persuaded of God’s Goodness**

★ **Confiding in God’s Care**

Suddenly this lament of David switches *“from divine address to third-person reference”* starting with this verse twelve (Allen 334). This is a common feature in lament psalms. God can be trusted to look out after those who are suffering persecution for righteousness sake and for those who suffer want due to the attacks by their enemies. David’s confidence in the mercy of God for these is reassuring for him and all those who so suffer at the hand of evil men.

★ **Commending God’s Name**

With great confidence David knows praises of thanksgiving will come to God from the righteous he has lifted up out of the deadly hold of their enemies.

★ **Continuing in God’s Presence**

God would go on and be with David. He would fulfill the promises made to the King. His dynasty would last for many generations. The kingdom would grow. His son, Solomon, would build the Temple. Jesus Christ would be born the son of David and resurrection to set upon the throne of David at the right hand side of God. The hope for the Christian is to be with God in Heaven. *“And I heard a loud voice*

*from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God'" (Rev. 21:3).*

**Questions:**

1. What is an imprecatory psalm?
2. How can one reconcile these imprecations with an author like David who was inspired and a man after God's own heart? Still how can these have any place in the life of New Testament Christians?
3. Where is this psalm quoted in the New Testament? Why?
4. What are the characteristics of the evil men who are troubling David?
5. What four devices do the enemies of David use against him?
6. What privileges from God does David have?
7. How did the evil traps set by Daniel's enemies come back upon their own heads?
8. How does Haman exemplify verse eleven?
9. How does the psalmist respond to God's goodness?

10. What purpose does the three uses of "*selah*" hold in this psalm?

**Application and Discussion:**

1. What are the various types of snares and traps the enemies set for God's people today?

2. How should Christians deal with the enemies?

**Homework:** Pray an imprecatory prayer New Testament style this week.