

KISS THE SON

STUDIES IN PSALMS 1-50

BY

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1. THE TWO WAYS

Psalm 1:1-6.

The Psalms are part of the “wisdom literature” of Scripture. The first psalm is a fitting introduction to this whole body of literature, for it expounds the doctrine of the two ways, a major motif in wisdom writings.

1. Two pathways.

Two paths are noted, “the way of the righteous” and “the way of the wicked.”

Jesus referred to them as the “narrow way” and the “broad way.” One is traveled by “many,” the other by “few” (Matthew 7:13-14). In a moral universe the quality of the way is not determined by the numbers who pursue it.

Each person must choose his or her way, but everything else--character, behavior, and destiny--flows from that choice.

2. Two pilgrims.

Two pilgrims pursue these two pathways, the “righteous” and the “wicked.”

The righteous are marked by what they avoid and by what they enjoy. They shun the counsel, life-style and gatherings of the wicked. They reflect upon the word of God and seek guidance from its pages. As a consequence, they prosper as do well-watered evergreens.

The wicked, by contrast, are weightless, like the chaff separated from the wheat in the process of winnowing. They are blown away.

3. Two prospects.

Two futures confront the two pilgrims on their opposite pathways.

The righteous are protected by the Lord and brought into “life.” The wicked “perish” (compare Matthew 7:13-14). Likely, the psalmist had in mind prosperity and perishing that related chiefly to this world. However, since Jesus came, the righteous are defined in relationship to him. Life is also defined by him. The second Psalm contains a special word of wisdom for us: “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way....Blessed are all those who take refuge in him” (v. 12).

In the Psalms, as in all Scripture, the happy are the holy, and holiness is a right relationship to God.

2. KISS THE SON!

Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed...

(Psalm 2:12).

Though lacking any solid evidence, scholars have affirmed a coronation ritual in ancient Israel to which they assign this psalm.

They may be right, but the psalm really fits but one king, and his name is Jesus.

1. The installation: “I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill” (v. 7).

The anointing of the divine king occurred at Jesus’ baptism, where the Spirit descended upon him as the power by which his ministry would be carried out.

The installation of the divine king occurred at Calvary, for this king reigns from a tree, reigns in self-sacrificing love.

Through Jesus, “The One enthroned in heaven” rules on earth in the hearts and lives of his followers.

Jesus is the “Lord of lords” and “King of kings” who is destined to rule everywhere and forever.

2. The rebellion: “...the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One” (v. 2).

The early Christians found this ancient scripture fulfilled in the collaboration of “Herod and Pontius Pilate...with the Gentiles” to crucify Jesus (Acts 4:27). They raged against him, plotted his death, and thought Calvary ended his disturbing career.

God laughed, the earth quaked, the resurrection occurred. Jesus is the mighty conqueror of sin and death, and he will be acknowledged by all as Lord.

3. The proclamation: “I will proclaim the decree of the Lord” (v. 7).

The decree includes the affirmation of sonship, the promise of heritage, and the prophecy of conquest. God affirmed the sonship of Jesus on several occasions. To Jesus is promised the “the nations.” He will rule with inflexible justice, destroying all who oppose him.

Wisdom dictates, therefore, that rulers and their followers “Serve the Lord” and “Kiss the Son.” The alternative is his righteous wrath. No one and nothing can prevent the fulfillment of God’s purposes. We align with them or destroy ourselves.

The psalm ends with a beatitude. “Blessed are all” connects with “Blessed is the man” in Psalm 1. The king, opposed but triumphant, is a refuge for all who come to him for salvation from sin and death.

3. FOES AND FAITH

O Lord, how many are my foes!But you are a shield around me... (Psalm 3:1, 3).

Scholars believe that this psalm became a morning prayer, used by both the king of Israel and his people. It is, in the language of commentators, “a protective prayer.” That’s not the only kind, but sometimes it’s the best kind.

1. The psalmist’s foes.

Who they were is left unspecified. That’s helpful to succeeding generations, for the prayer can be fitted to whoever is opposing the people of God.

He speaks of them as “many” in verse 1 and refers to “tens of thousands” in verse 6. The psalm is loaded with military language and allusions. The psalmist who wrote it was likely bucking an army.

If the editorial caption is trustworthy, the psalmist was David and the occasion was Absalom’s rebellion. In that case many of the foes were David’s own countrymen and even family members. They make the worst enemies and the saddest situations.

2. The psalmist’s faith.

The Lord is his “shield.” The Lord “sustains” him. He answers the cry for help wrung from the beleaguered soul of the psalmist. No matter how numerous your enemies, one friend can assure victory if that friend is the Lord.

The psalmist’s confidence is not in his praying; rather, his confidence in the Lord prompts him to pray. “I cry aloud...and he answers me.” So great is that confidence that he can sleep on the eve of battle (v. 5).

He prays a rough prayer--that the Lord will strike the jaws and break the teeth of his enemies. The punishment he seeks is fitted to the offense they give. They “are saying...‘God will not deliver him.’” With a busted jawbone and a mouth full of broken teeth they won’t be taunting him long.

The closing verse ascribes deliverance, not to his fighting ability or that of his troops, but to the Lord. What began as complaint ends as benediction: “May your blessing be on your people.” Selah!

4. BAD MEN AND GOOD GOD

O men.... O Lord... (Psalm 4:2, 6).

Just as Psalm 3 came to be used as a morning prayer, Psalm 4 came to be used as an evening prayer. Or so many scholars believe. The closing verse gives credence to the theory.

The psalmist was being harassed by men and expected to be helped by God. No specific life setting can be pinpointed as the origin of the psalm. That makes it anyone's psalm who finds himself or herself in a similar situation.

1. The accusing men.

The psalmist has been falsely accused by lying men who ignore his protested innocence. Their continuing barrage of slander became a heavy burden upon his soul.

They turn his "glory" into "shame" (v. 2), dishonoring him by their false charges. He urges them to restrain their anger and muzzle their tongues (v. 4), and to bring the right sacrifices in the right spirit to the Lord in worship (v. 5). He seems to expect his pleas to fall on deaf ears, however.

Unable to change them, his only refuge is the Lord to whom he turns in earnest prayer.

2. The answering God.

He speaks to God as "righteous" out of a relationship that is personal--"my righteous God." God is not only righteous but merciful, and as merciful he answers prayer (v. 1).

Skeptics ask, "Who can show us any good?" His reply is, the Lord, who shows favor to his people, floods their hearts with joy, and enables them to "sleep in peace" in the midst of threats.

This Lord “has set apart the godly for himself.” His chosen people are his valued treasure. His love for them inspires their prayers to him (v. 3).

No specific answer to prayer is given. The Lord does not silence the tongues of the accusers. The situation remains unchanged, but the psalmist doesn't. His confidence grows, his gladness increases, and God's peace becomes his pillow. Peace from God is better than a truce with men.

5. MEETING THE LORD

Give ear to my words, O Lord... (Psalm 5:1).

This psalm is a personal prayer that was set to music and used in corporate worship. It affirms faith in God in the face of the wicked. We can meet men without fear when we meet God without fail.

1. Meeting the Lord in morning prayer (vv. 1-3).

Facing the day with “sighing,” the psalmist prays for audience with God. Before him a tried man lays his requests and from him a trusting man awaits help. We all have such mornings!

That he can approach God reminds him that the wicked cannot. They cannot stand in his presence nor can they escape his judgment (vv. 4-6).

2. Meeting the Lord in temple worship (vv. 7-8).

The mercy of God gives the psalmist entry into the house of God. There he bows in reverence and prays for guidance. His enemies make urgent a need for straight paths and clear directions. These he implores from the Lord.

Unlike God’s words, the words of the wicked cannot be trusted. Their deceitful tongues betray their destructive hearts. He prays that God will sentence them and banish them as rebels (vv. 9-10).

3. Meeting the Lord in all circumstances (vv. 11-12).

God is a refuge whose protection functions like a body shield and brings joy and song to those who love him, whatever their situation in life.

The God whom we serve is never more than a prayer away, and he turns our sighing into singing. We can endure the intrigues of men when we enjoy the presence of God.

6. A SICK MAN'S PRAYER

O Lord, heal me.... Save me because of your unfailing love
(Psalm 6:2, 4).

This ancient prayer was wrung from the lips of a desperately ill man. His foes made his situation even more devastating. His only hope was God, his only recourse prayer. Has this ever been your situation? Sooner or later, it will be.

1. A cry to be “heard without prejudice” (vv. 1-2).

If God has permitted the illness, is it presumptuous to petition him for healing? To an OT Jew who recognized no “secondary causes” this could be a real dilemma, and prompts a plea to heard without prejudice because the illness was so grave, the pain so unbearable. The psalmist was in such anguish that his prayer shrank at times to a pitiful and desperate wail of “How long, O Lord?”

2. A prayer to be delivered while worship and praise could result (vv. 4-7).

The psalm predates a doctrine of resurrection and afterlife. Death was a descent into Sheol, a shadowy realm where worship and praise did not occur. To be healed and restored to vigorous life now would result in “remembering” God with appropriate sacrifices of praise. The cry, “Turn, O Lord, and deliver me” indicates the sickness of soul that matched the sickness of body; the sufferer felt that God was absent.

3. A confidence that prayer has been heard and deliverance will come (vv. 8-10).

Those who have worsened the situation with their accusations and/or gloating are dismissed. The prayer has been accepted and

will be answered. The Lord has “turned” toward the petitioner in mercy, and now his enemies will be “turned” away in “sudden disgrace.” His healing becomes a judgment upon their evil.

The psalmist’s prayer in sickness is not as well suited to us as it was to his contemporaries, thanks to the fact that Jesus Christ “has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:10). Nevertheless, severe illness can so afflict body and soul that much of the prayer and faith expressed in this psalm is personally relevant.

7. A PRAYER FOR JUSTICE

God is a righteous judge... (Psalm 7:11).

False charges create a passion for justice. Innocence intensifies suffering and thirsts for relief. God is a righteous judge, and in his court the innocent are always acquitted, the guilty are always punished. That moral conviction underlies this psalm.

1. Undeserved suffering (vv. 1-5).

The psalmist has been falsely accused of treacherous conduct. His response is twofold, marked by the words “O Lord my God.”

First, he prays for deliverance, for God to be his refuge from the savage cruelty of human tongues that tear like lions’ teeth.

Second, he affirms his innocence. He wants to be cleared of charges. Had he been guilty he would expect and accept the penalty.

2. Inescapable justice (vv. 6-13).

His passion for justice is matched by the Lord who is primed for justice. He prays for God to hold court, vindicate his innocence, and end the violence of his enemies.

God is described as armed for battle against unrighteousness. He defends the upright in heart and punishes the wicked. He cannot be deceived for he “searches minds and hearts.” Inner and outer lives are transparent to him. From the justice of such a God there can be no escape.

3. Self-destructive sin (vv. 14-16).

They have birthed disillusionment who think they can escape the consequences of sin. Life boomerangs and the wicked are victims of their own misdeeds, falling into the traps they set for others, and damaged by the violence they do to others.

The psalm closes with thanksgiving and praise. These are expressions of faith, for justice has not yet been done, prayer has not yet been answered. There is a movement in this psalm, as in many of them, from trouble to trust and hence from sorrow to song.

8. FINDING OURSELVES

...what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? (Psalm 8:4)

The search for identity is crucial to effective living. In this ancient psalm we can learn who we are and find peace and security as the result.

1. We cannot find our identity by sky-gazing.

“When I consider your heavens...what is man...? By the immensity of space and the brevity of life we are dwarfed and humbled. Creation is so vast; we are so small. The contrast can be intimidating, leaving us with a sense of insignificance.

If we feel that we are nothing we may live for nothing, denying purpose and becoming useless.

2. Our identity is discovered by exploring the Scriptures.

“O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” We know who we are and why we are, not from reflecting upon nature but from attending to revelation. In God’s “name”—that is, in his revealed identity and purpose—we find our own identity and value and reason for existence.

The heavens and earth are “the works of [God’s] hands.” We may be dwarfed by them, but they are dwarfed by him. In our relationship to him we adjust our relationship to them. God has made humans in his own image. In part, this means that we share the majesty of his dominion over creatures not human (vv. 6-8; cf. Genesis 1:27-30). We are his children, his stewards, his agents.

When they know his name, little children who offer praise to him speak with greater wisdom than do his enemies (v. 2).

The “majesty” of God’s name opens and closes this psalm. His name gives meaning to our names. His name delivers us from the oppression of both nature and sin. Like the psalmist, let us speak that name in praise, for that name provides our identity, purpose and security for this world and the world to come.

9. WHOLEHEARTED PRAISE

I will praise you, O Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonders (Psalm 9:1).

The Lord deserves and inspires wholehearted praise. The psalm tells why.

1. His triumphs over evil inspire wholehearted praise.

He has “rebuked,” “destroyed,” and “blotted out” from memory the nations that defied him in the past (v. 5).

He will inflict a terrifying judgment upon those who oppose him in the present. As for the future, “endless ruin” will overtake “all the nations that forget God” (vv. 6, 17).

Evil cannot have the last word in a moral universe.

2. His mercies to the oppressed inspire wholehearted praise.

He is “a refuge for the oppressed,” and he never forsakes “those who seek [Him].” He hears “the cry of the afflicted” and avenges the blood of the martyred (vv. 9-12). Because he “govern[s] the peoples with justice,” the wicked will fall into their own traps, but the “needy” who look to him will be saved (vv. 15, 18).

Divine justice will finally triumph over human injustice.

3. His lordship over all people inspires wholehearted praise.

“Those who know your name will trust in you” (v. 10). His name is Lord, which appears nine times in this psalm. He is the “Most High” (v. 2). His name is Ruler and Savior and Judge. What a ground for confidence we have in the names he bears and in the wonders he

performs! The nations “are but men” and cannot triumph, but “the Lord reigns forever” (vv. 7, 19-20).

Do we know his name? Do we trust in him? Then he will lift us from “the gates of death” (v. 13) and secure us forever.

Let us praise him and proclaim him with all our hearts!

10. IN TIMES OF TROUBLE

Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?” (Psalm 10:1).

This psalm is a classic lament. It is the outpouring of a man who is deeply hurt, confused and saddened. He is undergoing a crisis of faith. Three things especially trouble him.

1. He is troubled by the arrogance of evil.

The “wicked man” who arrogantly and cruelly “hunts down the weak” distresses the psalmist. The wicked man “reviles the Lord” and “sneers at his enemies,” confident that he will escape retribution. “Nothing will shake me,” is his proud boast.

2. He is troubled by the impotence of good.

In contrast to the haughty wicked man, who plots and traps and kills “the innocent,” the victims of evil seem so utterly “helpless.” They are caught and crushed under the weight of their oppressor. It seems to them, as it seems to their oppressor, that “God has forgotten.”

3. He is troubled by the absence of God.

God seems remote, hidden and indifferent. While the wicked gloat and the helpless groan, God seems to be doing nothing, although the afflicted cry out to him.

The psalmist rallies his faith, however. He affirms that God does see and does hear and does care and will take things “in hand.” The Lord will “arise” and call the wicked “to account.” He will encourage and defend “the fatherless and the oppressed.” “The Lord is king for ever and ever.” In his time and way, he will bring justice to the nations.

The opening and closing words of the Psalm are instructive.
In times of trouble the first words of the afflicted are “Why, O Lord?” In times of trouble the last words of God to the oppressor are “no more.”

11. THE TRIUMPH OF FAITH

In the Lord I take refuge (Psalm 11:1).

The psalmist was in a jam, unspecified—for which we can be thankful. It forms a blank that we can fill in with our own trouble.

1. Two human options (vv. 1-3).

Wicked men snipe at the psalmist--literally or metaphorically?--“from the shadows.” The situation is so desperate that it seems “the foundations” of society are “being destroyed.” The troubled man has two options--to take refuge or to take flight.

An unidentified voice--his own or another’s?--advises him to “Flee like a bird” to a mountain.

Instead, he chooses to “take refuge” in the Lord. While the outlook was depressing the up-look was encouraging.

2. Two divine actions (vv. 4-7).

When the righteous can do nothing, the Lord can do everything necessary.

The Lord is both transcendent--“on his heavenly throne”--and immanent--“in his holy temple.”

The Lord refines the righteous by fire. Metallurgy provides the metaphors of “observing” and “examining” the righteous. The Lord brings his people through the fires of testing.

The Lord reproves the wicked by fire. He hates wickedness and those who will not repent of it will perish from it. “Fiery coals...burning sulfur...a scorching wind...” are metaphors for divine retribution upon “those who love violence.”

The Lord “is righteous” and “loves justice.” His character assures refuge for the righteous and retribution for the wicked.

12. FLATTERING WORDS, FLAWLESS WORDS

...their flattering lips speak with deception. ...the words of the Lord are flawless (Psalm 12:2, 6).

Creation resulted from divine speech. Chaos results from human speech. When the wicked speak to oppress the weak, the weak can speak to petition God's help. This whole Psalm is a contrast between the speech of wicked men and the speech of the righteous God.

1. Flattering words--human speech abused.

The wicked abuse the gift of speech by flattering words that deceive people and by arrogant words that defy God.

The godly have been oppressed, maligned and deceived by lying men. So bad is the situation that the psalmist looks in vain for those who stand for God before the onslaught of "flattering lips": "the godly are no more; the faithful have vanished..."

These lying men "freely strut about." They boast, "We will triumph with our tongues."

They claim sovereignty over their own lips and expect no retribution from God--"we own our lips--who is our master?"

2. Flawless words--divine speech extolled.

The psalmist prays for the Lord to "cut off" flattering lips and boasting tongues. He hears the Lord say "I will arise. He will go into action; he will speak in judgment that punishes "the wicked" and protects "the weak" and "the needy."

In contrast to human speech, "the words of the Lord" are pure, like ultra-refined silver. He doesn't boast, he doesn't deceive, and he doesn't flatter. What he says is. What he says goes. He can "cut

off” the proud and impious speech of the wicked, but none can empty his words of his power to achieve his purpose.

God is the answer to the arrogant question posed by lying men who thought there was no answer--“Who is our master?” He is. God’s mighty “I will” triumphs over the empty “We will” of the wicked.

The psalmist is confident that God’s flawless words will prevail to silence forever man’s flattering words. The ground of his confidence is not the fact that he has prayed for help, not his own words, but the pure words of God that promise help.

13. HOW LONG, O LORD?

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? (Psalm 13:1).

Tempus fugit, the Romans used to say. Time flies! Not for the patient gripped with serious illness and longing to be well. His days and nights seem endless. “How long, O Lord?”

1. A sad situation.

The psalmist was near death and only the Lord could change his situation. But the presence of illness was worsened by the seeming absence of God. The Lord was hidden. The Lord had forgotten. So his mind was filled with struggle and his heart with sorrow that persisted--“every day.” He desperately wanted to live but was dangerously near to death.

Four times the anguished cry is heard: “How long...How long...How long...How long...? And the answer seemed to be “forever.”

2. An earnest prayer.

“Look on me and answer”! His enemy could gloat over his misery, but surely the Lord would view him with pity, for the Lord was not his enemy.

“Give light to my eyes”! In illness the eyes dim. With returning health they brighten. This is true of the spiritual eyes as well as the physical eyes. The cry is for total healing--for the whole person to be saved.

“My foes will rejoice”! Death will be a victory for those who wish him dead. He confesses no sin. His prayer arises from grief, not

from guilt. If he has kept covenant with God, will not God's honor be at stake when his enemies rejoice? This seems to be his thinking.

3. A stubborn faith.

Though he seems to be a goner, the psalmist trusts in God to answer his prayer and bring "salvation," in this case, deliverance from the near-death situation. He anticipates what he does not yet experience. His confidence is grounded, not upon his fidelity to God or his prayers to God, but upon the "unfailing love" of God. The reference is to God's loyalty to his covenant-partners. Furthermore, future good is expected upon the basis of past good: "he has been good to me." Memory is placed in service to faith.

The psalm ends on a note of triumphant hope. "I will sing to the Lord." Sorrow will turn to song. When nothing is left but prayer, prayer will be joined by praise.

14. FOOLS AND EX-FOOLS

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God" (Psalm 14:1).

"The fool" is not a mentally deficient person but a morally deficient one. Paul uses this passage in Romans 3:10-18 to argue that "all have sinned" and can only be "justified by faith" in Jesus Christ. That being true, every non-believer is a fool and every believer is an ex-fool.

1. The fool and his conclusions.

Fools deny God because they want no God. It is not a matter of intellectual conviction but of moral corruption.

Concluding that, they are incapable of doing good and versatile in doing evil. They eat bread, but forget that "man does not live by bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord" (Deut. 8:3). They feed their bodies and starve their souls.

The acme of their folly is a practical atheism. They "do not call on the Lord," but order their lives by their own lusts, producing a harvest of "vile" deeds.

2. The wise and their frustrations.

The wise, the righteous, are those who "seek God," who "call on the Lord," who find their resources for right living in his words.

They enjoy the presence of God. "God is present in the company of the righteous." He is a refuge for "the poor" from evildoers who "frustrate" their plans. In a society where masses live with no thought of God, those who would serve him must expect opposition and frustration. But God is the constant refuge of all who trust in him.

The wise petition the salvation of fools. The psalm closes with a prayer that deliverance “might come out of Zion,” leading to Israel’s gladness. The proper response of ex-fools is not to condemn the fools about them but to seek their conversion to the Lord.

Salvation has indeed come out of Zion. The ultimate wisdom of God is Jesus Christ, crucified and resurrected with power to save all who call upon his name (1 Cor. 1:20-31). He is a fool who rejects Christ, whatever his intellectual competence in his career field. He is wise who accepts Christ as the forgiver of his sins and the shaper of his life.

Keep the “ex” in front of “fool.”

15. WORTHY TO WORSHIP

Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary?” (Psalm 15:1).

“Sanctuary” is translated “tent” or “tabernacle” in other English versions of the Psalms. The reference is to God’s dwelling place on earth in the midst of His people.

1. A crucial question.

We were created for fellowship with God. Who, then, is qualified to enter his presence in worship? God is holy. Is he not therefore unapproachable? Would not his presence mean our deaths?

2. A challenging answer.

Ten qualifications are stated. They do not concern rituals but morals. Five of them are positively stated, five are negatively stated.

The positive conditions: (1) walk blamelessly; (2) act righteously; (3) speak truthfully; (4) despise the vile, honor the God-fearing; (5) keep your word even when it proves costly.

The negative conditions: (1) do not slander; (2) do no evil to your neighbor; (3) do not share damaging gossip; (4) do not charge interest on money loaned; (5) do not accept money in payment for lies.

These conditions for entering the presence of God as a worshiper stress our relationships to other people. We cannot be right with God and wrong with people.

If we ask the crucial question the answer given should impel us to search our hearts, confess our sins and implore God’s pardon.

3. A comforting promise.

The one who so lives, the psalmist declares, “will never be shaken.” This implies that such living is possible, but it is possible only by grace, not by nature. Our sins must be forgiven, our hearts must be cleansed, and our inner condition and outer conduct must be empowered by the Holy Spirit before we can achieve such “golden rule” living.

Who has always lived like this? Only Jesus! That is why worshipers in ancient Israel brought animal sacrifices to the place of worship. That is why we can worship comfortably and joyfully only in the name of Jesus Christ. Our acceptance with God requires a mediator. Thank God, we have one, the only one.

16. A SUFFICIENT REFUGE

Keep me safe, O God, for in you I take refuge (Psalm 16:1).

This psalm is the work of an individual in community, probably David, as the editorial caption suggests.

1. A crisis.

A crisis is implied in verse 1--“refuge.” Only the threatened need a refuge. The crisis is stated in verse 10—“the grave.” His crisis most likely was a near-death experience.

2. A contrast.

The speaker of verse 2 and 3 was a syncretist. He “hedged his bet” by serving both the Lord and pagan gods (“saints” and “glorious ones” are used of heathen gods).

In contrast, the psalmist refuses to even name these false gods (cf. Hos. 2:17). His God is “the Lord” (vv. 2, 4).

3. A confidence.

The psalmist’s one God is enough. The Lord is sufficient (1) to secure him (vv. 5, 6, 8) and (2) to direct him (v. 7). Increasing gods would only serve to increase sorrows (v. 4).

4. A consequence.

Secure in his God, the psalmist has a glad heart (vv. 6, 9) and a happy life (v. 11). Not an easy life (v. 8) but a joyful one.

The church saw in Jesus Christ the full meaning of verses 8-11 (Acts 2:25-31; 13:35). In Christ, the “boundaries” are now enlarged, the blessings are now increased.

17. A PRAYER FOR PROTECTION

Keep me as the apple of your eye... (Psalm 17:8).

A good man in a bad fix cries for protection. Does that resonate with your experience? If not, it soon will.

1. His prayer.

It is urgent, almost desperate, arising from his feelings: “Hear...listen...Give ear...” (v. 1).

But it is also confident, arising from his faith: “I call on you, O God, for you will answer” (v. 6). Hearing and helping are God’s nature and covenant promise.

2. His protest.

He asserts his innocence: “Though you probe my heart...you will find nothing” (v. 3). His trouble is not a judgment on him for his sins.

He identifies his source of strength: “...by the word of your lips I have kept myself from the ways of the violent...” (v. 4).

3. His protection.

He seeks divine protection: “...your great love... your right hand...” The prayer reflects the “Song of the Sea” in Exodus 15:6, 12-13. This is a “You have done it before, now do it again” sort of prayer.

“Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings...” (v. 8). In contrast to violent opposition from men, he wants tender loving care from God (cf. Deut. 32:10; Zech. 2:8).

5. His prospects.

He expects to “be satisfied” with material and spiritual blessings. The ultimate satisfaction is the “face” of God (v. 15), a metaphor for God’s presence.

The prospects are both communal--“those you cherish...” (v. 14) and individual--“I will see your face...” (v. 15).

From the N. T. perspective, the prospect looks beyond death. We shall see the king in his beauty, and dwell with him in peace and joy forever.

18. THE WARRIOR GOD

The Lord thundered from heaven.... He shot his arrows and scattered the enemies.... He rescued me... (Psalm 18:13, 14, 17).

This lengthy psalm extols the Lord as the God of battles and victories, fought by and with and through his anointed king and loyal people.

1. An intimate relationship.

The psalm strikes an intimate note in the first verse: “I love you, O Lord.” This Lord is then described in metaphors drawn from a warrior’s weaponry and a battle’s arena (v. 2). The love of the psalmist-king is grounded upon divine help received in answer to prayer (vv. 3-6).

2. A dramatic deliverance.

The Lord who came to deliver his servant is described in vivid poetic imagery. He is accompanied by a thunderstorm. His presence shakes earth and sea. He routs the enemies and rescues the psalmist, delighting in him because he has “not done evil by turning from [his] God” (vv. 7-20).

The Lord isn’t playing favorites. The psalmist extols the goodness of God to all those faithful to his covenant (20-31). God helps the pure, the humble and the faithful, enabling them to conquer when assaulted by powerful enemies.

This warrior God arms, trains, sustains and crowns with success his warrior king (vv. 32-45). The victorious king describes his battle prowess and the crushing defeat he inflicted upon those against whom he fought, boasting not in himself but in the Lord, mingling “I” with “You” in his song of triumph.

3. An ecstatic celebration.

The psalm closes in jubilant praise to the living Lord, who avenges his servant and subdues his enemies, showing “unfailing kindness to his anointed, to David and his descendants forever” (vv. 46-50). He is the rock on which the king is founded, the savior by whom the king is rescued. He gives “great victories” and elicits great praise.

This warrior God is the God who delivered his anointed Son from death, has enthroned him as Lord over heaven and earth, and through him rescues us from sin and death and hell forever. We owe him endless praise.

19. GOD'S GLORY REVEALED

The heavens declare the glory of God... (Psalm 19:1).

Two things are before us in this psalm--revelation and response.

1. The divine revelation (vv. 1-11).

There is a revelation from the skies (v. 1). It is continuous (v. 2). It is non-verbal (vv. 3-4, margin). It is universal (vv. 4, 6).

There is a revelation in the scriptures (v. 7). It involves a change of names (vv. 1, 7-9). It includes a variety of terms and effects (vv. 7-8). It has a value beyond comparison (vv. 10-11).

2. The human response (vv. 12-14).

The revelation of God engenders humility in mankind (v. 12).

The revelation of God inspired prayer (vv. 12-14). The psalmist prays to be pardoned, to be protected and to be pleasing.

The psalm is labeled editorially, "A Psalm of David." The contents make it a psalm for everyone.

20. REJOICING IN THE KING'S VICTORY

We will shout for joy when you are victorious (Psalm 20:5).

Psalm 20 has an “eve of battle” setting. Before taking his troops to war the king visits the temple and prays for guidance and victory. The people respond in the words of this psalm.

1. An “amen” to the king’s prayer (vv. 1-5).

The words addressed to the king indicate the contents of his prayer. He has petitioned God for (1) safety: “May the name of the God of Jacob protect you;” for (2) support: “May he send you help from the sanctuary and grant you support from Zion;” and for (3) success: “May he...make all your plans succeed.”

The people’s lives are bound up in the fortunes (and in the misfortunes) of the king. He prays and fights as their representative. This obliges them to cooperate in his administration of the nation’s life.

2. An affirmation of the king’s victory (vv. 6-10).

An individual speaks: “I know that the Lord saves his anointed...” This is the only “I” in the psalm; elsewhere it is “we.” This likely refers to a priest or prophet who speaks for God in assuring the king of victory.

The ground of confidence is asserted: “...we trust in the name of the Lord our God.” Notice the three references to the divine name: vv. 1, 5, 7. God’s name is shorthand for all he is and does, for his nature and the action that flows from it.

Future victory is affirmed as though already achieved: “They are brought to their knees and fall, but we rise up and stand.” What God wills and promises is that certain to transpire.

The psalm closes with a prayer of the people. “May the Lord answer you...” becomes “O Lord....Answer us...!” An “amen” to another’s prayer is no substitute for our own praying.

21. GOD'S MERCIES PRAISED

He asked you for life, and you gave it to him (Psalm 21:4).

This is another of the so-called royal psalms. It was spoken by a priest or a prophet or the people. It contains three distinct portions.

1. Past victories are recounted (vv. 1-6).

God is praised for his mercies to the king, presumably in battle situations, an inevitable part of royal life (v. 1).

(1) God answered prayer (vv. 2, 4). The king was spared from death in battle. (2) God rewarded service (v. 3, 5). The king was crowned as a victor over enemies. (3) God created joy (vv. 1, 6). The king was gladdened by military victories and the divine presence.

2. Present faith is expressed (v. 7).

(1) The King trusts in the Lord. Past victories ground present faith. (2) The King trusts in his love. Love's power is the believer's security.

3. Future victories are anticipated (vv. 8-12).

Battles will recur, but the God who gave victory before will do so again; his love and might are constant. (1) God's power is exalted (vv. 8). The "right hand" symbol is frequent in Scripture. (2) God's anger is affirmed (vv. 9-10). Scripture, unlike the church, is not silent about divine wrath. (3) God's triumph is assured (vv. 11-12). The schemes of his enemies will fail and their armies will retreat.

The psalm ends on a note of congregational song and praise, a fitting way to close any service of worship.

22. FROM GRIEF TO GLORY

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? (Psalm 22:1).

The psalm is personal, liturgical and messianic.

1. A long lament (vv. 1-18).

The psalmist feels forsaken by God (v. 1); scorned by people (v. 6); encircled by “dogs” (v. 16) and ridiculed by onlookers (v. 17).

His utter loneliness, despair and misery are compressed into the single statement, “There is no one to help” (v. 11). The only thing close to him is “trouble.” Have you been there?

2. A short prayer (vv. 19-21).

Two words sum it up, “come” and “deliver.” He wants the Lord’s presence as a power for rescue. Calling the Lord “my Strength” is a way of confessing his own weakness (v. 19).

He wants help “quickly,” for he is almost gone. He is under attack by men as strong and savage as wild beasts (vv. 20, 21).

His help will come through prayer. Have you been there and done that?

3. A broad praise (vv. 22-31).

The psalmist expects prayer to be heard and answered. His plea will turn to praise. Here is faith in the midst of deepest trial.

He will praise the Lord (v. 22, 25). Israel will praise the Lord (v. 23). The nations will praise the Lord (vv. 27, 28). Future generations will praise the Lord (vv. 30, 31). Grief turns to glory in a widening circle of praise.

Will you be there and do that?

23. CONFIDENCE AND CONSEQUENCE

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want... (Psalm 23:1).

This psalm expresses trust. It is intensely personal but also communal, for each sheep is part of a flock.

1. The sheep following (vv. 1-4).

An ancient metaphor: “shepherd.” Cf. Genesis 49:24.

A personal confession: “my shepherd.”

A confident assertion: “I shall not be in want.”

An extensive provision: (vv. 2-4). The Shepherd “leads” the hungry sheep; “restores” the weary sheep; “guides” the uncertain sheep; and “comforts” the threatened sheep.

An adequate ground: “for his name’s sake” (cf. Psalm 106:8).

As a consequence of the shepherd’s care there is no lack, no fear. The psalm has undertones of God’s delivering and sustaining grace in the Exodus and the Wilderness Journey.

2. The sheep feasting (vv. 5-6).

In the present: “You prepare a table...” (cf. Psalm 78:19).

In the future: “I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

We feast now in settings of conflict (“the presence of my enemies”), but we shall banquet together in perfect peace in heaven.

This beautiful psalm is not quoted in the New Testament, but its meaning, application, and effect are enhanced by Jesus’ words, “I am the good shepherd...” (John 10:11, 14, 27-30).

24. THE KING OF GLORY

Who is this King of glory? (Psalm 24:8).

Many scholars view this psalm as “entrance liturgy” used at the coronation of a king and at annual celebrations of his accession to the throne of David. Christians have long viewed it through New Testament lenses as a psalm fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

1. The “King of glory” is the almighty creator (vv. 1-2).

The Lord is first of all named as the maker and founder of the world.

What he founded he sustains: “he founded it...and established it...”

What he produced he possesses: “The earth is the Lord’s...everything in it...all who live in it.”

2. The “King of glory” is the gracious redeemer (vv. 3-6).

If God is creator, logically we are worshipers. We come to “his holy place” to adore him.

Since God is holy, worship is conditioned upon morality. “Clean hands and a pure heart” qualify us to enter his presence.

Because all have sinned, morality is the issue of divine grace. Thus God is “the Savior” of “Jacob.” He prepares us for communion with himself by forgiving our sins and cleansing our hearts.

3. The “King of glory” is the victorious warrior (vv. 7-10).

“The Lord mighty in battle” is the King of glory.

His victorious return from battle, symbolized in the return of the ark to the temple, is hymned with joy.

His dwelling is in and with his people, for he is pictured as coming with the worshipers to the temple, not waiting there to meet them.

This portion of the psalm brings to our minds the ascension of the resurrected Christ who conquered sin, death and hell.

Let us open the gates of our hearts to admit the King of glory.

25. PRAYER AND TRUST

...you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you... (Psalm 25:5).

This is an acrostic psalm. Each section begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The psalm is composed of petitions for help interspersed with expressions of trust.

1. The psalmist prays for divine action (vv. 1-3).

He worships (“I lift up my soul”) and waits for God to act, to speak and to deliver. Divine response cannot be coerced. The initiative always remains with God. But the psalmist expects God to act for he is faithful to his covenant.

2. The psalmist prays for divine instruction (vv. 4-15).

He pleads “Show me...teach me...guide me...” He has chosen the way of the Lord, and he seeks instruction and empowerment to pursue that way onward.

His trust is based upon the prior mercies of God (vv. 6, 10).

He has failed at times in this chosen way. His barriers to progress are both outward (“my enemies”) and inward (“my iniquity”). Therefore, he seeks pardon, asking the Lord to “remember” the sinner but not the sins.

3. The psalmist prays for divine protection (vv. 16-21).

He is “lonely” and “afflicted.” His “troubles” have multiplied and his enemies have “increased.”

However, his “refuge” is the Lord. He prays that God, who is his savior will “free,” “guard,” “rescue” and “protect” him. And once again he prays that all his sins might be “taken away.”

His “hope” is in the God who is “gracious,” not in any merit of his own--though he does insist that his repentance, prayer and hope are matters of “integrity and uprightness.” He is not sinless but he is sincere.

The last verse is a postscript added to the psalm that makes the petitions and affirmations communal as well as personal. “I” becomes “Israel” and “my” becomes “their.”

26. ENTRANCE EXAM

Test me, O Lord, and try me, examine my heart and mind

(Psalm 26:2).

This psalm expresses a desire for admission to the worship services of the temple. It combines and repeats the themes of prayer, integrity and trust.

1. A petition for testing.

“Vindicate me, O Lord...” (v. 1). “Test me, O Lord...” (v. 2).

The prayer is likely a response to priestly challenges at the temple entrance (cf. 15:1; 24:3).

The psalmist dares to pray for judgment because he knows that God is love (v. 3), love that forgives and cleanses and enables.

“Test me....redeem me....” (vv. 2, 11). The connection is vital.

The language of verse 2 is drawn from metallurgy.

2. A declaration of innocence.

“I have led a blameless life... (v. 1). “I walk continually in your truth...” (v. 3).

He asserts his moral integrity. He is blameless (not sinless, not faultless), and he is blameless by grace, not by nature: “I walk....I wash...”

His rituals have become realities, evidenced positively by his obedience to God, and negatively by his avoidance of evil persons (vv. 3-8).

3. An expression of confidence.

“I have trusted in the Lord...” (v. 1).

He is confident of acceptance as a worshiper, of admission to the Lord's house (v. 8). This confidence is grounded on God, not on his own prayers or his own integrity.

He stands on "level ground," not on the slippery slopes of sin. God has made him different from "sinners" in character and behavior, and he expects a difference in destiny (vv. 9-11; cf. 23:1).

Consider what he affirms about God: "your love," "your truth," "your altar," "your praise," "your glory." That makes clear and rational what he affirms about himself: "I walk," "I wash," "I love," "I praise." When who we are and what we do is grounded upon who God is and what God does, we are indeed bound for glory.

27. AN ANTIDOTE TO FEAR

I will be confident...I am still confident... (Psalm 27:3, 13).

This psalm is, above all else, an affirmation of confidence in the prayer-hearing, people-helping God. That makes it a psalm for us.

1. The psalmist is confident of being helped. Are we?

His reasons for fear are compelling: “evil men,” “enemies,” “war” (vv. 2, 3).

His refuge from fear is adequate: “the Lord” as “salvation” and as “stronghold” (vv. 1, 4-6).

He looks to the Lord’s house as a place of (1) safety: “He will keep me safe in his dwelling...;” (2) sacrifice: “at his tabernacle will I sacrifice...;” (3) shouting and singing: “with shouts of joy;” “I will sing and make music...”

Do we find our fears displaced by joy as he did?

2. The psalmist is confident of being heard. Are we?

He prays for acceptance: “Do not reject me or forsake me...” (v. 9). He prays for guidance: “Teach me your way, O Lord...” (v. 11). He prays for deliverance: “Do not turn me over to...my foes...” (v. 12).

(1) He experienced past mercies: “you have been my helper...” (2) He expected future mercies: “I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.”

Do past victories anchor your confidence for future triumphs?

The closing words are for us when we are under attack: “Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.” Our God will hear and help. There is much in life to cause fear. There is more in God to inspire trust.

8. PRAYER AND PRAISE, THE RHYTHMS OF LIFE

To you I call, O Lord....Praise be to the Lord... (Psalm 28:1, 6).

This psalm alternates prayer and praise. That the Lord is a “rock” (v. 1) assumes his power--he can help. That he is a “shepherd” (v. 9) assures his care--he will help.

1. The praying worshiper: “Hear my cry for mercy as I call to you for help” (v. 2).

His desperation: “For if you remain silent I will be like those who have gone down the pit” (v. 1). Apart from God he is a goner. He does not wish to share the fate of “the wicked” who have violated God’s covenant. Note the contrast: “what their hands have done” (v. 4); “what his hands have done” (v. 5).

His direction: “I lift up my hands toward your Most Holy Place” (v. 2). God’s people prayed toward the temple, for it was the symbol of God’s presence. Lifted hands speak of both supplication and expectation.

2. The praising worshiper: “Praise be to the Lord, for he has heard my cry for mercy” (v. 6).

His praise was from a trusting heart: “...my heart trusts in him, and I am helped” (v. 7). He trusted the Lord as his “strength,” his “salvation” and his “shepherd” (vv. 7, 8, 9).

His praise was from a thankful heart: “My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song” (v. 7). The glad heart is a grateful heart; the grateful heart is a glad heart. It can sing in storms.

Verses 8 and 9 conclude the psalm with affirmation of the Lord's love and power and fidelity. These supply the grounds of prayer and praise. And they are "forever".

29. MIGHTIER THAN THE MIGHTY

...the Lord is enthroned as King forever (Psalm 29:10).

Psalm 29 is one of the earliest in the Psalter, and difficult to translate and to interpret. It celebrates the God of Israel--in contrast to pagan gods--as the Lord of nature and the Lord of history.

1. A call to worship (vv. 1-2).

The addressees are “mighty ones,” literally “sons of God.” A heavenly court seems to be in view, probably a retinue of angels.

The ascriptions are “glory and strength.” The language of the psalm reflects the victory songs of ancient Israel (cf. Exodus 15:1-18 and Judges 5:4-5, 19-21).

2. A cause for worship (vv. 3-9).

The “voice of the Lord” is celebrated as mightier than the natural forces associated with power: chaos (“the mighty waters”); forests (“the cedars of Lebanon”); mountains “Sirion”); and storms (“thunder” and “lightning”).

These natural forces were associated with pagan gods in ancient mythology. The psalmist places them under God’s control, thus taunting the weakness of those foreign gods.

3. A consequence of worship (vv. 10-11).

God, recognized and honored as “King forever,” gives his people “strength” (the ability to conquer) and blesses them with “peace” (the fruit of conquest). He who is celebrated in heaven is the one who rules on earth.

The ancient hymn reminds the modern church that all the threatening forces before which men tremble are under God’s control. We can exhale in the scariest situations we face.

30. LIFTED INTO LIFE

I will exalt you, O Lord, for you lifted me out of the depths...

(Psalm 30:1).

This psalm recounts a personal testimony that became useful in Israel's communal worship. For obvious reasons it was used at the dedication of God's house and at Israel's annual celebrations of Hanukah.

1. The theme (vv. 1-3).

The whole psalm is summed up in the opening words. God is praised for delivering the psalmist from a near-death illness.

The psalmist prayed and was lifted up. Now God is lifted up in praise.

2. The invitation (vv. 4-5).

The psalmist invites others--"you saints of his"--to praise the Lord with him. He reminds them that God's response to sin is "anger," and the consequent judgment upon sin brings "weeping."

God's response to repentance and prayer is "favor," and the consequent deliverance brings rejoicing.

3. The experience detailed (vv. 6-12).

To fully share his joy the saints must know exactly what occasions it.

The Lord bestowed His favor, and the psalmist allowed it to make him arrogant, self-confident, and presumptive—"I will never be shaken."

The Lord withheld His favor--"you hid your face"--and the psalmist became desperately ill. From near-death the psalmist "cried

for mercy.” He is willing now to praise the Lord, all self-boasting excluded, but he won’t be able to do that from the grave.

The Lord restored his favor. He turned the psalmist’s “wailing into dancing” by a miracle of healing. Now it’s praise time.

The psalmist has learned his lesson. His folly will not be repeated. He will trust in God, not in the favors granted, and his gratitude will be perpetual: “I will give you thanks forever.”

Lessons for us: God’s favor is life, his disfavor is death. Some illness results from sin, and sin always brings judgment. God honors penitence and prayer with forgiveness and deliverance. Answered prayer calls for constant praise.

31. IN GOOD HANDS

My times are in your hands... (Psalm 31:15).

This psalm is special to Christians because Jesus quoted from it as he died on the cross, his body broken, but his faith intact (v. 5).

1. The psalmist lamented his troubles (vv. 1-13).

He was assailed by enemies. They were idolaters (v. 6), who set a trap for him (v. 4); plotted to kill him (v. 13), and reduced him to an object of contempt (v. 11).

He was afflicted by illness. Unspecified, it caused weakness (v. 10), grief (v. 9), pain (v. 10), and threatened to become fatal.

He was abandoned by friends. They fled from him (v. 11) and forgot him (v. 12) when he needed most their sympathy and help.

2. The psalmist affirmed his trust (vv. 6, 14-18).

His trust was in God as his “refuge” and “rescue” (vv. 1-5).

He was in God’s “hands,” not in the grip of some impersonal fate (v. 15). He was comforted by God’s “face,” not by help from other sources (v. 16). God’s “unfailing love” would save him from unloving failures.

3. The psalmist celebrates his triumph (vv. 19-24).

He praises God as a storehouse (v. 19). The divine “goodness” was his resource for deliverance and sustenance.

He praises God as a shelter (v. 20). The divine “presence” was his refuge from schemes and charges of wicked men.

He panicked, he prayed, and he was preserved, for which he offers praise (vv. 21, 22). He broadened the celebration by calling on “all his saints” to “love the Lord” and to “hope in the Lord” (v. 23, 24).

32. THE BLESSED FORGIVEN

Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven... (Psalm 32:1).

Three elements stand out in this psalm--beatitude, testimony and promise.

1. Beatitude (vv. 1-2).

“Blessed is the man” belongs to the “wisdom” category of biblical literature. The phrases “blessed is” and “blessed are” occur 40 times in the Old Testament, more often in Psalms than in any other book.

Three of the psalms contain “blessed is the man” in their opening statements (1, 32, 112). This and similar beatitudes occur 18 times in the Psalter.

Here the blessedness of the forgiven sinner is extolled.

2. Testimony (vv. 3-7).

The psalmist gives his personal testimony as one who has found this blessedness.

There is a progression in his experience that can be summed up like this: (1) Transgression--“my transgressions...” (2) Repression--“When I kept silent my bones wasted away...” (3) Confession--“I acknowledged my sin to you...” (4) Remission--“you forgave the guilt of my sin...” (5) Exhortation--“let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found...”

3 Promise (vv. 8-10).

At this point someone, perhaps a priest or prophet, speaks for God, assuring the forgiven that God’s saving work continues beyond the point of forgiveness. Two promises are given: (1) Instruction--“I

will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go...” (2)
protection--“I will counsel you and watch over you...”

The forgiven are to remain teachable and obedient, not rebelling like fractious animals but trusting the Lord who guides them. Such trusting persons are “surrounded” by “unfailing love” and “surrounded” with “songs of deliverance.” That’s great company!

The concluding verse, likely added when the psalm became a part of temple worship, calls upon the forgiven and guided “righteous” to be glad and to sing. The Lord’s pardon issues in our praise.

33. LORD OF NATURE, LORD OF HISTORY

Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous... (Psalm 33:1).

Psalm 33 is another of the acrostic psalms, which makes the organization of its contents a bit difficult. It is a psalm which calls upon the people to praise the Lord who is revealed in His works (vv. 1-3). New experiences of grace call for “new” songs of joy.

1. The Lord is praised as nature’s creator (vv. 4-9).

Here “the word of the Lord” is a key phrase. The Lord spoke into existence the heavens and the earth, a reflection of Genesis 1.

His works reflect his nature, which is true of all builders; thus “the earth is full of his unfailing love” and of his righteousness.

2. The Lord is praised as history’s controller (vv. 10-21).

Here the phrases “the plans of the Lord” and “the eyes of the Lord” are foundational.

His plans are perfect (vv. 10-12). He often foils human plans, but his purposes are never thwarted.

His perceptions are perfect (vv. 13-15). He sees everyone from the heart out, and knows everything that is done. All motives, all actions are known to him.

His power is perfect (vv. 16-19). No army can defeat him or those who “hope in his unfailing love.” He can deliver from the strongest enemies and preserve in the direst circumstances.

Because he is Lord of nature and history, His people await their deliverance from trouble in hope and trust and joy (vv. 20-21).

The psalm which began with praise closes with prayer (v. 22). The prayer expresses dependence upon and confidence in the Lord.

34. A WISDOM PSALM

I will extol the Lord....I sought the Lord and he delivered me....I will teach you the fear of the Lord... (Psalm 34: 1, 4, 11).

This is another acrostic psalm with several themes, each line “free standing” yet all contents connected.

1. The psalm begins with a resolution (vv. 1-3).

“I will extol the Lord at all times...” The psalmist commits himself to constant praise, and invites others to join him in exalting the divine name.

2. The psalm continues with a testimony (vv. 6-10).

“I sought the Lord and he delivered me from all my fears.”

Three good reasons are given for his resolution:

- (1) God hears and answers prayer (vv. 4-5).
- (2) God delivers and protects his people (vv. 6-8).
- (3) God supplies all his people’s needs (vv. 9-10).

Those who hear the psalm are challenged to experience these truths for themselves: “Taste and see that the Lord is good...”

3. The psalm closes with lessons (vv. 11-22).

“I will teach you the fear of the Lord...” This latter half of the psalm is typical of “wisdom” literature in the Old Testament.

It urges the good life in terms of avoiding wrong and doing right (vv. 11-14).

It utilizes the wisdom motif of contrast between the righteous and the wicked: (1) In their relationship to God (vv. 15-18); (2) In their final destiny (vv. 19-22).

Verse 20 of this psalm is cited in the New Testament with reference to Christ's death (see John 19:34). Verse 8, for obvious reasons, was used by the early church in its Lord's Supper invitations.

The abiding message of the psalm: Serve God and seek peace. Then this life will be good, and the next life will be glorious.

35. FALSELY ACCUSED, FAITHFULLY VINDICATED

Contend, O Lord, with those who contend with me... (Psalm 35:1).

1. The situation behind the psalm (vv. 1-10).

A political crisis has arisen. The king-psalmist of Israel is unjustly accused of a treaty violation. The charge against him will become an excuse for war against Israel. He protests his innocence, and calls upon God to be his advocate in court and his vindicator in battle. He prays for the ruin of those who plot his ruin. Then he will “rejoice in the Lord and delight in his salvation.”

2. The treachery of friends turned enemies (vv. 11-21).

The king-psalmist’s enemies were once friends and brothers--treaty partners. When treaty partners had been sick, the king fasted, sorrowed and prayed for them. Now his good is being repaid with evil. False charges, lying witnesses and savage slanders mount against him and make war apparently inevitable. They hate him without reason and oppose him without cause, falsely claiming to have been eye-witnesses to treacherous conduct on his part. Let the Lord rescue him and he will praise the Lord “among throngs of people,” probably a reference to assembled worshipers.

3. The prayer for defense and vindication (vv. 22-27).

The grieving king petitions the Lord to draw near, speak out in his defense, and vindicate him as a righteous judgment upon those cruel and deceitful enemies. He wishes them to be “clothed with shame and disgrace” who have armed themselves for conflict. Then his own people, who delight in his well-being, will “shout for joy and gladness.” The Lord has been witness to the treaty made and kept

by the king, and now is sought as the executor of the curses written into the treaty against those who violate its terms. The king is not thirsting for personal vengeance but for legal justice.

As a consequence of divine intervention, the king-psalmist pledges to speak of the Lord's righteousness and praises "all day long" (v. 28). Prayer answered leads to praise given.

Who of us will be involved in an international political crisis? However, this psalm can teach us to let the Lord handle those who mishandle us, to resort to prayer when relationships break down, and to honor with praise the Lord who rescues us when we pray.

36. THE ULTIMATE CONTRAST

Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies (Psalm 36:5).

Wisdom literature usually contrasts wicked and righteous people. In this psalm the contrast is between wicked people and the loving, faithful God.

1. The loveless wicked man (vv. 1-4).

He has no fear of God.

He has no sense of sin. He is too blinded by self-adulation “to detect or hate his sin.”

He has no concern for others. His deceitful words and deeds are designed to exploit others for his own advantage.

His sin is an obsession without respite. He does wrong by day and plots more wrong by night; “Even on his bed he plots evil; he commits himself to a sinful course.”

2. The loving faithful God (vv. 5-12).

His love exceeds all measure. The psalmist ransacks nature for the strongest metaphors to describe its vastness--“the heavens,” “the mighty mountains,” “the great deep.”

His love embraces all creatures. It extends to “both man and beast,” and to “both high and low among men.” In its source--“fountain”--and in its flow--“river”--it reaches all creation. It is “priceless” to, and protective of, all who make it their “refuge.”

His love extends to all time. It is continuing (v. 10), and secures “the upright” against all who seek to destroy him. God’s love means the ultimate overthrow of all evil. Evildoers will “lie fallen--thrown down, not able to rise!”

The Psalms recognize the reality of evil, but they proclaim the finality of love. The love of our faithful, covenant-keeping God is the force that ultimately determines the course and outcome of history.

37. ALPHABET WISDOM

...there is a future for the man of peace.... The future of the wicked will be cut off... (Psalm 37:37, 38).

Psalm 37 is not a philosophy of good and evil or of good versus evil. It summons us to do good and avoid evil. Its burden is practice, not theory.

1. Unless you can read Hebrew you cannot fully appreciate this psalm.

It is an acrostic psalm, containing 22 sections, each beginning with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The scheme disappears in English translations. Each section is a rather self-contained proverb, and the psalm reads like a page out of the book of Proverbs. The Hebrew teachers passed on these nuggets of truth to their pupils. By listing them in alphabetical order they were easier to memorize and recall.

2. The psalm is a classical sample of the “wisdom” teaching of Scripture, a short manual on living to please God.

It distinguishes the righteous from the wicked in both character and destiny. Each may or may not prosper in the short term, but the righteous have a future and the wicked do not. The wicked are not to be envied or emulated. The Lord will cut them off without hope or heritage. In contrast, the righteous will be objects of his love and recipients of His mercy in all generations.

3. The prosperity and pleasure of the wicked are for “a little while,” but the inheritance of the righteous “will endure forever.”

“Better the little that the righteous have,” therefore, “than the wealth of many wicked.” Appearances to the contrary, the Lord does

not favor the wicked though they prosper, nor does he forsake the righteous though they suffer. “The Lord laughs at the wicked, for he knows their day is coming.” “The Lord loves the just and will not forsake his faithful ones.” In the face of life’s obvious inequities our duty, simply stated, is to “Turn from evil and do good,” and to “Trust in the Lord and do good,”

The format of the psalm may seem artificial, but the content is relevant. We are prone to envy the wealthy and powerful wicked today, forgetting their date with destiny. We need to define authentic life in terms of God’s word and will, and to find our joy in serving human need, not in gratifying human greed. “The man who does the will of God lives forever” (1 John 2:17).

38. A 911 CALL

Come quickly to help me, O Lord my Savior (Psalm 38:22).

This is the cry of a man desperately and painfully sick, whose only hope is God. The psalm opens and closes with prayer. In between it details the physical, mental and social afflictions that constitute the victim's burden.

1. The cause that explained his illness.

The psalmist attributes his sickness to his sin, and to the righteous judgment of God upon that sin. "I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin" (v. 18). "Because of your wrath there is no health in my body" (v. 3).

Sin does not always bring sickness and sickness does not always result from sin. Other psalms are prayers for healing where no guilt is mentioned. But in this case, the sufferer is convinced that sickness is judgment upon sin.

2. The consequences that worsened his illness.

His sickness has resulted in alienation from God. While his "sighing is not hidden from [God]" (v. 9), God seems hidden to him. Hence he prays, "O Lord, do not forsake me...Come quickly to help me..." (vv. 21, 22).

His sickness has also resulted in alienation from friends. "My friends and companions avoid me because of my wounds; my neighbors stay far away" (v. 11). The sight and smell of his wounds may have repulsed them. Fear of contagion may have repulsed them.

While family and friends are repulsed, enemies are attracted. They close in like hyenas on dying prey, seeking his life and plotting

his ruin (v. 12). He refuses debate with them, but the knowledge of their hatred adds to his misery.

3. The confidence that defied his illness.

Whatever the cause or consequence of his illness, he prays and believes that God will hear and can heal. He will not talk to men, but he does talk to God. He cannot trust in men, but he does trust in God. His pleas are based upon a personal relationship--he can say "my God" and "my Savior." No situation is hopeless when that bond has been forged which neither sin nor sickness can break.

The psalm reads like a 911 call. From "a burden too heavy to bear" rises a prayer too desperate to silence. There are times when such praying is all we can do. "I wait for you, O Lord; you will answer, O Lord my God" (v. 15).

39. LEARNING A HARD LESSON

But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you

(Psalm 39:7).

Psalm 39 speaks powerfully to all who are tempted to doubt God because of the loss of goods or of health.

1. An impossible resolution (vv. 1-3).

“I will put a muzzle on my mouth...” Reverses of fortune and inequities of life caused the afflicted psalmist to doubt. He resolved to say nothing, lest his words should displease God and delight the wicked. However, his anger intensified until he found silence impossible.

2. A sobering realization (vv. 4-7).

“You have made my days a mere handbreath...” At its longest, life is short and “fleeting,” a mere “breath.” Its meaning cannot lie in material goods and physical health. Things do not satisfy, for we lose them or leave them (vv. 4-6). What all should seek, therefore, is God and not his gifts (v. 7).

3. An earnest petition (vv. 8-13).

“Hear my prayer, O Lord...” If God is the ultimate meaning and goal of human life, then our relationship to him is of highest importance. He prays, therefore, to be saved from his sins (vv. 8-9).

Since God had afflicted him in order to teach him this lesson, only God can lift the chastening rod and restore his heart to gladness. He prays for renewed favor with God (vv. 10-13), that he might live and die in peace and joy.

The petition in verse 13 implies that the psalmist was an old man. The “reality check” which he experienced is important to all of us, whatever our ages. Have we really learned this lesson? Do we really believe that God is our chief good and ultimate goal?

40. TRUST, TRIUMPH, TESTIMONY

Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust... (Psalm 40:4).

Like many other psalms, this one blends both personal and communal notes. Scholars regard it as “royal liturgy,” spoken by the king on behalf of himself and his subjects.

1. A rescue (vv. 1-5).

The psalmist was “lifted out” of menacing circumstances. He describes them as a “slimy pit.”

He was lifted out by looking up in prayer and trust to God, in contrast to those who look to false gods.

The rescue inspired celebration, which took the form of a “new song” of praise to God.

The rescue defied enumeration. God had wrought so many “wonders” that they could not be counted or recounted.

2. A response (vv. 6-10).

The appropriate response to God’s mercy goes beyond ritual offerings to personal obedience. “Burnt offerings and sins offerings” give place to heart-deep allegiance to the will of God. The New Testament uses this passage to proclaim the saving obedience of Christ (Heb. 10:5-14).

The response issues, not in private religion, but in public witness. The psalmist does not “hide” God’s righteousness in his heart, but proclaims it with his lips to “the great congregation.”

3. A request (vv. 11-17).

Past mercies do not suffice for present needs. He prays in the face of a new crisis for God to deliver him. Past sins and present

enemies combine to menace him and others. The only hope of rescue lies in God.

Help is needed in a hurry. In contrast to the patient waiting of verse one, he now sends out an SOS: “Come quickly to help me....do not delay.” Been there! Done that!

“Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust.” Such a man can say both “our God” and “my God.” He is one with the Lord and with the Lord’s people. And that is equally true of women.

41. A SICK MAN'S PRAYER

O Lord, have mercy on me; heal me, for I have sinned against you (Psalm 41:4).

This psalm is best understood as the prayer of sick man who seeks help through a ritual of healing at the house of worship.

1. The qualification for divine help (vv. 1-3).

Probably these words were spoken by a priest, describing the kind of person who may expect help from the divine healer.

The one who has helped others may expect God to help him (v. 1).

The Lord's help includes protection from enemies and personal care in times of illness (vv. 2-3). Verse 3 accents the compassion of the Lord--he nurses the sick back to health.

2. The petition for divine help (vv. 4-10).

The psalmist prays for both physical and spiritual healing. Evidently he attributed his illness to his sins, either as a natural consequence or as a divine judgment (v. 4).

His situation has been worsened by malicious enemies who gloat over his misery and anticipate his death, though they pretend real concern on visits to his sickbed. Even a close friend has become his enemy, greatly enhancing his suffering (vv. 5-9).

His prays for mercy that he may inflict justice (v. 10).

3. The reaction to divine help (vv. 11-13).

The psalmist is confident of having received a positive answer to his prayers. He is assured of divine favor which heals, forgives and vindicates him. Best of all is the confidence that he will live in

the Lord's presence "forever." All physical healing is temporary, but spiritual healing can be permanent.

The praise exhorted in verse 13 is an appropriate reaction to mercy received.

Scholars think the last verse (13) was added to the psalm because this psalm closes the first section (book) into which Israel had divided the whole collection of psalms.

42. THIRSTY, TROUBLED, TRUSTING

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God (Psalm 42:2).

The psalm is classified as an individual lament.

Three words sum the content of the psalm.

1. Thirst.

The psalmist thirsts for God as a deer pursued through desert country would thirst for water (v. 1). One could scarcely thirst for an idol; only the “living God” could provoke such desire (v. 2). One would not thirst for that which he had not before experienced. The “panting” soul of the Psalmist, therefore, evokes memories of better days when he led processions of joyful worshipers to the house of God (v. 4, 6). The thirst attests the satisfying depth of his prior experience.

2. Trouble.

The psalmist was experiencing the absence of God. His enemies taunt: “Where is your God?” (vv. 3, 10). His own soul cries, “Why have you forgotten me?” (v. 10). He is swept by chaotic waters of some unspecified suffering (v. 7). As a result of this misery he is mourning (v. 9); his tears are the only water he finds now (v. 3). He is “downcast” and “disturbed” within who once knew “shouts of joy” (v. 5, 11).

3. Trust.

The memories which he summoned to relieve his misery only accentuated it. “The good old days” cannot redeem the situation. But he does not allow himself to despair totally. He orders his soul to remember, trust, and praise God (vv. 5, 6, 11). He remains confident of God’s love (v. 8), and still names God as his “Rock.” Eventually,

he trusts, deliverance will come. “I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.” No man or woman who possesses such determined faith will be defeated.

He is “the God of my life” (v. 8), not of its good times only, but of the whole life. Therefore, the final word in life cannot be lament, but only praise.

No “teacher” needs to tell you that this psalm is applicable to your life. You have “been there and done that.” You may even be there, doing that. Here are the psalm’s best words for you: “Put your hope in God.”

43. THE WAY OUT OF TROUBLE

Vindicate me, O God...rescue me...guide me... (Psalm 43:1, 3).

Psalm 43 is closely linked to the preceding one, as the refrain in verse 5 indicates.

1. An old situation (v. 2).

The lament of psalm 42 continues. The psalmist is still depressed, still oppressed. His enemies are present but God seems absent. His soul still cries “Why?” to the silent heavens. However, a change is taking place.

2. A new strategy (vv. 1, 3, 4, 6).

In Psalm 42 he spoke to his soul; now he speaks to his God.

Where memory fails prayer prevails. Recalling better days did not bring deliverance. Petitioning God for help will bring victory, for God is the judge who puts things right.

He prays for deliverance: “rescue me.” He cannot save himself. Others cannot save him. God alone is his “hope.”

He prays for direction: “guide me.” Through God’s “light” and “truth” he will be brought again to the temple, the place where prayer is heard and praise is given (1 Kings 8:27-30).

His pledged response to answered prayer is caught up in the phrases “I will go to the altar of God” and “I will praise you with the harp” (v. 4).

The psalm closes with the confident refrain found also in the previous psalm at verses 5 and 11. His “hope” is in his God, not in himself or in others, and he is sure God will come through with deliverance.

44. THAT WAS THEN, THIS IS NOW

Our fathers have told us what you did in their days.... Rise up and help us (Psalm 44:1, 26).

These words from the first and last verses of the psalm capture its essence. It combines recognition of past victories with prayers for present deliverance. The psalm reads like the lament of a people devastated by a military defeat.

1. The power for past victories (vv. 1-8).

God “drove out” the enemies and “planted” his people in the land. Their weaponry and strength were not adequate. God’s love and power alone brought victory. Therefore, his people trust in him, boast in him, and not in their own fighting abilities. They do fight, but they win only through him.

2. The puzzle of present defeat (vv. 9-16).

God is charged with giving them up and selling them off. They are slaughtered, plundered, disgraced and taunted by the enemy. The contrast between what the fathers boasted of and what the people now complain about could not be greater. And their disaster is as much God’s doing as were the fathers’ deliverances.

3. The protest of complete innocence (vv. 17-22).

They have been loyal to God and faithful to his covenant. They have not strayed from his ways, neither in their hearts nor with their feet. They have not turned from him in ignorance or in rebellion. Still they face death like helpless sheep before slaughterers. The mystery terrifies.

4. The prayer for immediate deliverance (vv. 23-26).

They plead with God to wake up, consider their plight, and deliver them from imminent destruction. Their cry for help reduces to two phrases--“Rise up” and “rescue us.” They ground their plea, not on their innocence, but on his “unfailing love.”

While the lamentation and intercession of the psalm are national and collective, much of its content is applicable to individual situations. There are lessons here for me and you.

45. A WEDDING SONG

I recite my verses for the king... (Psalm 45:1).

Some poet unknown to us delivered this psalm at the marriage of a king unknown to us. Obviously, it has limited application.

The introduction (v. 1) assigns quality to the subject matter--“a noble theme”--and affirms the sincerity and skill of the poet--“My heart is stirred...my tongue is the pen of a skillful writer.”

1. The king is addressed (vv. 2-9).

The psalmist lauds the king as “the most excellent of men.” Three tributes follow. He is an anointed speaker: “...your lips have been anointed with grace.” He is a mighty warrior: “Gird your sword upon your side, O mighty one.... Ride forth victoriously.” He is a choice ruler: “You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions...”

In resplendent attire the king prepares to receive his bride.

2. The bride is addressed (vv. 10-15).

“In gold of Ophir” she stands at the groom’s right hand, and the poet seeks to impress her with her good fortune.

She is exhorted to forget her past: “Forget your people and your father’s house.” She is expected to rejoice in her future: “Men of wealth will seek your favor.”

With her entourage of “virgin companions” she enters “the palace of the king.”

The psalm closes with the poet’s pledge to perpetuate the king’s memory through all generations and among all nations (v.17).

46. GOD-CONFIDENCE

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble (Psalm 46:1).

Psalm 46 is an expression of confidence in God's protection and defense of his people.

Three units, marked by three "selahs," contain the key word-- "earth"--and the major theme--protection.

1. An affirmation. "God is our refuge and strength, and ever-present help in trouble."

He is our refuge when nature is in an uproar (vv. 2-3). Though the earth quakes our hearts can remain unafraid. He is the Lord of nature.

He is our refuge when nations are in an uproar (vv. 4-7). Kingdoms rise and fall but "the city of God" remains calm in the chaos. The presence of God there assures her stability.

Though "waters roar" and nations are in "uproar," his mightier voice which "melts" the earth affirms his lordship over nature and history.

3. An invitation. "Come and see the works of the Lord."

He desolates the earth with natural disasters. He can muster the forces of nature to impose his will upon the earth.

He disposes of armies and weapons, causing wars to cease. His sovereignty extends "to the ends of the earth." He is thus exalted over nature and nations. He can command them to desist and recognize His sovereignty.

The psalm borrows titles for God from earlier traditions: “the Most High,” “the Lord of hosts,” “the God of Jacob.” Thus past records serve present demands for trust in God.

“Ever present” in verse 1 opens, and “with us” in verse 11 closes this hymn of confidence in God. His presence is our protection.

47. THE ONCE AND FUTURE KING

How awesome is the Lord Most High, the great King over all the earth! (Psalm 47:2).

Psalm 47 is an outburst of praise. Some classify it as an “enthronement psalm” but that is moot. It contains military imagery and language, and likely celebrates the divine kingship after victories won by the Israelite king and his army.

1. Exuberant praise.

The worshipers are summoned to “clap your hands” and “shout to God.” “Sounding of trumpets” is mentioned and “sing praises” occurs four times within a single verse. This is a call to worship that can be described as holy hilarity.

There are good reasons for exuberant worship. They are supplied in the two phrases “He subdued” and “He chose.” He subdued their enemies and chose their inheritance--the land in which they dwelled. The military conquests and territorial gains are attributed to God. No wonder he is called “awesome.” And his motive in subduing and choosing is “love” for “Jacob”--his people in their weakness and their sins.

2. Enthronement praise.

Whether or not Israel observed annual enthronement rituals, this psalm describes the enthronement of “the Lord Most High.” His ascension to his throne is accompanied by trumpet fanfares and celebrated by adoring choirs.

He is not the God and King of Israel only. “Seated on his holy throne,” he “reigns over the nations.” Nobles, representing those nations, are pictured as worshipers. They join the children of

Abraham in exalting “the King of all the earth.” He is a universal sovereign and the “kings of earth” are among his vassals.

No king of Israel, not even David, fits this picture, except in very limited ways and at very limited times. The church has viewed in this psalm a prophecy of Christ and his conquests and the consequent glory he brings to the Father. The full reality described in the psalm awaits the future and final victory of our Christ.

This much is sure: Those who are saved from sin by Jesus Christ have ample and constant reasons for exuberant worship of the king of kings.

48. IN PRAISE OF A CITY

Great is the Lord, and most worthy of praise, in the city of our God, his holy mountain (Psalm 48: 1).

Human life began in a garden and will end in a city. No city has been more celebrated—and lamented—than Jerusalem, the subject of this psalm.

1. The source of the city's greatness.

“Great is the Lord...in the city of our God.” While the psalmist found beauty and joy in the very “towers,” “ramparts” and “citadels” of Jerusalem, he knew that God’s presence is what made Jerusalem truly great and praiseworthy. It is “the city of our God.” Apart from him it would merely be another organized pile of stones.

2. The security of the city's greatness.

“God is in her citadels.” “God makes her secure forever.” The wisdom and strength of her human population did not secure the city. The presence of God, who “has shown himself to be her fortress,” makes the city invincible to foes, impervious to time (vv. 1, 3).

The psalmist envisions a coalition of kings and armies marching against the city, only to be routed and shattered because Jerusalem is “the city of the Lord Almighty” (vv. 4-8).

The focus of God’s presence is the temple. There his people meditate and offer praise, and central to that worship is God’s “unfailing love.” His love is not soft; it demands and establishes justice, in which the city and satellite villages rejoice (vv. 9-11).

3. The scope of the city's greatness.

It is “the joy of the whole earth,” and the praise of its divine resident “reaches to the end of the earth” (vv. 2, 10). Jewish thought,

at its purest and highest, recognized their God as the true God of all nations. Indeed, they were chosen to make him known “to the ends of the earth” and not simply to “the next generation” of Jews (vv. 10-13).

The twice repeated “forever” of the Psalmist seems ironic in view of the twice destroyed city and temple. His confidence seems to be misplaced and overstated. Israel’s security, however, was always predicated upon her loyalty to God. As covenant-breakers they forfeited his presence from the city and temple and thus invited destruction. Their history has powerful lessons for the church.

49. WEALTH AND DEATH

For all can see that wise men die; the foolish and the senseless alike perish and leave their wealth to others (Psalm 49:10).

Psalm 49 is a “wisdom” psalm, a collection of reflections upon wealth with reference to death.

1. A call to hear (vv. 1-4).

The speaker was first a listener and then an expositor (v. 4). He speaks as a “wisdom teacher,” a man in Israel to whom God had given deep and true insights into the meaning of life. His speaking is marked by (1) urgency--“hear,” (2) sincerity--“from my heart,” and (3) clarity--“I will expound my riddle.” To such a man the wise will listen.

2. A message loud and clear (vv. 5-19).

His message is that (1) every person dies. Death respects no person. The rich and poor, the wise and foolish “alike perish” (v. 10). “They are destined for the grave” (v. 14). God accepts no ransom (vv. 7-9). Continued life is a gift but never a bribe.

His message is that (2) every person dies poor. What they leave behind may vary, but in every case all is left: “They leave their wealth to others.” Landed estates shrink to the size of graves (v. 11). Those who “trust in themselves” (v. 13), and “trust in their wealth” (v. 6), are being herded “like sheep” to their graves. In death none will be richer or poorer than others (cf. Isa. 14:4-17).

3. A conclusion that both brings and removes fear (vv. 5, 12, 16, 20).

The certainty of death makes the fear of men foolish and the fear of God wise. (For commentary on these verses read the words

of Jesus in Matthew 10:28). We meet God and not our enemies beyond death. We should fear God and not men in life.

The psalm has universal application, typical of wisdom literature. It is addressed to all. It applies to all.

Lessons for us: (1) don't fear or envy the rich. (2) Don't make wealth your priority. You will lose it or leave it. (3) Don't let death find you unprepared to face God. He can redeem you from death and take you to himself (v. 15).

50. GOD COMES TO JUDGE

He summons the heavens above, and the earth, that he may judge his people (Psalm 50:4).

The caption reads, “A psalm of Asaph.” Asaph was a music leader appointed by King David to minister in the tabernacle (1 Chron. 6:39). He may have been the writer of this psalm, which depicts God’s people being summoned to judgment.

1. The summons (vv. 1-6).

The God of the Covenant suddenly appears in fire to judge His people. He summons those who made a covenant with him. He is righteous, and therefore qualified to judge. They have been unrighteous, but he has withheld judgment. Now the silence is broken and judgment begins.

2. The indictment (vv. 7-22).

God does not rebuke his people for their sacrifices, but for turning them into empty rituals, into symbols devoid of substance (vv. 7-8).

He did not require sacrifices because he needed them, for all that lives on earth is his (vv. 9-13). Israel needed the sacrifices to remind them of covenant demands and promises, but Israel dishonored him by offering sacrifices unaccompanied by commitment to obey his words.

Disobedient worshipers are labeled “the wicked.” They recite his laws, but use their mouths for evil and deceit and slander (vv. 16-20). They mistake his patient silence for indifference. Even worse, they projected their own crooked character to him (v. 21).

Their wickedness provokes a terrible threat of retribution (v. 22). Like an animal seizing prey, he will tear them to pieces and no rescuer will appear to deliver them.

3. The promises (vv. 14-15, 23).

Those who worship gratefully and walk obediently will be shown “the salvation of God.” He will deliver them “in the day of trouble.” Religion without obedience will bring on the day of trouble.

The psalm speaks powerfully to the churches of this day. Those who recite creeds and perform rituals but live in defiance of God’s words cannot escape his righteous judgment. He accepts no substitute for complete covenant loyalty.