

Introductory Notes to Psalms

I. Name

The word *psalm* comes from a Greek word that means “a poem sung to musical accompaniment.” The Hebrew name is *tehillim*, which means “praises.” Not all of the psalms are hymns of praise, but many of them are. The Book of Psalms is the hymnal of the Jewish nation, and some of the psalms have found their way into the Christian hymnal. Psalm 46 is the basis for Luther’s “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” and Isaac Watts used Ps. 90 to write “O God, Our Help in Ages Past.” The familiar Doxology (or “Old Hundredth”) is based on Ps. 100.

II. Purpose

The Book of Psalms is a collection of very personal songs and poems. As the book grew over the centuries, its contents were adapted by the Jews for their corporate worship as well as for their personal devotions. In this collection you find prayers from sufferers, hymns of praise, confessions of sin, confessions of faith, nature hymns, and songs that teach Jewish history, and in each one the focal point for faith is the Lord. Whether the writer is looking back at history, looking up into the heavens, or looking around at his problems, he first of all looks by faith to the Lord. The psalms teach us to have a personal relationship with God as we tell Him our hurts and our needs and as we meditate on His greatness and glory.

III. Hebrew Poetry

Western poetry is often based on rhyme, but not so Eastern poetry. It is based primarily on what we call “parallelism”; that is, the relationship of the lines to each other. In synonymous parallelism, the second line restates the first, as in Ps. 15:1 (nkjv)—“Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?” *Antithetic* parallelism is just the opposite: the lines are in contrast to each other. One example is Ps. 37:9 (nkjv)—“For evildoers shall be cut off; but those who wait on the Lord, they shall inherit the earth.” Psalm 19:8–9 (nkjv) is an example of *synthetic* parallelism as each successive line expands the meaning: “The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.”

IV. Christ in the Psalms

Jesus said that the psalms spoke about Him (Luke 24:44), and we can see that they do. He is the crucified Savior in Ps. 22; the shepherd in Ps. 23 (see John 10); the sacrifice in Ps. 40:6–8 (see Heb. 10:1–10); the high priest in Ps. 110 (see Heb. 7:17–21); the stone in Ps. 118:22–23 (see Matt. 21:42); and the coming King in Ps. 2 (see Acts 4:25–26 and 13:33).

V. Special Psalms

Seven of the psalms are called “penitential psalms” because they are confessions of sin (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143). Psalms 120–134 are called the “Songs of Degrees” and are thought to be a collection of the songs that the Jewish pilgrims sang as they made their way to the annual festivals in Jerusalem. There are several “imprecatory psalms” in which the writers call down God’s wrath upon their enemies (35, 37, 69, 79, 109, 139, 143). These are not so much personal expressions of vengeance as national petitions for the justice of God to be manifested for His chosen people. Psalm 119 extols the virtues of the Word of God (see also Ps. 19), and Pss. 113–118 are used by the Jews when they celebrate Passover.

VI. Authors

Though we usually associate David with the Book of Psalms (his name is on seventy-three of them), some of the psalms are anonymous and some list other authors: Asaph (50, 73–83), Solomon (72, 127), the sons of Korah (42–49, 84–85, 87–88), Ethan (89), and Moses (90). Some of David’s psalms reflect the experiences he was going through, such as the rebellion of his son Absalom (3), his victory over Saul (18), his sin with Bathsheba (32, 51), his strange behavior in Gath (34, 56), and his years of exile in the wilderness (57, 63, 142).

VII. Outline

Since each of the psalms is a separate unit, there is no need for an analysis of the structure of the book. There are five divisions, each ending with a benediction: 1–41, 42–72, 73–89, 90–106, 107–150.

Psalm 1

The theme of this psalm is the happiness of the godly and the judgment of the ungodly. Verse 1 can be translated, “O the happinesses of the man.” No matter where we turn in the Bible, we find that God gives joy to the obedient (even in the midst of trial) and ultimately sorrow to the disobedient. God sees but two persons in this world: the godly, who are “in Christ,” and the ungodly, who are “in Adam.” See 1 Cor. 15:22, 49. Let us look at these two persons.

I. The Person God Blesses (1:1–3)

From the beginning of creation, God blessed mankind (Gen. 1:28); it was only after sin had entered the world through Adam’s disobedience that we find the word “curse” (Gen. 3:14–19). It has always been God’s desire that mankind should enjoy His blessings. Ephesians 1:3 tells us that the believer in Christ has been “blessed with all spiritual blessings.” How rich we are in Him! Sad to say, many Christians do not “possess their

possessions" (Obad. 17) and enjoy their blessings in Christ. In these verses we have a description of the kind of Christian God is able to bless.

A. A person who is separated from the world (v. 1).

The Christian life is compared to a walk (see Eph. 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15). It begins with a step of faith in trusting Christ and it grows as we take further steps of faith in obedience to His Word. Walking involves progress, and Christians are to make progress in applying Bible truths to daily life. But it is possible for the believer to walk "in the darkness," outside the will of God (1 John 1:5–7). The people God blesses are careful in their walk: though they are in the world, they are not of the world. By contrast, it takes little imagination to see the person walking near sin, then standing to consider it, and finally sitting down to enjoy "the pleasures of sin for a season" (Heb. 11:25). We see this sad development in Peter's disobedience. Jesus said he should go away (John 18:8), but instead, Peter walked after Jesus (18:15). Next we see him standing with the wrong crowd (18:18), and before long he is sitting by the fire (Luke 22:55). You know what happened: he walked right into temptation and three times denied his Lord. If Christians start listening to the counsel (advice, plans) of the ungodly, they will soon be standing in their way of life, and finally will sit right down and agree with them.

B. A person who is saturated with the Word (v. 2).

Those whom God blesses are not delighted with what pertains to sin and the world; they delight in the Word of God. It is love for and obedience to the Bible that brings blessing on our lives. See Josh. 1:8. The people God blesses not only read the Word daily, but they study it, memorize it, and meditate on it during the day and night. Their mind is controlled by the Word of God. Because of this, they are led by the Spirit and walk in the Spirit. Meditation is to the soul what "digestion" is to the body. It means understanding the Word, "chewing on it," and applying it to our lives, making it a part of the inner person. See Jer. 15:16, Ezek. 3:3, and Rev. 10:9.

C. A person who is situated by the waters (v. 3).

Water for drinking is a picture of the Holy Spirit of God (John 7:37–39). The Christian is here compared to a tree that gets its water from the deep hidden springs under the dry sands. This world is a desert that can never satisfy the dedicated believer. We must send our "spiritual roots" down deep into the things of Christ and draw upon the spiritual water of life. See Jer. 17:7–8, Ps. 92:12–14. There can be no fruit without roots. Too many Christians are more concerned about the leaves and the fruit than they are the roots, but the roots are the most important part. Unless Christians spend time daily in prayer and the Word, and allow the Spirit to feed them, they will wither and die. The believer who draws upon the spiritual life in Christ will be fruitful and successful in the life of faith. When Christians cease to bear fruit, it is because something has happened to the roots (Mark 11:12–13, 20; and see Luke 13:6–9). What kind of fruit are we to bear? See Rom. 1:13 and 6:22, Gal. 5:22–23, Heb. 13:15, and Col. 1:10.

Of course, the perfect example of this godly person in vv. 1–3 is Jesus Christ. He is the Way (v. 1), the Truth (v. 2), and the Life (v. 3); see John 14:6.

II. The Person God Judges (1:4–6)

“Not so!” This means that all that the godly person enjoys and experiences is not true in the life of the ungodly. The godly are compared to a tree—strong, permanent, beautiful, useful, fruitful. The ungodly are compared to chaff—they have no roots; they are blown with the wind; they are useless to the plans of God; they are neither beautiful nor fruitful. John the Baptist used a similar picture in Matt. 3:10–12 when he described God as a harvester, visiting the threshing floor and separating the grain from the chaff. “He will burn up the chaff!” See also Ps. 35:5 and Job 21:18. What a tragedy for people to spend their whole life on earth as chaff and, as far as eternal things are concerned, amount to nothing.

Is there a future judgment? Verse 5 informs us that there is. Of course, in the OT we do not find the full explanation of the future judgments as we do in the NT. For the believer in Christ, there is no judgment of sin (John 5:24; Rom. 8:1), but for the unbeliever, there is “a fearful looking for of judgment” (Heb. 10:27). This judgment of the lost is described in Rev. 20:11–15. There will be no Christians at that scene, only unsaved people. The true character of the wicked will be revealed at that judgment; they will be seen as chaff, worthless lost souls. When v. 5 says the wicked “shall not stand” in the judgment, it does not mean they will be absent; rather, it means they will not be able to endure the judgment. When the books are opened, these individuals will be flung to their knees in confession of sin and of the truth of God’s Word and God’s Son (Phil. 2:9–11). These ungodly people will never be allowed to enter the heavenly congregation of the righteous, even though on earth they might have been members of religious groups. See Matt. 7:21–23.

The word “know” in the Bible means much more than the mental understanding indicated when we say, “I know the names of the twelve Apostles.” In addition, it carries the idea of choosing and caring. “The Lord knows those who are His” (2 Tim. 2:19, nkjv). “I know my sheep ... As the Father knows me, even so I know the Father (John 10:14–15, nkjv). Christ’s statement to the lost is, “I never knew you” (Matt. 7:23). The Lord knows the way of the righteous: He has planned it and marked it out (Eph. 2:10), and He keeps His eyes upon the righteous as they walk this way. The life of the godly person is an eternal plan of God! What he says, where he goes, what he does—all of these have eternal consequences. But the ungodly have “turned every one to his own way” (Isa. 53:6). The path of the righteous leads to glory (Prov. 4:18), but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

Verse 6 sets before us the familiar teaching of the “two ways.” Jesus concluded His Sermon on the Mount with this picture (Matt. 7:13ff), and we see it mentioned throughout the Book of Proverbs (Prov. 2:20; 4:14; 4:24–27; etc.). Why are the ungodly lost? Because they will not submit to Christ and His Word. They prefer the counsel of the ungodly to the “whole counsel of God” in the Word (Acts 20:27). They prefer the friendship of godless people to the congregation of the righteous. They spend their days thinking about sin, not about the Word of God (Gen. 6:5). They think they are secure in the earth—but they are only chaff!

How can the believer practice Ps. 1:1–3? It begins with surrender to the Lord, a daily surrender of all that we are and all that we have (Rom. 12:1–2). It involves spending time with God's Word, reading it and meditating upon it. It means living a life separated from the world (not isolated, of course, but separated from its defilement). It demands a life with roots that draw upon the hidden resources of God. What a blessed life, one that gives satisfaction here and hereafter.

Psalm 2

There is an interesting contrast between the first two psalms. Psalm 1 is personal and focuses on the Law, while Ps. 2 is national and focuses on prophecy. In Ps. 1, we see Christ the Perfect Man; in Ps. 2, He is the King of kings. Psalm 1 deals with the blessing of the Jew (although it certainly applies to the Christian today), while Ps. 2 presents the judgment of the Gentile nations. Both psalms use the word *perish* (1:6 applies it to the individual sinner; 2:12 to the rebellious nations), and both psalms use the word *meditate* (translated "imagine" in 2:1). We have the right kind of meditation in 1:2 and the wrong kind in 2:1. The twelve verses of Ps. 2 may be divided into four sections of three verses each, and in each section we can hear a different voice.

I. The Voice of the Nations (2:1–3)

This is a voice of rebellion—the word "rage" means "to assemble tumultuously." It is the Gentiles that are in view ("heathen" and "people" in v. 1), and they are rebelling against God and His rule. The nations are led in rebellion by their kings, and all are resisting God and Christ. Of course, this voice has been heard down through the centuries, but it is being heard in a greater way in these last days. As never before, there is a united voice of rebellion against the rule of God and Christ. What do the nations want? Freedom from God's rule! "Let us break their bands asunder!" According to Gen. 10:5, God divided the Gentile peoples into their lands and nations; see also Acts 17:26 and Deut. 32:8. History shows that the Gentile nations have rejected God's people (Israel), God's Word, and God's Christ. The nations do not want to submit to God's rule. Like proud Nebuchadnezzar, they want their own way, and they refuse to admit that God rules in the affairs of men. See Dan. 4:28–37. This Gentile rebellion grew more fierce with the establishing of the church (Acts 4:23–30). But in the last days, it will have its complete fulfillment as the "kings of the earth" unite to fight against God (see Rev. 1:5; 6:15; 16:12–16; 17:2, 18; 19:11–21).

II. The Voice of the Father (2:4–6)

How does God respond to the threats of men? He laughs! It is the holy voice of derision, for God is greater than man and need not fear the proud attacks of puny kings. God does not speak today in judgment; He speaks in grace from the cross. But the day is coming when God will have "the last laugh" (Ps. 37:1–15; 59:1–8). Remember how

proud Sennacherib defied God and the Jews and then was suddenly wiped out? (2 Kings 19) This will happen again when God decides to deal in judgment with the nations of the world.

There is also the voice of displeasure (v. 5). We can say it again: today God is not speaking in wrath; He is speaking through His Son in grace (Heb. 1:1–2); one day, however, He will send His wrath upon the nations of the world. The word “displeasure” here means “fiery anger.” This is the tribulation, described in detail in Rev. 6–19. It will be a time of awful judgment upon the land and sea, the heavens, the world of nature, and people and nations. Millions of people will die in plagues and heaven-sent disasters. During the tribulation period, the nation of Israel will be “purged” to prepare a believing remnant for the return of Christ to establish His kingdom from Jerusalem. Multitudes will be saved during this time, but many of them will seal their decision with their own lives.

Finally, God's voice is a voice of declaration (v. 6); God has set (“anointed”) His King upon His holy hill. This is Christ (Isa. 9:6–7; Dan. 7:13–14). Though He is not yet seated on His own throne of glory, or upon the throne of David, He is seated at the Father's right hand; and His throne is as certain as the Father's word! Today, Christ is a priest-king like Melchizedek (Heb. 6:20–7:17). He intercedes for His own. One day He will return in glory and sit upon the throne to judge and rule the nations (Matt. 25:31–46).

III. The Voice of the Son (2:7–9)

Christ speaks in these verses and tells us what the Father said to Him in His eternal decree. How good to know that God has decreed the fulfillment of His plan, and that man will not hinder God's working. “You are My Son, today I have begotten You.” When did the Father say this to the Son? Not when He was born into the world, but when He came out of the tomb. Read Acts 13:28–33 carefully. Christ was “begotten” from the virgin tomb into a glorious life of resurrection power. (This verse is quoted again in Heb. 1:5 and 5:5.)

Because of His victory over sin and death, Christ is given an inheritance; see Heb. 1:4–5. You will recall the Father saying to the Son at His baptism, “This is my Beloved Son” (Matt. 3:17, nkjv). He repeated this at the Transfiguration where Jesus faced His death on the cross (Matt. 17:5). Jesus has all the nations as His inheritance because of His faithful work on the cross. However, Satan offered Him these same kingdoms apart from the cross; see Matt. 4:8–10. Jesus could have received the nations without suffering had He yielded to the devil, but then He would have stepped outside the Father's will. (Of course, it was impossible for Christ to sin, but the temptation was still just as real.) Satan will offer these kingdoms to Antichrist, and he will rule the nations for a brief season. See Rev. 13:1–10.

When will Christ receive “the uttermost parts of the earth” for His possession? When He returns to the earth in power and glory; see Rev. 19:11–21. Psalm 2:9 is referred to in Rev. 12:5 and 19:15; and in Rev. 2:26–29, we are told that Christians will reign with Him. See also Dan. 2:42–44.

IV. The Voice of the Spirit (2:10–12)

The closing three verses are an appeal from the Spirit to the sons of men to submit themselves now to Jesus Christ. The Spirit appeals to every area of the personality:

A. The mind (v. 10).

“Be wise ... be instructed!” The “counsel of the ungodly” (Ps. 1:1) has led the ungodly astray. The wisdom of the world is foolishness with God (1 Cor. 1:18–31). Our world boasts of its knowledge, and it seems that there is more knowledge than ever before, but there also seems to be less wisdom. God’s wisdom is found in God’s Word, yet the kings and rulers do not want the Word of God.

B. The heart (v. 11).

“Serve Him!” Instead of rebelling and resisting, people should bow down to Christ and serve Him. A reverential joy is what will result from yielding to Christ.

C. The will (v. 12).

“Kiss the Son” implies paying homage to Him, showing loving surrender to Him. A kiss speaks of love and reconciliation. God has been reconciled to the world by the Cross of Christ (2 Cor. 5:14–21); righteousness and peace kissed each other on the cross (Ps. 85:10). Now God is able to save lost sinners and still uphold His holy law. It is tragic that most of the people of the world are saying, “We will not have this Man to reign over us!” When Jesus returns, they will be forced to bow before Him (Phil. 2:10–11), but then it will be too late. All God has to do is kindle His wrath “but a little”—and sinners perish! What will it be like when His wrath burns on this earth in great judgment?

Psalm 1 opens with a beatitude; Ps. 2 closes with one: “Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him.” “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21).

Psalm 8

Hidden in this beautiful psalm’s poetic description of man’s place in creation lies much teaching for practical people today. With the aid of the NT references to Ps. 8, we will be able to discover some of the lessons found here.

I. The Setting Historically

You have noted that there are two types of inscriptions in the psalms: historical and musical. For example, at the beginning of Ps. 8 we read, “To the chief Musician upon Gittith, a psalm of David.” *Gittith* means “winepress” and probably referred to the use of the psalm in the harvest season. However, some Bible students have concluded that the musical directions belong at the end of the preceding psalm, as seen in Hab. 3. This means that *Muth-labben* at the beginning of Ps. 9 really belongs at the end of Ps. 8.

The term *Muth-labben* means “death of the son” or “death of the champion,” and could refer to David’s slaying of Goliath (1 Sam. 17). It is easy to see young David alone with God that evening after he had killed the giant, looking up to heaven and marveling at God’s concern for His own. David was but a “babe and suckling” compared to the giant, yet God used the babe to silence the enemy. Note that in 1 Sam. 17:4 Goliath is called “a champion” and that he proudly challenged the fearful Jews for forty days (17:16). When David offered to silence the enemy, Saul said, “You are but a youth” (17:33, nkjv)—a babe, a suckling. Note another parallel between 1 Sam. 17 and Ps. 8 in “the fowl of the air” and “the beasts of the field” (1 Sam. 17:44 and Ps. 8:7–8). Also, Ps. 8 glorifies the “name of the Lord” (8:1, 9), and David defeated Goliath in the “name of the Lord” (17:45).

Here we have youthful David praising the Lord for the great victory that He gave. “What is man that You are mindful of him?” Why would God pay any attention to a shepherd boy? What a wonderful type of Jesus Christ we see in David: (1) both were born at Bethlehem; (2) both were shepherds; (3) both were rejected temporarily by their brethren; (4) both faced an enemy in the wilderness and won; (5) both were exiles before being made kings; (6) both took a bride while in exile; and (7) both were beloved—for the name David means “beloved.”

II. The Meaning Doctrinally

Any time a psalm is quoted in the NT and applied to Christ, this makes it a messianic psalm. Psalm 8 is applied to Christ in several places in the NT: Matt. 21:16; Heb. 2:6–8; 1 Cor. 15:27; and Eph. 1:22. Read these references carefully, especially Heb. 2.

The main teaching from Ps. 8 in Heb. 2 and 1 Cor. 15 is this: Christ has regained all that Adam lost because of sin. Christ has been exalted above the heavens and thus has glorified God’s name (Eph. 1:19–23; Heb. 1:1–3). God’s glory is no longer in a tent or a temple; it is “above the heavens” in Christ and in the hearts of ordinary believers. When Christ was ministering on earth, He was not praised by the priests or kings; it was the little children who praised Him in the temple.

Read Gen. 1:26–28 carefully, and note that God gave the first man dominion (rule) over the fish, the fowl, and the cattle. Actually, man was made “a little lower than God” and was appointed God’s deputy to rule over the earth. But when Adam sinned, he lost that dominion. Romans 5 points out that there was a change of “kings”: death reigned (5:14, 17), and sin reigned (5:21), but Adam no longer reigned. Instead of a king, Adam had become a slave!

When Christ came to earth, He exercised the dominion that Adam lost. Christ ruled over the fish (Luke 5:1–6; Matt. 17:24–27; John 21:1–6), over the fowl (Luke 22:34), and over the beasts (Mark 1:13; 11:1–7). No one on earth today could control nature the way He did. When Jesus came to earth, it was God “visiting” men (Ps. 8:4 with Luke 1:68, 78). Note that David is picturing a night scene (v. 3) because it certainly was night spiritually when Jesus came to earth. But by humbling Himself and becoming a servant and dying on the cross, Jesus glorified God and purchased the salvation of a lost people and a lost world. Hebrews 2:8 points out that we do not yet see all of nature put in subjection to man. There are still floods and earthquakes and plagues. Yes, but we

see Jesus! (v. 9) And the fact that He died for us is all the assurance we need that one day, when He returns, His people will reign over a renewed earth.

One final thought: Christ's work on the cross did not merely undo Adam's sin and put us back where Adam was. Rather, it gave us much more: it made us like Christ. Note the repetition of "much more" in Rom. 5:9–21.

III. The Living Practically

A. Praise.

If David had reason to praise God for his position and his victory, how much more should we praise Him. Who are we that God should visit us? Who are we that Christ should die for us and lift us with Him above the heavens?

B. Position.

This psalm exalts the dignity of man. Verse 5 should read, "You have made him a little lower than God." Man is certainly the greatest of God's creations, for man is made "in the image of God." Because modern teaching has lowered man to an animal and rejected the image of God, the world is in chaos. James 3:9 reminds us that we will treat people better if we remember they are made in God's image. No wonder we have so much civil unrest, so much brutality. We have dethroned God and debased humanity. Let us never forget our obligation as creatures made in God's image, and our greater obligation as saints being renewed in this image through Christ (Col. 3:9–10; Rom. 8:29).

C. Power.

Christ has given us dominion; this means that we reign as kings. We can reign in life through Christ (Rom. 5:17), getting victory over sin and temptation. We reign in death (1 Cor. 15:54–57), for death no more has dominion over us. We shall reign in His kingdom here on earth, our place of service to be determined according to our life and faithfulness here today (Matt. 25:14–30; Luke 19:12–27). Finally, we shall reign with Him forever and ever.

D. Promise.

This psalm makes it clear that God is concerned with creation, and the interpretation in Heb. 2:6–9 indicates that Christ will one day deliver creation from the bondage of sin. See Rom. 8:18–24. This will include the "redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:23) when we shall see Christ and become like Him (1 John 3:1–3; Phil. 3:20–21). The fact that Jesus Christ is today on the throne is proof that one day all creation will be redeemed. What a glorious promise!

Of course, Ps. 8 applies only to believers in Jesus Christ. The unbeliever may admire God's creation, the work of His fingers (v. 3), but those who are saved have experienced the power of His arm. "Who has believed our report? And to whom has the

arm of the Lord been revealed?" (Isa. 53:1) How wonderful that God should visit this earth for salvation, but one day He will visit it in judgment. Have you trusted Christ as your Savior? Are you permitting Him to rule and reign in your life?

Psalm 19

God's revelation to man is the theme of this psalm. It is amazing that God speaks to us at all. Men and women are sinners and have no desire to listen to God, yet He graciously continues to speak. God speaks to us in three ways:

I. He Speaks in the Skies (19:1–6)

God's wisdom, power, and glory are seen in His creation. Modern science would have us study "natural laws" and leave God out, but the psalmist looked at the marvels of heaven and earth and saw God. See also Pss. 8 and 29, as well as Isa. 40:12–31. Jesus saw His Father's handiwork in the lilies and the birds (Matt. 6:24–34). Both by day and by night, God's creation is speaking (v. 2), but this speech is not heard with the human ear. Verse 3 should read, "There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard" (NIV). We hear the voice of God in creation by seeing His wisdom and power. Certainly so complex an entity as our universe (and the universes beyond our own universe) demands a Creator and Sustainer. To believe that the universe evolved out of nothing and arranged itself in this orderly manner is folly.

Creation speaks a universal language to all nations (vv. 3–4). It is this fact that Paul used in Rom. 1:18–32 to prove that all people everywhere are under the wrath of God. "Are the heathen lost?" is an oft-repeated question, and the answer is "Yes." On what basis are they lost if they have never heard the Gospel? On the basis of God's revelation in creation. The heathen see God's power and wisdom, His "eternal Godhead," in creation and know that they have a responsibility to Him. Paul uses Ps. 19:4 again in Rom. 10:18.

Nature preaches a thousand sermons a day to the human heart. Each day begins with light and moves to darkness, from waking to sleeping, a picture of life without God. Each year moves from spring to winter, from life to death. We see the grass mowed down (Isa. 40:6–8), the tree cut down (Luke 13:6–9; Matt. 3:10), the fire destroying the waste (Matt. 13:40–42). The activities of nature, under the hand of God, are vivid object lessons to the hearts of sinners but, alas, many do not want to see or hear. The lost sinner, wherever he or she may be on this globe, stands condemned before the throne of God.

II. He Speaks in the Scriptures (19:7–11)

The heavens declare God's glory, and the Scriptures declare His grace. See Heb. 1:1–3. This law, testimony, commandment, word, of course, is a personal revelation from

God, for the name used is not "God" but "LORD," meaning "Jehovah." This is the personal, covenant name for God.

A. What the Bible is.

(1) The perfect law—There is no error in the Bible, either in historical fact or in spiritual truth. Of course, the Bible records the lies of men and of Satan, but the total message of the Bible is that of truth. See Ps. 119:128 and 160.

(2) The sure testimony—The Word does not change; it is sure and steadfast, Ps. 119:89. It is God's testimony to man, His witness of what is true and right. See Matt. 5:18.

(3) The right statutes—"Statutes" means "precepts, rules for daily living." Some rules are wrong rules; God's Word is right. Obeying the Word brings blessing to daily life.

(4) The pure commandment—See Pss. 12:6; 119:140; Prov. 30:5. The "sacred books" of some world religions are anything but pure, but God's Word is pure, even when dealing with sin. Nothing in the Bible, rightly understood, could lead a person into sin.

(5) The clean fear of the Lord—The phrase "fear of the Lord" (v. 9) is another reference to "the Law," since the Word of God produces a reverence for God. See Deut. 4:10; Ps. 111:10. To fear God makes a person clean; to worship heathen idols makes a person filthy.

(6) True, righteous judgments—God's evaluations of men and things are true; He knows all things completely. It pays for the Christian to believe what God says and not to depend on his own evaluation. Lot made this mistake and lost everything.

(7) Better than gold—What a treasure is the Bible (Ps. 119:72; Prov. 8:10; 16:16).

(8) Sweeter than honey (Ps. 119:103)—The spiritual Christian does not need the artificial things of this world for satisfaction; the Word satisfies the spiritual appetite.

B. What the Bible does.

(1) Converts—This is the same as "restores" in Ps. 23:3. The Word converts the sinner from his ways and restores the saint when he wanders. It refreshes and heals.

(2) Makes wise—Read Ps. 119:97–104; Isa. 8:20; Jer. 8:9; Col. 1:9; James 1:5.

(3) Rejoices—The spiritual believer finds joy in the Word (Jer. 15:16).

(4) Enlightens—"The entrance (opening) of Your words gives light" (Ps. 119:130, nkjv).

(5) Endures—Other books fade and are forgotten, but God's Word remains. Many a hammer has been worn out on the anvil of God's Word!

(6) Enriches—It is better than gold or silver (Prov. 3:13–15).

(7) Satisfies—The honey satisfies the body; the Word satisfies the soul.

(8) Warns—It is better to prevent sin and avoid trouble than to confess sin and try to remedy mistakes. Knowing the Word and obeying it guides the believer on the safe path. See Prov. 2.

(9) Rewards—Money cannot buy the rewards of a godly life: a clean conscience, a pure heart, joy, peace, and answered prayer. Note that v. 11 says there is a reward *in*

keeping the Word, not *for* keeping it. The reward comes in the doing: "This man shall be blessed in *his doing*" (James 1:25).

III. He Speaks in the Soul (19:12–14)

No person can understand his or her own heart (Jer. 17:9). We need the mirror of the Word to reveal our sins to us (James 1:22–25). The psalmist closes by asking God to reveal his secret sins to him; see Ps. 139:23–24. The OT law provided for sins of ignorance (Lev. 4–5; Num. 15:22ff). But for sins of open defiance and rebellion, there was no sacrifice; see Num. 15:30–31. David asks not only to be cleansed of secret faults, but to be restrained from running head-long into open sin. "Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation." This kind of wicked abandonment to sin leads to slavery, and sin becomes the master of the life. Romans 6 tells us that sin should not have dominion over us. Of course, it is by allowing the Word of God to control our lives that we get victory over sin. By "great transgression" in v. 13, the psalmist seems to mean a "sin unto death" or a repeated rebellion against God that brings forth His wrath. It is by an accumulation of the little secret sins of v. 12 that the person gradually walks into the great sin. It is important that Christians confess their sins immediately and allow the Word and the blood to cleanse the heart.

The prayer of v. 14 ought to be on our lips and in our hearts all day long. The meditation of the heart controls the words of the mouth (Mark 7:14–23). The word "meditation" here has the image of a musician plucking the strings of a harp. Who controls the music of your heart, God or Satan? Meditation is to the heart what digestion is to the body; it is the taking in of the Word of God and making it a part of the inner being. As the heart and mind think on the Word all day long, the Spirit guides the life. This is what it means to walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16) and to have the spiritual mind (Rom. 8:1–8).

Is your Bible all to you that God wants it to be? Read this psalm again and ask God to enable you to love the Word, live in it, and obey it—and He will bless you.

Psalms 22, 23, 24

These three familiar and beloved psalms present Christ as the Shepherd, each one emphasizing a different aspect of His Person and His work. Psalm 22 pictures the Good Shepherd dying for the sheep (John 10:11); Ps. 23 the Great Shepherd caring for the sheep (Heb. 13:20–21); and Ps. 24 the Chief Shepherd coming for the sheep (1 Peter 5:4). In other words, Christ died for us (past), Christ lives for us (present), and Christ will come for us (future).

I. The Good Shepherd (22)

This psalm presents the crucifixion of Christ in vv. 1–21 and His resurrection in vv. 22–31. Since the Jews did not know of crucifixion back in David's time, this vivid description

of Christ's death on the cross could only have been penned by inspiration of the Spirit. It is interesting to contrast the two sections of this psalm. In vv. 1–21 we see Christ's suffering and crucifixion, while in vv. 22–31 we see His glory and resurrection. The first passage depicts pain and prayer; the second passage depicts praise and promise. And the first shows Christ in the midst of His enemies; the second, Christ in the midst of the church.

It is not difficult to see the fulfillment of this chapter in the NT story of the cross:

- v. 1—Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34—Christ spoke these words
- v. 2—Alternate light and darkness; Matt. 27:45
- vv. 6–8—The reproach of the people; Matt. 27:39–44
- vv. 11–12—No help was offered Him; Matt. 26:56
- v. 16—His hands and feet pierced; Matt. 27:35
- v. 17—People staring at Him; Luke 23:35
- v. 18—Gambling for His garments; John 19:23–24

At v. 22, the scene changes, and we move into resurrection. See Heb. 2:11–12 for the NT explanation of this. Christ is no longer on the cross; He is in the midst of His brethren (the church) declaring the glory of God. Verse 24 must be read in connection with Heb. 5:7. This final section is filled with praise: in the church (v. 22), in Israel (vv. 23–26), and among the Gentiles (vv. 27–31). Verse 31 (nkjv) ends, "He has done this," paralleling Jesus' words, "It is finished." Because of Christ's work on the cross, salvation has been accomplished and all who come to Him by faith will be saved.

II. The Great Shepherd (23)

Hebrews 13:20–21 informs us that today Jesus is the Great Shepherd who cares for the sheep. We are His sheep, and as we follow Him He ministers to us. Christ did not simply die for us; He rose again and lives for us. He is the Great Shepherd, the Great High Priest. "I shall not want" is the theme of Ps. 23. "I shall not want" for: rest and refreshment (v. 2), restoration and righteousness (v. 3), protection in trouble (v. 4), provision in the wilderness (v. 5), and a home to go to at the end of the day (v. 6).

Of course, the picture here is that of the Oriental shepherd and his flock. Such a shepherd knows each sheep by name. The shepherd goes before the sheep and makes sure they are not walking into danger (John 10:27–28). The sheep never need worry when they follow the shepherd, for he will protect them and provide for them. Even when they go through a dangerous valley (v. 4), the shepherd is beside them, and beyond the valley is the house of rest. At the end of the day, the shepherd leads the flock back to the fold and stands by the open door to examine each one as it enters. If he sees one that is bruised or weary, he puts the refreshing oil upon it to soothe and heal it, and gives it a drink of cool water. How gracious our Shepherd is to care for us!

Each of the OT names for God is seen in this psalm: *Jehovah-Jireh*, "The Lord will provide" (Gen. 22:13–14); *Jehovah-Rapha*, "The Lord will heal or restore" (Ex. 15:26); *Jehovah-Shalom*, "The Lord our peace" (Jud. 6:24); *Jehovah-Tsidkenu*, "The Lord our righteousness," (Jer. 23:6); *Jehovah-Shammah*, "The Lord is there," (Ezek. 48:35); *Jehovah-Nissi*, "The Lord our banner" (Ex. 17:8–15); and *Jehovah-Raah*, "The Lord my shepherd" (Ps. 23:1). In other words, Jesus Christ is to His sheep all that they ever

need. As the little child said when misquoting this psalm, "The Lord is my shepherd—what more shall I want?"

III. The Chief Shepherd (24)

Jewish tradition says that this psalm was written to commemorate David's returning the ark to Jerusalem (1 Chron. 13–15). It was probably sung by different choirs and soloists, each answering the other. The choir would sing vv. 1–2, a voice would respond with v. 3, and then another voice would answer with v. 4. Then the chorus would sing vv. 5–6. As the people entered the gates of the city, the chorus would sing out vv. 8–9, and the voice would ask again, "Who is this king of glory?" Then the entire group would shout, "The Lord of hosts! He is the king of glory!" What a wonderful spectacle it must have been!

But an even greater wonder awaits Jerusalem when the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ, appears to claim David's throne. This psalm describes the return of the King to Zion; see Rev. 19:11–16. This present earth is under the sway of sin and Satan. Though it is the Lord's by creation and redemption, it has not yet been delivered from bondage. But thank God, one day Jesus will return to the earth to claim His inheritance. Then the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord.

The question in v. 3 is important: who is worthy to rule over the earth from Mt. Zion? It reminds us of Rev. 5 when the question is asked, "Who is worthy to open the book and break the seals?" There can be only one answer: Jesus Christ the Son of God. Psalm 24:4 describes Him as the Perfect Man, the Perfect King. David did not have clean hands, for he murdered a man; nor did he have a pure heart, for he lusted and committed adultery. He lifted up his soul to vanity and pride when he numbered the people. Solomon could not qualify, for he was an idolater. Even great King Hezekiah fell because of pride. No, the only king who can qualify is Jesus Christ.

When Jesus Christ claims Jerusalem, He will come as one fresh from the battle (v. 8), for He will have defeated the nations of the world at Armageddon (Rev. 19:19–21). Before Jesus was born, it was promised that He would sit on David's throne (Luke 1:30–33). Today He is seated on His Father's throne (Rev. 3:21), but when He returns to this earth in judgment and glory, He will claim David's throne and reign over the house of Jacob. Of course, He will first return in the air to take the church to heaven (1 Thes. 4:13–18). Then will follow seven years of awful tribulation on the earth, "the time of Jacob's trouble." When Satan and his evil associates have done their worst, Jesus Christ will return to judge and to deliver the world from evil. Then there will be a renewed earth, a restored Israel, and a righteous kingdom for a thousand years (Rev. 20:1–5).

If Christ is your *Good Shepherd* because you have received Him as Savior, then let Him be your *Great Shepherd* to guide and bless your life. Then when He returns as the *Chief Shepherd*, you will be ready to meet Him.

Psalms 32 and 51

The background for these two psalms is 2 Sam. 11–12. David lusted after his neighbor's wife, committed adultery, made the husband drunk, had him killed, and then covered the whole affair for at least a year. He was not a youth when he fell into these sins; he was a mature man, ruling over a great kingdom. "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12, nkjv). Psalm 51 was David's prayer of confession, and Ps. 32 his song of forgiveness. Read 1 John 1:5–2:2 for God's provision for cleansing.

I. David's Prayer of Confession (51)

This is a very personal prayer; note how often David uses "me" and "my sin." His eyes are not on someone else; his eyes are on himself and on his Lord.

A. The cost of committing sin.

Falling into lust and adultery seemed momentary acts, but what a tremendous price David paid. (It is possible, though, that David had "planned to sin" when he came home from the battle.) As we shall see in Ps. 32:3–4, David paid for his sins physically and became ill. But the spiritual cost was also great. He lost the purity of his heart (vv. 1–2) and therefore needed to be washed and cleansed (v. 7). Note the words used for sin here: transgressions means acts of rebellion, defying God by crossing over the line God has drawn; iniquity means inward crookedness, perversity; sin means missing the mark, failing to meet God's standard. Verse 17 suggests that David's heart not only became defiled, but it also became hard. When we harbor sin, it hardens the heart. David's eyes were also affected; all he could see were his sins (v. 3). People with a dirty conscience are usually on the defensive, wondering what other people may know. Sin also affected his ears, for he lost the sound of joy and gladness (v. 8). Nothing sounds good to a person out of fellowship with God. Even David's lips were affected, for he could no longer testify or witness, or even sing God's praises (vv. 13–15). Nothing shuts a Christian's mouth like unconfessed sin. His mind was affected, for he begged for wisdom (v. 6). The inner person (heart and spirit, v. 10) was out of fellowship with God (v. 11), and there was no joy. God does not take away the Holy Spirit when we sin (John 14:16), but we do grieve the Spirit and thereby lose His fellowship and help (Eph. 4:30–32). May we never forget the high cost of committing sin!

B. The cost of confessing sin.

True confession of sin involves repentance, a sincere change of mind. During that year when David covered his sins, he thought he would "get away" with something. But when Nathan confronted him with his sins, David's heart smote him and he repented. There is a difference between admitting sins and confessing sins. Confession (1 John 1:9) literally means "to say the same thing." If we say the same thing about our sins that God says about them, and we truly mean it, then we are confessing sin. David even went so far as to admit his sinful nature, born in sin (v. 5). Beware of "cheap confession." Merely praying with the lips, "Lord, I have sinned, please forgive me!" is not confession. True confession costs something—a broken spirit and a contrite heart (v. 17). This does not

mean that we do penance and earn forgiveness, but it does mean that we are so broken by our sins that we hide nothing from God.

C. The cost of cleansing sin.

Good works cannot cleanse sin, not even religious works and sacrifices (vv. 16–17). Only the blood of Jesus Christ can wash away sins (Heb. 10:1–18; 1 John 1:7–2:2). Forgiveness is not a cheap thing; it cost Jesus Christ His life. We receive forgiveness because of what He has done, not because of our prayers or tears. God is willing to blot out sins (vv. 1, 9; see Isa. 43:25) and purge us completely. The high cost of cleansing alone ought to make us hate sin and want to turn from it.

II. David's Praise for God's Cleansing (32)

The first two verses are quoted by Paul in Rom. 4:7–8, so be sure to read that passage. Literally, David sang: "Oh, the happiness of the man whose rebellion has been forgiven, whose failure to hit the mark has been covered. How happy is the man on whose account the Lord does not put his crookedness, and in whose spirit there is no deceit." David had been guilty of all of this: he had rebelled against the Law and failed to meet God's righteous standard; he had allowed his crooked nature to control him; and he had deceitfully covered the whole matter up for a year. See Prov. 28:13 and apply it to David's case.

A. The silence of conviction (vv. 3–4).

What happened to David when he refused to confess his sins? He suffered. He suffered spiritually (as we saw in Ps. 51), but he also suffered physically. He became like an old man. God's hand of conviction was heavy upon him day and night. He "dried up" like a brook in a drought. Some people who go to the doctor to take care of their symptoms ought to go to the Lord to take care of their sins. This does not mean that all sickness is caused by sin, but it does mean that unconfessed sin can cause physical affliction. See 1 Cor. 11:29–32.

B. The sob of confession (v. 5).

Literally, "I began to make known to You my sin." David immediately confessed that he had sinned when Nathan spoke to him (2 Sam. 12:13), but then, privately, he allowed the Spirit of God to uncover his sins one by one. David's prayer was no "general confession"; he named his sins specifically. Because he confessed, God forgave. One writer has said, "The less you spare yourself, the more God will spare you." Paul said, "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged" (1 Cor. 11:31). God does not forgive us because we feel sorry, or because we pray; He forgives us when we confess our sins because He is "faithful and just"—faithful to His promise, and just with reference to the Cross. God will not make us pay for sins that Christ has already paid for. Read Rom. 8:31–39.

C. The song of cleansing (vv. 6–7).

David's sighing has been replaced by singing. He is surrounded by "songs of deliverance"; and wherever he turns, he discovers something to sing about. It used to be that wherever he turned, he saw his sins (51:3). He warns us that we should pray to God for forgiveness "in a time of finding." This may have two meanings: in a time when we find out our sins, and in a time when God may be found (Isa. 55:6–7). If a believer allows sins to accumulate, God will have to step in and chasten (Heb. 12). David is no longer afraid, for God is his hiding place. Let troubles come; he is not afraid.

D. The shout of confidence (vv. 8–11).

God is now speaking to David and assuring him that He will direct his steps. "He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake" (Ps. 23:3, nkjv). God wants to guide us, not with a heavy rod, but with His eye. An obedient child watches his parents' eyes, to see what their will is. The Christian must constantly stay under the Father's eye and live to please Him. In v. 9 David talks about two extremes: the horse that rushes ahead impulsively, and the mule that lags behind stubbornly. Christians should avoid both of these patterns of behavior. We should walk with the Lord a step at a time in loving obedience. Horses and mules must be controlled by bits and bridles "else they will not come near you." Alas, some Christians must have "bits and bridles" before God can control them. But the normal way is for God to guide us with His eye upon us. Dumb animals have no understanding, but God's people can understand what the will of the Lord is (Eph. 5:15–17).

After we as Christians have sinned and been restored, Satan tries to undermine our peace and confidence. We begin to worry about the past and the consequences of our foolishness. Yes, there are bitter fruits from disobedience (and how David found that out!), but vv. 10–11 assure us that God protects and upholds those who belong to Him. The wicked have many sorrows, and sorrows come to the lives of disobedient saints, but the cleansed Christian experiences the loving-kindness and mercy of the Lord. No wonder David ends by shouting. The past is forgiven—the present is joyful—and the future is secure in the hands of God.

Psalm 40

This psalm may be called "The Christmas Psalm" because it looks forward to the birth of Christ. Verses 6–8 are quoted in Heb. 10:5–10 and applied to Jesus Christ. Historically, the psalm grew out of a crisis in the life of David. He was in "a horrible pit" and cried out to God, and God delivered him. In the first half (vv. 1–10), David testifies of God's mercy and shows his gratitude by yielding himself anew to the Lord. In the closing verses (vv. 11–17) David calls to God for further help as new enemies approach him. What a strength there is in v. 17, nkjv—"The Lord thinks upon me." Since this is a messianic psalm (a psalm that speaks of Jesus Christ), we want to study that aspect of it especially.

I. The Birth of Christ (40:6–7)

You will want to read Heb. 10:1–18 carefully. The chapter begins by saying that God has set aside all the Hebrew sacrifices which could never take away sins. In vv. 5–9, the writer argues that Jesus Christ came to do what those sacrifices could never do. But in order for Jesus to die, He had to come to earth as a man in a body of flesh (without sin, of course). As He came into the world, the Son said to the Father, “Lo, I come—in the volume of the book (the OT prophecies) it is written of Me.”

Hebrews 10:5, nkjv, quotes Ps. 40:6, nkjv, as “a body You have prepared for Me” instead of “my ears You have opened.” Of course, the same Holy Spirit who wrote the Word can quote it and expand or explain it as He wills. Jesus Christ came in a prepared body; He was born of the Virgin Mary, conceived by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:26–38). God has four ways to make a body: (1) out of clay, as with Adam; (2) out of man, as with Eve, Gen. 2:21–25; (3) out of woman married to man, as in every normal human birth; and (4) out of woman without man, as with the birth of Christ. Jesus Christ came in a prepared body, a body that was not tainted by sin. Though He felt all the *sinless* infirmities of flesh (hunger, pain, weariness, death), He never shared in the *sinful* weaknesses of flesh. If Jesus Christ did not have a sinless nature, then He could not be the Savior of the world.

For the phrase “my ears you have opened,” see Ex. 21:1–6 and Isa. 50:5. The OT Jew would pierce the ear of the servant who wanted to remain with him forever. It is a beautiful picture of dedication. Note too that the birth of Christ was “written in the book.” The first promise is in Gen. 3:15, where God announced that the “seed of the woman” (not the man, therefore a virgin birth) would defeat the seed of Satan. Later, God announced to Abraham that the Savior would come through the Jews, and then He revealed that He would come through the tribe of Judah. Isaiah 7:14 announced the virgin birth, and Micah 5:2 informed the people that He would come to Bethlehem.

II. The Life of Christ (40:8–10)

These verses beautifully summarize what Jesus did: He loved the Word, He lived the Word, and He preached the Word to the people. Nobody could ever accuse Jesus of sin; see John 8:46. The Jews had to hire liars to bring false testimony against Him at His trial. Even Judas (who would have had good excuse to accuse Christ) admitted that He was innocent (Matt. 27:1–5). Jesus delighted in the Word and will of God. “I do always those things that please Him,” He said in John 8:29. His life and His lips magnified the righteousness and the loving-kindness of the Lord.

III. The Death of Christ (40:6)

He came in that perfect body to be the perfect sacrifice for sins. Read 1 Sam. 15:22, Ps. 51:16–17, Hosea 6:6, and Micah 6:6–7 to see that nowhere in the OT are we taught that the blood of animals could wash away sins. Many Jews trusted the sacrifice instead of looking by faith to the Lord. How like many church members today who are trusting baptism or membership for salvation. Verse 6 mentions four kinds of offerings: (1) *sacrifice*, any kind of bloody offering; (2) *offering*, the non-bloody offerings, such as the

meal offerings; (3) *burnt offering*, offering picturing total dedication to God; and (4) *sin offering*, offering dealing with the sin of the person.

All of these OT offerings (outlined in Lev. 1–5) are pictures of the atoning work of Jesus Christ. The burnt offering pictures His total surrender to God; “I delight to do Your will.” The meal offering (Lev. 2) illustrates His perfect nature and reminds us that we feed on Him to satisfy the soul. The peace offering (Lev. 3) pictures peace with God, a peace between the sinner and the Savior that Jesus made at the cross (Col. 1:20; 2 Cor. 5:18). The sin offering (Lev. 4) deals with sin in our nature, while the trespass offering (Lev. 5) deals with acts of disobedience. Christ died for our sins, but He also condemned our old nature on the cross and thereby is able to give us victory over sin (Rom. 6–8).

The important thing is this: all of these offerings are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. By one offering He settled the sin question completely and eternally. What millions of lambs and goats could never do, Jesus Christ did in His hours of agony on the cross. Hallelujah, what a Savior!

IV. The Resurrection of Christ (40:1–3)

These verses describe David's deliverance from some trouble, but they also illustrate Christ's resurrection. Jesus had gone down into the pit of sin for us; He was made sin for us (1 Peter 2:24; 2 Cor. 5:21). Certainly it was a “horrible pit” when you consider that Jesus bore on His sinless body all the sins of all mankind for all time. But He did not stay in the pit; God raised Him from the dead. Hebrews 5:7 suggests some of the horror of that Gethsemane and Calvary experience, and informs us that Jesus prayed to be “delivered *out of death*” (not *from death*, for He came to die). The Father answered that prayer and raised Him from the dead.

Christ today is raised to die no more. His work is finished; His feet are on the rock. The new song is a song of victory and praise to God; see Ps. 22:22–25, and compare these verses with Ps. 40:9–10. He has put all enemies under His feet.

Psalm 90

Since Moses was the author of this psalm, it makes it the oldest of all the psalms. It was probably written in connection with Israel's failure at Kadesh-barnea (Num. 13–14). The people (except for Joshua and Caleb) refused to follow Moses and to trust God. Instead of entering the land by faith, they turned back in unbelief, and God judged them. He made the nation wander for forty years in the wilderness until all the people who had been over twenty years of age at Kadesh-barnea died. Keep this in mind as you read Ps. 90 (especially vv. 7–11), and it will take on new meaning. This psalm is Moses' personal reaction to the crisis; he turned to God in prayer and sought an eternal abiding place in the Lord. Years later he would say to Israel, “The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms” (Deut. 33:27). It was this kind of faith that sustained Moses during those trying years in the wilderness. Isaac Watts used Ps. 90

as the basis for his majestic hymn, "O God, Our Help in Ages Past." Read through the hymn with this psalm in mind.

I. God's Eternality and Man's Frailty (90:1–6)

What a contrast we see here. The eternal God exists far above history. Generations come and go, but God is still the same. "For I am the Lord, I change not" (Mal. 3:6). "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8). There is a difference between being immortal and being eternal. Man is immortal—that is, his soul will never die; but God is eternal—He has neither beginning nor ending. God existed before the mountains (the most durable thing known in Moses' day); in fact, He gave birth to the mountains. Through faith in Jesus Christ, we become a part of eternity and possess eternal life.

The illustrations of the frailty of man are these: dust (v. 3); a watch in the night, about three hours long (v. 4); a brief flood after a shower that soon dries up (v. 5); a sleep that seems but a few minutes long (v. 5); the grass that suddenly shoots up, but before evening has been cut down (vv. 5–6). For other pictures of the brevity of life, see Job 7–9. Verse 3 takes us back to Gen. 3:19; see also Ecc. 12:7. It has well been said that humans are part dust and part divinity. We are made in the image of God, yet we are made of dust. Were it not for sin, there would be no death or decay in our world.

These verses explain why human beings need an eternal refuge. We are frail, we are dust, we are creatures of time; unless we are rightly related to the eternal God, we are nothing. Only through faith in Christ can we know God and share His eternal life.

II. God's Holiness and Man's Sins (90:7–12)

Israel's rebellion at Kadesh-barnea brought forth the wrath of God. See Num. 14:11–25. God offered to strike the nation with disease and disinherit them, but Moses pled with Him on the basis of His own promises and covenants. Moses asked God to pardon their sins, but the Lord still judged Israel by causing the older generation to die in the wilderness during the next forty years. It was the world's longest funeral march. "The wages of sin is death."

Sinful humans live under the wrath of God. "He who does not believe is condemned already," announces John 3:18, nkjv. God sees the secret sins (v. 8; Heb. 4:13) as well as the open ones. Human days "decline like a sunset" (v. 9), from light to darkness. Our days are "as a sigh" (not a "tale"), they are so brief and empty and pass by so quickly. How long do humans live? Well, that generation in Moses' day (from twenty years up, Num. 14:29) would live but forty more years. Add twenty to forty and you get sixty years. Moses speaks of seventy years as the limit, unless God grants an extra ten years. The older people in Israel at that time would not live to reach their eightieth birthday because of their sins. Note that believing Caleb was forty years old at Kadesh-barnea and was allowed to enter Canaan at the age of eighty-five (Josh. 14:6–15).

Verses 11–12 draw a practical conclusion: number your days and make your life count. Who really understands the power of God's anger? If we did understand it, we would not waste our lives as we do in useless endeavors. We must fear the Lord and honor Him, and use our brief lives for His glory. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of

wisdom. Since we are frail, and we are sinners, we need a Savior; and the only Savior is Jesus Christ.

III. God's Blessing and Man's Yearnings (90:13–17)

This final section contains a series of prayers that God will bless His people and crown their lives with glory. Man is not just an animal that lives and dies. He is made in the image of God, and he yearns to have his life accomplish something and mean something. Multitudes of people today are caught in a meaningless existence without purpose or challenge. How they need to yield to Jesus Christ and say with Paul, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21).

Moses prays for God's favor (v. 13). Of course, God does not "repent" as man does, for God never sins. When God repents, He changes His dealings with His people. See Ex. 32:12 and Deut. 32:36. God had just judged Israel; now Moses prays that He will forgive Israel and restore them to the place of favor and blessing.

He prays for joy (vv. 14–15). Imagine facing forty years of constant wandering and death. Imagine having to bury hundreds of people day after day. How could there be any joy or gladness in such a situation? Only through the Lord. Verse 14 can carry the meaning, "Satisfy us in the morning with Your mercy." What were the Jews to do every morning? Go out early and gather the heavenly manna. See Ex. 16. Moses is saying, "Meet us each morning, Lord, as we awaken to the new day. Feed us on Your Word. Give us joy in Your presence." It is just as important for the NT Christian today to start the day with the Lord, reading the Word and praying. In v. 15 Moses asks for gladness in proportion to the sorrows they have tasted. As Christians, we have an even greater promise in 2 Cor. 4:16–18. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (v. 17, nkjv). See also Paul's statement in Rom. 8:18.

Moses prays for God's work to be done (v. 16). He longs to see God's power work on behalf of the people. Historically, of course, this referred to Israel's possession of the land of promise; see Moses' argument with God in Num. 14:13–19. It was certainly no glory to God while Israel wandered in the wilderness; however, it was to His glory when Israel crossed the Jordan and claimed her inheritance in power. Note that Moses in v. 16 is more concerned with God's glory than his own enjoyment.

He prays for God's blessing on man's work (v. 17). There is a wonderful connection between vv. 16 and 17: "Your work—the work of our hands"; "Your glory—the beauty of the Lord our God upon us." The word "beauty" means "God's grace and kindness." In Ps. 27:4, we behold the beauty of the Lord, but here we share the beauty of the Lord. "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:1–2). What does Moses mean when he prays about the work of our hands? Simply this: that our lives might not be wasted, but that God would guide us and bless us so that what we do will last for eternity. "He who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:17). As Moses watches the Jews wander in the wilderness, their lives seem so wasted and useless. Being a man of God, he does not want his life to be wasted; he wants it to count for God's glory. Therefore, he prays that God would establish his works in and through His people. Jesus had the same idea in mind in the Parable of the Two Builders (Matt. 7:21–29).

Apart from Jesus Christ, life would be unbearable. Why endure the trials of life if there is no God and no glory? Then we would be like the sinners who say, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (1 Cor. 15:32). But life is not a burden, a sigh, a sleep in the night. With Jesus Christ in control, life is an adventure, a challenge, an investment for eternity. "Teach us to number our days, Lord, and help us to live every day for Jesus Christ with Your wisdom!"

Psalm 119

This psalm is special in several ways. It is the longest psalm (176 verses), and it is an acrostic psalm, following the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. In most editions of the Bible, the twenty-two sections of this psalm are headed by the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet (Aleph, Beth, Gimel, etc.). In the Hebrew Bible, each verse in a section begins with that Hebrew letter. For example, all the verses in the "aleph" section (vv. 1–8) begin with the Hebrew letter "aleph." Look at the "teth" section (vv. 65–72) and start v. 67 with "Til" and v. 71 with "Tis," and you will have each line starting with the English letter "T" (which is the same as the Hebrew "teth"). The Jews wrote in this fashion to help them memorize the Scriptures so they could meditate on God's Word. We do not know who wrote this psalm, although the writer refers to himself many times. He was suffering for his love for God's Law (vv. 22, 50–53, 95, 98, 115), yet he had determined to obey the Word regardless of the cost. All but five verses mention the Word of God in one way or another. The exceptions are vv. 84, 90, 121, 122, and 132. God is referred to in every verse. The number eight is stamped all over this psalm. Each section has eight verses; there are eight special names for God's Word listed; there are eight symbols of the Word given; the believer has eight responsibilities to the Word. The word "eight" in Hebrew literally means "abundance, more than enough"; it is the number of new beginnings. It is as though the writer is saying, "God's Word is enough. If you have the Scriptures, that is all you need for life and godliness." Indeed the Bible points us to Christ: He is the Living Word about whom the written Word speaks. In one sense, Ps. 119 is an expansion of Ps. 19:7–11. Note the eight basic titles of the Bible in the first nine verses of the psalm: law of the Lord, testimonies, ways, precepts, statutes, commandments, judgments, and word. These are repeated many times throughout the psalm.

I. What the Bible Is

A. *Water for cleansing (v. 9).*

This whole section (vv. 9–16) deals with victory over sin. Young people in particular need to learn to *heed* and *hide* the Word that they might overcome temptation. As you read the Word and meditate on it, it cleanses your inner being, just as water cleanses the body. See John 15:3 and Eph. 5:25–27.

B. Wealth and treasure (vv. 14, 72, 127, 162).

Many people do not know the difference between prices and values. Your Bible may cost but a few dollars, but what a treasure it is. How would you feel if you lost God's Word and could not replace it?

C. A companion and friend (v. 24).

The writer was a stranger (v. 19), rejected by the proud (v. 21) and by princes (v. 23), but he always had the Word to be his counselor. Read Prov. 6:20–22.

D. A song to sing (v. 54).

Imagine making a song out of statutes—laws! Life is a pilgrimage; we are “tourists” and not residents. The songs of the world mean nothing to us, but God's Word is a song to our hearts.

E. Honey (v. 103).

The sweetness of the Word is like honey to the taste. It is sad when the Christian must have the “honey” of this world to be satisfied. See Ps. 34:8 and Job 23:12.

F. A lamp (vv. 105, 130).

This is a dark world and the only dependable light is the Word of God (2 Peter 1:19–21). It leads us a step at a time, as we walk in obedience. First John 1:5–10 tells us we walk in the light as we obey His Word.

G. Great spoil (v. 162).

Poor soldiers were made rich from the spoil left by the defeated enemy. The riches of the Word do not come easy; there must first be that spiritual battle against Satan and the flesh. But it is worth it. Read Luke 11:14–23.

H. A heritage (v. 111).

What a precious inheritance is the Bible! And think of those who had to suffer and die that we might have this inheritance.

II. What the Bible Does

A. It blesses (vv. 1–2).

It is the book with a blessing (Ps. 1:1–3). We are blessed in reading the Word, understanding the Word, and obeying the Word. We are also blessed when we share the Word with others.

B. It gives life (vv. 25, 37, 40, 50, 88, 93).

“Quicken” means “to give life.” The Word gives us eternal life when we believe (1 Peter 1:23). It is the living Word (Heb. 4:12). But the Word also quickens us when we are weak, discouraged, and defeated. Revival comes when we yield to God’s Word.

C. It gives strength (v. 28).

Trusting the Word encourages us (Matt. 4:4). God’s Word has power (Heb. 4:12) and can empower us when we believe and obey.

D. It gives liberty (v. 45).

A law that gives liberty—what a paradox! Sin would have dominion over us (v. 133), but the Word sets us free (John 8:32). True liberty comes in obeying God’s will. His Word is “the perfect law of liberty” (James 1:25).

E. It imparts wisdom (vv. 66, 97–104).

We may get knowledge and facts in other books, but true spiritual wisdom is found in the Bible. Note in vv. 97–104 that there are various ways to discover truth—from your enemies, from your teachers, from your older friends—and all of these are good. But above them all is a knowledge of the Bible. Teachers may know from books, and elders may know from experience (both deserving respect), but these without the Bible are not sufficient.

F. It creates friends (v. 63).

Knowing and obeying the Bible will bring into your life the very finest friends. Those who love God’s Word are friends indeed. There are false friends who may dazzle you with their worldly wisdom and wealth, but their friendship will lead you astray. Stick with those who “stick” with the Bible (v. 31).

G. It gives comfort (vv. 50, 76, 82, 92).

More than sixty verses in this psalm mention trial and persecution (vv. 22, 50–53, 95, 98, 115, etc.). The believer who obeys the Word will have trials in this world, but the Bible gives him lasting comfort. The Comforter, the Spirit of God, takes the Word of God and applies it to our hearts to comfort us.

H. It gives direction (v. 133).

The Christian life is a “walk,” a day at a time and a step at a time (vv. 1, 3, 45). The Word directs our steps, both for walking and for running (v. 32). Note the prayers in vv. 35 and 116–117. As we pray for guidance, the Lord answers through His Word.

III. What We Must Do with the Bible

A. *Love it* (vv. 97, 159).

The way you treat your Bible is the way you treat Christ. To love Him is to love His Word. The Word is a delight (vv. 16, 24, 16, 35, 47, 70) and not a disappointment; we rejoice to read it (vv. 14, 162).

B. *Prize it* (vv. 72, 128).

To hold the Bible in high esteem is the mark of a true saint. It should be more precious to us than any earthly treasure.

C. *Study it* (vv. 7, 12, 18, 26–27).

At least twelve times the psalmist prays, "Teach me." The Christian who *daily* studies his Bible will be blessed of God. Bible study is not always easy, for it takes the "whole heart" (vv. 2, 10, 34, 69, 145).

D. *Memorize it* (v. 11).

"The best Book, in the best place, for the best purpose!" is the way Campbell Morgan explained this verse. All ages need to memorize the Word, not children and young people alone. Joshua was not a youth when God commanded him to memorize the Law (Josh. 1:8). Jesus was able to quote Scripture when He faced Satan in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1–11).

E. *Meditate on it* (vv. 15, 23, 48, 78, 97, 99, 148).

Meditation is to the soul what digestion is to the body. To meditate means to "turn over" God's Word in the mind and heart, to examine it, to compare Scripture with Scripture, to "feed on" its wonderful truths. In this day of noise and confusion, such meditation is rare but so needful. Meditation is impossible without memorization.

F. *Trust it* (v. 42).

We trust the Bible about everything, because it is right about everything (v. 128). It is true and can be trusted wholly. To argue with the Bible is to argue with God. We test every other book by what God says in His Word.

G. *Obey it* (vv. 1–8).

To keep the Word is to obey it, to walk in its commandments. Satan knows the Word, but he cannot obey it. If we know God's truth and fail to obey it, we are only fooling ourselves.

H. Declare it (vv. 13, 26).

As we obey, we should also witness to others about the Word and tell them what the Lord has done for us.