



*Good News*  
**Bible Reading Program**

A free educational service provided by the United Church of God, *an International Association*

— May 2005 —

DATE	READING TOPIC	SCRIPTURES
1-13 May	Production Delay	
14 May	Introduction to Psalms	
15-16 May	Book 1 opening: 1) The righteous blessed, the ungodly shall perish; 2) The Messiah will rule the nations	Psalms 1–2
17-20 May	3) Plea for deliverance from enemies; 4) Confident prayer for relief in distress; 5) Prayer for God's direction; 6) Prayer for healing	Psalms 3–6
21-24 May	7) Plea for deliverance from enemies; 8) God's glory in creation and human dominion; 9) Praise to God for deliverance from enemy nations; 10) Prayer for justice	Psalms 7–10
25-28 May	11) Trusting in God; 12) Plea for help against the proud; 13) Patiently trusting in God's salvation; 14) The foolishness of godless and corrupt mankind	Psalms 11–14
29-31 May	15) Those who may dwell with God; 16) The hope of those who trust in God; 17) Confident prayer for vindication, help and deliverance	Psalms 15–17

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<b>Highlights to Think About From This Month's Reading</b>
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**Production Delay****May 1-13**

Our apologies for the delay. Readings resume May 14.

**Introduction to Psalms (Psalms 1–2)****May 14**

As we have seen, the early Hebrew arrangement of the Old Testament was in three parts—the Law, the Prophets and the Writings. Mentioning this arrangement, Jesus Christ referred to the last section as the Psalms (Luke 24:44). This was evidently a common designation for the Writings that arose from Psalms being the first book of this section and occupying a rather significant portion of it.

The English titles by which we know this great book of songs, prayers and poetry—Psalms and the Psalter—derive from Greek. *Psalmoi* is the book's title in the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament and the name used in the original Greek of the New Testament (Luke 20:42; 24:44; Acts 1:20). Meaning a song sung to a stringed instrument (such as the harp, lyre and lute), the word was apparently a translation of the Hebrew *mizmor*, a term used in the introductory precepts or superscriptions of 57 individual psalms. No original title for the book has been preserved in Hebrew. However, in rabbinic literature the accepted name was *Sefer Tehillim* ("Book of Praises").

The predominant author of the book is Israel's King David. Of the 150 psalms making up the collection, 73 are designated in the introductory superscriptions as *le-David*, translated "of David." While the terminology is not clear, as it could mean *by* David, *concerning* David, *for* David or *to* David, it is traditionally understood to mean an attribution of authorship. Psalm 18's superscription says explicitly that David "spoke to the LORD the words of this song." This psalm varies only slightly from David's psalm in 2 Samuel 22. And the end of Psalm 72 refers to preceding psalms in the book as "the prayers of David the son of Jesse." The Psalms are referred to in one of the ancient Jewish histories as "the writings of David" (2 Maccabees 2:13). The Talmud likewise attributes them in the Midrash on Psalm 1. The New Testament confirms David as the author of at least seven psalms: Psalm 2 (Acts 4:25-26); Psalm 16 (Acts 2:25-28; 13:35-36); Psalm 32 (Romans 4:6-8); Psalm 69 (Acts 1:16-20; Romans 11:9-10); Psalm 95 (Hebrews 4:7); Psalm 109 (Acts 1:16-20); and Psalm 110 (Matthew 22:41-45; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44; Acts 2:34-35).

David was certainly suited to this task. He is described as a "skillful player on the harp" (1 Samuel 16:16-23), an inventor of musical instruments (1 Chronicles 23:5; 2 Chronicles 29:26-30; Nehemiah 12:36; Amos 6:5), a composer of laments or dirges (2 Samuel 1:17; 3:33), and "the sweet psalmist of Israel" (23:1). As king, David took on the task of organizing the singers and musicians for tabernacle and later temple worship (1 Chronicles 6:31-32; 16:4-7, 41-42; 25:1, 6; 2 Chronicles 7:6; 8:14; 23:18; 29:26-27, 30; Nehemiah 12:24).

Yet David is not the only composer of the Psalms. We also find some attributed to men David placed in charge of worship in Jerusalem—Asaph (with 12 psalms) as well as Ethan and Heman (with one psalm each). The name of David's son Solomon appears twice. Ten psalms are attributed to the Levitical family of Korah (the designation "*sons of Korah*" meaning "*descendants of Korah*"). This is the same Korah who rebelled in the wilderness in Numbers 16, so obviously these descendants did not share his mindset. One composition, Psalm 90, is attributed to Moses—making it the psalm of oldest recorded origin.

Fifty psalms have no attribution, though two of these, Psalms 2 and 95, are referred to in the New Testament as the work of David, as noted above. A number of other anonymous psalms are probably also the work of David. Yet other people must have contributed as well, as Psalm 137 was written following the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem—centuries after the time of David and Solomon. Women, such as Deborah (see Judges 5) and Hannah (see 1 Samuel 2), are known to have written songs and poetic prayers. The prophet Habakkuk wrote a psalm to be used in temple worship (Habakkuk 3). King Hezekiah curiously declared, "We will sing my songs with stringed instruments all the days of our life, in the house of the LORD" (Isaiah 38:20). Perhaps some psalms were composed as late as the time of Ezra, when the final compilation of the book of Psalms took place.

Actually, the book of Psalms is composed of *five* books, each ending with a doxology (expression of praise) to God:

- **Book I** (Psalms 1–41): “Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen” (41:13).
- **Book II** (Psalms 42–72): “Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only does wondrous things! And blessed be His glorious name forever! And let the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen and Amen. The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended” (72:18-20).
- **Book III** (Psalms 73–89): “Blessed be the LORD forevermore! Amen and Amen” (89:52).
- **Book IV** (Psalms 90–106): “Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting! And let all the people say, ‘Amen!’ Praise the LORD!” (106:48).
- **Book V** (Psalms 107–150): No similar short closing formula. Rather, the entirety of Psalm 150 apparently serves as the doxology.

The doxologies ending Books I, II and III do not appear to have originally been part of the final psalms to which they are appended. It seems that the three books once formed independent collections—separate hymnals so to speak. The note concluding Book II stating that the prayers of David end with Psalm 72 supports this since there are at least 19 psalms of David in later books. (Thus the prayers were ended as far as that particular collection went.) The repetition of psalms also supports this. Psalm 14 in Book I reappears as Psalm 53 in Book II. Psalm 40:13-17 in Book I reappears as Psalm 70 in Book II. Parts of two psalms in Book II, Psalm 57:7-11 and 60:5-12, become Psalm 108 in Book V.

Many believe Book I of Psalms to have been compiled before David’s death. Perhaps it was initially put together early in his reign to serve as the hymnal for tabernacle worship. This does not rule out later additions and rearrangement—as Psalm 3 concerns events late in David’s life. Some have speculated that Book II was also compiled before David’s death—shortly before it, with the total of 72 psalms (3 x 24) intended to be sung in succession by the 24 priestly courses David appointed for temple worship. There is some disagreement about this numbering however, with a few psalms as we currently have them appearing to have originally been one psalm and some questioning whether Psalms 1 and 2 originally served as an introduction to Book I. Another issue concerns the superscription of Psalm 72, the last psalm in Book II. It is labeled as *le-Solomon*. Since the end of this psalm concludes with “The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended,” some see it as a psalm of David *concerning* Solomon or intended *for* Solomon to use. But it could well be that Solomon wrote it prior to David’s death and that David simply included it in his own collection. It could also be that, following David’s death, Solomon appended his own psalm to the end of his father’s psalms—either having received the compilation of Book II from David or having authorized the compilation himself.

Book III is often considered to have been compiled during the Babylonian Exile, while the compilation of Books IV and V appears to have come after the return from Babylon (though some place Book IV during the Exile). It should be noted that the break between Books IV and V might have been artificial. The doxology ending Book IV seems to be integral to Psalm 106 and may not originally have applied to the entire collection. There is no “Amen and Amen” to conclude Book IV as in previous divisions. Books IV and V share common distinctions from the other books. For one, many more psalms have no superscriptions (18 of the 61 as opposed to only six without superscriptions in the preceding 89). For another, Books IV and V have a near absence of musical references and technical terms like *lamente’ah* (“To the Chief Musician”) and *selah* (probably indicating a pause or interlude).

Also, *Hallelujah* (“Praise the LORD” in the NKJV) occurs only in Books IV and V. And these latter two books share similar subject matter—psalms of praise and thanksgiving suitable for temple worship services. All of this leads us to suspect that Books IV and V were originally one collection that was later divided into two. This may have been done to fit the pattern of the five books of the Law, as they were apparently read according to a weekly schedule in conjunction with the Law and Prophets in a three-year cycle—a practice that seems to have begun in Ezra’s time. The Talmud in its Midrash on Psalm 1 draws a correspondence between the five books of the Law and the five books of Psalms. There are thematic correspondences here as well, as we will see.

The Psalms give us the heart and feeling of God’s law. God’s law is an expression of His character—revealed in Scripture as love. For us, living this way of love means following His commandments. The first four of the Ten Commandments tell us how to love God, and the last six tell us how to love our fellow man. God’s commandments are further delineated and demonstrated through the first division of the Old Testament, the five books of the Law. The next division, the Prophets, gives an added dimension.

The Former Prophets (the books of Joshua through 2 Kings) show us how, historically, blessings came by obedience to God's law and curses came through disobedience. The Latter Prophets (the books of Isaiah through Malachi) carry the same lessons of blessing and cursing into the future. The next Old Testament division, the Writings, gives further and finer specifications of the application of God's law.

The book of Psalms in particular gives the whole heart, feeling and approach one needs to have toward God's law. God looked on David as a man after His own heart (Acts 13:22), and the outpouring of David's (and others') thoughts and feelings in prayer, or in song, before God is a tremendous example to be carefully studied and personally applied.

Here are five specific applications of the Psalms:

1. *Prayers*: Psalms can provide examples of how to pray. They can be a guide to getting started in prayer, or become your own personal prayers in particular cases.
2. *History*: Many psalms show what went through David's mind in certain situations in his life. The Psalms even contain added details about the history of Israel.
3. *Songs and poetry*: Hymnals used in the Church of God today are a prime example of this, as they often make use of the translated lyrics of the psalms.
4. *Prophecy*: Psalm 22, for example, is a prophecy of the Messiah's sufferings. Others speak of His return and other future events.
5. *Practical*: The Psalms contain direct how-to instruction, though not typically in the same specific way as Proverbs.

The five books of Psalms, like the five books of the Law, cover an interesting progression of historical and prophetic themes. The historical themes of the Psalms by book respectively appear to be: (I) Man and creation; (II) Israel and redemption; (III) Public worship and the temple; (IV) The sojourn of God's people on the earth; (V) Praise and the Word of God. The prophetic themes appear to be: (I) The beginning of salvation; (II) God's relationship with His Church; (III) The time of the Great Tribulation; (IV) God's Kingdom; (V) Mankind's complete salvation. Correspondence has also been shown with the five Megilloth ("Scrolls")—i.e., the festival scrolls read by the Jews during particular festivals. These are as follows:

1. Song of Solomon: Read at Passover.
2. Ruth: Read at Pentecost, the time of the wheat harvest, though there may also be a connection with the closely related Days of Unleavened Bread commencing the earlier barley harvest. Both harvests are mentioned in Ruth.
3. Lamentations: Read on the fast of the 9th of Ab commemorating the temple's destruction, though there could be a thematic connection with the Feast of Trumpets.
4. Ecclesiastes: Read in conjunction with the Feast of Tabernacles, though this sober reflection seems to correspond with the Day of Atonement's focus in the run-up to the Feast.
5. Esther: Read in conjunction with the Jewish feast of Purim commemorating the deliverance of the Jews as told in the book, yet this may prefigure on some level the ultimate deliverance of all mankind foreshadowed in the Eighth Day following the Feast of Tabernacles, often referred to today as the Last Great Day.

Time and space prevents us from exploring all the parallels with the five books of Psalms here, but this makes for a fascinating study.

At the outset, we should take a moment to consider the literary quality of the Psalms. *The Bible Reader's Companion* says in its introduction to the book: "The Psalms are lyric poems, heart songs that touch us deeply. Much of their power derives from a distinctive form of Hebrew poetry, which does not rely on rhyme but on rhythmic patterns of thought. Ideas, emotions, and images are repeated or developed in a variety of ways to create an intuitive response in the reader. While it is not necessary to understand Hebrew poetry to be captivated by the Psalms or to sense their impact, it's important to grasp its principles if we try to interpret them.

"Simply put, the key to Hebrew poetry is parallelism. That is, its tendency to arrange ideas, emotions, and images side by side in a variety of ways. The three simplest forms of parallelism are synonymous, antithetic, and synthetic. In synonymous parallelism a thought is repeated in different words:

“Our mouths were filled with laughter,

our tongues with songs of joy' (Ps. 126:2).

"In antithetic parallelism the initial thought, emotion, or image is emphasized by contrasting it with an opposite:

"A kind man benefits himself,  
but a cruel man brings himself harm' (Prov. 11:17).

"In synthetic parallelism the second line completes the thought of the first:

"I will lie down and sleep in peace,  
for You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety' (Ps. 4:8).

"There are more complex types of parallelism found in Psalms. Yet the basic concept is simple. The power of Hebrew poetry flows from the arrangement and repetition of the emotions, ideas, and images presented by the poet" (p. 346).

A note on the superscriptions or prescripts of the Psalms is also in order. In the psalm of Habakkuk 3, the phrase "A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, on Shigionoth [apparently denoting a poetic style]" appears at the beginning, while appended to the end are the words "To the Chief Musician. With my stringed instruments." It has been suggested by some that this is the proper formula for psalms in general and that it should be extended to the book of Psalms. This would mean that the beginning of many a superscription actually belongs to the previous psalm. For instance, Psalm 3 would begin with the superscription "A Psalm of David when he fled from Absalom his son" and end with what Bible translations place at the beginning of Psalm 4: "To the Chief Musician. With stringed instruments." Psalm 4 would begin with "A Psalm of David" and end with the beginning of the next superscription, "To the Chief Musician. With flutes." And on it goes.

In his *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, Gleason Archer cites a treatise (J.W. Thirtle, *The Titles of the Psalms, Their Meaning and Nature Explained*, 1905) suggesting "that many of the Psalms had not only a prescript but also a postscript. Some of the ancient Egyptian and Akkadian hymns have been preserved to us with a final notation. This makes it quite possible that in the later compilation of the canonical Psalms the scribes became confused by the presence of postscripts and assumed that they should be taken as part of the prescript for the psalm following" (1982, p. 243). Bear this in mind through the readings, as we will not always touch on this in commenting on individual psalms.

Finally, it should be mentioned that we have already read 19 psalms and part of another one in the Bible Reading Program, mainly in conjunction with events in David's life. This will be noted when we encounter these. We are reading them again here to see their context in the Psalter, sometimes with additional comments.

### **Follow Righteousness and Submit to the Lord's Anointed (Psalms 1–2)**

**May 15-16**

Neither Psalm 1 nor 2 have a superscription giving attribution. The apostles Peter and John ascribe Psalm 2 to David in Acts 4:24-26, as does Paul in Acts 13:33. David may be the author of Psalm 1 as well, as it opens Book 1 of the Psalms, which along with Book 2 is generally attributed to him (see 72:20). On the other hand, it could well be the work of another composer, as it may have been placed here by a later editor to serve as an introduction to the entire collection of the Psalms. Of course, a psalm of David himself could have been used for the same purpose, as Psalm 2 seems to be part of the introduction as well.

Regarding Psalms 1–2, *The Zondervan NIV Study Bible* notes: "These two 'orphan' psalms (having no title) are bound together by framing clauses ('Blessed is the man...{whose} delight is in the law of the LORD'; 'Blessed are all who take refuge in him') that highlight their function as the introduction to the whole Psalter. Together they point on the one hand to God's law and to the instruction of the wisdom teachers (Ps 1) and on the other hand to a central theme in the Prophets...namely, what [God] has committed himself to accomplish for and through his anointed king from the house of David (Ps 2). In this way these two psalms link the Psalter with the rest of the [Old Testament] literature and alert those who take it in hand that to hear these psalms aright they must be understood within that larger frame of reference. At the same time, as the port of entry into the Psalter they make clear that those who would

find their own voice in the psalms and so would appropriate them as testimonies to their own faith must fit the profile of those called ‘blessed’ here.”

In **Psalm 1**, the psalmist contrasts the way of the righteous, which brings blessings, with the destiny of the wicked. “For a prime indicator of the psalm’s central theme [compare] the first and last words, which frame the whole (“Blessed...perish”)” (note on Psalm 1). The word translated “blessed” can also mean “happy.” However, as *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* points out, it is important to remember that this state of true happiness is “not merely a feeling. Even when the righteous do not feel happy, they are still considered ‘blessed’ from God’s perspective. He bestows this gift on them. Neither negative feelings nor adverse conditions can take His blessing away” (note on verse 1). Because the righteous delight in God’s law (verse 2; 119:6) they bear good fruit for God.

God blesses those who are trying to live the right way (verse 6) and gives them a sense of joy and purpose. He does not bestow that same attention on the ungodly (verses 4-5). In terms of productiveness for God, the wicked are as useless as wind-blown chaff. Jeremiah makes a similar pronouncement about ungodly men: “Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD. He will be *like a bush in the wastelands*” (17:5-6, NIV). Evil men are prone to engage in deepening wickedness (verse 1). They move from *walking* alongside of evil, to openly *standing* in sin, then *sitting* as teachers of evil.

The godly, in contrast, “are devoted to the Lord (Deut. 6:7, cf. Joshua 1:7-8). In all their activities they keep distant from the ungodly, lest they get under their influence. They carefully guard themselves in their family, business, and social relations as they set the terms of their relations, while being polite and gracious” (*Expositor’s*, note on verse 1).

**Psalm 2** is a royal psalm that speaks of David and His descendants reigning in Jerusalem—ultimately pointing to Christ’s millennial rule on the earth. “I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion...I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession” (verses 6, 8). “Israelite kings and priests were anointed with oil when they took office. The ‘Anointed One’ probably originally meant ‘king.’ It came, however, to stand for more. The Hebrew word is *masiah*, which became *Messiah* and is translated into Greek as *Christos* or *Christ*. This psalm was understood in the New Testament as referring to Jesus—for no Old Testament king ever gained the control of the nations implied here” (*Zondervan New Student Bible*, note on verse 2).

Considering that God announced His plan and has all power to fulfill it, the psalmist wonders at the audacity of plotting against Him. To take counsel against God and His Anointed is a *vain thing*. God laughs scornfully at the long history of human insubordination (verse 4). Kings and leaders have been warned in advance. They should “wise up” and serve the Lord in fear and trembling (verse 11; Deuteronomy 10:12-13). At the end of the age, a union of nations will mount another rebellion against God—this time an attack on the returning Jesus Christ. With all power at His command, Christ will destroy the rebel armies and commence to rule the nations “with an iron scepter” (verse 9; Revelation 2:27; 12:5, NIV).

“You are My Son, today I have begotten You” in Psalm 2:7 “is the public proclamation that the Son is to inherit the kingdom from His Father...establishing the Son’s right to rule over God’s kingdom” (*The Bible Reader’s Companion*, note on verse 7). God has not said this to His angels (see Hebrews 1:5). He reserved this for Jesus (Acts 13:33) as well as other human beings who would be spiritually begotten as God’s children (see Hebrews 1–2).

“Kiss the Son” (verse 12) is perhaps meant “as a sign of submission (see 1Sa 10:1; 1Ki 19:18; Hos 13:2...). Submission to an Assyrian king was expressed by kissing his feet” (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on Psalm 2:12). The New Testament shows kissing on the cheek as a means of greeting, which would signify welcome and acceptance. The Jewish Tanakh translation renders the entire phrase “pay homage in good faith,” leaving out the word “Son”—perhaps with some concern over Christian interpretation—but declaring the Hebrew uncertain in a footnote. It is true that the word for “son” would here be the Aramaic *bar* rather than the Hebrew *ben*. However, as *Expositor’s* states in its footnote on verse 12, “In favor of the traditional translation [‘Son’]...are the context of the psalm (submission to the Lord and to the anointed), the proposal by [commentator] Delitzsch that the sequence *bar pen* (‘Son, lest’) avoids the dissonance of *ben pen*...and the suggestion by [another commentator] that the usage of the Aramaism may be intentionally directed to the foreign nations”—as Aramaic was the common language

of the entire ancient Middle East. Interestingly, it would also be the language of the Jews when Jesus the Son actually came among them.

### “You Have Relieved Me in My Distress” (Psalms 3–6)

May 17-20

**Psalm 3** begins a thematic grouping of 12 of David’s psalms (3–14), as we will later see in conjunction with Psalm 8 and Psalm 14.

We read Psalm 3 earlier in the Bible Reading Program. It is the lament David composed when he fled from his son Absalom (see the Bible Reading Program comments on 2 Samuel 15:1–16:14 and Psalm 3). Driven by ambition to become king himself, Absalom turned the hearts of the people away from David. David despairs that so many have turned against him (verse 1). They no longer believe God is with him to help him (verse 2).

The phrase “lifts up my head” (verse 3) expresses David’s belief that God will raise him up from the humiliation he suffers. In 2 Samuel 15:30 we read of the sad occasion of David being driven out of Jerusalem: “So David went up by the Ascent of the Mount of Olives, and wept as he went up and he had his head covered and went barefoot. And all the people who were with him covered their heads and went up, weeping as they went up.”

In spite of intense enemy opposition, David is able to sleep without fear, “for the LORD sustained me” (verses 5-6). The KJV and NKJV translation of verse 7 says that God has come to David’s defense before. However, the NIV translates verse 7 as a present request for God to “strike all my enemies on the jaw; break the teeth of the wicked.” Even if the latter is correct, God has indeed intervened for David before and will certainly do so again—just as He will for all of us who place our trust in Him.

**Psalm 4** is one of David’s prayers for deliverance. It “is linked to Ps. 3 in mood and concept. Both speak of the possibility of finding such peace in God’s presence that even when torn by physical and emotional pain, a person may still have restful sleep (3:5; 4:8)” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on Psalm 4).

In the superscription, where the King James Version leaves a word untranslated, “on Neginoth,” the New King James Version properly translates this as “With stringed instruments.” (As noted in the Bible Reading Program introduction to Psalms, this may be the postscript for Psalm 3.)

Getting into the words of Psalm 4 itself, “O God of my righteousness” in verse 1 “can also be translated ‘O my righteous God.’ The phrase has two meanings: (1) Only God is righteous. (2) All of a person’s righteousness is found in him alone” (note on verse 1).

David addresses those who are currently troubling him: “How long, O you sons of men, will you turn my glory to shame?” (verse 2). “That is, through slander rob David of the public honor he had enjoyed under the Lord’s blessing and care (see 3:3...) and bring him into public disrepute” (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on 4:2).

David knows that God has set certain godly people “apart for Himself.” David was such a person, set apart by God to be king over Israel (1 Samuel 16:12-13). For this reason, he is confident that God hears his prayers and intervenes to help him.

David calls on his enemies to search their hearts, saying, “In your anger [against me] do not sin” (verse 4, NIV). Since anger can lead to sin, his detractors need to quiet down, bring their requests and sacrifices to God and trust Him to resolve their complaints (verse 5). This is remarkable in that the wicked are offered a way to redemption rather than a pronouncement of doom. In the New Testament the apostle Paul quotes verse 4 about being angry and yet not sinning in a different context—to describe the proper exercise of righteous indignation (Ephesians 4:26).

In Psalm 4:6, David recognizes that many have become discouraged, asking, “Who can show us any good?” (NIV). David knows that only God can restore confidence in the nation and end the present crisis. “Lift up the light of your countenance upon us” (verse 6). The related priestly blessing in Numbers 6:26 adds an additional phrase: “The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, *and give you peace.*” With that in mind, it is interesting to note that David concludes with a determined focus on joy and peace. Again, he is able to sleep peacefully even in the present circumstances because God provides safety.

**Psalm 5.** The superscription (the first part of which may refer to Psalm 4, as the Bible Reading Program’s introductory notes on Psalms explains) apparently describes accompaniment “with flutes,” the latter word seeming to translate the Hebrew “Nehiloth” (KJV).

Psalm 5 is a morning prayer (verses 2-3) in which David seeks help for another day. Because the world is corrupt, God makes Himself a refuge and shield for the righteous (verses 11-12). Because the

world is confused, He provides clear guidance if we will seek it: “Lead me, O LORD, in Your righteousness...make Your way straight before my face” (verse 8).

Only the righteous can come into God’s presence and enjoy His blessings (verses 5, 11-12). David says in verse 5, “You hate all workers of iniquity.” The Hebrew word for hate “is a strong term that speaks primarily of rejection” (*Nelson*, note on 11:4-6). We should understand this in terms of ultimate judgment, as the next verse continues: “You shall *destroy* those who speak falsehood; the LORD *abhors* the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.” What God really hates (what He rejects and wants to destroy) is what the wicked think and do—that is, the things that classify them as wicked. God in fact loves all humanity so much that He has provided an atonement for them through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (see John 3:16)—*if* they will repent and accept it. Yet ultimately, if they still reject God, then all that will constitute them are the things God hates—and He will in perfect justice utterly annihilate them (for their own good and the good of everyone else).

David immediately balances his reference to God’s just hatred of evil by referring to “the multitude of Your mercy” (verse 7). “Mercy here is *hesed*, a term also translated as ‘love,’ ‘covenant love [or loyalty],’ and ‘loving-kindness.’ *Hesed* reminds us that God is totally committed to humankind. The love we see in Calvary’s ultimate sacrifice draws us, as God’s mercy drew David, to worship and serve the Lord” (*Bible Reader’s Companion*, note on verse 7). Relying on God’s mercy, David expresses his intent to worship God and asks for help in following Him—to provide no basis for his enemies’ accusations—as he knows he would not succeed in obedience on his own (verses 7-8).

It is interesting that David says he will worship toward God’s holy temple (verse 7) when there was as yet no temple in Jerusalem. Perhaps David was speaking of God’s temple in heaven (compare Hebrews 9:23-24; Revelation 15:5–16:1). Or perhaps during his preparations for the building of the physical temple late in his life, David wrote this psalm (or modified an earlier one) to be sung when the temple was standing. Note that the psalm’s superscription (or alternatively the postscript at the beginning of Psalm 6) is addressed “To the Chief Musician.” For us today, the temple of God, in a spiritual sense, can also refer to the body of believers with God’s Holy Spirit—the Church of God (Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Corinthians 3:17).

David asks God to pass sentence on his enemies because they have “no faithfulness in their mouth” (Psalm 5:9). They boast, flatter, lie and curse. “Not a word from their mouth can be trusted; their heart is filled with destruction” (same verse, NIV). “Their throat is an open tomb; they flatter [deceivingly] with their tongue.” Paul used these words to argue for the depravity of all humanity (Romans 3:13). Jesus stated that a man is defiled by what comes out of his heart: “Those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man” (Matthew 15:18-29). The sins of the wicked (verses 4-5, 9-10)—which means everyone until they repent—spring from rebellion against God: “Banish them for their many sins, for they have rebelled against you” (verse 10, NIV). As mentioned above, ultimately the wicked will be cast out: “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matthew 7:19).

But God surrounds the righteous—those who repent and seek His will—with protection and favor, making Himself their refuge and shield (Psalm 5:11-12). Of course, this does not mean that God will allow no calamity to overtake His people, as we saw in the book of Job. But everything happens within His oversight, as He directs all things to a positive outcome for those who faithfully serve Him (see Romans 8:28). And in general, He does maintain a protective defense around His people, and He provides them with constant blessings.

**Psalm 6.** Where the King James Version gives the superscription (perhaps the postscript of Psalm 5) as “on Neginoth upon Sheminith,” the New King James gives the likely translation “On an eight-stringed harp.”

In Psalm 6, David is distressed by an illness that he senses God has sent as a punishment for his own sinfulness (verse 1). He suffers intense pain—“my bones are troubled” (verse 2)—with no remission in sight: “My soul is in anguish. How long, O LORD, how long?” (verse 3). He believes the illness to be mortal (verse 5).

We do not know when this situation occurred. David wrote a number of psalms associated with serious illness that may concern the same time. Some have speculated that this came on him after the

episode of taking a census of Israel, which focused more on national strength than the need for God's help (see 2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 21). God sent a plague on the people, who were likely complicit in self-sufficient thinking. Yet David, who had ordered the census despite Joab's warning, took responsibility. As 2 Samuel 24:17 says: "Then David spoke to the LORD when he saw the angel who was striking the people, and said, 'Surely I have sinned, and I have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand, I pray, be against me and against my father's house.'" Perhaps his concluding words here came to pass when the plague on the nation was halted, though we cannot know for sure.

Whatever sin it was that apparently brought on his illness, David calls on God's mercy—His unfailing love (Psalm 6:4). As in Psalm 5, the word here again is *hesed*. Says *The Nelson Study Bible*: "Perhaps the most significant single term in the Hebrew text regarding the character of God is the word rendered *mercies* here. The Hebrew word describes what some prefer to call the loyal love of God. The translations vary because the word has much depth. Aside from the personal name of God (Yahweh), it may be the single most important term describing Him as the object of praise in the Book of Psalms" (note on 6:4).

David warns his enemies in verses 8-10 that he is confident in God's healing and that they will be ashamed, dismayed, and suddenly disgraced for reviling him and, in so doing, dishonoring God, who declared David His servant.

### **"That You May Silence the Enemy" (Psalms 7–10)**

**May 21-24**

The superscription of **Psalm 7** in the New King James Version calls it a "meditation" of David. The Hebrew for meditation is *higgaion*, as in Psalm 9:16, but the word at the beginning of Psalm 7, as the KJV superscription shows, is actually *shiggaion*, which occurs only here in the Bible. Its plural form, however, is used in the psalm of Habakkuk 3. Repeating from the Bible Reading Program comments on that passage, "The word *shiggayon* comes from *shagah*, 'to wander,' a wandering song" (*Adam Clarke's Commentary*, note on Psalm 7; see note on Habakkuk 3:1). "It may derive from a verbal root meaning 'to reel' or 'to err,' and if so points to some irregular rhythmic mode" (*New Bible Commentary*, note on Habakkuk 3:1).

David names Cush the Benjamite in Psalm 7's superscription. This man, mentioned nowhere else in Scripture, has apparently spoken on behalf of a group of persecutors who accused David of wrongdoing and were bent on his destruction. Whether they actually believed him guilty of wrong or were just making this up to justify action against him is not clear. Some today speculate that the distinct reference to Cush being a Benjamite may indicate his being a supporter or agent of King Saul. In any case, Cush and his comrades must have been dangerous opponents because David cries out that, if God does not deliver him, his persecutors would "tear me like a lion, and rip me in pieces" (verses 1-2).

In his appeal to God, David takes an oath of innocence in which he invites God to give him into the hands of the enemies who seek to take his life if he is guilty of any of the charges they bring against him (verses 3-5). David is so confident of his innocence that he asks God to judge his righteousness, his integrity (verse 8), his heart and mind (verse 9). "In the Hebrew, *hearts and minds* is literally 'hearts and kidneys'—an ancient way of describing the innermost person" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verses 9-10). We should note that in praying to God the words "Judge me according to my righteousness," David does not mean for God to judge every aspect of his life by this standard. (As with any of us, God would in such an inventory find sins worthy of condemnation. Indeed, other prayers of David show him praying for forgiveness where he has fallen short.) Rather, David in his prayer here is asking for God's judgment in the matter at hand—to judge him according to his deeds and even inward motivations with respect to the accusations that have been made against him. In these, he knows that the righteous and just God will see his complete innocence and fully absolve him.

Against the wicked, however, David describes God as a just Judge and an angry Warrior who will "sharpen His sword," prepare "deadly weapons" and make ready "flaming arrows" to satisfy justice (verses 11-13). Yet David recognizes that the wicked create their own problems for themselves, reaping what they sow (compare Galatians 6:7-8). They *conceive* trouble, which then returns on their own heads (verses 14, 16). "The wicked become 'mothers' to trouble. They will give birth to their own destruction" (note on verses 14-16). They fall into the pits they themselves have dug to trap their prey (verse 15). David therefore knows that those who have plotted his destruction have set up the circumstances for their

own demise. Perhaps it was in the midst of his prayer that God inspired David with this reminder—moving him to sing God’s praises (see verse 17).

**Psalm 8.** “At this juncture in the Psalter,” says the *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* in its note on Psalm 8, “this psalm surprises. After five psalms [3–7] (and 64 Hebrew poetic lines—following the introduction to the Psalter...Ps 1–2) in which the psalmists have called on Yahweh to deal with human perversity, this psalm’s praise of Yahweh for his astounding endowment of the human race with royal ‘glory and honor’ (v. 5) serves as a striking and unexpected counterpoint. Its placement here highlights the glory (God’s gift) and disgrace (humanity’s own doing) that characterize human beings and the corresponding range of difference in God’s dealings with them. And after five more psalms [9–13] (and 64 poetic lines), this psalm in turn receives a counterpoint...[in Psalm 14, as we will later see].”

Where the NKJV superscription of Psalm 8 has “On the instrument of Gath,” the KJV has “upon Gittith” and the NIV has “According to *gittith*.” “The Hebrew word perhaps refers to either a winepress (‘song of the winepress’) or the Philistine city of Gath (‘Gittite lyre or music’; see 2Sa 15:18)” (note on Psalm 8).

David opens and closes the psalm praising the excellence of God’s name (verses 1, 9)—representing God’s power, His character and His purpose. The name here is the Hebrew *YHWH*—the Tetragrammaton (i.e., four letters)—often transliterated into English as *Yahweh*, as above. The name means “He Is Who He Is” (the Eternal One). David declares God’s name excellent “in all the earth.” Wherever one looks on earth—and up from earth to the heavens above—the glory of God is revealed. God introduced Himself to Moses by the first person form of the Tetragrammaton, saying, “I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3:14). “The One who spoke to Moses declared Himself to be the Eternal One—uncaused and independent. Only the Creator of all things can call Himself the I AM in the absolute sense; all other creatures are in debt to Him for their existence” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on Exodus 3:14).

David observes that “from the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies” (verse 2, NIV). While the word for “praise” could also be rendered “strength,” as in the KJV and NKJV, “praise” seems the better translation since Jesus quoted the verse this way when the common people (figuratively children) praised Him while the “mature” religious leaders who opposed Him wanted to squelch them but could not (Matthew 21:16). Perhaps David simply meant that despite the scorn of the wicked, there were always new generations of children to gaze in wonder at God’s creation and express awe. Yet God who inspired the psalm also had the more specific prophetic fulfillment in mind.

David’s reflections on the grandeur of the heavens (verse 3) gives rise to the question, “What is man?” (verse 4). “The Heb[rew] word here [for man] is *’enos*, which emphasizes man’s mortality and weakness. David is stunned that the all-powerful Creator should exalt in such puny beings by caring for us and by giving us dominion over His earth” (*Bible Reader’s Companion*, note on Psalm 8). Who are we in comparison to the Creator? Why would He even think of us? Why would He care for us or have anything to do with us? (verse 4). The word for “visit” here in the NKJV has the sense of “see to” or “deal with,” which can have either a positive or negative sense. Here the meaning is positive.

In verses 5-8, David muses further about man’s place in the scheme of things—that he is the pinnacle of God’s earthly creation.

In verse 5, the word translated “angels” is *elohim*, the word used throughout the Old Testament for God. The Moffatt Translation says, “Thou hast made him little less than divine.” Yet it does not seem reasonable to say that man is only a little lower than God. After all, David himself was thinking about how man was basically nothing next to God’s majesty as revealed in the sky above. And God Himself tells human beings, “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:9). Perhaps it was because of this that the Targums (ancient Jewish paraphrases of Scripture) and the Septuagint (the Jewish rendering of the Old Testament in Greek) translated the word *elohim* here as meaning “angels.” Yet human beings seem rather far below the amazing power and abilities of angels too.

It should be noted that the words “little less” or “little lower” could also be rendered “for a little *while* lower.” The literal meaning would then be that man has been created for a little while lower than God, implying that man after that little while will ultimately share God’s plane of existence. This is in fact man’s destiny—to be part of *Elohim*, the family of God (see also Psalm 82:6 and our free booklet, *Who Is God?*). Yet such a rendering would no doubt have made early Jewish translators even more

uncomfortable. So we can see why they would prefer the word “angels” over “God” in Psalm 8:5 in any case. Of course, it is certainly true that for the time being man has been made lower than the angels as well as God, so the writer of the New Testament book of Hebrews (probably the apostle Paul) had no problem using the translation the Jews were familiar with, giving the Greek word for angels rather than God (see Hebrews 2:7).

Psalm 8:6 speaks of God giving man dominion over His creation. This is quoted in Hebrews 2:8. Yet where David goes on in Psalm 8:7-8 to focus on man’s dominion over the animals of the earth, recalling Genesis 1–2, the book of Hebrews ends its quotation with Psalm 8:6, emphasizing the “all things” committed to man’s rule in this verse—meaning, in its fullest sense, the entire universe and spirit realm. Man, Hebrews 2 explains, has not yet received this ultimate dominion with God—except for Christ, who is our forerunner. We will see more about this in our later reading of Hebrews 2.

**Psalm 9** and Psalm 10 may have initially been composed as one single psalm. “A number of indicators point in that direction. Ps 10 is the only psalm from Ps 3 to 32 that has no superscription, and the Hebrew text of the two psalms together appears to reflect an incomplete (or broken) acrostic structure” (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on Psalm 9). “Acrostic refers to the poetic practice of opening each line, verse, or stanza with a different letter of the alphabet. The acrostics are sometimes complete (Ps. 25; 34; 37; 111; 119; 145). Psalms 9 and 10 form an incomplete acrostic” (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, introduction to Psalms). The Greek Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible treats them as a single psalm.

“Ps 9 is predominantly praise (by the king) for God’s deliverance from hostile nations.... It concludes with a short prayer from God’s continuing righteous judgments (see v. 4) on the haughty nations. Ps 10 is predominantly prayer against the rapacity of unscrupulous people within the realm—as arrogant and wicked in their dealings with the ‘weak’ (v. 2) as the nations were in their attacks on Israel (vv. 2-11 can serve equally as a description of both). The conjunction of these two within a single psalm is not unthinkable since the attacks of ‘the wicked’ (9:5; 10:4), whether from within or from without, on the godly community are equally threatening to true Israel.... Probably Ps 9-10 came to be separated for the purpose of separate liturgical [i.e., religious worship service] use” (*Zondervan*, note on Psalm 9).

“To {the tune of} [a now unknown song] ‘Death of the Son’” could be the meaning of the Hebrew phrase *almuth labben* in the superscription of Psalm 9, as in the NKJV and NIV. However there are other possibilities (see *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, footnote on verse 1).

David says that those who seek God are those who know His name and put their trust in Him (verse 10). Those who reject God come to experience Him in a different way: “The LORD is known by the judgment He executes” (verse 16). David includes words relating to *judgment* six times in the psalm. God judges individuals (verse 3), nations (verses 5, 19) and the entire world (verse 8). God judges so that individuals and nations may learn that they are *but men* (verse 20) who live under the authority of the Creator. God has the power to destroy *wicked men* (verses 5-6) and to advance the cause of *righteous men* (verses 8-10, 12, 19). God’s righteous judgment is a major factor in leading the humble to seek Him.

David, we should further note, also points out that the wicked bring about their own destruction (verses 15-16), just as was pointed out in 7:15-16. After making this point, the end of Psalm 9:16 notes: “Meditation. Selah.” While the word translated “meditation” may be a musical notation, it could well be meant literally. Perhaps in conjunction with the musical term *selah*, which seems to indicate a pause or interlude, the idea here is to stop and think about what has just been sung. For all who would pursue a life of sin, it should be remembered that your sins will catch up with you. As Numbers 32:23 tells us, “Take note...be sure your sin will find you out.”

Psalm 9:17 in the NKJV says that the wicked are headed for “hell.” The Hebrew word here is *sheol*, which the NIV correctly translates as “the grave.” (See our free booklet *Heaven & Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?*) The righteous, on the other hand, are brought “up from the gates of death” (verse 13) to praise God “in the gates of the daughter of Zion” (verse 14). Besides speaking of present deliverance, this seems to anticipate the future actual resurrection of the saints and their dwelling with Christ in Jerusalem.

Verses 19-20 call on God to act in accordance with His righteous judgment in the sight of all nations, foreshadowing the end of the age when God will do just that.

**Psalm 10.** Continuing with the theme of God’s righteous judgment, especially the last two verses of Psalm 9, the psalmist (probably still David) asks why God does not immediately act in the face of evil (10:1). Things often seem to be going so well for the wicked (verse 5).

To strengthen his plea for God to take righteous action, the psalmist describes his enemies’ disregard for God. The wicked man says, “Nothing will shake me; I’ll always be happy and never have trouble.... God has forgotten; He covers His face and never sees.... He won’t call me to account” (verses 6, 11, 13, NIV). Emboldened by such reckless thinking, the wicked man persecutes the poor, murders the innocent, crushes the helpless and curses God. He plots, boasts, lies and deceives (verses 2-13). The psalm summarizes, “In all his thoughts there is no room for God” (verse 4, NIV).

Wickedness does not escape God’s notice, however—and He *will* justly punish (verse 14). God will call for an accounting: the wicked will no longer terrorize the earth (verses 16, 18). The reference to the nations perishing in verse 16 ties back to Psalm 9. When Christ returns to rule the earth, He will put an end to wickedness and establish true justice (10:15-18).

### “Help, LORD, for the Godly Man Ceases!” (Psalms 11–14)

May 25-28

David composed **Psalm 11** when others around him (the “you” in verse 1 is plural) were counseling him to flee from encroaching enemies. The NKJV closes the quote of the counselors at the end of verse 1, but it makes more sense to close the quote at the end of verse 3, as the NIV does. It is not clear whether the threat of enemies secretly shooting with arrows in verse 2 is literal or figurative (see 64:3-4), though the advice of flight would seem to imply mortal danger.

The advisers see no alternative to a hiding out in the hills because they believe “the foundations are destroyed” (verse 3). *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* says: “The word ‘foundations’ (*shathoth*) occurs only here with this meaning.... The ‘foundations’ appear to be a metaphor for the order of society (75:3 {NIV, ‘pillars’}; 82:5; Ezek 30:4): the ‘established institutions, the social and civil order of the community’.... This order has been established by the Lord at creation and is being maintained.... [Yet to the advisers it now appears that] God’s justice and law are being replaced by human autonomy and its resultant anarchy” (note on Psalm 11:1-3).

David counters that the foundations are not destroyed because the Lord Himself is the true foundation. God may be testing the righteous at this time (verse 5), but He is in charge and sees what is going on (verse 4). David knows that “God is alive and at work in His holy temple [not the one in Jerusalem that was yet to be built but the one in heaven, as made clear by verse 4]; that He is hearing prayer, forgiving sins, welcoming home sinners, waiting for people to flee or to take refuge in Him, and not away in the mountains; that God is ruling His world from on high, noticing and testing every little detail of human life” (George Knight, *Psalms*, OT Daily Bible Study Series, 1982, comments on 11:1-7).

God hating the wicked and lovers of violence in verse 5 refers to His ultimate rejection of them (see the Bible Reading Program comments on 5:5). The phrase “the portion of their cup” (11:6) refers to “their lot” (NIV; see 16:5). The cup for the wicked is one of punishment (see 75:8; compare Jeremiah 25:15-29). It is shown in Psalm 11:6 to contain fire, brimstone (sulfur) and burning wind—images we later see in John the Baptist’s warning of God’s “winnowing fan” and “unquenchable fire” (Matthew 3:12) as well as the book of Revelation’s prophecy of the future “lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (21:8). The unrepentant will be completely burned up in this fire, not tormented forever (see our free booklet *Heaven & Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?*).

Yet God faithfully loves the righteous and will in His righteous justice ultimately preserve them. The concluding phrase “His countenance beholds the upright” (Psalm 11:7) could also be rendered in reverse, “Upright men will see his face” (NIV), implying free access to God’s throne.

In the superscription of **Psalm 12**, the word *sheminith*, as in Psalm 6, is likely properly translated in the NKJV as “eight-stringed harp.” As to substance, David in Psalm 12 laments the perversion of language he witnesses everywhere, with people using words to hurt each other. Conversation is filled with lies, flattery, deception, boasting, idle words (verses 2-4). “Everyone lies to his neighbor” (verse 2, NIV). The wicked say whatever promotes their own interests (verse 4). “We’ll talk our way to the top, we’ll outtalk the simple; no one can stop us” (Knight, *Psalms*, comments on 12:1-8). Christ warned his followers to be careful about what they say: “But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:36-37).

God doesn't speak meaningless, idle words. He backs up what He says. Therefore, when God states that He will rise up on behalf of the oppressed and provide a safe refuge (Psalm 12:5), the oppressed can confidently count on His help. "In contrast to the idle words of the wicked (vv. 1-4), the words of God are altogether trustworthy. The eternal and steadfast nature of the Lord Himself stands behind His words" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verses 5-7). The words of God here can denote the whole of Scripture. The comparison of refining silver demonstrates how carefully chosen His words are. That they are purified seven times demonstrates how complete and perfect they are. It may also hint at numerous patterns of seven, signifying completeness and perfection, within the Bible.

The psalm ends in verse 8 with the sobering reminder that though God will be faithful to His promises in taking care of His people, we still in the meantime must be on guard against the reality of living in an evil world.

**Psalm 13.** In the throes of anxiety over a situation that could spell death for David, he asks God four times how long He will refrain from intervening to help (verses 1-2). The question "How long shall I take counsel in my soul...?" (verse 2) could also be phrased as "How long must I wrestle with my thoughts...?" (NIV).

David appeals to God's honor, for his death would mean to his enemies either that David was not a legitimate servant of God contrary to God's own testimony or that God was unable to save Him. "The enemies' rejoicing [over David's fall] would be intolerable because it would be aimed in part against God in whom the psalmist has trusted (35:19)" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on 13:4).

In verse 5 we come to a turning point. It appears that God has now granted David a proper perspective. He thus ends the psalm confidently by focusing on God's mercy (*hesed*)—His covenant faithfulness, His unfailing love—remembering God's goodness to Him in the past (verse 6).

**Psalm 14**, of which Psalm 53 is a somewhat revised duplicate, is a lament about the foolishness of "practical atheism." The fool (*nabal*, wicked, impious person) convinces himself, "There is no God" (14:1)—or at least no God who would deign to impact his life. Determining the concept of God to be essentially irrelevant, the fool "intentionally flouts his independence from God and his commandments" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on verse 1).

*The Zondervan NIV Study Bible* comments on Psalm 14: "This psalm brings to closure the collection of prayers that began with Ps 3.... Five psalms (and 64 Hebrew poetic lines) after Ps 8's surprising evocation of humanity's 'glory and honor' (8:5), this psalm highlights their disgrace.... In this it serves as a counterpoint to that earlier recollection of humanity's high dignity and thereby exposes more sharply the depth of their disgrace—from which the petitioners in this and the preceding psalms have suffered."

While fools go about denying God's existence, He looks down on humanity, assessing its wickedness (14:2). David says that God has found everyone corrupt (verses 1-3). The apostle Paul will quote this verdict in Romans 3:10-12. It is not clear if David intends to include in this indictment those he refers to as "the generation of the righteous" (verse 5). No doubt he realizes that they were not righteous to begin with but had needed to come to God in repentance. Paul's use of this passage is to show that all are guilty of sin and in need of God's grace. Yet those who respond in faith become the godly in contrast to the godless hosts of mankind.

Eventually the wicked of every age who refuse to repent will face the consequences of their foolishness. "There," at a specific time of judgment, they will greatly fear (verse 5). And at that time, God's people, those who repent of their wayward human nature, will be saved (verses 6-7).

### **"Preserve Me, O God, for in You I Put My Trust" (Psalms 15–17)**

**May 29-31**

**Psalm 15** begins a new group of psalms (15–24). As the *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* notes, "Ps 15 and its distinctive counterpart, Ps 24, frame a cluster of psalms that have been arranged in a concentric pattern with Ps 19 serving as the hinge.... [There are] thematic links between Ps 16 and 23, between Ps 17 and 22, and between Ps 18 and 20-21.... The framing psalms (15; 24) are thematically linked by their evocation of the high majesty of God and their insistence on moral purity 'without {which} no one will see the Lord' (Heb 12:14). At the center, Ps 19 uniquely combines a celebration of the divine majesty as displayed in the creation and an exposition of how moral purity is attained through God's law, forgiveness and shepherding care. Together, these three psalms (15; 19; 24) provide instructive words concerning the petitioners heard in the enclosed psalms, offer a counterpoint to Ps 14, and reinforce the instruction of Ps 1."

Psalm 15 identifies some of the important requirements for someone coming into God's presence. The psalm brings to mind pilgrims making their way to Jerusalem for the annual worship festivals. "As the pilgrims approached Jerusalem—the city of God, where His 'sanctuary' was located on the 'holy hill'—they had to examine themselves before entering the courts of God's sanctuary" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on verse 1).

In a larger sense, the psalm presents a number of points of examination for anyone who wants to be in God's presence. Such an individual 1) follows what is right as a general way of life, 2) obeys God's commandments, 3) speaks truthfully, 4) doesn't make spiteful remarks about others, 5) doesn't intentionally hurt others, 6) doesn't spread false accusations against others; 7) shuns the wicked and their ways, 8) honors godly people, 9) keeps promises even when it hurts, 10) doesn't take advantage of those in need, 11) doesn't act against innocent people for gain.

God's sanctuary today, His spiritual temple or house, is the Church. Yet the figure surely extends to the future temple of God in His Kingdom. Of course, just trying to follow these points will not gain us access to God through entrance into His Church and Kingdom—because no one is innocent and no one can succeed in this effort on his own. God imputes true righteousness to those "who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification" (Romans 4: 24-25). For those who are so justified, the points of Psalm 15 constitute one of many "lists" of right things to practice as part of building on a strong foundation (Matthew 7:24-25)—so that they "will never be shaken" (Psalm 15:5, NIV).

**Psalm 16** is referred to in its superscription as a *mikhtam*. "The term remains unexplained, though it always stands in the superscription of Davidic prayers occasioned by great danger (see Ps 56-60)" (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on Psalm 16). The Septuagint renders the word as the Greek *stelographa*, meaning "an inscription on a slab." *Mikhtam* is possibly related to the similar-sounding word *mikhtav*, meaning "writing" in Isaiah 38:9. Perhaps these particular psalms were originally written not as songs but as poems.

David begins Psalm 16 with a petition for protection and deliverance to God in whom he has placed his trust (verse 1). David then reflects in verses 2-3 on the basis on which God hears him: 1) he has confessed God as the Lord of his life; 2) he recognizes that whatever good he has comes only from God and not from himself; and 3) he honors and takes joy in the "saints" or "holy ones"—the other followers of the true God.

David thinks next about the sorrows men bring on themselves when they chase after false gods (verse 4). Indeed, the religions of the cultures surrounding Israel in his day included some obvious examples of this. "If he had chosen the god Moloch of the Canaanites, for example, he would have had to sacrifice one of his babies to that god (Lev. 20:2). If he had gone to live in Carthage, and had adopted its religion, he would have had to participate in human sacrifice. Obviously he shrank in horror from the very idea of both practices" (Knight, *Psalms*, comments on Psalm 16:1-11). Of course, David likely meant much more than this. False religion has spawned *many* wrong concepts and practices that lead mankind away from true happiness.

David then addresses God again, saying, "You are the portion of my inheritance and my cup; You maintain my lot" (verse 5). "The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places" (verse 6). Several words here recall the apportioning of the Promised Land to Israel: "chosen portion," "inheritance," "lot," "boundary lines." *The Nelson Study Bible* comments that "David had an ancestral inheritance in the land. As king, he also had extensive royal holdings. But he realized that no inheritance was greater than his relationship with Almighty God" (note on verses 5-8).

In verse 10, where the NKJV has "You will not leave my soul in Sheol," the NIV has "You will not abandon me to the grave." This could be understood as meaning either that God will not allow David to go to the grave in his present circumstances or that, even if David dies, God will resurrect him from the grave. The latter seems to be intended by what follows: "Nor will you allow your Holy One to see corruption" or, as the NIV translates it, "decay." Yet this reference to *the* Holy One was in fact a prophecy of the Messiah. "If this could be said of David—and of all those godly Israelites who made David's prayer their own—how much more of David's promised Son! So Peter quotes vv. 8-11 and declares that with these words David prophesied of Christ and his resurrection (Ac 2:25-28...)" (*Zondervan*, note on Psalm 16:9-11). Indeed, Jesus is more exactly meant by these verses because, unlike

David, He was resurrected before His body started to decay. As the apostle Paul explained in Acts 13:35-36: “Therefore He also says in another Psalm: ‘You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.’ For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption; but He whom God raised up saw no corruption.”

David concludes this psalm by expressing confidence that God will show him the way to eternal life, the “path of life” in God’s presence (verse 11), which he describes as full of joy and pleasure forever.

**Psalm 17.** David calls for God’s attention and vindication. His is a “just cause,” and he knows that God is aware of his innocence (verses 1-3). Yet we should recognize that David is not at all prideful over his obedience to God, as he realizes the need for God’s help to continue in His ways (verse 5). David bases his request for vindication on God’s “lovingkindness” (*hesed*)—His covenant loyalty, whereby He is faithful to save those who trust in Him (verse 7).

David’s request that God keep him as the “apple of Your eye” (verse 8) makes use of an expression also found in Deuteronomy 32:10, Proverbs 7:2 and Zechariah 2:8. This phrase poetically depicts the sensitivity of the pupil (apple) of one’s eye and portrays God as focused on and very attentive to His people. Interestingly, “in Old English the pupil of the eye was called a ‘mannikin,’ meaning ‘little man,’ because the pupil gave back the reflection of a grown man as a little man. So too with the Hebrew, for it too means ‘little man,’ or even ‘dear little man’” (Knight, *Psalms*, comments on Psalm 17:1-15).

David’s desire that God hide him “under the shadow of Your wings” (verse 8) pictures the protection a mother hen provides her chicks. It also portrays an intimate relationship with God (see the Bible Reading Program comments on Ruth 3). David pictures his enemies, on the other hand, as young lions, “lurking in secret places,” eager to strike (verses 11-12). Their having “fat hearts” in verse 10 speaks of “their greedy, self-loving, and insensitive nature” (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, note on verses 10-12)—their “callous hearts” (NIV).

Commentators are not clear on the correct translation of the second half of verse 14. Where the first half is clearly talking about the worldly people who receive their portion in this life, it is not clear whether the second half is still speaking of these (as in the NKJV) or if the reference changes to the godly (as in the NIV). Related to this is the question over whether the phrase translated “hidden treasure” in the NKJV denotes something positive or negative. If negative, the righteous could not be meant. If positive, either the righteous or the wicked could be meant. The evidence seems to favor the understanding that the meaning is positive and that worldly people are meant. These are content to amass possessions and leave them to their children. Their sights are set on nothing higher than what falls to them in this life.

David in contrast looks to the far future for his ultimate reward. His reflection here on the resurrection, “I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness” (verse 15) reminds us of the apostle John’s wonderful prophetic declaration concerning our awesome destiny, “We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2).