



Good News
Bible Reading Program

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

— August 2005 —

DATE	READING TOPIC	SCRIPTURES
1-4 Aug	58) God will judge justly; 59) Prayer for deliverance from surrounding enemies; 60) Prayer for restored favor and trust in God to defeat Israel's enemies	Psalms 58–60
5-10 Aug	61) Prayer to remain secure in God's presence forever; 62) Waiting on God for defense and salvation; 63) Those who long for God will rejoice but their enemies will fall; 64) Prayer for God's protection against enemy plotting	Psalms 61–64
11-13 Aug	65) Praising God for His forgiveness and calling and His provision throughout the earth; 66) Praising God's awesome works on behalf of His people collectively and individually	Psalms 65–66
14-16 Aug	67) Praising God for the blessings His Kingdom will bring; 68) Praising God for His intervention for Israel and His provision	Psalms 67–68
17-19 Aug	69–70) Pleas for deliverance from enemies	Psalms 69–70
20-22 Aug	71) Trusting prayer for help against enemies in old age; 72) Prayer to bless the reign of the king's son with endurance, dominion, compassion and provision	Psalms 71–72
23-25 Aug	73) It is foolish to envy the wicked; 74) Prayer for relief from enemies who've ravaged God's sanctuary	Psalms 73-74
26-29 Aug	75) Thanks for God's righteous judgment; 76) God's judgment to deliver all the oppressed; 77) Prayer for God to intervene as in times past	Psalms 75-77
30-31 Aug	78) God's dealings with and continued help to rebellious Israel	Psalms 78

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Highlights to Think About From This Month's Reading

“Deliver Me From My Enemies, O My God” (Psalms 58–60)

August 1-4

Psalm 58, the third *miktam* of David out of five in a row, addresses human misrule and injustice. He may have written this before he was king—while on the run from Saul, as in the preceding psalm and the one that follows. However, even while king, David could not completely control every judge under his authority and certainly not the rulers of enemy lands outside his empire.

In verse 1, the NKJV calls the offenders “silent ones,” a valid translation, because they remain silent when it comes to saying what needs to be said and rendering appropriate judgment. Verse 2 appears to say that those being addressed commit evil and violence themselves. Yet it may mean that by failing in justice, they promote these things in society.

The beginning of verse 3 says, “The wicked are estranged from the womb...” This is an odd turn of phrase in English but is clearly explained by the next line, an example of Hebrew poetry’s repetition: “...they go astray as soon as they are born”—that is, they are drawn away from God early in life.

In positions of judgment and leadership, the wicked are dangerous—compared to a cobra that can’t be mesmerized by a snake charmer (verses 4-5). David further compares them to ravenous lions and urgently calls on God to break their fangs—that is, their power to hurt people (verse 6). He also asks that they be swept away as running water and that their “arrows,” or means of dealing out destruction, be rendered useless (verse 7). In verse 8, when David asks that *they* melt away like a snail and that *they* are not brought to term like a stillborn child, it is not clear if he means the wicked themselves or their arrows of verse 8. Either way, the point is to neutralize the grave threat they pose.

In verse 9, the added italicized words “*the burning*” before “thorns” gives the correct sense here, as is made clear by other verses: “Twigs from wild thornbushes were used as fuel for quick heat (see 118:12; Ecc 7:6)” (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on Psalm 58:9). The meaning of the verse is that God’s judgment will come suddenly on the wicked.

In its note on verse 10, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* states: “The joy of the righteous comes to full expression when they see evidences of God’s justice. It is not so much the case that they are bloodthirsty [as might appear here at first glance] but rather that they delight in justice. The reign of terror must come to an end! Isaiah portrays the Lord as the Divine Warrior coming with red garments, stained by the blood of his enemies (Isa 63:1-6). Here the godly join in the victory march, as they too have been granted victory. The imagery of feet in blood portrays the victory (cf. Isa 63:1-6; Rev 14:19-20; 19:13-14), rather than the gruesome picture of people relishing the death of the wicked. The godly share together with the Lord in his triumph over evil.”

The injustice of human misrule will at last be overturned and righted when God brings His true and righteous judgment (Psalm 58:11). The message will be clear: righteousness pays; wickedness doesn’t.

Psalm 59 is the fourth in the sequence of five Davidic *miktams* here. We earlier read it in the Bible Reading Program in conjunction with the event mentioned in the superscription—when Saul sent assassins to stake out David’s house and kill him (see the Bible Reading Program comments on 1 Samuel 19; Psalm 59). Yet the request in verse 5 to “punish all the nations” does not appear related to that episode (see also verse 8). The *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* suggests: “If originally composed by David under the circumstances noted in the superscription, it must have been revised for use by one of David’s royal sons [i.e., descendants] when Jerusalem was under siege by a hostile force [compare verses 6, 14] made up of troops from many nations—as when Hezekiah was besieged by the Assyrians (see 2Ki 18:19). (Some, however, ascribe it to Nehemiah; see Ne 4.)” (note on Psalm 59).

There appear to be four stanzas in the song (verses 1-5, 6-10, 11-13, 14-17). The first and third are related thematically—asking for God to punish and how to punish and each ending with *selah*. The second and fourth both begin with an identical characterization of the prowling enemy (verses 6, 14) and end with a similar refrain about God as the source of strength, defense and mercy (see verses 9b-10a, 16b-17).

The request at the end of verse 5 that God not be merciful to wicked transgressors should not be understood as a prayer that God would never grant them repentance so as to show them mercy, but that He would not leave them unpunished for their sins so long as they persisted in them.

The wicked blasphemously think they are getting away with something (see verse 7), but God will have the last laugh (verse 8). Starting with this verse, the song moves from a plea for help to assurance that God will intervene.

Verse 11 asks that the enemy not be instantly slain but scattered and abased. This was so the Israelites would not forget the punitive humbling of the enemy. Great men may fall on the battlefield and still be remembered as heroes. But if they are brought down to destitution and vagrancy, people would more readily deem them cursed. Moreover, if they were simply wiped out, people might soon forget them and what had happened to them, whereas if they were alive but shamed and disgraced, they would be around for some time as an object lesson.

Yet what are we to make of verse 13's request that the enemy be consumed in wrath till they are no more? Does this contradict verse 11? No, it is simply a matter of timing. The prayer is that the enemy would undergo a period of humiliation and scattering and only then, after the lesson had sunk in among God's people, be destroyed. And note that this is not for personal vengeance but as a witness of God's ultimate rule (verse 13)—and of His protection and care for those who trust Him (verses 9-10, 16-17).

Other scriptures explain that God will resurrect the wicked, giving those who previously lacked adequate understanding the opportunity for repentance and salvation. "The Lord is not...willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). For a more complete picture of what lies ahead in the afterlife, see our booklets *What Happens After Death?* and *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?*

Singing of God's mercy "in the morning" (Psalm 59:16) could mean every morning, but it seems more likely that morning here is figurative—meaning the end of this dark "day of my trouble" (same verse).

Psalm 60 is the last *miktam* in the series of five here as well as the last in the sequence of seven prayers for help against enemies at the center of Book II of the Psalter. The superscription notes that it is "for teaching."

The setting of the psalm is not entirely clear. The superscription says that David "fought against Mesopotamia and Syria of Zobah." This would seem to be the war described in 1 Chronicles 19, where Syrian and Mesopotamian forces assisted the Ammonites against Israel (see especially verse 6), which in the end became a long Israelite siege against the Ammonite capital of Rabbah. The parallel account of this episode is in 2 Samuel 10, though the Mesopotamian forces are not mentioned there. It was with these chapters that we earlier read Psalm 60 (see the Bible Reading Program comments on 2 Samuel 10; 1 Chronicles 19; Psalm 60; Psalm 108; Psalm 83).

However, the superscription's further note about Joab killing 12,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt (likely the desert south of the Dead Sea) seems more closely related to events in 1 Chronicles 18 and 2 Samuel 8, concerning an earlier conflict with Syria that ended with David killing 18,000 Syrians in the Valley of Salt (2 Samuel 8:13) and Joab's brother Abishai killing 18,000 Edomites there (1 Chronicles 18:12)—Joab being over the army (verse 15).

In fact, these earlier chapters concern Israel's campaigns against and subjugation of the Philistines, the Moabites, the Syrians and the Edomites. With that in mind, consider that the enemy nations mentioned in Psalm 60 are Moab, Edom and Philistia (verses 8-9). There is no mention of Syria, Ammon or Mesopotamia—though Ammon could be indirectly indicated in stating that Gilead (the area the Israelites took from Ammon) belongs to God (verse 7). Nevertheless, considering that formerly subjugated Syria rebelled against David in the later conflict, it could well be that these other nations also rebelled at this time, given the powerful assistance of the forces of Mesopotamia (and that this could also be the setting for the international coalition of Psalm 83). Psalm 60:10 indicates that Israel initially suffered a period of defeat—the occasion for the psalm—which is new information, as such defeat is not recorded in the accounts of *either* of the two conflicts mentioned above.

Many question the scriptural validity of the superscriptions of the psalms, often deeming them later midrashic additions. Yet we need not ignore the superscriptions to explain apparent discrepancies. A number of possibilities exist for the current one. Perhaps Psalm 60 concerns the earlier conflict mentioned above and, though unrecorded in the account of that conflict, Mesopotamian forces were then involved as well. The differences in numbers killed in the Valley of Salt is reconcilable given that different numbers are attributed to different commanders—David, Abishai and Joab. Alternatively, Psalm 60 could

exclusively concern the later conflict, meaning that Moab, Edom and Philistia revolted and that Joab conducted a new campaign against the Edomites in the Valley of Salt. A further possibility is that the superscription is referring to the later conflict occurring *after* Joab's return from the earlier conflict. In the overall picture, these could be viewed as two phases in the same war.

Perhaps most likely, given that neither Ammon, Syria nor Mesopotamia are mentioned in the text of Psalm 60 itself—and that Mesopotamia and Syria are solely mentioned in the superscription—is that the psalm was initially composed during the earlier conflict but then used as a rallying or marching song during the later conflict (perhaps at a point when things did not seem to be going so well). It seems highly unlikely that a forger would have read this psalm about fighting against Moab, Edom and Philistia and then written Mesopotamia and Syria into a fake title. A forger would rather have attempted to undo any confusion. Once again, what appears to be a contradiction is instead a mark of genuineness.

As mentioned, things did not seem to be going well for David's army for a time. Perhaps in the case of the later conflict it was because the nations where David had garrisoned forces were nevertheless able to stage an international rebellion. David complains to God: "You have rejected us...and burst forth upon us.... You have shown your people desperate times; you have given us wine that makes us stagger" (verses 1-3, NIV). The Israelites were reeling, wondering how this could be happening.

But David encourages his troops, confident in victory through God. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* states in its note on verse 4: "The Lord has raised a 'banner' (*nes*; cf. Isa 5:26; 13:2; Jer 4:6 [and Exodus 17:15]) designating a place where the godly may find refuge under the protection of the Divine Warrior. The godly, those who 'fear' (cf. [Psalm] 34:7, 9) him, will find protection from the attacks of the enemy."

The section of Psalm 60 that follows the *selah* ending verse 4 (i.e., verses 5-12), is later reused as the latter half of Psalm 108 (verses 6-13)—the first part of Psalm 108 coming from Psalm 57:7-11.

In Psalm 60:6, the phrase "in His holiness" can also be translated "in His holy place"—probably designating Israel as the land of His sanctuary. Dividing Shechem and measuring out the Valley of Succoth represent God apportioning and parceling out the inheritance of the Promised Land to His people. "Shechem and the Valley of Succoth represent regions west and east of the Jordan River in the central parts of the land. Gilead and Manasseh are also regions east and west of the Jordan; Ephraim and Judah are regions in the north and south. The Lord was asserting His sovereignty over the entire land of Israel" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verses 6-8).

Moab being God's "washpot" (verse 8) or "washbasin" (NIV) refers to that used for washing the feet, which became rather dirty in a time of wearing sandals. The meaning? "Moab was doomed to the most abject and degrading servitude" (Barbara Bowen, *Strange Scriptures That Perplex the Western Mind: Clarified in the Light of Customs and Conditions in Bible Lands*, 1944, p. 25).

God next says He will cast His shoe over Edom (same verse). It could be that Edom is likened in this metaphor to the threshold of a house where shoes, considered dirty and defiling, were removed and left (Bowen, *Strange Scriptures*, pp. 67-68). Recall God demanding the removal of shoes in His presence (Exodus 3:5; Joshua 5:15). Yet it might refer "to the conventional symbolic act by which one claimed possession of land (cf. Ru 4:7)" (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on Psalm 60:8).

The final line of verse 8 is literally "Over me, Philistia, shout in triumph" (Green's Literal Translation). Perhaps the meaning is "Over me, Philistia, [is a] shout in triumph"—meaning by God's people. Yet the Jewish Tanakh renders the verse, "Acclaim me, O Philistia!"

David further proclaims that God, who for a time seemed to have abandoned Israel, would now lead them to victory (verses 9-10). And as we face enemies today, especially those spiritual forces that seek to destroy us, let us remember, as David said in the concluding verses, that only God can help us win the battle and grant us ultimate victory.

"Lead Me to the Rock That Is Higher Than I" (Psalms 61–64)

August 5-10

Psalms 61–64, all psalms of David according to their superscriptions, form a cluster of four royal prayers linked together by interweaving themes, especially "the common theme of strong reliance on God for deliverance in the face of great—perhaps mortal—danger" (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, Psalms introduction, "Significant Arrangement of the Psalter"; and note on Psalms 61–64).

Neginah in the superscription of **Psalm 61**, which may be part of a postscript to Psalm 60, is probably correctly translated in the NKJV as "stringed instrument."

Overwhelmed at his circumstances (verse 2), the details of which we are not given except that it involves some enemy (verse 3), David feels cut off from God: “From the ends of the earth I call to You” (verse 2, NIV). He seeks to be led to the “rock that is higher than I” (verse 1). By “rock” he means God Himself, as he did earlier in Psalm 18 (verses 2, 31, 46). The imagery of God as a Rock of protection occurs early in Scripture in the Song of Moses (see Deuteronomy 32:4). David uses it again in the next Psalm (62:2, 6-7) and in other psalms (71:3; 144:1). “This is a particularly apt image [of God] for David, who many times had to hide in the mountains for security (see 1 Sam. 26:1, 20)” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on Psalm 18:2).

Indeed, it seems that David is now led to the Rock as he has asked—for the rest of his psalm exudes confidence in God’s protection and blessing.

David likens the shelter of God’s tabernacle to the shelter of a mother bird’s wings (verse 4). David will repeat this imagery of finding refuge under God’s wings in Psalm 63:7 (see also 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 91:4). There is probably also a figurative tie-in here to the wings or hem of a garment—symbolism employed in the book of Ruth for taking in marriage (as Christ takes His people in marriage). God’s people thus become part of His household and family—the primary idea behind abiding in His tabernacle (His dwelling) forever.

The vows David had made to God (verse 5)—his promises to remain devoted and faithful to God, to obey and serve Him—were genuine. And for that God would reward him with the heritage of all who fear and honor God’s name (same verse)—not just long life (verse 6) but eternal life in God’s presence (verse 7). The King of Israel living forever here is understood in Jewish interpretation as a prophecy of the Messiah, as it likely is, but it also applies to David himself. God’s “mercy and truth” would preserve King David as well as the future messianic King (verse 7; see also 25:10; 85:10, 15; 89:14; Proverbs 20:28; Isaiah 16:5). Consider that Jesus Christ came “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14; see also verse 17)—fulfilling the messianic expectation of these passages.

David closes his prayer by saying that he will use the eternity God is giving him to forever extol and obey God (Psalm 61:8). What remarkable devotion!

Jeduthun, in the superscription of **Psalm 62**, was, as noted in the Bible Reading Program comments on Psalm 39, one of David’s three choir leaders (1 Chronicles 15:41-42; 25:1, 6; 2 Chronicles 5:12) who was also known as a seer or prophet (35:15)—often thought to be synonymous with Ethan (1 Chronicles 6:44; 15:19), representing the Levitical family of Merari. The name Jeduthun also appears in the superscription of Psalm 77.

Psalm 62 has three stanzas (verses 1-4, 5-8, 9-12)—the first two of which begin almost the same (verses 1-2, 5-6). David here says that he will silently wait for God’s deliverance and refers to God, as in the previous psalm, as his rock of protection and source of salvation. As the end of verses 2 and 6 declare, he will “not be greatly moved”—that is, “shaken” (NIV).

David’s need here is urgent. Arrogant foes conspire to “cast him down from his high position” (verse 4)—to topple him from the throne—through deceit and intrigue. He asks them how long they will attack him (verse 3a). The meaning of the second part of verse 3 is not clear however. Either he is announcing to the conspirators what will befall them as in the NKJV: “You shall be slain, all of you, like a leaning wall and a tottering fence.” Or he is further lamenting their attack on him, referring to himself as the vulnerable one: “Would all of you throw him down—this leaning wall, this tottering fence?” (NIV; see also NRSV; Tanakh).

In any case, David is confident of God’s protection and ultimate deliverance. He gives others the advice he himself follows: to trust God at all times and pour out one’s heart to Him (verse 8)—for God is an unfailing refuge. Men, no matter what their position, are inconstant and unreliable—and not the place to put one’s trust (verse 9). It is futile to hope in their evil way of doing things or to trust in the wealth they pursue as a source of help in all of life’s circumstances (verse 10). Real power belongs to God (verse 11)—along with mercy to those who serve Him and the means to compensate each person according to the choices they make in life (verse 12; compare Matthew 16:27).

That God has spoken *once* and David heard it *twice* (Psalm 62:11) is explained as a form of expression in Old Testament times. As *The Nelson Study Bible* notes on verse 11: “It is a convention of wisdom literature to use a number and then raise it by one (Prov. 30:11-33). The point here is that David has heard the message with certainty.”

In its introductory note on **Psalm 63**, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* says, "In spirit it is close to Psalm 42:1-2 [given the reference to thirsting for God and longing to be in His presence] and fits well with Psalms 61 and 62 as a collection of psalms bound by a common concern for closeness and fellowship with the Lord."

According to its superscription, Psalm 63 was written when David "was in the wilderness of Judah"—and verse 6 tells us that people were then seeking to kill him. The setting is likely when he was living in the Judean wilderness while on the run from Saul, and we earlier read this psalm in that context (see the Bible Reading Program comments on 1 Samuel 23:1-14; Psalm 63). It is possible, however, that it was written much later, when David fled during Absalom's rebellion and stayed for a brief period in the wilderness (see 2 Samuel 25:23-28; 16:2, 14; 17:16, 29). Advocates of this view cite David's reference to himself in Psalm 63:11 as king. Yet, as was pointed out in the earlier Bible Reading Program comments, even as Saul pursued him, David knew he was the rightful king, having already been anointed so by Samuel. Moreover, he was looking to the future in this verse.

At the opening of the song, David expresses his faith in God and how *earnestly* he desires to be in His presence. The NKJV translation of the second line of verse 1 reads, "Early will I seek You," while the NIV reads, "Earnestly I seek you" (as does Green's Literal Translation). The Jewish Tanakh just has "I search for you." *Expositor's* explains that the phrase "earnestly I seek" (NIV) is derived from a root word related to the word for "dawn." This relatedness "gave rise to the tradition of treating Psalm 63 as a morning psalm with the translation 'early will I seek You' [but] The NIV correctly emphasizes the *eagerness* rather than the *time* of the 'seeking,' as the verb [elsewhere] denotes a *diligent search* for godly wisdom as most important to life (cf. Prov. 2:1-4; 8:17-21)" (footnote on Psalm 63:1, emphasis added).

It is also interesting in verse 1 to note the parallelism of "soul thirsts" and "flesh longs" or "body longs" (NIV). *Expositor's* states: "The longing for God consumes the whole being. The NIV rendering 'soul...body' reflects the M[asoretic] T[ext], but it should be remembered that the Hebrew for 'soul' (*nepesh*) signifies one's whole being, as does 'body' (lit[erally], 'flesh'; cf. 84:2)" (same footnote). Note that the word "soul" or *nepesh* here does not refer to some inner immortal spirit personage, as many today imagine, but the whole living being. While other verses do refer to a spiritual component within human beings—which together with the workings of the physical brain forms the human mind—that spirit is not conscious apart from the body. This is why a future resurrection is required for an awakening of consciousness.

David compares his longing to enter the sanctuary of God with his continuing thirst for water in the desert, again recalling Psalm 42. God's lovingkindness (*hesed*, also meaning loyal love, covenant faithfulness or mercy) is "better than life" (verse 3), so David finds great satisfaction in praising and blessing Him (verse 5).

David refers to his meditations during the "night watches." Among the ancient Israelites, the night was divided into three watches of four hours each, and at times David focused his thoughts on God to pass sleepless hours (verse 6). Because God had helped him in the past (verse 7), David trusts that he will continue to remain sheltered under God's wings (as in 61:4) and even rejoice there (63:7). And he will go forward with God as a little child whose parent holds his hand while walking to keep him from falling (verse 8).

David declares that his enemies will not succeed in killing him because they will die instead (verses 9-10). Everyone who "swears by" God (verse 11)—in this broad context meaning that they live by promissory commitment to God and follow through (see Deuteronomy 6:13)—will receive honor. But those who live by deceit—including those who are hypocritical in their faith—will be silenced.

In **Psalm 64**, last in the group of four psalms here, David prays for protection from those plotting against him and meditates on the sudden judgment that awaits the wicked.

The rebels "encourage themselves" by scheming and coming up with the "perfect plan" (compare verses 5-6). By saying that the inward thought and heart of man are "deep" (verse 6), David seems to be saying that they are hidden deep down where no one would see, following the question in verse 5. But Someone does see. *The Nelson Study Bible* states: "The arrogance of the wicked in their plots against the righteous is a continuing theme in the Psalms (Ps. 9;10; 12). *Who will see* [they think to themselves]: The wicked do not know, or do not care, that there is One who sees (73:11), and who will repay (75:7)" (note on Psalm 64:5-6). Jeremiah quoted God as saying: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and

desperately wicked; who can know it? *I, the LORD*, search the heart, *I* test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings” (Jeremiah 17:9-10).

Indeed, David believes that God will punish the wicked based on the principle of just retribution. Their “arrows” or “bitter words” (verses 3-4) God will shoot back at them (verse 7). “He will make them stumble over their own tongue” (verse 8) is not a reference to stuttering but that their own words will ultimately trip them up and bring them down. In essence, what they plan to do to others will “come back to bite them” and bring about their own downfall (compare Galatians 6:7).

This will be a lesson to all (Psalm 64:9). In addition to *fearing* God, they will “declare the work of God,” passing on to others what they have witnessed, and “wisely consider” what He has done (same verse). In light of God’s faithfulness, David in verse 10 encourages the godly to trust and rely on Him.

“By Awesome Deeds in Righteousness You Will Answer Us” (Psalms 65–66) August 11-13

The *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* says in its introductory note to Psalms 65–68 that these are “four psalms dominated by the theme of praise and linked by the shared recognition that God’s ‘awesome’ deeds evoke the wonder of ‘all the earth’ to join Israel in singing the praise of her God.... In these four psalms, the occasions—and reasons—for this universal praise include (1) God’s mighty acts in maintaining the creation order and making it fruitful so that humans are richly blessed, and (2) God’s saving acts in behalf of his people. These are significantly brought together here by alternating the focus; Ps 65 and 67 speak of the former, and Ps 66 and 68 speak of the latter. Thus, in this short series all of God’s benevolent acts are brought into purview, and the whole human race is encompassed in the community of praise.”

The framing psalms of this section, 65 and 68, are attributed to David. The interior psalms, 66 and 67 are anonymous. These are two of only four anonymous psalms in Book II. Yet since the first, Psalm 43 (attributed to David in the Septuagint), was most likely part of Psalm 42, there are probably only three anonymous psalms in Book II—66, 67 and 71. However, given their placement and the fact that Book II ends a few chapters later by referring to previous psalms as “prayers of David” (Psalm 72:20), it seems likely that these are all Davidic psalms—or at least ones he collected and used. The Septuagint attributes Psalm 71 to David.

Psalm 65, as *The Nelson Study Bible* says, “is a wisdom psalm and more particularly a creation psalm (as Ps. 19). It celebrates rainfall, sharing the mood of Ps. 104 in this regard. But this is also a prophetic psalm, although it is not always regarded as such. The prophetic element is signaled in the first verse, the vow of praise yet to be paid—that is, all creation is waiting to praise the Lord when He finally appears in glory (see Rom. 14:10, 11; Rev. 19:5). [See also the next psalm, 66:1-4.]....

“In the background of this psalm [65] is an idea not far from that of Paul in Rom. 8:22, the groaning of creation for its release from the curse brought on it by humanity’s [sin in the Garden of Eden] (Gen. 3:17). The point of the psalm is twofold: (1) Every good rain and every full harvest is a blessing from God, showing His delight in His creation. (2) A day of God’s goodness is coming in which good rains and harvests will be greater than ever before” (introductory note on Psalm 65 and note on verse 1).

Yet there is more to it still. For in juxtaposing atonement for sin (verse 3), entry into God’s temple courts (verse 4) and the abundance of rain and harvest to crown the year (verses 9-13), David seems to picture here the observance of the fall festival season in thanksgiving for the late summer and fall harvest as figurative of the future coming of God’s Kingdom and the great spiritual harvest of humanity at that time. In Jewish interpretation, the crowning of the year (verse 11) refers to the civil new year, Rosh Hashanah or the Feast of Trumpets. As ancient Israelite coronations were accompanied by the blowing of the shofar or ram’s horn, the blowing of the ram’s horn at the Feast of Trumpets was seen as the crowning the year—and indeed this festival begins the sacred year’s seventh month, which celebrates the fall harvest and pictures the culmination of God’s plan for humanity’s redemption and salvation.

Verses 2-3 refer to God providing atonement for all flesh—all people. *The Nelson Study Bible* notes on these verses: “David speaks of a coming day when sin will be dealt with fully, when redemption will be completely paid. This took place in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (see Eph. 1:7).” However, Christ’s sacrifice will not be generally applied to all mankind until the world at large repents, commencing after Jesus’ return as symbolized in the Day of Atonement, which comes just nine days after the Feast of Trumpets. And Atonement itself serves as a prelude to the Feast of Tabernacles beginning five days later—also known as the Feast of Ingathering to emphasize its harvest theme (and to prefigure

the ingathering of all humanity into a relationship with God, into His temple courts to dwell with Him forever).

When Jesus Christ returns, God will truly be “the confidence of all the ends of the earth” (verse 5). All mankind will understand His plan and His awesome and righteous deeds to save all people.

Even now God’s power as displayed through nature elicits awe: “Those living far away fear your wonders” (verse 8, NIV). Yet this may also foretell the humbling of mankind at Christ’s return through a series of global natural catastrophes He will bring. But even these will be to produce a harvest—a harvest of repentant people.

In verses 9-13 David cites God’s comprehensive care for the earth—the rain (verses 9-10), the blessings on the pastures, hills, meadows and valleys. “Your paths drip with abundance” (verse 11b). The NIV translation replaces “paths” here with “carts.” Green’s Literal Translation says “tracks.” *The Nelson Study Bible* says, “The picture is of wagon tracks across the heavens, where the ‘cart’ of God’s mercies sloshes abundance on the earth below” (note on verses 11-13).

God’s marvelous outpouring of material and spiritual blessings through the year were celebrated with great rejoicing during His annual festivals—particularly during the fall festivals. But those blessings and celebration are only a small foretaste of what awaits in the wonderful Kingdom of God to come.

As already mentioned, the author of **Psalm 66** is not given in the title, though David seems rather likely. The perspective in the first part of the song (verses 1-12) is from the plurality of God’s people (using the pronouns “us” and “we”), while the latter part (verses 13-20) is from a singular perspective (using “I” and “me”).

In the spirit of the previous psalm, the psalmist calls on the whole earth to praise God and acknowledge His awesome works (verses 1-3a) and then, to God, prophetically says that in the future “all the earth shall worship You” and “submit themselves to You” (verses 3b-4).

The psalm calls on all to come and *see* the great things God has done and is doing for people (verse 5)—to witness and experience it firsthand or to look into what is recorded in Scripture. God delivered Israel from Egypt by parting the Red Sea and making a dry-land passage to freedom (verse 6). God also dried up the Jordan River so that “all Israel crossed over on dry ground, until all the people had crossed completely over the Jordan” (Joshua 3:17). Yet in declaring this message to the world at the time of Christ’s return, the wording here could also refer to the parallel crossings over water on dry land that will occur at that time—when “the LORD will utterly destroy the tongue of the Sea of Egypt...[and] shake His fist over the River [Euphrates]...and make men cross over dryshod” (Isaiah 11:15).

God’s people are able to declare that He “has preserved our lives and kept our feet from slipping” (verse 9, NIV) even though He has tested them (verse 10). The tests are likened to the refining of silver, to being captured (perhaps imprisoned), to being afflicted on the back (perhaps through the lash or in bearing burdens) and to suffering oppression—in summary, “We went through fire and water, but You brought us out to a place [or state] of abundance” (verse 12, NIV). As God says through Isaiah of His intention to preserve His people: “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior” (Isaiah 43:2-3).

On the occasions of personal deliverance, the psalmist promises to bring thank offerings (verses 13-15). And he will talk about the wonderful things God “has done for me” (verse 16, NIV). Whereas verse 5 called on all to “come and *see*” God’s works toward humanity, the psalmist now directs those who have been stirred to fear and honor God to “come and *hear*” his individual witness (verse 16)—what God has done for one, for him, and will also do, it is implied, for each of them.

Then notice the realization of verse 18, which is an implicit warning to others hearing this witness: “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” This is in a present or continuing sense. The NIV renders this verse in the past tense, as expressive of what had occurred in this episode: “If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.” Either way, we are told here that the harboring of sin, failing to confess it and forsake it, and the nurturing of sinful thoughts will thwart effective prayer. We find this important message in other passages of Scripture as well (see Proverbs 15:29; 28:9; Isaiah 1:15; 59:1-2).

Conversely, the apostle John tells us: “Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His

commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight” (1 John 3:21-22). Psalm 66 expresses this very confidence, the psalmist stating in verses 19-20 that God on this occasion has *certainly* listened to his prayer and has not rejected it nor withheld His *hesed*—His steadfast love and mercy.

“Let All the Peoples Praise You” (Psalms 67–68)

August 14-16

Neginoth in the superscription of Psalm 67 likely means, as the NKJV translates it here and in other places, “stringed instruments.”

George Knight’s Daily Study Bible Series commentary *Psalms* says: “Obviously this psalm was composed for public worship. Perhaps it belonged particularly to the autumn harvest festival [i.e., the Feast of Tabernacles or Ingathering] (see verse 6)” (comments on verses 1-7). This he takes from the RSV, which renders verse 6 as “The earth has yielded its increase,” whereas other translations understand the verb here as future tense—“shall yield.” Of course, the annual harvest does portray a future harvest, as was pointed out with respect to Psalm 65, which begins the current grouping of psalms—and that is certainly a major theme here as well.

The song opens with a prayer for God’s mercy and blessing and that His face would shine—smile in favor—on His people (67:1). As previously pointed out in regard to Psalm 31:16, the language here is taken from the priestly blessing of Numbers 6:25 (see also Psalm 4:6; 44:3; 80:3, 7, 19; 119:135). The *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* says that this song’s “content, form and brevity suggest that it served as a liturgical [i.e., worship service] prayer of the people at the conclusion of worship, perhaps just prior to (or immediately after) the priestly benediction” (note on Psalm 67).

“God’s blessing on his people (as well as his saving acts in their behalf) will catch the attention of the nations and move them to praise (65:2)” (same note). Indeed, this is a rather exciting thought within the psalm. Note the repetition in the refrain of 67:3 and verse 5. The excitement here is not just for the increased praise for God, but for the fact that all peoples will be able to rejoice when they experience the establishment of His righteous government over all nations. In their happiness over this certain hope, God’s people are expressing love for all mankind.

Given all this, the focus of verse 6 is clearly future. The earth yielding its increase speaks not only of God’s great agricultural provision in the world to come, but of the great harvest of humanity that will then take place—to the “ends of the earth” (verse 7), as the nations learn to properly fear and respect Him and His people are vastly blessed as never before.

In Psalm 68 David calls on God to deal with His enemies and for the righteous to rejoice in His triumph. The first half of the psalm (to verse 18) reviews God’s historic acts on behalf of the Israelites, progressing from the wilderness of Sinai to the conquest of the Promised Land. Verse 18 carries the meaning forward to Christ’s day, as we will see, and then the second half of the psalm “looks forward with expectations of God’s continuing triumphs until the redemption of his people is complete and his kingly rule is universally acknowledged with songs of praise” (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on Psalm 68).

In Psalm 68:4 God’s name is given as “YAH” (see also Isaiah 12:2), a shortened form of YHWH, usually transliterated as *Yahweh*. This longer form, replaced in most Bible versions with the word “LORD,” is the third-person form of the name that God gave in the first person in Exodus 3:14. In that verse God gave a long version of this name, “I AM WHO I AM,” as well as a short version “I AM.” Just the same, the third-person form YHWH means “He Is Who He Is,” while the shorter form YAH means “He Is” or “He Who Is.” This short form appears in the names of many people in the Bible, such as Elijah (i.e., Eli-Yah), Isaiah (i.e., Yitza-Yah) and Jeremiah (i.e., Yerem-Yah).

Psalm 68:5-6 expresses God’s special concern for the orphan and widow and His care to make those who are lonely part of families. His desire is to help those in need, which brings us to the next clause in verse 6—delivering the oppressed. Actually, the specific wording here—of bringing those who are bound into prosperity but the rebellious to desert exile—probably relates, given the context of the verses that follow, to God’s merciful deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage and their subsequent rebellion and wilderness wanderings (see also 66:10-12).

God still continued to provide for His people. Psalm 68:8-9 appears to paraphrase a few lines from the Song of Deborah in Judges 5:4b-5 about God providing rain to the Israelites in the Sinai desert. The provision of rain also ties the psalm to Psalm 65:9-10. God’s “inheritance” (Psalm 68:9) is a reference to

Israel (see Deuteronomy 9:29)—synonymous in the next verse with His congregation and the poor for whom He provided (Psalm 68:10).

Verses 11-14 speak of God granting victory to Israel in its battles against the armies of various kingdoms on the way to subduing the Promised Land. Zalmon in verse 14 is a mountain near Shechem in northern Israel (see Judges 9:46-48). Bashan (Psalm 68:15) is a high plateau northeast of the Sea of Galilee. It was part of the territory of King Og when the Israelites came to the land. “Mountain” in these verses seems to symbolize land and dominion. That is, the mountain of Bashan is the land or kingdom of Bashan. God says it is now a mountain of *His* (verse 15)—that is, it is incorporated into His dominion as part of the Kingdom of Israel. The mountain’s peaks (verse 16) would represent its various sub-kingdoms or city-states. These peaks are erupting, like volcanoes, with envy against the takeover by God and His people. God, however, says He desires to dwell in this mountain—the Promised Land—forever.

Yet, depending on when David wrote this psalm, the mountain of God could perhaps be more specifically identified as Mount Zion—of which the whole land of Israel is an extension (just as Zion, the Mountain of the Lord’s House, will, after Christ’s return, represent both Jerusalem and the whole Kingdom of God). For it is in Jerusalem that God has chosen to dwell: “For the LORD has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His dwelling place: ‘This is My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it’” (Psalm 132:13-14).

With this in mind, consider Psalm 68:17. It mentions God’s vast chariot army, and then notice how the NRSV translates the second half of the verse: “The Lord came from Sinai into the holy place.” The Hebrew wording here is difficult, but this meaning fits well in context. That is, what has gone before in the account has shown the progress from the wandering in the wilderness to the permanent establishment of God within His sanctuary in Israel—probably on Mount Zion.

The first phrase in the next verse, “You have ascended on high” (verse 18), would fit with the idea of God’s entourage moving from lower surrounding lands to the heights of Israel (especially in the sense of ascending to the place that was to represent the spiritual peak among the nations of the earth). The mountain of God, we have seen in other psalms, represents the heavenly Zion as well—just as it does here. Indeed, there is much more to this verse.

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul notes something remarkable about this passage. He quotes from it in Ephesians 4:8. Then, in verse 9, he asks: “Now this, ‘He *ascended*,’—what does it mean but that He also first *descended*...?” Paul realizes that this verse refers to *God*, who dwells in the highest heaven. So how can He be portrayed as ascending to a higher place or station? Only if He first descended—and this Paul explains as prophetic of God coming down from heaven as a human being, Jesus Christ, to then later ascend back up to heaven to reassume His divine majesty. We will see more about Paul’s explanation of this when we come to the book of Ephesians in the Bible Reading Program.

The next phrase in Psalm 68:18, also referred to by Paul, “You have led captivity captive,” finds an earlier parallel in the Song of Deborah: “Arise, Barak [the leader of Israel’s army], and lead thy captivity captive” (Judges 5:12, KJV). In that passage, the NKJV translates the phrase simply as, “Lead your captives away.” Indeed, the idea here seems merely to be: “Take those you have captured and lead them away as captive.” Many see in this a sort of victory procession (compare Psalm 68:24-25). The NIV, similar to the NRSV, renders the phrase in Psalm 68:18 as “You led captives in your train.” However, it is not clear if the captives here are humiliated and paraded enemies (compare also Colossians 2:15) or those whom God has converted to His truth—themselves victorious with God in the procession (compare Psalm 69:33; Romans 6:16-22; Ephesians 3:1).

The next clause in Psalm 68:18 says, “You have received gifts among men.” Paul in quoting this seems to reverse it, saying that God “gave gifts to men” (Ephesians 4:8)—referring to the apportioning of spiritual gifts to Christ’s followers (verses 7, 11-16). *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* states: “Paul does not cite either MT [the Masoretic Text] or LXX [the Septuagint].... Some have claimed that, under the inspiration of the Spirit, Paul felt free to amplify the meaning of the Psalm, since the giving is implicit in the receiving for. But it seems more probable that the apostle was drawing on an ancient oral tradition reflected in the Aramaic Targum on the Psalter and the Syriac Peshitta version, both of which read, ‘Thou hast given gifts to men.’ Early rabbinical comments applied the verse to Moses when he *received* the Law on Sinai so as to bring it *to the people*” (note on Ephesians 4:8, emphasis added). *Zondervan* notes on this verse: “Paul apparently takes his cue from certain Rabbinic interpretations current in his day that read the

Hebrew preposition for ‘from’ in the sense of ‘to’ (a meaning it often has) and the verb for ‘received’ in the sense of ‘take and give’ (a meaning it sometimes has—but with a different preposition...).” Of course, God receives from people only what He has already given them or produced in them—so Paul’s understanding was certainly correct in any case.

Verse 19 of Psalm 68 continues in the theme of God providing for His people: “Blessed be the Lord, who daily loads us with benefits.” However, it is possible that the latter clause should be rendered, as in the NRSV, “who daily bears us up” (i.e., carries us), or, as in the NIV, “who daily bears our burdens.”

But those who oppose God will not fare so well in the end (verses 21-23). Crushing enemies in blood under foot (verse 23) recalls Psalm 58:10. As there, this is not to relish the destruction of others but to portray a meting out of justice on those who refuse to repent.

In these verses, we are moving beyond ancient Israel’s subjugation of the Promised Land to the future subjugation of the earth to God’s Kingdom at Christ’s coming. As we saw, Psalm 68:18, besides representing the establishment of the ancient sanctuary in Jerusalem, also represented the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ to the heavenly sanctuary. Yet it also represents the ascension of Christ to the throne of the earth in His Kingdom (as in Psalm 47), when the future temple is established at Jerusalem (see 68:29).

Verse 30 is probably to be interpreted by verses 31-32, so that “beasts of the reeds” (verse 30)—likely descriptive of the crocodile and hippopotamus of the Nile—represents Egypt and Ethiopia (verse 31) and “the herd of bulls with the calves of the peoples” (verse 30) represents the various “kingdoms of the earth” (verse 32), both great and small. Though initially rebuked, most will soon become part of a great chorus of nations praising God (see verses 32-35), as was called for in the previous psalm.

“Let Me Be Delivered From Those Who Hate Me” (Psalms 69–70)

August 17-19

With **Psalm 69** we come to the final group of psalms in Book II (Psalms 69–72). The *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* comments on these four psalms: “Book II of the Psalter closes with a cluster of three prayers and an attached royal psalm—in perfect balance with its beginning (...Ps 42–45). These three prayers [69–71] were originally all pleas of a king in Israel [stated to be David in the superscriptions of 69 and 70] for deliverance from enemies (apparently internal) determined to do away with him. They all contain certain key words that are found elsewhere in Book II only in Ps 42–44 and in the seven psalms (54–60) placed at the center of the Book. Another link between Ps 69–71 and 42–44 is the placement of a short psalm at the center of each triad. These placements have the appearance of deliberate editorial design. In the former cluster Ps 43 has been artificially separated from 42...while in the latter cluster Ps 70 repeats (with some revision) Ps 40:13-17 and was probably intended to serve as an introduction to Ps 71. The attached prayer for the king [also referred to as the king’s *son*] (Ps 72) stands in similar relationship to Ps 69–71 as Ps 45 stands to Ps 42–44 and brings Book II to its conclusion. Thus, as with Ps 45, its placement here hints at a Messianic reading of the psalm already by the editors of the Psalter... It should be further noted that in Ps 65–68 all peoples on earth are drawn into the community of those praising God... Here in Ps 69 all creation is called to join that chorus (v. 34), and Ps 72 envisions that all peoples and kings will submit to the son of David (vv. 8-11) and be blessed through his reign (v. 17)” (note on Psalms 69–72).

Yet the resounding praise in Psalm 69 does not come until the end. Most of the psalm constitutes an urgent prayer by David for deliverance while lamenting over life-threatening circumstances and enemy persecution. While he meant himself as the sufferer, this was also prophetic. “The authors of the N[ew] T[estament] viewed this cry of a godly sufferer as foreshadowing the sufferings of Christ; no psalm, except Ps 22, is quoted more frequently in the N[ew] T[estament]” (note on Psalm 69). As *The Nelson Study Bible* states: “This highly messianic psalm presents a remarkable description of the sufferings of Jesus Christ. Whereas Ps. 22 describes Jesus’ physical sufferings, Ps. 69 focuses more on His emotional and spiritual suffering. Yet like Ps. 22, this psalm was written by David approximately a thousand years before the events it describes. Both psalms begin with the sufferings of David but have their full meaning in the sufferings of Jesus. For these reasons, the apostles in the New Testament acknowledge that David was a prophet of God (Acts 2:30)” (note on Psalm 69).

David likens his anguish to sinking in mud and deep water, being swallowed by the ocean deep or the pit—that is, the grave (verses 1-2, 14-15). This imagery was also used in Psalm 40 (see verse 2), another messianic psalm quoted in the New Testament. Psalm 40 is part of the cluster of psalms closing

Book I of the Psalter, just as Psalm 69 is part of the cluster of psalms closing Book II. A further link here can be found in the fact that the very next psalm, Psalm 70, is, as was noted above, a reprise of Psalm 40:13-17—and it seems like a quick summary of Psalm 69.

David has sought God so earnestly, through crying and constant prayer, that he says, “My throat is dry; my eyes fail while I wait for my God” (verse 3). While the latter expression may denote in part his eyes being swollen from crying, it probably also has to do with diminished joy and hope. (For more on the metaphor of eyes failing, see the Bible Reading Program comments on Psalm 38.)

David is wearied by his host of enemies who, he says, “hate me without a cause” (69:4). We saw this same description earlier in Psalm 35:19 and will see a similar one in Psalm 109:3-5. As pointed out in the Bible Reading Program comments on Psalm 35, this baseless antagonism was prophetic of Jesus Christ’s experience—as He specifically declared it to be (John 15:25).

David does confess sins to God, but his point here is to say that God knows his enemies aren’t opposing him for this reason (Psalm 69:5). As in other messianic passages, Jesus does not share the fault of sin—yet He did suffer for sins (the sins of others, including David’s).

In verse 6, the implication is that others on David’s side are praying for him. David prays that none of these will suffer shame and discouragement as a result of what happens to him. Indeed, Jesus no doubt prayed for His disciples this way in the time before His trial, crucifixion and death. In David’s case, he was asking for God to rescue Him and thereby demonstrate that those who were praying for Him were in the right. In Jesus’ case, He would have been asking for His disciples to be helped through what was happening until they were completely vindicated when God truly rescued Jesus from death by resurrecting Him. We should learn a lesson from the fact that Christ was not preserved from death but was ultimately saved out of it. If God does not deliver us from some circumstance in the here and now, we should not let that discourage us. Indeed, God is always alongside the believer, whether He rescues him now or not.

David further states: “For Your sake I have borne reproach...and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me” (verses 7, 9). He is speaking here of the life of the righteous in general terms—of which his present circumstance is only an example. The godly suffer when they turn away from the world to obey God. They often go through difficulties not of their own doing: “Yet for your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered” (Psalm 44:22, NIV). As Jesus told His followers: “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:11-12)—David having been one of these prophets. Jesus Himself was, of course, the premier example of being hated for following God.

In describing his devotion to God for which he is persecuted, David says, “Zeal for Your house has eaten me up” (verse 9). David was consumed with wanting to honor God—filled with desire to serve God’s tabernacle and God’s nation and to build God’s temple. Christ’s disciples recognized this passage as applying to *Him* after He ran the moneychangers out of the temple of His day—evidently already having understood Psalm 69 to be a messianic psalm (see John 2:17). God’s people today should have this same zeal for His house, which at this time is His Church (see 1 Timothy 3:15).

David was in sore grief, which in itself became something for others to ridicule (verses 10-11). He was scorned by many at all levels of society—from “those who sit in the gate” (city elders) to drunk commoners singing mocking bar songs about him in the taverns (verse 12). Jesus also faced such contempt.

In verses 13-18 David returns to pleading with God to rescue him—“speedily,” he asks (verse 17), trusting that he is praying “in the acceptable time” (verse 13)—also translated “in the time of your favor” (NIV). Considering the messianic nature of this psalm, it is interesting that God will later declare that He has heard His Servant (representative of both the Messiah and Israel) “in an acceptable time” (Isaiah 49:8; see also 2 Corinthians 6:2).

David can’t find anyone to comfort him (Psalm 69:20). Consider that Jesus’ disciples abandoned Him during His trial and suffering so that the only ones to turn to for pity were His adversaries and other onlookers, and they gave him none. David further states that those from whom he sought comfort instead gave him “gall” (denoting a bitter substance) to eat and, for his thirst (compare verse 3), vinegar to drink (verse 21). David was here employing “vivid metaphors for the bitter scorn they made him eat and drink

when his whole being craved the nourishment of refreshment and comfort” (*Zondervan*, note on verse 21). Yet this was prophetic of what Christ experienced, both figuratively *and literally* (see Matthew 27:34, 48; Mark 15:23, 36; Luke 23:36; John 19:28-29).

For their mistreatment of him, amounting to defiance of God, David calls on God to curse his enemies with punishment (Psalm 69:22-28). Verse 25, combined with Psalm 109:8, is understood in the New Testament as prophetic of Judas Iscariot no longer having a place among the apostles following his treachery and suicide (see Acts 1:20). Indeed, we should understand David’s words here more as a prophecy of judgment on God’s enemies than as a model to follow in our own prayers. Jesus gave us the pattern of what to say during persecution when He was being executed: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34). We are to pray for our enemies (Matthew 5:44)—the best thing we can pray for being that they will repent.

Of course, there are circumstances where it is proper to seek God’s intervention and justice against those who refuse to repent. This, however, does not mean wishing people out of God’s Kingdom forever. David’s prayer about blotting his enemies out of the book of life and that they not be written with the righteous (Psalm 69:28) might seem to imply this—leaving them utterly hopeless. Yet we should consider that what David was really saying here is that God would not accept these enemies as they were at that time—giving them eternal life in spite of the evil they had done. And in fact God does not do this. None of the enemies David speaks of here may ever receive eternal life in God’s family—until, that is, their repentance, acceptance of Christ’s atonement for their sin and their transformation into wholly new people. The people they *were* will never be in the Kingdom of God. (Even David’s old self—which, frankly, was his greatest enemy—will not be in God’s Kingdom. And so it is with all of us today.) Indeed, knowing David’s character as a man after God’s own heart, we can be confident that if one of those of whom he spoke here sincerely repented and begged him for mercy, he would have shown it—making it clear that he did not mean that they should never be able to repent.

David’s statement in verse 29, “But I am poor and sorrowful,” again calls to mind Psalm 40: “But I am poor and needy” (verse 17), which is repeated in Psalm 70:5. As before, “poor” in this context does not mean financially indigent but, rather, broken in spirit (humbled) and in great need of help—as Jesus Christ also was in His fatal circumstances.

Yet David is confident of God’s intervention, declaring that he will praise and thank God (69:30)—stating that the proper attitude is what God desires more than the ritualism of the sacrificial system (verse 31), as David also stated in Psalm 40 (verse 6) and in other psalms.

The humble seeking God on his behalf will then rejoice (69:32-33)—just as Christ’s followers would later rejoice after His resurrection (and just as all His followers today will rejoice after His return in power and glory to rule all nations).

Verse 34, as pointed out earlier, calls on all creation to join in praising God. And verses 35-36 speak of the salvation and restoration of Zion and Judah. David may have been referring to present circumstances—perhaps to Jerusalem and outlying towns taken over by enemies during Absalom’s or Sheba’s rebellion afterward reverting to David and those loyal to him. Yet some contend that David did not write these words—seeing the specific reference to Judah and the need to rebuild its cities (in a literal sense) as an indication that verses 34-36 were added to David’s psalm by a later king in Jerusalem, such as Hezekiah at the time of Assyria’s invasion. That could be. In any case, the words here likely refer not just to ancient Zion, but prophetically to spiritual Zion today (God’s Church) and to Jerusalem at the time Christ returns to establish God’s Kingdom.

Psalm 70, as mentioned earlier, repeats Psalm 40:13-17 with several minor word changes—these changes perhaps suggesting a different tune. It is interesting that Psalm 70, being taken from Psalm 40, follows Psalm 69, which itself carries imagery over from Psalm 40. Thematically, Psalm 70 appears to be a condensed version of the material in Psalm 69—and it also seems to introduce Psalm 71 (compare 70:1-2; 71:12-13).

The superscription of Psalm 70, like that of Psalm 38, in the NIV says, “A petition.” But the KJV and NKJV give the literal rendering of the words here as “To bring to remembrance.” In the present case, this terminology could reflect this psalm being a reprise of the end of Psalm 40 and a summary of Psalm 69—i.e., a recounting of the need for deliverance.

One point of indirect contact between Psalms 70 and 69 is found in 70:3. This verse, with enemies saying “Aha, Aha!” (also 40:15), finds a counterpart in Psalm 35:21. These enemies, it is said two verses earlier in Psalm 35:19, “hate me without a cause”—a phrase that also appears in Psalm 69:4 (all of these being messianic psalms).

David focuses on God throughout his trial—continually praising Him (70:4) and seeking His help.

A Plea for Help Against Foes in Old Age;

The Blessed Reign of the King’s Son (Psalms 71–72)

August 20-22

Psalm 71 is “a prayer for God’s help in old age when enemies threaten because they see that the king’s strength is waning.... The psalm bears no title, but it may well be that Ps 70 was viewed by the editors of the Psalms as the introduction to Ps 71 (compare vv. 1, 12-13 with 70:1-2, 5), in which case the psalm is ascribed to David (in his old age; see vv. 9, 18). This suggestion gains support from the fact that Ps 72 [which immediately follows and closes Book II of the Psalter] is identified as a prayer by and/or for King Solomon” (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on Psalm 71). And Psalm 72 ends by describing the psalms that have come before as prayers of David (see verse 20). The Greek Septuagint translation adds a superscription to the beginning of Psalm 71, labeling it “of David.”

The opening of Psalm 71—the declaration of trust in God, the plea for His righteous deliverance, that He would bend His ear and be a strong refuge, and the identification of Him as the psalmist’s rock and fortress (Psalm 71:1-3) is essentially repeated from David’s opening to Psalm 31 (verses 1-3). As David’s suffering in that psalm foreshadowed the sufferings of the Messiah, it is likely that Psalm 71 is similarly prophetic, though Jesus’ sufferings came when He was a young man, in terms of His human life.

One difference we may note here in verse 3 is the statement, “You have given the commandment to save me.” The psalmist recognizes that God has all the forces of the universe and heavenly realm at His disposal. He has but to command the psalmist’s deliverance for it to be effected—and indeed the psalmist knows that God has so commanded it. His words bring to mind the centurion’s response when Jesus offered to come to his home to heal the servant. The centurion said, “Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed” (Matthew 8:5-8).

Psalm 71 is a welcome comfort for believers enduring a lingering trial that drains their strength, whether physically, emotionally or mentally. God is our Rock, our safe place.

The psalmist, who is likely David, is a man who has trusted God his whole life. His relationship with God began in his youth and has continued ever since (verses 5-6, 17). The statement about God having brought him forth from his mother’s womb (verse 6) is also found in Psalm 22 (verse 9), another messianic psalm of David.

The psalmist in 71:7 says “he has become ‘a portent’ [NIV] (*mopeth* ‘a wonder’ [NKJV]) to his contemporaries, i.e., a sign of trouble, chastisement, and divine retribution” (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, note on verses 5-8). Many see his troubles and weakness as evidence of God’s punitive judgment on him, as would later be wrongly assumed regarding Jesus Christ (see Isaiah 53:4). Enemies deduce that now is a good time to rise up against him because they think “God has forsaken him...[and] there is none to deliver him” (Psalm 71:11).

Verses 12-13 are a restatement of David’s urgent plea for deliverance and the confounding of his enemies in Psalm 70:1-2, thus serving to connect Psalms 70 and 71. As noted above, Psalm 70, a reprise of the end of Psalm 40, appears to condense the themes of Psalm 69 and to introduce Psalm 71.

The psalmist will continue to hope and praise God (verses 14-16). He makes a final plea for God to not forsake him so that he may sing of God’s power and strength to the present generation and those yet to come (verses 17-18; compare 22:30). And he is confident that God will save him (71:19-24).

In verse 20, when the psalmist says that God will bring him back up “from the depths of the earth,” he is speaking metaphorically of being rescued from his life-threatening situation and his despondency (compare 40:2; 69:2, 14-15). Yet, being old, he could also be contemplating the end of his life and looking forward to his future resurrection from the grave. Given the messianic nature of this and related psalms, it also seems logical to view this as Jesus Christ looking forward to His own resurrection.

Psalm 72 is the last psalm in Book II of the Psalter. At its end appear the words, “The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended”—apparently closing the collection of David’s psalms in Books I and II as of the time this note was appended. (Other psalms of David do appear in later books.)

Psalm 72 concerns the reign of a succeeding “king...the king’s son” (verse 1). The superscription says “Of Solomon,” which could mean, as with Psalm 127 (the only other psalm bearing his name), that Solomon wrote it. Yet, because of the appended note about the prayers of David, many feel that David wrote Psalm 72 *about* or *for* Solomon. The Greek Septuagint translation has *eis*, meaning “to” or “for.” As pointed out in the Bible Reading Program’s introduction to Psalms, it *could* be that Solomon wrote it prior to David’s death and that David included it in his own collection—or it could just as well be that, following David’s death, Solomon appended his own psalm to the end of the collection of his father’s psalms. The Protestant Reformer John Calvin argued that David gave the substance of Psalm 72 in a spoken prayer before his death and that Solomon afterward set it down in the form of a psalm, composing the poetry and music himself (see *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, footnote on verse 1). It would thus be a prayer of David but a psalm of Solomon.

In any case, Psalm 72 was probably also used by the nation as a prayer for later kings in David’s line. Yet it should be clear from reading this remarkable psalm that it is not the reign of Solomon or any merely human king that is primarily in view here. Rather, Psalm 72 concerns the reign of the ultimate Son of David, who is also the Son of the Almighty King, God. As *The Nelson Study Bible* comments, “This psalm is intensely messianic, speaking in ideal terms of the coming of the great King...who will establish this glorious reign” (note on Psalm 72).

Indeed, as pointed out in prior comments, we should notice again a most interesting pattern of arrangement in Book II of the Psalter. Book II begins with a cluster of lamenting prayers to God for help against enemies (Psalms 42–44), figurative of the suffering of Jesus Christ at His first coming, followed by a psalm about the Messiah’s marriage to His Bride at the beginning of His glorious reign at His second coming (Psalm 45). Likewise, the book ends with a cluster of lamenting pleas for God’s help against enemies, which expressly relate to the Messiah’s sufferings in His first coming (Psalms 69–71), followed by a psalm that portrays Christ’s majestic reign when He comes again (Psalm 72). Realize also that David himself, whose grief in the lamenting psalms foreshadowed Christ’s own, will himself be raised to rule with Christ as king over Israel at that time. Moreover, all Christ’s followers should also see in these psalms that our own suffering for His sake today will be followed by our future glory when we are at last raised to reign with Him in His Kingdom.

Verse 3 says that during the King’s reign the mountains and hills will bring forth peace by righteousness. On one level this may concern productivity. The Hebrew word for peace, *shalom*, means more than absence of war. It concerns perfect contentment and happiness and may connote prosperity. Mountains and hills are not typically fertile areas, but blessing will flow even from them (compare Joel 3:18; Amos 9:13). Yet mountains and hills can also be figurative of great and small nations—and that may be intended here as well, considering the universal reign of this King, as later described. The verse would then entail all peoples learning God’s way, resulting in world peace. The reign of Solomon, whose name meant peace, was a time of peace and prosperity—yet it was only a small foretaste of the peace and prosperity of the Kingdom to come.

The King will be *feared*—denoting “an expression of wonder, awe, reverence, worship, and obedience” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on Psalm 72:5-7)—and this for as long as the sun and moon exist, throughout all generations (verse 5). Righteousness and abundant peace would flourish during His reign “until the moon is no more” (verse 7). Clearly this did not concern merely Solomon’s earthly reign. Again, the Kingdom of the immortal Messiah is primarily intended. The Messiah’s coming is as the gentle rains to bring forth righteousness and peace (verse 6; compare Hosea 6:3; 10:12; Isaiah 55:10-11). Isaiah states, “Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end” (9:7).

The King’s dominion, Psalm 72:8 tells us, will extend “from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.” The expression “the River” typically denotes the Euphrates River, the northern boundary God promised for the Promised Land—as it was during Solomon’s reign. “Sea to sea” might then appear to represent the east-west boundaries of the land of Israel—from the Dead to the Mediterranean Sea. However, since the dominion extends *to the ends of the earth*, “sea to sea” could have a much broader meaning. Solomon did experience the royalty of other lands, including Sheba, presenting him with gifts, as described in verse 10 (see also verse 15). But He did not experience the fulfillment of verse 11, which says that all kings would fall down before the Great King and that all nations would serve Him. This will only happen following the return of Jesus Christ.

Verses 12-14 expand on the important theme introduced in verses 2 and 4—bringing justice to the lowly and needy, saving them from those who oppress them. Indeed verse 12 seems to imply that this is part of the reason nations will choose to serve Him. “The little word [‘for’ at the beginning of verse 12] directs our look back at the prediction, ‘All kings will bow down to Him’ (v. 11). What makes the rule of this king so special? Simply that he is dedicated to save the needy and rescue the oppressed. He has God’s own compassion and the power to act on others’ behalf. These verses forever change our notion of ‘rule.’ The central issue of rule is not the power to use others, but the willingness to serve them” (Lawrence Richards, *The Bible Reader’s Companion*, note on verses 12-14).

The statement “precious is their blood in His sight” (verse 14) does not mean the King desires their deaths. Just the opposite, this phrase should be seen as the reason that He saves people from violence, as mentioned immediately before in the verse. Their blood is what sustains their lives (Leviticus 17:14), and it is their lives that are precious to Him (for similar wording, see 2 Kings 1:13-14). In short, the King will not look on human life as cheap—as so many cruel despots throughout history have done. Rather, He values it very highly. And violence will be eliminated during the rule of His Kingdom (Isaiah 11:9).

In Psalm 72:17, the mention of all peoples being blessed through Him “recalls the promise to Abraham (see Ge 12:3; 22:18) and suggests that it will be fulfilled through the royal son of David—ultimately the Messiah” (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on Psalm 72:17).

Verses 18-19 were probably added to the psalm a closing doxology (expression of praise) when Book II of the Psalter was completed. And the “prayers of David” note in verse 20, as already mentioned, was probably also appended at that time.

“Then I Understood Their End” (Psalms 73–74)

August 23-25

Book III of the Psalter, as the *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* explains, “consists of three groupings of psalms, having an overall symmetrical pattern (six psalms {73–78}, five psalms {79–83}, six psalms {84–89}) and at its center (Ps 81) an urgent exhortation to fundamental covenant loyalty to the Lord” (note on Psalms 73–78). Of the 17 psalms in this book, the titles of the first 11 (these psalms constituting the first two clusters of the three mentioned above) bear the name of Asaph, one of David’s three choir directors—Asaph evidently being the primary director among the three. We earlier read Psalm 50, another psalm of Asaph that may have been detached from a full grouping of 12 to be placed in Book II during a later process of arrangement.

As mentioned earlier, *le-Asaph* could either mean that the psalms were written *by* Asaph or *for* him to perform. The former seems more likely, though there is some difficulty with respect to Asaph’s authorship or even performance of the psalms bearing his name. A number of the psalms of Book III deal with a time of national invasion and devastation. Indeed, two of Asaph’s psalms (74 and 79) concern an enemy invasion of Jerusalem and the ravaging of the temple. This helps to establish a link, as explained in the Bible Reading Program’s introduction to Psalms, between Book III of the Psalter and the third of the five Festival Scrolls, the book of Lamentations, read annually by the Jews during their fast on the ninth of Ab in commemoration of the Babylonian and Roman destructions of the temple. Asaph, though, lived centuries before the Babylonian destruction.

It is perhaps possible that Asaph did live to see Pharaoh Shishak’s invasion during the reign of Solomon’s son Rehoboam (1 Kings 14:25-28; 2 Chronicles 12). But Asaph would have been extremely old then if he were still alive. Consider that he was given his appointment when the Ark of the Covenant was brought to Jerusalem shortly after David’s establishment there (see 1 Chronicles 15:17-19; 16:5). Asaph would then have been over 30, as David’s change to allow Levitical service at a younger age did not come until the end of the king’s reign (compare Numbers 4:2-3, 22-23, 29-30; 1 Chronicles 23:3, 25-27). Shishak’s invasion came about 78 years after David took over Jerusalem, so Asaph would have been 108 or older. While seemingly unlikely, this is not impossible.

However, other solutions have been put forward. Perhaps the most popular is the general rejection of the superscriptions in the book of Psalms as unreliable. But then we are left with the great mystery of how these scribal attributions arose. If oral tradition, did not the tradition have some basis?

Others would argue that Asaph wrote the psalms in question in a form we no longer have and that later editors rewrote these to fit their later circumstances. This could be, but in such a case it would seem that the particular psalms would have been chosen for revision because they concerned similar

circumstances, in this case national invasion, yet no such invasion took place in Asaph's time prior to Shishak's.

Some believe that "references to Asaph in these titles must sometimes include descendants of Asaph who functioned in his place" (*Zondervan*, note on Psalm 73 title). It is true that Asaph's descendants remained as temple singers in later centuries (see 2 Chronicles 35:15; Ezra 2:41; Nehemiah 7:44; 11:17). But why would the titles not say "sons of Asaph," as others say "sons of Korah"?

Another very real possibility is that Asaph was writing prophetically. He is referred to in 2 Chronicles 29:30 as "Asaph the seer." Indeed, many of the psalms are understood to be prophetic, but usually this means that some present circumstance was being written about that reflected future events in a dual sense. Indeed if Asaph did witness, and was writing about, Shishak's invasion, his words were also likely prophetic of future destruction—that is, of the ancient Babylonian and Roman destructions as well as the end-time destruction yet to come. However, it could be that God gave Asaph a vision of the future disconnected from his immediate circumstances. He may have been writing of what he saw with his mind and not with his eyes. We simply don't know for sure. In any event, we will assume Asaph himself as the author of the psalms bearing his name, as this seems most likely despite the apparent difficulty.

We begin, then, with the first cluster of Book II, Psalms 73-78. This "first group is framed by psalms of instruction. Ps 73 is a word of godly wisdom based on an individual's life experience, while Ps 78 is a psalm of instruction based on Israel's communal experience in its historical pilgrimage with God. Within this frame, Ps 74 (a communal prayer) is linked with Ps 77 (a prayer of an individual) by the common experience of seeming to be rejected by God (see 74:1; 77:7) and by an extended evocation of God's saving act in Israel's exodus from Egypt (see 74:13-15; 77:16-19). At the center, two psalms (75; 76) express joyful assurance that Israel's God (His 'Name is near,' 75:1; 'his name is great in Israel,' 76:1) calls the arrogant wicked to account and rescues their victims; he cuts off 'the horns of the wicked' (75:10) and breaks 'the spirit of rulers' (76:12 [NIV])" (note on Psalms 73-78).

Psalm 73 explores the dilemma of the wicked seeming to prosper while the godly suffer so much. It is thematically tied in this respect to Psalm 49. Like that song, Psalm 73 gives the clarity of vision that comes from realizing people's future destiny. "Placed at the beginning of Book III, this psalm voices the faith (confessed {v. 1}, tested {vv. 2-26} and reaffirmed {vv. 27-28}) that undergirds the following collection. It serves in Book III as Ps 1-2 serve in Book I" (note on Psalm 73).

Asaph knows that God is good to those in Israel who are pure in heart (verse 1), but he had struggled to understand why the wicked prosper—being nearly tripped up by this as he started to envy their strength, abundance and carefree lives (verses 2-5, 7, 12). It seemed they could do and say whatever they want (verses 8-9). How is it that they could defy God and everything still go so well for them? (verses 11-12). Was it pointless to obey God? (verses 13-14). Besides the personal quandary of Asaph detailed here, this song probably found meaning to the nation at large in later years when wicked enemy nations seemed to freely defy God and prosper while God's own nation suffered greatly at their hand.

In verse 15 Asaph says to God, "If I had really spoken this way, I would have been a traitor to your people" (New Living Translation). Thus he was so far only entertaining these thoughts. He had not yet succumbed to actually believing them. But the confusion was very uncomfortable (verse 16).

Until one day, that is, while he was in God's sanctuary (the tabernacle or temple)—perhaps performing his duties leading prayerful and worshipful music—that it hit him. He realized the *end* of the wicked (verse 17)—they will perish (verse 27). "He rediscovered something that he probably already knew but had not really considered: The prosperity of the wicked will not last. Their wealth will have no value in the next life" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verses 15-18). Indeed, more than in just this ultimate sense, he realized that without God's overseeing care their demise could come at any moment (verses 18-19; compare Luke 13:1-5). The middle statement of Psalm 73:19, "They are utterly consumed with terrors," means either that terrible events would destroy them (see NIV) or that, deep down, the wicked are really filled with fear of what might happen to them because they do not have the assurance of faith the godly have. Verse 20 says that when God finally does decide to deal with the wicked, they will disappear like a bad dream—the phrase "despise their image" here in context meaning to disregard the sight of them as unreal (compare Isaiah 29:5-8).

Asaph was then rather upset with himself (Psalm 73:21) for being so stupid—like an ignorant beast (verse 22; compare Job 18:3)—in thinking the way he had. Nevertheless, God didn't desert him in his

foolishness but enlightened his perspective to keep him on the road to glory (Psalm 73:23-24). Nothing in the universe can compare to a relationship with God (verse 25). Physical life ends, but with Him is eternal life and reward (verse 26). Those who forsake God for unfaithfulness are on the road to death (verse 27).

Contrary to his earlier consideration of serving God being futile (verse 13), Asaph concludes just the opposite: “It is *good* for me to draw near to God” (verse 28). He trusts God and will proclaim to others—as this song does—that what God does for us makes our devotion to Him more than worth it.

According to its superscription, **Psalm 74** is a *maskil* (instructional psalm or, as in the NKJV, “contemplation”) of Asaph. As mentioned earlier, it, like Psalm 79, concerns a time of national invasion and devastation, including the ransacking of the temple in Jerusalem—the sanctuary (verses 3-4, 7) at Mount Zion (verse 2). The psalm is a lamenting plea for relief from the godless invaders and oppressors.

As mentioned before, it is possible that Asaph lived to see Pharaoh Shishak’s invasion of Judah around 925 B.C., which included the looting and defiling of the temple (1 Kings 14:25-28; 2 Chronicles 12). However, it is just as possible that Asaph was given a vision of the future—of events beyond his death, possibly Shishak’s invasion but perhaps one long afterward, such as the Babylonian invasion of 586 B.C. or the Roman invasion of A.D. 69-70 (or perhaps the end-time invasion still ahead).

Whatever he saw, the utter sense of shock and misery in Psalm 74 is clear: “Why...? Why...?” he asks (verse 1). “How long...?” and “Why...?” (verses 10-11). He realizes that the invasion is a result of God’s judgment (verse 1)—but is stunned at what God has permitted the enemy to do. Asaph implores God to restore His relationship with His people and act to preserve His own reputation against the blasphemous actions of the wicked invaders. “Lift up your feet” in verse 3 is a call for God to walk—to come and see what the enemy is doing.

In verse 5-6, enemy troops are shown hacking with axes and hammers at the temple’s carved work—its paneling or other décor—and then in verse 7 they are described as setting fire to the sanctuary, defiling it to the ground. It is not clear what this means. If this means setting fires in parts of the temple as part of utterly defiling it, this could possibly refer to Shishak’s invasion. But if it means that the enemy has burned the temple to the ground (as the NIV translates it), we should realize that such calamity only happened during the Babylonian and Roman invasions.

The statement in verse 9 that “there is no longer any prophet” is interesting in light of the fact that Asaph himself was a seer (2 Chronicles 29:30). This may support the argument that Asaph did not actually live to witness the devastation he is writing about. Yet considering what follows in the verse, this may simply mean that there is no prophet who knows how long the enemy oppression will last. Based on the same verse, the identification of the invasion as that of the Babylonians is problematic because God’s prophet Daniel lived through the entire Babylonian captivity. And Jeremiah remained in Judah until he was taken by the remnant of the country to Egypt (after which only a few peasants were left in the land). And Jeremiah even gave a time frame for the dominion of Babylon.

Asaph urges God to take action against the evil adversary (verse 11) and then recounts the mighty acts God accomplished for His people in the past—when He delivered them from Egypt and led them to the Promised Land. (Asaph also reflects on this deliverance in Psalms 77, 78 and 81.)

God divided the Red Sea, opened fountains of water for the people in the wilderness and dried up the Jordan River so the Israelites could cross (74:13, 15). The breaking of the heads of the sea serpents, of Leviathan, in pieces (verses 13-14) refers in one sense to the devastation brought against Egypt at that time. Leviathan, the sea serpent of Job 41, is representative of Satan the devil, the true ruler of this world. He is portrayed in Revelation 12:3 as having multiple heads—in that case the heads being those of prophetic Babylon (a succession of world-ruling empires) shown as springing from him (see Revelation 13; 17). Yet he was also the power behind the thrones of Egypt and the other nations Israel defeated in their wilderness wanderings. Indeed, the Egyptian pharaoh is portrayed in the book of Ezekiel as a crocodilian river monster or sea monster (29:3; 32:2). The heads of Leviathan being given as food to the Israelites in the wilderness would seem to refer to their looting of the Egyptians and the carrying away of Egypt’s substance as well as the plunder of other Satan-led nations on the way to the land of Canaan.

In Psalm 74:16-17, Asaph points out God’s power to determine day and night, the earth’s borders (perhaps the division of land and sea) and the seasons. He is essentially saying, “You can do anything. You are in control of everything.” And on that basis, He again pleads with God to consider what the enemy has done (verses 18) and the need of His people (verses 19-21).

The reference to God's people as "Your turtledove" (verse 19) is probably a term of endearment, showing the people as God's beloved (see Song of Solomon 2:14; 5:2; 6:9). In Psalm 74:20 Asaph asks that God would have respect to the covenant—wherein God had said that if the people repented and called on Him for help that He would deliver them.

The Contemporary English Version renders the latter part of verse 20 this way: "Violent enemies are hiding in every dark corner of the earth." That is, enemy forces are set to ambush God's people all over the place—emphasizing the urgent need for help. This also reminds us of the fact that God's people today are constantly pursued by spirit enemies, about which Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:12: "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the world's rulers, of the darkness of this age, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Modern King James Version).

Asaph further calls the people "Your poor" (Psalm 74:19), "the oppressed" and "the poor and needy" (verse 21)—as they have been humbled and are the kind of people God says He will care for and rescue.

Verses 22-23 contain a final plea for God to act against the enemies. While God has permitted them to attack His people for the sake of judgment, these wicked invaders have assaulted and blasphemed God Himself and continue to do so. They must be stopped—and they will be.

"When I Choose the Proper Time, I Will Judge Uprightly" (Psalms 75–77) August 26-28

Psalms 75 and 76 are both songs of reassurance of God's justice when things seem to be going so well for the wicked—no doubt sung in later years for encouragement when evil enemy nations encroached. "In some ways this psalm [75] may be regarded as God's answer to the questions presented in Ps 74" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on Psalm 75). There Asaph had asked: "Will the enemy blaspheme Your name forever? Why do You withdraw Your hand, even Your right hand?" (Psalm 74:10-11). Here God says: "When I choose the proper time, I will judge uprightly" (75:2).

Though no attribution is given to God as the One speaking, it is obvious from what is said that He is being quoted. God further says that even when severe distress engulfs the world, He is in control: "When the earth totters, and all its inhabitants, it is I who keep its pillars steady" (verse 3, NRSV). "He is the great Judge-Ruler, who will not permit wickedness, evil powers, and the arrogant to undermine the foundations of his kingdom. The quaking of the earth and peoples is a metaphor for the erosive effects of evil. Immorality undermines the stability of earth and society...[but] the Lord proclaims that he graciously upholds his creation" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on verse 3).

"Thematic parallels to the song of Hannah (1Sa 2:1-10) are numerous" (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on Psalm 75)—particularly in her statement, as a representative mother in Israel, that her "horn is exalted in the LORD" while God deals with her enemies. The horn is a biblical symbol for power and strength.

God here in Psalm 75 warns the wicked to stop arrogantly boasting and flaunting their horn (verses 4-5). Asaph adds that exalting oneself or seeking exaltation from or through other people on earth is vain—as God has ultimate control over who is demoted or promoted in the world's kingdoms (verses 6-7; compare Daniel 4:25b, 32b; Romans 13:1). This applies to our own individual circumstances as well. While there are practical steps we can take to achieve advancement, promotions and leadership opportunities—be it at work, school, church or community—the most important strategy is to rely on God for His direction and help. For "unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it" (Psalm 127:1).

Incidentally, it is interesting to note the cardinal directions mentioned in Psalm 75:6-7—or, rather, the one *not* mentioned. Exaltation does not come from east, west or south but from God. This would appear to identify God with the *north*, as other passages do—that is, either the Temple Mount on the north side of Jerusalem or the farthest north in heaven (compare Psalm 48:2; Isaiah 14:13).

From His throne, God is sovereign throughout the earth. And, as Psalm 75:8 makes clear, He has destined abasement through severe judgment for those who persist in wickedness. The imagery of the winecup of judgment here is also found in other verses (see Isaiah 51:17; Jeremiah 25:15; Revelation 14:10; 16:19).

Asaph knows that as God's servant he will live forever—and will throughout eternity continue to sing praise to God (Psalm 75:9). Then in verse 10 God speaks again to conclude that the horns of the wicked will be cut off (compare the imagery in Zechariah 1:18-21) while the horns, again representing

strength, of the righteous will be exalted (compare Psalm 89:17; 92:10-11)—meaning, in concert with Asaph’s previous words, for eternity to come.

Psalm 76, another song of Asaph, is “a celebration of the Lord’s invincible power in defense of Jerusalem, his royal city. The psalm is thematically related to Ps 46; 48; 87” (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on Psalm 76). Like Psalm 75, this psalm would provide encouragement when enemy forces seemed unstoppable.

Jerusalem is referred to here in the abbreviated form of Salem (Psalm 76:2; compare Genesis 14:18). The victory over military forces God achieved at Jerusalem (Psalm 76:3) concerns God delivering His own oppressed people from an assault there, as the rest of the psalm makes clear.

Asaph declares God “more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey” (verse 4). The expression “mountains of prey” is interpreted by the next verse: “The stouthearted [referring to the invading enemies] were plundered.” Mountains are often symbolic in Scripture of kingdoms or nations. These enemy mountains, seeking to prey upon God’s people, have themselves become prey. As God elsewhere says to Israel of the end time: “All those who devour you shall be devoured; and all your adversaries, every one of them, shall go into captivity; those who plunder you shall become plunder, and all who prey upon you I will make a prey” (Jeremiah 30:16; compare also Isaiah 31:4).

Though speaking of the victory as already accomplished in most of Psalm 76 (see verses 3, 5-6, 8-9), Asaph was prophesying here of the future (compare verses 10, 12). On one level the prophecy could be looking forward to the overthrow of Sennacherib’s army outside Jerusalem in Hezekiah’s day (see 2 Kings 19:35). Yet the main focus is God’s deliverance of the Jews there in the end time (see Zechariah 12:8-9)—as Psalm 76 shows that the rescue is part of God’s deliverance of “all the oppressed of the earth” (verse 9) when He breaks the spirit of rulers in an awesome show of power to “the kings of the earth” (verse 12). This could also represent God’s victory in delivering the people of *spiritual* Zion, His Church, from the unseen spiritual rulers of this world bent on destroying them.

Fear of God, mentioned in three verses in this psalm (7, 8, 11), is an important theme here. “For the righteous, the fear of God is a response of awe, wonder, adoration, and worship. For the wicked, the fear of God is terror, for there is no escape from Him (14:5)” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on Psalm 76:7).

Even the wrath of man directed against God will actually serve to praise and glorify Him (verse 10). This is because human attempts to fight against God (compare Revelation 19:19) will only demonstrate how irresistibly powerful He is (17:14). God in such cases counters with His own wrath. “The remainder of wrath” (Psalm 76:10), indicates “that particular judgments do not exhaust his wrath; a remainder is left to deal with other hostile powers” (*Zondervan*, note on verse 10). Indeed, God will deal with *all* hostile powers when Jesus Christ returns and establishes the Kingdom of God throughout the earth.

The middle phrase in the superscription of **Psalm 77**, which may be part of the postscript of Psalm 76, says “To Jeduthun”—the last of three occurrences of this designation in the psalms (see also the titles of Psalms 39 and 62). As mentioned regarding the previous occurrences, Jeduthun was one of David’s three music directors, apparently synonymous with Ethan, who was over the Merarite performers (i.e., of the Levitical sub-tribe of Merari), as Asaph led the Gershonite choir and Heman led the Kohathite performers (compare 1 Chronicles 6:16, 33, 39, 43-44; 15:17, 19; 16:41-42; 1 Chronicles 25:1, 6; 2 Chronicles 5:12; 35:15).

In great duress over some unnamed circumstance, Asaph has poured out his heart to God, knowing God has heard him (verse 1). He speaks in verse 2 of “the day of my trouble.” While seemingly personal, this may, like some of the other psalms in this section, reflect a time of *national* tragedy—particularly considering the focus of the end of the psalm on God’s past intervention for Israel.

Asaph has lifted his outspread hands to God in prayer through the night as he just can’t get comfortable or go to sleep (verses 2, 4a). Thinking about God is only troubling to him (verse 3) because he doesn’t understand why God is permitting or causing what is happening. He doesn’t know what to say (verse 4b).

In verses 5-6, Asaph is trying to put the present situation into perspective by thinking on the past. Yet this engenders the question of why God is not showing mercy as He has before. In its note on verses 7-9, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* states: “The formulation of questions has a therapeutic effect.... These questions go from the present situation of rejection (v. 7) to the cause: the Lord’s ‘anger’ (v. 9). In

asking these questions and in expressing his doubts, the heart of the psalmist comes to rest; for he knows the God of Abraham...will remain faithful to ‘his promise.’”

Though in turmoil, Asaph determines to recall and meditate on God’s mighty intervention of times past (verses 10-13). If the added italicized “is” in verse 13 (NKJV) is dropped, as it could be, the clause here, starting with the end of the previous verse could read, “...and talk of Your deeds—Your way, O God—in the sanctuary.” The next line reflects what he would say: “Who is so great a God as our God?”

Through the remainder of the psalm, Asaph thinks about God’s deliverance of Israel from Egypt in the days of Moses and Aaron (verses 14-20). Asaph’s mind is moved as he meditates. “Unconsciously he has jumped from (a) talking about God, to (b) talking to God. Then he finds himself in prayer (c) confessing God’s greatness, and finally (d) he seizes on the fact that of course...he belongs to that people whom God has already redeemed” (George Knight, *Psalms*, comments on verses 12-15).

Asaph concludes the psalm with declarations of God’s sovereignty over the “waters”—a symbol of chaotic, threatening forces. The waters here are viewed as the thunderclouds of storm (verses 17-18) and the mighty sea, which God divided to lead his people through (verses 16, 19-20). “Lost in contemplation of the greatness of God, the poet seems thoroughly distracted from his pain. He does not mention it again, not daring to compare it to the greatness of the Almighty” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 20). God is in control, and His aim is to deliver His people—as He surely will, in the proper time as He determines.

“Again and Again They Tempted God” (Psalm 78)

August 29-31

Like Psalm 74, **Psalm 78** is a *maskil*—an instructional psalm or “contemplation” (NKJV)—of Asaph. In this closing psalm of the first cluster of Book III, the second-longest psalm in the Bible, Asaph reflects on God’s faithfulness despite Israel’s history of rebellion against Him—and on God’s decision to dwell with Judah rather than with Israel at large. Where the KJV and NKJV have “my law” in verse 1, the NIV has “my teaching,” as the Hebrew word *torah* means instruction—principles to understand and live by, thus a law for life (compare Proverbs 1:8; 3:1; 4:2).

In Psalm 78:2, “the terms *parable* and *dark sayings* or riddles indicate sayings with ‘deeper meanings’ or ‘teachings with a point’ (Prov. 1:6)” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on Psalm 78:1-2). The apostle Matthew quoted Psalm 78:2 as a prophecy of Jesus’ use of parables (Matthew 13:34-35)—using stories to teach lessons. In Psalm 78 the story is that of Israel’s history—a pattern followed by Christ’s disciple Stephen in his message of Acts 7.

The general instruction here is not new, Asaph explains, as it was to have been passed down from one generation to the next so that succeeding generations would come to know God’s laws and learn from the mistakes of past generations who failed to follow these laws (Psalm 78:3-8). Asaph is participating in this passage of instruction on a broad scale through the composition and performance of his psalm for the national audience.

Yet what may be new, the more subtle point of the psalm, as we will see, concerns the shift of the center of God’s worship and of civil rule from the northern tribes to Judah. This is first hinted at in verses 9-11. The tribe of Ephraim son of Joseph here, as the leading tribe in Israel, was representative of the nation of Israel in general, particularly the northern tribes. Indeed, the mention of Ephraim in verse 9 with respect to a battle may be specific. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* states: “From the description of God’s judgment on Israel, on Shiloh ([the site of His tabernacle through the period of the judges] located in the mountains of Ephraim), and, particularly, on Ephraim (vv. 56-64, 67), the psalmist may be thinking of the Philistine incursion and victory at Ebenezer, which resulted in the loss of the ark and the destruction of Shiloh (1 Sam 4:1-11)” (note on Psalm 78:9).

The loss at Shiloh, due to Israel’s refusal to obey God, was a momentous development, as the psalm later points out. Yet it followed a pattern of Israel’s rebellion since the nation’s deliverance from Egypt, which is recounted in the psalm. (Zoan in verses 12 and 43 was an Egyptian city in the Nile Delta.)

Despite God’s awesome deliverance (verses 12-16), the Israelites rebelled in the wilderness, trying God’s patience (verses 17-18). Though He had divided the Red Sea, they didn’t believe He would provide food and drink for them in the desert. They thought they would starve because of His “deliverance” (see Exodus 16). And when He did provide, they were later unsatisfied with what He gave them (see verses 18-22)—even though He gave them manna, the “bread of heaven...angel’s food” (verse 24), which Jesus later explained was symbolic of Himself given for others to partake of in a spiritual sense (see John 6). So God gave them what they craved—sending birds in abundance to provide them with meat—but He struck

them with a plague for their voracious lust and outrageous ingratitude (Psalm 78:26-31). The full account of this episode is found in Numbers 11.

“In spite of this,” says Psalm 76:32, the Israelites continued to sin against God, not believing “in His wonderful works” (Psalm 78:32). How is this possible when they saw the supernatural intervention with their own eyes? Perhaps some did not trust what they had seen—or they willfully forgot. Yet on a wide scale this probably means that the people did not retain confidence in these things as proof of God’s care for them or an indication that He would judge evil the next time as He had before. This too is a form of forgetfulness. In Hebrews 3:12-13, Christians are warned against following the Israelites’ example in developing an “evil heart of unbelief...hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”

Because they didn’t believe Him, God caused the Israelites to spend the rest of their days “in futility” and “fear” rather than entering the Promised Land (Psalm 78:33). For 40 years they wandered, seeking God then forgetting Him and becoming unfaithful (verses 34-42). Yet in His compassion, God averted His wrath on many occasions, remembering “that they were but flesh” (verses 38-39). God is still the same merciful God, for which we can be ever thankful (compare Malachi 3:6).

Again, at the root of the Israelites’ unfaithfulness was their failure to remember—in the way they should have—God’s power as exercised to deliver them from their enemies (Psalm 78:42). Asaph, expressing what parents should have been teaching their children, again recounts God’s striking of Egypt to free His people and His driving out of the Canaanites to give His people the Promised Land (verses 43-55). Having come to “His holy border” in verse 54, “this mountain” in the same verse is evidently the whole land of Israel (as mountains often represent nations in Scripture).

Even in the Promised Land, the people “turned back and acted unfaithfully like their fathers” (verse 57). A major reason is probably that succeeding generations failed to pass on what God did for the nation—and to pass on God’s laws. Verses 58-59 show that the Israelites sank into syncretistic and idolatrous practices, which infuriated God.

We come, then, to verse 60. Because of their pattern of unfaithfulness, God forsakes the tabernacle at Shiloh, allowing the enemy Philistines to capture, for a period of time, “His strength...and His glory” (verse 61)—referring to the Ark of the Covenant (compare 1 Samuel 4:22). Many Israelites were killed in the battle, including the high priest Eli’s wicked sons Hophni and Phinehas (see Psalm 78:62-64; 1 Samuel 4).

In Psalm 78:65-66, God is portrayed as afterward rousing Himself and, with a great shout, beating back His enemies, putting them to a “perpetual reproach.” Asaph is speaking of events leading up to the time he wrote this, essentially describing God leading Israel to defeat its enemies in the time of King David, creating an ongoing period of Israelite peace and triumph under Solomon.

As part of this process, Asaph says that God “rejected the tent of Joseph, and did not choose the tribe of Ephraim, but chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion which He loved, and He built His sanctuary like the heights” (verses 67-69). Thus, the center of worship is moved from the tabernacle of Shiloh in the territory of Ephraim to the temple of Jerusalem in the land of Judah. Focus is also placed on God choosing David, of Judah, as king over all Israel (verses 70-71). David’s demeanor and care-giving knowledge as an actual shepherd of sheep was valuable training for shepherding God’s people on behalf of God Himself, the great Shepherd (see Psalm 23).

Yet there may be much more to this psalm. After all, Psalm 78:2 is prophetic of Christ’s parables. His parables mostly concerned His servants and the Kingdom of God. Might there be a Kingdom parable here in Psalm 78? Certainly the need to remain faithful to God and His continual faithfulness to forgive upon repentance are Kingdom themes. But there may be more.

The exaltation of Judah as God’s dwelling in Psalm 78 would take on greater meaning after the division of the kingdom into north and south upon Solomon’s death and the subsequent apostasy of the northern kingdom. As the prophet Hosea would later write in Hosea 11:12: “Ephraim has encircled Me with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit [following Israel’s historical pattern in Psalm 78—see especially verse 36]; but Judah still walks with God, even with the Holy One who is faithful.” Judah was in essence the faithful remnant of Israel. But Judah would later apostatize as well. Even then, however, an elect few remained as the true Jews, so to speak—the true Jews of today, the elect remnant according to grace, being God’s Church (compare Romans 2:28-29; 11:5).

In that sense, God building His sanctuary on Mount Zion could today figuratively represent the building of His spiritual temple, His Church, the spiritual Zion. Indeed, the psalm could be seen, in type, as showing the center of God's worship being moved from the physical nation of Israel to the spiritual remnant of Israel—again, the Church. Yet in looking forward to God's Kingdom, we should understand that the people of spiritual Zion will be established at the earthly Zion and all Israel will ultimately be saved—no longer enslaved to the pattern outlined in this psalm. David in the concluding verses of Psalm 78 is in this picture representative of the rulers of God's coming Kingdom, especially the chief ruler, David's descendant Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd who will reign from the throne of David over all nations. David himself and all the saints will then reign with Him in perfect integrity and skill.

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