

Meditations on the Psalms

Volume Four: Psalms 31-40

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Table of contents

1 Psalm Thirty-One.....	4
1.1 First: Prayer is the Refuge of the Sufferer.....	6
1.2 Second: The Story of the Sufferer.....	9
1.3 Third: God's Goodness.....	11
1.4 Fourth: Two Pieces of Advice to the Saints.....	12
1.5 Questions.....	13
2 Psalm Thirty-Two.....	13
2.1 First: The Necessity of Confessing Sin.....	14
2.2 Second: The Danger of Failing to Confess Sin.....	17
2.3 Third: The Sorrows of the Wicked and the Delights of the Righteous.....	18
2.4 Questions.....	19
3 Psalm Thirty-Three.....	19
3.1 First: A Call on the Believers to Praise.....	21
3.2 Second: Praising the God of Creation.....	22
3.3 Third: Praising the God of Mankind.....	24
3.4 Fourth: How Should Praise Be?.....	26
3.5 Questions.....	27
4 Psalm Thirty-Four.....	27
4.1 First: A Praise of Thanksgiving.....	29
4.2 Second: A Sermon from the Cave of Adullam.....	32
4.3 Third: God's Good Relation to His People.....	33

4.4 Questions.....	35
5 Psalm Thirty-Five.....	35
5.1 First: The Psalmist's Saviour.....	37
5.2 Second: The Psalmist's Enemies.....	39
5.3 Third: The Psalmist's Prayer.....	40
5.4 Questions.....	42
6 Psalm Thirty-Six.....	42
6.1 First: The Principles and Deeds of the Wicked.....	43
6.2 Second: The Principles and Deeds of God.....	45
6.3 Third: The Psalmist's Prayer.....	48
6.4 Questions.....	48
7 Psalm Thirty-Seven.....	49
7.1 First: Do not Envy the Wicked.....	51
7.2 Second: The Schemes of the Wicked Bounce Back on Him",6The Schemes of the Wicked Bounce Back on Him.....	54
7.3 Third: Seven Contrasts Between Righteous and Wicked",6Seven Contrasts Between the Righteous and the Wicked.....	55
7.4 Questions.....	60
8 Psalm Thirty-Eight.....	60
8.1 First: The Psalmist's Difficulties Reminded him that God was Angry with Him.....	62
8.2 Second: The Psalmist's Difficulties made him Check his Human Relationships.....	63
8.3 Third: The Psalmist's Difficulties made him Develop his Relationship with the Lord64	
8.4 Questions.....	66
9 Psalm Thirty-Nine.....	66
9.1 First: Silence in Pain.....	67
9.2 Second: Speaking in Pain.....	68
9.3 Third: Hope in Pain.....	69
9.4 Fourth: Supplication in Pain.....	71
9.5 Questions.....	72
10 Psalm Fourty.....	72

10.1 First: What the Lord Did for the Psalmist.....	74
10.2 Second: What the Psalmist Did for the Lord.....	76
10.3 Third: A Prayer for Deliverance.....	79
10.4 Questions.....	80
11 Quiz.....	80

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1. Psalm Thirty-One

He has Shown His Marvellous Kindness

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.

1 In You, O Lord, I put my trust; let me never be ashamed; deliver me in Your righteousness.

2 Bow down Your ear to me, deliver me speedily; be my rock of refuge, a fortress of defense to save me.

3 For You are my rock and my fortress; therefore, for Your name's sake, lead me and guide me.

4 Pull me out of the net which they have secretly laid for me, for You are my strength.

5 Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.

6 I have hated those who regard useless idols; but I trust in the Lord.

7 I will be glad and rejoice in Your mercy, for You have considered my trouble; You have known my soul in adversities,

8 And have not shut me up into the hand of the enemy; You have set my feet in a wide place.

9 Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am in trouble; my eye wastes away with grief, yes, my soul and my body!

10 For my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away.

11 I am a reproach among all my enemies, but especially among my neighbors, and am repulsive to my acquaintances; those who see me outside flee from me.

12 I am forgotten like a dead man, out of mind; I am like a broken vessel.

13 For I hear the slander of many; fear is on every side; while they take counsel together against me, they scheme to take away my life.

14 But as for me, I trust in You, O Lord; I say, "You are my God."

15 My times are in Your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies, and from those who persecute me.

16 Make Your face shine upon Your servant; save me for Your mercies' sake.

17 Do not let me be ashamed, O Lord, for I have called upon You; let the wicked be ashamed; let them

be silent in the grave.

18 Let the lying lips be put to silence, which speak insolent things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous.

19 Oh, how great is Your goodness, which You have laid up for those who fear You, which You have prepared for those who trust in You In the presence of the sons of men!

20 You shall hide them in the secret place of Your presence from the plots of man; You shall keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues.

21 Blessed be the Lord, for He has shown me His marvelous kindness in a strong city!

22 For I said in my haste, "I am cut off from before Your eyes"; nevertheless You heard the voice of my supplications when I cried out to You.

23 Oh, love the Lord, all you His saints! For the Lord preserves the faithful, and fully repays the proud person.

24 Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all you who hope in the Lord.

The occasion for writing this psalm is an accident that happened to David when he was running from Saul from one place to another till he reached the Wilderness of Maon. Saul stalked him until he was hurriedly summoned to come back and defend his land, as the Philistines had launched an attack against Israel. Saul returned and David escaped, therefore the place was called the Rock of Escaping. It was not due to his intelligence or craftiness that David escaped, but because the Lord allowed him to (1 Samuel 23).

The psalmist had grown weary, mentally and physically, from persecution and defamation. He could only cast himself upon God and sing this psalm. He lifted it up as a prayer, and it lifted him up above the problems that plagued him, and filled his heart with faith and hope in the living God.

This psalm must have been on Jeremiah's mind when he quoted the idea of "a broken vessel" (verse 12) when talking about the potter's vessel (Jeremiah 18:4; 22:28), from whom also he quoted the expression "Fear is on every side" (verse 13) in Jeremiah 6:25; 20:10; 49:29. Jonah, too, quoted verse 6 in his prayer in Jonah 2:8,9. A pious elder also quoted the first three verses at the beginning of Psalm 71, which was perhaps his favourite song in the beginning of his life.

On the cross Christ quoted a part of verse 5: "Into Your hand, O Lord, I commit my spirit", after adding to it "Father". These words imply trust in God. Christ did not quote the second half of the verse that says, "You have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth" because, as He was Himself the Redeemer, He did not need redemption.

These words have become a source of encouragement to believers generation after generation. Saint Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, recited them as he was martyred by

burning. Also Saint Jerome, who translated the Bible into Latin, recited them at his death. John Hus recited them when he burned at the stake for translating the Bible into the vernacular of the people. A countless number of believers must have quoted them at their death or when their souls were in anguish. They fixed their gaze upon the Lord, to commit their spirit into His hands.

Martin Luther said, "Blessed is the man who dies with Christ as a believer because he believed. Blessed is the man who dies for Christ as a martyr. Blessed is the man who dies with Christ as He says, 'Into Your hand I commit my spirit.'" By these devotional words we commit ourselves to the Lord completely, knowing that this world is not our dwelling-place. Christ said, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also...I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:2-6).

This is a blessed psalm and this jewel is in the centre of it: "Into Your hand I commit my spirit", which raises our eyes to the Lord, no matter how weary or pursued we might be.

The psalm includes the following:

- First: Prayer is the refuge of the sufferer (verses 1-8)
- Second: The story of the sufferer (verses 9-18)
- Third: God's goodness (verses 19-22)
- Fourth: Two pieces of advice to the saints (verses 23,24)

1.1. First: Prayer is the Refuge of the Sufferer

(verses 1-8)

The psalmist begins this psalm with prayer, afterward he lifts up his complaint. Perhaps if we were in his place we would begin with complaining and expressing our pain and grievances! We learn how to pray in our difficult times from the author of this psalm.

1. Five reasons made the psalmist pray:

1. **The psalmist's confidence:** "In You, O Lord, I put my trust"(verse 1a). The psalmist's confidence in the Lord made him trust Him, because he experienced Him and found Him the only one worthy of his trust. He never shamed him or let him down "According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed" (Philippians 1:20). This is why he repeats the declaration of his trust: "But I trust in the Lord" (verse 6b), because he realises that God is a loving Father, who bows down and pick up His suffering child and sets him above suffering. He declares his trust again by saying, "For You are my rock and my fortress" (verse 3a). The rock is a high mountain and the fortress is the place where you run for shelter. He says

- again, "For You are my strength" (verse 4b). "I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken" (Psalm 37:25).
2. **God's name:** "For Your name's sake, lead me and guide me"(verse 3b). The Lord's wrath was kindled against the Israelites during their journey in Sinai, because they worshipped a golden calf who, they claimed, brought them out of bondage to Pharaoh. The Lord told Moses He was going to destroy all the people who associated another god with Him, and start a new nation from Moses himself. Moses said to the Lord, "Why should the Egyptians speak and say, 'He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains...'? Remember... Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, '...all this land I have spoken of I give to your descendants'" (Exodus 32:7-14). Moses' intercession worked! God was testing Moses' faithfulness to his mission: Would he be happy if the nation were called "the children of Moses" instead of "the children of Israel"? Moses knew God's name that leads and guides, because he walked closely to his Lord, and the Lord performed what he asked for.
 3. **God's past dealings with the psalmist:** "You have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth"(verse 5b). The God of truth obtained for David an eternal redemption and paid the ransom on his behalf to deliver him. Now the greatest and the most tremendous ransom is Christ's redemption of us, for it is the "great sacrifice". He came from heaven, became sin for us so that we should become the righteousness of God in Him. He replaced us and became our substitute.
 4. **The psalmist's godliness:** "I have hated those who regard vain idols"(verse 6a). The vanity of idols extends to witchcraft, divination and clairvoyance.
 5. **The psalmist's joy:** "I will be glad and rejoice in Your mercy"(verse 7a). In the past he rejoiced in the Lord's mercy, which did not execute punishment that he deserved, and he trusts that this same mercy still endures, because his mercy endures forever (Psalm 138:3).
2. **The psalmist asks six requests:**
1. **Not to let him be ashamed**(verse 1b): He knew that Saul pursued him unjustly. He remembers also that as a shepherd boy the prophet Samuel came and anointed him king, and from that time on he became the anointed of the Lord. He did not desire to seize or grab the office, but waited on the Lord to give it to him, knowing that God's promise was sure. True, Saul wanted to halt God's purposes, but God's will must be fulfilled, and David would not be ashamed forever. Yes, he will sit on the throne, and from his seed "The Son of David" will come, to whose reign there will be no end.
 2. **To rescue him quickly:** "Bow down Your ear to me, deliver me speedily"(verse 2a). Many years went by as David roamed aimlessly from place to place. "Shall not God avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with

- them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily" (Luke 18:7,8). It is paradoxical to say "He bears long with them" and "He will avenge them speedily." But they are not really contradictory. In our viewpoint we think that God bears long with us, but in His divine viewpoint He avenges us speedily.
3. **To be his rock:** "be my rock of refuge, a fortress of defence to save me"(verse 2b). "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life", Peter asked (John 6:68). Solomon said, "The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous run to it and are safe" (Proverbs 18:10). The request to be "my rock of refuge" may mean: Be once more a rock of refuge; or: Reassure my soul afresh. Prove to me that You are still the same, so that I can dwell with You in safety, and abide with you forever.
 4. **To lead him and guide him:** "For Your name's sake, lead me and guide me"(verse 3b). The fearful little child runs to his father, who hugs him and reassures him, and gives him protection. After he is reassured, he runs away. But the father always has useful advice to his child. The father may say, "You were afraid because you made a mistake in that matter." If the little one waited a while after the reassurance in his father's bosom he might hear his advice and guidance. We are like children, of limited information and in need of a father to guide us. As travellers we need a guide to show us the way; as soldiers of Christ we need to receive instructions from the commander-in-chief step by step. Let us always lift up this supplication: "For Your name's sake, lead me and guide me." In this supplication David says to the Lord, "I got my confidence from You, but I want to always be in Your bosom, near Your heart. Guide me by the skilfulness of Your hands" (cf. Psalm 78:72).
 5. **To pull him out of the net:** "Pull me out of the net which they have secretly laid for me"(verse 4a). The enemies are cunning and crafty; they hid a net to catch the psalmist. It is a powerful net, but God is more powerful. Their deed is evil, but God is a good God who performs all goodness.
 6. **To receive his spirit:** "Into Your hand I commit my spirit"(verse 5). When afraid of falling into sin, when there are spiritual enemies around we commit our spirits into His hand to find deliverance. When sick and on our deathbed we commit our spirits into His hands, to hear Him say, "Come, you blessed of My father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34).
3. **Four things God did to the psalmist in the past:**
1. **God considered his trouble:** "You have considered my trouble"(verse 7b). Usually people don't take interest in a troubled person; they look away from the painful sights, because they don't like to see tragedy. But God lends the suffering believer who experiences trouble a special care, as He said to Moses, "I have seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. So I have come down to deliver them" (Exodus 3:7,8).

2. **The Lord knew the psalmist's situation:** "You have known my soul in adversities"(verse 7c). People know each other in times of relief and prosperity, but rarely do they do so in adversities. The Lord, however, considers and knows. We all take a passing look at the oppressed, but if we are interested we take a second, scrutinising, effective look. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all" (Psalm 34:19).
3. **The Lord rescued the psalmist:** "You have not shut me up into the hand of the enemy"(verse 8a). It is true that God allowed Saul to pursue the psalmist, but He never delivered him into his hand. When Saul arrived at David's place to capture him, David inquired of the Lord: "Will the men of Keilah deliver me into the hand of Saul?" And the Lord said, "They will deliver you" (1 Samuel 23:12). "Saul sought him everyday, but God did not deliver him into his hands" (1 Samuel 23:14). God gave Saul the freedom to move, because in His wisdom and power He allows an opposition party to rise and contest the divine acts. But God's present power always puts things in the proper perspective, and brings everything back to where it belongs!
4. **God gave the psalmist a wide space:** "You have set my feet in a wide place"(verse 8b). The Authorised Version says, "Thou hast set my feet in a large room." Saul wanted to put him in a dungeon or a grave, but God set his feet in a broad room, just as Paul and Silas were put in the inner prison, but the Lord snapped open the prison gates and released them to preach without hindrances (Acts 16:26). He opens and no one can close, brings us out of dire distress into a broad place where there is no restraint! (Job 36:16).

1.2. Second: The Story of the Sufferer

(verses 9-18)

1. **The psalmist suffers from inner trouble:** "Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am in trouble; my eye wastes away with grief"(verse 9a). His eyes sank deep in their sockets because of too much grief, and could no longer be visible. "My soul and my body" (verse 9b). The Hebrew says, "My soul and my stomach." He has so many spasms that he cannot eat. He could no longer enjoy anything, therefore he said, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am in trouble." His life wasted away with sorrow, and his years with sighing. "My strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away" (verse 10b). He wonders: "How long will Saul run after me? You promised me, Lord, when I was still young to become King. But all those years I have been running from one place to another. Will I have a sound body when I assume the throne to lead the people? Lord, my whole body is tired!" When we fail under the weight of physical pains and emotional problems, let us lift up this supplication.
2. **The psalmist suffers from outer trouble:** "I am a reproach among all my enemies, but especially among my neighbours, and am repulsive to my acquaintances; those who see

me outside flee from me"(verse 11). Because Saul persecuted him no one wanted to have anything to do with him, for they feared the king's anger. He may question them and their friends and their acquaintances, or he may persecute and even kill them, as he did the priests in Nob (1 Samuel 22:18).

David was troubled by his enemies, his neighbours and acquaintances! He had no more refuge among men, so he had to turn to God for refuge, who never refuses any refugee. Oh, how we thank God for Christ who suffered and was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin, is able to help all those who are tempted. He said when Judas sold Him, Peter denied Him and all His disciples left him and ran away, "You...will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the father is with Me" (John 16:32).

3. **The psalmist is troubled by the people's evaluation of him:** "I am forgotten like a dead man, out of mind; I am like a broken vessel"(verse 12). He was like a dead man, with no one wanting to mention his name, just as Job said of himself, "My relatives have failed, and my close friends have forgotten me" (Job 19:14). Saul's secret police trailed him everywhere to arrest him. He became like a broken, useless vessel, good only for throwing out of the window. The most dangerous thing is to lose one's self-confidence!
4. **The psalmist is troubled by the people's speech and actions:** "For I heard the slander of many; fear is on every side; while they take counsel together against me, they scheme to take away my life"(verse 13). Although David was as good as dead, people banded together against him to insult him. They showed the cruelty of the serpent's seed! The prophet Jeremiah said, "For I heard many mocking: 'Fear on every side!'...But the Lord is with me as a mighty, awesome one. Therefore my persecutors will stumble, and will not prevail. They will be greatly ashamed, for they will not prosper. Their everlasting confusion will never be forgotten...Sing to the Lord! For He has delivered the life of the poor from the land of evil-doers" (Jeremiah 20:10-13).
5. **The psalmist still has a glimmer of hope in the midst of complaint:** "But as for me, I trust in You, O Lord; I say, 'You are my God.' My times are in Your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies, and from those who persecute me. Make Your face shine upon Your servant; save me for Your mercies' sake"(verses 14-16). David complained because his enemies reviled and defamed him, so that he lost confidence. Yet they could not make him lose his relationship with the Lord, nor his dependence on his God. He affirmed, "I trust in You." David based his hope on two things:
 1. **The fact that he belongs to God:** "You are my God"(verse 14b). He willingly chose to be the Lord's, and the Lord became his: "My beloved is mine, and I am his" (Song of Solomon 2:16).
 2. **The fact that his life is in God's hand:** "My times are in Your hand"(verse 15a). This means: The beginning and the end of my life are in the Lord's hand. It also means that life, with all its changes, sorrows and joys are in His hand. David's life

will not be in Saul's hand, nor in the hand of David's friends or foes. We are not left to circumstances; we are in the hands of a loving God.

Because of these two reasons he asked the Lord for three things:

1. **Deliverance:** "Deliver me from the hand of my enemies, and from those who persecute me"(verse 15b).
2. **Approval:** "Make Your face shine upon Your servant"(verse 16a). He asks the Lord to smile at him with approval so that his many pains may come to an end.
3. **Salvation:** "Save me for Your mercies' sake"(verse 16b). We do not depend on personal worthiness, but on God's mercy that lifts the deserved punishment from the believer, and on the divine grace that grants him what he does not deserve.

No doubt the psalmist was pondering over the believer's blessings promised in the priestly benediction: "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace" (Numbers 6:24-26).

6. **The psalmist asks for the evildoers to be punished:** "Do not let me be ashamed, O Lord, for I have called upon You; let the wicked be ashamed; let them be silent in the grave. Let the lying lips be put to silence, which speak insolent things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous"(verses 17,18). The psalmist had already asked God never to let him be ashamed (verse 1), rather that the wicked should be ashamed. He asked for his times to be in the hand of the Lord (verse 15) and for the wicked to die and be silent in their graves. He asked for his tongue to be released to praise, and that the liars who mock him shut up. He asked the Lord to be his rock and fortress (verse 3), and that the lips of the proud and contemptuous be silenced.

I believe that the New Testament believers should not pray for the punishment of the wicked, but for their repentance. Abraham Lincoln said, "I kill my enemies by turning them into friends."

1.3. Third: God's Goodness

(verses 19-22)

1. **His goodness is a treasure for those who fear Him:** "Oh, how great is Your goodness, which You have laid up for those who fear You, which You have prepared for those who trust in You in the presence of the sons of men!"(verse 19). This is the shout of triumph; whenever the weary thinks of God's goodness and generosity he overcomes his troubles; because God's goodness is a treasure laid up for those who need it, those who turn to Him at all times. It is preserved for the believer, and the believer is preserved for it (1 Peter 1:4,5). "To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat" (Revelations 2:17). There are blessings preserved and hidden by the Lord for the

believers, and there are blessings laid open. There are blessings in this present age and blessings in the one to come. Men will see in public what the Lord has given the believers in secret. "All who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the posterity whom the Lord has blessed" (Isaiah 61:9). David likewise said, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies" (Psalm 23:5).

2. **His goodness guards those who fear Him:** "You shall hide them in the secret place of Your presence from the plots of man; You shall keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues"(verse 20). In the hiding place of God's presence there is light that darkness cannot comprehend. The psalms list several places where God hides His children, so that the plots of the wicked should not overtake them. They are the secret place of His tabernacle (Psalm 27:5), the shelter of His wings (Psalm 61:4), the secret place of the Most High (Psalm 91:1), and the secret place of His presence.
3. **His goodness corrects the course of those who fear him:** "Blessed be the Lord, for He has shown me His marvellous kindness in a strong city! For I said in my haste, 'I am cut off from before Your eyes'; nevertheless You heard the voice of my supplications when I cried out to You"(verses 21,22). Here the believer corrects his course. He thought he was cut off from before the eyes of the Lord, because Saul was chasing him and he could settle down anywhere. He finally hit bottom, and said, "My life wasted away with sorrow, and my years with sighing" (verse 10). Jonah has the same experience. He said, "I have been cast out of Your sight; yet I will look again toward Your holy temple" (Jonah 2:4). The divine goodness and heavenly loving-kindness have done marvellous things for him. After declaring God's goodness he wanted to act in a way that suits this goodness. It had dawned on him how wrong he was to assume that God forgot him, because he had established his assumption on wrong information. The more the believer ponders the divine goodness the more good thoughts he develops concerning God. God has never forgotten or forsaken His children.

1.4. Fourth: Two Pieces of Advice to the Saints

(verses 23,24)

These two pieces of advice come from an experienced heart; they are absolutely important:

1. **Love God:** "Love the Lord, all you His saints!"(verse 23a). The first and the greatest commandments is: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might and (Jesus added) with all your mind" (Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37). He who loves the Lord obeys Him, reads His word, speaks with Him and follow His example. Let the mind of Christ be in us.

The psalmist gives two reasons for loving the Lord:

1. **Because the Lord is faithful:** "For the Lord preserves the faithful"(23b). The Hebrew plural EMONIM refers to a state of being, namely to faithfulness itself. He is

always as good as His words. Let us also be as good as our words and promises.

2. **He repays the proud in full:** "And fully repays the proud person"(verse 23c). This is His justice.
2. **Be of good courage:** "Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all you who hope in the Lord"(verse 24). "Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are fearful-hearted, 'Be strong, do not fear. Behold, your God will come with vengeance with the recompense of God; He will come and save you'" (Isaiah 35:3,4).

The psalmist rounds this psalm off with the same thing with which he rounded off Psalm 27: An exhortation to hope in the Lord. All those who hope in the Lord receive strength from Him, and lack no good thing. Let us hope in the Lord, into whose hand we commit our spirit.

1.5. Questions

1. In Psalm 31:1-8 the psalmist mentions five things that motivated him to pray. List them.
2. In Psalm 31:15-16 the psalmist asked God for three things. List them and comment on each of them briefly.

2. Psalm Thirty-Two

Repentance and the Joy of Forgiveness

A Psalm of David. A Contemplation.

1 Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

2 Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

3 When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long.

4 For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into the drought of summer. Selah

5 I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord", And You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah

6 For this cause everyone who is godly shall pray to You In a time when You may be found; surely in a flood of great waters they shall not come near him.

7 You are my hiding place; You shall preserve me from trouble; You shall surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah

8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye.

9 Do not be like the horse or like the mule, which have no understanding, which must be harnessed

with bit and bridle, else they will not come near you.

10 Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; but he who trusts in the Lord, mercy shall surround him.

11 Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous; and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

This is one of the seven psalms of repentance (6,32,38,51,102,130,143). Please refer to the introduction to Psalm 6. Psalm 32 carries the title of a Contemplation. Contemplation is the translation of the Hebrew word MASKIL, which was also translated "knowledge" in 2 Chronicles 30:22. It means a poem of contemplation on the mercies of the Lord who forgives the sins of the His people, so that man might increase knowledge and wisdom. There is a relation between this psalm and Psalm 51, which David wrote after his fall into his well-known sin. He wrote Psalm 32 after he had made sure all his sins were forgiven, and his heart was at peace. He wrote Psalm 51 shortly after he sinned, in which he asked for forgiveness.

The psalm includes the following:

- First: The necessity of confessing sin (verses 1-7)
- Second: The danger of failing to confess sin (verses 8,9)
- Third: The sorrows of the wicked and the delights of the righteous (verses 10,11)

2.1. First: The Necessity of Confessing Sin

(verses 1-7)

1. **Confession is the basis for receiving the joy of salvation:** "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile"(verse 1,2). The first psalm blessed the man who does not sin, but Solomon said in the prayer inaugurating the temple, "There is no one who does not sin" (1 Kings 8:46). So it was necessary to bless the one who repents of his sin so that God might forgive him. How happy is he to whose account the Lord does not charge any sin, since he confessed it and repented of it. How unhappy is he who prays, "God, I thank You that I am not like other men!" How happy is the confessor who prays, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" (Luke 18:9-14) because he experiences the statement that says, "For this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all long-suffering, as pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life" (1 Timothy 1:16). Forgiveness turns the hell of the sinner into everlasting joy. The psalmist describes alienation from God using three words:

1. **Iniquity:**Iniquity is perverseness. Blessed is he whose perverseness is forgiven, meaning whose iniquity has been lifted up from him, not more weighing him down. Blessed is he who cast his iniquities on "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of

- the world" (John 1:29), the one who bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors (Isaiah 53:12).
2. **Sin:**It is missing the mark. Blessed is he whose sin is covered. To cover sin is to blot it out or conceal it so that the Judge may not see it, which can be done because "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).
 3. **Guile:**Is deceit and moral corruption. Blessed is he to whom the Lord does not impute guile. Shemei the son of Gera pleaded, "Do not let my lord impute iniquity to me, or remember what wrong your servant did" (2 Samuel 19:19). Oh, how we thank Christ who paid off our debts and redeemed us by His great sacrifice. Let us turn to the grace of His redemption apart from trusting our own righteousness, for "to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: 'Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin'" (Romans 4:4-8). This indicates that we cannot do anything to have our iniquities blotted out, for the soul that sins must die. Due to our inadequacy to cover ourselves Christ dies to atone for us, redeem us, and pay off our debts.

Our sins cannot be covered except through the blood of His atonement. When we have a right relationship with God His face shines upon us and He beams down a smile of approval upon us, and then we start to have joy. How great is the grace of God that put an end to the unrighteousness of the ungodly, the sin of the sinner, and the deception of the deceptive by imputing Christ's righteousness to them! Divine grace does not count the sins of the confessing and penitent sinner, but accounts Christ's righteousness to him. The secret of this "accounting" lies in this verdict: "If One died for all, then all died...that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:14,19).

2. **The misery of not confessing:** "When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groanings all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into the drought of summer"(verses 3,4). When the psalmist sinned he refused to confess his sin to himself, to God, and to the ones he offended. The more you try to hide your sin the fiercer the fires of guilt roar up inside you. But God did not leave David to the misery of failing to confess, out of love for him, and inflicted a heavy punishment on him, which awakened his conscience and led to the confession of his sin. He appears to have contracted fever, so that he started to groan like a wounded lion: "But a broken spirit dries the bones" (Proverbs 17:22). The psalmist has separated himself from the source of living water, and for that reason his vitality was turned into the drought of a scorching hot summer. Both his emotional and physical pains were enormous, ongoing

and incurable- until he confessed. How wretched is he who does not confess his iniquity, and how happy is he who does so. In a quite similar situation David said, "For Your arrows pierced me deeply, and Your hand presses me down. There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your anger, nor is there any health in my bones because of my sin" (Psalm 38:2,3). Truly, "He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13).

3. **Confession brings forgiveness:** "I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and You forgave the iniquity of my sin"(verse 5). How happy is the soul that makes a complete and candid confession, because it experiences God's forgiveness and is completely transformed. Tertullian said, "The less you pardon yourself the more God pardons you." God took the weight of his iniquity away from the psalmist's shoulders and set him at the glorious liberty of the sons of God (Romans 8:21).
4. **A call for confession:** "For this cause everyone who is godly shall pray to you in a time when You may be found; surely in a flood of great waters they shall not come near him. You are my hiding place; You shall preserve me from trouble; You shall surround me with songs of deliverance"(verses 6,7). Since confession of sin is the foundation of the joy of being forgiven, and since failing to confess leads to misery, the godly who fears God and prays to God seeking forgiveness at any time will find Him, and this time is now! "Behold, now is an acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation...Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (2 Corinthians 6:2; Hebrews 3:7-8). Christ promised, "The one who comes to me I will by no means cast out" (John 6:37). God said, "Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other" (Isaiah 45:22). It is now! "But as for me, my prayer is to You, O Lord, in the acceptable time" (Psalm 69:13). The chance may be lost forever, and then they will hear God say, "Then they will call on Me, but I will not answer...They would have none of my counsel" (Proverbs 1:28,30). The psalmist lists four blessings the confessor got:
 1. **Deliverance:** "Surely in a flood of great waters they shall not come near"(verse 6b). The flood is known to have drowned the sinner but never came near to the believer who stood on the rock. The believer is delivered in much the same way the survivors of the ark of Noah were. The flood of great waters fell upon all the inhabitants of the earth and killed them, but those who took refuge in the ark "they shall not come near" them. Let us seek Christ's protection, who is our delivering ark, because He is the atonement for our sins.
 2. **A hiding place:** "You are my hiding place"(verse 7a). "For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; in the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock" (Psalm 27:5). "You shall hide them in the secret place of Your presence from the plots of man" (Psalm 31:20). "He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (Psalm 91:1).

3. **Preservation:** "You shall preserve me from trouble"(verse 7b). Anyone who hides by God will live under divine preservation and nothing will harm him. Truly, "In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them; and He bore them and carried them all the days of old" (Isaiah 63:9).
4. **Joy:** "You shall surround me with songs of deliverance"(verse 7c). Singing surrounds him wherever he goes, because there is "joy in heaven over one sinner who repents...and there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:7,10). "Then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with singing" (Psalm 126:2).

2.2. Second: The Danger of Failing to Confess Sin

(verses 1-7)

1. **Failing to confess puts God's plan on hold:** "I will instruct you and teach in the way you should go"(verse 8a). As a response to the prayer of the confessing sinner God imparts to him a word of teaching and instruction. God has designed a good plan for the life of each one of us. He also teaches and instructs us in His ways, advising us while we walk in them, and observing and following us with His loving eyes. "Good and upright is the Lord; therefore He teaches sinners in the way...Who is the man that fears the Lord? Him shall He teach in the way He chooses" (Psalm 25:8,12).

God calls with the voice of love to reclaim us to Himself through a sermon we hear in church, an accident trauma, a loss of money, a betrayal by a friend, a Bible verse that shakes our heart and emotions, or through the example and model of a good friend. God says that through all these "I will guide you with My eye" (verse 8b) because He wants us to take a straight path, with our full choice, under His leading and mercy. But when we disobey His voice, continue to sin and not confess or repent, we put His good plan for our lives on hold.

2. **Failing to confess ravages the psychic powers:** "Do not be like the horse or like the mule, which have no understanding, which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, else they would not come near you"(verse 9). This is a warning to him who ignores God's plan and refuse to obey Him. He becomes like a stubborn mule, and a horse that bolts. People put bit and bridle in the mouth of a horse or a mule for decoration and direction, so that the animal might submit to its master. Likewise, if man does not come near God and obeys Him willingly and readily, he becomes like an unruly animal that needs bit and bridle to follow the command of its master, lest it should come near him, attack him, and do him harm. "Man who is in honour, yet does not understand, is like the beasts that perish" (Psalm 49:20).

We are in no need for a bit because God gave us minds. Yet, when we walk in ignorance and stubbornness like animals God uses hardships on us to bring us back to Him. Let us

not be as insubordinate as Cain, to whom God said, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door" (Genesis 4:6,7). But Cain did not do well! Let us not be as stubborn as Balaam who disobeyed the Lord and loved the wages of unrighteousness, for which he was rebuked on account of his transgression. It was a dumb donkey with human voice that prevented his folly (Numbers 22; 2 Peter 2:15,16).

2.3. Third: The Sorrows of the Wicked and the Delights of the Righteous (verses 10,11)

There is a contrast in these two verses between the destiny of the wicked and the righteous. It calls for confessing sin and repenting of it:

1. **The sorrows of the wicked are numerous:** "Many are the sorrows of the wicked"(verse 10a). No one sorrow, but successive sorrows! I wonder if sin is worth all the price paid for it? "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26). How many are the sorrows of the wicked which he incurred on himself because of his resistance to the divine will, and his refusal to confess his sin, although God calls him for repentance time and time again! Sadly, Satan comes and snatches away what has been planted in his heart (Matthew 13:19).
2. **The mercies of the righteous are great:** "But he who trusts in the Lord, mercy shall surround him"(verse 10b). He trusts in the Lord who walks in the light of God's word, depends on the divine promises, obeys the heavenly directions. "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me", (Psalm 23:6), he says. Goodness and mercy are two guardian angels who follow the believer. When a man confesses and repents he becomes just and righteous, having a right standing with God. A man as such says, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God" (Romans 5:1). His heart is right now because he has a right attitude toward God, just like the tax-collector who prayed, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" and went back home justified (made just and righteous), with a right heart. This sinner and those like him is surrounded by mercies on all sides, therefore he rejoices and delights in the Lord always (Philippians 4:4), and the joy of the Lord becomes his strength (Nehemiah 8:10).

Many people seek earthly mercies; such as health, children, finances and peace of mind. But they are in a much more dire need of seeking the kingdom of God first and His righteousness, so that God may add all these things to them (Matthew 6:33). The beginning of seeking the kingdom is the confession of sin, asking for forgiveness, and having a right standing with God.

The last verse of our psalm is an application of the first verse. The psalm begins with saying,

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven" and ends with saying, "Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous" (verse 11a). You, to whom the righteousness of the Lord was accounted, having been justified by grace -by the redemption that is in Christ. "And shout for joy, all you upright in heart" (verse 11b). Because the Lord does not consider you sinful any more, has forgiven you your unrighteousness after you had confessed it, and regards you now as upright. It is true that you missed the mark, but after repenting and confessing you got to know the correct mark, so God renewed and transformed your lives, and adorned them with His salvation. He took away your sins and filled your mouths with jubilation and praise to Him. Joy is not only your privilege, it is your duty as well! There is no room for murmuring or sorrow any more!

Let us return to the Lord in repentance, and He will have mercy on us and will freely pardon (Isaiah 55:7).

2.4. Questions

1. Write down four reasons for confessing our sins to God.
2. List two dangers in not confessing our sins to God.

3. Psalm Thirty-Three

A Call for Praise

- 1 Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous! For praise from the upright is beautiful.**
- 2 Praise the Lord with the harp; make melody to Him with an instrument of ten strings.**
- 3 Sing to Him a new song; play skillfully with a shout of joy.**
- 4 For the word of the Lord is right, and all His work is done in truth.**
- 5 He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.**
- 6 By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.**
- 7 He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap; He lays up the deep in storehouses.**
- 8 Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.**
- 9 For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.**
- 10 The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; He makes the plans of the peoples of no effect.**
- 11 The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of His heart to all generations.**
- 12 Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people He has chosen as His own inheritance.**

- 13 The Lord looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men.**
- 14 From the place of His dwelling He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth;**
- 15 He fashions their hearts individually; He considers all their works.**
- 16 No king is saved by the multitude of an army; a mighty man is not delivered by great strength.**
- 17 A horse is a vain hope for safety; neither shall it deliver any by its great strength.**
- 18 Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His mercy,**
- 19 To deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine.**
- 20 Our soul waits for the Lord; He is our help and our shield.**
- 21 For our heart shall rejoice in Him, because we have trusted in His holy name.**
- 22 Let Your mercy, O Lord, be upon us, just as we hope in You.**

This psalm is a call for joy and praise to God after He has granted forgiveness to the psalmist, who has confessed his sin in Psalm 32 and made sure that God covered his sin. In the above-mentioned psalm he said, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven" (verse 1), and ended with calling the believers to "Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart" (verse 11). He starts Psalm 33 with the same call: "Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous! For praise from the upright is beautiful. Praise the Lord with the harp; make melody to Him with an instrument of ten strings. Sing to Him a new song." Those who enjoyed the Lord's forgiveness of their sins assemble together to sing and encourage one another to sing a new song of thanksgiving, in which they would glorify God for His attributes and works. They admit He is the Creator, the King, the Judge and the Saviour, with whom the right relationship started by being forgiven and accepted before Him. Therefore the righteous shout for joy and magnify Him, declare their trust in Him and wait on Him in adoration.

In football matches goals are only accredited to the team members. The spectators may watch the game all they want, but if any of them scores a goal it will never be accredited to him. If you want to score the goal for which God created you, and enjoy spiritual joy, do not sit back and be a spectator, but get active and take part in the game by joining the people of God. Only then will you relish true joy that comes from the Lord to those whose slates have been cleared by the Lord Himself after they had put their trust in Christ's atonement. Then you'll shout out loud with them, "Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous! For praise from the upright is beautiful. Praise the Lord with the harp; make melody to Him with an instrument of ten strings...Play skilfully with a shout of joy." Our God deserves all the singing, glorification and praise that can be, because He accepted us in spite of our sin, and granted us the free gift of Christ's dwelling in our hearts through faith, in whom also we became a new creation.

The psalm includes the following:

- First: A call on the believers to praise (verses 1-3).
- Second: Praising the God of creation (verses 4-11)
- Third: Praising the God of mankind (verses 12-19)
- Forth: How should praise be? (verses 20-22).

3.1. First: A Call on the Believers to Praise

(verses 1-3)

1. A description of the praisers:

1. **They are the righteous:** "Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous!"(verse 1a). The righteous received a new standing from the Lord, a right standing, the standing of the justified. They were once sinners, separated from Him, but now they have become righteous with a right standing with Him, with a call to rejoice and praise the Lord who justified and forgave them. "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God" (Romans 5:1) because the righteousness of Christ was accounted to us. It is known that "They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, no, not one" (Psalm 14:3). But the righteous, the just and the upright took asylum in Christ's blood, and were completely covered, and purposed in their heart to lead an upright life.
2. **They are the upright:** "For praise from the upright is beautiful"(verse 1b). The righteous is the upright. The righteous Joseph was upright, for he refused the crooked invitation of his master's wife and did not commit iniquity (that is crookedness). Those upright and righteous people have acquired a new life, for which they praise God who gave them the free gift of adoption. The righteous praises his Father who takes care of him, who has a personal relationship with him. "Whoever offers praise, glorifies Me" (Psalm 50:23). The sinner, on the other hand, does not rejoice, because he is separated from God and has no relationship with Him.
2. **The instruments of the praisers:** "Praise the Lord with the harp; make melody to Him with an instrument of ten strings"(verse 2). Believers join all God's creation in singing to and praising Him, for the mountains sing (Isaiah 55:12), and the trees of the woods sing (1 Chronicles 16:33), the valleys sing (Psalm 65:13), as well as the morning stars together with all the sons of God (Job 38:7). In the book of Revelation we read about the songs of the 144 thousand believers, on whose foreheads the name of the Lord has been written, playing on their harps and singing a new song before the throne (Revelations 14:1-5).

In praise there are words, a melody, voices and musical instruments:

1. **There are words:**They come as the believer who loves the Lord reacts to the Lord's

- kindness as it touches his heart, which overflows with good words and sings out a poem of glorification to the Lord for His mercies that never go away and are new every morning (Lamentations 3:22,23). The believer may also be so moved as to put the words of his praise to music, or another believer may read the words, be touched by them and set them to music for the glory of the Lord.
2. **There are voices:** These go higher and break out in singing; some of which are beautiful enough to sing in the choir, and some lack in beauty, but all take part in praising and thanking the Lord. Singing is as much a duty as it is a privilege for these who have been given justification and a right standing with God, as well as a new life and tongue of praise.
 3. **There are musical instruments:** They accompany the singing to add more beauty to it. The best instruments to play at the time of the psalmist were the harp and the ten-stringed lute or rebec. But even if there were no instruments to play on, believers would sing and make melody in their hearts to the Lord (Ephesians 5:19). This praise has harmony and newness: "Sing to Him a new song; play skilfully with a shout of joy" (verse 3). The believer sings praises by himself or together with all believers in a corporate fellowship.

3.2. Second: Praising the God of Creation

(verses 4-11)

All creation praises God:

1. **Because of His rightness and justice:** "For the word of the Lord is right, and His work is done in truth. He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord"(verses 4,5). God's words and actions are right and faithful, and both reveal His good will. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is n variation or shadow of turning" (James 1:17). This is why they shout for Him: "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; mercy and truth go before Your face" (Psalm 89:14). Nature testifies to His faithfulness by the trustworthiness of its laws- you can always depend on the law of gravity and utilise it in your life. The trustworthiness of God's laws teaches us that His faithfulness is absolute and that He is abounding in goodness and truth (Exodus 34:6).
2. **Because of His great power:** "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth"(verse 6). God created the heavens and all the stars and the angels in them. "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:3). "Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has bound the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and what is His Son's name, if you know?" (Proverbs 30:4,5). "The hosts of the heavens" are the sun, the moon and the stars. They move along as a

disciplined army in obedience to God's command: "Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things...by the greatness of His might the strength of His power; not one is missing" (Isaiah 40:26).

"He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap"(verse 7a). In the beginning the waters covered the dry land, and God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear"; and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering together of the waters He called Seas" (Genesis 1:9,10). Can anyone make the waters stand like a wall? God alone can do that through His righteous and true prophets: He did so through Moses, Joshua, Elijah and Elisha. At the time of the Exodus "Moses stretched out his hand over the [red] sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea into dry land, and the waters were divided. So the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry ground, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left" (Exodus 14:21,22). They said later in the praise of deliverance, "With the blast of Your nostrils the waters were gathered together; the floods stood upright like a mound; and the depths congealed in the heart of the sea" (Exodus 15:8). When it was time to cross the Jordan river "and as those who bore the ark came to the Jordan [river], and the feet of the priests who bore the ark dipped into the edge of the water (for the river overflows all its banks during the whole time of harvest),...the waters...stood still, and rose in a heap" (Joshua 3:15,16). As for Elijah, he "took his mantle, rolled up, and struck the water; and it was divided this way and that, so that the two of them [that is Elijah and Elisha] crossed over on dry ground" (2 Kings 2:8). When Elisha took Elijah's mantle, he went to the Jordan river and said, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" and when he also had struck the water, it was divided this way and that; and Elisha crossed over (2 Kings 2:14).

"He lays up the deep in storehouses"(verse 7b). The psalmist means that the great God stores up the waters in the clouds, the seas and the oceans to use them at the time He wants to accomplish His purposes, just as was said that on the time of the Flood of Noah "all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened" (Genesis 7:11). God challenged Job, "Have you entered the treasury of snow, or have you seen the treasury of hail, which I have reserved for the time of trouble, for the day of battle and war?" (Job 38:22,23).

- 3. Because of the universality of His authority:** "Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the earth stand in awe of Him. For He spoke and it was done; He commanded and it stood fast"(verses 8,9). God created the universe and everything in it by a word from Him. The psalmist demands that all the inhabitants of the earth should acknowledge His authority, which extends to cover the whole earth, not only His people; and he asks all the nations of the earth to fear the Lord, because the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord (Proverbs 9:10). All the inhabitants of the earth, whether righteous or unrighteous, enjoy God's gifts, and all of them have to fear Him and praise Him

because He looks after them and keeps them safe by means of His miracles every day. Have we ever had to do without the sun, or have ever we lacked oxygen in the air? If we just think over the miracles He performs with us we will urge each other earnestly, saying, "Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous! For praise from the upright is beautiful."

4. **Because of the wisdom of His administration:** "The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; He makes the plans of the peoples of no effect. The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of His heart to all generations"(verses 10,11). "There are many plans in a man's heart, nevertheless the Lord's counsel- that will stand" (Proverbs 19:21). The hearts, the plans and the decisions of the world leaders are in His hand. They think and plot, but the Lord plans and arranges. If their thoughts contradict His, their counsels come to no effect and their plans dissolve, because they are evil. God brought the evil counsel of Ahithophel to nothing (2 Samuel 15:31; 17:23), brought the plans of the unrighteous Haman down on his head (Esther 8:7). But His own counsel stands forever and His plans to all generations, because they are plans of love; and love never fails. Our good God plans for all the inhabitants of the earth as a loving Father. How great is this praiseworthy God!

The writer of Psalm 2 wondered, "Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed...He who sits in the heaven shall laugh" (verses 1-4). They are like mob of little children wanting to knock down a mountain! The desires of the loving heart of God will come true, and the evils will be defeated! "Be shattered, O you people, and be broken in pieces! Give ear, all you from far countries. Gird yourselves, but be broken in pieces. Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing; speak the word, but it will not stand, for God is with us" (Isaiah 8:9,10).

3.3. Third: Praising the God of Mankind (verses 12-19)

1. **They praise the All-wise:** "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, and the people whom He has chosen as His own inheritance. The Lord looks from heaven; he sees all the sons of men. From the place of His habitation He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth; He fashions their hearts individually; He considers all their works"(verses 12-15). God created all mankind, and he watches them and knows all their works and the plans of their hearts; He takes care of them, makes His sun shine, and pours down rain on them. Among them is His chosen creation, the ones who have a special place in His heart because He chose them as His own precious inheritance; He will never dispose of them or replace them. The elect are those who received Jesus as their Saviour: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name: who were born...of God" (John 1:12). God extends a general invitation to all people, saying, "Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth!"

(Isaiah 45:22). Everyone who accepts this invitation becomes a member of the chosen family of God who received Him as Saviour, for whom Christ prayed in His intercessory prayer: "And for their sake I sanctify Myself, that they also might be sanctified by the truth" (John 17:19). He dedicated Himself to the body of believers, so that they should become His body. Let them shout for joy and gratitude because they belong to Him, that they are His inheritance, to whom He says, "Your father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him" (Matthew 6:8).

If you are far from God, have committed sins, but did not get what you deserve, you believe that God does neither good nor evil (Zephaniah 1:12). But you should know that God must repay everyone according to his work because He knows everything. "O Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; you understand my thought afar off...For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O Lord, You know it altogether...My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in secret, and skilfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth" (Psalm 139:1,2,4,15).

2. **They praise the All-powerful:** "No king is saved by a multitude of an army; a mighty man is not delivered by great strength. A horse is a vain hope for safety; neither shall it deliver any by its great strength"(verses 16,17). People think that to be saved from their enemies depends mainly on their large army and military arsenal, but the truth is that victory is from the Lord, for nothing restricts the Lord from saving by many or by few (1 Samuel 14:6). He delivered His weak people from the powerful hand of Pharaoh, and was glorified through Pharaoh, his chariots and horsemen (Exodus 14:18). Again He rushed to rescue His people when Gideon the judge led three hundred men with trumpets and jars and torches to defeat the Midianite army that consisted of 32 thousand soldiers (Judges 7:19-25). The great might of the Midianites could not deliver them, neither could their cavalry protect them from slaughtering one another as they were taken by horror when they hear the sound of trumpets and breaking jars! This was the same experience of David before Goliath the giant (1 Samuel 17), as well as of Peter in the prison of Herod (Acts 12) and Paul and Silas in the prison in Philippi (Acts 16).
3. **They praise the perfect Deliverer:** "Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His mercy, to deliver their soul from death, and to keep alive in famine"(verses 18,19). "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil" (1 Peter 3:12). God has a chosen people from every tribe, nation and tongue (Revelations 7:9) who love the Lord, enjoy His loving care, fear Him and hope in His mercy. The Lord looks upon His people with an approving and caring eye, delivering their souls from death in the wars waged against them by their enemies, and keeping them alive when the drought hits their lands and their crops diminish. He says to them, "The very hairs of your head are numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:30,31). When we fear the Lord we revere Him, hope in Him and wait for Him to

deliver our souls from death and keep us alive in famine.

3.4. Fourth: How Should Praise Be?

(verses 20-22)

In these three verses we see how praise should be:

1. **In a waiting spirit:** "Our soul waits for the Lord; He is our help and our shield"(verse 20). We praise a living and active God, whom we wait for, because He is our help and shield. Shields were pieces of wood covered with animal skin, with which the soldier defended himself against poisoned arrows, which drained their poison into the shield. When the Israelites found the Red Sea ahead of them and the Egyptian army behind them, they feared terribly and Moses said to them, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for your today" (Exodus 14:13,14). The Lord was their help and shield. Today, we don't follow fantasies, for "He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (Psalm 91:1). We wait upon the Lord and He rushes to our aid. He does not offer us verbal encouragement only, but promises coupled with actions. He is a God who is active in history, in the present and in the future. He said, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Let us praise Him, therefore, and wait for His salvation.
2. **In a rejoicing spirit:** "For our heart shall rejoice in Him, because we have trusted in His holy name"(verse 21). "The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous run to it and are safe" (Proverbs 18:10). The name of the Lord represents the Lord Himself, who is perfect in love, holiness, wisdom and power. We trust in Him joyfully because He is alive, the Rock of ages, the One who holds full authority in all the earth, who said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18). When Pilate said to Him, "Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?" He answered Him, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given You from above" (John 19:10,11). When believers trust in Him they find deep spiritual joy even under the hardest of circumstances. In the city of Philippi Paul and Silas were beaten, then locked up in the inner jail, but they rejoiced because they were considered worthy to be reviled for sake of Christ's name. No prisoner, beaten and badly wounded, could sing out loud and joyfully, so that all prisoners could hear, unless his joy sprang from a higher strength. This isn't strange, since "the joy of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10). When the jailer of Philippi found the salvation of his soul "he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household" (Acts 16:34). How happy are His people when they hear Him say, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:27,28).
3. **In a prayerful spirit:** The psalmist turned his praise in a prayer, in which he said, "Let

Your mercy, O Lord, be upon us, just as we hope in You" (verse 22). He praises Him and waits for His help joyfully, trusting that he will obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16). The psalmist repeats the declaration of his hope in the Lord. As much as we wait on Him He gives us: "And as you have believed, so let it be done for you" (Matthew 8:13). Let us pray with confidence, because without faith no one can please Him (Hebrews 11:6).

There are big differences between human discipline and divine discipline. Humans are happy to know that their children can stand on their own feet and depend on themselves. The heavenly father, however, does not want independent children, but children who always depend on Him, because without Him they actually can do nothing (John 15:5). Even as they grow spiritually and achieve a great deal for the glory of God, they still must depend on him. Let us pray the Lord to increase our hope in Him, enlarge the horizons of our faith and give us a bigger vision. Let His mercy be upon us, just as we hope in Him to bring a revival in our spiritual life and church, to refresh us and bless us together with our country, spread justice among us, stop the injustice and accomplish God's purpose for our life even more. We will become a blessing to our country just as Christ wanted us to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world and a yeast that leavens the whole dough.

3.5. Questions

1. The psalmist mentions four reasons why creation should worship God. What are they?
2. Psalm 33:20-22 explain what worship should be like. What do they say?

4. Psalm Thirty-Four

His Praise Shall Continually Be in my Mouth

A Psalm of David when he pretended madness before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he departed.

1 I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth.

2 My soul shall make its boast in the Lord; the humble shall hear of it and be glad.

3 Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together.

4 I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.

5 They looked to Him and were radiant, and their faces were not ashamed.

6 This poor man cried out, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.

7 The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them.

8 Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him!

- 9 Oh, fear the Lord, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him.**
- 10 The young lions lack and suffer hunger; but those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing.**
- 11 Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord.**
- 12 Who is the man who desires life, and loves many days, that he may see good?**
- 13 Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit.**
- 14 Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.**
- 15 The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry.**
- 16 The face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.**
- 17 The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles.**
- 18 The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit.**
- 19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.**
- 20 He guards all his bones; not one of them is broken.**
- 21 Evil shall slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous shall be condemned.**
- 22 The Lord redeems the soul of His servants, and none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned.**

Saint Augustine called seven psalms "the fugitive psalms". They are Psalms 7,34,54,56,57 and 142. David wrote these psalms while he was running away from King Saul, moving from one town to another, from one cave to another, even into the lands of the Philistines.

David wrote down this psalm as a thanksgiving hymn celebrating the Lord's care for all those who fear Him. In it he called on his audience to lead a God-fearing life resulting in their own blessedness. He wrote it after he had run away from Saul's presence to Gath, one of the five capitals of the Philistines, which are: Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Akron and Gath. The counsellors of King Abimelech, the king of Gath, told him that David was the killer of Goliath and that he was the coming king of the Israelites, which upset the king. David felt the danger, so he faked insanity, started to scratch the gate and let his saliva drip down his beard. Believing that David was insane, the king of Gath drove him out and did not kill him. Thereupon David escaped and hid himself in the cave of Adullam (1 Samuel 21,22), where four hundred men who were in distress rallied around him and David became captain over them. On the occasion of this deliverance David wrote down this psalm as a thanksgiving hymn, which he began by saying, "I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth."

Some people may wonder why the name of the king of Gath is Achish in 1 Samuel but Abimelech in the heading of our psalm? The answer is that the personal name of the king

was Achish, but Abimelech was his formal title, which actually means "My father is king". This was the title of Philistine kings, just as the kings of Egypt carried the title of Pharaoh. The same applies also to the Amalekite kings; their title was Agag, but each individual king had his own personal name.

David composed another psalm for the same occasion, that is Psalm 56, which he started by saying, "Be merciful to me, O God, for man would swallow me up; fighting all day he oppresses me", and ended it by saying, "For You have delivered my soul from death. Have You not delivered my feet from falling, that I walk before God in the light of the living?" Divine deliverance is the lot of those who love God, those who want to obey Him.

The psalm is the third acrostic, with every verse starting with a consequent letter of the Hebrew alphabet, except for the Vav. The first two acrostic psalms are Psalm 9 and 25. The church chose this psalm to be read during the communion because verse 8 says, "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him."

The psalm includes the following:

- First: A praise of thanksgiving (verses 1-10)
- Second: A sermon from the cave of Adullam (verses 11-14)
- Third: God's good relation to His people (verses 15-22)

4.1. First: A Praise of Thanksgiving

(verses 1-10)

1. A call for praise (verses 1-3):

1. **This praise is spontaneous and enthusiastic:** "I will bless the Lord"(verse 1a). He mentioned the great danger that threatened him as he was in the palace of King Achish, and how the Lord delivered him from it. Danger was an unexpected surprise, as much as deliverance was. Thanksgiving just welled up from his heart!
2. **It is continual:** "At all times...continually"(verse 1b). King Saul could bear no more to see David alive, so David ran away to Achish, who could not bear it either. But God smiled on him in approval and delivered him from death, so he made up his mind to spend the rest of his life praising God. Happy is the grateful and joyful believer, whose godliness becomes visible as he sings during his sickness as much as during his health, and in times of failure as much as in times of success.
3. **It is secret and public:** "His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make its boast in the Lord"(verses 1c, 2a). His tongue praises and his heart praises, too. He makes his boast in the Lord. He neither boasted over his intelligence when he feigned madness, nor over earthly things. He did not bother to congratulate himself

for delivering himself, but blessed the Lord for it and gloried in Him who said, "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, exercising loving-kindness, judgement, and righteousness in the earth" (Jeremiah 9:23,24). Let us glory in the person of the Lord, His promises and His miracles.

4. **It affects those who hear it:** "The humble shall hear of it and shall be glad. O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together"(verses 2b,3). The humble heard his invitation and started singing with him. The humble are those who learned humility in the school of suffering and magnified the Lord with David, acknowledging God's favour and the greatness of His grace. The humble proclaim, "Ascribe greatness to our God" (Deuteronomy 32:3). "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable" (Psalm 145:3). The deeper we perceive God's greatness the more often we will invite others to join us in praising Him.
2. **The incentives to praise (verses 4-11):** Miraculous deliverance was not only David's experience, but the common experience of everyone who trusts in God, the God of all beings. The psalmist lists four incentives to praise:
 1. **Great deliverance:** "I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears"(verse 4). He was afraid of Saul so much, and of Achish only a little, but this little turned out to be much. Yet, the Lord delivered him from the two fears; the big and the small! Both the sinner and the believer face dangers, and often the dangers of the sinner are less than those of the believer; because the devil, the prince of this age, supports the sinner. The sinner, however, lives in a greater fear, because he knows that the Lord is not on his side. The believer, on the other hand, seeks the Lord and He hears him and delivers him from all his fears. The mighty hand of God can reach down to us in the deepest pit into which we might fall, and as we seek Him whole-heartedly He hears us.
 2. **The coming bright days:** "They looked at Him and they were radiant, and their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried out and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles"(verses 5,6). Looking to the world causes depression. It is enough to skim through the first page of any newspaper to see wickedness, hatred and despair. The one who looks at the Lord, however, his spirits soar up, just as Hannah's spirits soared up after her prayer and her face was no longer sad (1 Samuel 1:18). The people who were stung by the serpents looked up to the fiery serpent and got healed of the deadly venom (Numbers 21:9). The fiery serpent stands for Christ who saves from the poison of sin (John 3:14-16). For this reason the believer says, "Unto You I lift up my eyes, O You who dwell in the heavens. Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their masters, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our

eyes look to the Lord our God" (Psalm 123:1,2). He lights up because he obeys the command of the Lord, who says to the believers, "Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you" (Isaiah 60:1). As Moses saw the glory of the Lord, his face shone (Exodus 34:30). "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

3. **Angelic protection:** "The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them"(verse 7). He is called "the angel of His presence" in Isaiah 63:9: "In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them; and He bore them and carried them all the days of old." This angel delivers all those who fear the Lord just like an army. He is also called the "commander of the army of the Lord" (Joshua 5:14) who comes in an army of angels to protect, as was the case with Jacob. When Jacob met the angels of the Lord, he said, "This is God's camp", and consequently the place was called Mahaniam, meaning Double Camp (Genesis 32:2). This also happened to the servant of Elisha, who was afraid of the enemies. The man of God prayed, "Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." The servant saw the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (2 Kings 6:16).

God delivers us from troubles that are known to us. We cry out because of these and thank Him for His deliverance. He also delivers us from troubles that we do not see approaching, because in His love He hides the danger from our sight so that we do not panic.

4. **The believer's good relations with the Lord urges him to praise (verses 8-10).**
 1. **It is a personal relationship:** "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him"(verse 8). The believer tastes God's goodness when he comes to know Him in an intimate, personal way. He discovers His great goodness and learns to trust Him and depend on Him, adjusts his daily conduct to fit his belief, and draws strength from Him. Peter said, "You have tasted that the Lord is good" (1 Peter 2:3 NIV). By the "Lord" he meant Christ. Paul also said, "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection" (Philippians 3:10). This knowledge is the intimate, experiential knowledge that leads to true happiness. The Hebrew word *gever*, translated in this verse by "man", refers to the strong man. The one who tastes God's goodness has a strong moral and faith life.
 2. **It is a transforming relationship:** "Oh, fear the Lord, you His saints!"(verse 9a). "Fear the Lord" means become godly by fearing God in your conduct. Holiness or sanctity means to be devoted and consecrated to God, as well as being pure and walking in a way fit for our calling to become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6). God says, "For I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and you shall be holy" (Leviticus 11:44). We say, "This church is holy", not because its building materials are different from those used in

any neighbouring house, but because it is dedicated to God. Paul said, "The God to whom I belong and whom I serve" (Acts 27:23), because he had already dedicated himself to serving Him.

3. **It is a blessed relationship:** "There is no want to those who fear Him. The young lions lack and suffer hunger; but those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing"(verses 9b,10). The Lord supplied the needs of the indebted widow by making the jar of oil fill all the vessels which she borrowed from her neighbours. She sold the oil, paid off her debts and managed to live together with her sons on what was left (2 Kings 4:1-7), while the young lions lacked and suffered hunger. The psalmist may have meant the literal meaning of the word "young lions" as it is the case in Job 4:11: "The old lion perishes for lack of prey, and the cubs of the lioness are scattered", or maybe he meant the oppressors, as it the case in Psalm 35:17: "Rescue me from their destruction, my precious life from the lions." The lions here were his enemies who wanted his destruction. The meaning of the verse then is: The strong man who snatches away will be reduced to starvation, but the gentle believer will inherit the land and lack nothing. "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Psalm 23:1). "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). Christ asked His disciples, "When I sent you without money bag, sack, and sandals, did you lack anything?" "Nothing," they said (Luke 22:35). Those who have a personal relationship with God ensure for themselves all the divine blessings.

Saint Columba (521-597 AD) who brought Christianity to Scotland was writing down an exposition of our psalm right before his death. He stopped at verse 10 and did not write on. His biographer commented on this by saying, "Saint Columba did not lack any good thing while he lived with God here, and he will not lack any good thing as he lives with God there. He left the trust of preaching and teaching to those who will carry it after him."

4.2. Second: A Sermon from the Cave of Adullam

(verses 11-14)

After feigning madness David ran away from the presence of King Achish to the cave of Adullam, where four hundred men joined him, mostly people who ran away from debts or arrest. All of them were in distress and their souls were embittered, but they accepted him as leader and captain over them (1 Samuel 22:1,2). On a Saturday in Adullam he preached a sermon that was an answer to a question he had asked. We will meditate on the preacher, the question and the sermon/answer.

1. **The preacher:** "Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord"(verse 11). As a preacher he pitied the sinners and advised them. As a fighter and

leader he was brave and strong. But he also experienced the suffering of being driven away though innocent, just as they did. Yet, his ethics and interests were higher than theirs and his knowledge of God deeper, so he received instruction from God and passed it on to them. A successful preacher listens to God, then tells the people what he has heard out of a desire to change their lives to the better. He could have been concerned with his own safety or the material and economical affairs of the four hundred men, but he never forgot the spiritual life of that group.

2. **The preacher asks a question:** "Who is the man who desires life, and loves many days, that he may see good?"(verse 12). The kind of life which the godly man desires is the abundant life which Christ came to give to us (John 10:10). It is not measured by the number of days, but by achievements, happiness and obedience. It is a meaningful life that serves others and grows day after day in the fear of the Lord, which is the ultimate good.
3. **The sermon:**The theme of the sermon is that the happy man is the man who fears God in his speech and actions:
 1. **Godliness in speech:** "Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking guile"(verse 13). Usually the outcasts use rough language, and fight together and with others. The preacher advises them that if they want long and good lives, they have to restrain their tongues from evil and deceit, "For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45). The hearts must be mended. This can never happen until each one of them finds a personal relationship with the Lord, and tastes how good God is, and that the man who trusts in Him is blessed. The word "man" here means a strong one who can control his tongue, because "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).
 2. **Godliness in actions:** "Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it"(verse 14). The outcasts are in bad need of peace with God, with themselves and with others. They have to pursue it continually and undesperingly. "Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another" (Romans 14:19). The apostle Peter quoted these same words in 1 Peter 3:10 because he wanted to explain to the believers how to have a meaningful and valuable life by controlling the tongue and departing daily from evil and doing good.

4.3. Third: God's Good Relation to His People (verses 15-22)

The psalmist concludes his psalm by talking of the Lord as being good in respect to His relation to His people. He spells out three things:

1. **The Lord cares for His people:** "The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ear

are open to their cry. The face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth"(verses 15-17). The Lord's relation to His people is:

1. **One of perfect knowledge:**An eye that sees, and ear that hears, because He is father who cares for and watches over His people. "Say to the righteous that it shall be well with them" (Isaiah 3:10).
2. **One of absolute tenderness and divine intervention:** "In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry came before Him, even to His ears"(Psalm 18:6). Since believers cry out from the persecution of their oppressors, God, who cares for them, punishes the oppressors and cuts off their remembrance from the earth.
2. **The Lord lifts up His people:** "The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. He guards all his bones; not one of them is broken. Evil shall slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous shall be condemned"(verses 18-21). The broken-hearted and the contrite of spirit are those who have been crushed by sorrow, despair, persecution and sin, and were humbled by all of these. To such as these Christ says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn" (Isaiah 61:1,2). The more a man's heart is broken the humbler he becomes, and the more prepared to receive God's blessings: "For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones'" (Isaiah 57:15). The Lord lifts up His broken people and says to them, "I will...bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick" (Ezekiel 34:16).

The Lord never promised a pain-free life; He never said we won't face tribulations. On the contrary, He promised us that in the world we will have tribulations, but to be sure that He overcame the world. With Him we also overcome the world, for He who is within us is greater than the one who is in the world (John 16:33; 1 John 4:4). The believers really suffer and face many afflictions in this world that hates the truth. But their God is with them; His love refreshes them, His promises comfort them and the throne room is always open to them. Evil shall slay the wicked, however, and the Lord shall revive the spirit of the righteous, who has been justified by what Christ did for him through His precious atonement.

"He guards all his bones"(verse 20a). He cares for the physical just as much as He cares for the spiritual, for the body of the believer is the temple for the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). This prophecy was fulfilled in the crucified Messiah, when the soldiers

broke the legs of the two thieves crucified with Him but did not break His because they "saw that He was already dead...For these things were done so that the Scripture should be fulfilled, 'Not one of His bones shall be broken'" (John 19:32-36).

- 3. The Lord redeems His people:** "The Lord redeems the soul of His servants, and none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned"(verse 22). Redemption is the soul's salvation from sin, the body's salvation from disease, hunger and pain. Prisoners used to pay a ransom or redemption money. Christ completed our redemption when he paid the price of our sins, and He became for us wisdom from God-and righteousness and sanctification and redemption- (1 Corinthians 1:30), provided that sinners accept His redemption by faith. "There is...now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:1), who have been redeemed by Christ through His blood, for the praise of His glorious grace. They say, "I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth."

4.4. Questions

1. In Psalm 34:4-7 the psalmist mentions three motivations for praising God. List them.
2. What was the subject of the Adullam sermon?

5. Psalm Thirty-Five

They have dug without cause for my life

A Psalm of David.

1 Plead my cause, O Lord, with those who strive with me; fight against those who fight against me.

2 Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for my help.

3 Also draw out the spear, and stop those who pursue me. Say to my soul, "I am your salvation."

4 Let those be put to shame and brought to dishonor who seek after my life; let those be turned back and brought to confusion Who plot my hurt.

5 Let them be like chaff before the wind, and let the angel of the Lord chase them.

6 Let their way be dark and slippery, and let the angel of the Lord pursue them.

7 For without cause they have hidden their net for me in a pit, which they have dug without cause for my life.

8 Let destruction come upon him unexpectedly, and let his net that he has hidden catch himself; into that very destruction let him fall.

9 And my soul shall be joyful in the Lord; it shall rejoice in His salvation.

10 All my bones shall say, "Lord, who is like You, delivering the poor from him who is too strong for

him, yes, the poor and the needy from him who plunders him?"

11 Fierce witnesses rise up; they ask me things that I do not know.

12 They reward me evil for good, to the sorrow of my soul.

13 But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth; I humbled myself with fasting; and my prayer would return to my own heart.

14 I paced about as though he were my friend or brother; I bowed down heavily, as one who mourns for his mother.

15 But in my adversity they rejoiced and gathered together; attackers gathered against me, and I did not know it; they tore at me and did not cease;

16 With ungodly mockers at feasts they gnashed at me with their teeth.

17 Lord, how long will You look on? Rescue me from their destructions, my precious life from the lions.

18 I will give You thanks in the great assembly; I will praise You among many people.

19 Let them not rejoice over me who are wrongfully my enemies; nor let them wink with the eye who hate me without a cause.

20 For they do not speak peace, but they devise deceitful matters against the quiet ones in the land.

21 They also opened their mouth wide against me, and said,

22 This You have seen, O Lord; do not keep silence. O Lord, do not be far from me.

23 Stir up Yourself, and awake to my vindication, to my cause, my God and my Lord.

24 Vindicate me, O Lord my God, according to Your righteousness; and let them not rejoice over me.

25 Let them not say in their hearts, "Ah, so we would have it!" Let them not say, "We have swallowed him up."

26 Let them be ashamed and brought to mutual confusion who rejoice at my hurt; let them be clothed with shame and dishonor who exalt themselves against me.

27 Let them shout for joy and be glad, who favor my righteous cause; and let them say continually, "Let the Lord be magnified, Who has pleasure in the prosperity of His servant."

28 And my tongue shall speak of Your righteousness and of Your praise all the day long.

David wrote this psalm in a time of severe persecution, perhaps during Saul's constant hunt for him. Maybe it was during that time also that David said to Saul, "Let the Lord be judge, and judge between you and me, and see and plead my case, and deliver me out of your hand" (1 Samuel 24:15). He could also have written it during the insurrection against him that was organised by his son Absalom. David's persecutors were among his beloved ones; David defended King Saul and his honour, but Saul wanted to kill him because he was mentally

sick. If you have done good to somebody and he repaid you with evil, you will find assistance and encouragement in this psalm.

There is Messianic prophecy in this psalm. The psalmist says, "For without cause they have hidden their net for me in a pit" (verse 7). Christ cited this prophecy as speaking of Himself when He said, "They have seen and also hated me and My Father. But this happened that the word might be fulfilled which is written in their law, 'They hated Me without a cause.'" (John 15:24,25). The same concept is also repeated in Psalm 69:4. Verses 11 and 12 of our psalm describe Christ's trial: "Fierce witnesses rise up; they ask me things I do not know. They reward me evil for good, to the sorrow of my soul." They asked Christ about things that never happened, and many false witnesses came to testify against Him, but their testimonies did not agree (Mark 14:56).

The psalm is full of requests to God to inflict punishment on the enemies. Maybe the psalmist wanted God to plead his cause and judge him according to His justice. This way God's truth is held up and the psalmist's rights are given back to him, after a long time of suffering at the hand of Saul, Absalom and Shimei (2 Samuel 16:5-13). The psalm starts by saying, "Plead my cause, O Lord, with those who strive with me. Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for my help...Say to my soul, 'I am your salvation.'!" These are words from a man who asks God for justice and protection.

The psalm includes the following:

- First: The psalmist's Saviour (verses 1-10)
- Second: The psalmist's enemies (verses 11-16)
- Third: The psalmist's prayer (verses 17-28)

5.1. First: The Psalmist's Saviour (verses 1-10)

David was not one to avenge himself, but was merely declaring the divine condemnation of the corrupt human nature. The key sentence to these ten verses is: "Say to my soul, 'I am your salvation'" (verse 3b).

1. **The psalmist asks for God's salvation (verses 1-3):** David demands his Lord to do for him what He usually does for all believers: "O Lord, save me!" As though he was saying, "Lord, it's not a must to deliver me this moment, but give me hope in the fact that You are my Saviour."

In this psalm David calls his God by the name Jahweh eight times. Jahweh is the living, self-existent Creator, who delivered and will deliver. He also calls God *Adonai* (Master) three times, to indicate that he is the righteous Judge. He knows that there are masters on

earth, but a high official watches over a high official, and a higher One watches over them all (Ecclesiastes 5:8).

We ask this just and sovereign Judge to save us. David also calls Him Elohim (God) twice, because He is the eternally Mighty One, in whom he trusts. He is the One we always turn to because He never shuts His door in our faces.

David depicts His God as a man of war coming to help him, armoured to the teeth to fight the enemy and defend His weak servant. Maybe he recalled Moses' song: "The Lord is a man of war... Your right hand, O Lord, has become glorious in power; Your right hand, O Lord, has dashed the enemy in pieces" (Exodus 15:3,6). It maybe that the psalmist remembered the Commander of the army of the Lord who came to help Joshua to be victorious (Joshua 5:13-15). He demanded the Lord to take hold of a shield (the bigger type) and a buckler (the smaller type), because the attacks against him were numerous and only the Lord could provide full protection. A shield is a piece of wood covered with animal skin, with which the soldier defended himself against poisoned arrows. When the arrows struck the shield their poison was drained into the shield. Before the arrow could hit David it had to hit the shield or the buckler which protected him. The psalmist is not asking for salvation in a court room, but in a battle field!

- 2. God's salvation is death to the wicked and life to the righteous (verses 4-8):** Since God is the only Saviour of His people, David demands of Him in these verses to force the enemies to withdraw and announce their defeat, so that the divine promise should be fulfilled in them: "Even the captive of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible be delivered; for I will contend with him who contends with you, and I will save your children. I will feed those who oppress you with their own flesh... All flesh shall know that I, the Lord, am your Saviour" (Isaiah 49:25,26). He asks that they should be uprooted like chaff (a symbol of weakness and smallness) before the wind (a symbol of power and judgement), that they slip in darkness before the angel of the Lord, who encamps all around those who fear Him and delivers them. The angel of the Lord defeats the enemies, chases them away, so they become like flying chaff that goes away and never turn back to attack David any more. Everyone who distances himself from God degrades himself and becomes like chaff, worthless, light, not settled and not at peace or quiet. One can say about such men, "Their foot shall slip in due times; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things to come hasten upon them" (Deuteronomy 32:35).

They attacked the innocent and "they have without cause dug for my life" (verse 7b). His enemy hid a net for him to trap him and destroy him, so he said, "Let destruction come upon him unexpectedly, and let his net that he has hidden catch himself" (verse 8). The psalmist is in agreement with the prophet who says, "Shall evil be repaid for good? For they have dug a pit for my life. Remember that I stood before You to speak good for them, and to turn away Your wrath from them" (Jeremiah 18:20). For "whatever a man

sows, that he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

- 3. The psalmist rejoices at the Lord's salvation:** "And my soul shall be joyful in the Lord; it shall rejoice in His salvation. All my bones shall say, 'Lord, who is like You, delivering the poor from him who is too strong for him?'" (verses 9,10). Every answered prayer must cause our hearts to overflow with thanksgiving and joy in the Lord's salvation, who is unparalleled in His mercy and power, and delivers the poor from his oppressor. Christ's salvation is a good news that makes the bones healthy (Proverbs 15:30) and encourages the believer to trust in the Lord and be prospered (Proverbs 28:25). He says, "Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy" (Micah 7:18).

At the beginning of speaking about God the Saviour, the oppressed cried out asking God to punish his foes, contend with those who contend with him, take up his cause and defend him. He ended what he started by thanking God: "And my soul shall be joyful in the Lord; it shall rejoice in His salvation." God heard, answered, took up the cause, defended and gave victory. He is therefore worthy of joyful praise. This is what will happen at the end of the age, for the seer says, "I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, 'Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honour and power to the Lord our God! For true and righteous are His judgements, because He has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of his servants shed by her.' Again they said, 'Alleluia! And her smoke rises up forever and ever.'" (Revelations 19:1-3).

5.2. Second: The Psalmist's Enemies

(verses 11-16)

- 1. They falsely testified against him:** "Fierce witnesses rise up; they ask me things I do not know" (verse 11). They accused David of hideous things he has never heard of, saying that he wanted to hurt King Saul although he was his son-in-law and a faithful courtier (1 Samuel 24:9). They did that although God had commanded: "You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness" (Exodus 23:1). The Jewish elders committed the same crime with Christ, for they "sought a false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward" (Matthew 26:59,60).
- 2. They rewarded His love with hatred (verses 12-14):** He never expected such treatment from the ones he did good to; they rewarded him with sorrow to his soul. The same thing repeated itself with Christ, for He said to the Jews, "Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone me?" (John 10:32). When the

psalmist's enemies fell ill he humbled himself before God in fasting and prayer for them, wearing sackcloth (as a sign of grief), so that the Lord would heal them and make them repent. He wept with and for them, as though he were mourning his mother. Yet, his prayer brought blessing down on him, but did not yield the same result in their case. They simply refused God's blessings. When the believer asks for a blessing for the unbeliever, heavens answer his prayer, prepares the blessing and sends it off. But the recipient refuses the gift! The gift is sent back to the sender with a note attached to it: TO BE RETURNED TO THE SENDER. Thus he denies himself the blessing. The believer's prayer, however, must be answered, therefore the psalmist's prayer brought blessing to him. His enemies, on the other hand, did not benefit from it because their hearts were closed to God's grace. Christ said to the disciples, "If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you" (Matthew 10:13). How did David grieve for Saul's sickness, and how often had he played on the harp and prayed for him! Yet, the wicked Saul was not blessed by David's prayer. The Lord restored Job's losses when he prayed for his friends. His friends, however, did not benefit from his prayer as much as he himself did!

- 3. They gloated over him and attacked him:** "But in my adversity they rejoiced and gathered together; attackers gathered against me, and I did not know it; they tore at me and did not cease; with ungodly mockers at feasts they gnashed at me with their teeth"(verses 15,16). The Hebrew word for adversity literally means "limping". One of his enemies could have attacked him and hit him, causing him to fall down and limp. Then they gathered around him to gloat over him and revile him, tearing at him and not ceasing, just like fierce wolves. They maligned him, made him the laughingstock of their parties, hired "ungodly mockers" (rowdy and unrestrained jesters) to poke fun at him, and were given a cake for their payment (The Hebrew can mean "for a cake" as well "at feasts"). It was the custom when throwing a banquet to hire clowns to make the guests laugh as the food is being served.

David says that his respectable friends, for whom he fasted and prayed, stood up in the midst of those clowns, gnashing their teeth at him and wanting to devour him.

5.3. Third: The Psalmist's Prayer

(verses 17-28)

- 1. A confident prayer:** "Lord, how long will You look on? Rescue me from their destructions, my precious lives from the lions. I will give You thanks in the great congregation; I will praise You among many people"(verses 17,18). David fasted and prayed for his enemies, but they repaid good with evil. The Lord alone remained the object of his confidence, because He is always faithful. This is the reason he blamed the Lord for delaying with love and hope, demanded that He restore his soul, which he almost lost, and preserve his precious life from the mouth of the fierce and wild lion. He

declared in advance that he would declare his praise in the midst of the believers for the greatness of the Lord's faithfulness.

2. A prayer for help (verses 19-21):

1. **He cries out because of those who hate him:** "Let them not rejoice over me who are wrongfully my enemies; nor let them wink with their eye who hate me without a cause"(verse 19). If David suffered because he sinned this psalm should be a psalm of confession. But he did not offend those men, and therefore asked the Lord to judge him rightly, so that they would not gloat over him and wink at him because "He who winks with the eye causes trouble" (Proverbs 10:10).
2. **He cries out because of their deceitful talk:** "For they do not speak peace, but they devise deceitful matters against those who are quiet in the land. They also opened their mouth wide against me, and said, 'Aha, aha! Our eyes have seen it.'"(verses 20,21).

They hate peace, how will they speak it? They mock him and say that they have seen his downfall! Their deeds are evil, their talk is deceitful and their mockery is bitter. Only the Lord remains a shelter from all these things to the psalmist.

3. A prayer from someone oppressed (verses 22-26):

1. **The oppressed thinks that God is silent:** "This You have seen, O Lord; do not keep silent. O Lord, do not be far from me"(verse 22). The person who is under oppression assumes that God looks on injustice silently. He looks as though He cannot see. But the psalmist declares He is alive and there, and He must hear, act and draw near to deliver the oppressed and judge the oppressor.
2. **But he knows He is a righteous Judge:** "Stir up Yourself, and wake to my vindication, to my cause, my God and my Lord. Vindicate me, O Lord my God, according to Your righteousness; and let them not rejoice over me"(verses 23,24). The just must hate injustice, as Habakkuk said to God, "Why do you show me iniquity, and cause me to see trouble?" [or: You see trouble?]"...Therefore the law is powerless, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore perverse judgement proceeds" (Habakkuk 1:3,4). God must stir Himself up to defend the oppressed, because He is the righteous Judge.
3. **He knows He will deliver him:** "Let them not say in their hearts, 'Ah, so we would have it!' Let them not say, 'We have swallowed him up.' Let them be ashamed and brought to mutual confusion who rejoice at my hurt; let them be clothed with shame and dishonour who magnify themselves against me"(verses 25,26). God will not leave the psalmist in the mouth of the wicked to satisfy their evil desires for him; He will not let them swallow him up from the land of the living and wipe out his remembrance; He will not let them hurt him and rejoice at his calamity. He will surely return their shame and dishonour upon them, because they are proud! This is

their lot on earth, and in heaven!

4. **A joyful prayer:** "Let them shout for joy and be glad, who favour my righteous cause; and let them say continually, 'Let the Lord be magnified, who pleasure in the prosperity of His servant.' And my tongue shall speak of Your righteousness and of Your praise all the day long"(verses 27,28). In these two verses the psalmist mentions three groups of people who rejoice at his deliverance and his answered prayer: The people of the truth who took up his righteous cause at God's command, the Lord who has pleasure in the prosperity of His servant, and David himself. The psalmist asked the Lord to gladden supporters and friends together with him by justice and deliverance, even if their feelings for him were just wishes without works. Everyone who lifts up his prayer in confidence must end up being glad. David took recourse to God because he was wronged, and God intervened to save him.

Our psalm started out with a complaint: "Plead my cause, O Lord, with those who strive with me...how long will You look on?" and ended by shouting for joy: "My tongue shall speak of Your righteousness and of Your praise all the day long." May the Lord grant us the ability to lift up our eyes to Him in all our troubles, and thus experience His great justice.

5.4. Questions

1. In Psalm 35:11-16 the psalmist mentions three offences with which his enemies offended him. List them.
2. In Psalm 35:22-26 the psalmist has three concepts about God. Write them down.

6. Psalm Thirty-Six

Man's Wickedness and God's Goodness

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David the Servant of the Lord.

1 An oracle within my heart concerning the transgression of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes.

2 For he flatters himself in his own eyes, when he finds out his iniquity and when he hates.

3 The words of his mouth are wickedness and deceit; he has ceased to be wise and to do good.

4 He devises wickedness on his bed; he sets himself in a way that is not good; he does not abhor evil.

5 Your mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens; Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds.

6 Your righteousness is like the great mountains; Your judgments are a great deep; O Lord, You preserve man and beast.

7 How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the

shadow of Your wings.

8 They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, and You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures.

9 For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light.

10 Oh, continue Your lovingkindness to those who know You, and Your righteousness to the upright in heart.

11 Let not the foot of pride come against me, and let not the hand of the wicked drive me away.

12 There the workers of iniquity have fallen; they have been cast down and are not able to rise.

The psalm presents us with two contradictory pictures. The first belongs to the wicked who have corrupt principles and deeds, who rejected God and the fear of God; and the second belongs to the infinite love of God. The psalmist envisages himself between these two major powers, and fears falling prey to evil and the wicked. Therefore he asks, "Let not the foot of pride come against me, and let not the hand of the wicked drive me away" (verse 11). He asks the loving God for His mercy and salvation, because he is "the servant of God" (this is his title in the heading of the this psalm and Psalm 18). One can summarise the theme of this psalm in the proverb that says, "Do they not go astray who devise evil? But mercy and truth belong to those who devise good" (Proverbs 14:22).

The psalm includes the following:

- First: The principles and deeds of the wicked (verses 1-4)
- Second: The principles and deeds of God (verses 5-9)
- Third: The psalmist's prayer (verses 10-12)

6.1. First: The Principles and Deeds of the Wicked

(verses 1-4)

1. The principles of the wicked (verses 1,2):

1. **The wicked does not fear God:** "An oracle within my heart concerning the transgression of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes"(verse 1). The Hebrew word for "oracle" could also mean a heavy sigh or a groan. In which case the psalmist would be expressing how painful it is to watch and see the evil and revolt of the wicked against God, and their falling away from Him. This is very similar to how Christ wept over Jerusalem because she did not know what was good for her own peace (Luke 19:41,42). It can also mean that the groaning is in the heart of the wicked as a result of his rebellion against God and alienation from Him. The New American Standard Bible translates it: "Transgression speaks to the ungodly within his heart."

"There is no fear of God before his eyes" because he believes that God neither does good or evil (Zephaniah 1:12) and that ungodliness will not be condemned, therefore it is not necessary to worship. His eyes are open only to the chance of making a better living, whether it be legal or illegal. He knows a lot about physical pleasure, hatred, revenge and lying, but his understanding is darkened when it comes to spiritual things, because the devil "the god of this age has blinded their minds, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them" (2 Corinthians 4:4). The believer is led by the word of God, which is a lamp to his feet and a light to his path (Psalm 119:105). The wicked, however, is led by his darkened thoughts, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, theft, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man" (Matthew 15:19).

2. **The wicked praises himself:** "For he flatters himself in his own eyes, when he finds out his iniquity and when he hates"(verse 2). The wicked penetrated deeply into evil and hatred, persuading himself that his iniquity and hatred would not be discovered, and that he was right. This wicked man is poor, because self-deception is one of the most dangerous things to oneself. When a man deceives another he knows deep down that he is a deceiver; but if he flatters himself and believes his own lies, who can persuade him that he is a sinner in need of repentance?

2. The actions of the wicked (verses 3,4):

1. **His words are wicked:** "The words of his mouth are wickedness and deceit"(verse 3a). He utters ungodly and perverse things. He has already flattered himself, and was able to deceive himself. Will it be too much for him now to deceive others, as well?
2. **His mind is wicked:** "He has ceased to be wise and to do good"(verse 3b). Perhaps he was wise and a worker of good someday, and discovered that wisdom would not bring him so many worldly possessions, so he stopped being wise and doing good, preferring quick, temporary gain to the expense of his eternity! When man ceases to communicate with God, he turns foolish and ignorant and falls prey to the devil.
3. **His work is wicked:** "He devises wickedness on his bed; he sets himself in a way that is not good; he does not abhor evil"(verse 4). By night, when man is in bed, he must review the occurrences of his day, and meditate on them, thanking God for the good ones and repenting to Him for his mistakes. But this wicked man began his wickedness by thinking on his bed: "He devises wickedness." Then he set himself in a way that is not good, and did not refuse to do evil. "Woe to those who devise iniquity, and work out evil on their beds! At morning light they practice it, because it is in the power of their hand" (Micah 2:1). He should have paid attention to the words of Psalm One: "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful" (Psalm 1:1).

This is a description of the sinner's nature, thinking pattern and actions. If we have repented and returned to God, and if Christ has reigned over our thoughts and actions, then let us pray that we might yield the fruit of the Holy Spirit: Love, joy and peace.

6.2. Second: The Principles and Deeds of God

(verses 5-9)

The psalmist despaired of people, lifted up his face toward God, and what a gentle and life-giving sight he got! He saw God's principles of mercy, love, faithfulness and righteousness. He saw his acts of salvation, protection, satisfaction, vivification and guidance.

1. God's principles (verses 5,6a):

- 1. The principle of love:** "Your mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens"(verse 5a). His mercy is as high as the heavens and manifests itself in forgiving sins, answering prayer, writing our names in the Lamb's Book of Life, and in sending His own angels to his servants to serve them. His mercy is also on earth, because "He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber" (Psalm 121:3). From His throne, God comes down to aid us, supply our needs and look after us. When we reach heaven, however, we will find out about His other mercies which we could not see here on earth due to the limitation of our perception. How often does His mercy surround us in such unimaginable ways!

There are three heavens: The first is the heaven of birds, in which we perceive His mercy with the birds, because not one of them will fall down without Him, and not one of them spends the night without food (Matthew 6:26; 10:29). The second is the heaven of the stars, in which we see "the moon and the stars, which You have ordained" (Psalm 8:3)... "The firmament shows His handiwork" (Psalm 19:1) because He established them in their due place to tell every believer, "The One who holds the stars in their locations will hold you in place, so that you cannot be moved; He will hold you up, so that you should fear." Now the third heaven is the heaven of God, whence the one and only Son came to our earth, gave Himself up for us to redeem us, carried our sins and became a man like us to make us partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4).

- 2. The principle of faithfulness:** "And Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds"(verse 5b). It is high and lofty, above human comprehension. In his days the psalmist could not reach the clouds, so he used this as a hyperbole. Oh, the great faithfulness of God in every promise He gives! Even when we are not faithful to Him He remains faithful to us; He cannot deny Himself (2 Timothy 2:13). No one thing has failed of all the good things which He promised His people. They got it all (Joshua 23:14).

3. **The principle of righteousness:** "Your righteousness is like the great mountains; Your judgements are a great deep"(verse 6a). God's righteousness is as steadfast as the mountains; it cannot hide. People wronged the psalmist, but the Lord is righteous and just. The earth shook under him and the Lord stood beside him, established him, calmed him down, gave him back what was his due and gave to him such great promises, because "Your judgements are a great deep." His commandments are a river that could not be crossed, and no matter how big our biblical knowledge can grow His judgements will remain a great deep, bottomless, too deep to fathom, as well as "exceedingly broad" (Psalm 119:96). When the believer says that the hairs of his head are numbered, that none of them can fall down without the Father knowing about it, it may sound like he is exaggerating a bit. No, it is absolutely literal (Matthew 10:30). "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgements and His ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:33).
2. **God's deeds (verses 6b-9):**
 1. **God preserves:** "O Lord, You preserve man and beast"(verse 6b). God preserves man from hunger and from war (Psalm 27:1-3), from sickness (Luke 8:36) and from sin (Luke 19:10). He preserves beasts, too. They are His creation, and He looks after them and provides them with food. "Who provides food for the raven, when its young ones cry to God, and wander about for lack of food?" (Job 38:41). Who cares for the birds, has any of them spent a night without dinner? "They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet, your heavenly Father feeds them" (Matthew 6:26). "These all wait for You, that You may give them their food in due season. What You give them they gather in; You open Your hand, they are filled with good" (Psalm 104:27,28). If He preserves the beasts, would He not preserve us? If He feeds the birds, would He not feed us? If He looks after all creation, would He not look after you? How happy we are as we hear Him say, "And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left [namely children], and also much livestock?" (Jonah 4:11).
 2. **God protects:** "How precious is Your loving-kindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings"(verse 7). God, mercy and protection extend to mankind, all mankind, for He is the Lord of all beings; and they extend as well as to all His creation. His love is gracious; it bestows upon them His undeserved favours, therefore the children of men take shelter under the shadow of His wings. They are the children of Adam, the children of dust, weakness and sin. Yet, He protects them, even though they try to take shelter under the shadow of other men or their own works. Man thinks that he has health, but he loses it; he thinks he has money, but it just vanishes in thin air! He may think he has a friend or a mate, but they, too, desert him. Come, let us put our trust under the only shadow that deserves

- to be trusted, because it endures forever. Boaz said to Ruth, "The Lord repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge" (Ruth 2:12). Let us say to Him, "Keep me as the apple of Your eye; hide me under the shadow of Your wings" (Psalm 17:8). "Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You; and in the shadow of Your wings I will take my refuge, until these calamities have passed by" (Psalm 57:1).
3. **God satisfies:** "They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, and You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures"(verse 8). No doubt the psalmist recalls the water that gushed out of the rock to water His people in the barren desert (Exodus 17; Numbers 20), which prompted him to say that God prepares a table for His people in the presence of their enemies, and makes their cup run over (Psalm 23:5). The Hebrew word translated "pleasures" is the plural of the word Eden, the garden in which Adam lacked nothing. The psalmist says that God gives him drink from the river of His Edens, or gardens, and quenches his thirst to the full. Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, "Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). "For the Lord will comfort Zion, He will comfort all her waste places; He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord" (Isaiah 51:3). This satisfaction is everlasting, for the seer says, "The Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Revelations 7:17).
 4. **God gives life:** "For with You is the fountain of life"(verse 9a). God gives, preserves and secures life. He is the source of all joy. He took dust from the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being (Genesis 2:7). As man fell, he was separated from God, and became dead in transgressions and sins, so Christ had to come to save us. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).
 5. **God enlightens:** "In Your light we see light"(verse 9b). God enlightens the believer's life by His precious person, and enlightens it also by the light of His word which is "a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105). He enlightens it by Christ, the light of the world, "For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). The Lord keeps the believer in His presence, shines upon him, because "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness" (John 1:4,5). Let us listen to the commandment: "That you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days"

(Deuteronomy 30:20).

6.3. Third: The Psalmist's Prayer

(verses 10-12)

1. **He asks for the continuity of loving-kindness and righteousness:** "Oh, continue Your loving-kindness to those who know You; and Your righteousness to the upright in heart"(verse 10). God showed loving-kindness toward the psalmist, which he described in verses 5-9. Now he wants it to continue. As though he says to the Lord, "Be as You were, without change." "Continue" implies extension. He wants God to extend His loving-kindness longer. The more God gives us, the deeper we feed in need of Him more than any other time. The psalmist pleads for loving-kindness and righteousness on behalf of the "upright in heart". He does not mean those who are perfectly upright, simply because there are people with perfectly, upright hearts always. It is the uprightness of intention and the desire to do God's will that is intended.
2. **He asks for protection:** "Let not the foot of pride come against me, and let not the hand of the wicked drive me away"(verse 11). The psalmist asks the Lord to protect him and not let the proud trample on him with his foot or hurt him with his hand; for instance drive him away from home and turn him into a vagrant beggar, or kill him. To drive away often refers to captivity (cf. 2 Kings 21:8). The psalmist asks the Lord for protection, so that the enemy should not drive him away from his home to wander away in foreign lands, as it happened when he had to ask the king of Gath for protection (1 Samuel 21).
3. **He asks for the downfall of the worker of iniquity:** "There the workers of iniquity have fallen; they have been cast down and are not able to rise"(verse 12). The psalmist sees the end of the wicked and the destruction of the workers of iniquity through the eye of faith. The prophet says of them to the Lord, "They are dead; they will not live; they are deceased, they will not rise. Therefore You have punished and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish" (Isaiah 26:14). The prosperity of the wicked lasts but for a short while, and they will not win the final battle. The psalmist does not rejoice at their downfall; he simply can see it coming upon them. "And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly" (Romans 16:20). "How precious is Your loving-kindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings. They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, and You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures."

6.4. Questions

1. According to Psalm 36:5-6, God has three principles. List them.
2. In Psalm 36:6b-9 God does five things. List them.

7. Psalm Thirty-Seven

Do not Envy the Wicked

A Psalm of David.

- 1 Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity.
- 2 For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb.
- 3 Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness.
- 4 Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.
- 5 Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.
- 6 He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday.
- 7 Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass.
- 8 Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret--it only causes harm.
- 9 For evildoers shall be cut off; but those who wait on the Lord, they shall inherit the earth.
- 10 For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more; indeed, you will look carefully for his place, but it shall be no more.
- 11 But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.
- 12 The wicked plots against the just, and gnashes at him with his teeth.
- 13 The Lord laughs at him, for He sees that his day is coming.
- 14 The wicked have drawn the sword and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, to slay those who are of upright conduct.
- 15 Their sword shall enter their own heart, and their bows shall be broken.
- 16 A little that a righteous man has Is better than the riches of many wicked.
- 17 For the arms of the wicked shall be broken, but the Lord upholds the righteous.
- 18 The Lord knows the days of the upright, and their inheritance shall be forever.
- 19 They shall not be ashamed in the evil time, and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied.
- 20 But the wicked shall perish; and the enemies of the Lord, like the splendor of the meadows, shall vanish. Into smoke they shall vanish away.
- 21 The wicked borrows and does not repay, but the righteous shows mercy and gives.
- 22 For those blessed by Him shall inherit the earth, but those cursed by Him shall be cut off.

- 23 The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way.**
- 24 Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with His hand.**
- 25 I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread.**
- 26 He is ever merciful, and lends; and his descendants are blessed.**
- 27 Depart from evil, and do good; and dwell forevermore.**
- 28 For the Lord loves justice, and does not forsake His saints; they are preserved forever, but the descendants of the wicked shall be cut off.**
- 29 The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell in it forever.**
- 30 The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom, and his tongue talks of justice.**
- 31 The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide.**
- 32 The wicked watches the righteous, and seeks to slay him.**
- 33 The Lord will not leave him in his hand, nor condemn him when he is judged.**
- 34 Wait on the Lord, And keep His way, and He shall exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off, you shall see it.**
- 35 I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a native green tree.**
- 36 Yet he passed away, and behold, he was no more; indeed I sought him, but he could not be found.**
- 37 Mark the blameless man, and observe the upright; for the future of that man is peace.**
- 38 But the transgressors shall be destroyed together; the future of the wicked shall be cut off.**
- 39 But the salvation of the righteous is from the Lord; He is their strength in the time of trouble.**
- 40 And the Lord shall help them and deliver them; He shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in Him.**

In Psalm 36 the psalmist pondered over the prosperity of the wicked, despite their ungodly works, but he found comfort in God's justice and mercy. In this psalm he again ponders over the prosperity of the wicked, and encourages the believers by telling them that the wicked are doomed to certain destruction and ruin, but the meek shall inherit the earth. The believers down the ages have found difficulty with the apparent prosperity of the wicked and the troubles of the just, so much so that they even murmured against and envied the wicked for their prosperity. Some of them were even on the verge of losing their faith in God's goodness and justice. They all needed someone to see them through their spiritual affliction.

In this didactic psalm, which resembles the wisdom of the Book of Proverbs, the psalmist

explains that the prosperity of the wicked does not continue; the punishment for his wickedness must ultimately catch up with him. He also explains that the state of the just is far better than that of the wicked, even if the just suffers troubles. The troubles of the just are transient, but the punishment of the wicked is everlasting. The psalmist so simply solves the problem by telling us, "Put your trust in the Lord and wait on Him, and everything is going to be just perfect at the end. The wicked will perish and the just will be rewarded. For the time being, let the believer delight in worshipping the Lord and find joy in being near to Him."

Our psalm is an acrostic, with every two verses beginning with a subsequent letter of the Hebrew alphabet. We have already meditated on three psalms of this literary style: 9, 25, 34.

The psalm includes the following:

- First: Do not envy the wicked (verses 1-11)
- Second: The schemes of the wicked bounce back on him (verses 12-15)
- Third: Seven contrasts between the righteous and the wicked (verses 16-40)

7.1. First: Do not Envy the Wicked

(verses 1-11)

The psalm begins by the advice: "Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity" (verse 1). The wicked have things that provoke the just to envy- they flourish like green grass, whereas the believer is heavy-hearted and persecuted. It saddens the just to see the prosperity of those who do not deserve it, and says together with Asaph, "For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked" (Psalm 73:3). He wonders with the prophet, "Righteous are You, Lord, when I plead with You; yet let me talk with You about Your judgements. Why does the way of the wicked prosper?" (Jeremiah 12:1, cf. Job 21:7-15). If you are tempted to be envious of the prosperity of the wicked, cut this envy down to size by listening to the wise man telling you, "Do not envy the oppressor and choose none of his ways... Do not let your heart envy sinners, but in the fear of the Lord continue all day long... Do not be envious of evil men, nor desire to be with them" (Proverbs 3:31; 23:17; 24:1).

The psalmist sets out seven reasons that help the believer not to envy the wicked:

1. **The wicked must perish:** "For they shall soon be cut off like the grass, and wither like the green herb"(verse 2). They will become like the chaff which the wind drives away (Psalm 1:4). "All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers the flower fades, because the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass" (Isaiah 40:6). So the blessings of the wicked are short-lived; the biggest prosperity they can have is earthly- it comes to an end, however long it may last. It is nothing to be compared to the endless eternity, "For what is a man profited if he gains the

whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Matthew 16:26).

2. **The believer must be faithful:** "Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness"(verse 3). The remedy for envy and jealousy is to trust the Lord, do good, dwell near the Lord in the land He divided to us and wanted us to live on it, and lead a life of faithfulness toward Him and others. When we set about obeying the commandment our time will be occupied with God, His ministry, and our doing good, so that we no longer have time to murmur! Let us put our trust in the Lord and rely on Him; let us do and be good and leave the results to Him. Then He will tell us, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord" (Matthew 25:21).
3. **The believer must rejoice and delight in the Lord:** "Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give You the desires of your heart"(verse 4). Eliphaz the Temanite said, "Now acquaint yourself with Him, and be at peace; thereby good will come to you...For then you will have delight in the Almighty, and lift up your face to God. You will prayer to Him, He will hear you, and you will pay your vows. You will also declare a thing, and it will be established for you; so light will shine on your ways" (Job 22:21-28). "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him" (Psalm 34:8). Take your joy from your fellowship with the Lord, and He will grant you the desires of your heart that you really need. Sometimes we ask for things that are not good for us. But when we delight ourselves in the Lord He gives us the real desire that satisfies our heart. He can give your the desire of your heart because He holds full authority and because He loves you. "All authority has been to Me in heaven and on earth", Christ announced (Matthew 28:18). May God give us to recognise "the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power" (Ephesians 1:19).
4. **The believer must commit himself to the Lord:** "Commit yourself to the Lord, rest also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday"(verses 5,6). "Commit your works to the Lord, and your thoughts will be established" (Proverbs 16:3). "Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). "He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:24). Let us, then, commit our affairs to the Lord, be they bitter or sweet, so that He would support and guide us. He will bring to pass all the believer's expectations; he is alive, active and present in our world which is under His authority. When sinners try to becloud you, He defends you, removes the clouds of doubt away from you, and gives you victory over them. As long as you trust Him and rely on Him, He will bring forth your hidden justice like the shining sun, and grant you the fulfilment of the promise: "But the path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day" (Proverbs 4:18). Do what is good as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance (Colossians 3:24). "Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father"

(Matthew 13:43).

5. **The believer must patiently wait for the Lord:** "Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass"(verse 7). Waiting for the Lord is equal to resting before Him without grumbling, waiting patiently to hear His voice, and expecting Him to intervene in the right time which He sets by His wisdom, as the psalmist says, "Truly my soul silently waits for God; from Him comes my salvation" (Psalm 62:1). "For thus says the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: 'In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength'" (Isaiah 30:15). "I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry" (Psalm 40:1). The believer is prone to murmur when he sees the wicked prosper through fraud and duplicity. But waiting patiently before God and expecting Him to step in will put an end to the unnecessary murmuring. Because we wait for God to work and believe in His wise timing, we do not push the hands of the clock forward, neither do we pry open the petals of a beautiful flower before it is time for it to blossom. Let us wait patiently for the Lord, not with the patience of the helpless, but that of the hopeful who trusts that a glorious resurrection must follow the crucifixion, that victory comes after war and that "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5).
6. **The believer must control his reactions:** "Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret-it only causes harm. For evildoers shall be cut off; but those who wait on the Lord, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more; indeed, you will look diligently for his place, but it shall be no more"(verses 8-10). Anger leads the angry to sin, because it makes him forget God's love, care and gifts. He may join the wicked in their foolish acts, as Asaph said after he had seen the prosperity of the wicked and the trouble of the believer: "Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain" (Psalm 73:13). But the Lord opened his eyes to see the truth, and he said, "Truly God is good...to such as are pure in heart" (Psalm 73:1). Cleanse your heart, and cease from anger to obtain the divine blessing; not forgetting that the wicked are doomed to destruction.
7. **The believer must be meek:** "But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace"(verse 11). This does not mean that the believer will literally inherit the land, for the verse also carries a spiritual connotation, that is winning the people of the land by our love and meekness. Many people inherit lands that do not delight them, either because of their anxiety or sin. But those who have patiently waited for the Lord and expected Him, will inherit the land and delight themselves in what He has given them. The Lord fulfilled this promise to Moses, whom the Bible describes as very humble and meek in Numbers 12:3 "Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth." This why he was able to lead the children of Israel to the promised land.

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth", Christ said (Matthew 5:5). If we

are meek we will obtain the fulfilment of the promise: "My people will dwell in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places" (Isaiah 32:18). "Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble" (Psalm 119:165).

7.2. Second: The Schemes of the Wicked Bounce Back on Him",6The Schemes of the Wicked Bounce Back on Him

(verses 12-15)

Often the just does not feel the schemes of the wicked against him, because the just has good intentions and is endowed with a simple heart and eye. The wicked often devises schemes against the just because he knows that the just resists evil by good only. But the schemes of the wicked must bounce back on him to hurt him. When Christ raised Lazarus from the dead many people believed in Him, which made the Jewish elders jealous. Thereupon they decided to kill Lazarus, in order to bury the witness of Christ's power (John 12:9,10). How grotesque! Wouldn't it be better for them to believe in Christ than to kill Lazarus? Envy over Christ's success caused them to devise schemes against Him and Lazarus! "The wicked plots against the just."

There are two ideas in these four verses:

1. **Plotting a scheme:** "The wicked plots against the just, and gnashes at him with his teeth. The Lord laughs at him, for He sees that his day is coming"(verses 12,13). The wicked is like a predator, trying to catch prey and gnashing at it with its teeth to swallow it down. But the Lord had already doomed the wicked to destruction. King Saul gnashed at David with his teeth, and pursued him to destroy him. One day as he was chasing David, Saul fell into David's hands and David could have killed him. Yet, he said, "The Lord will strike him, or his day will come to die, or he will go out to battle and perish. The Lord forbid that I stretch out my hand against the Lord's anointed" (1 Samuel 26:10,11). And so it happened!
2. **The implementation of the scheme:** "The wicked have drawn the sword and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, to slay those who are of upright conduct. Their sword shall enter their own heart, and their bows shall be broken"(verses 14,15). They thought about the scheme, and drew out their swords to thrust them straight to the heart! Most probably David was recalling King Saul who tried more than once to kill him by the spear and the sword, who took his life by falling on his sword and dying! (1 Samuel 31:4). Or maybe he remembered what happened with his son Absalom, who led an unsuccessful coup against him, and died hanging on a tree after having been run through by the captain of David's army (2 Samuel 18:9). The two swords bounced back to the hearts of Saul and Absalom!

As the soldiers came to arrest and crucify Christ, Malchus, the chief servant of the high priest, accompanied them. Peter drew out his sword, struck Malchus down, cutting off his ear. Christ, however, returned Malchus' ear to its place, and said to Peter, "All who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matthew 26:52). Leave the violent men to their painful destiny, which is the wages of sin, because they refused to repent. As for the people of the Lord, let them delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

7.3. Third: Seven Contrasts Between Righteous and Wicked",⁶Seven Contrasts Between the Righteous and the Wicked

(verses 16-40)

1. **A contrast of enjoying riches:** "A little that a righteous man has is better than the riches of many wicked"(verse 16). The righteous may own a little and the wicked many own so much that the righteous is tempted to envy the wicked. But the little which we know we have earned honestly and righteously is far better than a large income that came through injustice. Proverbs states, "Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure with trouble" (Proverbs 15:16). "Better is a little with righteousness, than vast revenues without justice" (Proverbs 16:8). "Better is a dry morsel with quietness than a house full of feasting with strife" (Proverbs 17:1). The little that a righteous man has is his rightful possession, which he manages wisely as a trustworthy steward over what God has given him. Therefore he enjoys it, and it spills health over his body. The righteous man will also use what he has to serve others: "He is ever merciful, and lends; and his descendants are blessed" (verse 26). The Lord blesses the righteous and what he owns because he obeys God's commandment and pays the tithe of his revenue to the Lord's work. The wicked, though, does not enjoy his possessions, because he robs God by not paying the tithe. Will a man who robs God be blessed? (Malachi 3:8). His heart will be weighed down by worries, and even if he laughs, his laughter will not last for long!
2. **A contrast of power:** "For the arms of the wicked shall be broken, but the Lord upholds the righteous"(verse 17). The arms of the wicked are strong, working evil and opposing the righteous, because the Lord Himself opposes the wicked "and the upraised (haughty) arm is broken" (Job 38:15). God upholds the righteous when the wicked tries to hurt him. The wicked may think that he is strong, backed up by his injustice, influence, money or patrons. But the Lord breaks the arms of the wicked. Even though the arms of the righteous may seem weak, God upholds him through His love and strengthens him.
3. **A contrast in life span (verses 18-20):**
 1. **The Lord knows the believers:** "The Lord knows the days of the upright, and their inheritance shall be forever"(verse 18). He knows their names and calls them by them (Isaiah 43:1); He numbers the hairs of their heads (Matthew 10:30); He knows their obedience and love for Him. He knows the days of their life, as Job said, "Since his

- days are determined, the number of his months is with You; You have appointed his limits" (Job 14:5). The psalmist said, "My times are in Your hand" (Psalm 31:15). He knows and determines what is going to happen in their lives, and makes everything work together for good to them, because they are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). He knows their eternal destiny, for He has bequeathed them an imperishable, incorruptible, undiminishing inheritance kept for them in the heavenly places. He also keeps them steadfast until He gets them to where they obtain that inheritance (1 Peter 1:4,5).
2. **He knows what happens to the believers:** "They shall not be ashamed in the evil time, and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied"(verse 19). True, the righteous go through many difficulties, suffers many days of spiritual, mental, intellectual and physical famine, but the Lord who walks by their side all the days and will see them through all of them. "Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good" (1 Peter 4:19), so that they may say with David, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4). Men are entitled to have the fulfilment of this promise of Jesus: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world" (John 6:51).
 3. **He knows what will fall down on the wicked:** "But the wicked shall perish; and the enemies of the Lord, like the splendour of the meadows, shall vanish. Into smoke they shall vanish away"(verse 20). They perish just as the green pastures dissolve under the heat of summer and the grazing of animals, which turn them into dry, barren lands! What a world of difference between those who live for God and those who live for themselves! The Lord knows the days of the upright, and distinguishes between them and the wicked. True, the enemies of the Lord may appear like green, lush meadows, but it will soon be said of them, "Into smoke they vanished away."
 4. **A contrast in faithfulness:** "The wicked borrows and does not repay, but the righteous shows mercy and gives. For those who are blessed by Him shall inherit the earth, but those who are cursed by Him shall be cut off. The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with His hand. I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread. He is ever merciful and lends; and his descendants are blessed"(verses 21-26).

These verses teach us three facts:

1. **The wicked borrows and does not pay back:**At the beginning of the psalm the psalmist was envious of the wicked because of his riches and prosperity. But the prosperity of the wicked did not last long, and he had to borrow and failed to pay his

debts off. Or maybe he did not pay out of dishonesty. The painful result is that he will be cut off from the land. As for the psalmist, who seemed poor at the beginning of the psalm, God gave him enough provisions to meet his needs and those of the others around him. Therefore he is ever merciful and gives out. He is charitable to the needy, so the description fits him well: "A good man deals graciously and lends; he will guide his affairs with discretion...He has dispersed abroad, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever" (Psalm 112:5,9). He obtains the fulfilment of the divine promise: "The Lord your God will bless you just as He promised you; you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow; you shall reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over you" (Deuteronomy 15:6).

2. **The Lord hates the way of the wicked:** The Lord takes delight in the way of the righteous, because the righteous takes delight in the way of God, "For as many as led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God" (Romans 8:14). The righteous meditates on the life of Christ, who set us an example which we would do well to follow, and walks in the footsteps of his Master (1 Peter 2:21). The righteous may trip or fall while walking in the way of righteousness, but he soon rises up and shakes off all the dirt that stuck to him, because the Lord upholds his hand just as Christ took hold of Peter's hand when he has almost drowned, and rescued him (Matthew 14:31). "For a righteous man may fall seven times and rise again" (Proverbs 24:16). "For, the Lord your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, 'Fear not, I will help you.'" (Isa 41:13). The believer sets out on the journey of life holding God's hand. If he slips, through any mistake or lack of wisdom on his part, God quickly lifts him up. "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of glory with exceeding joy...be glory and majesty" (Jude 24). The wicked are not so- when they fall into sin, they wallow in it and continue doing it, because it fits their corrupt natures.
3. **The Lord rewards the righteous:** He never lets him or his children lack anything. The children of the wicked, though, will continually be wanderers for lack of good example and education by their parents, and be surrounded by poverty and hunger; seeking bread in their desolate places but finding none (Psalm 109:10). The psalmist repeats that the righteous deals graciously and gives, and that his children follow his example and learn to give from their parents. When we serve God through our finances, He rewards us with finances, and rewards our children financially too. When we serve Him by praising Him and witnessing to others about Him, He rewards us spiritually and rewards our children in the same way. Let us serve God both financially and spiritually in order to get the two blessings.
5. **A contrast in conduct:** "Depart from evil, and do good; and dwell for evermore. For the Lord loves justice, and does not forsake His saints; they are preserved forever, but the descendants of the wicked shall be cut off. The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell

in it forever"(verses 27-29). The psalmist advises his audience to turn away from evil and do good, as he has already urged elsewhere, "Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it" (Psalm 34:14). As a natural result of this right conduct on the part of the believer who fears God and honours Him, God does not forsake him or his descendants; He lets them enjoy a settled lifestyle. The believer lives forever through his God-blessed offspring, who will be preserved forevermore. The righteous will inherit the land and dwell in it forever, because the Lord destroys the wicked and gives his blessings to the believer. He loves justice, therefore He issued this judgement: "For the upright will dwell in the land, and the blameless will remain in it" (Proverbs 2:21).

The Lord has never forsaken his saints, therefore the psalmist prays, "Your mercy, O Lord, endures forever; do not forsake the works of Your hands" (Psalm 138:8). The wicked, however, must be destroyed, and his descendants must be cut off, just as the psalmist put it: "Let his posterity be cut off, and in the generation following let their names be blotted out" (Psalm 109:13).

- 6. A contrast in wisdom:** "The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom, and his tongue talks of justice. The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide"(verses 30,31). "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things" (Matthew 12:34,35). The righteous is the person who has a right standing with God and a good heart. Because of this his heart meditates on the wisdom that God gave him, and the understanding that comes to him through God's written word that fills his heart. His motto is "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (Psalm 119:11). Christ's statement "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you" (John 15:3) is fulfilled with him. He fulfils the Mosaic commandment: "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart; you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). The just and righteous person knows the truth, because he knows God's law. Therefore his tongue speaks the truth, and his feet shall not slide. He is like Joshua, the military general, whom God commanded: "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success" (Joshua 1:8).

What a great difference there is between the believer's wisdom that is derived from God's word, and the folly of the wicked that is grounded in error. The wise philosopher said, "The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but the perverse tongue will be cut out. The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked what is perverse" (Proverbs 10:31,32).

- 7. A contrast in the ending (verses 32-40):**In these nine verses the psalmist sets out four

facts about the end of the righteous and the wicked:

1. **The wicked plots against the righteous but the Lord delivers him:** "The wicked watches the righteous, and seeks to slay him. The Lord will not leave him in his hand, nor condemn him when he is judged. Wait on the Lord and keep His way, and He shall exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off; you shall see it"(verses 32-34). God gave the righteous the privilege of being the light of the world. But since the wicked has sick eyes, it hurts him to behold the light, and therefore he opposes the righteous. The good works of the righteous rebuke the evil works of the wicked, causing his conscience to rise against him, just as Cain was rebuked by Abel (Genesis 4:6-7).

Likewise the righteous may sometimes oppose the works of the wicked, prove his ideas are wrong, and hamper his ungodly plans and conspiracies. For this reason the wicked watches the righteous and seeks to slay him. He may drag him to an unjust trial on the basis of false accusations. But God never allows his plots to trap the righteous, neither does He leave the righteous in the hand of a prejudiced trial. It is true that sometimes the machinations of the wicked against the righteous work out, resulting in unjust judgements against him, but the Lord must eventually avenge His elect who cry out to him day and night, even if He seems to delay a little while (Luke 18:7).

The psalmist advises the maligned believer to wait for the Lord. The theme of waiting for the Lord is often repeated in Scriptures, because man is usually hasty, especially so when he is in distress. It is hard for him to wait for the right divine timing. But there is time for everything under heaven (Ecclesiastes 3:1). So the maligned believer may cry out: "Plead my cause, O Lord" (Psalm 35:1). The psalmist advises the believer to keep the way of the Lord, so that the Lord may exalt him, bequeath the land to him and grant him victory over the plots of the wicked, who is bound for destruction!

2. **The wicked vanishes away:** "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a native green tree. Yet he passed away, and behold, he was no more; indeed I sought him, but he could not be found"(verses 35,36). A tree spreads itself and flourishes when it is planted in its natural element. The wicked seems flourishing and strong, but his end is certain. In these two verses there is a clear call for repentance, for God bestows prosperity in the wicked to let him know about His love and grace. If he acknowledges God's favour toward him and repents, God forgives him. But if he persists in his evil, his own evil will slay him. The psalmist had once known a strong and despotic wicked man, who spread himself like a native green tree, but he was cut off abruptly and was no more. "Every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matthew 3:10).

3. **Two destinies:** "Mark the blameless man, and observe the upright; for the future of that man is peace. But the transgressors shall be destroyed together; the future of the wicked shall be cut off"(verses 37,38). The blameless and upright man has a distinguished future and a great hope, and has a right standing with God. "The righteous...shall enter into peace; they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness" (Isaiah 57:1,2). The philosopher said, "Do not let your heart envy sinners, but in the fear of the Lord continue all day long; for surely there is a hereafter, and your hope will not be cut off" (Proverbs 23:17,18). As for the wicked, they shall be destroyed "there will be no prospect for the evil man; the lamp of the wicked will be put out" (Proverbs 24:20). "Dreadful sounds are in his ears; in prosperity the destroyer comes upon him...It will be accomplished before his time, and his branch will not be green" (Job 15:21,32).
4. **The salvation of the righteous is certain:** "But the salvation of the righteous is from the Lord; He is their strength in the time of trouble. And the Lord shall help them and deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in Him"(verses 39,40). These two verses sum up the whole psalm, and encourage the believer in his temptation, weariness and distress. They confirm to him divine help and special protection. The believer's life does not end in sorrow, but in joy in the Lord who saves and delivers. The law of the Lord has always been the believer's delight; he trusted God's faithfulness and took refuge in Him. In response, God became his stronghold in times of trouble, be it from caused by an enemy, a sickness or sin.

Who is the man who enjoys all the heavenly blessings and protection? It is the righteous and the upright, the one who has a right standing with God, the one who has been justified and atoned for by Christ. Let us take refuge in the Lord, our Redeemer, and hide under the shadow of His precious redemption which He prepared for us on the cross. For only then can we say, "Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

7.4. Questions

1. List seven reasons why the righteous should not envy the wicked.
2. According to Psalm 37:17, why is the little that the righteous have better than the wealth of the many wicked.

8. Psalm Thirty-Eight

Difficulties Lead to Repentance

A Psalm of David. To bring to remembrance.

1 O Lord, do not rebuke me in Your wrath, nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure!

2 For Your arrows pierce me deeply, and Your hand presses me down.

3 There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your anger, nor any health in my bones because of my sin.

4 For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me.

5 My wounds are foul and festering because of my foolishness.

6 I am troubled, I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long.

7 For my loins are full of inflammation, and there is no soundness in my flesh.

8 I am feeble and severely broken; I groan because of the turmoil of my heart.

9 Lord, all my desire is before You; and my sighing is not hidden from You.

10 My heart pants, my strength fails me; as for the light of my eyes, it also has gone from me.

11 My loved ones and my friends stand aloof from my plague, and my relatives stand afar off.

12 Those also who seek my life lay snares for me; those who seek my hurt speak of destruction, and plan deception all the day long.

13 But I, like a deaf man, do not hear; and I am like a mute who does not open his mouth.

14 Thus I am like a man who does not hear, and in whose mouth is no response.

15 For in You, O Lord, I hope; You will hear, O Lord my God.

16 For I said, "Hear me, lest they rejoice over me, lest, when my foot slips, they exalt themselves against me."

17 For I am ready to fall, and my sorrow is continually before me.

18 For I will declare my iniquity; I will be in anguish over my sin.

19 But my enemies are vigorous, and they are strong; and those who hate me wrongfully have multiplied.

20 Those also who render evil for good, they are my adversaries, because I follow what is good.

21 Do not forsake me, O Lord; O my God, be not far from me!

22 Make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation!

This is one of the seven penitent psalms. We therefore recommend that you refer to the introduction of Psalm 6. The heading of our psalm is "To bring to remembrance." David remembered a sin he had committed (most likely that with Bathsheba- 2 Samuel 11,12), for which God punished him. His body was disturbed, as well as his soul; he was deserted by his friends and ridiculed by his enemies. In the midst of all these sufferings he remembered his sin, and recognised that he deserved what he got. So he accepted the reviling of the revilers

and cried out to the Lord at the beginning and at the end of the psalm to remove this punishment from him (verses 1,21,22). Yet, in the rest of the psalm he exclaims that the punishment is too much for the sins he committed. No doubt God chastens the believer when he sins, and this chastisement seems to bring sorrow, not joy (Hebrews 12:10). But God chastens him in order not to judge him along with the world (1 Corinthians 11:32), and to let him share in His holiness.

Job described in detail what the psalmist mentions here in short; such as his sickness (Job 7:5; 9:17), saying that God punished him (Job 16:12-14), and his friends deserted him (16:20; 19:13-15). Job refers his suffering to his sins, although he did not know a specific sin that brought all these calamities upon him (Job 7:20; 10:6). There are also some other similarities between the sufferings of the psalmist and those of the suffering servant of the Lord set out in Isaiah 53, yet the causes of suffering are different.

The psalm includes the following:

- First: The psalmist's difficulties reminded him that God was angry with him (verses 1-10)
- Second: The psalmist's difficulties made him check his human relationships (verses 11-14)
- Third: The psalmist's difficulties made him develop his relationship with the Lord (verses 15-22)

8.1. First: The Psalmist's Difficulties Reminded him that God was Angry with Him

(verses 1-10)

1. **The intensity of the psalmist's difficulties:** "O Lord, do not rebuke me in Your wrath, nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure! For your arrows pierce me deeply, and Your hand presses me down. There is no soundness in my flesh because of your anger, nor is there any health in my bones because of my sin"(verses 1-3). The psalmist admitted that the punishment that fell on him came from an angry Judge, not a tender Father, as though he felt the same thing as Jeremiah when he said, "O Lord, correct me, but with justice; not in Your anger, lest You bring me to nothing" (Jeremiah 10:24). He does not reject rebuke and correction, but he wants them to be without anger, for he saw God piercing him with an arrow, then striking him with His hand. God's arrows are sickness and pain that did not leave soundness in his body. His hand is the successive blows that seem to come from a stick, which left the psalmist no inner rest because he is a sinner, nor enjoyment of the Lord's mercy because He is angry at him. His sense of guilt was like a fever that ate up his soul from within, and the divine punishment was like a shower of blows hitting him from without. Isaiah put it like this: "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it,

but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment" (Isaiah 1:5,6). David recognises that sin was the cause of God's anger at him.

2. **The cause of the psalmist's difficulties:** "For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds are foul and festering because of my foolishness"(verses 4,5). David sees his sins as an overwhelming flood that has gone over his head and has almost drowned him. As though he says, "Then the waters would have overwhelmed us, the stream would have gone over our soul" (Psalm 124:4). He regarded it as a burden weighing him down, just as Cain said, "My punishment is greater than I can bear" (Genesis 4:13). God struck him because of his sin and wounded him, and the wounds festered, putrefied and started to smell. When the conscience awakes it recognises the ugliness of sin and feels its weight. These feelings are healthy, because they prompt the person to turn to Christ the Redeemer, repent and make up his mind to live with the Lord.
3. **The result of the psalmist's difficulties:** "I am troubled, I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. For my loins are full of inflammation, and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and severely broken; I groan because of the turmoil of my heart"(verses 6-8). David was troubled, both physically and mentally, as if he was seized by a severe chill that left him unable to move and seriously broken. Job expressed the same feelings when he said, "My heart is in turmoil and cannot rest...My skin grows black and falls from me; my bones burn with fever" (Job 30:27,30). His heart groaned with sorrow, and his soul moaned with pain because of his disease: "For my sighing comes before I eat, and my groanings pour out like water" (Job 3:24). When we reach the stage of groaning with sorrow over our sins, the tender-hearted God hears us and gives us comfort that wipes away all trace of mourning: "Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4).
4. **The blessings of the psalmist's difficulties:** "Lord, all my desire is before You; and my sighing is not hidden from You. My heart pants, my strength fails me; as for the light of my eyes it also has gone from me"(verses 9,10). Difficulties drove the psalmist to the warm, divine bosom, for the Lord knows everything about His people, and knows also what we need before we even ask Him (Matthew 6:8). "I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel", God says (Exodus 6:5), and we answer, "Put my tears into Your water-skin" (Psalm 56:8). Happy is the troubled man who turns to God, even if he realises that his trouble is a divine punishment. When he turns to God's mercies he finds himself welcomed, loved and forgiven.

8.2. Second: The Psalmist's Difficulties made him Check his Human Relationships

(verses 11-14)

1. **Deserted by his friends:** "My loved ones and my friends stand aloof from my plague, and my kinsmen stand afar off"(verse 11). The Hebrew word for "plague" means leprosy (Leviticus 13:3). His loved one and friends treated him like a leper! They stood afar off because they were unable to lend a hand, or because they were afraid of his contagious disease, since they did not want to share in his trouble. Perhaps all these reasons combined together. In his trouble, David looked for the people he loved, but found none!
2. **His enemies grew more wicked:** "Those also who seek my life lay snares for me; those who seek my hurt speak of destruction, and plan deception all the day long"(verse 12). They lashed out at him falsely, as was their wont always. Often we are attacked as a result of our own fault, but when we are attacked for being faithful we receive divine blessings. "Having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil" (1 Peter 3:16,17).
3. **He was unable to defend himself:** "But I, like a deaf man, do not hear; and I am like a mute who does not open his mouth. Thus I am like a man who does not hear, and in whose mouth is no response"(verses 13,14). The psalmist became aware of his sin, and preferred to hold his tongue in the presence of his enemies as though he did not hear their curses and decided to surrender to God, because he had nothing to defend himself with. Job did the same thing as he could not refute the claims of his friends. He wished to present a complaint to God and said, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come to His seat! I would present my case before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments" (Job 23:3,4).

8.3. Third: The Psalmist's Difficulties made him Develop his Relationship with the Lord

(verses 15-22)

1. **His difficulties increased his hope in and expectation of the Lord:** "For in You, O Lord, I hope; You will hear, O Lord my God. For I said, 'Hear me, lest they rejoice over me, lest, when my foot slips, they magnify themselves against me.' For I am ready to fall and my sorrow is continually before me"(verses 15-17). His waiting was full of hope and expectation: "Therefore I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me" (Micah 7:7). He found no strength within himself, and did not wait for the people, lest they should rejoice over him and say that the Lord had abandoned him. The reaction he expected from the enemies prompted him to pray. Also he was about to fall because his foot hit so hard against something that rankled his life. Every day brought a new problem along. Yet throughout all these he waited on the Lord and hoped in Him, being confident of the answer, and committed himself into the hands of his Creator. In patience he was able to possess himself (Luke 21:19), knowing that God would choose the right time to deliver him.

2. **His difficulties prompted him to confess his iniquities:** "For I will declare my iniquity; I will be in anguish over my sin"(verse 18). The psalmist acknowledges that his sin was the cause of his misery, and "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). God is faithful in His love and promises to forgive the penitent. He is also just because He has already received the wages for our sin when Christ was crucified. If we cast our sins upon Christ we receive forgiveness, because God does not receive the wages for sin twice. There is no unforgivable sin as long as we come to God in repentance and brokenness. "I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and You forgave the iniquity of my sin" (Psalm 32:5).
3. **His difficulties prompted him to follow what is good:** "But my enemies are vigorous, and they are strong; and those who hate me wrongfully have multiplied. Those also who render evil for good, they are my adversaries, because I follow what is good"(verses 19,20). The true believer who patiently waits for the Lord and confesses will receive forgiveness and do what is good no matter the adversity. "Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him" (Psalm 37:7). Anyone who confesses his sin will not continue to sin, but turn their back on it and do what is good, saying, "In return for my love they are my accusers, but I give myself to prayer" (Psalm 109:4). If we are fixed in the Lord the way a branch is fixed into a vine, we are bound to produce good things as a natural result of abiding in Him. David's enemies were vigorous, with alert and wary eyes; they even gained strength and multiplied. Although he dealt well with them they paid him evil in return "as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother[.] And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's were righteous" (1 John 3:12). The one who does good, however, does so for the Lord, and from the same he will receive his reward (Colossians 3:24).
4. **His difficulties prompted him to pray:** "Do not forsake me, O Lord; O my God, be not far from me! Make haste to help me, O God of my salvation!"(verses 21,22). The Lord Himself is the psalmist's salvation, therefore he concluded his psalm by a prayer for help from the Lord, his salvation. If you commit yourself to Him and make Him Lord over your life, you'll be saved from the sin that follows you and from the men who harass you. The believer cannot live independent of God. He lives by depending on Him continually. From the Lord he receives wisdom, strength and holiness, therefore he calls upon the Lord, "Be not far from me!" God cannot be far, or stop loving; it is sin that separates man from God and makes him believe that God is far from him. The important question is: Which of us has moved?! Has God changed His attitude to the believer? Or has the believer changed his attitude to God?!

Let us return to God in repentance, for he never forsakes us or stays away from us. He hastens to forgive us our sins, restore the relationship between us and Himself and deliver us from everything that bothers us. Accept Christ as Lord over your life, and you'll find

forgiveness and security.

8.4. Questions

1. When the psalmist checked his human relationships he found three things. Mention them.
2. What blessings did the psalmist receive from his difficulties?

9. Psalm Thirty-Nine

Because it Was You who Did It!

To the Chief Musician. To Jeduthun. A Psalm of David.

1 I said, "I will guard my ways, lest I sin with my tongue; I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle, while the wicked are before me."

2 I was mute with silence, I held my peace even from good; and my sorrow was stirred up.

3 My heart was hot within me; while I was musing, the fire burned. Then I spoke with my tongue:

4 "Lord, make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am.

5 Indeed, You have made my days as handbreadths, and my age is as nothing before You; certainly every man at his best state is but vapor. Selah

6 Surely every man walks about like a shadow; surely they busy themselves in vain; he heaps up riches, and does not know who will gather them.

7 "And now, Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in You.

8 Deliver me from all my transgressions; do not make me the reproach of the foolish.

9 I was mute, I did not open my mouth, because it was You who did it.

10 Remove Your plague from me; I am consumed by the blow of Your hand.

11 When with rebukes You correct man for iniquity, You make his beauty melt away like a moth; surely every man is vapor. Selah

12 "Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; do not be silent at my tears; for I am a stranger with You, a sojourner, as all my fathers were.

13 Remove Your gaze from me, that I may regain strength, before I go away and am no more."

This is a psalm of David; a sequel to the previous psalm, and related to Psalm 62. (Compare 38:13,14 with 39:2,9; 38:15 with 39:7; 38:16 with 39:8; 38:1-3,11 with 39:10,11). Most probably it was set to music by the chief musician Jeduthun, whose name is also Ethan (1 Chronicles 15:17-19). He is of the family of Merari of the tribe of Levi. His name means

"praiser". It seems that singing was like second nature to this family, which included Asaph and Heman, who were appointed by David to supervise praise in the temple (2 Chronicles 35:15).

The occasion for which this psalm was written is not quite known, but it must have been a time of doubting and painful problems in which David expresses his feelings of grief. Was he taken so ill that he thought he was going to die?...The Old Testament believers thought of death as a sign of God's anger, and that death blocked their communication with God. Or had he lost a dear friend to death? Had he been subject to severe persecution? We don't know for sure. Anyhow the affliction was so hard for him, and he could not see any good or wise thing about it. So he turned to prayer in order to complain to God of his pitiable situation. He feared that the wicked would hear his complaint and ridicule his worship of God, as well as ridicule his God who does not hear. Therefore he decided, in his severe pain, to keep silent.

The psalm includes the following:

- First: Silence in pain (verses 1-3)
- Second: Speaking in pain (verses 4-6)
- Third: Hope in pain (verses 7-9)
- Fourth: Supplication in pain (verses 10-13)

9.1. First: Silence in Pain

(verses 1-3)

1. **The silence of the wise:** "I said, 'I will guard my ways, lest I sin with my tongue; I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle, while the wicked are before me'"(verse 1). David decided to bear the calamities silently in order not to sin, and controlled his tongue so that the wicked should hold his words against him, and ridicule him and blaspheme God because of them. The kind of words he refrained from uttering must have been like these words of Asaph's: "Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain" (Psalm 73:13). Yet Asaph followed this up quickly with these words, "If I had said, 'I will speak thus,' behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of Your children" (Psalm 73:15). He knew that a new generation was coming, and that they might quote the words of his weakness as laws and pronouncements which describe God's worship as vain, just as they had quoted his words of glorification.

David applied a muzzle to his mouth to keep silent. Now there are many types of silence; the forced silence, the silence out of ignorance, the silence of a politician who weighs thing out according to their benefits and the silence of the wise. The silence of psalmist was that of the wise and the prudent. Had he spoken up, he would have sinned, both he and his audience would have been confused, both he and they would go astray and his

words would be taken against him. He would not be able to withdraw what his mouth has uttered. His words could have also been a stumbling block to others. So it was wise to keep silent. The wicked were used to hearing David singing to the Lord, now if he utters something against his God he would provide the wicked with a chance to do just the same. "If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man" (James 3:2).

Let's be careful when we express our doubts and complaints- we don't know all of God's purposes for our pain. When the time of pain has gone by and the time for learning has come, we will realise God's kindness, goodness and love. Then we will regret every vain word we might have uttered!

2. **The silence of the suffering:** "I was mute with silence, I held my peace even from good; and my sorrow was stirred up. My heart was hot within me; while I was musing, the fire burned. Then I spoke with my tongue"(verses 2,3). When one is afflicted with a temptation he feels released when he talks about it. When he keeps silent, however, he feels the intensity of pain. The Lord commands us: "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29). We ought to refrain from the repeating corrupt, but communicate whatever is good. When David kept silence, he uttered neither good nor bad communications, because he had mixed emotions. His silence intensified his anguish to a degree that he could no more put up with it. His heart burned within him because of his repressed complaint. Finally he could not hold his peace any longer and spoke up. He had nothing to say about the goodness of God, but the complaint within him burned like fire.

9.2. Second: Speaking in Pain

(verses 4-6)

Silence was no more bearable, and David had to speak. He uttered a prayer to God, asking Him to let him see how his life will fade away. Thus he would leave off grumbling and submit to God's will, just as Moses said, "So teach to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12).

1. **He asked to know how frail his life was:** "Lord, make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am"(verse 4). The psalmist grew weary of his life, did not expect to find any good thing in it, felt it was coming to an end, and that "all was vanity and grasping for the wind" (Ecclesiastes 2:11). So he asked to know the number of days he still had left in this miserable life, from which he will not have any relief until he is dead. Death posed as the only deliverer, as Job said, "That it would please God to crush me...Oh, that You would hide me in the grave" (Job 6:9; 14:13).
2. **He declared that life is short:** "Indeed, You have made my days as handbreadths, and

my age is as nothing before You; certainly every man at his best state is but vapour"(verse 5). Handbreadth was the shortest measurement unit. The psalmist saw that his life was a few handbreadths, as Jacob said, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years; few and evil.." (Genesis 47:9). "Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower and fades away; he flees like a shadow and does not continue", Job proclaimed (Job 14:1,2). "For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away" (James 4:14). Our lives are short if measured by what we would like to achieve and accomplish in it, by the service we would like render to God, family and people in general, and by the desired development of our potentials and talents. But there is another side of the believer's life: it is everlasting with Christ, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

- 3. He declared the vanity of life:** "Surely every man walks about like a shadow; surely they busy themselves in vain; he heaps up riches, and does not know who will gather them"(verse 6). Man's life is short and his end is unknown; he is like a vapour and a shadow, yet he busies himself-- in vain. He is like the foolish rich man whose life came to an abrupt end as God said to him, "This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?" (Luke 12:20). There was a French millionaire named Fouscou. This man laid up all his fortune in the basement under his house, and equipped it with a door that shuts automatically. Every now and then he went down to the basement to visit his huge fortune. One day when he was inside the basement the door was shut and he was locked inside. He could not open the door, and his family did not know where he was since they had no idea about that basement. The man just died among his treasures. The house was sold and the new owner decided after many years to pull down the house to build a new one. As the workers started to dig up the foundations of the house they found Fouscou's bones. He had obviously bitten off a part of the candle that stood beside him to fill his hunger. All his treasures lay in place, and they now fell to the new owner! "He heaps up riches, and does not know who will gather them." But fortune has yet another aspect to it; with it we can build for ourselves eternal homes in heaven as we give out the tithes, help God's work expand, and provide the poor with what they need (Luke 16:9).

9.3. Third: Hope in Pain

(verses 7-9)

The psalmist realised that man's life is only a vapour or a shadow, and that his riches are vain- he does not know who will gather them. Therefore he took the right direction from the Lord, where there is hope and continuity.

- 1. He spoke to the Lord with hope:** "And now, Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in

You"(verse 7). He reached the end of human reasoning, and came up to a dead end. "And now, Lord, what do I wait for?" he began to wonder. It was a cry of despair, but it must be ended by God's light shining upon the believer. Then he will shout, "My hope is in You!" The Lord gathers us when father and mother forsake us (Psalm 27:10), and says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). Hence, the psalmist cast himself into God's bosom, and submitted himself into His loving hands. He really complained of God, but he complained to God, the source of his hopes, to remove his sufferings away from him! This is what Peter did when he denied his master; he did not despair of God's mercy, but wept bitterly and therefore won his eternal life. Later, Christ restored his special place and assigned him the responsibility of watching over His sheep (John 21:15-17). Judas Iscariot did just the opposite. After he has betrayed his Master, he lost hope in God's mercy, and went and hanged himself (Matthew 27:5).

We need to be filled with a confident hope in the Lord at the time of sorrow. Many believers complain of God, but if they take the time to mull over the many blessings He showers them with they would be sure of His goodness and love. If it so happens once that He permits pain, the record of His dealings with us, which are full of love, makes us turn to Him in prayer, being confident of the One we hope in because "all things work together for good to those who love God" (Romans 8:28).

2. **He spoke to the Lord to confess:** "Deliver me from all my transgressions; do not make the reproach of the foolish"(verse 8). The psalmist asked for deliverance from his sufferings and calamities, then put forward a deeper request: To be delivered from his transgressions, which he thought were the cause of these sufferings, so that the foolish sinners should reproach him. He confessed his sin, saying, "Deliver me from all my transgressions" because he hoped for forgiveness and concealment of his sin before God and men, so that he could be faultless and blameless. As He forgives David's transgressions, God stops punishing him, so his sufferings stop too, and the reproaches he receives from people change. This is what the apostle expressed as he said, "'My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.' If you endure chastening God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness" (Hebrews 12:5-10).
3. **He spoke to the Lord submissively:** "I was mute, I did not open my mouth, because it was You who did it"(verse 9). The psalmist was mute out of submission to God and His good, acceptable and perfect will. Everything that happened to him and for him was done according to His predestination or permissive will. The psalmist laid aside his silence

from good, which moved him with pain (verse 2), a silence of rebellion and complaint, and moved into a silence of surrender to the hands of the loving and wise Father, who has the ultimate power over his life and the universe. God extracts His children out of their predicaments, guides them, leads them and trains them "in the paths of righteousness." He always does, and He does magnificently. He knows what we don't know, and sees what we don't see. Therefore we surrender to Him, because "it was You who did it." In this verse we can see the good God who does good, and the good believer who repeats with Christ, "If this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done" (Matthew 26:42).

9.4. Fourth: Supplication in Pain

(verses 10-13)

The psalmist concludes his psalm with a payer coming from someone suffering who cries out to God: "Remove Your plague from me; I am consumed by the blow of Your hand. When with rebukes You correct a man for iniquity, You make his beauty melt away like a moth; surely every man is vapour. Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; do not be silent at my tears; for I am a stranger with You, a sojourner, as all my fathers were. Remove Your gaze from me, that I may regain strength, before I go away and I am no more" (verses 10-13).

In these verses the psalmist pleads for relief and rest. It is a supplication of someone who begs God to spare him the sudden plague that nearly consumed him. If the Lord administers the punishment he deserves to the psalmist, he will become like a garment ruined by the moth, and deprived of its beauty and benefit. The prophet Hosea compares God's punishing hand to moth and rotteness: "I will be to Ephraim like a moth, and to the house Judah like rotteness" (Hosea 5:12). The psalmist, however, realises that the Lord will surely hear his prayer and incline His ear to his crying. If our human hearts are moved with compassion at the sight of the tears of those who suffer, how much more would God's heart be moved with tender mercies on those who weep before Him? When Christ saw the widow of Nain mourning over her only child who died, He said, "Do not weep" and restored her son to life (Luke 7:13). As He saw Mary Magdalene weeping over her Master, whom she thought was dead, He told her, "Why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" and restored her hope to her (John 20:15). God cannot keep silent at the sight of our tears; He preserved David's tears in a water-skin (Psalm 56:8), and in much the same way He feels for us, hears our groanings, sees our tears, and delivers.

David says he is a stranger and a sojourner, although he was not even a normal citizen, lacking a home or money, but a king who had all the substance needed for a luxurious style of living. But as a devout believer, he realised he was a sojourner, a tenant, because God says, "The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me" (Leviticus 25:23). The believers are not the owners, but only stewards.

In David's prayer he requests the Lord to stop beating him, so that he could catch his breath before he goes away and is no more. "Regain my strength" can actually mean: My face shines bright with laughter.

We saw in the first six verses of the psalm the silent sufferer who could not keep silent, so he spoke up. We saw how, when he spoke, his words were not wise. But as he turned to God in prayer, the Holy Spirit prayed within him and filled his prayer with hopeful confidence. The Holy Spirit enabled him to say, "My hope is in You" (verse 7), repent and confess to God, saying, "Deliver me from all my transgressions" (verse 8), submit saying, "I was mute...because it was You who did it" (verse 9), and cry out to God, "Remove Your plague from me" (verse 10). God must deliver him, as much He must deliver you if you approach him the way the psalmist approached Him.

9.5. Questions

1. In Psalm 39:4-6 the psalmist began to speak. What did he say?
2. In his pain the psalmist had hopes. Mention them.

10. Psalm Fourty

I Delight to Do Your Will

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.

1 I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry.

2 He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps.

3 He has put a new song in my mouth-- praise to our God; many will see it and fear, and will trust in the Lord.

4 Blessed is that man who makes the Lord his trust, and does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.

5 Many, O Lord my God, are Your wonderful works which You have done; and Your thoughts toward us cannot be recounted to You in order; if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.

6 Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; my ears You have opened. Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require.

7 Then I said, "Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me.

8 I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart."

9 I have proclaimed the good news of righteousness In the great assembly; indeed, I do not restrain my lips, O Lord, You Yourself know.

10 I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart; I have declared Your faithfulness and Your salvation; I have not concealed Your lovingkindness and Your truth from the great assembly.

11 Do not withhold Your tender mercies from me, O Lord; let Your lovingkindness and Your truth continually preserve me.

12 For innumerable evils have surrounded me; my iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of my head; therefore my heart fails me.

13 Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me; O Lord, make haste to help me!

14 Let them be ashamed and brought to mutual confusion who seek to destroy my life; let them be driven backward and brought to dishonor who wish me evil.

15 Let them be confounded because of their shame, who say to me, "Aha, aha!"

16 Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; let such as love Your salvation say continually, "The Lord be magnified!"

17 But I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinks upon me. You are my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O my God.

This psalm was written on the occasion of a great deliverance the psalmist was expecting. Therefore, he broke forth in praise, thanking God from the deepest core of his being. He also declared this praise before the believers to make them join him in thanksgiving.

The occasion on which this psalm was written is not quite known. Perhaps it was the occasion of David's deliverance from the unsuccessful coup his son Absalom organised to depose him (2 Samuel 15). The children of Israel used to sing this psalm in their public worship on Saturdays, led by the chief musician, namely the chief leader of the temple choir. The psalm served the purpose of expressing their gratitude to the Lord for the deliverance they had experienced, and declaring their expectation to be delivered from all difficulties that would come upon them, for God who delivered would continue to deliver.

There is a Messianic prophecy in verses 6-8. The author of the Hebrews quoted this prophecy as he said, "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure, Then I said, 'Behold, I have come -in the volume of the book it is written of Me- to do Your will, O God'" (Hebrews 10:5-7).

The psalm includes the following:

- First: What the Lord did for the psalmist (verses 1-5)
- Second: What the psalmist did for the Lord (verses 6-10)
- Third: A prayer for deliverance (verses 11-17)

10.1. First: What the Lord Did for the Psalmist

(verses 1-5)

The Lord did two great things for the psalmist:

1. The Lord rewarded the psalmist's waiting by inclining to him and hearing his prayer (verses 1-3)

1. **He heard his prayer:** "I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry"(verse 1). When a child cries, his mother rushes to him, bows down, lifts him up, wipes away his tears and does not leave him till he calms down and smiles. This is perfect love, which was what the psalmist experienced with God, who loved him and answered his prayer. He stood up and beheld the Lord's salvation (Exodus 14:13). The psalmist's waiting for the Lord was full of hope and expectation, therefore the Lord fulfilled his expectations and he experienced the promise: "As one whom His mother comforts, so I will comfort you" (Isaiah 66:13). We see in David's life an excellent example of waiting, which he expressed in Psalm 27:14; 37:7; 62:1,5 and 69:3. On that day it will be said, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation" (Isaiah 25:9).
2. **He saved him:** "He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay"(verse 2a). A pit is a deep dungeon or hole, and the miry clay is black mud mixed with dirt. People of antiquity used to throw prisoners into pits full of miry clay to subject them to slow torture till they die. Jeremiah was thrown into such a pit and it was said of him, "He is likely to die from hunger in the place where he is." When they made up their minds to rescue him, they sent him thirty men to draw him out. Taking along some ragged clothes and ropes, they requested him to tuck the clothes under the ropes under his armpits. They pulled up the ropes and got him out (Jeremiah 38:9-12). A man who falls into a pit and miry clay is in complete darkness, because sun light never reaches him. He despairs of life and loses hope in deliverance. He has no power to deliver himself either, for the pit has no walls he can climb to get out!
3. **He established him:** "And set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps. He has put a new song in my mouth- praise to our God; many will see and fear, and will trust in the Lord"(verses 2b,3). The psalmist was in a pit, with the mud rolling on him, and he was floundering and blundering in it. God saved him, stood him up on a rock, establishing his feet and fulfilling His promise to him: "My steps have held to your paths; my feet have not slipped" (Psalm 17:5 NIV). "You enlarged my path under me; so that my feet did not slip" (Psalm 18:36). His tongue was released to praise the Lord on this account, and a new song came out for a new occasion of divine providence, after he had sung to the Lord thanking Him for His past providence.

He had sung hymns of praise when God delivered him in the past, and now he sang a new song for his present deliverance. Doubtless he will also sing other songs in the future whenever he experiences a new deliverance. God's mercies do not go away; they are new every morning. Great is His faithfulness (Lamentations 3:23). Singing had a great effect on its hearers, causing many to trust the Lord who works salvation. The Lord's miracles are not fantasies, but a repeated, daily experience. Even if the Lord allowed the evil king Herod to kill James, John's brother, with the sword, James still reached his eternal glory in a much quicker way (Acts 12:2). God opened the prison gate for Peter to get out to the street, but this was to give him a longer time of service (Acts 12:7). After his premature death, James went to his everlasting rest to serve his God day and night, and sing a new song. After his miraculous deliverance, Peter went on to preach, write, call for repentance, with a heart full of a new song, as he saw thousands of men returning to God and believing in Christ.

From these verses, as well as from others, we see three privileges that distinguish Christianity:

The first privilege: That God is love: "He inclines His ears to us." He does not look down upon us, but comes down to us. In the fullness of time He sent His Son, born of a woman in a manger. Christ condescended, emptied Himself, assuming the form of a servant (Philippians 2:7). He became what He was not to make us become what we were not. He came down to lift us up; He became poor to make us rich, he died to give us life. He cares for us. Let us rest secure in the knowledge that we are not lost in God's vast universe, because He knows us by name.

The second privilege: We can start a personal relationship with God, in which we become His children, and freely call him as sons, "Our Father in heaven" (Matthew 6:9). He is the one who grants us adoption in Christ, and says to us, "No longer do I call you servants...but I have called you friends" (John 15:15). This reason for this is "that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them" (2 Corinthians 5:19).

The third privilege: The guarantee and assurance based on grace alone. We are not saved by our good works, but only by God's grace and love. He has stretched His loving hand out to us to deliver us, because He is love. This gives us the assurance concerning the continuity of His love and forgiveness "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Therefore Paul said, "For I know whom I have believed and I am persuaded that He is able to keep what I committed to Him until that day" (2 Timothy 1:12).

2. **The Lord rewarded the psalmist's trust by working innumerable miracles with him (verses 4,5)**

1. **He has kept him from the way of the wicked:** "Blessed is the man who makes the Lord His trust, and does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies"(verse 4). God kept the psalmist from the self-conceited men, as well as from the liars; he was not taken in by their sugar-coated, unfulfilled promises, and refused to throw in his lot with them. The psalmist calls the man who trusts the Lord "gever", that is, a strong man who can resist the way of unrighteousness and swim in the direction of goodness despite the strong opposite current. He has rejected pride, submitted to God and discarded the thoughts of the people who tend toward lying, who have abandoned the truth and depended on untrue counterfeits, and veer away toward misleading goals.
2. **He has worked countless miracles with him:** "Many, O Lord my God, are Your wonderful works which You have done; and Your thoughts which are toward us cannot be recounted to You in order"(verse 5a,b). The Lord delivered the psalmist through a miracle which inspired him to write this psalm. It wasn't the first or the only one to happen in his life, for the Lord has been taking care of him since childhood, and has worked miracle upon miracle with him- they are too many to be counted. The psalmist was the object of God's thoughts, and therefore could not count all God's favours toward him! The apostle Paul asked on behalf of the believers that the eyes of their understanding be enlightened to know the exceeding greatness of His power toward them (Ephesians 1:19).
3. **He made him a faithful witness to these divine miracles:** "If I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered"(verse 5c). The original Hebrew has no conditional particle in this verse; rather an emphatic suffix to the first two verbs (declare and speak). Thus the psalmist wanted to emphasise that the miracles were more than he could keep to himself, so he declared them to everyone he met. The same happens with everyone when Christ changes their life; they go and witness to everybody what great things the Lord has done for them (Mark 5:19), and obey Christ's instruction: "You shall be My witnesses" (Acts 1:8).

10.2. Second: What the Psalmist Did for the Lord (verses 6-10)

The believer waited on his God, who rewarded him by fulfilling his expectations. He trusted in God, who rewarded him by cheering his heart. As he felt God's favour, he decided to dedicate his life to God and lead a life of implicit obedience, praise and witnessing.

1. **He resolved to lead a life of obedience and dedication:** "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; my ears You have opened; burnt offering and sin offering You did not require. Then I said, 'Behold, I come; in the scroll of the Book it is written of me. I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart'"(verses 6-8). These three verses

say that true obedience to God is not through offering the duties and rituals of worship only, but through committing oneself to God. They answer an implicit question: How can I express my thanks to my Benefactor? They say that rituals in themselves are useless unless they are coupled with obedience on the part of the worshipper. The prophet Samuel said to Saul, "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams" (1 Samuel 15:22). Again God said, "For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6). The prophet Micah wondered. "With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the Most High? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings?...He has shown, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:6-8). "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1).

The psalmist lists out the types of sacrifices required by the Mosaic law, whose presentation does not connote a whole-hearted obedience to God. He mentions the animal "sacrifice", the "offering" which consists in plants from the ground, "burnt offering" which indicates one's dedication to God, as though he is placing himself on God's altar, and "sin offering" which was offered as a means of reconciliation with God and regaining a right relationship with Him. All such offerings failed to please God, unless they were coupled with a whole-hearted obedience on the part of the one who presented them. As an expression of obedience, the psalmist says, "My ears You have opened." This could possibly mean that God removed the psalmist's deafness to hear God's voice clearly. It could also refer to what the servant who loved his master and refused to leave him used to do, namely he would have his ear pierced by his master, and thereby serve him forever (Exodus 21:6; Deuteronomy 15:17).

No sooner the psalmist realised what God required and what obedience really meant than he responded to His call, saying, "Behold, I come", just as Isaiah said to God, "Here am I! Send me" (Isaiah 6:9).

The psalmist carries with him "the scroll of the Book", which is a parchment on which the law of God is written. It tells a man of his responsibilities toward God, himself and others. He is delighted to do two things: To do God's good, acceptable and perfect will, and to keep God's law in the depth of his heart just as the Lord required of His people (Deuteronomy 6:6), and as all the righteous do (Isaiah 51:7). The law is no longer written on stone tablets, but on the hearts of those who love God.

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews quoted verses 6-8 of our psalm (Hebrews 10:5-7) as being said by Christ, the Word of God Incarnate. The quotation comes from the Septuagint which renders "my ears You have opened" as "You prepared a body for

Me." But anyway the body is the instrument that puts into practice the commands that the ears hear. We find in the "scroll of the Book" (the Torah) many detailed prophecies about Christ's virgin birth, supernatural life, death on the cross, resurrection from the dead, ascension to heaven and second coming to the earth as Judge for the living and the dead. Being the highest example of obedience, Christ took a body to fulfil these prophecies. As He approached the imminent crucifixion He said to the heavenly Father, "If this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done" (Matthew 26:42). "Father, if it is your will remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42). We know that Christ is God appearing in human body, and that He has both the nature of a man and of God. In his perfect humanity He says, "These words were fulfilled in Me, for I obeyed unto death, even the death of the cross."

It is worthy then of everyone who loves God to say, "My ears You have opened. I obey You, Lord. What do You want me to do? What is perverse in me, so that You should correct it? What is lacking in me, so that You should complete it? Behold, I come."

2. **He resolved to lead a life of praise and witness:** "I have proclaimed the good news of righteousness in the great congregation; indeed, I do not restrain my lips, O Lord, You Yourself know. I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart; I have declared Your faithfulness and Your salvation; I have not concealed Your loving-kindness and Your truth from the great congregation"(verses 9,10). In verses 6-8 the psalmist declared that he presented himself a living sacrifice to God, and in verses 9-10 he declares that he is presenting to God a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. It wasn't possible that God would bring the psalmist out of the pit of destruction, establish his feet and put a new song in his mouth, only for the psalmist to keep all these secrets to himself. Likewise, the believer cannot receive forgiveness for his sins without inviting everybody to celebrate with him and to explain to them how they, too, can enjoy what he enjoys. We should not keep the grace of God to ourselves, but share it with others. The psalmist provides the model: "I have proclaimed...I do not restrain...I have not hidden...I have declared...I have not concealed." He also reveals the topics he has proclaimed:
 1. **He proclaimed God's righteousness and justice:**God is righteous; He requites everyone according to his work. He punishes the wicked and rewards the believer, giving each one what he deserves. He is faithful to His promises and laws; He is loving, holy, powerful and wise.
 2. **He proclaimed God's salvation and mercy:**His salvation envelops our spiritual life with forgiveness and redemption, our physical life with care and generosity. He saves from sin (Luke 19:10); and delivers from famine (Psalm 36:6), war (Psalm 27:1-3), and sickness (Luke 8:36).
 3. **He proclaimed the meeting together of God's truth and justice:**These two qualities do not come together except in the redemption which Christ finished for us

on the cross. In the cross the requirements of truth and justice were completely satisfied, and God's mercy and love were made manifest in such a way that the psalmist's prophecy was fulfilled: "Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Psalm 85:10).

10.3. Third: A Prayer for Deliverance

(verses 11-17)

1. **The psalmist prays to be delivered from sin:** "Do not withhold Your tender mercies from me, O Lord; let Your loving-kindness and Your truth continually preserve me. For innumerable evils have surrounded me; my iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of my head; therefore my heart fails me"(verses 11,12). The psalmist declares his trust in God's answer, for He does not withhold His tender mercies from the believer who acknowledges and proclaims God's favour before the great congregation. Likewise, everyone who acknowledges Christ before men, Christ will also acknowledge him before the Father in heaven (Matthew 10:32). He knows that God's mercy and justice will always, because divine redemption reconciles justice to mercy.

The psalmist realises that his great deliverance is through God's kindness, but as for himself, his sins are "innumerable", have become "more than the hairs of his head", have "overtaken him" like a flood, and easily beset him and "surrounded him". As a result he bowed down in weakness and was not able to look up. "His heart failed"; he lost heart. David said in a similar situation, "The waves of death encompassed me, the floods of ungodliness made me afraid" (2 Samuel 22:5). Jonah said in the belly of the fish, "The waters encompassed me, even to my soul; the deep closed around me; weeds were wrapped around my head" (Jonah 2:5). In this confession of sin the psalmist trusts in God's mercy and forgiveness, for "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32).

2. **The psalmist prays for deliverance from the enemies:** "Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me; O Lord, make haste to help me! Let them be ashamed and brought to mutual confusion who seek to destroy my life. Let them be driven backward and brought to dishonour who wish me evil. Let them be appalled because of their shame, who say to me, 'Aha, aha!'"(verses 13-15). The Lord delivered the psalmist, but he was endangered again by those who pursued him and those who mocked and threatened him, saying, "Aha, aha!" The kingdom of the devil never stops fighting against the kingdom of God. Even after Christ defeated Satan and overcame his three temptations in the desert, the Bible says that he "departed from Him until an opportune time" (Luke 4:13). This means that our victory requires more watchfulness and obedience to God. To be saved and

delivered does not mean that our problems are finished, but that we have learned a way to solve our problems, that is by holding on to the Lord who puts a new song of thanksgiving in our mouth for a renewed deliverance from renewed tribulations!

3. **The psalmist prays for gladness:** "Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; let such as love Your salvation say continually, "The Lord be magnified!"(verse 16). The psalmist was not content to pray only for himself, but expanded the circle of his interest, declaring that divine Providence envelops all those who love the Lord with joy and gladness. God gives them thankful hearts that experience the shout of triumph: "The Lord be magnified!" Paul declared his own triumphant shout as he said, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally there is laid for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7,8).
4. **The psalmist admits God's favour:** "But I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinks upon me. You are my help and my deliverer, do not delay, O my God"(verse 17). The psalmist admits his need, poverty and misery, yet he trusts that God will not forget him! Daniel prayed, "O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by Your name" (Daniel 9:19). The psalmist discerns his material, intellectual, social, emotional and spiritual poverty. But, at the same time, he discerns God's riches, and at once becomes assured of God's comfort in his solitude and sorrow, and that he will overcome despite his troubles and anguish. He will experience that God does not delay coming to His beloved ones and those who seek Him. God says to the believer, "I bring My righteousness near, it shall not be far off; My salvation shall not linger" (Isaiah 46:13), and the believer says to God, "I waited patiently for the Lord...do not delay."

10.4. Questions

1. What are the three privileges that distinguish Christianity?
2. Psalm 40:6-10 tell what the psalmist did for the Lord. What did the psalmist do?

11. Quiz

There are two questions at the end of each chapter. If you answer 15 of these questions correctly you may join our Bible school by correspondence and work toward a certificate.

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