

Meditations on the Psalms

Volume Eight: Psalms 71-80

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1. Psalm Seventy-One

The Testimony of a Godly Elder

1 In You, O LORD, I put my trust; let me never be put to shame.

2 Deliver me in Your righteousness, and cause me to escape; incline Your ear to me, and save me.

3 Be my strong refuge, to which I may resort continually; You have given the commandment to save me, for You are my rock and my fortress.

4 Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man.

5 For You are my hope, O Lord GOD; You are my trust from my youth.

6 By You I have been upheld from birth; You are He who took me out of my mother's womb. My praise shall be continually of You.

7 I have become as a wonder to many, but You are my strong refuge.

8 Let my mouth be filled with Your praise and with Your glory all the day.

9 Do not cast me off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength fails.

10 For my enemies speak against me; and those who lie in wait for my life take counsel together,

11 Saying, "God has forsaken him; pursue and take him, for there is none to deliver him."

12 O God, do not be far from me; O my God, make haste to help me!

13 Let them be confounded and consumed who are adversaries of my life; let them be covered with reproach and dishonor who seek my hurt.

14 But I will hope continually, and will praise You yet more and more.

15 My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness and Your salvation all the day, for I do not know their limits.

16 I will go in the strength of the Lord GOD; I will make mention of Your righteousness, of Yours only.

17 O God, You have taught me from my youth; and to this day I declare Your wondrous works.

18 Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, do not forsake me, until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to everyone who is to come.

19 Also Your righteousness, O God, is very high, You who have done great things; O God, who is like You?

20 You, who have shown me great and severe troubles, shall revive me again, and bring me up again from the depths of the earth.

21 You shall increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side.

22 Also with the lute I will praise you -- and Your faithfulness, O my God! To You I will sing with the harp, O Holy One of Israel.

23 My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing to You, and my soul, which You have redeemed.

24 My tongue also shall talk of Your righteousness all the day long; for they are confounded, for they are brought to shame who seek my hurt.

This psalm expresses the feelings of a godly elder who testifies of his past experiences. As he remembers God's dealings with him, he admits his weaknesses and recalls the trials he went through. Yet, he does not forget the talents, the natural and supernatural gifts that God gave him. Remembering the past, his hearts fills with hope for the future.

This psalm is a reminder to the elders to sing a testimony about their past life with the Lord. It also inspires the young to know what they may say as they advance in age. It is a psalm for all ages. Pastors often read it to the sick when they visit them.

The psalm includes the following:

- First: The Confidence of the Godly Elder (verse 1-4)
- Second: The Memories of the Godly Elder (verse 5-8)
- Third: The Troubles of the Godly Elder (verse 9-13)
- Fourth: The Victory of the Godly Elder (verse 14-24)

1.1. First: The Confidence of the Godly Elder

(verse 1-4)

The first three verses of this psalm are quoted from the onset of Psalm 31. Most likely, David's words in Psalm 31 were the favourite song of the author of this psalm. He opened with these verses to declare his confidence in the Lord in verses 1 and 3, and in verses 2 and 4 he starts to ask the Lord for things.

1. **The reassurance of the godly elder:** "In You, O LORD, I put my trust; let me never be put to shame... Be my strong refuge, to which I may resort continually; You have given the commandment to save me, for You are my rock and my fortress" (verse 1,3). This is a declaration of confidence in the Lord and His protection; this is why he will never be put

to shame. The Apostle Paul put it in much the same way: "According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed" (Philippians 1:20). He abides in God, and shall never be shaken; he hides in the shelter of the Almighty, as David hid in the cave from Saul. The psalmist knows that God is always a rock of refuge for him, for He gave a command to save and deliver him. God commanded light to shine out of darkness, and it was so. And when He gives a command to save, salvation surely comes. He is always there with His righteous servant; and the righteous run to Him and are safe (Proverbs 18:10). He is the Lord of nature, who commands it to serve His servants; He is the Lord of Providence, who charges it for their good; and He is the Lord of angels, who directs them to guard His people.

There is a special relationship between the psalmist and God, which makes him address God with certainty: "You are my rock and my fortress." God's fortress is impregnable to all attacks, yet it has a window that is ever open so that prayers may ascend as sweet incense.

2. **The request of the godly elder:** "Deliver me in Your righteousness, and cause me to escape; incline Your ear to me, and save me... Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man" (verse 2,4). He appeals to the Lord's righteousness to deliver him from the wicked and cruel man, because the Lord judges everyone according to their works. He also seeks the Lord's reassuring intimacy when he says, "Incline Your ear to me." God is not far away, but his heart needs the reassurance anyway.

There are two lessons for us in the request of the godly elder:

1. **True prayer is a faith prayer:** "For he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). Let the believer "ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord" (James 1:5-7).
2. **True prayer is an expectant prayer:** He who cries out to God in prayer knows well that his Father who is in heaven gives good things to those who ask Him! (Matthew 7:11). Because He hears prayer, to Him all flesh will come (Psalm 65:2). As a believer, you speak God with the assurance that He hears you and is able to help you. He is wise in all the advice He gives, for He is Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God (Isaiah 9:6).

1.2. Second: The Memories of the Godly Elder (verse 5-8)

The psalmist mentions three memories, which he follows with words of thanks and praise:

1. **He remembers the days of his youth:** "For You are my hope, O Lord GOD; You are my trust from my youth" (verse 5). How wonderful it is to recall God's dealings with us and conclude that "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Psalm 23:1). Another elder, Jacob, said as much to his son Joseph in his last days, "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has fed me all my life long to this day" (Genesis 48: 15). During his youth, the psalmist experienced the goodness and care of God who preserved him at the time of temptation. It seems that God seemed to say to him, "Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth" (Revelation 3:10). God set his feet upon a rock and established his steps (Psalm 40:2). Even when he fell, he was not utterly cast down; for the LORD upheld him with His hand (Psalm 37:24). God preserved David from Goliath and Saul, and used him in some quite heroic acts. In old age He would also keep him safe from all danger, and use him in mightier works.
2. **He remembers how God brought him into being:** "By You I have been upheld from birth; You are He who took me out of my mother's womb. My praise shall be continually of You" (verse 6). "For You formed my inward parts... Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them" (Psalm 139:13,16). Before the psalmist was aware of his own existence, while he was yet an embryo, and after his birth, when he could do nothing on his own, God gave him life and upheld him. Similarly, He told Jeremiah that "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you" (Jeremiah 1:5). His promises still hold true to all His people: "Listen to Me, O house of Jacob who have been upheld by Me from birth, who have been carried from the womb: even to your old age, I am He, and even to grey hairs I will carry you! I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you" (Isaiah 46:3,4).
3. **He remembers how he was in his sufferings and trials "as a wonder to many":** "I have become as a wonder to many, but You are my strong refuge. Let my mouth be filled with Your praise and with Your glory all the day" (verse 7,8). They saw him suffer from afflictions and thought that his God deserted him. But the afflictions increased his determination to hold fast to his God, and as a result, God remained a strong tower for him. He went through the experience of the suffering Messiah, thus astonishing many (Isaiah 52:14), because of what had become of him. But after all, divine victory was his.

God was with the godly elder since he was an embryo, carried him with love and might in his youth, and was a strong tower for him in times of trouble, therefore both his friends and foes were astonished. As a result, the mouth of the godly elder was filled with God's praise, and he spent the whole day thanking, praising and glorifying the God of heavenly glory for what He did for him.

1.3. Third: The Troubles of the Godly Elder

(verse 9-13)

The godly elder mentions two sorts of troubles he went through and how he overcame them in prayer:

1. **Troubles of physical fatigue:** "Do not cast me off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength fails" (verse 9). Every elderly person is apt to get into these problems. Ecclesiastes 12:1-8 depicted old age in a figurative poem full of images and metonymy. The author describes the years in which a man takes no pleasure, when the sun and the light, the moon and the stars are darkened, meaning that pleasure comes to an end because death is near. "And the clouds do not return after the rain," since they have already poured down all the good rain. In old age one's arms, "the keepers of the house," start to tremble, and the feet, "the strong men," bow down. Also the teeth, "the grinders," cease and the eyes, "those that look through the windows," grow dim. "The doors," (the ears and eyes) through which sound and light comes in, will be shut. The sound made by the teeth, "the sound of grinding," becomes low, while sleep becomes light and one rises up at the sound of a bird! An old man does not take pleasure any more in the sound of music; for him "all the daughters of music are brought low." He becomes "afraid of height," in that his legs grow weaker and incapable of climbing up any more. "The almond tree blossoms," namely his hair grows grey, and "The grasshopper is a burden," because, as small as it is, he has no strength to lift it up! One's appetite for food ceases "and desire fails. For man goes to his eternal home." And as he dies, the mourners go about the streets, because the silver cord (carrying the golden olive oil to the branch of the lampstand) comes loose, and the golden bowl (by which the lampstand is fed) is broken. The pitcher shatters at the fountain, and the wheel is broken at the well. Then the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

God has never rejected his loved ones in the time of their old age, when their strength fails. It was said of Moses that he "was one hundred and twenty years old when he died. His eyes were not dim nor his natural vigour diminished" (Deuteronomy 34:7). Caleb said, "Here I am this day, eighty-five years old. As yet I am as strong this day as on the day that Moses sent me; just as my strength was then, so now is my strength for war, both for going out and for coming in" (Joshua 14:10,11). The divine promise is true that "Those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31).

2. **Troubles from the people around him (verse 10,11):** Some people rejoice when they see others in trouble. The enemies of the godly elder monitored his every step; they said every evil word against him. Hearing of his physical ailments and afflictions, they assumed that God had deserted him and would not deliver him any more. They made up

their mind to pursue him and hurt his reputation, finances and children. This is very much reminiscent of Rabshakeh, the commander of the Assyrian army, who came to invade the kingdom of Judah and sent messengers to King Hezekiah, saying, "Have I now come up without the LORD against this land to destroy it? The LORD said to me, 'Go up against this land, and destroy it'" (Isaiah 36:10). Yet, he lied in all he said. The only thing that was left for Hezekiah to do was to turn to God. He tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD to seek help (Isaiah 37:1). This is what the godly elder did when his bodily weakness and enemies gave him trouble: He turned to God in prayer and found a way of deliverance. He cried out to his divine Saviour, "O God, do not be far from me; O my God, make haste to help me! Let them be confounded and consumed who are adversaries of my life; let them be covered with reproach and dishonour who seek my hurt" (verse 12,13). And God must have listened to the cry for help and sent speedy assistance as He usually did. So the godly elder declared in the final part of the psalm that his faith overcame, and that his enemies were covered with shame and dishonour as they saw God lifting up the one they persecuted. They thought that God left him, but he "who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (Psalm 91:1).

1.4. Fourth: The Victory of the Godly Elder

(verse 14-24)

It is so wonderful to hear the psalmist's tone changing from one of fear and helplessness to one of assurance and confident declaration of his victory in God. This declaration takes up about half of the psalm.

1. The godly elder declares his victory in many ways (verse 14-17):

1. **Through praise:** "But I will hope continually, and will praise You yet more and more" (verse 14). "But" explains the difference between what he does and what his enemies did. They tried to frustrate him, but his hope in God remained strong, because God has not given him a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7).

This was not the end of the God's mercies to the psalmist, and they will never be, for they are new every morning (Lamentations 3:23). Thus the psalmist multiplies his praise to the Lord, because he is awed by Him and his mighty deeds. He sings out his thanksgiving even more than ever before.

2. **Through his daily confession in secret and among his family (verse 15,16):** The occasions on which God rescued him were so many. Impressed, he reacts by spending the whole day speaking about them. He says in this respect, "I will go in the strength of the Lord GOD; I will make mention of Your righteousness, of Yours only" (verse 16). This means that he talks about God's mighty deeds, about His unique

righteousness and justice. The Lord has saved him from his enemies and has given him back what was rightfully his. He has also exonerated him from his sins and has given him a right standing with Himself, so much so that he is able to say like Paul, "Not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith" (Philippians 3:9).

3. **Through his daily conversation about the Lord with his friends and acquaintances:** "O God, You have taught me from my youth; and to this day I declare Your wondrous works" (verse 17). He says what the Lord has taught him since his youth, and tells about the wonders he has done for him. What a great teacher and what a glorious school! This is the theoretical and theological school where the Lord is known for who He really is, as well as the practical school where one knows what the Lord does; both in health and in sickness, in plenty and in want, in youth and in old age. We learn from the psalmist to witness to everyone we meet about the Lord's faithfulness, and proclaim the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvellous light. It is also a commandment to tell what great things the Lord has done for us, and how He has had compassion on us.

2. **The victorious godly elder asks with assurance (verse 18-21):**

Having declared his victory, the psalmist moves on to prayer. He asks God not to forsake him (verse 18). He depends on the righteous God, who gives everyone what is rightfully his, and does great and mighty acts that none can imitate (verse 19). God was good to him in the past and He will surely be good to him in the future; He will again comfort him (verse 20,21).

"Now also when I am old and grey-headed, O God, do not forsake me, until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to everyone who is to come" (verse 18). The godly elder asks God to preserve his health, so that he could hand down to his children, grandchildren, and the coming generation his own experiences with God, to teach them about God's faithfulness and love. They were supposed to recall the memory of the miracle of the exodus in the reality of their contemporary lives. Then the godly elder would attain what Samuel spoke about: "I am old and grey-headed, and look, my sons are with you. I have walked before you from my childhood to this day" (1 Samuel 12:2).

For this request to be granted he had to depend on God's unique righteousness and transcendence. He is the incomparable One who dwells in heaven: "Also Your righteousness, O God, is very high, You who have done great things; O God, who is like You?" (verse 19). "Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" (Exodus 15:11). True, the Lord allows His people to see trouble, but He must raise them up from the bottom of the pit, so they can enjoy the sun of righteousness with healing in its wings. The Lord increased the

greatness of the psalmist and comforted him, so he could not help saying, "O LORD, I will praise You; though You were angry with me, Your anger is turned away, and You comfort me" (Isaiah 12:1). Similarly, everyone who obtains God's righteousness through Christ sees God's highness and great deeds, experiences one miracle and one grace after another, and says with the godly elder, "You, who have shown me great and severe troubles, shall revive me again, and bring me up again from the depths of the earth" (verse 20). God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it (1 Corinthians 10:13). "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4:17). If he allows us to be chastened at present, He will eventually grant us peaceable fruit of righteousness (Hebrews 12:11), just as our psalmist said, "You shall increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side" (verse 21). This was David's experience. The Lord took him from following the sheep, made him a King, and him a great name, like the name of the great men who are on the earth (2 Samuel 7:9). This also happened with Mordechai, the doorkeeper of the king, whom the king delighted to honour. He became the prime minister of the greatest empire in his time (Esther 6:8). How great is He who "suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit" (1 Peter 3:18).

3. The godly elder sings for the joy of victory (verse 22-24):

As a natural result of God's comforting mercy the voice of the godly elder rings out in praise to God: "Also with the lute I will praise you; and Your faithfulness, O my God! To You I will sing with the harp, O Holy One of Israel" (verse 22). His song expressed his feelings about God: "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. He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:18,19).

Joyful singing comes from the depth of the redeemed soul that says, "My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing to You, and my soul, which You have redeemed" (verse 23). For "The LORD redeems the soul of His servants, And none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned" (Psalm 34:22). "He has redeemed my soul in peace from the battle that was against me, for there were many against me" (Psalm 55:18). Because of the greatness of this redemption, the soul sings and shouts, "To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever" (Revelation 1:5,6).

Singing comes also from the heart that trusts in its victory and peace: "My tongue also shall talk of Your righteousness all the day long; for they are brought to shame who seek my hurt" (verse 24). The tongue of the godly elder talks of God's righteousness and

justice, because he realises that his enemies must be ashamed, and he must be delivered. This is the lot of all who say, "For You are my hope, O Lord GOD; You are my trust from my youth" (verse 5).

1.5. Questions

1. The godly elder remembered three things to be thankful for. What are they?
2. The godly elder mentioned two things that troubled him. What are they? How did he overcome them?

2. Psalm Seventy-Two

The Kingdom of the Messiah

A Psalm of Solomon.

1 Give the king Your judgments, O God, and Your righteousness to the king's Son.

2 He will judge Your people with righteousness, and Your poor with justice.

3 The mountains will bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness.

4 He will bring justice to the poor of the people; He will save the children of the needy, and will break in pieces the oppressor.

5 They shall fear You as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations.

6 He shall come down like rain upon the grass be-fore mowing, like showers that water the earth.

7 In His days the righteous shall flourish, and abundance of peace, until the moon is no more.

8 He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.

9 Those who dwell in the wilderness will bow be-fore Him, and His enemies will lick the dust.

10 The kings of Tarshish and of the isles will bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba will offer gifts.

11 Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him; all na-tions shall serve Him.

12 For He will deliver the needy when he cries, the poor also, and him who has no helper.

13 He will spare the poor and needy, and will save the souls of the needy.

14 He will redeem their life from oppression and vi-olence; and precious shall be their blood in His sight.

15 And He shall live; and the gold of Sheba will be given to Him; prayer also will be made for Him continually, and daily He shall be praised.

16 There will be an abundance of grain in the earth, on the top of the mountains; its fruit shall wave

like Lebanon; and those of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth.

17 His name shall endure forever; His name shall continue as long as the sun. And men shall be blessed in Him; all nations shall call Him blessed.

18 Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only does wondrous things!

19 And blessed be His glorious name forever! And let the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen and Amen.

Psalm 71 spoke of God's righteousness, whereas this psalm speaks of the blessings that will overflow from His representative on earth. The people of old thought this representative would be Solomon the son of David, but in fact, it was the awaited Saviour the Messiah who would descend from David. We have already seen many psalms in which the author cries out from injustice, but in this one we see the just king upholding the cause of the wronged and stopping the misdeeds of the oppressors. The superscription of the psalm says it is "A Psalm of Solomon," which means that it is about him and for him. The Syriac translations render the superscription thus: "A Psalm of David when he made Solomon King, a prophecy about the coming of the Messiah, and a call for the nations." Most probably, David wrote this psalm, which Solomon heard recorded before, or shortly after, his father's death.

In this psalm, David regards Solomon's reign as a type for the coming Saviour, the Messiah and King. It is evident that Solomon had a great beginning, but his end was a painful one. He was so cruel to his subjects that they said to his son Rehoboam after his death, "Your father made our yoke heavy; now therefore, lighten the burdensome service of your father and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you" (2 Chronicles 10:4). But as Rehoboam refused to grant the people's wish, the kingdom was divided, and thus David's expectation of Solomon did not come true. The content of our psalm, then, must find its fulfilment in the Messiah and King, the Son of David, of whom it was said, "Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly He shall speak peace to the nations; His dominion shall be 'from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth'" (Zechariah 9:9,10). The early church chose this psalm for Christmastide, because the Magi came a long way to pay homage and worship the born King, offering Him gold, frankincense and myrrh (Matthew 2:11). Let us pray that the words of this psalm be fulfilled in our lives, so that Christ may reign over us.

The psalm includes the following:

- First: The Kingdom of Christ is Just (verse 1-7)
- Second: The Kingdom of Christ is Universal (verse 8-15)
- Third: The Kingdom of Christ is Everlasting (verse 16-19)

2.1. First: The Kingdom of Christ is Just

(verse 1-7)

There are three ideas in these seven verses:

1. **The people ask for a just reign:** "Give the king Your judgements, O God, and Your righteousness to the king's Son" (verse 1). "The judgement is God's" (Deuteronomy 1:17), but He gave his judgements to the king's Son. The earthly king has power that comes from his father, the previous King, as well as power invested in himself. God appeared to King Solomon, the son of King David, in Gibeon in a dream and asked him what He should give him. So Solomon asked for an understanding heart to discern between good and evil (1 Kings 3:6-9). And God granted his wish. Even though he loved to walk in the statutes of his father David, Solomon still sacrificed and burned incense at the high places, like the pagans, therefore the prophecies of this psalm were not fulfilled in him. They had to be fulfilled in the Messiah, the coming King, who has the throne of David and about Whom the angel Gabriel said to Mary before she conceived Him, "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32,33). This is what was said of Him by the Spirit of prophecy, "The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him ... and He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, nor decide by the hearing of His ears; but with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked" (Isaiah 11:2-4). This expectation will also be fulfilled in Christ who will come back to our planet as a righteous Judge: "For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will" (John 5:21). Therefore, we call out to God today, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).
2. **A description of the righteous kingdom (verse 2-6):**
 1. **A kingdom that produces peace:** "He will judge Your people with righteousness, and Your poor with justice. The mountains will bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness" (verse 2,3). It is a kingdom of righteousness for the broken-hearted who need the protection of righteous government (Isaiah 3:14,15). This was Christ's public statement in the synagogue of Nazareth: "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted" (Luke 4:16-19). Christ ushered in a true jubilee year, "the acceptable year of the LORD," in which debts are cancelled, lands sold revert to their owners, and the slaves are set free. This has always, and will always, be His call: "Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

As a result of the justice and righteousness that will reign over all, "The mountains will bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness." The mountains and the little hills symbolise the nobility and the upper class folk. Peace prevails when righteousness rules. A righteous king reassures his people and causes the high officials and the nobles to bring peace to the people. A high mountain sees the need of a low valley and pours down onto it that which God spilled over it. "Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it ... He shall judge between the nations ... nation shall not lift up sword against nation ... Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field. The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever" (Isaiah 2:2-4; 32:16,17). He is the Anointed One, the King and the Priest, according to the order of Melchizedek. He is also the King of righteousness and justice owing to the fact that He paid our debts on the cross, as well as the King of peace because He reconciled us to God. When He comes to the earth, He will visit His people with mercy, reward their faithfulness, and punish their enemies who did them wrong.

2. **A kingdom that teaches godliness:** "He will bring justice to the poor of the people; He will save the children of the needy, and will break in pieces the oppressor. They shall fear You as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations" (verse 4,5). The judges of the Israelites neglected justice: "They do not plead the cause, the cause of the fatherless; yet they prosper, and the right of the needy they do not defend" (Jeremiah 5:28). The Messiah came to save them, because His kingdom brings justice to the oppressed, those who need special protection, the lonely, the crushed, those who are not cared for, and those who cannot face life (Isaiah 10:2). "For judgement is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgement" (James 2:13).

When the king is righteous, people see the righteousness of heaven clearly, and all hearts are filled with the fear of God: "They shall fear You as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations." The light of the godly shines from their hearts as long as the light from the sun and the moon remains. People will fear God under the sun and the moon throughout all generations.

3. **A kingdom of plenty that gladdens the hearts:** "He shall come down like rain upon the grass before mowing, like showers that water the earth. In His days the righteous shall flourish, and abundance of peace, until the moon is no more" (verse 6,7). Grass means plenty of food for both man and animal. Under a righteous king the people are filled with God's love that comes "like the rain, like the latter and former rain to the earth" (Hosea 6:3). Righteousness leads to prosperity, and a righteous king always governs a kingdom where all the needs of his subjects are met. This is what David

says in his final song: "He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be like the light of the morning when the sun rises, a morning without clouds, like the tender grass springing out of the earth, by clear shining after rain" (2 Samuel 23:3,4). Then there will be "showers of blessing" (Ezekiel 34:26), and "times of refreshing" will come "from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19).

Because of the king's righteousness, "In His days the righteous shall flourish, and abundance of peace, until the moon is no more." The righteous will be happy and their faces will shine. They will hold important positions and peace shall abound until the time ends and the moon will be no more. And then the saying will come true: "But the righteous will flourish like foliage" (Proverbs 11:28).

2.2. Second: The Kingdom of Christ is Universal

(verse 8-15)

When the people come to know this righteous King and enjoy his just rule, they will love to unite under Him, and his rule will include them all.

1. The extent of the Messiah's kingdom (verse 9-11):

1. **It reaches all the earth:** "He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth" (verse 8). This symbolic description of the expansion of the kingdom is borrowed from the boundaries of the Land of Promise: "And I will set your bounds from the Red Sea to the Sea, Philistia, and from the desert to the River" (Exodus 23:31). It is also borrowed from the boundaries of Solomon's kingdom: "So Solomon reigned... from the River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt over all the region on this side of the River from Tiphshah even to Gaza, namely over all the kings on this side of the River; and he had peace on every side all around him" (1 Kings 4:21,24). This expansion is also described thus: "They shall come to you from Assyria and the fortified cities, from the fortress to the River, from sea to sea, and mountain to mountain" (Micah 7:12). The whole world belongs to the Lord, and He gives it over to His Anointed One: "His dominion shall be 'from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth'" (Zechariah 9:10).
2. **All nations submit to it:** "Those who dwell in the wilderness will bow before Him, and His enemies will lick the dust" (verse 9). Those who dwell in the wilderness are nomads, free to move about, and not limited by boundaries. Yet, they grovel on the ground before the universal King in abject submission: "They shall lick the dust like a serpent; they shall crawl from their holes like snakes of the earth. They shall be afraid of the LORD our God" (Micah 7:17). This will take place at the second coming of Christ, when "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10,11).

3. **All kings submit to it:** "The kings of Tarshish and of the isles will bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba will offer gifts. Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him" (verse 10,11). Those rich kings are obliged to give gifts to the Messiah and King, as sign of submission to Him. They will come from everywhere: From Tarshish, which was a rich Phoenician colony in the south of Spain, and the farthest point of the known world at that time, and from Seba, which is Ethiopia. As the kings offer their offerings and gifts, and worship the universal King, all their nations will worship Him. This prophecy was only partially fulfilled in Solomon. "So Solomon reigned over all kingdoms... They brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life and men of all nations, from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom, came to hear the wisdom of Solomon" (1 Kings 4:21,34). The whole prophecy, however, will be fulfilled, both spiritually and physically, in Christ when He comes again to our planet: "And I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession" (Psalm 2:8).
2. **The reasons of the expansion of the Messiah's kingdom (verse 12-15):**
 1. **The Messiah's compassion:** "For He will deliver the needy when he cries, the poor also, and him who has no helper. He will spare the poor and needy, and will save the souls of the needy" (verse 12,13). Christ's rule does not expand by the sword, but through justice, love and extending help to those under it. This kingdom is spiritual and it overcomes spiritually. The heart of the ruler is full of compassion, mercy, tenderness and love. He is Almighty, and there is nothing too difficult for Him. He is also just and does not approve of injustice. He appreciates the need of the needy who cry out to Him, and the helpless who cannot help themselves. The Lord spares the poor from the wrong of others, as well as from their own wrong. "The humble also shall increase their joy in the LORD, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 29:19).
 2. **The Messiah's redemption:** "He will redeem their life from oppression and violence; and precious shall be their blood in His sight" (verse 14). Christ, the Good Shepherd, saves his lambs from the wolves, and redeems their souls by laying down His own life for them. He esteems their blood, which is their life (Leviticus 17:11). He sees them worthy of being redeemed by His great sacrifice. He supplies them with all their needs, saying, "The poor and needy seek water, but there is none, their tongues fail for thirst. I, the LORD, will hear them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them" (Isaiah 41:17). When King Saul was pursuing David, he himself fell into the hands of David. Instead of killing him, David forgave him. This caused Saul to say to David, "My life was precious in your eyes this day" (1 Samuel 26:21). We offended the Lord with our sins, and deserve to be destroyed. Yet, in His mercy, He regards our souls precious in His eyes and redeems us from the wrong we did to ourselves and from the

wrong we did to others. He saves! How great is the redemption that Christ effected on the cross! "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 1:7).

3. **The Messiah's gift:** "And He shall live; and the gold of Sheba will be given to Him; prayer also will be made for Him continually, and daily He shall be praised" (verse 15). Christ redeems the life of the believer and gives him great gifts. These gifts are compared to "the gold of Sheba," which is the best quality of gold, and the rarest. In appreciation of this divine kindness, the believer offers up to Christ the dearest thing he has, which the Magi also did (Matthew 2:11).

Christ prays for the believer, saying, "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word" (John 17:20). He always lives to make intercession for them (Hebrews 7:8,25). In appreciation of this divine kindness, the believer prays always and does not lose heart.

Christ blesses the believer all day long, from the rising of the sun till the time it goes down, as well as preserving him from the dangers of the night. Therefore the believer blesses the Lord all day long, saying, "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits" (Psalm 103:2).

2.3. Third: The Kingdom of Christ is Everlasting

(verse 16-19)

In these four verses, the psalmist declares that the Messiah's kingdom will grow, increase and receive glorification and praise from the entire earth.

1. **The Messiah's everlasting kingdom will grow unceasingly:** "There will be an abundance of grain in the earth, on the top of the mountains; its fruit shall wave like Lebanon; and those of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth. His name shall endure forever; His name shall continue as long as the sun. And men shall be blessed in Him; all nations shall call Him blessed" (verse 16,17). The Messiah's kingdom starts out like a handful of grain sown on the top of the mountains. It soon grows; first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head (Mark 4:28). The winds blow on it, causing its to grow deep into the soil. It becomes like the cedar of Lebanon in beauty and loftiness, and like the dewy grass of the land that refreshes whoever beholds it or walks upon it. "I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall grow like the lily, and lengthen his roots like Lebanon. His branches shall spread; his beauty shall be like an olive tree, and his fragrance like Lebanon. Those who dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall be revived like grain, and grow like a vine" (Hosea 14:5-7). "Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit" (Isaiah 27:6). "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of

the air come and nest in its branches" (Matthew 13:31,32). There is a potential power in the seed of the word of God, and it must work and expand. The Holy Spirit will make sure that it will have an effect. It will effectively continue to work among everyone forever, causing many people to repent and return to God. Thus the prophecy will be fulfilled: "Behold, I will lift My hand in an oath to the nations, and set up My standard for the peoples; they shall bring your sons in their arms, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders Then you will know that I am the LORD, for they shall not be ashamed who wait for Me" (Isaiah 49:22,23). So the name of the Messiah will endure forever and His kingdom will never come to an end. "His name shall continue as long as the sun," and it will go from one country to another. "And men shall be blessed in Him" because He is their generous benefactor. "All nations shall call Him blessed" through words of songs of glorification like the ones in the following two verses.

2. **All the earth praises the Messiah's everlasting kingdom:** "Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only does wondrous things! And blessed be His glorious name forever! And let the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen and Amen" (verse 18,19). They will praise Him for His singular wonders, of which Job said, "He does great things past finding out, yes, wonders without number" (Job 9:10). He works wonders in nature, which declares His glory; and in the firmament, which shows His handiwork. He works wonders for His people "telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done" (Psalm 78:4). This is how He demonstrates his power and love. Who else can do these wonderful acts?! He alone is able to do these things; so let us bless Him, because He alone is worthy. The whole earth will continue praising the Lord forever, and will be completely filled with His glory. All the peoples of the earth will bow down before the One who said, "As I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD" (Numbers 14:21).

The people will hear this call to praise everywhere: "Stand up and bless the LORD your God forever and ever! Blessed be Your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise!" (Nehemiah 9:5). And their answer will be: Amen, Amen! While lifting up their hands, they will bow their heads and worship the LORD with their faces to the ground (Nehemiah 8:6). "Blessed be the LORD forevermore! Amen and Amen" (Psalm 89:52). "Blessed be the LORD from everlasting to everlasting! And let all the people say, 'Amen!' Praise the LORD!" (Psalm 106:48).

Oh, are we not blessed with such a great King, whose kingdom is everlasting, universal and righteous! He chose us to be His own people, so let us indeed be his people and the sheep of His pasture!

2.4. Questions

1. The psalmist mentions three descriptions for the just kingdom. Mention them.

2. Why does the kingdom of the Messiah expand?

3. Psalm Seventy-Three

Astonishment at the Prosperity of the Wicked.

A Psalm of Asaph.

1 Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart.

2 But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped.

3 For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

4 For there are no pangs in their death, but their strength is firm.

5 They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men.

6 Therefore pride serves as their necklace; violence covers them like a garment.

7 Their eyes bulge with abundance; they have more than heart could wish.

8 They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression; they speak loftily.

9 They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walks through the earth.

10 Therefore his people return here, and waters of a full cup are drained by them.

11 And they say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?"

12 Behold, these are the ungodly, who are always at ease; they increase in riches.

13 Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence.

14 For all day long I have been plagued, and chastened every morning.

15 If I had said, "I will speak thus," behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of Your children.

16 When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me

17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end.

18 Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction.

19 Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors.

20 As a dream when one awakes, so, Lord, when You awake, You shall despise their image.

21 Thus my heart was grieved, and I was vexed in my mind.

22 I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You.

23 Nevertheless I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand.

24 You will guide me with Your counsel, and after-ward receive me to glory.

25 Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.

26 My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

27 For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish; You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry.

28 But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all Your works.

This psalm is a complaint lodged with God by a suffering, persecuted believer. The believer saw the wicked prospering, having more success from their wickedness than godliness and purity would bring, so he doubted God's goodness to the righteous. He began to consider godliness and purity stagnant commodities, or even harmful, and think that the evil of the wicked is useful and beneficial. Right at the start of his astonishment, he was afraid that if he revealed his opinion to the godly worshippers, they would stumble, but after his astonishment was over and he found the answer, he recorded all his feelings in this psalm.

The darkness of the psalmist's thoughts cleared up as he entered into the sanctuary of the Lord. Then he saw things in perspective and recognised that stagnation and desolation will suddenly befall the prosperity of the wicked. Godliness, however, has the promise of life, both present and future. Later, he confessed his mistake to the Lord, and offered Him thanksgiving for the glory of being close to Him.

This psalm speaks of the astonishment of the believer as he passes through inexplicable crises. It teaches us that the best we can do is appear in the presence of God and ask Him to answer all our questions. He is not bothered by our doubts, nor does he drive us away from His presence because of our lack of understanding. Rather, He brings us closer to Him, and unravels the mysteries of His love. At this we cannot but say along with the author of this Psalm, "Nevertheless I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand. You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory" (verses 23,24).

Psalm 73 reminds us of Psalm 37, in which the believer has a problem with the prosperity of the wicked and the troubles of the believers. So he tells the believers to have patience and trust in the Lord. For the prosperity of the wicked is short-lived, while the reward of the believer is everlasting. The psalm also reminds us of Psalm 49, which expresses the fact that wealth does not continue bringing happiness to its owner, whereas God's care of the righteous is permanent and never ceases. Although Psalm 37 and Psalm 49 are alike in speaking of the prosperity of the wicked, Psalm 73 adds another dimension. That is, the troubles and astonishment of the believers as they see the wicked prosper. It is marked by blessing the believer for his joyous relationship with the Lord and explaining the beauty of intimacy with God in this life and the one to come, as being the ultimate good. Life in this

world is only one chapter of one's life story. There is a much better chapter to come in the life to come. How beautiful it is when the believer surrenders his all to the Lord and expresses his love for Him, knowing that this love is superior to everything in the universe.

Whoever is weary and confused and has a complaint is to kneel before God to learn in His sanctuary as Asaph did. Asking is not forbidden and doubting is never a crime. Christ answered the doubts of His disciple Thomas when he doubted in His resurrection, and said, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing" (John 20:27). This is the same thing He does with every believer who asks and complains. The Lord answers the questions and dispenses all doubts, causing the believer to shout out loud along with Thomas, "My Lord and my God!"

The psalm contains the following:

- First: A Declaration of Trust (verse 1)
- Second: The Believer Wavers in his Faith (verses 2-14)
- Third: The Believer Finds the Reassuring Answer (verses 15-28)

3.1. First: A Declaration of Trust

(verse 1)

Before the psalmist introduces us to the maze of his doubts and questions, he begins the psalm with his conclusion, "Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart." "Truly" God is the only One who is good to His people. Even if He allows troubles to come in, He is still loving and "good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him" (Lamentations 3:25), and to Israel, who "[has] struggled with God and with men" (Genesis 32:28). The psalmist has struggled with the Lord in that he asked and complained, and was blessed by Him just as Jacob was blessed when he struggled for obtaining grace. He was thus assured that the Lord was good to the pure in heart "for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8).

When the goodness of God shines upon us, darkness is dispersed from our eyes, and we begin to see Him as eternally good, because His goodness wells up from His good character. So we are assured of this goodness even though the circumstances we go through say quite the opposite. For the sun of His love shines beyond the clouds of cares and the black outward cover contains a great message of love. Thus we realise what the psalmist meant as he said, "Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation" (Psalm 24:3-5).

3.2. Second: The Believer Wavers in his Faith

(verses 2-14)

1. **The believer's problem:** "But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked" (verses 2,3). To say "as for me" means that the psalmist disagreed with the Lord until he almost lost sight of His straight paths. He embarked on a perilous journey, during which his feet almost fell into the pit of despair, because he walked in a miry land. But for God's mercy he would have slipped, because he was envious of the prosperity of the wicked. Certainly this was contrary to David's advice: "Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb" (Psalm 37:1,2). The philosopher said, "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 the day" (Proverbs 3:31; 23:17). He should have rather sung along with David, "Uphold my steps in your paths that my footsteps may not slip" (Psalm 17:5) and with the sons of Korah, "Our heart has not turned back, nor have our steps departed from Your way" (Psalm 44:18).

In the overwhelming sufferings of the psalmist, brought upon him by his troubles, he forgot that those he felt envious of were "boastful". They thought they could live and prosper without the Lord. They were not aware of the fact that "the boastful shall not stand in Your sight; You hate all workers of iniquity" (Psalm 5:5). They did not realise that they were wicked, and all the wicked must perish.

2. **The cause of the believer's problem:**

The psalmist mentions four causes for his problem:

1. **The comfort of the wicked:** "For there are no pangs in their death, but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men" (verses 4,5). The psalmist says that he never saw a wicked man die in the prime of his youth, nor held in captivity, nor plagued with a mortal disease, nor killed by someone else. He always saw the wicked in good health: "their strength is firm" although "man is born to trouble" (Job 5:7). The wicked did not suffer from the troubles that good men have to endure. He must have been reminiscing about his forefather Jacob when Pharaoh asked him his age. Jacob said, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years; few and evil" (Genesis 47:9). How possibly could the forefather of the tribes of Israel suffer while the strength of the wicked grows firm?!
2. **The pride of the wicked:** "Therefore pride serves as their necklace; violence covers them like a garment. Their eyes bulge with abundance; they have more than heart could wish" (verses 6,7). The psalmist was astonished at the pride of the wicked, for when they lived in comfort, they grew boastful and wore their pride like a necklace around their necks. Their life turned into continual violence and oppression of the poor, as if their violence were an indispensable garment. David has described the

- wicked as having "clothed himself with cursing as with his garment" (Psalm 109:18). When they ate what they extorted from the poor, they became fat and their eyes protruded due to their extreme fatness! Eliphaz the Temanite described one of those wicked and boastful people thus: "He has covered his face with his fatness, and made his waist heavy with fat" (Job 15:27). Their pride reached the climax, so that they excelled over their predecessors in wickedness and improved on them. The psalmist had never seen or heard of someone with such pride!
3. **The speech of the wicked:** "They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression; they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walks through the earth" (verses 8,9). The wicked relaxed, grew proud and oppressed others. So they thought they were gods and that their words are statutes to be believed by those who hear them! They spoke as though they were in power, and proclaimed their principles as though they were unchangeable divine laws. They blasphemed God and insulted men who were created in His image.
 4. **The followers of wicked:** "Therefore his people return here, and waters of a full cup are drained by them. And they say, 'How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?'" (verses 10,11). The believer is amazed at the popularity of those wicked people, because many people of God turned away from God's way and followed those wicked men, having seen their prosperity. They began to believe that their utterances are inspired and that their ideas are examples to be emulated. They started, therefore, to drink of the cup of their sins as though it provided thirst-quenching water! Those misled followers shouted, "Is there knowledge in the Most High?" This was definitely a repetition of what other wicked men said, "The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts ... He has said in his heart, 'God has forgotten; He hides His face; He will never see' ... Why do the wicked renounce God? He has said in his heart, 'You will not require an account'" (Psalm 10:4,11,13).
 3. **The believer repeats the explanation of his problem:** "Behold, these are the ungodly, who are always at ease; they increase in riches. Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence. For all day long I have been plagued, and chastened every morning" (verses 12-14). In these three verses the psalmist sums up his problem; he says that the wicked are at ease and rich, so what then is the recompense of godliness? His conscience is good, and he has practised all the demands of the Mosaic Law, such as the washing of hands and feet (Exodus 30:17-21), but he only got troubles, persecutions and chastisement every morning for his godliness and purity of heart. He was plagued all day long, although those who break the law "no are they plagued like other men" (verse 5)!

3.3. Third: The Believer Finds a Reassuring Answer

(verses 15-28)

The psalmist did not give in to his own doubts, but wrestled on with his questions. In the sanctuary of the Lord, he found a reassuring answer, after the Lord had revealed to him His good will.

1. He moved on from murmuring to triumph (verses 15-17):

1. **He did not complain to his fellow believers:** "If I had said, 'I will speak thus,' behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of Your children" (verse 15). Despite his queries, the psalmist loved the Lord and his fellow believers. Therefore he refused to treat them treacherously by revealing his own doubts to them. He also trusted that the Lord must clear up his grief, so why make known his questions about it? It is true that if he told the people about his questions, he would express himself, be relieved, and, thus, have a little comfort. But this comfort would lead him to join the company of the wicked, and he would be grieved once more when he saw that misleading thinking triumphed and spread out, and gained more following. Those who would follow it will say, "Who is the Almighty, that we should serve Him? And what profit do we have if we pray to Him?" (Job 21:15). He well knew that the people of the Lord are the children of the Lord, so how could he bring doubt into their hearts? How could he desert their cause, hurt their feelings, and heap stumbling blocks in their path?
2. **He did not deceive himself:** "When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me" (verse 16). The psalmist was confused because he could not reconcile God's love, justice and faithfulness to his difficult reality and increasing sufferings. True, he did not want to bother others, but his honesty to himself confused and exhausted him as he mulled over these thoughts in his mind.
3. **He found victory in the presence of God:** "Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end" (verse 17). The psalmist arrived at the solution and gained victory when he entered the house of God and had a spiritual encounter with God. He realised then that God's promises were true and that the wicked must get the punishment for his evil, which is death. This was the turning point in his attitude. Joseph anticipated our psalmist in solving the problem of his brothers' wickedness. As a child, Joseph was unable to bring his brothers back to their senses, so he carried their news to his father Jacob, who was more able and qualified to impart advice to his children. We can follow the example of Joseph and the psalmist, because we have a heavenly Father to whom we can bring our problems in the place of prayer during out quiet time. It is He then that gives us reassurance and comfort.
2. **The psalmist saw the end of the wicked:** "Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awakes, so, Lord, when

You awake, You shall despise their image" (verses 18-20).

In the presence of the Lord the psalmist saw the mysteries of God's holy providence, and knew that the end of the wicked is full of perilous slippery places, ruin, destruction and terrible catastrophes that befall them or their followers suddenly. It seems as though God were asleep and left the wicked alone, but woke up to despise them, causing them to discover that they were living a dream and a fantasy. Zophar the Naamathite was correct to say, "The joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment ... He will fly away like a dream, and not be found; yes, he will be chased away like a vision of the night" (Job 20:5,8). They are like weeds among wheat; the harvest day must come when they are consumed by unquenchable fire (Matthew 13:30).

At the commencement of his psalm, the psalmist embarked on a dangerous trip in which his feet nearly slipped, because he walked on dangerous ground. But in the house of the Lord, he discovered that he was standing on a rock and came to realise that the wicked will slide down in the abyss. All of a sudden he saw that their prosperity was a dream, and that they were only images that exist today and are immediately destroyed as the sun of truth brings their imaginary existence to an end. Evil cannot prevail, as God said of the wicked, "Their way shall be to them like slippery ways; in the darkness they shall be driven on and fall in them; for I will bring disaster on them, the year of their punishment" (Jeremiah 23:12).

3. The psalmist held on to the Lord (verses 21-28):

1. **He confessed to Him:** "Thus my heart was grieved, and I was vexed in my mind. I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You" (verses 21,22). The psalmist was in pain because he was hasty and did not see God's justice and truth until he entered God's sanctuary. Then his conscience convicted him; his heart was grieved, and was vexed in his mind. The psalmist confessed that he was as foolish and ignorant as a beast that does not comprehend. It is the mind actually that sets man apart from the animals, so how could the psalmist miss God's history of tenderness with His people? How could he possibly forget God's good dealings with himself? True, "a senseless man does not know, nor does a fool understand this" (Psalm 92:6).
2. **He fellowshiped with Him:** "Nevertheless I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand. You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (verses 23-26). Again the psalmist compares himself to the wicked, saying, "Nevertheless I am continually with You." He resolved to walk with the Lord, and his attitude was "My soul follows close behind You; Your right hand upholds me" (Psalm 63:8). He decided to make the law of the Lord a lamp to his feet and a light to his path (Psalm 119:105). He obeyed the Lord's commandments, to be blessed

by them both in his present and future. He would be guided by the Lord's counsel here on earth, and enter His glory there, just as "Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him" (Genesis 5:24). How glorious it is for the psalmist to have his hand held by the King of kings, in affirmation of His love and care for him. Through God's fellowship with the psalmist, he recognised that if the Lord who dwells in heaven were his, he would not need anything or anyone on earth, because the Lord is his goodness and the source of his happiness. He says, "You are my Lord, My goodness is nothing apart from You" (Psalm 16:2). It did not matter anymore whether the wicked prospered or whether he suffered, because he was in fellowship with the Lord. Although his body and strength grow weak, the Lord would be His strong refuge to protect him from all danger. To this he answers, "He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defence; I shall not be moved" (Psalm 62:6). The Lord is his portion forever; none will snatch him away from the Lord, nor the Lord from him. In this way he expresses the fact that he belongs to the Lord as one of the Lord's priests. They had no portion in the Lord, because the Lord was their portion (Deuteronomy 10:9), and what a portion!

3. **He drew closer to Him:** "For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish; You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry. But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all Your works" (verses 27,28). Since God is the source of life, everyone who is far away from Him is dead in trespasses and sins. Since all mankind are God's because He created them, cared for them and redeemed them, everyone who turns away from Him is considered to be disloyal to Him and His kingdom. The Israelites considered themselves "God's bride" because turning away from God is spiritual disloyalty and adultery (Hosea 2:2-4). However, everyone who draws closer to God receives abundant life, because Christ came to give us life, and that more abundantly (John 10:10). Whoever experiences life in Christ does not stop talking about it and telling how much God did for him.

Let us all enter the sanctuary of the Most High at all times, to find healing answers to our questions, enjoy His tender fellowship, and proclaim the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvellous light. If any of us is far away from the Lord, let him draw closer to Him in repentance. If any of us is confused, may the Lord reassure his heart.

May the Lord establish our faith and deepen our hope in Him, no matter how the circumstances may look.

3.4. Questions

1. What is the similarity between Psalm 73 and 37. What is the difference?
2. In verse 15 the psalmist says that he did not share his doubts with his fellow believers.

Why not?

4. Psalm Seventy-Four

Why does Your Anger Smoke?

A Contemplation of Asaph.

1 O God, why have You cast us off forever? Why does Your anger smoke against the sheep of Your pasture?

2 Remember Your congregation, which You have purchased of old, The tribe of Your inheritance, which You have redeemed -- This Mount Zion where You have dwelt.

3 Lift up Your feet to the perpetual desolations. The enemy has damaged everything in the sanctuary.

4 Your enemies roar in the midst of Your meeting place; They set up their banners for signs.

5 They seem like men who lift up Axes among the thick trees.

6 And now they break down its carved work, all at once, With axes and hammers.

7 They have set fire to Your sanctuary; They have defiled the dwelling place of Your name to the ground.

8 They said in their hearts, "Let us destroy them altogether." They have burned up all the meeting places of God in the land.

9 We do not see our signs; There is no longer any prophet; Nor is there any among us who knows how long.

10 O God, how long will the adversary reproach? Will the enemy blaspheme Your name forever?

11 Why do You withdraw Your hand, even Your right hand? Take it out of Your bosom and destroy them.

12 For God is my King from of old, Working salvation in the midst of the earth.

13 You divided the sea by Your strength; You broke the heads of the sea serpents in the waters.

14 You broke the heads of Leviathan in pieces, And gave him as food to the people inhabiting the wilderness.

15 You broke open the fountain and the flood; You dried up mighty rivers.

16 The day is Yours, the night also is Yours; You have prepared the light and the sun.

17 You have set all the borders of the earth; You have made summer and winter.

18 Remember this, that the enemy has reproached, O LORD, And that a foolish people has blasphemed Your name.

19 Oh, do not deliver the life of Your turtledove to the wild beast! Do not forget the life of Your poor

forever.

20 Have respect to the covenant; For the dark places of the earth are full of the haunts of cruelty.

21 Oh, do not let the oppressed return ashamed! Let the poor and needy praise Your name.

22 Arise, O God, plead Your own cause; Remember how the foolish man reproaches You daily.

23 Do not forget the voice of Your enemies; The tumult of those who rise up against You increases continually.

This psalm is a lament written by Asaph after King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon devastated his country, slaughtered many of his people, and left their carcasses to rot in the streets in 586 BC. This made his country the laughing stock of its neighbours. Nebuchadnezzar also pulled down and burnt the temple that Solomon had built, causing worship to stop, as though God rejected His own people (2 Kings 25). The prophet Jeremiah wept over this situation in his lamentations, saying of his country, "Her gates have sunk into the ground; he [the enemy] has destroyed and broken her bars. Her [exiled] king and her princes are among the nations; the Law is no more, and her prophets find no vision from the LORD. The elders of the daughter of Zion sit on the ground and keep silence; they throw dust on their heads and gird themselves with sackcloth" (Lamentations 2:9,10).

This psalm is a cry from the heart of someone suffering, beseeching God to remember His covenant with His people and show mercy to them. The Israelites used to sing on the days of fasting in which they confessed their sins to the Lord and humbled themselves before Him to restore their temple to its former glory. This psalm and Psalm 79 are very similar in both subject and content. God must have inspired the authors of both psalms to write them for the same painful occasion.

The psalm contains the following:

- First: The Psalmist's Complaint (verses 1-11)
- Second: Past Memories of Mercy (verses 12-17)
- Third: Asking for Deliverance (verses 18-23)

4.1. First: The Psalmist's Complaint

(verses 1-11)

When his sufferings increased, the psalmist turned his questions to God, from a heart that loves God to the God who loves him. Here he recalls Jeremiah's words: "O LORD, my strength and my fortress, my refuge in the day of affliction" (Jeremiah 16:19).

1. **Asking why:** "O God, why have You cast us off forever? Why does Your anger smoke?"

(verse 1a + b). The psalmist begins his complaint by posing two questions to God:

1. **Why have You cast us off:** It seemed to the psalmist that God cast His people off forever so that their country became "perpetual desolations" (verse 3) and the enemy reviled God's name "forever" (verse 10). He asks, "Why?" not because he grumbles against God, but because he wants to know in order to change his course and that of his people. The Lord's countenance would then shine upon them with favour "For the Lord will not cast off forever" (Lamentations 3:31).
 2. **Why does Your anger smoke?** Smoke represents the burning of God's anger. David said of the Lord that in His anger: "Smoke went up from His nostrils, and devouring fire from His mouth; coals were kindled by it" (Psalm 18:8).
2. **Describing the questioning people:** "Why does Your anger smoke against the sheep of Your pasture? Remember Your congregation, which You have purchased of old, the tribe of Your inheritance, which You have redeemed; this Mount Zion where You have dwelt" (verses 1c,2). The psalmist lists three descriptions of his people that made him raise up these questions.

1. **They are the sheep of the Good Shepherd:** "The sheep of Your pasture." The psalmist was encouraged to ask the Lord, because He was his good and faithful Shepherd, who is responsible for him, as the Scriptures say, "So we your people and the sheep of your pasture will give you thanks forever. We will show forth your praise to all generations" (Psalm 79:13). He trusts his shepherd, and often called: "Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand" (Psalm 95:6,7).

Now sheep are known for their weakness, dumbness and aptitude to be led astray. They know how to lose their way, but do not know how come back. Neither can they defend themselves. "The sheep of Your pasture" is an indication of the need for guidance, protection and continual management of affairs on the part of the shepherd who will "will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young" (Isaiah 40:11).

2. **They are the redeemed ones whom He purchased:** "Remember Your congregation, which You have purchased of old, the tribe of Your inheritance." (verse 2a). The psalmist gave himself the right to find refuge with God on the basis of being a member of God's congregation which He has chosen of old, redeemed from the Pharaoh's bondage, set free from the evil torment, and made into the inheritance of the Lord among the nations. The Scriptures say that Moses sang after the exodus, "You in Your mercy have led forth the people whom You have redeemed; You have guided them in Your strength to Your holy habitation Fear and dread will fall on

them; by the greatness of Your arm they will be as still as a stone, till Your people pass over, O LORD, till the people pass over whom You have purchased" (Exodus 15:13,16). Now in the light of New Testament, we realise the full meaning of redemption and purchasing "knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18,19).

3. **They are the ones among whom God dwelt:** "This Mount Zion where You have dwelt" (verse 2b). The Lord has shepherded and redeemed His people, and He dwells among them in His holy temple. The place where God dwells cannot, therefore, be desolated forever, just as much as the boat where Christ was could not sink despite the fierce storm that the disciples encountered. All those who obey the command to let "Christ dwell in your hearts through faith" (Ephesians 3:17) cannot sink into the oceans of cares and problems!

3. **The motivation to the question (verses 3-9):**

The psalmist lists five reasons for the question:

1. **The enemy has damaged everything:** "Lift up Your feet to the perpetual desolations. The enemy has damaged everything in the sanctuary" (verse 3). The psalmist cried out in such strong expressions, demanding divine intervention to save the nation from the enemy that spread ruin. The wicked assaulted the congregation of believers, defeated them and destroyed everything. They even carried away the vessels of the holy temple and put them in the house of their unclean idol. The temple had become so desolate that it had to be rebuilt. No deliverance could come except from the Lord who must visit His people and fulfil His promise: "Those from among you shall build the old waste places; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations ... And they shall rebuild the old ruins, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the ruined cities" (Isaiah 58:12; 61:4).
2. **The enemy had replaced God's signs with his own:** "Your enemies roar in the midst of Your meeting place; they set up their banners for signs" (verse 4). God's enemies raised their voice like roaring lions in God's meeting place, His sanctuary, where His people come to hear and learn His word. God's meeting place was first called the "tabernacle of meeting" as He said to Moses, "At the door of the tabernacle of meeting where I will meet you to speak with you. And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by My glory" (Exodus 29:42,43). But the enemies set up their religious banners above the divine instructions, and made their idols and images signs and gods in the midst of the temple, thus replacing the divine truth with heathenish falsehood.
3. **The enemy destroyed the decoration of the temple:** "They seem like men who lift

- up axes among the thick trees. And now they break down its carved work, all at once, with axes and hammers" (verse 5,6). The enemy destroyed the decoration of the temple, so it was said of Solomon's temple, "The inside of the temple was cedar, carved with ornamental buds and open flowers. All was cedar; there was no stone to be seen ... Then he carved all the walls of the temple all around, both the inner and outer sanctuaries, with carved figures of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers" (1 Kings 6:18,29). The enemies brought their unjust axes and hammers and destroyed all that.
4. **They set fire to the temple:** "They have set fire to Your sanctuary; they have defiled the dwelling place of Your name to the ground. They said in their hearts, 'Let us destroy them altogether.' They have burned up all the meeting places of God in the land" (verses 7,8). Nebuchadnezzar burnt down the temple, which was the place that God chose for His glory to dwell in (1 Kings 8:11). David said of it, "LORD, I have loved the habitation of Your house, and the place where Your glory dwells" (Psalm 26:8). The enemy "burned the house of the LORD and the king's house; all the houses of Jerusalem, that is, all the houses of the great, he burned with fire. And all the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down the walls of Jerusalem all around" (2 Kings 25:9,10).
 5. **There was no more a preacher:** "We do not see our signs; there is no longer any prophet; nor is there any among us who knows how long" (verse 9). There was no more worship, feasts, observation of the Sabbaths, king or priests to remind the Israelites of the worship of the Lord. The Lord had said to Moses, "Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: 'Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you'" (Exodus 31:13). The psalmist was convinced of the words of the prophet Ezekiel: "Disaster will come upon disaster, and rumour will be upon rumour. Then they will seek a vision from a prophet; but the law will perish from the priest, and counsel from the elders" (Ezekiel 7:26).
 4. **The psalmist asks for an explanation and an answer:** "O God, how long will the adversary reproach? Will the enemy blaspheme Your name forever? Why do You withdraw Your hand, even Your right hand? Take it out of Your bosom and destroy them" (verses 10,11). In these two verses the psalmist wonders if this miserable state will last forever. And if it will end, when will that be? He demands that the Lord save his people and destroy their enemies, who reviled the Lord's name by their words and insulted Him by their actions, as the king of Assyria said, "As my hand has found the kingdoms of the idols, whose carved images excelled those of Jerusalem and Samaria, as I have done to Samaria and her idols, shall I not do also to Jerusalem and her idols?" (Isaiah 10:10,11). By these words he equated the idols with the Lord God! It seemed to the psalmist that the Lord was unwilling to rescue His people, as the author of

Lamentations said, "He has cut off in fierce anger every horn of Israel; He has drawn back His right hand from before the enemy. He has blazed against Jacob like a flaming fire devouring all around" (Lamentations 2:3). So the psalmist appealed to God to take out His right hand out of His bosom and stretch it out by His power, as He had already done, making the sea swallow and destroy the Egyptians (Exodus 15:12).

4.2. Second: Past Memories of Mercy

(verses 12-17)

In recalling God's past mercies, the psalmist saw three great things in God:

1. **The Lord is the God of salvation:** "For God is my King from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth. You divided the sea by Your strength; you broke the heads of the sea serpents in the waters" (verses 12,13). The psalmist declares that God is still his King, as He was and will be. For God is the fair judge of all the earth, who works salvation and justice, because He says, "In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you" (2 Corinthians 6:2). In spite of the painful difficulties the psalmist and his people underwent, he was still aware that "The LORD shall reign forever and ever" (Exodus 15:18). So he said to Him, "You are my King, O God; command victories for Jacob" (Psalm 44:4). He saved His people by bringing them out of Egypt in the presence of all countries and nations, and relieved them of the pain of torment (Psalm 77:14), as much as He worked salvation at Elijah's time by bringing fire down to burn up the sacrifice. At that time the people shouted, "The LORD, He is God!" (1 Kings 18:39). He also worked salvation at Daniel's time when He saved the three young men from the fiery furnace (Daniel 3) and saved Daniel himself from the den of lions (Daniel 6).

The God of salvation divided the Red Sea by His heavenly power, so that His oppressed people could cross over and Pharaoh and his soldiers would be drowned. The Egyptians were defeated and their bodies floated on the water, "So the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore" (Exodus 14:30). The Scriptures call Pharaoh "the reptile", as well as "Leviathan", and "great monster". Isaiah said, "In that day the LORD with His severe sword, great and strong, will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan that twisted serpent; and He will slay the reptile that is in the sea" (Isaiah 27:1). He called upon the arm of God's power, saying, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD! Awake as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Are You not the arm that cut Rahab (Egypt) apart, and wounded the serpent?" (Isaiah 51:9). Ezekiel also said, "Thus says the Lord GOD: 'Behold, I am against you, O Pharaoh king of Egypt, O great monster who lies in the midst of his rivers, who has said, "My River is my own; I have made it for myself"' (Ezekiel 29:3).

2. **The Lord is the God of providence:** "You broke the heads of Leviathan in pieces, and gave him as food to the people inhabiting the wilderness. You broke open the fountain and the flood; You dried up mighty rivers" (verses 14,15). The heads of Pharaoh's soldiers were broken and were dashed to pieces, so that they became food for the beasts of the wilderness, just as God said to Pharaoh, "I will leave you in the wilderness, you and all the fish of your rivers; you shall fall on the open field; you shall not be picked up or gathered. I have given you as food to the beasts of the field and to the birds of the heavens" (Ezekiel 29:5).

When the people were thirsty the caring God burst springs of water from the rocks of the Sinai Peninsula so that the people could drink for forty years (Exodus 17:6; Numbers 20:8). "And they did not thirst when He led them through the deserts; He caused the waters to flow from the rock for them; He also split the rock, and the waters gushed out" (Isaiah 48:21). Therefore the psalmist said, "He split the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink in abundance like the depths" (Psalm 78:15).

And when the people needed to cross the water to reach the land which God had promised to them, the Lord dried up the ever-flowing Jordan River "And as those who bore the ark came to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests who bore the ark dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks during the whole time of harvest), that the waters which came down from upstream stood still, and rose in a heap very far away at Adam, the city So the waters that went down into the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, failed, and were cut off; and the people crossed over opposite Jericho" (Joshua 3:15-16). "For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed over, that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever" (Joshua 4:23,24).

3. **The Lord is the God of creation:** "The day is Yours, the night also is Yours; You have prepared the light and the sun. You have set all the borders of the earth; You have made summer and winter" (verses 16,17). God created day and night on the basis of the earth's rotation around itself when He said, "'Let there be light' and there was light. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night... God said, 'Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth,' and it was so. Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night" (Genesis 1:5,14-16). God also created the boundaries of the earth and marked off its limits on the day when He divided between the land the water: "Then God said, 'Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear'" (Genesis 1:9). Based on the earth's rotation around the sun, God created the seasons.

4.3. Third: Asking for Deliverance

(verses 18-23)

1. **He asked for deliverance because the enemy had reproached the Lord:** "Remember this, that the enemy has reproached, O LORD, and that a foolish people has blasphemed Your name" (verse 18). When the enemy attacks the people of the Lord and gains victory over them, he supposes that his idols are greater than the Lord and that his triumphant attack is a reproach to the God of the defeated people. In such case the enemy is utterly ignorant of the Lord's greatness and the generosity of his loving care to His people. The ignorant said in his heart, "There is no God" (Psalm 14:1), and "Many are they who say of me, 'There is no help for him in God.'" (Psalm 3:2).
2. **He asked for deliverance because he was innocent and weak:** "Oh, do not deliver the life of your turtledove to the wild beast! Do not forget the life of your poor forever" (verse 19). The psalmist compares the people of the Lord with a turtledove that cannot defend itself. A turtledove hurts no one and sings in such a sad tone, while the enemy is a ferocious beast. He also describes himself as a poor man, unable to sustain or guide himself. Unable to defend himself, he turns to the Good Shepherd to remember him in his time of trouble.
3. **He asked for deliverance because the Lord has a covenant with His people:** "Have respect to the covenant; for the dark places of the earth are full of the haunts of cruelty. Oh, do not let the oppressed return ashamed! Let the poor and needy praise Your name" (verses 20,21). The Lord entered into a covenant with His people so that He would keep them and they would be His own. He said to Noah and His descendants, "And as for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you and with your descendants after you" (Genesis 9:9), and again "the LORD made a covenant with Abram" (Genesis 15:18). As Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, he sent the young men of the Israelites to slaughter animals for sacrifices. Moses took half of their blood and put it in basins, and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people, took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, "This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you according to all these words" (Exodus 24:4-8). Again God made a covenant with David and said, "I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to My servant David" (Psalm 89:3).

But it seemed to the psalmist that God turned his face away from His covenant with His people, so that the children of Israel were carried away from their land to "the dark places of the earth" in Babylon, where there was dark idol-worship and where injustice dwelt and filled every corner. The people were crushed, shamed, exposed to poverty and reduced to misery. The psalmist reminds the Lord of His covenant with His people, so that the crushed ones should not return ashamed because their prayers have not been answered, but rather sing and praise the Lord who heard their prayers. Then "The LORD

also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. And those who know Your name will put their trust in You; for You, LORD, have not forsaken those who seek You ... You will cause Your ear to hear, to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may oppress no more" (Psalm 9:9,10; 10:17,18).

4. **He asked for deliverance because his cause is the Lord's:** "Arise, O God, plead Your own cause; remember how the foolish man reproaches You daily. Do not forget the voice of Your enemies; the tumult of those who rise up against You increases continually" (verses 22,23). This is the last call for deliverance in this psalm. The psalmist was used to asking God to plead his personal cause or that of his people, so he said, "Vindicate me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation; oh, deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man!" (Psalm 43:1). But here he demanded God to plead the divine cause against the foolish man who reviled the Creator, the Lord of all the earth. It seemed to the psalmist that God forgot the reproaches of His foes, the voices and tumult of His enemies that rise up in defiance to heaven from ever blaspheming mouths. He waited to hear once more the words that God said to the King of Assyria: "Because your rage against Me and your tumult have come up to My ears, therefore I will put My hook in your nose and My bridle in your lips, and I will turn you back by the way which you came" (Isaiah 37:29).

The enemy is ignorant of the Lord and the might of His power. The enemy is too strong for the psalmist to confront because the psalmist is like an innocent, defenceless turtledove. Injustice lurked round every dark corner of the earth! But the Lord is the God of justice who must deliver His elect who cry out to Him day and night.

4.4. Questions

1. In verses 1c and 2 the psalmist gives three descriptions of the believers. Write these descriptions.
2. In verses 18-23 the psalmist tells four reasons why the Lord should help him. What are these four reasons?

5. Psalm Seventy-Five

When I Choose the Proper Time

To the Chief Musician. Set to "Do Not Destroy." A Psalm of Asaph. A Song.

1 We give thanks to You, O God, we give thanks! For Your wondrous works declare that Your name is near.

2 "When I choose the proper time, I will judge uprightly.

3 The earth and all its inhabitants are dissolved; I set up its pillars firmly. Selah

4 I said to the boastful, 'Do not deal boastfully,' And to the wicked, 'Do not lift up the horn.

5 'Do not lift up your horn on high; Do not speak with a stiff neck.' "

6 For exaltation comes neither from the east nor from the west nor from the south.

7 But God is the Judge: He puts down one, and exalts another.

8 For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is fully mixed, and He pours it out; surely its dregs shall all the wicked of the earth drain and drink down.

9 But I will declare forever, I will sing praises to the God of Jacob.

10 All the horns of the wicked I will also cut off, but the horns of the righteous shall be exalted."

This psalm and the one after it are songs of thanksgiving by Asaph for deliverance. He sang them after God listened to his complaint in Psalm 74. They were sung on occasions of national victory. They are like Psalms 46 and 38, which were sung by the Sons of Korah. God has judged and destroyed the proud enemy, and the psalmist experienced all over again that God was the fair judge who grants victory to His people. He saw that as a fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy: "You shall have a song as in the night when a holy festival is kept, and gladness of heart as when one goes with a flute, to come into the mountain of the LORD, to the Mighty One of Israel" (Isaiah 30:29).

We do not know exactly the occasion of writing this psalm; perhaps it was the destruction of the 185,000 Assyrian soldiers who laid siege to Jerusalem (2 Kings 19:35). This is an experience that God repeats with His people through the ages.

The psalm contains the following:

- First: The Psalmist Thanks the Lord (verse 1)
- Second: The Lord Answers the Psalmist (verses 2,3)
- Third: The Psalmist Warns His Enemies (verses 4-8)
- Fourth: The Psalmist Glorifies the Lord (verses 9,10)

5.1. First: The Psalmist Thanks the Lord

(verse 1)

The psalmist begins and ends his psalm with praising and glorifying God for answering his complaint.

1. **He thanks Him in an emphatic way:** "We give thanks to You, O God, we give thanks!" (verse 1a). The sentence "We give thanks to You" is repeated to emphasise the people's wholeheartedness in thanking God for His mercies that are new every morning. The psalmist's heart overflowed with thanksgiving to God who saved them from severe suffering, whose mercy was greater than every trouble. Likewise, every true believer

learns to thank at all times for all things, and to do like the Samaritan leper, whom Jesus healed together with nine others. This leper returned to give thanks to his healer, and Jesus asked him, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?" (Luke 17:17), because many are healed and do not thank.

The true believer thanks even for the bad circumstances, not because they are bad, but because God will bring something good out of them. "Out of the eater comes something to eat, and out of the strong comes something sweet" (Judges 14:14). We must always say to the righteous that it shall be well with them (Isaiah 3:10).

2. **He thanks Him for His wondrous works:** "For Your wondrous works declare" (verse 1b). The psalmist and those surrounding him talk about the wonders of divine deliverance, as if saying, "I will praise You, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will tell of all Your marvellous works ... O God, You have taught me from my youth; and to this day I declare Your wondrous works" (Psalm 9:1; 71:17). They are awed by the repeated miracles that have increased their spiritual maturity, as though they say along with Paul, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).
3. **He thanks Him for His nearness:** "Your name is near" (verse 1c). The name of the Lord is His Person and all the attributes by which He revealed Himself to mankind. He is always near to those who seek Him, although this nearness is felt much more in times of trouble when He demonstrates His active presence by saving them. Moses said to the children of Israel, "What great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him?" (Deuteronomy 4:7). "The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit ... The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth" (Psalm 34:18; 145:18). "May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble; may the name of the God of Jacob defend you" (Psalm 20:1). For this reason Paul, while in prison in Rome, said to the suffering people in Philippi, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand" (Philippians 4:4,5). He is nearer to the believers than they can imagine, as much as His second coming is also near.

5.2. Second: The Lord Answers the Psalmist

(verses 2,3)

God must punish the wicked and keep the moral principles in the world that He created, even if it appears to our human eyes that it has become utterly chaotic. But the praiseworthy God has set up the cosmos like a firmly balanced house. "Let the heavens declare His righteousness, for God Himself is Judge" (Psalm 50:6). These two verses say that:

1. **There is a time for divine intervention:** "When I choose the proper time" (verse 2a). It

seems to the one in trouble that God has forgotten, but "To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:1). The poor man who grew weary and poured out his complaints before God said, "You will arise and have mercy on Zion; for the time to favour her, yes, the set time, has come" (Psalm 102:13). What great wisdom there is in divine timing, for the gift that we receive in time of need is definitely the best gift ever. "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!" (Matthew 7:11). "For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come, It will not tarry" (Habakkuk 2:3). There is certainly a set time for every deed that is done, so let us wait for God's timing, with our heart saying, "I waited patiently for the LORD; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry" (Psalm 40:1).

When the Lord makes a covenant with His friend Abraham and promised to give him the Promised Land, He did not give it to him right away "for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete" (Genesis 15:16). God gave the Amorites four hundred years to repent. They had to understand the wise warning: "Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?" (Romans 2:4).

2. **There is realisation of justice in the divine intervention:** "I will judge uprightly" (verse 2b). God assures that He alone will right the wrongs, administer punishment to the enemy if he does not repent, let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream (Amos 5:24). There will be no injustice, "because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained" (Acts 17:31).
3. **The divine intervention will subject all:** "The earth and all its inhabitants are dissolved; I set up its pillars firmly" (verse 3). Justice might seem to falter in this world, and the faith of the believer may waver because of it, and so he says, "Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence" (Psalm 73:13). Yet God has set up His world on moral foundations like firmly balanced pillars. When earthly justice shakes and injustice prevails, God restores justice to its firm state and punishes the unjust. Then the believer will say, "Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end. Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction" (Psalm 73:17,18). God has balanced everything and placed it in its proper location. He has not left the world he created to chance, neither has He neglected His people for a moment! This is what we see in all history. The earth and all its inhabitants melted down as they witnessed the exodus from Egypt, they melted once more as they witnessed the return of the people from their captivity in Babylon to rebuild the temple! All the earth will melt again at the second coming of Christ to judge all beings. "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not

willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:9-13).

5.3. Third: The Psalmist Warns his Enemies

(verses 4-8)

The Old Testament law said, "eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot" (Exodus 21:24). Therefore the psalmist had the right to ask for the destruction of his enemies, but instead he offered them warnings and advice, drawing their attention to God's just judgement that they may repent:

1. **He warned them of being arrogant:** "I said to the boastful, 'Do not deal boastfully,' and to the wicked, 'Do not lift up the horn. Do not lift up your horn on high'" (verses 4,5a). The boastful take pride in themselves not in the Lord, and it will be said to them, "Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man? The goodness of God endures continually" (Psalm 52:1). The wicked man lifted up his horn on high, to where God dwells. A horn symbolises strength; an ox butts with it. The horn was a title of kings because they have strength and authority (Daniel 7:7,8; Psalm 132:17). The psalmist warns his enemies of boasting, because blessed are the poor in spirit (Matthew 5:3). The latter realise that all the authority they have is a gift of God, and each one of them says, "My soul shall make its boast in the LORD" (Psalm 34:2).

The Persian vizier Haman was upset because Mordechai, the doorkeeper of the king, refused to bow down to him in obedience to the commandment: "You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve" (Matthew 4:10). In his pride, Haman decided to hang Mordechai, but he was hanged on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordechai (Esther 7:9,10).

In the pride of his heart, Nebuchadnezzar looked at his great capital and said, "'Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honour of my majesty?' While the word was still in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven: 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the king-dom has departed from you! And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses'" (Daniel 4:28-32). And so it was, until he realised that the Most High rules in

the kingdom of men. Later he regained his mind and was restored to his throne.

"Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king's personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king's country. So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. And the people kept shouting, 'The voice of a god and not of a man! Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died.'" (Acts 12:20-23). Thus Herod destroyed himself by his pride, because before he was afflicted with his bodily disease, his soul was eaten by the malady of pride.

2. **He warned them of stubbornness:** "Do not speak with a stiff neck" (verse 5b). Hanna, the mother of Samuel, said, "Talk no more so very proudly; let no arrogance come from your mouth, for the LORD is the God of knowledge; and by Him actions are weighed" (1 Samuel 2:3). "A stiff neck" is a proud one. Man has got to learn humility. The earth has claimed many dignitaries and rich, influential men, and it will continue to do so. So let us give up this stiff neck, and bend before the Lord in humility, as Mary, the mother of Jesus, humbled herself and said, "My soul magnifies the Lord ... For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done great things for me ... He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly" (Luke 1:46-52).
3. **He reminded them of divine authority:** "For exaltation comes neither from the east nor from the west nor from the south. But God is the Judge: He puts down one, and exalts another" (verses 6,7). The enemies attacked the people of God from all directions; from the North, the South and Arabia. "But" there is hope for the believer and terror for the unjust, since God is the Judge. Isaiah said, "For the LORD is our Judge, the LORD is our Lawgiver, the LORD is our King; He will save us" (Isaiah 33:22). The Lord kills and makes alive. He brings down to the grave and brings up. The Lord makes poor and makes rich. He brings low and lifts up# (1 Samuel 2:6,7). "The LORD lifts up the humble; He casts the wicked down to the ground" (Psalm 147:6).
4. **He warned them of the divine punishment:** "For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is fully mixed, and He pours it out; surely its dregs shall all the wicked of the earth drain and drink down" (verse 8). The cup indicates the divine punishment. The psalmist mentioned it elsewhere, "You have shown Your people hard things; You have made us drink the wine of confusion" (Psalm 60:3). The Lord commanded the prophet Jeremiah, "For thus says the LORD God of Israel to me: 'Take this wine cup of fury from My hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send you, to drink it. And they will drink and stagger and go mad because of the sword that I will send among them.'" (Jeremiah 25:15,16). The prophet Isaiah also said to his country, "Awake,

awake! Stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk at the hand of the LORD the cup of His fury; you have drunk the dregs of the cup of trembling, and drained it out" (Isaiah 51:17). The cup of wine in the hand of Lord means severe punishment for the wicked. The cup is "fully mixed," that is, the punishments that God will pour out are diverse and numerous, because it is still full of His fury. The wicked will drink of it to the dregs that are on the bottom. They will drain it out so that not a single drop will be left in it.

These words may seem harsh, but the fact is that those who drink the cup of God's fury to the dregs are those who rejected God's mercy. Although God has long been calling them to repent, they refused, and in their refusal they treasured up for themselves wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgement of God (Romans 2:5).

5.4. Fourth: The Psalmist Glorifies the Lord

(verses 9,10)

After warning the wicked of their evil destination, the psalmist made his position clear and declared it publicly. They declared war, but he seeks peace. Their tongues cursed, but his tongue blesses.

1. **The psalmist glories God by revealing His acts:** "But I will declare forever" (verse 9a). God performed an act with the believer that he did not deserve or expect. It was exceedingly abundantly above all that he asked or thought, so, in astonishment, he tells what great things the Lord has done for him, and how He has had compassion on him (Mark 5:19). The Scriptures say to the believers, "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy" (1 Peter 2:9,10). So each of them says, "My heart is overflowing with a good theme; I recite my composition concerning the King; my tongue is the pen of a ready writer" (Psalm 45:1).
2. **He glorifies Him by rejoicing in what He has done:** "I will sing praises to the God of Jacob" (verse 9b). Jacob's history was not the history of someone who deserved divine mercy; neither he nor his descendants. So when God rescued them, the psalmist expressed his glorification of God by singing. Jacob did not deserve mercy, for he cheated his brother, father and uncle. Even his relationship with God started on a selfish basis. He vowed, "If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God. And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You" (Genesis 28:20-22). God granted Jacob's requests, but Jacob forgot about his vow and was censured by God for not performing his covenant. God said to him, "Arise, go up to

Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother" (Genesis 35:1). Later, Jacob felt he was unworthy of God's kindness, so he told his son Joseph about his two grandchildren, Manasseh and Ephraim, "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has fed me all my life long to this day, the Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads" (Genesis 48:15,16). The psalmist praises the God of Jacob because He had compassion on Jacob, and because He opened the gate of His mercy, because He "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4).

- 3. He glorifies Him by declaring his victory:** "All the horns of the wicked I will also cut off, but the horns of the righteous shall be exalted" (verse 10). The psalmist declares that God will defeat the enemies and see that justice is done to His people. He will cut off all the horns of the wicked and all manifestations of its influence, but the horns of the righteous shall be exalted, because God will right the wrongs and rescue His children from danger. "Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion; for I will make your horn iron you shall beat in pieces many peoples" (Micah 4:13). "The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken in pieces; from heaven He will thunder against them. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth. He will give strength to His king, and exalt the horn of His anointed" (1 Samuel 2:10). Truly, "whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Matthew 23:12).

Let this psalm be a source of true encouragement to you. "My soul, wait silently for God alone, for my expectation is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defence; I shall not be moved" (Psalm 62:5,6).

5.5. Questions

1. Comment on verse 2 "I choose the proper time."
2. How did the psalmist choose to glorify his Lord?

6. Psalm Seventy-Six

God's Saving Power

To the Chief Musician. On stringed instruments. A Psalm of Asaph. A Song.

1 In Judah God is known; His name is great in Israel.

2 In Salem also is His tabernacle, and His dwelling place in Zion.

3 There He broke the arrows of the bow, the shield and sword of battle. Selah

4 You are more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey.

5 The stouthearted were plundered; they have sunk into their sleep; and none of the mighty men have

found the use of their hands.

6 At Your rebuke, O God of Jacob, both the chariot and horse were cast into a dead sleep.

7 You, Yourself, are to be feared; and who may stand in Your presence when once You are angry?

8 You caused judgement to be heard from heaven; the earth feared and was still,

9 When God arose to judgement, to deliver all the oppressed of the earth. Selah

10 Surely the wrath of man shall praise You; with the remainder of wrath You shall gird Yourself.

11 Make vows to the LORD your God, and pay them; let all who are around Him bring presents to Him who ought to be feared.

12 He shall cut off the spirit of princes; He is awesome to the kings of the earth.

In Psalm 74 the psalmist lifted up a complaint to God about the enemy's injustice to the people that God loved. The enemy destroyed the temple, God's dwelling place among His people. And in Psalm 75 we heard the divine answer to the complaint, in which God said that He was a fair judge, that He fixed times for everything, and that His judgements were straightforward. In this psalm there is yet another divine answer, in which God says that His great power will certainly destroy the enemy. It is plain that in our world there are two contending kingdoms where battles rage on between good and evil. We live in a world that has given its driving seat to the devil, and the majority of people have given in and surrendered themselves to the evil one. They have been defeated by him so often that they no longer have confidence in overcoming. Defeat has become the order of the day!

However, the kingdom of righteousness will be victorious in the end, although right now it suffers many attacks from the kingdom of evil. The Scriptures exhort us to "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:10-12). If you want to lead a holy, serving, courageous life, you should expect opposition, but know at the same time that you "are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:37).

This psalm sounds like Psalm 46, which opens up by the announcement: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Our present psalm consists of twelve verses that contain four themes. Each of these takes up three verses.

The psalm contains the following:

- First: The Lord's Power (verse 1-3)
- Second: The Lord's Glory (verse 4-6)

- Third: The Lord's Authority (verse 7-9)
- Fourth: Pieces of Advice to the Meek (verse 10-12)

6.1. First: The Lord's Power

(verse 1-3)

1. **A well-known power:** "In Judah God is known; His name is great in Israel" (verse 1). God's history with His people is well known. It is recognised by the miraculous exodus from Egypt, the dividing of the Red Sea, providing the manna and quail for the people in the desert to eat, and quenching their thirst with water that gushed forth from the rock. During their celebration of the Passover, the children would ask their parents, "What do you mean by this service?" and the answer was, "It is the Passover sacrifice of the LORD, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households" (Exodus 12:26,27). God is known to have infinite power. At the creation, He said, "Let there be light," and there was light. He is "upholding all things by the word of His power" (Hebrews 1:3). He created the world, He takes care of it, and controls it. All things were created and remain existing by His will (Revelation 4:11). He rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked. "The LORD is known by the judgement He executes; the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands" (Psalm 9:16). "God is in her palaces; He is known as her refuge" (Psalm 48:3).

Both David and Solomon reigned over a united kingdom, but later it was divided into two kingdoms: A northern kingdom, the kingdom of Israel, whose capital was Samaria, and a southern kingdom, the kingdom of Judah, whose capital was Jerusalem. God was known in both kingdoms, Israel and Judah. God made Himself known to them through His prophets and the miracles He worked through them.

2. **An establishing power:** "In Salem also is His tabernacle, and His dwelling place in Zion" (verse 2). The psalmist says that the Lord established His tabernacle in Salem, a short form and a pet name for Jerusalem, meaning "the City of Peace" or "the Foundation of Peace". In New Testament times, the heavenly Jerusalem was substituted for the earthly Jerusalem, because the Jews, Christ's own people, did not accept Him. For this reason He gave all those who accepted Him from every nation, people and tongue all the privileges of His people, to whom Christ said, "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it" (Matthew 21:43).

"In Salem also is His tabernacle." The same word for tabernacle is sometimes applied to the lion's lair. The meaning could then be that the Lord defends His people as a lion defends its lair. "For thus the LORD has spoken to me: 'As a lion roars, and a young lion over his prey (when a multitude of shepherds is summoned against him, he will not be

afraid of their voice nor be disturbed by their noise)... so will the LORD of hosts defend Jerusalem. Defending, He will also deliver it" (Isaiah 31:4,5).

God dwells amongst His people; He lives in their midst. John saw Christ in the midst of seven golden candlesticks, which were the seven churches (Revelation 1:13). Christ also said, "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20).

3. **A triumphant power:** "There He broke the arrows of the bow, the shield and sword of battle" (verse 3). "There" in all the battles the enemy waged against the people of the Lord, the Lord broke the arrows shot from the enemy's bows by His superior power, which must conquer and grant victory to His people. The Bible says of God's arrows that defend His people and defeat His enemies, "He sent His arrows and scattered the foe, lightning in abundance and He vanquished them" (Psalm 18:14). The prophet said, "Then the LORD will be seen over them, and His arrow will go forth like lightning" (Zechariah 9:14). Here the Bible says that the Lord will crush all tools of war; the buckler, the sword and the soldiers altogether.

6.2. Second: The Lord's Glory

(verse 4-6)

1. **He destroyed the fortifications:** "You are more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey" (verse 4). The mountains of prey are the lofty, firm mountains, which are topped by the enemy's strong fortifications, and the impenetrable caves that none of the people of the valley could reach. God, however, is more glorious and excellent than all of them, because He who is with us is by far greater and more powerful than those who are with them. God offered such great encouragement through the prophet Nahum, who said about the attack of the Assyrians (whose capital was Nineveh) against His people, "'Where is the dwelling of the lions? ...The lion tore in pieces enough for his cubs, killed for his lionesses, filled his caves with prey, and his dens with flesh. Behold, I am against you,' says the LORD of hosts" (Nahum 2:11-13).
2. **He destroyed the soldiers:** "The stout-hearted were plundered; they have sunk into their sleep; and none of the mighty men have found the use of their hands. At Your rebuke, O God of Jacob, both the chariot and horse were cast into a dead sleep" (verse 5,6). The king of Assyria said, "By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent; ... My hand has found like a nest the riches of the people, and as one gathers eggs that are left, I have gathered all the earth." But God said to him, "Shall the axe boast itself against him who chops with it? Or shall the saw exalt itself against him who saws with it?" (Isaiah 10:13-15). God has plundered the brave enemies, let them fall into a deadly sleep, saying about them, "'That they may ... sleep a perpetual sleep and not awake,' says the Lord" (Jeremiah 51:39). When they attempted to use their hands and feet

for attacking or defending, they found them cut off, either because they actually lost them, or because they were unable to use them any more.

God rebuked the enemy by the sound of His authority: "You have rebuked the nations, You have destroyed the wicked" (Psalm 9:5). Both the chariot and horse fell into deep sleep, were cast into a trance of death. All God's enemies fell down and died. He is God "who brings forth the chariot and horse, the army and the power (they shall lie down together, they shall not rise; they are extinguished, they are quenched like a wick)" (Isaiah 43:17).

6.3. Third: The Lord's Authority

(verse 7-9)

1. **Because He is feared:** "You, Yourself, are to be feared; and who may stand in Your presence when once You are angry?" (verse 7). God is an awesome God and none can stand against Him. Saul of Tarsus withstood Christ and His Church, carrying messages from the Jewish leaders that allowed him to arrest the Christians, both men and women, and take them to prison to be tortured. But with all his knowledge, power and zeal for his doctrine, he could not stand up against the awe of God, who send dazzling light around him and caused him to fall to the ground. At which point he heard Christ say, "Why are you persecuting Me? ... It is hard for you to kick against the goads" (Acts 9:4-6). Truly "The LORD Most High is awesome" (Psalm 47:2). He is "a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29). "Who can stand before His indignation? And who can endure the fierceness of His anger?" (Nahum 1:6). The psalmist said to Him, "If you Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?" (Psalm 130:3).
2. **Because He is the judge:** "You caused judgement to be heard from heaven; the earth feared and was still, when God arose to judgement, to deliver all the oppressed of the earth" (verse 8,9). God is a fair judge who pronounces judgements against the wicked that incapacitate them and render them defenceless. Hannah said in her prayer of thanksgiving, "The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken in pieces; from heaven He will thunder against them. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth" (1 Samuel 2:10). The children of Korah said as well, "The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved; He uttered His voice, the earth melted" (Psalm 46:6). And Isaiah said, "The LORD will cause His glorious voice to be heard, and show the descent of His arm, with the indignation of His anger and the flame of a devouring fire ... For through the voice of the LORD Assyria will be beaten down" (Isaiah 30:30,31).

God must arise to execute fair judgement, frighten the wicked, and save all the meek of the earth. "But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked" (Isaiah 11:4). God rushes to the rescue of the helpless; He defends them as they keep silent. When we encounter an arrogant man who

oppresses the helpless, we must remember that God arises to save the meek of heart. He says to them, "All the horns of the wicked I will also cut off, but the horns of the righteous shall be exalted" (Psalm 75:10).

6.4. Fourth: Pieces of Advice for the Meek

(verse 10-12)

The psalmist made plain that God's power breaks the enemy and defends the meek who cannot defend himself. Then he reassures the meek by giving him three pieces of advice:

1. **God is in full authority:** "Surely the wrath of man shall praise You; with the remainder of wrath You shall gird Yourself" (v, 10). Man's wrath against God's people must be made to glorify the Lord and bring welfare to His people. God must work miracles to rescue His people; bringing out of the eater something to eat, and out of the strong something sweet (Judges 14:14). This was the case with Pharaoh, to whom God said, "But indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth. As yet you exalt yourself" (Exodus 9:16). If the evil man still keeps wrath unexpressed, God girds Himself with it and makes it for the good of His people. God says to the sinners, "Your breath, as fire, shall devour you" (Isaiah 33:11).

When Haman was angry with Mordechai, he was crucified on the tree that he had erected for the purpose of crucifying Mordechai. The king tore the signet from Haman's finger and gave it to Mordechai. The enemy destroyed himself while God honoured His people (Esther 7:9; 8:2).

Christ said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18). This took place after the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian to be martyred. "At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles... Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 8:1,4). The wrath of the people made the spreading of God's word possible.

2. **Pay your vows:** "Make vows to the LORD your God, and pay them; let all who are around Him bring presents to Him who ought to be feared" (verse 11). In times of distress, man makes vows to the Lord, but when what he requested comes true he often forgets about the vow. A vow is an agreement between the weak man and Almighty God. God, in His love, accepts this arrangement, not because He expects the man to pay up, but because He wants us to be faithful to our promises. When Jacob vowed to build a house for the Lord if He kept him safe and honoured him, the Lord granted his request, but Jacob forgot his vow (Genesis 28:20-22). God's words came true, but Jacob's did not! Therefore the Lord told Jacob to remember his vow and go to Bethel to pay it (Genesis

35:1).

The psalmist joins his voice with the voice of God in requiring everyone who makes a vow to fulfil it. "When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; for He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed; better not to vow than to vow and not pay" (Ecclesiastes 5:4,5).

3. **Rest assured:** "He shall cut off the spirit of princes; He is awesome to the kings of the earth" (verse 12). When man alienates himself from God, he ruins and destroys his soul. When his actions contradict the divine laws, he cuts his soul with a sharp sword, because God's laws are like a sword; it protects us if we walk alongside Him, but rips us apart if we go against Him.

Revelation speaks of this cutting off of the spirit of princes using the following picture: "And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, 'Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe.' So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God" (Revelation 14:18,19).

This psalm is the voice of God that comforts us in times of trouble and distress. It says that God is a victor, that He will make His enemies His footstool. Let us rejoice in the God of our salvation.

6.5. Questions

1. What did the psalmist mean by saying, "You are more glorious than the mountains of prey"?
2. Why does the wrath of man praise God?

7. Psalm Seventy-Seven

You Guided Your People

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

1 I cried out to God with my voice -- to God with my voice; and He gave ear to me.

2 In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord; my hand was stretched out in the night without ceasing; my soul refused to be comforted.

3 I remembered God, and was troubled; I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah

4 You hold my eyelids open; I am so troubled that I cannot speak.

5 I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times.

6 I call to remembrance my song in the night; I meditate within my heart, and my spirit makes diligent search.

7 Will the Lord cast off forever? And will He be favourable no more?

8 Has His mercy ceased forever? Has His promise failed forevermore?

9 Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies? Selah

10 And I said, "This is my anguish; but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High."

11 I will remember the works of the LORD; surely I will remember Your wonders of old.

12 I will also meditate on all Your work, and talk of Your deeds.

13 Your way, O God, is in the sanctuary; who is so great a God as our God?

14 You are the God who does wonders; you have declared Your strength among the peoples.

15 You have with Your arm redeemed Your people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah

16 The waters saw You, O God; the waters saw You, they were afraid; the depths also trembled.

17 The clouds poured out water; the skies sent out a sound; Your arrows also flashed about.

18 The voice of Your thunder was in the whirlwind; the lightnings lit up the world; the earth trembled and shook.

19 Your way was in the sea, Your path in the great waters, and Your footsteps were not known.

20 You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

This psalm corresponds with the prayer that prophet Habakkuk lifted up to God as he saw the Chaldean armies approaching to devastate his country. His faith received a violent jolt, and he wondered if the justice of God would approve the rise of terror and violence. The Lord answered His prophet Habakkuk by saying that justice will undoubtedly come; it shall not delay, and he must wait for it. As the prophet demanded God to act speedily lest the believing hearts should fail, God revealed to him in a vision that He was coming to punish His enemies and grant victory to His people, just as He did in the past. History repeats itself.

At the time of writing this psalm, the psalmist's country was devastated, and the Chaldeans had exiled his people. Therefore, he presented the problem to God and waited for an answer, which he got. The answer was that God never rejected His people, and that He who worked miracles for them in the past will continue to do so in the future. God, who brought His people out of Egypt to freedom, will also bring them back to their land from the Babylonian exile.

The psalmist desired in this psalm to escape bitter reality, and recover the glories of the happy past. But after consideration, he felt sure that he will have a better future, because

God, who took care of His people through Moses and Aaron for 40 years in the desert, is the same yesterday, today and forever.

The psalm contains the following:

- First: The Problem (verse 1-10)
- Second: The Solution (verse 11-20)

7.1. First: The Problem

(verse 1-10)

1. A problem within the soul (verse 1-4):

1. **Crying:** "I cried out to God with my voice; to God with my voice; and He gave ear to me" (verse 1). When a child misses the feeling of security, he cries out at the top of his voice. When the adult loses his way, he also cries out like a child. So the psalmist started his psalm complaining with a loud voice, addressing God not man, knowing that God will answer, because He had answered him before. "I sought the LORD, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears" (Psalm 34:4).
2. **Seeking:** "In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord; my hand was stretched out in the night without ceasing; my soul refused to be comforted" (verse 2). The psalmist's vision was not so clear, so he sought for the Lord. He began to stretch out his hand in tireless prayer the whole night long, questioning, "Has God forgotten His people? Where are His past mercies?!" He sounded like David when he said, "Hear the voice of my supplications when I cry to You, when I lift up my hands toward Your holy sanctuary" (Psalm 28:2). The psalmist refused all consolation because his problem was still there. He was like Jacob who wept over his lost son Joseph, believing that a wild animal devoured him: "And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and he said, 'For I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning'" (Genesis 37:35). He was like Rachel who wept over her children "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted for her children, because they are no more" (Jeremiah 31:15). The psalmist's soul would not be comforted, because he had limited knowledge and could not, with his limited human ability, put his trust in the Lord, just as Jacob believed that Joseph was lost, although living; and like Rachel who refused all consolation although the holy family was in perfect safety in Egypt, and the children that Herod murdered stand in the presence of God.
3. **Groaning:** "I remembered God, and was troubled [or groaned]; I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed" (verse 3). The psalmist prayed and remembered God, waiting for a speedy salvation. When He delayed His coming, the psalmist began to groan and murmured to himself, "Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do

you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. Therefore the law is paralysed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted... I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint" (Habakkuk 1:3,4; 2:1 NIV).

Due to his many complaints, heartache and perplexity, his spirit was overwhelmed and he could not sleep.

Believers go through such an experience when they are faced with difficult circumstances. They are overwhelmed by their sickness, by the loss of a loved one, by disappointment, or by a spiritual weakness. The children of Korah, though, found the solution to such a circumstance, for their song leader said to himself, "Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God" (Psalm 42:11).

4. **Trouble:** "You hold my eyelids open; I am so troubled that I cannot speak" (verse 4). Because of the intensity of the psalmist's trouble, the depth of his sadness, his many questions, and the depth of his despair he could not sleep and he lost the power to express himself. It felt as if God was holding his eyelids, keeping them from closing, and as if his tongue could not move because of his trouble. He could just as well have said, "I am weary with my groaning ... My eye wastes away because of grief; it grows old because of all my enemies" (Psalm 6:6,7).
2. **The problem of comparing the present with the past:** "I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. I call to remembrance my song in the night; I meditate within my heart, and my spirit makes diligent search" (verse 5,6). In these two verses the psalmist compares the present with the past. He recalled all that God did for His people since He had chosen Abraham. He considered it, analysed it, and was glad at what he found out. He could just as well have said, "God my Maker, Who gives songs in the night... The LORD will command His loving-kindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me; a prayer to the God of my life ... It is good to give thanks to the LORD, and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High; to declare Your loving-kindness in the morning, and Your faithfulness every night" (Job 35:10; Psalm 42:8; 92:1,2). Still, the psalmist's present was different from his past, so he began to wonder in bewilderment and grumble to his heart, while his spirit searched and looked to see if God would fulfil His promise: "But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the descendants of Abraham My friend. You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest regions, and said to you, 'You are My servant, I have chosen you and have not cast you away: Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.'" (Isaiah 41:8-10).

3. A problem with God (verses 7-10):

1. **The Lord is not favourable:** "Will the Lord cast off forever? And will He be favourable no more?" (verse 7). The psalmist wondered how much longer God will hide His face from him, while both he and his people undergo sufferings, who were once before in His favour. Why does He continue to refuse; why does He not restore them to His favour? The psalmist joins his voice with that of Asaph who asked, "O God, why have You cast us off forever? Why does Your anger smoke against the sheep of Your pasture?" (Psalm 74:1). He remonstrates with the children of Korah: "Will You be angry with us forever? Will You prolong Your anger to all generations?" (Psalm 85:5).
2. **The Lord does not show mercy:** "Has His mercy ceased forever? Has His promise failed forevermore?" (verse 8). The psalmist continues his question: If you have rejected us, Lord, where are Your mercies? Have they ceased? Have your promises failed? At a time of joy and peace, one psalmist said, "He is the LORD our God; His judgements are in all the earth. He remembers His covenant forever, the word which He commanded, for a thous-and generations, the covenant which He made with Abraham, and His oath to Isaac, and confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant" (Psalm 105:7-10). Yet God allowed His people to be carried away for a long time. Does that mean, then, that He no longer has mercy to cover the faults of His people? Have His good promises, which He affirmed to Abraham, failed?
3. **The Lord forgot and changed:** "Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies? And I said, 'This is my anguish; but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High'" (verse 9,10). The Lord descended in the clouds and called out "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation" (Exodus 34:5-7). Has the Lord been angered in such a way that He held back His mercies? Was it because of this that Habakkuk pleaded him, "In wrath remember mercy" (Habakkuk 3:2)?

The psalmist felt that the hand that used to support him in the past stopped doing so, or perhaps began to work against him to make him fall. Certainly these were feelings, not realities, because God will never change. He is the First and the Last. He will never forget His people because they are dear to His heart, neither will His wrath hinder His acts of mercy; for He is love. Yet the psalmist was struck with sickness; he groaned and moaned and his health still deteriorated. He murmured to himself, his spirit was overwhelmed, sleep escaped his eyes, and words ceased to come forth from his lips. He asked many unanswerable questions as he saw God's acts being changed from acts of

mercy to acts of punishment.

The psalmist's feelings must have humbled him before God as though he were saying like Jeremiah, "Woe is me for my hurt! My wound is severe. But I say, 'Truly this is an infirmity, and I must bear it'" (Jeremiah 10:19). They must have made him sympathise with the suffering: "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15). They must have kept him awake lest he should fall into temptation (Matthew 26:41). It is also certain that they made him hold on more firmly to God and say, "If I say, 'My foot slips,' Your mercy, O LORD, will hold me up. In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul" (Psalm 94:18,19).

7.2. Second: The Solution

(verse 11-20)

When we focus on the problems, we lose our sleep and fall ill. The remedy lies in focusing one's eyes upon the Lord who solves the knotty problems, in obedience to the commandment: "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). Thus we can say, "I have set the LORD always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved" (Psalm 16:8). As Peter focused his eyes upon Jesus, he could walk on the waves, but when he turned them away from Him to the waves, he began to sink (Matthew 14:30).

The psalmist found the solution to his problem in focusing on God and pondering on His unchangeable character. And when he recalled His wonderful, frequent works, the glorious past filled his soul with hope for the future, and he was able to say, "I will mention the loving-kindnesses of the LORD and the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD has bestowed on us, and the great goodness ... according to His mercies, according to the multitude of His loving-kindnesses ... In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them; in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bore them and carried them all the days of old" (Isaiah 63:7,9).

1. **The solution is with the God of wonders:** "I will remember the works of the LORD; surely I will remember Your wonders of old. I will also meditate on all Your work, and talk of Your deeds" (verse 11,12). The Holy Spirit must intervene in the right time to change the atmosphere of misery and complaint into one of thanksgiving and appreciation to God's grace. He reminds us of all that God said to us (John 14:26). The Spirit of God reminded the psalmist of the Lord's works, wonders, deeds and acts, beginning from Exodus and its accompanying miracles and the song, "Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" (Exodus 15:11). So his soul was reassured.

When John the Baptist was in jail, he sent two of his disciples to ask Christ: "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" He expected that, with the miracles that He had

performed, Christ must rescue him. But Christ did not release John the Baptist; He strengthened his faith by commanding his disciples to tell their rabbi what they had heard and seen: "The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them." Then Christ said to John the Baptist, "And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me" (Matthew 11:3-6). John the Baptist's soul must have been comforted as he heard the glad tidings of the kingdom of God, although he was still in jail.

2. **The solution is with the God of holiness:** "Your way, O God, is in the sanctuary [holiness]; who is so great a God as our God?" (verse 13). All that God does is flawless for "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). Habakkuk asked Him this rhetorical question, "Are You not from everlasting, O LORD my God, my Holy One?" (Habakkuk 1:12). He is a great God in His holiness; all His ways are holy, and the angels shout out loud for Him, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!" (Isaiah 6:3). As soon as the clouds of doubt were dispersed and the mournful tears were wiped from the eyes of the psalmist, his soul rested and he saw the perfect holiness of God, who does nothing evil.
3. **The solution is with the God of salvation:** "You are the God who does wonders; You have declared Your strength among the peoples. You have with Your arm redeemed Your people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph" (verse 14,15). The holy God of wonders is the Saviour, whose deeds Moses recounted to his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian: "And Moses told his father-in-law all that the LORD had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardship that had come upon them on the way, and how the LORD had delivered them. Then Jethro rejoiced for all the good which the LORD had done for Israel ... And Jethro said, 'Blessed be the LORD, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh ... Now I know that the LORD is greater than all the gods; for in the very thing in which they behaved proudly, He was above them.' Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took a burnt offering and other sacrifices to offer to God" (Exodus 18:8-12).

This God is unique in His power, to whom we offer sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise, and in whose presence we find intimate fellowship, peace and satisfaction. It is He who released "the sons of Jacob and Joseph" from captivity. This expression occurs here and in Obadiah 18 only. "The sons of Jacob" refers to the southern kingdom, and the "sons of Joseph" refers to the northern one, because Joseph was the father of the strongest two tribes in it, which were Ephraim and Manasseh. He means, then, that all the children of Israel, both in the north and in the south, have experienced the salvation of the great God who miraculously delivered them.

4. **The solution is with the God of authority (verse 16-20):**
 1. **His authority is over the waters:** "The waters saw You, O God; the waters saw You,

- they were afraid; the depths also trembled" (verse 16), as though the waters and the depths had eyes to see God's awe-inspiring majesty and tremble. The waters of the Red Sea submitted: "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). To Him also the waters of the Jordan River submitted: "And as those who bore the ark came to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests who bore the ark dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks during the whole time of harvest), that the waters which came down from upstream stood still, and rose in a heap ... Then the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan" (Joshua 3:15-17). To Christ the churning waters of the sea of Galilee also submitted as He "rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace, be still!' And the wind ceased and there was a great calm" (Mark 4:39).
2. **His authority is over the rain:** "The clouds poured out water; the skies sent out a sound; Your arrows also flashed about. The voice of Your thunder was in the whirlwind; the lightning lit up the world; the earth trembled and shook" (verse 17,18). The psalmist depicts here a rainy storm, accompanied by thunder and lightning. It caused light to flash all over the country: "The LORD thundered from heaven, and the Most High uttered His voice. He sent out arrows and scattered them; lightning bolts, and He vanquished them" (2 Samuel 22:14,15). The earth shook from the sound of the storm. Who is it that possesses such absolute authority? It is the Almighty God, the all-powerful.
 3. **His authority is mysterious:** "Your way was in the sea, Your path in the great waters, and Your footsteps were not known. You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron" (verse 19,20). God's works are mysterious; no one can predict them. He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think (Ephesians 3:20). God did not disclose His plans ahead of time, for "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter" (Proverbs 25:2). God's way is mysterious; no one can fathom it. He says, "'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,' says the LORD. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts'" (Isaiah 55:8,9). "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).

Who could believe that Pharaoh's army would sink while the miserable underdogs would be delivered?! Who would imagine that God would support about two million souls for forty years in the desert of wandering. So let us commit ourselves to the hands of our Supporter and feel reassured about His love, holiness and power. He guided His people like sheep through Moses and Aaron. And like weak and helpless sheep they were! Sheep

know how to get lost, but not how to find their way back. So God guided them through Moses and Aaron, though both of them needed guidance from the God of guidance. Today God guides us through His holy Word, His Holy Spirit, the acts of His Providence and his ministers, who do His pleasure. His guidance is personal for the individual, and collective for all believers.

This psalm is an invitation to turn our eyes away from the problems and fix them upon God, to kneel down in His presence with submission and assurance. It is an invitation to wait upon God's guidance and direction, so that our heads be lifted up above every problem! "Behold, God is mighty, but despises no one; He is mighty in strength of understanding ... He does not withdraw His eyes from the righteous; but they are on the throne with kings, for He has seated them forever, and they are exalted ... If they obey and serve Him, they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures" (Job 36:5,7,11).

7.3. Questions

1. The psalmist meditated within his heart and his spirit made diligent search. What was the subject of his meditations?
2. The psalmist found his rest at the feet of the God of authority. How did he see God's authority?

8. Psalm Seventy-Eight

God's Faithfulness Despite His People's Unfaithfulness

A Contemplation of Asaph.

1 Give ear, O my people, to my law; incline your ears to the words of my mouth.

2 I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old,

3 Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us.

4 We will not hide them from their children, telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done.

5 For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children;

6 That the generation to come might know them, the children who would be born, that they may arise and declare them to their children,

7 That they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments;

8 And may not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that did not set its heart aright, and whose spirit was not faithful to God.

9 The children of Ephraim, being armed and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle.
10 They did not keep the covenant of God; they refused to walk in His law,
11 And forgot His works and His wonders that He had shown them.
12 Marvellous things He did in the sight of their fathers, in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan.
13 He divided the sea and caused them to pass through; and He made the waters stand up like a heap.
14 In the daytime also He led them with the cloud, and all the night with a light of fire.
15 He split the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink in abundance like the depths.
16 He also brought streams out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers.
17 But they sinned even more against Him by rebelling against the Most High in the wilderness.
18 And they tested God in their heart by asking for the food of their fancy.
19 Yes, they spoke against God: They said, "Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?
20 Behold, He struck the rock, so that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed. Can He give bread also? Can He provide meat for His people?"
21 Therefore the LORD heard this and was furious; so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel,
22 Because they did not believe in God, and did not trust in His salvation.
23 Yet He had commanded the clouds above, and opened the doors of heaven,
24 Had rained down manna on them to eat, and given them of the bread of heaven.
25 Men ate angels' food; He sent them food to the full.
26 He caused an east wind to blow in the heavens; and by His power He brought in the south wind.
27 He also rained meat on them like the dust, feathered fowl like the sand of the seas;
28 And He let them fall in the midst of their camp, all around their dwellings.
29 So they ate and were well filled, for He gave them their own desire.
30 They were not deprived of their craving; but while their food was still in their mouths,
31 The wrath of God came against them, and slew the stoutest of them, and struck down the choice men of Israel.
32 In spite of this they still sinned, and did not believe in His wondrous works.
33 Therefore their days He consumed in futility, and their years in fear.
34 When He slew them, then they sought Him; and they returned and sought earnestly for God.

35 Then they remembered that God was their rock, and the Most High God their Redeemer.

36 Nevertheless they flattered Him with their mouth, and they lied to Him with their tongue;

37 For their heart was not steadfast with Him, nor were they faithful in His covenant.

38 But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them. Yes, many a time He turned His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath;

39 For He remembered that they were but flesh, a breath that passes away and does not come again.

40 How often they provoked Him in the wilderness, and grieved Him in the desert!

41 Yes, again and again they tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel.

42 They did not remember His power: The day when He redeemed them from the enemy,

43 When He worked His signs in Egypt, and His wonders in the field of Zoan;

44 Turned their rivers into blood, and their streams, that they could not drink.

45 He sent swarms of flies among them, which devoured them, and frogs, which destroyed them.

46 He also gave their crops to the caterpillar, and their labour to the locust.

47 He destroyed their vines with hail, and their sycamore trees with frost.

48 He also gave up their cattle to the hail, and their flocks to fiery lightning.

49 He cast on them the fierceness of His anger, wrath, indignation, and trouble, by sending angels of destruction among them.

50 He made a path for His anger; He did not spare their soul from death, but gave their life over to the plague,

51 And destroyed all the firstborn in Egypt, the first of their strength in the tents of Ham.

52 But He made His own people go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock;

53 And He led them on safely, so that they did not fear; but the sea overwhelmed their enemies.

54 And He brought them to His holy border, this mountain which His right hand had acquired.

55 He also drove out the nations before them, allotted them an inheritance by survey, and made the tribes of Israel dwell in their tents.

56 Yet they tested and provoked the Most High God, and did not keep His testimonies,

57 But turned back and acted unfaithfully like their fathers; they were turned aside like a deceitful bow.

58 For they provoked Him to anger with their high places, and moved Him to jealousy with their carved images.

59 When God heard this, He was furious, and greatly abhorred Israel,

**60 So that He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent He had placed among men,
61 And delivered His strength into captivity, and His glory into the enemy's hand.
62 He also gave His people over to the sword, and was furious with His inheritance.
63 The fire consumed their young men, and their maidens were not given in marriage.
64 Their priests fell by the sword, and their widows made no lamentation.
65 Then the Lord awoke as from sleep, like a mighty man who shouts because of wine.
66 And He beat back His enemies; He put them to a perpetual reproach.
67 Moreover He rejected the tent of Joseph, and did not choose the tribe of Ephraim,
68 But chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion which He loved.
69 And He built His sanctuary like the heights, like the earth which He has established forever.
70 He also chose David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds;
71 From following the ewes that had young He brought him, to shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance.
72 So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands.**

In Psalm 77 the psalmist meditated on God's past deeds to encourage himself and others who are confused and worn out. He said, "I will also meditate on all Your work, and talk of Your deeds" (Psalm 77:12). And in this psalm the psalmist requires his audience to remember God's past miracles to take care not to repeat the mistakes of their fathers who forgot God's miracles. The psalmist especially pointed out the sins of the tribe of Ephraim, who were rejected by God to lead His people because of their rebellion. He compared them with the tribe of Judah, who were chosen by God as forefathers of King David.

Our psalm is the first among the historical psalms, which are Psalm 78, 105, 106 and 136. Our psalm consists of 72 verses that recount the history of God's dealings with his people, who were mistreated and tormented in Egypt. At that time they cried out to Him, and He answered them and sent His spokesman, Moses, and delivered them through great miracles. He took them out of the land of Egypt, sustained them in the Sinai Desert for 40 years. He fed them with manna and quail; their feet did not swell and their sandals did not wear out on their feet (Deuteronomy 8:4; 29:5). But they continued to sin and murmur, and even when they repented and confessed, it was done in the most superficial manner... As the years of wandering came to an end when Moses died, the leadership was given to Joshua. Through him God worked the miracle of dividing the River Jordan at its flood time, and the children of Israel crossed the Jordan on dry land. Once they all crossed, the water returned to its

normal condition. The Promised Land was divided among the tribes, as God promised Abraham, but the people departed from the worship of God after all those miracles!

One cannot blame the Israelites, because we forget God's favours just as they did. Therefore David says, "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits" (Psalm 103:2). Our psalm also tells us how great God's graciousness is to us, and that we do not deserve His favour. He expects our obedience to him because He loved us first. "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22,23).

The psalm contains the following:

- First: A Warning to the Coming Generation (verse 1-8)
- Second: Forgotten Miracles (verse 9-16)
- Third: Continual Murmuring (verse 17-33)
- Fourth: Superficial Repentance (verse 34-39)
- Fifth: They Did Not Thank God for the Miracle of the Exodus (verse 40-53)
- Sixth: They Did Not Thank God for the Promised Land (verse 54-67)
- Seventh: A New Beginning (verse 68-72)

8.1. First: A Warning to the Coming Generation

(verse 1-8)

1. **An invitation to listen (verse 1-4):** Right at the beginning of the psalm the psalmist warns the new generation the sins of the past one, so that they should not repeat them. He opens his mouth in a parable and utter dark sayings of old. He will explain an old story to draw beneficial lessons out of it, so that it would not be merely an historical incident, but a spiritual lesson; nor just memories of bygone events, but a present spiritual blessing to the souls. The parable that the psalmist utters is a reality that was coined by those who experienced it in a brief, rhymed phrase to be easily memorised by all, so that all would learn from its wisdom and practice it. The psalmist's experience was a mysterious riddle for many, so he wanted to make it plain, after the manner of the author of Psalm 49 and in keeping what Moses' command to the Israelites: "Set your hearts on all the words which I testify among you today, which you shall command your children to be careful to observe; all the words of this law. For it is not a futile thing for you, because it is your life, and by this word you shall prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to possess" (Deuteronomy 32:46,47).
2. **What God did (verse 5):** God asks His people to listen to Him in two things:
 1. **In a testimony:** God has set up a testimony in Jacob that testifies of the believers.

- This was kept in the Ark of the Covenant because it was a covenant between God and His people. It testifies of them, their works and their faith. And the Scriptures say, "Blessed are those who keep His testimonies" (Psalm 119:2). We have no excuse; because he has testified of us and of our works, as the Apostle Paul said, "How I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house" (Acts 20:20).
2. **In a law:** In Hebrew this is *torah*, and in Greek it is *nomos*, from which English derives words like economy and astronomy. It means a discipline, a manner of behaviour, a teaching. It must be followed because it is God's straight path that leads us to peace, rest and happiness: "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD!" (Psalm 119:1).
 3. **What the other generation must do (verse 6-8):**
 1. **They know:** "That the generation to come might know" (verse 6). They will hear of what they have not seen, and expect God's blessing.
 2. **They tell their children:** "That they may arise and declare them to their children" (verse 6). "You shall teach them diligently to your children ... You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (Deuteronomy 6:6-9).
 3. **They hope in God:** "That they may set their hope in God" (verse 7), and act on what they believe, thus they should not be moved or swayed.
 4. **They remember:** "And not forget the works of God" (verse 7). And if anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!
 5. **They keep:** "But keep His commandments" (verse 7) and live a life of obedience. "Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book" (Revelation 22:7).
 6. **They differ from the generation that sinned:** "And may not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that did not set its heart aright, and whose spirit was not faithful to God" (verse 8).

8.2. Second: Forgotten Miracles

(verse 9-16)

1. **The tribe of Ephraim forgot (verse 9-11):** Ephraim was the second son of Joseph. He was greater than his elder brother, Manasseh. His name means "double fruits". The tribe of Ephraim became the leader of the Northern Kingdom, but they turned back on the day of battle because they did not keep the covenant of God and would not walk in His law. He also forgot God's deeds and wondrous acts. This does not mean that Ephraim turned back in a specific military battle, but that he was defeated in a spiritual battle, in which he fell prey to the fangs of the devil. Ephraim was spiritually advanced as a tribe. From them came Joshua, Moses' successor, the prophet Samuel, and the prophetess Hannah. But

painfully they turned back from God, and, in consequence, God rejected the service of this tribe. It will be shown to us at the end of the psalm that God chose David to come from the tribe of Judah instead of the tribe of Ephraim. It is obvious that God does not reject the person himself, because He gives him a chance to repent, but He takes away the service that he was not faithful enough to perform, and gives it to another who would be faithful.

2. **What the tribe of Ephraim forgot (verse 12-16):**

1. **They forgot the division of the sea (verse 12,13):** The Lord worked miracles "in the field of Zoan." Zoan lies to the east of the delta in northern Egypt. The first king of the pharaonic twelfth dynasty made it his capital, to watch Egypt's eastern border. The shepherd kings fortified it, and now it is called Tanis. The greatest thing that happened in the land of Zoan (Egypt) was the division of the Red Sea to let the Israelites cross, and the drowning of the Egyptians in it.
2. **They forgot the pillar of cloud and the fire (verse 14),** whereby the Lord guided His people and protected them day and night during their journey in the desert of Sinai (Exodus 13:21).
3. **They forgot the water that came forth from the rocks (verse 15,16).** God split the rocks and gave water to the thirsty (Exodus 17:6; Numbers 20:11). Can anyone forget such a miracle?

8.3. Third: Continual Murmuring

(verse 17-33)

1. **They grumbled against the food (verse 17-20):** The people sinned against God by their continual rebellion against His clear commandments. They tempted Him by doubting of His goodness and demanded that He to show His power. When He gave them water, they asked, "But where is the food?" They grumbled against Moses and Aaron, saying, "Oh, that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full!" (Exodus 16:3). They said on another occasion, "Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" (Exodus 17:3).
2. **The punishment for grumbling (verse 21,22):** The people neither believed in God nor trusted in His salvation. They complained in God's ears and aroused Him to anger. Immediately fire was kindled among them and consumed some in the outskirts of the camp. So Moses prayed to the Lord, and the fire was quenched. They called the name of the place Taberah, meaning, "burning" (Numbers 11:1-3).
3. **Giving despite the grumbling (verse 23-29):** In spite of the complaint, the doubts, the grumbling, and the rebellion God opened up the gates of heaven and gave them manna, an angelic food called "bread from heaven" in the Scriptures (Exodus 16:4). The manna

was like coriander seed, its colour like the colour of bdellium, and it tasted was like pastry prepared with oil (Numbers 11:7,8). Then He drove the quails by a strong east wind. These are migrating birds that fly in large numbers from Africa in the south to the north. Their meat has a sweet taste (Exodus 16:13; Numbers 11:31).

4. **The punishment for ingratitude (verse 30-33):** God punishes some people by granting them the request of their greedy hearts. God punished those grumblers after He gave them what they asked for. God administered His heavy punishment on them while they were eating (Numbers 11:20,33). The purpose of the punishment was to correct those unthankful rebels. Yet, God continued to deal bountifully with them as well.

8.4. Fourth: Superficial Repentance

(verse 34-39)

1. **The repentance of the fearful (verse 34-37):** God punished the grumblers, so they cried out, not out of true repentance, but to escape the punishment. It was a superficial repentance, which the Lord described in these terms: "Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths and honour Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men" (Isaiah 29:13; Matthew 15:8).
2. **Divine mercy (verse 38,39):** God knows the frame of man; He remembers that he is dust. The wind passes over it, and it is gone (Psalm 103:14,16). He is merciful, gracious and longsuffering, therefore He does not punish the sinners according what they deserve (Exodus 34:6,7; Numbers 14:18; Deuteronomy 4:31).

8.5. Fifth: They did not Thank God for the Miracle of the Exodus

(verse 40-53)

1. **How often they disobeyed Him (verse 40-43)!** The more God multiplied His bounties to the Israelites, the more they multiplied their disobedience and murmuring. They disobeyed Him and grieved Him. They turned back from Him, tempted Him. They provoked Him to anger and forgot His bounties. Yet, He worked those miracles against Egypt, the greatest empire at the time, and against its capital Zoan.
2. **Plagues upon Egypt (verse 44-51):** The psalmist does not mention the seven plagues that befell Egypt not in the order of their occurrence. He began with the turning of water into blood (the first plague Exodus 7:20), the flies (the third plague Exodus 16:8), the frogs (the second plague Exodus 8:2), the caterpillar and locust (the eighth plague Exodus 10:12), the hail (the seventh plague Exodus 9:18), the death of cattle (the fifth plague Exodus 9:3), the death of the first-born (the tenth plague Exodus 11:5).
3. **The miracle of the exodus (verse 52,53):** Finally the miracle of the exodus took place (Exodus 15:13-17,22). What a great difference between the destiny of God's people and

the end of the army of the oppressor.

8.6. Sixth: They did not Thank God for the Promised Land

(verse 54-67)

1. **He brought them into the land (verse 54,55):** Finally, and despite their disobedience, God brought His people into the Holy Land, which He had promised, to Abraham, according to His unchangeable faithfulness. He also wanted to establish in it His holy temple, which Solomon built, as was expressed by Miriam's song: "You will bring them in and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance, in the place, O LORD, which You have made for Your own dwelling, the sanctuary, O LORD, which Your hands have established" (Exodus 15:17). Joshua said as he divided the land to the tribes, "I have divided to you by lot these nations that remain, to be an inheritance for your tribes, from the Jordan, with all the nations that I have cut off, as far as the Great Sea westward" (Joshua 23:4).
2. **Their disobedience in the land (verse 56-58):** The people went in the wrong way during the time of the judges; they veered away from the goal for which God brought them into existence. They worshiped idols.
3. **The punishment of the disobedient (verse 59-67):** Shiloh was the capital of the tribe of Ephraim. The Ark of the Covenant was set up there inside the tabernacle of meeting that Moses made. The reason it was selected for the establishment of the ark was that Joshua, the leader of the people, came from the tribe of Ephraim. In this way God honoured that tribe. But they departed from worshipping the Lord, so God rejected them because "they turned back in [the spiritual] battle" and missed the path to true worship. God rejected the tabernacle of Shiloh where the Ark of the Covenant stayed for over three hundred years (verse 60), and let the Ark be carried off (verse 61). The two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the LORD, were killed (verse 62,63a, see 1 Samuel 4:17). The maidens had no husbands to marry and the widows could shed no more tears because they wept so much (verse 63b,64).

Despite their apostasy, God never abandoned His people; He rather hastened to their assistance. The psalmist describes this "haste" with an unusual figure of speech. He compared God with a mighty man who shouts before joining the battle because of the wine he drank (verse 65), in order to redress the injustice done to His people and effect a change in the policy of the land. The Lord rejected the tabernacle that had been established in Shiloh in the land of Ephraim the son of Joseph, because He chose the tribe of Judah.

8.7. Seventh: A New Beginning

(verse 68-72)

1. **The election of the tribe of Judah (verse 68,69):** God stopped the old system and replaced it with a new one. He substituted the tribe of Ephraim for that of Judah, and the old city of Shiloh for Mount Zion in Jerusalem. And on the holy hills He established Solomon's temple.
2. **The election of David (verse 70,71):** For this new beginning, God chose David the humble shepherd, as He had already chosen Abraham and Moses. He bestowed upon these men the honour of serving Him and blessed them with making them the founders of a new covenant of true worship to God. "He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.'" (Acts 13:22). Thus David was transferred from watching over the sheep to watching over God's people in the paths of righteousness, as the heads of the people said to him "The LORD said to you, 'You shall shepherd My people Israel, and be ruler over Israel'" (2 Samuel 5:2).
3. **David shepherding the people (verse 72):** David shepherded God's people according to the integrity of his heart and the skill of his hands. God said to Solomon, "Your father David walked in integrity of heart and in uprightness" (1 Kings 9:4). At the beginning, Solomon walked in the footsteps of his father David, and asked the Lord for an understanding heart "to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil" (1 Kings 3:9), and God gave him "wisdom and exceedingly great understanding" (1 Kings 4:29).

God must have honoured the reader also with many spiritual and material blessings. So let us thank God and live in his obedience, and be "telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done ... that the generation to come might know them" (Psalm 78:4,6).

8.8. Questions

1. According to verses 6-8 mention four things the generation to come should do.
2. In verses 68 and 69 the psalmist mentions three new things God will do. Write them.

9. Psalm Seventy-Nine

A Petition for the Removal of Anger

A Psalm of Asaph.

1 O God, the nations have come into Your inheritance; Your holy temple they have defiled; they have laid Jerusalem in heaps.

2 The dead bodies of Your servants they have given as food for the birds of the heavens, the flesh of Your saints to the beasts of the earth.

3 Their blood they have shed like water all around Jerusalem, and there was no one to bury them.

4 We have become a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and derision to those who are around us.

5 How long, LORD? Will You be angry forever? Will Your jealousy burn like fire?

6 Pour out Your wrath on the nations that do not know You, and on the kingdoms that do not call on Your name.

7 For they have devoured Jacob, and laid waste his dwelling place.

8 Oh, do not remember former iniquities against us! Let Your tender mercies come speedily to meet us, for we have been brought very low.

9 Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Your name; and deliver us, and provide atonement for our sins, for Your name's sake!

10 Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?" Let there be known among the nations in our sight the avenging of the blood of Your servants which has been shed.

11 Let the groaning of the prisoner come before You; according to the greatness of Your power preserve those who are appointed to die;

12 And return to our neighbours sevenfold into their bosom their reproach with which they have reproached You, O Lord.

13 So we, Your people and sheep of Your pasture, will give You thanks forever; we will show forth Your praise to all generations.

This psalm is a prayer that urges God to remove His anger from His people. It is similar to Psalm 74. Both have been written by a son of Asaph when Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem in 586 BC and besieged it for eighteen months. He then destroyed it and ravaged its great temple, the hub of its worship, the place of offering sacrifices, and the dwelling place of the Ark of the Covenant which contained the law (2 Kings 24).

In this psalm the psalmist expressed his sufferings, yet without despair, because he had a steadfast hope in his Lord. One who sees the burnt gates, the demolished walls and the ravaged temple would surely lose hope. But the psalmist saw the Unseen One and the invisible things. He lifted up his gaze from the painful present to the Lord of the past, present and future. He saw himself in the light of his relationship with the Lord, and felt certain that deliverance will come. Because he belonged to the Lord he could muster the courage to say, "Let the groaning of the prisoner come before You; according to the greatness of Your power preserve those who are appointed to die" (verse 11). He also had the confidence to end his psalm with the statement: "So we, Your people and sheep of Your pasture, will give You thanks forever; we will show forth Your praise to all generations." Nebuchadnezzar carried away the great men of the land as prisoners to kill them, but the mighty arm of the Lord will keep them alive, and by a decree from Cyrus they will return.

Jeremiah explains the bad situation that prompted the psalmist to sing this psalm: "Now in the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month (which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, who served the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He burned the house of the LORD and the king's house; all the houses of Jerusalem, that is, all the houses of the great, he burned with fire. And all the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down all the walls of Jerusalem all around. Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive some of the poor people, the rest of the people who remained in the city, the de-fectors who had deserted to the king of Babylon, and the rest of the craftsmen. But Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left some of the poor of the land as vinedressers and farmers. The bronze pillars that were in the house of the LORD, and the carts and the bronze Sea that were in the house of the LORD, the Chaldeans broke in pieces, and carried all their bronze to Babylon" (Jeremiah 52:12-17).

We learn from this psalm that, when faced with trouble we must study our spiritual state objectively, to know when and where we have sinned and repent, so that we should rise up from where we have fallen. Thus we get to know what we have for us and what we have against us, and thus lift up our requests to God in the light of our spiritual reality. In every difficult situation when we feel help-less, we must lift up our eyes to God and fix them upon Him. for if we continue look at the things around us, we will get depressed and despair. We will be devastated on the inside. But fixing our eyes upon Him ensures peace and victory. Thus we can show forth the Lord's praise to all generations.

The psalm contains the following:

- First: A Request for Aid (verse 1-5)
- Second: A Request for Justice (verse 6,7)
- Third: A Request for Forgiveness (verse 8,9)
- Fourth: A Request for Deliverance (verse 10-12)
- Fifth: A Declaration of Confidence (verse 13)

9.1. First: A Request for Aid

(verses 1-5)

1. **A complaint of the nations:** "O God, the nations have come into Your inheritance; Your holy temple they have defiled; they have laid Jerusalem in heaps. The dead bodies of Your servants they have given as food for the birds of the heavens, the flesh of Your saints to the beasts of the earth. Their blood they have shed like water all around Jerusalem, and there was no one to bury them" (verse 1-3). The psalmist saw that the difficulty that he and his people were going through first had to do with God and His

glory, he was the Lord's and His land was the Lord's "mountain of inheritance" (Exodus 15:17). How could He then allow the heathen to enter His own inheritance, knowing that the inheritance is the most valuable thing a person has, not only because of its material value, but because of its moral value? Believers are of great value in the eyes of God, because they are His inheritance, and He considers them "the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (Ephesians 1:18). The temple also was "the sanctuary, O LORD, which Your hands have established" (Exodus 15:17). How could He possibly allow the heathen to defile it? Jerusalem was the city of the Great King, why did He let it turn into rubble? Why did He let His servants be killed and their bodies cast away in such great numbers that they had no one to bury them, and the birds of the skies devoured them as well as the beasts of the earth? The enemy shed the blood of the people of God like water, as though they were of no value or price. The living were not enough to bury the dead! So why did the Lord let all this happen to His inheritance, His temple, His city and His saints? Has the psalmist not said, "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints"? (Psalm 116:15). And has not Christ said to the persecutor of the Church, "Why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 4:9).

The psalmist knows that when he is hurt, the kingdom of God is also hurt. Happy is the believer who sees his strength belonging to the Lord, and is sure that He is with him at the time of his trouble, because "In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them" (Isaiah 63:9). He realises that his cause is not his alone, but that of his heavenly Father also.

2. **Shame from the neighbours:** "We have become a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and derision to those who are around us" (verse 4). The children of Israel were surrounded by idolatrous nations. Those nations believed that their gods were stronger and mightier than the true God, the Creator of heaven and earth. Now when the heathen defiled the holy temple of God, the neighbours of the Israelites mocked them and their God. They must have poked fun at them, since the God they worshipped did not grant them victory, while the Babylonian army triumphed!
3. **A petition from the psalmist:** "How long, LORD? Will You be angry forever? Will Your jealousy burn like fire?" (verse 5). The psalmist declares that the evil both he and his people experienced was caused by their own sins. He knows that God is a jealous God, who allows for no associates with Him and does not accept a divided heart (Deuteronomy 4:24). When a believer falters between worshipping the Lord and worshipping idols, God's anger is kindled against him like a fire. He wants the whole heart to be His, and that man's heart to yearn only for Him: "Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth; unite my heart to fear Your name" (Psalm 86:11). Because "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear" (Psalm 66:18). In his penitent state, the psalmist wonders: How much longer will God's anger against him and his people last?

9.2. Second: A Request for Justice

(verses 6,7)

"Pour out Your wrath on the nations that do not know You, and on the kingdoms that do not call on Your name. For they have devoured Jacob, and laid waste his dwelling place" (verses 6,7). There are four possible interpretations for these two verses:

1. **Justice in the Mosaic perspective:** The Mosaic law decreed that "if any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe" (Exodus 21:23-25); the same thought is repeated in Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21). According to this law the psalmist asks the Lord to pour out His anger against the heathen who do not know God, nor call upon His name. His reason is that they did great evil to the people of the Lord. This was David's request: "Plead my cause, O LORD, with those who strive with me; fight against those who fight against me ... Let them be like chaff before the wind, and let the angel of the LORD chase them" (Psalm 35:1,5).
2. **The necessity of justice:** In these two verses the psalmist declares that divine wrath is coming. It must fall upon the sinners as a consequence of the nature of their sins, and upon those who do not call upon His name, those who worshipped the created being rather than the Creator, although He manifested Himself to them through the nature that declares the work of His hands. As smart as the sinners are in matters of the world, they are ignorant when it comes to matters of faith. They would cut down trees for themselves, take some of them and warm themselves, and carve the rest to make a god and worship it (Isaiah 44:14-17). Therefore, God must show His wrath as a result of their sin.
3. **Mercy and justice:** God loves the sinner but hates his sin. Heaven rejoices at one sinner that repents (Luke 15:7). Bearing this in mind, the two verses, then, should mean that God pours down His wrath upon those who do not know Him, but He still calls them to repent and leave off their error. A pious man said, "Lord, help me destroy my enemies by making them my friends." We hate enmity, but love the enemy, and call upon God to break down the middle wall of separation, the enmity, which he does in Christ (Ephesians 2:14). God desires "all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4).
4. **The spiritual forces of darkness and justice:** The meaning of the two of verses might be that God will annihilate the spiritual forces of darkness that oppose the force of heavenly light, for "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). We pray, "Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Matthew 6:13).

9.3. Third: A Request for Forgiveness

(verses 8,9)

1. **Forgetting the iniquities of the former:** "Oh, do not remember former iniquities against us!" (verse 8a). When fathers sin, they leave behind a heavy heritage of grief and misery for their children. When fathers run into debt, they hand them down to their children, and when they misbehave they leave behind a bad name that sticks to their children. Also when they make bad decisions, they involve their children in the consequences of those decisions. On the other hand, when fathers repent, God forgives them, but their former conduct continues to be gossiped about by the coming generations. God forgave the penitent thief and Christ said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43), but his children and grandchildren carried the title "children and grandchildren of the thief that was executed on the cross"! God will not recall the sins of the fathers if they repent of them, but the reputation, health and economical situation of the children must suffer on account of the their fathers' iniquities. Yet, they will not suffer spiritually, because the Lord said, "In those days they shall say no more: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.' But every one shall die for his own iniquity; every man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge" (Jeremiah 31:29,30; see also Ezekiel 18:1-5).
2. **Granting mercy to this generation:** "Let Your tender mercies come speedily to meet us, for we have been brought very low" (verse 8b). The psalmist does not claim innocence for himself or for his generation from the sin that incurred trouble upon them, but requests the mercies of the Lord to meet him and protect him, so that he should walk behind it on a paved road. In Psalm 23:6 the psalmist said, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." So mercy also follows the believer to make sure he is safe from a stab in the back. In this way the believer will always be surrounded by the divine mercies, both from front and behind. They come "speedily" to meet him, because he has reached the utmost trouble and distress he could possibly endure, and both he and his people were humiliated.
3. **Forgiveness for His name's sake:** "Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Your name; and deliver us, and provide atonement for our sins, for Your name's sake!" (verse 9). In the heathen standpoint, the defeat of the people of God stands for the defeat of God Himself! The psalmist asks for mercy and salvation for the glory of the Lord's name, so that the heathen should not say that God is unable to deliver His people. For the glory of His name He must hasten to save us from our sins by forgiveness, from our wants by fulfilling them, from our sickness by health, and from our enemies by deliverance. We do not receive salvation from our sins, however, as a result of what we do, but as a result of what Christ did on the cross for us. We trust in the perfect sacrificial atonement, the Lamb of God, who was offered to take away the sin of the world. Every

blessing we have comes to us for the glory of His name, and for His name's sake.

9.4. Fourth: A Request for Deliverance

(verses 10-12)

1. **For the glory of the Lord:** "Why should the nations say, 'Where is their God?' Let there be known among the nations in our sight the avenging of the blood of Your servants which has been shed" (verse 10). The psalmist seeks the glory of his God, and does not want the heathen nations to scorn his people by saying that their God is not with them. He sees that vengeance upon the enemy goes hand in hand with deliverance, for God must avenge the slaughtering of His servants by those who shed their blood. Such a state of affairs is in keeping with what Moses said in his song after the recording of the Torah: "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people; for He will avenge the blood of His servants, and render vengeance to His adversaries; He will provide atonement for His land and His people" (Deuteronomy 32:43). The enemy will be smitten with fear, while the broken heart of God's people will be strengthened, according to the statement of the Lord, "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 35:4).
2. **For the reassurance of the prisoner:** "Let the groaning of the prisoner come before You; according to the greatness of Your power preserve those who are appointed to die" (verse 11). God answered this request, heard the groans of the prisoners in Babylon, and His mighty arm spared the lives of many of those who were appointed to die. Among those were Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego, whom God preserved from the peril of death when the Babylonian king commanded them to partake of his food and drink his wine. "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank" (Daniel 1:8). And as Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego refused to bow down before the statue of the king, he ordered them to be cast into a fiery furnace. But even there God spared their lives and rescued them from burning (Daniel 3). Also when Daniel refused to pray to the king, he cast him into a den of lions, but the Lord sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths so that they should not hurt him (Daniel 6). This is exactly what He did for Peter on the day He got him out of Herod's prison (Acts 12). He heard the groaning of the prisoner and reassured him about his life and future.
3. **For the punishment of the aggressor:** "And return to our neighbours sevenfold into their bosom their reproach with which they have reproached You, O Lord" (verse 12). The Moabites, Ammonites and Edomites were Israel's neighbours, but they did not empathise with them when the Babylonians laid their capital and temple waste. Further, they made fun of the God of Israel and cursed His people. The prophet Ezekiel predicted that God's wrath would fall upon those evil neighbours who cursed and mocked God

(read Ezekiel 25). The psalmist asks for sevenfold of what they have done to be delivered into their bosoms, so that they would not escape it.

9.5. Fifth: A Declaration of Confidence

(verse 13)

"So we, Your people and sheep of Your pasture, will give You thanks forever; we will show forth Your praise to all generations" (verse 13). When the psalmist uttered these thankful words, his deliverance had not yet been accomplished. It was still a request offered to God. Nonetheless, he saw the answer to his request coming with no doubt, because faith sees both the visible and the invisible. It is the confidence in what is hoped for and not yet received, and the assurance of things not yet seen, but will be seen with no doubt.

The psalmist was sure that his people was the people of the Lord, and that they were the sheep of His pasture. Therefore he must thank Him all his life long and show forth His praise to all generations. What the psalmist waited for came true, for once the seventy years of captivity were over, the people returned to their land by a decree from Cyrus the Persian. One group returned with Ezra, another with Zerubbabel the governor, and a third group with Nehemiah. The building of the house of Lord was begun by the encouragement of Haggai and Zechariah the prophets. Although the second temple was not as grand as Solomon's temple, it was greater in glory, because Christ cleansed it twice, and in it God's promises to David were fulfilled in Christ, the Son of David.

Today, the believers stand in the presence of the Lord, lifting up praise and thanksgiving to Him, because they are His particular people, and He has brought them into a new covenant with Himself. They have become the sheep of this Good Shepherd who gave up His life for them. They thank Him in this generation and in the generations to come, because He said, "This people I have formed for Myself; they shall declare My praise" (Isaiah 43:21).

9.6. Questions

1. The psalmist mentions three reasons why God should save His people. What are these three?
2. The last verse of the psalm is a proclamation of trust. Write a short comment on this verse.

10. Psalm Eighty

Return, O Lord, and Restore Us

To the Chief Musician. Set to "The Lilies." A Testimony of Asaph. A Psalm.

1 Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock; You who dwell between the

cherubim, shine forth!

2 Before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, stir up Your strength, and come and save us!

3 Restore us, O God; cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved!

4 O LORD God of hosts, how long will You be angry against the prayer of Your people?

5 You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in great measure.

6 You have made us a strife to our neighbours, and our enemies laugh among themselves.

7 Restore us, O God of hosts; cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved!

8 You have brought a vine out of Egypt; You have cast out the nations, and planted it.

9 You prepared room for it, and caused it to take deep root, and it filled the land.

10 The hills were covered with its shadow, and the mighty cedars with its boughs.

11 She sent out her boughs to the Sea, and her branches to the River.

12 Why have You broken down her hedges, so that all who pass by the way pluck her fruit?

13 The boar out of the woods uproots it, and the wild beast of the field devours it.

14 Return, we beseech You, O God of hosts; look down from heaven and see, and visit this vine

15 And the vineyard which Your right hand has planted, and the branch that You made strong for Yourself.

16 It is burned with fire, it is cut down; they perish at the rebuke of Your countenance.

17 Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand, upon the son of man whom You made strong for Yourself.

18 Then we will not turn back from You; revive us, and we will call upon Your name.

19 Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved!

The children of Israel were united in one kingdom under their first king, Saul, then under David and Solomon. Later the kingdom was divided into two: a Northern Kingdom and a Southern Kingdom. The Northern Kingdom had ten tribes and was ruled by Jeroboam the son of Nebat, known as the one who "made Israel sin" (1 Kings 15:26). Samaria was its capital. The Southern Kingdom, whose capital was Jerusalem, had two tribes and was ruled by Rehoboam the son of Solomon. Because of the indulgence of the inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom in their sins, the king of Assyria invaded their country, ravaged it, and took them captives in 724 BC. The believers in the Southern Kingdom realised that they would meet with the same destiny as their northern brothers, unless they repented, and unless God had compassion for them. For this reason they sang this psalm asking God for the

deliverance of the kingdom that fell and the protection of their kingdom that was about to fall. They besought the Lord to look after the children of Israel to restore them and let His face shine upon them so that they might be saved.

The believers of the Southern Kingdom were always concerned with the spirituality of the Northern Kingdom. They sent them men to call them to repent and worship God alone. The southern king Hezekiah sent letters calling all of Israel and Judah, as well as Ephraim and Manasseh, to come to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, to keep the Passover to the LORD God of Israel. So the runners passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, as far as Zebulun; but the people laughed at them and mocked them. Nevertheless some from Asher, Manasseh and Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 30:1,10,11). We should learn from King Hezekiah that one should never hesitate to speak the word of the Lord to everyone, even if they differ from us politically, religiously and racially. No doubt the concern of the believers of the South with the inhabitants of the North was according to mind of the Lord, who commanded Jeremiah, "Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say: 'Return, backsliding Israel,' says the LORD; 'I will not cause My anger to fall on you. For I am merciful,' says the LORD; 'I will not remain angry forever. Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the LORD your God, and have scattered your charms to alien deities under every green tree, and you have not obeyed My voice,' says the LORD. 'Return, O backsliding children,' says the LORD; 'for I am married to you. I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion. And I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding'" (Jeremiah 3:12-15).

The psalm contains the following:

- First: A Request for the Lord's Favour (verse 1-7)
- Second: Lessons from the Northern Kingdom (verse 8-19)

10.1. First: A Request for the Lord's Favour

(verse 1-7)

1. Requesting His favour because He loves His people (verse 1):

Now His relationship to His people is threefold:

1. **He is the Shepherd of His people:** "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel" (verse 1a). Jacob said of Him, "The God who has fed me all my life long to this day" (Genesis 48:15). His people are "the sheep of His pasture" (Psalm 74:1) who say to Him, "We, Your people and sheep of Your pasture" (Psalm 79:13). The shepherd leads his sheep to safety and food, defends them against all attackers, and provides them with all they need. Then they would say with David, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want"

- (Psalm 23:1). The psalmist asks the Lord to listen to his appeal, for to whom else will the flock go but the shepherd? The flock will not go to the hired hand who does not care about the sheep, neither to the wolf that preys upon the sheep, but to the lover of the sheep, who said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep" (John 10:11).
2. **He looks after His people:** "You who lead Joseph like a flock" (verse 1b). Joseph was Jacob's favourite son. The psalmist mentions him as a hero who made no mistakes, and a dutiful son who honoured his father, even though his brothers did not. Therefore God led him into a life of righteousness and gave him an opportunity to save the world from an all-out famine. The psalmist asks the Lord to work with him and his people as He did with Joseph. Here "Joseph" stands for the Northern Kingdom, which constituted the people who were led by the Lord in the desert for forty years. It was about those people also that the Scriptures said, "You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron" (Psalm 77:20). "He made His own people go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock" (Psalm 78:52). And he must lead today and tomorrow, for he is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).
 3. **He is the King of His people:** "You who dwell between the cherubim, shine forth!" (verse 1c). A "cherub" is an angel (the Hebrew plural is "*cherubim*"). There were two statues of cherubs spreading their wings over the cover of the Ark of the Covenant, which represented mercy. The Israelites called the Ark of the Covenant "the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, who dwells between the cherubim" (1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Samuel 6:2). He is the heavenly King, who also reigns over the earth and dwells among His people. Moses said about Him, "You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the Testimony that I will give you. And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony" (Exodus 25:21,22). King Hezekiah addressed the Lord, saying, "O LORD God of Israel, the One who dwells between the cherubim, You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth" (2 Kings 19:15). So come before Him in boldness and with confidence (Ephesians 3:12). "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). The psalmist turned toward the Lord who dwells between the cherubim, who spoke of the people through the two cherubim that covered their defects and shortcomings so that His law should not require justice from them. He asks Him to shine upon them with favour, so that He should appear to them in His power and glory to deliver them with a word from Him, because "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God will shine forth" (Psalm 50:2).
2. **Requesting His favour because He is strong:** "Before Ephraim, Benjamin, and

Manasseh, stir up Your strength, and come and save us!" (verse 2). The psalmist requests the Lord to stir up his mighty strength that seems slumbering, and make haste to save His people who were precious to Him. He refers to the people as Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph's two sons, and Benjamin, Joseph's full brother. Joseph and Benjamin were the sons of Jacob from his beloved wife Rachel, who was considered the mother of the Northern Kingdom (Jeremiah 31:15). Jacob gave a portion of the inheritance to each of his grandchildren, Ephraim and Manasseh. One of them received the portion of the tribe of Levi, the tribe invested with priesthood, who received no portion in the land because the Lord was their portion, and the other received the lot of Joseph their father. As the children of Israel camped in the desert of Sinai, these three tribes dwelt on the western side of the tabernacle of meeting, and as they journeyed these tribes went right behind the tabernacle of meeting (Numbers 2:17-24). "Before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh" means that God walks before His people leading them to victory, just as He did in the Sinai desert.

We imagine sometimes that the Lord is too sleepy to help us, although God's strength is always awake. He says to us when we rush Him, "To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:1), and "I, the LORD, will hasten it in its time" (Isaiah 60:22).

- 3. Requesting His favour because He restores:** "Restore us, O God; cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved!" (verse 3). The restoration that is being requested is the return from captivity, as well as repentance of error, withdrawal from disobedience to God, and the correction of things that went wrong. Thus Ephraim prayed, "You have chastised me, and I was chastised ... restore me, and I will return, for You are the LORD my God" (Jeremiah 31:18). "Turn us back to You, O LORD, and we will be restored; renew our days as of old" (Lamentations 5:21). The psalmist requests to be restored to the presence of grace and his previous position, so that he might say, "He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake" (Psalm 23:3). The people went astray, individually as well as corporately, and now they seek God's face with repentance, because they can never be restored except by the work of His grace. When they repent He smiles upon them and they can see His glory and His power to save them.

Are you in trouble because you are far away from the Lord? Then repeat what the psalmist said, "Restore us, O God" and He will immediately hear your prayer. When you return in repentance, God will make His face shine upon you and save you. It will be said to you, "The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you ... and give you peace" (Numbers 6:24-26).

- 4. Requesting His favour because the people are in trouble (verse 4-6):**

Their situation is described three different ways:

- 1. God rejected their prayers:** "O LORD God of hosts, how long will You be angry

against the prayer of Your people?" (verse 4). The psalmist addresses the Lord God of hosts, who alone is able to defend His people, who cry out to Him in an acceptable prayer that delights His heart like aromatic incense rising up before Him. Yet when God is angry with His people because of their sins, His anger smoulders against the prayers of His people, and the smell of incense changes. The psalmist wonders, "How long, O Lord, will you be angry with us and refuse to defend us?" "O God, why have You cast us off forever? Why does Your anger smoke against the sheep of Your pasture? Remember Your congregation, which You have purchased of old, the tribe of Your inheritance, which You have redeemed; this Mount Zion where You have dwelt" (Psalm 74:1,2).

2. **They have eaten the bread of tears:** "You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in great measure" (verse 5). God made tears their daily food and drink. They wept continuously because of the devastation that overtook them. In a poetic hyperbole the psalmist says that their tears were profuse and "in great measure" (a measure or an ephah was 45 litres!). This was within God's permissive will and aimed at making them repent and turn away from their evil ways.
3. **Their neighbours taunted them:** "You have made us a strife to our neighbours, and our enemies laugh among themselves" (verse 6). Their enemies around them attacked them and fought over their land, and later the enemies themselves fought with each other over their spoils. Each enemy wanted to get the bigger part, and all of them laughed at the defeated party because their God did not deliver them from their enemies' hands.

10.2. Second: Lessons from the Northern Kingdom

(verse 8-19)

We learn from the fall of Samaria in 724 BC certain lesson which the Scriptures recorded for us:

1. **God's grace to the vine (verse 8-11):**

1. **God planted it:** "You have brought a vine out of Egypt; You have cast out the nations, and planted it. You prepared room for it, and caused it to take deep root, and it filled the land" (verse 8,9). Jacob said of his son Joseph, "Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well; his branches run over the wall" (Genesis 49:22). Joseph is pictured as a fruitful vine. A vine is planted in a yard of a house to bear fruit, to cover its walls with its green leaves, and to give shade. The psalmist says that his people are the vine of God, which grew up in Egypt, later miraculously transported by God away from Pharaoh's bondage, and replanted in a land already prepared for it long before they ever reached it. He had evicted its idolatrous inhabitants so that His people should not be tempted by idolatry. In His love, God prepares the place even before He

plants us in it, just as He had prepared the Garden of Eden with all our first parents needed before He created them. God blessed His vine in the new land, so its roots went deep and were grounded in the land. It was like the mustard seed of the parable, which is very small, that grows and becomes a great tree so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade (Mark 4:31,32).

2. **God increased it:** "The hills were covered with its shadow, and the mighty cedars with its boughs. She sent out her boughs to the Sea, and her branches to the River" (verse 10,11). The boughs of the vine stretched out and overshadowed the mountains, like the high cedars of Lebanon, reaching the Mediterranean in the west and the Euphrates in the east, just as the Lord said through Moses, "Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours: from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the River Euphrates, even to the Western Sea, shall be your territory" (Deuteronomy 11:24). These were the boundaries of the kingdom of David toward the end of his life and the boundaries of the kingdom of Solomon all his life.

The experience of the Old Testament was also repeated with the New Testament on the day of Pentecost, yet in a spiritual sense. Three thousand souls joined from all over the world (Acts 2:41) "and the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47).

2. **God's punishment on the vine:** "Why have You broken down her hedges, so that all who pass by the way pluck her fruit? The boar out of the woods uproots it, and the wild beast of the field devours it" (verse 12,13). This is a rhetorical question and a real question at the same time. The psalmist marvels at the demolition of the walls of the vine, which allowed the invaders to come in and carry off its fruits. He asks the Lord who transported the vine, replanted it and increased it about the reason for punishing it, so that the boar out of the woods and the wild beast were not only allowed to take its fruits, but also to destroy the vine itself. They were not like invaders that take off the fruits and go, but they destroyed the roots and the branches! The Lord answers the psalmist with a question: "What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes?" (Isaiah 5:4). When the vine of the children of Israel did not fulfil the purpose of its existence, God withdrew His protection from it. He had chosen them to be a priestly kingdom for the nations around them to preach His name (Exodus 19:6). A priest speaks with God about the people and speaks with people about God. They did not do what God gave them to do, but despised the rest of the nations and regarded God's election of them as a reason for superiority, so God rejected them. Christ said to His disciples, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you." But he did not stop at that; He went on to say, "that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (John 15:16). In the light of that appointment, the disciples promulgated Christ's teachings to the uttermost parts of the earth. Now if we are not fruitful, we should be asking God to

work in us to make us fruitful, and submit our will to His directions. Let every believer ask himself right at the beginning of his spiritual life, from the time God planted him and increased till this hour: "What is my testimony of God in my society? What is the service that I have done to the Lord, my family and my fellow citizens?" But I hope that no one will pass a wrong judgement on himself, because many presume that the ministry consists only in preaching from the pulpit, whereas every work of mercy is indeed a ministry unto God, be it the offering of a cold glass of water (Matthew 10:42). A mother who looks after her house and children in love and the employee who does his job faithfully, both render a great service to God. If you have not done your due service to God, or if you have done it carelessly, ask Him to teach how to do Him the service that is acceptable to Him.

3. The prayer of the vine (verse 14-18):

1. **A prayer for the solicitation of favour:** "Return, we beseech You, O God of hosts" (verse 14a). In verses 3,7,19 the psalmist asked the Lord to restore him, namely to make him return in repentance. In this verse, however, he asks the Lord Himself to return to him, namely to forgive him and approve of him.
2. **A prayer for the solicitation of protection:** "Look down from heaven and see, and visit this vine and the vineyard which Your right hand has planted, and the branch that You made strong for Yourself. It is burned with fire, it is cut down; they perish at the rebuke of Your countenance" (verse 14b-16). God planted the vine with His mighty right hand for a holy purpose, but it deviated from that purpose and was burnt by the fire of remoteness from God and the fire of His wrath. So the psalmist requests a heavenly merciful look at the vine that is dear to the Lord, and at the king whom God chose for Himself to rule His people. This look would make Him cover both the vine and the king with protection and care. He planted the vine according to His purpose, and started a good work in it, and He must complete it.
3. **A prayer for the leader:** "Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand, upon the son of man whom You made strong for Yourself" (verse 17). The psalmist prays that God would stretch His hand over the man He chose for Himself to be a leader, to give him strong and mighty. There are three interpretations for "the man of Your right hand":
 1. Perhaps he meant the Messiah: He is the only Son who came in the flesh, born from a virgin by the Holy Spirit, thus becoming "the Son of Man". The Scriptures also say about this Son: "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry" (Psalm 2:12), and "great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh" (1 Tim 3:16).
 2. Or perhaps he meant the king: The son of David whom the Lord promised that "your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16).

3. Or maybe he meant the people of the Lord: The Lord calls His people "My son, My firstborn" (Exodus 4:22). They are the ones he prayed for in verse 2 because they were taken as captives.
4. **A prayer for the solicitation of a revival:** "Then we will not turn back from You; revive us, and we will call upon Your name. Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved!" (verse 18,19). In this prayer there are five requests:
 1. **A request for not turning back:** "Then we will not turn back" but be united with the Lord, and not be separated from His love and worship.
 2. **A request for a revival:** "Revive us, and we will call upon Your name" and preach His name far and wide, calling the people to His worship, because our spirits are revived by His Spirit. Therefore we want to speak about Him and see the people returning back to Him in repentance.
 3. **A request for restoration:** "Restore us." When we backslide, God can still forgive us and not let backslide again.
 4. **A request for approval:** "Cause Your face to shine" according the priestly benediction (Numbers 6:25).
 5. **A request for salvation:** "And we shall be saved" from the agonising past, the burdensome present, and also in the future. Salvation is a deliverance from sin by forgiveness (Luke 19:10), from hunger by satisfaction (Psalm 36:8), from war by victory and peace (Psalm 27:1-2), and from sickness by the restoration of health (Luke 8:36).

10.3. Questions

1. According to this psalm God's loving relationship with His people is three-fold. Mention these three aspects.
2. According to verses 8-11 of this psalm, what are God's favors to His vine?

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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