

Meditations on the Psalms

Volume Nine: Psalms 81-90

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1. Psalm Eighty-One

A Call to Celebrate

1 To the Chief Musician. On an instrument of Gath. A Psalm of Asaph. Sing aloud to God our strength; make a joyful shout to the God of Jacob.

2 Raise a song and strike the timbrel, the pleasant harp with the lute.

3 Blow the trumpet at the time of the New Moon, at the full moon, on our solemn feast day.

4 For this is a statute for Israel, a law of the God of Jacob.

5 This He established in Joseph as a testimony, when He went throughout the land of Egypt, where I heard a language I did not understand.

6 I removed his shoulder from the burden; his hands were freed from the baskets.

7 You called in trouble, and I delivered you; I answered you in the secret place of thunder; I tested you at the waters of Meribah. Selah

8 Hear, O My people, and I will admonish you! O Israel, if you will listen to Me!

9 There shall be no foreign god among you; nor shall you worship any foreign god.

10 I am the LORD your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt; open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.

11 But My people would not heed My voice, and Israel would have none of Me.

12 So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart, to walk in their own counsels.

13 Oh, that My people would listen to Me, that Israel would walk in My ways!

14 I would soon subdue their enemies, and turn My hand against their adversaries.

15 The haters of the LORD would pretend submission to Him, but their fate would endure forever.

16 He would have fed them also with the finest of wheat; and with honey from the rock I would have satisfied you.

This psalm is a shout and a call to celebrate a new year and to give thanks for the harvest. The Lord had commanded the Israelites to celebrate each month by blowing the trumpets

(Numbers 10:10). The seventh month was the first month of the Hebrew religious year, and at the same time the first month of the Hebrew civil year. The first day of the seventh month was always a special day. It was called "the memorial of blowing of trumpets" or "the day of blowing the trumpets" (Leviticus 23:24; Numbers 29:1). In the middle of this month, when the moon is full, the Israelites would sing this psalm while they gather the yield of the land and celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:39). This feast is one of the most festive one of all. During it they would stay in booths (tabernacles) built from palm branches in the city squares, on housetops, and on the mountains surrounding Jerusalem, as a reminder of their 40 years of wandering in the desert. It was also a chance to thank the Lord for the harvest, which He had also commanded: "Also on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of the LORD for seven days; on the first day there shall be a sabbath-rest ... that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 23:39,43). The Feast of Tabernacles came after the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) during which the people were cleansed from their iniquities. During the Feast of Tabernacles they would read the Law of Moses once every seven years (Deuteronomy 31:10-11).

The psalm contains the following:

- First: A call for celebration (verses 1-5)
- Second: Divine advice (verses 6-10)
- Third: The punishment of disobedience (verses 11-16)

1.1. First: A Call for Celebration

(verses 1-5)

In these four verses the psalmist presents the reasons for celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles:

1. **Because God is our strength:** "Sing aloud to God our strength" (verse 1a). The first step to celebrating is to set the minds of the people into motion to remember God's power that saved them from Pharaoh, and to sing afresh Moses' song: "I will sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea! The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation; He is my God, and I will praise Him; my father's God, and I will exalt Him" (Exodus 15:1,2). "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1). The celebration reminds us that our salvation does not come from ourselves, but from God. The branches cannot yield fruit on their own without abiding in the vine; likewise, without God we cannot do anything (John 15:4,5).
2. **Because He is the God of the covenant:** "Make a joyful shout to the God of Jacob"

(verse 1b). In celebrating the feast the people remember that God entered into a covenant with Jacob, their forefather, not because Jacob deserved it, but because He favored him and was pleased to call Himself "the God of Jacob". God still accepts every penitent sinner, counting him among His people who worship Him as their God. As the people of the Lord remember God's covenant, they shout for joy. Here are two occasions on which the people shouted:

1. **Shouting to the king:** The people shouted when they saw the king that God chose, because there was none like him among all the people (1 Samuel 10:24). We also shout to the Lord of lords and King of kings, saying, "Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" (Exodus 15:11).
2. **Shouting to the victor:** "Sing ... Shout ... Be glad and rejoice ... The LORD your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing" (Zephaniah 3:14,17). We shout to the victorious King who defeated Satan, sin and death. We say, "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? ... But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:55,57).
3. **Because it is a feast day:** "Raise a song and strike the timbrel, the pleasant harp with the lute. Blow the trumpet at the time of the New Moon, at the full moon, on our solemn feast day" (verses 2,3). People celebrate the feast because it is a memorial of a happy occasion. Celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles reminded the people of God of the past event when God sustained a whole nation for forty years in the desert. It also prompts them to offer thanksgiving to God who gave the harvest. The people must thank God for what happened and what will happen, with a loud song accompanied by a timbrel. A timbrel is a small hand drum or tambourine. It has small jingles or pellet bells hanging round its edge. When the drummer shakes the timbrel, the jingles rattle, and with the fingers of his other hand he beats on the skin of the drum. It is accompanied also by a harp, which is a plucked, stringed musical instrument that may have as many as ten strings and is easy to carry. There is also a rebec, which is a high-pitched stringed instrument. Then there is a trumpet, which was like a horn. The priests' trumpets were made out of silver.

The psalmist tells the people to sing to God with musical instruments of different resonance, yet harmonious. He requires them to "raise a song" that suits the Most High God, and to "blow the trumpet" with all their inward strength, with one mind and one heart to the One God.

4. **Because it is a duty:** "For this is a statute for Israel, a law of the God of Jacob. This He established in Joseph as a testimony, when He went throughout the land of Egypt, where I heard a language I did not understand" (verses 4,5). The celebration of the feast is a

duty and a statute for the people of the Lord, because He is worthy to be thanked. He had taken care of His people before the wandering years, as well as during those years. His care is from eternal past to eternal future, apparent to the sight, and it serves as a testimony to everyone. He said to Jacob, who was lying alone in the desert, "Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go ... I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you" (Genesis 28:15). The Lord took heaven and earth as witnesses to His great care when He brought Joseph from Pharaoh's prison to make him the grand vizier of Egypt, without whose consent no man could lift his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt (Genesis 41:44). When a new Pharaoh, who did not know Joseph, came onto the scene and humiliated the children of Israel, the Lord went forth in might against the land of Egypt, punished Pharaoh, and released the prisoners.

In the working-out of these miracles, the people of God heard a new language that was previously unknown to them. They heard the language of redemption, salvation and liberty. They had got used to humiliation and had never enjoyed a position of supremacy. Yet a new language announced to them: "The LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations" (Deuteronomy 7:9).

1.2. Second: Divine Advice

(verses 6-10)

1. Let us remember God's wonderful act (verses 6,7):

- 1. Freedom from slavery:** "I removed his shoulder from the burden; his hands were freed from the baskets" (verse 6). God did unique, extraordinary, supernatural and unforgettable things with His people. The Israelites used to carry bricks on their shoulders. God rescued the enslaved shoulder by removing its burden of bricks. He transferred it to a place of liberty and honor! They used to make baskets with their own hands, in which they carried mud and straw, but God turned their hands away from the making and the carrying of baskets.
- 2. Deliverance from trouble:** "You called in trouble, and I delivered you" (verse 7a). God relates the children of Israel, whom the psalmist was addressing, to their ancient ancestors. He says that they called on the Lord in their trouble and that He delivered them. For it is God Himself who said, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me" (Psalm 50:15). "Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God ... So God heard their groaning" (Exodus 2:23,24). This loving God "delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us" (2 Corinthians 1:10).
- 3. The secrets of thunder:** "I answered you in the secret place of thunder" (verse 7b). God revealed His power and salvation in the secret place of thunder (thunder as a

natural phenomenon had no explanation among the people of antiquity). The point here is that God answered His people in a secret or mysterious way that they could not understand, but they could see its miraculous effects. "Now it came to pass, in the morning watch, that the LORD looked down upon the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud, and He troubled the army of the Egyptians" (Exodus 14:24). God revealed Himself also to His people through the giving of the Law in the secret place of thunder (Exodus 19:16). In thunder God revealed the mysteries of salvation and the secrets of the Law.

4. **Water to the thirsty:** "I tested you at the waters of Meribah" (verse 7c). *Meribah* in Hebrew means "contention". It is the name of a spring of water that gushed out from the rock as Moses struck it by a divine command. This occurrence took place right after the Israelites contended with Moses for being thirsty. It is also called *Massah*, meaning "temptation". When the children of Israel were thirsty they wondered whether the Lord was in their midst or not (Exodus 17:7). One of God's unique acts is to still deal with contending people, who question His existence despite all His miracles. He continues to take care of them and to be good to them. He even waters them from the rock (see Numbers 20:8). The Scriptures warn us from repeating the mistake of the children of Israel, saying, "Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: 'Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tested Me' ... Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily ... lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:7-13).

2. Let us obey the Lord (verses 8-10):

1. **A warning:** "Hear, O My people, and I will admonish you! O Israel, if you will listen to Me!" (verse 8). The imperative "Hear" reminds us of the first and greatest commandment: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:4,5). At the beginning of advice to obey God, the Lord warns His people of the danger of disobedience and calls their attention to the blessings of obedience. This warning was repeated through the ages, as God said, "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the LORD has spoken: 'I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me ...' They have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away backward ... 'Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good ... If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword'" (Isaiah 1:2,4,16,17,19,20).
2. **A command:** "There shall be no foreign god among you; nor shall you worship any

foreign god" (verse 9). The Ten Commandments started with the command: "I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me" (Deuteronomy 5:6,7). Christ also said, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24). Because it is impossible to serve two gods, Elijah said to the people, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him" (1 Kings 18:21).

3. **A promise:** "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt; open your mouth wide, and I will fill it" (verse 10). God was with His people and rescued them with the miracles of the exodus out of Egypt. He still wants to fill His people as much as His people believe in Him and wait upon Him. The wider a believer opens his mouth, thirsting and longing for grace, the more God fills his mouth with every good thing. After the recording of the Torah, Moses said in his song, "For the Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the place of His inheritance. He found him in a desert land and in the wasteland, a howling wilderness; He encircled him, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye ... He made him ride in the heights of the earth, that he might eat the produce of the fields; He made him draw honey from the rock, and oil from the flinty rock" (Deuteronomy 32:9,10,13). Christ also said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6). He said to those who came seeking Him, "According to your faith let it be to you" (Matthew 9:29).

1.3. Third: The Punishment of Disobedience

(verses 11-16)

1. **Handing over the disobedient to his disobedience:** "But My people would not heed My voice, and Israel would have none of Me. So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart, to walk in their own counsels" (verses 11,12). When man disobeys God, he pays the price for his wrong choice, and God's wrath and punishment fall on him. The severest punishment for the sinner is to be left to do his own will! Bildad the Shuhite applied the same principle as he said to Job, "If your sons have sinned against Him, He has cast them away for their transgression" (Job 8:4). The principle itself was right, but its application to Job's children was wrong. The philosopher said, "They would have none of my counsel and despised my every rebuke. Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled to the full with their own fancies" (Proverbs 1:30,31). The Apostle Paul said about idol-worshippers, "[They] changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man; and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served

the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature" (Romans 1:23-26). Again he said of those who refuse Christ's salvation, "They did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12). Let's pray to God to help us obey Him, and not leave Him alone for the foolishness of our hearts. Let us pray, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer" (Psalm 19:14).

2. **Depriving the disobedient of blessings (verses 13-16):**

1. **Deprivation of the blessing of victory:** "Oh, that My people would listen to Me, that Israel would walk in My ways! I would soon subdue their enemies, and turn My hand against their adversaries. The haters of the LORD would pretend submission to Him, but their fate would endure for ever" (verses 13-15). God's people are supposed to be victorious in the Lord. They are His people and their enemies are considered His own enemies. Yet, this victory is dependent on their obedience to Him. If God's people walk in God's way, their adversaries and enemies would be defeated, because turning away from God brings destruction and humiliation. On the other hand, the Lord will always bring destruction on and subdue those who hate Him. His people, however, "their fate would endure forever," because they enjoy Him and His gifts in both their present and future life. They have life, and have it more abundantly (John 10:10). God said, "I am the LORD your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you by the way you should go. Oh, that you had heeded My commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea" (Isaiah 48:17,18). But His people did not listen to Him, and they received the same fate that Jerusalem received. This fate is well represented in Christ's words: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate" (Matthew 23:37,38).

This heavenly warning is meant to make us avoid defeat, and open our eyes to the way of victory. So let us abide firmly in the Lord and follow Him whole-heartedly, so that we may be able to say, "We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:37).

2. **Deprivation of satisfaction:** "He would have fed them also with the finest of wheat; and with honey from the rock I would have satisfied you" (verse 16). God satisfies His people who obey him with all His good things, so that they may say along with the psalmist, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want You prepare a table before

me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over" (Psalm 23:1,5). God had already fed His people with "the finest of wheat" (Psalm 147:14) and "the choicest wheat" (Deuteronomy 32:14). He also gave them honey for food from the rocks of the Sinai Desert: "He made him draw honey from the rock" (Deuteronomy 32:13). And He still loves to satisfy His people, for He says through our psalmist, "Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it" (verse 10). Our understanding of the blessing of being full to satisfaction may increase as we see a bird feeding its fledglings in the nest. The fledglings open their mouths wide to get their portion of food. They cannot survive without the care of the mother bird. In like manner, we cannot live, move or exist without God's care of us. Why then do we deprive ourselves of all these blessings that He wants to give to us? The desire to receive all these blessings must prompt us to lead a life of obedience to our heavenly Father.

1.4. Questions

1. The psalmist mentioned four reasons to celebrate. Write them down.
2. In verses 11-16, what are the punishments of the disobedient?

2. Psalm Eighty-Two

Orders to the Rulers and Judges

- 1 A Psalm of Asaph. God stands in the congregation of the mighty; He judges among the gods.
- 2 How long will you judge unjustly, and show partiality to the wicked? Selah
- 3 Defend the poor and fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and needy.
- 4 Deliver the poor and needy; free them from the hand of the wicked.
- 5 They do not know, nor do they understand; they walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are unstable.
- 6 I said, "You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High.
- 7 But you shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes."
- 8 Arise, O God, judge the earth; for You shall inherit all nations.

This psalm is designed for everyone who holds a place of authority and leadership. It emphasizes that these people are accountable to the Lord, the Master of all the earth. It is a psalm for the judges, in that it requires them to judge the people fairly. God delegated them to take His place and perform justice. He invested them with the authority to pronounce the death-sentence against one person, while pronouncing another innocent. They take His place and represent Him in performing justice by His own commissioning. This psalm is also

designed for every employer, president and head of a household, calling on them to be just and fair with those God committed into his care. It is evident that the privileges granted by God to those in responsibility are not there for their own enjoyment only, but to serve everyone they were commissioned to serve. Every great privilege carries with it a great responsibility.

We do not know the exact occasion that prompted Asaph to write down this psalm. Most likely there was no special occasion. Injustice was everywhere -- and has not abated. Perhaps the psalmist was disturbed by hearing of a judge doing a poor widow injustice, a ruler who issued a law for his own interest, a husband who divorced the lady he married when he was poor to marry another after attaining wealth, or a father who discriminates against some of his children! The occasion for writing this psalm is everyday, as Isaiah said, "The LORD stands up to plead, and stands to judge the people ... 'What do you mean by crushing My people and grinding the faces of the poor?' says the Lord GOD of hosts" (Isaiah 3:13,15). Yet, the psalm shows us another aspect. At the end it declares that God is the Judge of all judges and those involved in litigation. He must establish the rules of justice, "For when Your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Isaiah 26:9).

The psalm contains the following:

- First: God watches the judges (verse 1)
- Second: God takes the judges to court (verses 2-4)
- Third: God rebukes the judges (verses 5-7)
- Fourth: God the fair judge (verse 8)

2.1. First: God Watches the Judges

(verse 1)

1. **God is present in the courthouse:** "God stands in the congregation of the mighty" (verse 1a). The word translated "mighty" is *elohim*, which usually means God. But it is occasionally applied by way of deference to magistrates, noblemen or judges. Moses said to his father-in-law, "...the people come to me to inquire of God. When they have a difficulty, they come to me, and I judge between one and another; and I make known the statutes of God and His laws" (Exodus 18:15,16). Solomon said, "If you see the oppression of the poor, and the violent perversion of justice and righteousness in a province, do not marvel at the matter; for high official watches over high official, and higher officials are over them" (Ecclesiastes 5:8). The church is the congregation of God, according to what Christ said, "For where two or three are gathered together [congregated] in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). Therefore

the Scriptures say, "Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?" (1 Corinthians 6:1).

2. **God judges through the judges:** "He judges among the gods" (verse 1b). Judges enjoy a great position; therefore he calls them "gods". Their authority to judge comes from God, and they must judge according to God's law. When the officials who hold a high status come together to issue judgment, they must not presume that they are invested with authority simply to judge as they like. God stands in their midst and issues His judgments through them. They will certainly have to give Him an account of their stewardship. Right before he died, Moses said to the Lord, "'Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be like sheep which have no shepherd.' So the Lord said to Moses, 'Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight. And you shall give some of your authority to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient'" (Numbers 27:15-21).

God styled the judges, the leaders and the officials with great titles. He made them His own representatives. What an honor, and what a responsibility!

2.2. Second: God Takes the Judges to Court

(verses 2-4)

1. **Because they showed partiality to the wicked:** "How long will you judge unjustly, and show partiality to the wicked? Selah" (verse 2). In this verse and the next, God charges the judges with treating people unjustly and favoring the wicked at the expense of the poor. He asks them, "How long?" to alert them to evaluate their actions and to give them a chance to defend themselves. He had forbidden unjust judgment when He said, "You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor" (Leviticus 19:15). "Selah" is a pause, either for silence or for a musical interlude, or a chance to meditate on what one hears, for God gives the judges a chance to think about the charge that He lays at their door in order to get ready to answer it. God's rebuke here is like His rebuke of Pharaoh, "How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, that they may serve Me" (Exodus 10:3). How often we get trapped in the mistake of favoring the rich at the expense of the poor. Even the believers of the early church brought the rich forward while letting the poor sit in an ignoble place (James 2:1-9). When the Indian leader the Mahatma Ghandi entered a church in South Africa, the ushers asked him to sit in the rows of the black people, not the white people. At this Ghandi said, "But for the Christians I would have been a Christian." We stand covered with shame in front of this verse because we make the same mistake as those judges who were

thus rebuked by God.

2. **Because they wronged the poor:** "Defend the poor and fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy; free them from the hand of the wicked" (verses 3,4). The rulers and the judges represent the justice of God who demands that they defend the poor and fatherless, listen to their complaints, and give them a chance to request justice. He commands them to do justice to the afflicted and needy, give them their legitimate rights, and free them from the hand of the unjust and wicked men. This command repeats itself often in the pages of the Book of God: "Learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow" (Isaiah 1:17). It is also a frequently repeated warning: "Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees, who write misfortune, which they have prescribed to rob the needy of justice, and to take what is right from the poor of My people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless. What will you do in the day of punishment, and in the desolation that will come from afar? To whom will you flee for help?" (Isaiah 10:1-3).

This is a divine call from God to the judges and the heads of any establishment to do justice: the judge to his people, the ruler to his subject, the boss to his employees and the head of the house to his wife and children.

2.3. Third: God Rebukes the Judges

(verses 5-7)

1. **God rebukes the foolish judge:** "They do not know, nor do they understand; they walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are unstable" (verse 5). Before applying the law, the judge first has to acquaint himself with it. This is his responsibility and the first prerequisite for functioning in that office. Solomon prayed, "Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted. Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?" (1 Kings 3:7,9). Those judges, however, neglected the law, chose not to understand the word of the Lord, assumed an arrogant attitude, and put on injustice for a cloak. Yet God calls out, "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20). The light of dawn is bound with returning to the law and the testimony, which are "a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105). "When wisdom enters your heart, and knowledge is pleasant to your soul, discretion will preserve you; understanding will keep you, to deliver you from the way of evil, from the man who speaks perverse things" (Proverbs 2:10-12). "For the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light; reproofs of instruction are the way of life" (Proverbs 6:23).

As a result of the foolishness of the judge who says, "There is no God", all the foundations of the earth are unstable, because the moral bases are unsettled. And "If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?" (Psalm 11:3). Indeed "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6), because "men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed" (John 3:19,20).

2. **God reminds the judge of his status (verse 6):** In rebuking the judges, the Lord reminds them of the elevated status he conferred upon them:
 1. **They are gods:** "I said, 'You are gods'" (verse 6a). In case the thief was not known, the law required that "the master of the house shall be brought to the judges (*elohim*) For any kind of trespass the cause of both parties shall come before the judges (*elohim*); and whomever the judges (*elohim*) condemn shall pay double to his neighbor" (Exodus 22:8,9). The judge is a representative of God Himself; he is commissioned by Him to apply God's law "for the judgment is God's" (Deuteronomy 1:17). King Jehoshaphat said to the judges, whom he had appointed, "Take heed to what you are doing, for you do not judge for man but for the LORD, who is with you in the judgment. Now therefore, let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take care and do it, for there is no iniquity with the LORD our God, no partiality, nor taking of bribes" (2 Chronicles 19:6,7). The New Testament says, "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves" (Romans 13:1,2). Christ was quoting this verse when He declared, "I and My Father are one" (John 10:30). "The Jews, however, picked up rocks to stone him, so He said to them, 'Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?' The Jews answered Him, saying, 'For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God.' Jesus answered them, 'Is it not written in your law, "I said, 'You are gods'"? If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, "You are blaspheming", because I said, "I am the Son of God"? If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him'" (John 10:31-38).
 2. **They are the children of the Most High:** "And all of you are children of the Most High" (verse 6b). This second title shows that the first one "You are gods" was definitely a spiritual title, because this second title also has a spiritual sense. There is no bodily birth from God, but there is a birth from above, of water and the Spirit (John 3:3,5). It is what Christ came to give freely to those who believe in Him. "But

- as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12,13). This how they would become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). How great is the love that God has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God (1 John 3:1). But it is our responsibility to be pure just as He is pure, and holy as He is holy. "But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct" (1 Peter 1:15).
3. **God declares that a judge is liable to punishment:** "But you shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes" (verse 7). It is true that God delegated to them some of His authority, yet their failure to accomplish His expectations makes them liable to punishment by death, just the same as any soul that sins and dies (Ezekiel 18:4). Everyone who disobeys God's word judges it and condemns himself: "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). The next psalm (Psalm 83) relates the reports of the kings and the princes who fell and perished on account of their injustice (Psalm 83:9-11).

2.4. Fourth: God is the Fair Judge

(verse 8)

"Arise, O God, judge the earth; for You shall inherit all nations" (verse 8). The psalmist knew that God judged the judges of his people who did not do justice to the poor, fatherless, afflicted and needy. Therefore he decided to take his case to the just Judge who would do him and all the wronged people justice. At the introduction of his psalm he saw God standing, but the judges obstructed the divine justice. So he entreated God to take control of the situation in all the earth, because He held full authority and possessed all the peoples. "The LORD shall judge the peoples; judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness" (Psalm 7:8). "For the LORD Most High is awesome; He is a great King over all the earth" (Psalm 47:2). He is the fair judge who changes the injustice of the wicked into a blessing for the believer, just as Joseph told his brothers, "You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20).

Believer, your case has never and will never be in the hands of humans. It is always in the hand of the Lord. He will solve it through those whom He chooses to solve it, or through His personal intervention. So let us turn for refuge to the King of all the earth, to hear from His lips the sweet words: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18).

"For You shall inherit all nations."

2.5. Questions

1. Why does God rebuke some judges?

2. What comfort do you get from knowing that God is your judge?

3. Psalm Eighty-Three

A Cry for Help against the Alliance of the Wicked

1 A Song. A Psalm of Asaph. Do not keep silent, O God! Do not hold Your peace, and do not be still, O God!

2 For behold, Your enemies make a tumult; and those who hate You have lifted up their head.

3 They have taken crafty counsel against Your people, and consulted together against Your sheltered ones.

4 They have said, "Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more."

5 For they have consulted together with one consent; they form a confederacy against You:

6 The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites; Moab and the Hagrites;

7 Gebal, Ammon, and Amalek; Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre;

8 Assyria also has joined with them; they have helped the children of Lot. Selah

9 Deal with them as with Midian, as with Sisera, as with Jabin at the Brook Kishon,

10 Who perished at En Dor, who became as refuse on the earth.

11 Make their nobles like Oreb and like Zeeb, yes, all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna,

12 Who said, "Let us take for ourselves the pastures of God for a possession."

13 O my God, make them like the whirling dust, like the chaff before the wind!

14 As the fire burns the woods, and as the flame sets the mountains on fire,

15 So pursue them with Your tempest, and frighten them with Your storm.

16 Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek Your name, O LORD.

17 Let them be confounded and dismayed forever; yes, let them be put to shame and perish,

18 That they may know that You, whose name alone is the LORD, are the Most High over all the earth.

The reader of the Book of Psalms will find in many psalms that a powerful enemy stands against the believer and attacks the people of God. He finds out that an evil kingdom stands against the kingdom of God. Although the godly become afraid and are sometimes shaken, they always run to their abiding and steadfast Lord for their only shelter. They have set their love upon Him to deliver and help them. All through history, when the enemies of the Lord besieged the people of the Lord, and the godly people were unable to face up to them, God's

providence intervened on behalf of His people.

This psalm was composed for the occasion of an attack on the people of the Lord that they were unable to meet. The divine hand intervened, to push the enemies away and protect God's weak people. The divine promise declares, "When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD will lift up a standard against him" (Isaiah 59:19). The occasion for writing this psalm could have been the coming up of a powerful alliance against Jehoshaphat. The biblical historian says, "It happened after this that the people of Moab with the people of Ammon, and others with them besides the Ammonites, came to battle against Jehoshaphat. Then some came and told Jehoshaphat, saying, 'A great multitude is coming against you from beyond the sea, from Syria; and they are in Hazazon Tamar' (which is En Gedi). And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD" (2 Chronicles 20:1-3). He said, "... nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You." Then the LORD sent Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, upon whom was the Spirit of the Lord, to say to the king and the people, "Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's ... stand still and see the salvation of the LORD, who is with you" (2 Chronicles 20:12-22). Truly, "The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe" (Proverbs 18:10). "My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:2).

Thank God for Jehoshaphat and all the oppressed that see God above all antagonistic powers! "For he that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be higher than they" (Ecclesiastes 5:8 KJV). This is true of the safety of the people of Lord, both physically and spiritually. When the devil captures somebody and they fail to cut themselves loose from his clutches, the high, powerful and divine hand of God lifts them from the ring of death and transport them to the vastness of life. And in order to save mankind from the captivity of Satan, the hand of divine love, in Christ, reached down to the depth of human despair to save them and grant them the liberty of the sons of God. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth ... And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:14,16,17).

The psalm contains the following:

- First: A description of peril (verses 1-8)
- Second: Encouragement from history (verses 9-12)
- Third: A cry for help (verses 13-18)

3.1. First: A Description of Peril (verses 1-8)

1. **God kept silent:** "Do not keep silent, O God! Do not hold Your peace, and do not be still, O God!" (verse 1). It seems to the frightened and terrified person that God keeps silent and holds His peace. It appears that He is not doing anything. But this same person knows what He has done and how He rushed to his rescue. So he might well turn to Him and cry out, "Do not keep silent, O God!" Frightened believers all through the ages have echoed such a prayer, "To You I will cry, O LORD my Rock: Do not be silent to me, lest, if You are silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit" (Psalm 28:1). Some others said, "'The LORD has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me,' but He answered them, 'Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands'" (Isaiah 49:14-16).
2. **The enemies are getting ready:** "For behold, Your enemies make a tumult; and those who hate You have lifted up their head" (verse 2). The psalmist identifies his own enemies as though they were the Lord's enemies who hate Him. Although he sees the impending danger all around him, he still sees God by his side- and no wonder, because the believer abides in Christ just as the branch abides in the vine (John 15:2). Anyone who is out to hurt the branch will necessarily harm the vine, and he who touches you touches the apple of the Lord's eye (Zechariah 2:8). The enemies of the Lord make such tumult and racket. A tumult is the noise of the large number of soldiers who come to attack the psalmist and his people, as Isaiah said, "The multitude of many people who make a noise like the roar of the seas" (Isaiah 17:12). The enemies have lifted up their head with pride, as though they were certain of victory: "But God will wound the head of His enemies" (Psalm 68:21).
3. **The enemies plot together:** "They have taken crafty counsel against Your people, and consulted together against Your sheltered ones. They have said, 'Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more.' For they have consulted together with one consent; they form a confederacy against You" (verses 3-5). The enemies got ready; they sat down to plot and consult together against the congregation of God, cut them off so that none could remember them anymore. The psalmist perceives that such an evil conspiracy targets, above all, the divine interests. The conspiracy is formed against the people of God, and the goal is to cut off His sheltered ones, whom He promised shelter and preservation. These ones are those who say, "For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; in the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me" (Psalm 27:5). The psalmist considers the confederacy that the enemies formed together to be a confederacy against God Himself, just as much as it is against His people. In spite of the tremendous number of the enemies and diversity of their languages and races, the conspiracy was taken up with full determination and zeal.

The enemies' conspiracy against God's people will not succeed. Christ said to Peter, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail

against it" (Matthew 16:18). The gates of the ancient cities led to a spacious square in which the ruler, the noble men and the judges sat. Likewise, Satan and his minions sit at the gates of Hades plotting together against God's people. But they will not prevail against them, because Christ said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand" (John 10:27-29).

4. **The enemies are many:** "The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites; Moab and the Hagarites; Gebal, Ammon and Amalek; Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre; Assyria also has joined with them; they have helped the children of Lot" (verses 6-8). The psalmist cried out for the Lord's assistance, because those who plotted against him were many. They surrounded him. Assyria, the major northern political power at that time, recruited a group of nations against the people of God. The Edomites came from the southeast. Although the Edomites were the descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother, they turned against their cousins. They lived in the hill country between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba. The Ishmaelites, who were nomadic Bedouins, came from the northeastern borders of Egypt. Gebal also came, who lived in the mountains to the east of Idumea. The Ammonites came too. They hailed from the Transjordan and were the traditional enemies of the Israelites. The Amalekites came, as well, who were the first enemies to strike the Israelites as they left the land of Egypt (Exodus 17). The Philistines came from the West and the inhabitants of Tyre from the North. "Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against His Anointed!" (Psalm 2:1,2). To whom but God will the psalmist resort while his helpless people are going through all this, to complain to Him of the impending danger?

3.2. Second: Encouragement from History

(verses 9-12)

The psalmist recalls two historical events that took place during the time of the judges, which was the darkest era in the history of the Israelites. God granted his helpless people victory over two powerful enemies: the Canaanites and the Midianites. He says, "Deal with them as with Midian, as with Sisera, as with Jabin at the Brook Kishon, who perished at En Dor, who became as refuse on the earth. Make their nobles like Oreb and like Zeeb, yes, all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna, who said, 'Let us take for ourselves the pastures of God for a possession'" (verses 9-12).

1. **Victory over the Canaanites:** Sisera was the commander of the army of King Jabin, the king of Hazor. His kingdom lay on the eastern bank of the Brook Kishon, allowing him to control the road between the valley and the Mediterranean Sea. He used this advantage to

humiliate the Israelites for twenty years. Deborah, a judge of Israel, encouraged a man by the name of Barak to fight Sisera. The battle took place at the foot of Mount Tabor. Sisera was defeated and fled away on foot. He arrived at the tents of Heber the Kenite where Heber's wife killed him by driving a tent peg into his temple while he was asleep (Judges 4). The psalmist says that Jabin and his army perished at En Dor, a city that lay in the same valley where Taanach and Megiddo lay (Judges 5:19; cf. Joshua 17:11). The bodies of Jabin's soldiers, under the command of Sisera, fell like refuse (dung) on the earth.

2. **Victory over the Midianites:** The princes Zebah (sacrifice) and Zalmunna (the god of darkness) were kings over the Midianites. Two commanders lead their army; one was named Oreb (raven) and one was Zeeb (wolf). The ancients used to give their children such unusual names in hopes that they would grow up to be fierce when attacking the enemy and defeating them. The Midianites used to plunder the crops of the children of Israel after the harvest, and leave them as prey to hunger. The Midianites gathered themselves in the Valley of Jezreel to fall upon the children of Israel. So the Lord assigned the judge Gideon along with three hundred men to launch an attack at night against them. Chaos spread in the ranks of the Midianites and they killed each other. Oreb and Zeeb were also killed, and Gideon captured Zebah and Zalmunna. It was such memorable day of triumph and was called "the day of Midian" (Judges 6-8).

The psalmist closes this part by saying that the enemies of his people said, "Let us take for ourselves the pastures of God for a possession." The Book of Judges does not mention that either the Canaanites or the Midianites said this. But the Scriptures say that King Jehoshaphat said in his prayer, "And now, here are the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir ... rewarding us by coming to throw us out of Your possession which You have given us to inherit" (2 Chronicles 20:10,11). The psalmist is sure that what happened during the time of the judges will be repeated with Jehoshaphat and those who will come after him. God is the same yesterday, today and forever.

3.3. Third: A Cry for Help

(verses 13-18)

1. **A request for removing the enemy:** "O my God, make them like the whirling dust, like the chaff before the wind! As the fire burns the woods, and as the flame sets the mountains on fire, so pursue them with Your tempest, and frighten them with Your storm" (verses 13-15). The psalmist asks the Lord to take the enemies away from his country as the whirlwind drives away the dust and the chaff. He asks God to burn them as the fire burns the woods on the mountains during the time of dryness. During that time neither rain comes down to put the fire out, nor can a man go up to it to put it out. Isaiah's prediction applies to it, "Moreover the multitude of your foes shall be like fine dust, and the multitude of the terrible ones like chaff that passes away; yes, it shall be in an instant,

suddenly. You will be punished by the LORD of hosts with thunder and earthquake and great noise, with storm and tempest and the flame of devouring fire" (Isaiah 29:5,6). God says about the enemies of His people, "I will scatter them like stubble that passes away by the wind of the wilderness" (Jeremiah 13:24).

The psalmist here uses the Old Testament language, the "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" style (Leviticus 24:20). But we lift up this prayer in the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of the New Testament, which is expressed in these words spoken by a wise Christian: "Slay your enemies by making them your friends. Kill your enmity with love, and kill your negative attitudes toward them by giving them the message of Christ."

2. **A request for the repentance of the enemy:** "Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek Your name, O LORD. Let them be confounded and dismayed forever; yes, let them be put to shame and perish, that they may know that You, whose name alone is the LORD, are the Most High over all the earth" (verses 16-18). The psalmist requests the repentance of the enemy in two steps. First, shame and fear should make him realize the mistake he made; and second, the enemy should know what is right and seek to know the Lord:

1. **The realization of the mistake:** The psalmist asks the Lord to thwart the enemies' attack and defeat them, filling their faces with shame, astonishment and dismay. They clashed with an unexpected superior power, God's divine power. It is God's wisdom that makes man fail, in order to realize his own inadequacy and seek God's face. Thus, his mistake should lead him to search for what is right. In this humbled state he declares, "Show me Your ways, O LORD; teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; on You I wait all the day" (Psalm 25:4,5).
2. **Knowing what is right:** When the enemies' faces are filled with shame, they seek the Lord's face. When they are dismayed and many fall dead, they seek to worship the Lord, the Most High over all the earth, because He is the Lord of lords, the One who inhabits heaven, the Creator of heaven and earth and all that is upon them. He is Jehovah, the Lord of life, who is and who was and who is to come. He is the First and the Last, the Most High over all that is high and lifted up.

Our failure to reform ourselves is a definite blessing, because it leads us to seek new life from God. Our weakness helps us take shelter in God. Our poverty compels us to resort to God's riches. Our lowliness makes us seek God's exaltation. Let every believer pray to God to make his enemies God's beloved ones, to subjugate his foes to the divine glory, so that they would receive a blessing. In this the believer himself is also blessed.

3.4. Questions

1. What happened with Sisera and Zalmunna?

2. Reading verses 16-18, what are the two steps that lead to the repentance of a sinner?

4. Psalm Eighty-Four

Longing for the Courts of the Lord

1 To the Chief Musician. On an instrument of Gath. A Psalm of the sons of Korah. How lovely is Your tabernacle, O LORD of hosts!

2 My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

3 Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young -- even Your altars, O LORD of hosts, my King and my God.

4 Blessed are those who dwell in Your house; they will still be praising You. Selah

5 Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, whose heart is set on pilgrimage.

6 As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a spring; the rain also covers it with pools.

7 They go from strength to strength; each one appears before God in Zion.

8 O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob! Selah

9 O God, behold our shield, and look upon the face of Your anointed.

10 For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.

12 O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in You!

This psalm describes the joy of the heart that longs to be in the house of God, because it is full of enthusiasm for serving Him. It is similar to Psalm 42 and 43, which express longing for the house of the Lord and the pain of being deprived of worshipping in it. There is also a lot of similarity between the themes of Psalm 27, 61, 63 and this psalm, which may have been written on a Sabbath when the psalmist was unwillingly deprived of being in the house of God. He hoped that he would not go without worshipping in it for long, and blessed those who had the chance to worship. He said, "Blessed are those who dwell in Your house; they will still be praising You" (verse 4). It is like health, which is a crown on the head of the healthy that is seen only by the sick. So one can say that the psalmist regards worshipping in the courts of the Lord as a crown on the head of the worshippers, seen only by those who are deprived of it.

But the psalmist considers himself to be part of those blessings. He says, "Blessed is the man

whose strength is in You, whose heart is set on pilgrimage" (verse 5). Although he had no chance to be in the house of the Lord, he was still happy because his heart was set on pilgrimage. All the hymns, prayers, chants and recitations of the word of God in the temple still filled his heart and mind. He concluded the psalmist by saying, "O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in You!" (verse 12). Although he was physically far away from the courts of the Lord, he still trusted that he would receive forgiveness from the Lord through animal sacrifices, which the Mosaic Law required, and through divine fellowship. There is as great promise that says, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

The psalm contains the following:

- First: The reasons for yearning for the Lord's temple (verses 1-4)
- Second: The blessings of the Lord's temple (verses 5-7)
- Third: A prayer to the Lord of the temple (verses 8-12)

4.1. First: The Reasons for Yearning for the Lord's Temple (verses 1-4)

The psalmist present four reasons for his yearning for the house of the Lord:

1. **Because of the Temple's loveliness:** "How lovely is Your tabernacle, O LORD of hosts!" (verse 1). The Lord's tabernacle is lovely because there God lives among His people, as He said to Moses, "And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8). In the tabernacle was the brass altar for the burnt offering, on which they offered the main sacrifice. The people also came there with their sacrifices for the priests to lay hands on them; and the people would confess their sins and receive forgiveness (Leviticus 1:4). Ark of the Covenant of the Lord was also there. It contained the two tablets of the law given to Moses by God, a pot that contained manna, with which God had fed the children of Israel for forty years in the Sinai Desert, and Aaron's rod that budded to prove God's election of Aaron to be a priest. And above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. There God met His people on the basis of the blood of sacrifices that was shed. "Without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22). In the tabernacle of the Lord the people hear His sweet words. The psalmist said, "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward" (Psalm 19:7-11).

2. **Because of his love for the Lord:** "My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God" (verse 2). The man who is far away from God is dead in his trespasses and sins. He settles for material satisfaction only, although he knows full well that it is not by bread alone that man should live, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4). The man who is spiritually alive, however, is satisfied only by the living God, in whom he lives and moves and has his being (Acts 17:28). He also knows how much God longs for him. God had lived among his old people in the "tabernacle of meeting" in the Sinai Desert, and in the fullness of time He dwelt among us in Christ, His Word, who became flesh (John 1:14). The soul (i.e. the will) of the psalmist longs for the courts of the Lord, and his heart (emotions) and flesh (mind) cry out for the living God. In the courts of the Lord he meets with the Lord, who is a friend who sticks closer than a brother (Proverbs 18:24). When he comes to the house of the Lord, he joins the Greeks who asked to see Jesus. He sees Him, hears the announcement of His love for him, and experiences His goodness (John 12:20,21). Then Christ's words would apply to him: "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him" (John 14:21,23).
3. **Because of his security in the Lord:** "Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young; even Your altars, O LORD of hosts, my King and my God" (verse 3). The psalmist envied the sparrow and the swallow because they found a safe place in the house of the Lord, where they could build their nests and leave their young while they fly away to look for food! All those who find satisfaction for their soul in the Lord and His house want their children to find the same satisfaction from the very source! How happy is a godly father who sees his children in love with the Lord and eager to hear His word. Through the mention of the swallow and its young nestlings, the psalmist indicates that when he comes to the house of the Lord, he finds reassurance and peace. The sacrifice offered at the altar, according to the Mosaic Law, ensures that God forgave his sins. And as we grow weary, we take shelter in the house of the Lord, to find an open door welcoming us, and a word of encouragement that says, "So by my woes to be nearer my God to Thee, nearer to Thee." We know that God forgave us our sins and atoned for our transgressions through His great sacrifice, the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself up as a ransom for us.

The psalmist calls the Lord certain titles, such as "LORD of hosts", "my King" and "my God". The great and mighty God of the kingdom is the Lord of the psalmist. What a King who loves His people, and what an intimate and deep relationship it is for the psalmist that gives him reassurance and fills his soul with peace!

4. **Because of his unity with the believers in the temple of the Lord:** "Blessed are those

who dwell in Your house; they will still be praising You" (verse 4). The psalmist blesses the servants of the Lord who stay in His courts and praise Him in His house, lifting up songs of praise to Him from all of their hearts all the while. Those are truly "the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19). Deprived of worship, the psalmist desires to be blessed himself in meeting God's servants and the believers who love and praise the Lord. He seeks to be united with them in spirit and truth, because far away from God, he meets people that are vastly different from Him in terms of interests, doctrine and worship. In the holy house of the Lord, however, he joins his voice with those who agree with him on loving and praising God. His heart is then reassured, and he receives a charge of spiritual power with which he goes joyfully out to the world. He thus proceeds to proclaim to all those who are far away from the Lord the joy of living with Him. He bids them come and join in it. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! ... It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; for there the LORD commanded the blessing; life forevermore" (Psalm 133:1,3).

4.2. Second: The Blessings of the Lord's Temple

(verses 5-7)

The psalmist could not be present at the Lord's temple, because outward circumstances kept him from doing so. So, in his spirit, he turns to it, as though he were saying, "Create in me a clean heart, O God" (Psalm 51:10). And behold, his heart itself became a holy temple in which the Lord dwells. Likewise each and every believer must be a moving temple, as much as every family must be a praying church. There the husband, the wife and the children gather together to pray, so that Christ's promise to them is fulfilled: "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). Let both our houses and bodies be dwelling-places and courts for the Lord, to say with Joshua, "But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15).

In the psalmist's turning to the Lord's temple in spirit, he gets three blessings:

1. **The blessing of being strengthened by the Lord:** "Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, whose heart is set on pilgrimage" (verse 5). How fortunate they are because they made the Lord the source of their strength. He is truly a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe (Proverbs 18:10). Blessed be he that will trust in the LORD (Psalm 40:3) whose hope is in the LORD his God (Psalm 146:5). In spite of being separated from the temple in the flesh, the psalmist still blesses himself because the pilgrimage to the Lord's holy place is written in his heart. This impresses him deeply, so much so that he can say what Paul said to his disciple Timothy, "I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also" (2 Timothy 1:5). He not only knew the way to the house of the Lord, but also set his heart on pilgrimage to it. Today we need to engrave God's ways

deeply in our hearts, not only to follow them with our eyes. We must be able to say, "Your words were found, and I ate them" (Jeremiah 15:16). And since God is the source of our strength and power, let us also make His word a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Thus we may receive more strength and power from Him, moving up from one level of power to another, just as Christ promised us, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). God wants to give us spiritual power, so He nourishes us with His word and fills us with Holy Spirit. This way it may be said about us, "I have written to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one" (1 John 2:14). By the word of God and the work of His Spirit our faith increases and everything becomes possible for us, because all things are possible to him who believes (Mark 9:23). Then we can say along with Paul, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

- 2. The blessing of rejoicing in the Lord:** "As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a spring; the rain also covers it with pools" (verse 6). The Valley of Baca was a dry and arid valley. Balsam trees abound in it because they do not need so much moisture. Whenever these trees are cut, a liquid flows out of it, like the sap of rubber trees. For this reason the ancient Hebrews derived its name *baca* from a root that means "to weep". The pilgrims used to go through the Valley of Baca on their way up to Jerusalem. Yet their faith turned it into a spring. The Hebrew for "spring" could also be read "blessing". The pilgrims were indeed joyful, because the joy of the Lord filled their hearts even in the most trying circumstances. They do not derive their joy from things around them, but rather from the spiritual joy that the Lord gives them. When those who love the Lord pass through the valley of tears, they turn it into a source of true blessing. "The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail" (Isaiah 58:11).

It is worthy of mention that the first part in verse 6 says, "As they pass through the Valley of Baca," not "As they dwell in the Valley of Baca." There is a contrast between this statement and the one in verse 4 that says, "Blessed are those who dwell in Your house." We pass through the Valley of Weeping (this is what *baca* also means), but we dwell in the house of God. The Scriptures says in Psalm 23, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death." It does not say, "Though I stop in the valley of the shadow of death", or "though I tarry in the valley of the shadow of death." The period of trouble and suffering is temporary and impermanent. It must pass away, because God promised the believers to come to their rescue.

"The rain also covers it with pools." The Hebrew *moreh* (for rain) can be derived from a

root that means "bitter". Now the hill of Moreh was the place where the Midianites attacked the people of the Lord. The Lord granted His people victory through the judge Gideon, as it was said, "Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him rose early and encamped beside the well of Harod, so that the camp of the Midianites was on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh in the valley" (Judges 7:1).

So when we come to the valley of tears, we turn it into a spring of blessing and joy. When the enemy attacks us by the hill of bitterness, we cover it with blessings, because God turns our sufferings into blessings. He says to us, "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). His overcoming the world becomes ours when we unite with Him the way the branch unites with the vine.

- 3. The blessing of growing in the Lord:** "They go from strength to strength; each one appears before God in Zion" (verse 7). The pilgrims who go to worship in the house of God receive strength on their way up to Jerusalem. Their strength and joy even increase the closer they get to the temple, because they get encouraged, move on from strength to strength, and grow in the grace and knowledge of their Lord (2 Peter 3:18). "But 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). Of the fullness of the Lord they have all received, and they grow from glory to glory (John 1:16; 2 Corinthians 3:18). The New Testament believers long to worship in the spiritual Zion, amongst the multi-racial congregation of the believers. Paul established two churches that had no buildings; one on the riverbank, which claimed Lydia (a seller of purple) among its members, and the other in a stranger place: a prison. It was from that prison that Paul's and Silas' hymns were lifted up and heard by the prisoners, which led the jailer and his household to believe. The Lord did a great miracle. The believers in Philippi went from power to power, and the people saw them before God in His church.

4.3. Third: A Prayer to the Lord of the Temple

(verses 8-12)

- 1. Because He is the Lord of hosts:** "O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob!" (verse 8). The "LORD God of hosts" is the one of whom David said to Goliath, "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts" (1 Samuel 17:45). His hosts are all the created things (Genesis 2:1): His people whom He chose (Exodus 7:4); the sun, the moon and the stars (Deuteronomy 4:19; 17:3); and the angels (Luke 2:13). He has all authority in heaven and on earth. With all the greatness of "the LORD of hosts", the psalmist is not terrified of Him, but rather warms up to Him, because He is the "God of Jacob", the God who made a covenant with His friend Abraham (Genesis 15:18). God also entered into the covenant with Jacob, promising that in him and in his descendant Jesus all the tribes

of the earth would be blessed and that He would be with him and keep him wherever he went (Genesis 28:14,15). Today we know that He brought the believers into a new covenant with Christ. Every time we stand up to pray, we know that the Almighty God, the "LORD of hosts", is the God of the covenant, who fulfills all His promises to us. Not one thing will fail of all the good things which He spoke (Joshua 23:14).

2. **Because He is the God of protection:** "O God, behold our shield, and look upon the face of Your anointed" (verse 9). Shields were made of interwoven branches, or of leather stretched over wooden frames with handles on the inside. The soldier would carry it with his left arm to ward off the arrows. God said to Abraham, "I am your shield" (Genesis 15:1). The Lord protects the believer from the deadly arrows of the enemy. The psalmist then asks the Lord to turn Himself toward the face of His anointed one and keep him from getting hurt by the arrows. Perhaps "anointed" refers to the Son of David, the King, of whom the Lord said, "Your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16). Or it could refer to the people of the Lord at large, whom He called "My firstborn" (Exodus 4:22). It could have also referred to the high priests (Leviticus 4:3; see comment on Psalm 80:17).
3. **Because He is the God of joy:** "For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness" (verse 10). The psalmist prays asking for the joy of being in the courts of the Lord and in His presence. A day in the courts of the Lord is a day of festivity, celebration and joy on which he calls to remembrance God's favor to Him and his forefathers. There he hears God's encouraging word, especially in the time of trouble and distress. His soul is also encouraged as he meditates on the promises of the Lord. In the house of the Lord he finds the way to salvation through redemption: "And without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22). Therefore his guilt falls off his laden shoulders as he considers the day he meets the Lord better than a thousand days.

In the house of the Lord he rejoices to offer service to His God, however humble it may be. For even standing at the doorpost as a doorman is better than living and being hosted in the tents of the wicked, where vice goes rampant. The author of this psalm is a son of Korah. The sons of Korah worked as gatekeepers of the house of the Lord. The Bible says, "The Korahites, were in charge of the work of the service, gatekeepers of the tabernacle. Their fathers had been keepers of the entrance to the camp of the Lord" (1 Chronicles 9:19).

4. **Because He is the God of goodness:** "For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly. O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in You!" (verses 11,12). The psalmist describes the Lord as "a sun" in His giving. He is truly "The Sun of Righteousness [who] shall arise with healing in His wings" (Malachi 4:2). Just as the sun gives off light, the Lord Himself is [our] light (Psalm 27:1). The sun purges and burns off the dross: "So the

Light of Israel will be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame; it will burn and devour his thorns and his briers in one day" (Isaiah 10:17). In His light we see light (Psalm 36:9). He also gladdens the soul, because light "is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun" (Ecclesiastes 11:7). He warms up our lives by his love, giving up the energy and the strength, rousing us from our slumber, and bringing us back to life in order to move and act. The psalmist represents God as a "shield" because He protects the believer (verse 9). He also "will give grace and glory." In His mercy He does not administer to us our deserved punishment, and in His glory He grants us an unmerited blessing. He shows mercy to us out of love and glorifies us by His power, so that we may say to 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" (Psalm 73:23,24). True, He will glorify us after we have gone to heaven, but as we are guided by His counsel, we live a life full of glory. "No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly." Uprightness is a God-given gift, to which He adds good things. "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32). As a natural response to the prayer that the God of goodness answers, the believer trusts in Him and acts in assurance in the light of what he knows about Him. He is indeed the LORD of hosts (verse 1), the living God (verse 2), my King and my God (verse 3), the God of Jacob (verse 8), a sun and shield (verse 11). Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!

4.4. Questions

1. Mention four reasons that make the pious person long for the house of the Lord.
2. Mention three blessings you can get when you go to worship.

5. Psalm Eighty-Five

Mercy and Truth have Met Together

1 To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of the sons of Korah. Lord, You have been favorable to Your land; You have brought back the captivity of Jacob.

2 You have forgiven the iniquity of Your people; You have covered all their sin. Selah

3 You have taken away all Your wrath; You have turned from the fierceness of Your anger.

4 Restore us, O God of our salvation, and cause Your anger toward us to cease.

5 Will You be angry with us forever? Will You prolong Your anger to all generations?

6 Will You not revive us again, that Your people may rejoice in You?

7 Show us Your mercy, LORD, and grant us Your salvation.

8 I will hear what God the LORD will speak, for He will speak peace to His people and to His saints;

but let them not turn back to folly.

9 Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him, that glory may dwell in our land.

10 Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed.

11 Truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven.

12 Yes, the LORD will give what is good; and our land will yield its increase.

13 Righteousness will go before Him, and shall make His footsteps our pathway.

The psalmist begins his psalm with thanksgiving to God for answering prayer and returning His people from the Babylonian captivity during the time of Nehemiah and the prophet Zechariah. An angel has wondered, "O LORD of hosts, how long will You not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which You were angry these seventy years?" And the LORD answered the angel with good and comforting words. So the angel said to the prophet Zechariah, "Proclaim, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts: "I am zealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with great zeal"' (Zechariah 1:12-14).

The children of Israel prayed penitently to God and begged to be delivered. The Lord heard them and brought them back from captivity. Thus their return was evidence of His forgiveness of their sins and covering of their transgressions. This is how the prophet Jeremiah put it, "And I will cause the captives of Judah and the captives of Israel to return, and will rebuild those places as at the first. I will cleanse them from all their iniquity by which they have sinned against Me, and I will pardon all their iniquities by which they have sinned and by which they have transgressed against Me. Then it shall be to Me a name of joy, a praise, and an honor before all nations of the earth, who shall hear all the good that I do to them; they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and all the prosperity that I provide for it" (Jeremiah 33:7-9). On returning, however, they found the walls of Jerusalem lying in ruins. The city was in such devastation, the number of those who returned was few, and the people were mostly simple and poor, so that their thanksgiving turned into a complaint. The painful condition which they saw showed them that God was still angry with them. Perhaps they wondered, "When will God fulfill to us what He had prophesied to Isaiah about his blessings to those who returned from captivity?" That section of Isaiah opens with the following exhortation: "'Comfort, yes, comfort My people!' says your God. Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins" (Isaiah 40:1,2).

The psalm opens with a song from the people (verses 1-7) in which they ask for God's power to refresh and gladden them. Then the priest answers them (verses 8-13), saying that the answer came to him from God, confirming his peace to his people and the godly, so that they should not return to folly. Thus God's mercy has met His truth; righteousness and peace have embraced and kissed (verse 10). It is very obvious that this could not have been fulfilled in

any other way than the cross, in which God's justice met his mercy, and righteousness that demands justice, kissed peace that gives forgiveness. God's justice (truth) is reconciled with His mercy only through the cross, in which justice is fulfilled and the heavenly mercy and divine grace are revealed.

This psalm is a Messianic prophecy. It speaks of the Messiah who will come to fulfill the blessed promises.

In the Messiah we find peace, as the angels sang on the day of His birth, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" (Luke 2:14). Through Him we are saved, as Simeon the elder said of Him, "For my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples" (Luke 2:30,31). Through Him glory dwells on earth, because He is "A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel" (Luke 2:32). In Him also truth and mercy meet together: "But grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). Furthermore, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:19). Thus those who become reconciled with God can say, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

The psalm contains the following:

- First: Past mercies (verses 1-3)
- Second: Requesting new mercies (verses 4-7)
- Third: A divine voice (verses 8,9)
- Fourth: A confident expectation (verses 10-13)

5.1. First: Past Mercies

(verses 1-3)

The psalmist lists three blessings that God granted His people:

1. **Returning from captivity:** "Lord, You have been favorable to Your land; You have brought back the captivity of Jacob" (verse 1). When God's anger was kindled against His people, He let them be taken captives. It was said of them, "Therefore the LORD does not accept them; He will remember their iniquity now, and punish their sins ... When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. But I will consume them by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence" (Jeremiah 14:10,12). After seventy years, God received them back, turned His anger away from them and brought them back to their land. There is a worse captivity than that of Babylon: Satan's captivity and enslavement of sinners. But when a sinner

returns to God in repentance, beating his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" (Luke 18:13), God forgives him and sets him free from the humiliation of sin and the bondage of evil habits. He bestows on him a meaningful life. If you return to God in repentance, He will deliver you from the power of darkness and convey you into glorious liberty (Colossians 1:13).

2. **Being forgiven:** "You have forgiven the iniquity of Your people; You have covered all their sin" (verse 2). Iniquity is moral crookedness and corruption, and sin is missing the mark. God forgave His people their crookedness and corruption, and no longer reckoned it against them. He covered all their sins, so that they were no longer visible and the people could not be charged with them. He granted them what they could not do for themselves: He forgave them their trespasses and atoned for their sins. "Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy" (Micah 7:18). And what he did with the penitent Israelites, He does with us today, calling us to "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:7). He makes good his promise to "cleanse them from all their iniquity by which they have sinned against Me, and I will pardon all their iniquities by which they have sinned and by which they have transgressed against Me" (Jeremiah 33:8). Let us, then, come to Him penitently and confess our sins, because "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).
3. **Being rescued from God's anger:** "You have taken away all Your wrath; You have turned from the fierceness of Your anger" (verse 3). Wrath is severe anger. The psalmist saw in the Babylonian captivity the wrath and fierce anger of God, just as he saw the removal of divine anger in the return from captivity. "I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, and like a cloud, your sins. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you" (Isaiah 44:22). Let us remember God's mercy and humble ourselves before Him, for He is the One who gives to all liberally and without reproach (James 1:5). It is He who blots out transgressions for His own sake; and He will not remember them (Isaiah 43:25). He is also the blessed One who blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (1 Peter 1:3). Let us give Him our thanksgiving from our hearts, put our trust in Him, and lift up our voices always to say, "Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's" (Psalm 103:1-5).

5.2. Second: Requesting New Mercies

(verses 4-7)

In the first three verses the psalmist thanked God for His favor and kindness, in that he brought back many from captivity, although some stayed back by their own choice. He appealed to God to complete what is lacking, as the author of Psalm 126 said, "When the LORD brought back the captivity of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing..." (verses 1,2). Then he went on to say in verse 4, "Bring back our captivity, O LORD, as the streams in the South." When the Lord brought back their captivity, they were like dreamers, but they remembered the remainder of their brethren still in captivity, and lifted up an appeal for them. They were like the sinner who is enslaved by his sin and sees no way out of it. But as God saves him from it through repentance and gives him victory over it through sanctification, he shouts for joy, "The snare is broken, and we have escaped" (Psalm 124:7). Later on he begins to notice his faults and shortcomings, and appeals to God to complete his salvation by sanctifying him all the more and teaching him to submit to the Holy Spirit. So, let us ask God for more blessing, and He will give us according to His riches and generosity.

1. **Their return was still lacking, both in quantity and quality:** "Restore us, O God of our salvation" (verse 4a). The number of those who returned from captivity was small, while many stayed on in the land of captivity out of a desire for material gain, and to avoid the effort of travelling back to their home country. Some of those who returned faced problems and troubles, so that their hearts yearned for the land of their captivity. Their return to the land of Israel was in body only, but not in spirit. Therefore the psalmist lifted up a prayer for them so that their return to the Lord and Savior should be in body, heart and soul.

Today we also need to lift up such a prayer in a spiritual sense. There are many people who are far away from the Lord, living as captives of the devil. We must pray for them in order for the Lord to make them return in repentance. Also, there are many who return to the Lord, but they need spiritual power and true determination to live with Him. They need to grow deeper in loving Him and persevere in obeying Him. For these we join the psalmist in the prayer: "Restore us, O God of our salvation."

2. **God was still angry with them:** "And cause Your anger toward us to cease. Will You be angry with us forever? Will You prolong Your anger to all generations?" (verses 4b,5). The people provoked their God to anger and incited Him to wrath by their sins. He was very angry with them as He has expressed through the words of Jeremiah concerning the idolaters among them, "The children gather wood, the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven; and they pour out drink offerings to other gods, that they may provoke Me to anger. 'Do they provoke Me to

anger?' says the LORD. 'Do they not provoke themselves, to the shame of their own faces?' Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: 'Behold, My anger and My fury will be poured out on this place; on man and on beast, on the trees of the field and on the fruit of the ground. And it will burn and not be quenched'" (Jeremiah 7:18-20). The psalmist beseeches the Lord to quench His anger with them and put an end to it, as though he were saying, "O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your anger, nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure" (Psalm 6:1).

3. **They were still in need of a revival:** "Will You not revive us again, that Your people may rejoice in You?" (verse 6). The psalmist asked the Lord for a spiritual refreshment and a true revival that would awaken individuals and bring life to the congregation at large. "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 7:19). The prophet Hosea said, "Come, and let us return to the LORD; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight" (Hosea 6:1,2). The prophet Habakkuk also prayed, "O LORD, I have heard your speech and was afraid; O LORD, revive Your work in the midst of the years! In the midst of the years make it known" (Habakkuk 3:2). They were in need of an experience similar to that of the prophet Ezekiel: "And He said to me, 'Son of man, can these bones live?' So I answered, 'O Lord GOD, You know.' Again He said to me, 'Prophecy to these bones, and say to them, "O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: 'Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live'"'" (Ezekiel 37:3-5).
4. **They were still in need of mercy and salvation:** "Show us Your mercy, LORD, and grant us Your salvation" (verse 7). They have seen His anger, and now they ask to see His mercy. "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions" (Psalm 51:1). The first and foremost salvation is to be delivered from the wages of the evil power of sin. Our salvation from sin is an act of God's mercy alone. It is out of God's mercy that He forgives us and atones for our sins. The psalmist cannot have an answer to his prayer and deliverance from all the charges against him except through God's special mercy. Therefore he prays, "In wrath remember mercy" (Habakkuk 3:2).

5.3. Third: A Divine Voice

(verses 8,9)

After asking for salvation for his people and himself, the psalmist waited for the answer from the Lord. The answer came in these two verses. Therefore he shouted for joy. These two verses then are God's answer to his people's prayer, as the prophet Habakkuk said, "I will stand my watch and set myself on the rampart, and watch to see what He will say to me, and what I will answer when I am corrected. Then the LORD answered me and said: 'Write the

vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it. 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 2:1-3). Likewise the psalmist said, "God has spoken once, twice I have heard this: that power belongs to God. Also to You, O Lord, belongs mercy; for You render to each one according to his work" (Psalm 62:11,12). In these two verses God says something to His people:

1. **The Lord speaks peace to His people:** "I will hear what God the LORD will speak, for He will speak peace to His people and to His saints; but let them not turn back to folly" (verse 8). "'There is no peace,' says the LORD, 'for the wicked.'" (Isaiah 48:22). But when a wicked man repents, God grants him peace with God, with himself and his neighbors. God's answers came in the singular: "I will hear." Perhaps a priest used to sing solo and announce the answer to the question. The content of the answer is that the Lord of heaven and earth speaks a message of peace to His people and those who fear, love and honor Him. He said to them, "For I know the thoughts that I think towards you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:11-13). He further said, "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 9:10). This peace will have a good result for the nation, in that they will not go back to the folly of sin and self-reliance. When we ask, "Will You not revive us again?" (verse 6), he reassures us and promises us peace, saying, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). As we complain of the believers' weakness and the spread of evil, the Lord says to us, "Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more" (Romans 5:20). This way he fills our hearts with hope and we do not despair because the Lord works in the midst of His people. We rather say, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).
2. **The Lord saves and glorifies His people:** "Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him, that glory may dwell in our land" (verse 9). When the Lord speaks peace to His people, he draws near to them, saves them and delivers them from humiliation and peril. Thus He answers their prayer: "Show us Your mercy, LORD, and grant us Your salvation" (verse 7). So glory dwells in their land after it was once lost from them in the humiliation of the Babylonian captivity. As the enemies took away the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, the high priest Eli died of grief. Because of the tremendous shock, even his daughter-in-law, Phinehas' wife, died in labor. At her hour of death she called her son's name "Ichabod", meaning, "the glory has gone" (1 Samuel 4:21). The salvation of the Lord, however, brings the glory back to the believers who fear Him. To them the promise is fulfilled: "Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of

the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle" (Exodus 40:34,35). This was called *shechina*, the coming down of God in His glory in the midst of His temple amongst His people. The same thing occurred when Solomon's temple was inaugurated; the glory of the Lord filled the place (2 Chronicles 7:1-3). When this promise comes true, we sing, "'Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! For behold, I am coming and I will dwell in your midst,' says the LORD. Many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and they shall become My people. And I will dwell in your midst. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you" (Zechariah 2:10,11).

Yet, God's perfect glory is found in Christ: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth ... And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:1,14,16,17). Christ is "the image of the invisible God ... For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell ... who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power" (Colossians 1:15,19; Hebrews 1:3).

5.4. Fourth: A Confident Expectation

(verses 10-13)

God's people remembered His past mercies and asked Him for new ones, so He sent them His encouraging word with a message of peace. As a result of this peace the people expected three things:

1. **Reconciliation with God:** "Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed" (verse 10). The Lord is a merciful God, and in His great love He entered into a covenant with those who love Him. All the promises of His mercy were true. And at the same time He is a righteous and just God. He said of Himself, "Tell and bring forth your case; yes, let them take counsel together. Who has declared this from ancient time? Who has told it from that time? Have not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, a just God and a Savior; there is none besides Me. Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other" (Isaiah 45:21,22). How can He, being a righteous and just God, save the sinner? How can He possibly be merciful and just at the same time? How can He exercise His mercy with the sinner and say, "Your sins are forgiven you," (Mark 2:5), and at the same time execute His justice "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23)? If He forgives and pardons him, it will be at the expense of His justice. And if He punishes him, this will conflict with His mercy. So how

can truth and mercy possible meet together; how can just righteousness embrace forgiving peace? The psalmist must have written these words by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and grasped a little of what the vicarious sacrifices meant which the Mosaic Law prescribed. All those sacrifices foreshadowed what we fully comprehend now after the coming of Christ and His sacrificial death of the cross. In the crucifixion of Christ divine justice was satisfied, and in it also God's mercy was manifested in its greatness. Christ summed up His message in the statement: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). In the cross the Lord extended the hand of His love, tearing the veil of the temple in two from top to bottom, so that there would not be a divider between the just God and sinful man who takes refuge in His saving mercy (Matthew 27:51). The beginning and the initiative was from the top, from God "who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ ... that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them" (2 Corinthians 5:18,19). "Mercy and truth have met together" in the cross, where Christ paid the price for sin and reconciled us to God. Righteousness, which consists in justice, and peace kissed. God's justice was satisfied in Christ, which set the confessing, penitent sinner free. God does not require sin to be paid for twice!

2. **Blessed by God (verses 11,12):**

1. **Doing righteousness:** "Truth shall spring out of the earth" (verse 11a). God had cursed the earth because of sin. He said to Adam after His disobedience, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:17-19). Thus, the truth sprang out of the earth. But when God's peace reigns in our hearts, we begin a life of truth and walk in righteousness, because our faith shows in our good works that God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10). In this, the declaration is fulfilled in us, "Sing, O heavens, for the LORD has done it! Shout, you lower parts of the earth; break forth into singing, you mountains, O forest, and every tree in it! For the LORD has redeemed Jacob, and glorified Himself in Israel" (Isaiah 44:23).
2. **The blessing of heaven:** "And righteousness shall look down from heaven" (verse 11b). When God's peace reigns over the believers, God's righteousness looks down upon them from heaven the way the sun shines. Righteousness will grow, increase and prosper in the hearts of men, and harmony will prevail between mortal men and God. He will then say to them, "'In that day ... I will answer,' says the LORD; 'I will answer the heavens, and they shall answer the earth. The earth shall answer with

grain, with new wine, and with oil..." (Hosea 2:21,22). The Lord will command, "Rain down, you heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness; let the earth open, let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together. I, the LORD, have created it" (Isaiah 45:8).

3. **The blessing of the earth:** "Yes, the LORD will give what is good; and our land will yield its increase" (verse 12). When righteousness and truth prevail, economic prosperity follows: "The LORD will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand. You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath, if you heed the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, and are careful to observe them" (Deuteronomy 28:12,13). Then the promise will come true: "Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him! Oh, fear the LORD, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him" (Psalm 34:8,9). God gave us peace in Christ Jesus, and reconciled us through Him "who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32). So if He freely gave us the spiritual blessing, which is far more valuable than the physical one, will He not give us the physical blessing? "Look at the birds of the air ... Consider the lilies of the field" (Matthew 6:26-32). How can the Lord possibly look after them? "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matthew 10:30). Truly, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters ... You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over" (Psalm 23:1-5).
3. **God's leading:** "Righteousness will go before Him, and shall make His footsteps our pathway" (verse 13). God always leads His children in the path of righteousness, and makes His justice go before them. They, too, follow His footsteps: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God" (Romans 8:14). "Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard" (Isaiah 58:8). God guides the people in the front, as well as those in the rear. He opens up before them all the path to righteousness, so that righteousness may go before them. Then the believers will walk in the same paths as they say, "He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake" (Psalm 23:3).

Let us sing this psalm with thanksgiving, and call on the God of our salvation to speak peace to us, that His glory may dwell in our land.

5.5. Questions

1. The psalmist mentions three blessings the Lord gave His people. What are they?

2. Write down Psalm 85:10 and comment on it.

6. Psalm Eighty-Six

Unite My Heart to Fear Your Name

- 1 A Prayer of David bow down Your ear, O LORD, hear me; for I am poor and needy.
- 2 Preserve my life, for I am holy; You are my God; save Your servant who trusts in You!
- 3 Be merciful to me, O Lord, for I cry to You all day long.
- 4 Rejoice the soul of Your servant, for to You, O Lord, I lift up my soul.
- 5 For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You.
- 6 Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer; and attend to the voice of my supplications.
- 7 In the day of my trouble I will call upon You, for You will answer me.
- 8 Among the gods there is none like You, O Lord; nor are there any works like Your works.
- 9 All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord, and shall glorify Your name.
- 10 For You are great, and do wondrous things; You alone are God.
- 11 Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth; unite my heart to fear Your name.
- 12 I will praise You, O Lord my God, with all my heart, and I will glorify Your name forevermore.
- 13 For great is Your mercy toward me, and You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.
- 14 O God, the proud have risen against me, and a mob of violent men have sought my life, and have not set You before them.
- 15 But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth.
- 16 Oh, turn to me, and have mercy on me! Give Your strength to Your servant, and save the son of Your maidservant.
- 17 Show me a sign for good, that those who hate me may see it and be ashamed, because You, LORD, have helped me and comforted me.

This psalm is the only one in the third section of the Psalter (Psalm 73-89) written by David. It carries the title "A Prayer of David." All David's psalms have a common theme: An assaulting enemy and annoying difficulties; a situation that always leads to victory thanks to the Lord. Throughout the situation the psalmist sees the enemy clearly, but sees God more clearly.

This psalm is marked by many things; it is a prayer that begins with thanksgiving and ends in thanksgiving, although it is never mentioned that the crisis ended or even almost ended. It means that the psalmist sees whoever cannot be seen and whatever cannot be seen. He sees the sun behind the cloud and recognizes that after the severe darkness of the night the dawn must come. Then the sun will rise, ushering in a brand new morning. There is a cross in the life of every true believer in Christ, but that is not all, for after the cross comes the resurrection, the ascension, the glory and the second coming of Christ. This prompts the believer to adore the Lord, who is described by Elihu (Job's friend) as the One "Who gives songs in the night" (Job 35:10). Then the believer says, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5). Our psalmist has not yet seen the morning sun, but he is certain that it will rise. Final victory always belongs to Christ and to all those who follow Him.

The psalm uses (in the original Hebrew) the reference to God "Adonai" seven times. It means that He is the Lord and Master of the psalmist, whom he worships and lives to serve. Consequently, he lives under His protection and is led by His guidance. In that he followed his mother's footsteps, of whom he said, "Save the son of Your maidservant" (verse 16). This is the same attitude that Mary, the mother of Jesus, assumed as she said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). David repeated the same expression in Psalm 116:16 when he said, "I am Your servant, the son of Your maidservant". God's mastery means that His gracious hand takes hold of the wicked enemy who stalks David, making him fulfill the divine purposes unknown to him. Every believer lives under God's protection like a burning bush that burns but is not burnt up (Exodus 3:2). So he progresses spiritually in spite of the difficulties that obstruct his way. Instead they make him stronger. Myth has it that when God first created birds, they complained to Him of the weight of their wings, not knowing that that "weight" makes them soar on high. Lifting weights strengthens the muscles. Now when God allows us to carry a heavy weight, He gives us the power that enables us to carry it. This power still remains with us even after the weight is removed. The weight goes away but the grace stays on. God does not take back his freely given grace. Fortunate are the believers, therefore, who recognize their servanthood to the Lord God, and who acknowledge that the whole universe fulfills His purposes.

Again, this is the only psalm that uses the expression: "Unite my heart to fear Your name" (verse 11b). The cares of the world, the arrogance of riches, and the lust for the material often contend with us. They sidetrack us. So let us lift up this prayer of the psalmist, knowing that "the desire of the righteous will be granted" (Proverbs 10:24). It is a desire to do the Lord's will and live in His obedience and service.

This psalm is also marked by the expression: "All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord, and shall glorify Your name" (verse 9). It lifts our eyes up

to expect the coming of Christ, to which we must prepare ourselves, not because political events remind us of it, but because our Savior confirmed it to us (as in Matthew 24). Let us always be expecting and seeking His speedy return, for every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn (Revelation 1:7). The eyes of the believers will fill with tears as they welcome Him and subject themselves to Him, while those who turned away from Him will shed tears of terror because of the evil destiny awaiting them.

The psalm includes the following:

- First: A request for forgiveness (verses 1-5)
- Second: A request for deliverance (verses 6-10)
- Third: A request for consecration (verses 11-13)
- Fourth: A request for a sign (verses 14-17)

6.1. First: A Request for Forgiveness

(verses 1-5)

In this part of the psalm the psalmist asks forgiveness from the forgiving and abundantly merciful God for the following reasons:

1. **Because of the psalmist's condition:** "Bow down Your ear, O LORD, hear me; for I am poor and needy" (verse 1). The psalmist feels inferior and worthless before the Lord's greatness and loftiness. In much the same way Isaiah cried out, seeing God's greatness, "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (Isaiah 6:5). Likewise Peter cries out as he experienced the miracles of catching many fish. He said to Christ, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (Luke 5:8). He was "poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:3) and well recognized his neediness. He knew that the Most High, the great God was near and loving. This is why he entreated Him to incline His ears, draw near to him, and bow down to hear His requests. It seems like he was saying along with his forefather Jacob, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant" (Genesis 32:10). He realized how small he was and how limited his capabilities were, like a little child standing beside his mother, shouting for all he is worth. The mother takes pity on him, bows down to reach his level, and inclines her ears. She listens attentively to his complaints, looks after him, feeds him and reassures him. The psalmist knew he was poor and needy, with no influence, money or knowledge. Yet he runs to the loving God for refuge, knowing that He must answer and forgive his sins.
2. **Because of the psalmist's piety:** "Preserve my life, for I am holy; You are my God; save

Your servant who trusts in You!" (verse 2). There is a strong relationship between the psalmist and his God; he is "holy", a "servant", and "trusts". He is confident of God's love for him. In his holiness, his servant relationship with God, his reliance on God's love and trustworthy promises, he beseeches God to preserve his soul from temptations and from the enemies of goodness. "He preserves the souls of His saints" (Psalm 97:10). It is as though the psalmist prayed, "Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Matthew 6:13). This is exactly what Christ did for Peter. He said to him, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail" (Luke 22:31,32). Since every believer is targeted by the enemy, he should ask for divine protection and preservation. He asks to be protected from past sins through forgiveness (Luke 7:48,50), and from present sins through sanctification and purification (Philippians 2:12,13). Furthermore, he expects God to complete his salvation in the future by glorifying him in heaven (1 Peter 1:5). The Lord's salvation embraces all aspects of life; he saves from the onslaught of the enemies (Psalm 27:1-3), from sickness (Luke 8:36), from hunger (Psalm 36:6) and from all troubles (Psalm 34:6). The psalmist's request of God to "save" him indicates his confidence that there is no other salvation for him apart from his God. When troubled, one prays along with King Hezekiah, "Now therefore, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the LORD, You alone" (Isaiah 37:20). When caught up in sin, one should listen to Peter's admonition: "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

3. **Because of the psalmist's crying:** "Be merciful to me O Lord, for I cry to you all day long" (verse 3). He cries all day long because he sees his sins, and feels his great need for divine forgiveness. He is in trouble because he knows that all his efforts, good works, worship and contrition will not offer him forgiveness. The apostle Paul describes the sinner as a dead person in his sins because he is separated from God. Paul says that the only hope to get forgiveness is in "God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:4-9).
4. **Because of the psalmist's sorrow:** "Rejoice the soul of Your servant, for to You, O Lord, I lift up my soul" (verse 4). Nothing can break man's heart more than sin, separation from God, and feeling guilty. Sin is a heavy charge and causes terrible anxiety. The world cannot offer its followers true and lasting joy, every message that it sends starts out with joy and ends up in sadness and anguish. King David found out that fact the hard way, so he turned to the Lord, the only source of true joy. In this psalm he lifted up

his soul from its misery to God, asking for joy, because the joy of the Lord is his strength (Nehemiah 8:10). The psalmist cried, "For I am poor and needy, and my heart is wounded within me" (Psalm 109:22). Jeremiah expressed almost the same thing: "I am pained in my very heart! My heart makes a noise in me" (Jeremiah 4:19). Much like Jeremiah, the psalmist took refuge with the Lord, who lifts up the soul of man from the pit of sorrow and despair. Both David and Jeremiah got what they asked for. So let us then say with Peter: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). Jesus Himself encouraged us to do so when He said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). As we come to Him in repentance, asking for the joy of forgiveness, we would say, "But I am poor and needy; yet the LORD thinks upon me. You are my help and my deliverer" (Psalm 40:17), and follow that with obeying Paul's injunction: "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4).

5. **Because of the psalmist's confidence:** "For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You" (verse 5). The psalmist appeals for forgiveness with the assurance that he will get it because God is good, ready to forgive, abundant in mercy and ever willing to hear all those who call on him. "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" (Exodus 34:6,7). In view of all these qualities He calls to "'Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.' So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm" (Joel 2:12,13).

6.2. Second: A Request for Deliverance

(verses 6-10)

The psalmist asked the good, forgiving, abundantly merciful God for forgiveness, and was confident of the answer. Therefore, he turned to Him once more asking Him for deliverance from his troubles. The sinner often feels unworthy of asking God for anything, because he knows full well that He is not pleased with him. But as he knows that God accepted and forgave him, he comes boldly to the throne of grace. In these five verses the psalmist presents the request of deliverance from trouble (verses 6,7), then he glorifies God who will deliver him (verses 8-10).

1. **The psalmist's supplications:** "Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer; and attend to the voice of my supplications. In the day of my trouble I will call upon You, for You will answer me" (verses 6,7). The psalmist declared that his trouble was only temporary, not every day! He did not say, "the year of my trouble" or "my lifetime of trouble," because the Lord does not let the believer be troubled endlessly. In His address to the angel of the church of Smyrna Christ expressed it this way: "You will have tribulation ten days. Be

faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). As there is a day of trouble, there is also a day of relief and blessing. The Lord answers the troubled believer, since it was He who commanded him, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me" (Psalm 50:15). It should not be forgotten that "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).

2. **The God of the psalmist (verses 8-10):**

1. **Is the greatest:** "Among the gods there is none like Lord; nor are there any works like Your works" (verse 8). Pharaoh worshipped idols, while Moses worshipped the living God. His greatness cannot be compared with the idol gods, for the Lord is God and there is none other beside Him (Deuteronomy 4:35). Moses and his redeemed people sang for that living God, the Maker of heaven and earth. He delivered His people when they called on Him and they saw Pharaoh's army drown. On that occasion they wondered, "Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" (Exodus 15:11). Moses said to Him as he neared the Promised Land, "O Lord GOD, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your mighty hand, for what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do anything like Your works and Your mighty deeds?" (Deuteronomy 3:24). This God is great in both His attributes and deeds; He brings to pass whatever He wants "who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us" (2 Corinthians 1:10).
2. **All mankind worship Him:** "All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord, and shall glorify Your name" (verse 9). "He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings" (Acts 17:26). There must come a day when all of them must worship Him and glorify Him with their lips and through righteous deeds. This precious prophecy is not yet full, but it must be fulfilled. It was fulfilled in part in Christ's words: "I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself" (John 12:32). Millions upon millions have believed in Him ever since He was lifted up on the cross. But there will come a time when this prophecy will be fulfilled in full. That is when Christ comes again in His glory to earth, and 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 (Philippians 2:10,11). "And the LORD shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be 'The LORD is one,' and His name one" (Zechariah 14:9). Then the psalmist's words will come true: "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You. For the kingdom is the Lord's, and He rules over the nations" (Psalm 22:27,28). Jeremiah's

- prophecy will also come true: "No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them" (Jeremiah 31:34). This is the subject of the song of Moses and the Lamb: "Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested" (Revelation 15:3,4).
3. **Works miracles:** "For You are great, and do wondrous things; You alone are God" (verse 10). God works wonders every day as He looks after His creatures: "Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds?" (Luke 12:24). He said to Moses, "Behold, I make a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation; and all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the LORD. For it is an awesome thing that I will do with you" (Exodus 34:10). We might come upon something unusual and call it awesome, but it does not happen again. But the miracles of God keep on happening one after the other. They do not take place by chance, but rather through a divine order that surpasses all our human comprehension.

6.3. Third: A Request for Consecration

(verses 11-13)

After being forgiven and delivered, the psalmist resolved to lead a life of discipleship, obedience and love for God all the days of his life.

1. **A united heart:** "Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth; unite my heart to fear Your name" (verse 11). The psalmist asks the Lord to teach him His way, the way of truth, the straight way, so that he may walk in it with all his heart and direct all of his being toward God alone. No one else beside God deserves absolute confidence and perfect obedience! The first and the greatest commandment exhorts, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:4,5). "What does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deuteronomy 10:12). The psalmist knows how difficult it is to accomplish this request and agrees with the fact that "For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me" (Romans 7:15-17). In his prayer "unite my heart" he refuses to have a divided loyalty, as though he were crying out, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and

renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10). As a consequence, he receives the fulfillment of the divine promise: "Then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them" (Jeremiah 32:39).

2. **A thankful heart:** "I will praise You, O Lord my God, with all my heart, and I will glorify Your name forevermore. For great is Your mercy toward me, and You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol" (verses 12,13). The psalmist praises his Lord for it is good to sing praises to God; it is pleasant, and praise is beautiful (Psalm 147:1). He praises his Lord because God favored him and his nation: "I will praise You, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing to You among the nations. For Your mercy reaches unto the heavens, and Your truth unto the clouds" (Psalm 57:9,10). By deliverance from the depths of Sheol the psalmist may have meant an intrigue that has been plotted by his enemies, but which they failed to carry through. Or perhaps he was thinking of his vulnerable nation, in danger of defeat and captivity, which God saved from the depths of Sheol through the victory He granted. Truly, "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits ... Who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies" (Psalm 103:2,4).

6.4. Fourth: A Request for a Sign

(verses 14-17)

The psalmist asks the Lord to work a miracle for him, for four reasons:

1. **Because of the evil deeds of his enemies:** "O God, the proud have risen against me, and a mob of violent men have sought my life, and have not set You before them" (verse 14). When the people of the Wilderness of Ziph informed on David, and said to Saul that David was with them, David prayed, "Strangers have risen up against me, and oppressors have sought after my life; they have not set God before them" (Psalm 54:3). Although the people of the Wilderness of Ziph were David's blood relatives, still they were strangers to him in their sentiments. So he ran to God, who was ever near to him, and asked for deliverance. He seemed to be saying, "For dogs have surrounded Me; the congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me" (Psalm 22:16).
2. **Because of God's mercy:** "But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth" (verse 15). It is true that the enemies were proud and arrogant people who did not fear God, but he was sure of his God's mercy. This helped him pluck up courage and ask for mercy and compassion, as well as justice. He deserved God's punishment for his sins, but he trusted that God would not leave him or forsake him.
3. **Because of his belonging to God:** "Oh, turn to me, and have mercy on me! Give Your strength to Your servant, and save the son of Your maidservant" (verse 16). David feels

that he is God's servant, born in His house (Genesis 14:14), to be trusted and put in charge. He is of the household of God (Ephesians 2:19). In this he was like the prophet Samuel who was dedicated to God by his mother. Now because of this very special relationship he asked for mercy and salvation. God had promised good promises to his servant, the son of His maidservant, which He fulfilled because He was a good God, abundant in mercy and truth. And he must also continue to fulfill what He has promised, saying to him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

4. **So that his enemies should be ashamed:** "Show me a sign for good, that those who hate me may see it and be ashamed, because You, LORD, have helped me and comforted me" (verse 17). The psalmist asks for a new, visible and obvious sign. God had already worked many wonders and signs that helped him in his ordeal, and comforted and encouraged him in the past. This new situation needs a new sign for good, according to the Lord's promise: "For I will set My eyes on them for good ... I will build them and not pull them down, and I will plant them and not pluck them up. Then I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the LORD; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart" (Jeremiah 24:6,7). Truly, "The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him" (Ezra 8:22). "Thus says the LORD: 'In an acceptable time I have heard You, and in the day of salvation I have helped You; I will preserve You and give You as a covenant to the people, to restore the earth, to cause them to inherit the desolate heritages' ... Sing, O heavens! Be joyful, O earth! And break out in singing, O mountains! For the LORD has comforted His people, and will have mercy on His afflicted" (Isaiah 49:8,13).

May God answer our prayers as we pray with David, "Oh, turn to me, and have mercy on me! Give Your strength to Your servant, and save the son of Your maidservant." And may the Lord be the Master over our lives and the One who has the first and the last say in all our decisions and actions.

6.5. Questions

1. In verse 2 the psalmist asks for salvation. What are some requests included in his petition?
2. How can you get a united heart to fear God's name?

7. Psalm Eighty-Seven

The City of God

1 A Psalm of the sons of Korah. A Song. His foundation is in the holy mountains.

2 The LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.

3 Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God! Selah

4 "I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to those who know Me; behold, O Philistia and Tyre, with Ethiopia: 'This one was born there.' "

5 And of Zion it will be said, "This one and that one were born in her; and the Most High Himself shall establish her."

6 The LORD will record, when He registers the peoples: "This one was born there." Selah

7 Both the singers and the players on instruments say, "All my springs are in you."

This psalm is a song of exultation in Zion, where Solomon built the temple of the Lord. Zion was the impregnable fortress on which Jerusalem was built; the Israelites treasure it because David took it by the power of the Lord from the hands of the Jebusites. Later it was called "the City of David" (2 Samuel 5:7). The ark of the Lord was also moved there (2 Samuel 6:10-12). So the fortress became God's dwelling place; a symbol of His presence amongst his people and a symbol of triumph over the enemy. Later King Solomon built his temple on Mount Moriah and moved the ark there. Zion expanded to include the fortress and Mount Moriah. Moriah came to be identified with Zion where the holy temple of God was. This prompted the psalmist to write, "Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised In the city of our God, in His holy mountain. Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion ... the city of the great King" (Psalm 48:1,2). The Old Testament often calls the whole city of Jerusalem "Zion" (cf. 2 Kings 19:21; Isaiah 1:8).

Our psalm here fulfills the prophecy of Psalm 86:9: "All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord, and shall glorify Your name." This prophecy was gloriously fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost in the Church, which extended to all nations that were without Christ. They had been aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, but have become fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God (Ephesians 2:12,19). Our Zion and Jerusalem today are spiritual -- they are the Church, which includes all those who believe in Christ from all peoples. Paul made this very clear as he said, "for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children; but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all" (Gal 4:25,26). It is a spiritual fact that each and every believer in Christ used to be a fortress occupied by the devil and his soldiers, but now they are saved by Christ, who laid siege to them through his love and set them free from the bondage of sin and released them into the liberty of the glory of the sons of God. The Lord dwelt in their hearts by faith and made His home there. They have become the property of the One who purchased them at the expense of His own blood and made them His holy temple. Zion today is the Church, not in the literal sense of occupying physical mountains, but in the spiritual

sense of yielding the mind, the heart and life to the Lord. Only then can the promise be spiritually fulfilled: "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. Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths'" (Isaiah 2:2,3).

The psalm includes the following:

- First: The glorious city (verses 1-3)
- Second: The prolific city (verses 4-6)
- Third: The joyful city (verse 7)

7.1. First: The Glorious City

(verses 1-3)

1. **Glorious in its foundations:** "His foundation is in the holy mountains" (verse 1). The foundation of the house of God is on the holy mountains; therefore it is firm and stable. The city around it is glorious owing to the house standing in its midst. "God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her, just at the break of dawn" (Psalm 46:5). The city is immovable because the Lord protects and guards it. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea" (Psalm 46:1,2). The Church will stand firm and glorious because it stands on Christ, the Rock of ages and "no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11).

The author of the "family psalm" (Psalm 127) considers the house of a godly man to be a small city firm on the rock; it does not fall down even if the wind blows fiercely on it and torrents of rain fall upon it. It is build on Christ our rock. Truly "Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it" (Psalm 127:1).

2. **Glorious in its holiness:** "His foundation is in the holy mountains" (verse 1). God's house is holy because it belongs to God; because the holy God dwells in it. It has been built on a mountain to be a light to all to see. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden (Matthew 5:14). All those who come to Him will leave behind the cares and darkness of the world to walk in light and holiness (John 8:12). In his vision, John described the holy Church, the heavenly Jerusalem, as follows: "I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God ... And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God'" (Revelation 21:2,3).

How joyful we are because of what the holy God has prepared for us in our present and future life!

3. **Glorious in God's love for it:** "The LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob" (verse 2). The ark of the Lord journeyed many times, and stayed in many places. But the Lord chose Mount Zion to be the last abode for it, to be loved by Him more than all the places that served as dwellings for Israelites. God said of Zion, "This is My resting place forever ... for I have desired it" (Psalm 132:14). There were many high mountains: "A mountain of God is the mountain of Bashan; a mountain of many peaks ... Why do you fume with envy, you mountains of many peaks? This is the mountain which God desires to dwell in; yes, the LORD will dwell in it forever" (Psalm 68:15,16). The Lord chose Mount Zion not because it was higher or more magnificent in appearance; it was rather less significant than the others. Yet it was a choice made according to grace, as God said to the children of Israel, "The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 7:7,8). The Lord did not choose the children of Israel because they were more numerous in number than the rest, or because they were the most powerful nation. In fact, they were the weaker ones in the land. "But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are" (1 Corinthians 1:27,28). As for us, we humbly kneel down to the Lord who loved us and gave His life up for us, who was lead to the slaughter voluntarily to redeem us. He has said to us, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (John 15:16). The Lord chose David and took him away from following the sheep because He found him after His own heart (Acts 13:22). He also chose Mary to be the mother of our Savior, of which she said in humility, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). He chose Peter the fisherman and said to him, "On this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). Today the Lord chooses you and tells you that He loves you and wants to save you.
4. **Glorious in the way it is extolled:** "Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God!" (verse 3). The city of God is glorious in its present state, as it will be in its future state. It entertains the greatest understanding and is dwelt in by the most virtuous of men. God has chosen it to be His dwelling place; He will reveal His glory in it and honor it by His indwelling presence. This happened when Solomon offered up the inauguration prayer of the temple: "the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud... so that the priests could

not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God" (2 Chronicles 5:13,14). The psalmist says, "Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in His holy mountain. Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion on the sides of the north, the city of the great King ... As we have heard, so we have seen in the city of the LORD of hosts, in the city of our God: God will establish it forever" (Psalm 48:1,2,8).

These great words apply to every believer because he has become the temple of the Holy Spirit after Christ dwelt in his heart through faith (Ephesians 3:17) and granted him the glory of adoption. "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!" (1 John 3:1). God will grant him great glory in heaven as well: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). The believer in whose heart Christ dwells always looks forward to the more abundant life that Christ freely grants him in this world (John 10:10). Now, better than the present is the future: "The city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10). The church is spoken of as the origin of the greatest minds and the loftiest teachings, as well as the best manifestation of God's love for man and explanation of Christ's sweet aroma. Let us, then have the mind of the Lord (1 Corinthians 2:16), and make Him sovereign ruler over our present life, regardless the cost.

7.2. Second: The Productive City

(verses 4-6)

1. **The heathen are born in it:** "I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to those who know Me; behold, O Philistia and Tyre, with Ethiopia: "This one was born there."" (verse 4). The speaker here is the Lord, who alone can open the hearts of the heathen to hear and receive His message, and who alone can give new birth. This verse corresponds to Isaiah's prophecy: "For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem ... And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse [Christ], who shall stand as a banner to the people; for the Gentiles shall seek Him, and His resting place shall be glorious" (Isaiah 2:3; 11:10). Those born of God will say, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven" (1 Peter 1:3,4). They will also say that God "Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures" (James 1:18).

God intended that nations far away from His Law be born in His family. The first one mentioned is Rahab. Rahab in this psalm is Egypt (which is called by the same name in Isaiah 30:7; Psalm 89:10). The name indicates Egypt's pride and greatness represented in

the Pharaoh who subjected Moses and his people, which was to the worst kind of misery. Egypt was the major power south of Israel. It was also God's will that Babylon, the major northern power be born within His family, as well as Philistia and Tyre, who were Israel's sworn enemies. Ethiopia, too, known for its trade and fame, is to be born in the same way, though it is so far away from Mount Zion. On the Day of Pentecost God fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy: "Whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, 'Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance'" (Isaiah 19:25). The Scriptures say, "When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place ... And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven ... Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God" (Acts 2:1,5,9-11). All these are sheep that are not of the fold of the children of Israel, which the Lord brought in so that there would be one flock and one shepherd (John 10:16).

2. **The place of birth:** "And of Zion it will be said, 'This one and that one were born in her; and the Most High Himself shall establish her.'" (verse 5). When the Samaritan woman told Christ about the place where they should worship, He answered her, "You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22). By this Christ meant that He was the Savior and that "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). He also meant that salvation is where Christ is, for he said, "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). One of those I baptized said, "Is it not unusual that one cannot choose the time or the place of one's physical birth, but one can choose the time and the place of one's spiritual birth?" "But as many as received Him (Christ), to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood [not through natural procreation], nor of the will of the flesh [through human effort], nor of the will of man [i.e. through dependence on another man], but of God" (John 1:12,13). Everyone who surrenders his life to the Lord becomes a native of spiritual Zion, carrying the heavenly citizenship. It will be said to him, "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 marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God" (1 Peter 2:9,10).
3. **The recording of birth:** "The LORD will record, when He registers the peoples: 'This one was born there'" (verse 6). Nations prepare records to document the names, places of birth, birth dates, family tree and titles of their citizens. This is the way human birth is recorded. As for spiritual birth, it is recorded in a greater and more magnificent fashion. It

is God Himself who writes down the names in the Book of Life, as Christ declared to His disciples when they rejoiced that demons surrendered to them in His name: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:17-20). One believer has said, "When I go to heaven I will be astonished be at seeing people that I never expected to be there, and will also astonished not to see certain people that I expected to be there. But the cause of my greatest astonishment really is that I will be there, because God wrote my name in the Book of Life thanks to what Christ did." Are you sure that your name is written in the Book of Life because you received Christ, the Savior and Redeemer, as your own personal savior?

There is another sad book and we hope that you will make sure that your name is not written in it. It is the Book of the Earth. God said of this Book, "Those who depart from Me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living waters" (Jeremiah 17:13). Come to Christ in repentance and ask Him to write your name in the Book of Life, to be able to enter the glory of which John has said, "But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it and the Lamb is its light. And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it ... But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Revelation 21:22-27).

7.3. Third: The Joyful City

(verse 7)

"Both the singers and the players on instruments say, 'All my springs are in you.'" (verse 7). All the inhabitants of this glorious city, with its foundations and holiness, with God's love for it, and His laudation of it, feel God's gracious kindness to them. They express their sentiments through singing and playing music. All those born in that city have been born of God, and their names have been written in the Book of Life. What can surpass this joy that makes the believers sing with accompaniment of music! Even if this city goes through tribulation, it knows well that "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), and 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). The city knows that tribulation will not last long, because Christ said, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). This was Paul and Silas' experience as they were bound by chains in the prison of Philippi. In

spite of their distressed situation, they prayed and praised the Lord in a voice that was loud enough for all prisoners to hear (Acts 16:25). How lovely to know that God gives those who fear Him under all circumstances the fruit of the Spirit, which is joy and peace: "a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved" (Psalm 46:4-5).

If you are undergoing difficult times in your home country, I call on you to look forward to your heavenly home, to which you belong and to which you will go by the grace of God. Then your heart will rejoice and none will snatch away your joy from you. "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4). In the new Jerusalem all the inhabitants without exception will play on instruments and sing: "Each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song" (Revelation 5:8,9). Therefore "Praise the LORD! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and praise is beautiful" (Psalm 147:1).

7.4. Questions

1. How can a city be spiritually productive?
2. What makes a city rejoice?

8. Psalm Eighty-Eight

I Am Shut Up, and I Cannot Get Out

1 A Song. A Psalm of the sons of Korah. To the Chief Musician. Set to "Mahalath Leannoth." A Contemplation of Heman the Ezrahite. O LORD, God of my salvation, I have cried out day and night before You.

2 Let my prayer come before You; incline Your ear to my cry.

3 For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to the grave.

4 I am counted with those who go down to the pit; I am like a man who has no strength,

5 Adrift among the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom You remember no more, and who are cut off from Your hand.

6 You have laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the depths.

7 Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and You have afflicted me with all Your waves. Selah

8 You have put away my acquaintances far from me; You have made me an abomination to them; I am shut up, and I cannot get out;

9 My eye wastes away because of affliction. LORD, I have called daily upon You; I have stretched out my hands to You.

- 10 Will You work wonders for the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise You? Selah**
- 11 Shall Your lovingkindness be declared in the grave? Or Your faithfulness in the place of destruction?**
- 12 Shall Your wonders be known in the dark? And Your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?**
- 13 But to You I have cried out, O LORD, and in the morning my prayer comes before You.**
- 14 LORD, why do You cast off my soul? Why do You hide Your face from me?**
- 15 I have been afflicted and ready to die from my youth; I suffer Your terrors; I am distraught.**
- 16 Your fierce wrath has gone over me; Your terrors have cut me off.**
- 17 They came around me all day long like water; they engulfed me altogether.**
- 18 Loved one and friend You have put far from me, and my acquaintances into darkness.**

This psalm is marked as the saddest psalm of all. It is the cry of a frustrated and desperate godly man who goes through deadly sufferings, without a single gleam of hope to light his way. Every psalm starts with a problem. By the end of the psalm the author has found a solution for which he thanks God. This psalm, however, begins with a cry of pain and ends with the word "darkness". For this reason the Church chose it, together with Psalm 22, to be used on Good Friday as an expression of Christ's suffering during the Passion Week.

It seems that the psalmist had an incurable disease early in his life, for he says, "I have been afflicted and ready to die from my youth; I suffer Your terrors; I am distraught" (verse 15). Most likely he had leprosy and then became one of "the living dead". He was deprived of his health, social relationships and participation in religious practices in the temple. His only companionship was that of his fellow sick people, and was therefore isolated to the lowest pit.

There is a lot of similarity between this psalmist and the Book of Job which is full of self-pity. Job asks, "Why is light given to him who is in misery, and life to the bitter of soul, who long for death, but it does not come, and search for it more than hidden treasures?" (Job 3:20). It is also similar to the sad books of Jeremiah and Lamentations with their wailing over an incurable nation. Jeremiah says, "I am pained in my very heart! My heart makes a noise in me" (Jeremiah 4:19). Some have said that Job must be the original author of this psalm, and it was later modified and enlarged by Heman the Ezrahite to be suitable for public worship! Regardless of the author's name, he had a strong relationship with God in spite of the agony he suffered without hope of salvation. He lifted up his heart to the Lord in prayer: "O LORD, God of my salvation, I have cried out day and night before You ... LORD, I have called daily upon You; I have stretched out my hands to You ... But to You I have cried out, O LORD, and in the morning my prayer comes before You" (verses 1,9,13). He never let go of his God

despite his hopeless, incurable case!

In the past the devil accused Job, saying, "Does Job fear God for nothing?" (Job 1:9). Job's fear of God was not out of opportunism, but out of love for God. The author of our psalm gives us an example of someone who fears God for nothing. What a great difference there is between the words of the psalmist here and those of Asaph: "Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain" (Psalm 73:13). The psalmist here continued to pray despite the difficulty of his situation and the lack of an answer. How thankful we are for those who love God for who He is, not for His gifts, those who give themselves to Him even if they did not get what they asked for, those who take hold of Him and do not grumble against Him. Such men will say, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:35,37).

The psalm includes the following:

- First: A cry for help in the midst of suffering (verses 1-9)
- Second: Unanswered questions (verses 10-12)
- Third: Unanswered prayer (verses 13-18)
- Fourth: Now we ask ...

8.1. First: A Cry for Help in the Midst of Suffering

(verses 1-9)

1. **A long awaited request:** "O LORD, God of my salvation, I have cried out day and night before You. Let my prayer come before You; incline Your ear to my cry" (verses 1,2).
 1. **A request from the God of salvation:** "O LORD, God of my salvation." The psalmist lived in the darkness of agony, but was sure of the truth of David's experience: "The LORD is my light and my salvation" (Psalm 27:1). Accordingly he plucked up courage and prayed to "the LORD" Almighty, to the "God of salvation", deliverance and rescue. He saw and heard of God's saving others; he cried out and waited because he was sure that the Lord is able to save, and willing to save.
 2. **An ongoing request:** "I have cried out day and night before You." Perhaps he couldn't sleep because of the pain of his sickness, so he began to pray day and night, joining his voice to the one who said, "O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; and in the night season, and am not silent" (Psalm 22:2). This is reminiscent of the appeal of the children of Korah: "Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance" (Psalm 42:5).
 3. **A request mixed with a cry of pain:** "I have cried out ... before You." There is a

prayer of thanksgiving, a prayer of supplication, and a prayer of request. Here we hear a prayer of someone who cried out to God because of his indescribable pain.

4. **A hopeful request:** "Let my prayer come before You; incline Your ear to my cry" (verse 2). Although he waited long for the fulfillment of the request, the psalmist still appealed to his Lord and God of his salvation, hoping for an answer: "Put my tears into Your bottle; are they not in Your book?" (Psalm 56:8).

2. **The bad condition of the psalmist (verses 3-5):**

"For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to the grave. I am counted with those who go down to the pit; I am like a man who has no strength, adrift among the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom You remember no more, and who are cut off from Your hand" (verses 3-5). As long as he remembered, the psalmist continually met with unbearable disasters that brought him near the grave. Those around him reckoned him dead, and he was truly like a dead man, helpless, powerless and immobile. Because he lost the battle with sickness he became like those who fell on the battlefield and were indiscriminately buried in a common grave. He counted himself as being cut off from the hand of God, as though this powerful, saving, helpful, healing hand had nothing more to do with him. He was like the sick man of Bethesda who spent 38 years with none to look after him (John 5).

3. **God's anger with the psalmist (verses 6-9):**

1. **He brought him to the verge of the grave:** "You have laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the depths" (verse 6). God treated him as if he were dead and laid out in the lowest pit, the same way the writer of Lamentations put it: "He has set me in dark places like the dead of long ago ... I called on Your name, O LORD, from the lowest pit" (Lamentations 3:6,55). Job must have had a similar experience when he said, "Are not my days few? Cease! Leave me alone, that I may take a little comfort, before I go to the place from which I shall not return, to the land of darkness and the shadow of death" (Job 10:20,21).
2. **He was angry with him:** "Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and You have afflicted me with all Your waves" (verse 7). It seems like the psalmist's disasters afflicted him in succession, like waves following one another as the psalmist said, "O my God, my soul is cast down within me ... Deep calls unto deep at the noise of Your waterfalls; all Your waves and billows have gone over me" (Psalm 42:6,7). Jonah, too, said while in the belly of the fish, "Your billows and Your waves passed over me" (Jonah 2:3).
3. **He put away his friends from him:** "You have put away my acquaintances far from me; You have made me an abomination to them; I am shut up, and I cannot get out" (verse 8). Most probably this was due to his leprosy. The psalmist attributes the rift between him and his acquaintances to God. Job did the same thing: "He has removed

my brothers far from me, and my acquaintances are completely estranged from me. My relatives have failed, and my close friends have forgotten me ... All my close friends abhor me, and those whom I love have turned against me" (Job 19:13,14,19). How harsh it is to feel you are a hopeless case and that you will never be healed! How terrible it is to feel lonely and in a crushing need for sympathy and cordiality!

4. **He snuffed out his hopes:** "My eye wastes away because of affliction. LORD, I have called daily upon You; I have stretched out my hands to You" (verse 9). Job said, "My eye has also grown dim because of sorrow, and all my members are like shadows" (Job 17:7). Although he called daily upon the Lord and stretched out his hands to Him in his dire need, the Lord did not listen to him or answer his petition.

8.2. Second: Unanswered Questions

(verses 10-12)

After the suffering psalmist cried for help, he began to question. But just as his cry remained unanswered, so also his questions remained unanswered! The people of the Old Testament did not have a perfect idea of life after death. Job said, "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God" (Job 19:25,26). Yet the psalmist asked, "For in death there is no remembrance of You; in the grave who will give You thanks?" (Psalm 6:5). The psalmist also said, "The dead do not praise the LORD, nor any who go down into silence. But we will bless the LORD from this time forth and forevermore. Praise the LORD!" (Psalm 115:17,18). On his deathbed King Hezekiah prayed for healing and said, "For Sheol cannot thank You, death cannot praise You; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for Your truth. The living, the living man, he shall praise You, as I do this day; the father shall make known Your truth to the children" (Isaiah 38:18,19).

Given this background, the psalmist raises three questions:

1. **Does God work wonders for the dead?** "Will You work wonders for the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise You?" (verse 10). The Lord is a wonder-working God, and the believers glorify and thank Him for his miracles. Yet the psalmist, who is asking for healing but not getting it, asks whether God works miracles for the dead when it is too late for miracles. He also wonders if the spirits of the dead (Heb. *repha'im*) can rise up to thank and praise God. The answers to these questions are in the New Testament, where we find Christ working the miracle of raising the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7), Jairus' daughter (Mark 5), and Lazarus (John 11). Finally on the last day Christ will come and raise up the dead (1 Thessalonians 4:16).
2. **Do the dead declare God's lovingkindness?** "Shall Your lovingkindness be declared in the grave? Or Your faithfulness in the place of destruction?" (verse 11). The psalmist says that through his death the number of believers who declare the graciousness of the

Lord will be one less. However, if he gets healed and continues to live on earth, there will be a believer for whom the Lord will have made a miracle, who will tell what great things the Lord has done for him and how He had compassion on him. But the psalmist did not get an answer to his second question.

3. **Do the dwellers of the grave know God's miracles?** "Shall Your wonders be known in the dark? And Your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?" (verse 12). The psalmist says that his death will bring him down to the grave, the land of darkness where man is forgotten. Will the miracle-working God then perform miracles in the darkness of the grave, and will the dead person recognize His righteousness and goodness, being forgotten himself? The psalmist wants God to remember him during his life on earth, to work a miracle with him so that he might glorify and praise his God. But the psalmist did not get an answer to his third question either.

Today, in light of the New Testament and after the resurrection of Christ, we thank God that Christ abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Timothy 1:10). Christ has gone through the valley of the shadow of death before us, and through His own death destroyed the devil who held the power of death, thus freeing those who were enslaved by fear of death (Hebrews 2:14,15). Christ lit a candle to shed light on the other side of life, after our departure from this world, so that we can see the glory that awaits the believers.

8.3. Third: Unanswered Prayer

(verses 13-18)

1. **The psalmist's feeling of rejection:** "But to You I have cried out, O LORD, and in the morning my prayer comes before You. LORD, why do You cast off my soul? Why do You hide Your face from me?" (verses 13,14). The psalmist reckoned himself dead because all his past prayers have not been answered. Yet he continued to lift up his prayers to God because faith and hope still filled his heart. He did not cease to pray till the last breath. He started every day with prayer, as if saying, "My voice You shall hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning I will direct it to You, and I will look up" (Psalm 5:3). Every day and at all times he lifted up the incense of his prayer before His Lord, and nothing could keep him from speaking to his God who loves him.

Has the Lord rejected the soul of the psalmist? Has He hidden His face from him? God does not reject the godly believer, or hide His face from him. He may give him what he seeks; He may even give him something better than what he asks for, just as He gave Paul grace to put up with the thorn in the flesh without healing him of it (2 Corinthians 12:9). He may also refuse to give him what he asks for, as He refused to grant Elijah's prayer when he despaired of life (1 Kings 19:4). But we, the New Testament believers, say, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? ... in all these things we are more

than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:35,37).

2. **The crushing need of the psalmist:** "I have been afflicted and ready to die from my youth; I suffer Your terrors; I am distraught. Your fierce wrath has gone over me; Your terrors have cut me off. They came around me all day long like water; they engulfed me altogether" (verses 15-17). Here the psalmist shares in Job's complaint: "For the arrows of the Almighty are within me; my spirit drinks in their poison; the terrors of God are arrayed against me" (Job 6:4). He also shares in Jeremiah's complaint: "They silenced my life in the pit and threw stones at me" (Lamentations 3:53). He is sinking under the flood of pain and despair!
3. **The psalmist's loneliness:** "Loved one and friend You have put far from me, and my acquaintances into darkness" (verse 18). His old friends no longer visit him, and some of his acquaintances died. He must have felt like saying, "If I say to corruption, 'You are my father,' and to the worm, 'You are my mother and my sister,' where then is my hope? As for my hope, who can see it? Will they go down to the gates of Sheol? Shall we have rest together in the dust?" (Job 17:14-16).

8.4. Fourth: Now We Ask ...

At the conclusion we would like to raise three questions:

1. **Has the psalmist died before finishing his psalm?** In the Father's house there are many mansions, and Christ has gone to prepare a place for every believer. Once the believer's mansion is completed, Christ comes to take him to Himself, so that where Christ is, he may be also. Or perhaps the mansion of this psalmist has been completed before he was able to put a happy ending to his psalm, leaving it up to us to put such a happy ending by faith. We might say that he "died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom ... but now he is comforted" (Luke 16:22,25).
2. **Did the psalmist start his psalm during the crisis and never finish it?** Did his problem end, and did he express it poetically without recording the solution? The problem could not have been left without a solution. Sometimes we complain, but when our problem is solved we do not offer thanksgiving to God. Has Christ not asked, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?" (Luke 17:17). One learns from this psalm that we have the right to complain, but it is our duty as well to express out thanks.
3. **Could it possibly be that the first verse of the following psalm is actually the ending of this psalm?** Psalm 89 opens with the statement: "I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever; with my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations." Thus the complaint of Psalm 88 has been answered, so much so that the psalmist began to sing of the mercies of Lord. "For I have said, 'Mercy shall be built up forever; Your faithfulness You shall establish in the very heavens.' I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to My servant David" (Psalm 89:2,3). He promised to do, and He

will do it.

8.5. Questions

1. The psalmist raises three questions for which he found no answer. What are these questions?
2. The writer raised three questions at the end of his meditations on this psalm. What are they?

9. Psalm Eighty-Nine

The Mercies of the Lord

1 A Contemplation of Ethan the Ezrahite. I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever; with my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations.

2 For I have said, "Mercy shall be built up forever; Your faithfulness You shall establish in the very heavens."

3 "I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to My servant David:

4 'Your seed I will establish forever, and build up your throne to all generations.' " Selah

5 And the heavens will praise Your wonders, O LORD; Your faithfulness also in the assembly of the saints.

6 For who in the heavens can be compared to the LORD? Who among the sons of the mighty can be likened to the LORD?

7 God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be held in reverence by all those around Him.

8 O LORD God of hosts, who is mighty like You, O LORD? Your faithfulness also surrounds You.

9 You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, You still them.

10 You have broken Rahab in pieces, as one who is slain; You have scattered Your enemies with Your mighty arm.

11 The heavens are Yours, the earth also is Yours; the world and all its fullness, You have founded them.

12 The north and the south, You have created them; Tabor and Hermon rejoice in Your name.

13 You have a mighty arm; strong is Your hand, and high is Your right hand.

14 Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; mercy and truth go before Your face.

15 Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound! They walk, O LORD, in the light of Your countenance.

16 In Your name they rejoice all day long, and in Your righteousness they are exalted.

17 For You are the glory of their strength, and in Your favor our horn is exalted.

18 For our shield belongs to the LORD, and our king to the Holy One of Israel.

19 Then You spoke in a vision to Your holy one, and said: "I have given help to one who is mighty; I have exalted one chosen from the people.

20 I have found My servant David; with My holy oil I have anointed him,

21 With whom My hand shall be established; also My arm shall strengthen him.

22 The enemy shall not outwit him, nor the son of wickedness afflict him.

23 I will beat down his foes before his face, and plague those who hate him.

24 But My faithfulness and My mercy shall be with him, and in My name his horn shall be exalted.

25 Also I will set his hand over the sea, and his right hand over the rivers.

26 He shall cry to Me, 'You are my Father, My God, and the rock of my salvation.'

27 Also I will make him My firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.

28 My mercy I will keep for him forever, and My covenant shall stand firm with him.

29 His seed also I will make to endure forever, and his throne as the days of heaven.

30 If his sons forsake My law and do not walk in My judgments,

31 If they break My statutes and do not keep My commandments,

32 Then I will punish their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes.

33 Nevertheless My lovingkindness I will not utterly take from him, nor allow My faithfulness to fail.

34 My covenant I will not break, nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips.

35 Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David:

36 His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before Me;

37 It shall be established forever like the moon, even like the faithful witness in the sky." Selah

38 But You have cast off and abhorred, You have been furious with Your anointed.

39 You have renounced the covenant of Your servant; You have profaned his crown by casting it to the ground.

40 You have broken down all his hedges; You have brought his strongholds to ruin.

41 All who pass by the way plunder him; He is a reproach to his neighbors.

42 You have exalted the right hand of his adversaries; You have made all his enemies rejoice.

43 You have also turned back the edge of his sword, and have not sustained him in the battle.

44 You have made his glory cease, and cast his throne down to the ground.

45 The days of his youth You have shortened; You have covered him with shame. Selah

46 How long, LORD? Will You hide Yourself forever? Will Your wrath burn like fire?

47 Remember how short my time is; for what futility have You created all the children of men?

48 What man can live and not see death? Can he deliver his life from the power of the grave? Selah

49 Lord, where are Your former lovingkindnesses, which You swore to David in Your truth?

50 Remember, Lord, the reproach of Your servants -- how I bear in my bosom the reproach of all the many peoples,

51 With which Your enemies have reproached, O LORD, with which they have reproached the footsteps of Your anointed.

52 Blessed be the LORD forevermore! Amen and Amen.

This psalm expresses the emotional crisis that a godly believer had to go through during his time of captivity in Babylon. He was sure of God's mercy, and confident in His faithfulness to fulfill His promises to beat down David's foes and make him His firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth (verses 23,27). But at the same time he saw King Jehoiachin, David's descendant, captured and without a crown and the kingdom lying in ruins. So he said, "But You have cast off and abhorred, You have been furious with Your anointed. You have renounced the covenant of Your servant; You have profaned his crown by casting it to the ground" (verses 38,39). Then how can God's attributes of mercy and faithfulness to His many promises to David and his descendants be reconciled to the sad, painful reality of the captivity and humility of David's kingdom?

The perplexity of the psalmist ends in two things: First, the divine promise to David was conditional to the obedience of David and his descendants. When his descendants fell into disobedience God sent the prophets to warn them, but they continued in their disobedience. As a result, He punished them by sending them into captivity to chastise them; but He would not reject them. Second, God's promises and mercies will be completely fulfilled in Christ, the Son of David. The highest firstborn of the kings of the earth is the Christ-King, who has a spiritual kingdom. It is true that David's promises were fulfilled in Christ, of whom Isaiah prophesied, "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever" (Isaiah 9:6,7). It is a spiritual, not a political, kingdom, as Christ said to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world ... My

kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36).

One expositor said that Psalm 89 consists of 52 verses, and pointed that the weeks in the year are 52, in which we have winter, summer, spring and autumn. Similarly, in the life of the believer there are ups and downs, joys and sorrows. This is also what we find in this psalm. Yet in the midst of all these the believer must remain humble and completely dependent on the divine grace only.

The psalm includes the following:

- First: The psalmist sings of the mercies of God (verses 1-4)
- Second: The psalmist glorifies God (verses 5-37)
- Third: The psalmist complains to God (verses 38-51)
- Fourth: A final doxology (verse 52)

9.1. First: The Psalmist Sings of the Mercies of God

(verses 1-4)

1. **God's mercy and truth:** "I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever; with my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations. For I have said, 'Mercy shall be built up forever; Your faithfulness You shall establish in the very heavens.'" (verses 1,2). God's mercy is mentioned seven times in our psalm (verses 1,2,14,24,28,33,49), and truth is mentioned five times (verses 1,2,5,8,14). God's mercies and truth are two cheerful themes to the psalmist; they open his lips to sing praises of joy and thanksgiving. The psalmist starts by focusing on these two themes to rise above his sufferings, have reassurance in the midst of his queries, and confirm his determination to remember and declare God's mercies. He is certain that God's mercy stands like a towering edifice and that His truth is steadfast in the heavens, where neither devil nor human can trifle with it.
2. **God's faithfulness to His promises:** "I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to My servant David: 'Your seed I will establish forever, and build up your throne to all generations'" (verses 3,4). God's faithfulness is not dependent on the godly man's faithfulness, but is rather derived from the nature of God Himself. When David wanted to build a temple for the Lord, the Lord sent him Nathan the prophet, saying, "The LORD tells you that He will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever ... And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:11-13,16). Now God's promise has been completely fulfilled in Christ, who came, according to the flesh, from

his seed.

9.2. Second: The Psalmist Glorifies God

(verses 5-37)

1. **Glorifying God for his greatness (verses 5-18):** By speaking of God's greatness the psalmist intends two things: To ask the great God to help his people, and to encourage his people who worship this great God.
 1. **God's greatness in His angels (verses 5-7):** God's greatness appears in His heavens, where the holy angels praise His wonders and faithfulness (verse 5). The psalmist calls the angels "saints" because they are dedicated to the ministry of God. But in spite of their holiness, they are not equal to him in His heavens (verse 6). Eliphaz put it this way, "He puts no trust in His servants, ... He charges His angels with error" (Job 4:18). God's greatness appears also in the fact that He is "greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be held in reverence by all those around Him" (verse 7). The angels are assembled around God, ready to carry out His orders, for all of the ministering spirits are sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation (Hebrews 1:14). Daniel said of them, "My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths" (Daniel 6:22). Did Daniel see that angel, and did he hear the rustle of his wings? Or did he find the lions hovering round about him without hurting him? I wonder: we might not see an angel with our eyes, but we definitely experience his ministry to us. Our bodies may not feel something supernatural, but we are sure in our hearts that God is working miracles with us, and that the angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them (Psalm 34:7).
 2. **God's greatness in creation (verses 8-14):**
 1. **God's greatness over the sea (verses 8,9):** There is none like God who rules the raging sea when its waves rise. He commands it, "Peace, be still!" and there is a great calm (Mark 4:39).
 2. **His greatness over the enemies (verse 10):** God has crushed "Rahab", the great empire of Egypt, drowning Pharaoh's army. Isaiah prayed, "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 apart, and wounded the serpent? Are You not the One who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep; that made the depths of the sea a road for the redeemed to cross over?" (Isaiah 51:9,10).
 3. **The greatness of His authority over all the world (verses 11-13):** Heaven and earth belong to God because He founded them. His also is the north (representing Tabor, a mountain to the west of the Jordan River where Deborah gained victory), and the south (representing Hermon, a towering mountain to the east of the Jordan River). They all bear witness to his great creative power and His everlasting

might. "The right hand of the LORD is exalted; the right hand of the LORD does valiantly" (Psalm 118:16). We turn to Him for shelter to find Him a very present help in times of trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea (Psalm 46:1,2).

4. **His greatness in justice and mercy:** "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; mercy and truth go before Your face" (verse 14). God's unique greatness appears in the fact that He is a powerful, just God, as well as a faithful, merciful Father. Justice and mercy can only meet together in the cross, where justice was satisfied and mercy was fulfilled (Psalm 85:10). Were God only just with humans, he would destroy them without mercy because of their sins. And if He were only merciful with them, this would be to the expense of His justice. So the cross showed us God's justice that punishes the sinner, as well as His mercy in His loving hand that stretches out to reconcile us to Him. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends (John 15:13). "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).
3. **God's greatness in the believers (verses 15-18):**
 1. **They walk in the light of His countenance (verses 15,16):** The believers praise the Lord, walking in His countenance, rejoicing in His name, and being exalted in His righteousness. Those who walk in the countenance of the Lord are those who gain His favor, because they rejoice in Him and walk in the light of His word, saying "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105). They walk in the light of Christ who said, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12), and enjoy His justice that exalts them.
 2. **They enjoy His victory (verses 17,18):** The Lord confers a glorious strength on his people out of His pleasure with them, thus making their horn stand high against their enemies. The horn symbolizes strength because a strong animal uses its horn in both defense and offense (Deuteronomy 33:17), The horn also typifies glory (Lamentations 2:3) and triumph (1 Kings 22:11). The exaltation of the horn is a sign of an increase of glory (1 Samuel 2:1). The horn of God's people is exalted because He is their shield. Shields were made of wicker, or of leather soaked in oil to keep it from cracking and stretched over wooden frames with handles on the inside. The soldier would carry it with his left arm to ward off the arrows. The arrows would sink into the wooden frame. The horn of God's people is also exalted because He is their King who defends them, manages their affairs and gives them the law.
 2. **Glorifying God for His covenant with David (verses 19-37):**

1. **His election of grace (verses 19,20):** The Lord chose David, took him away from following the sheep, and made him king. He assigned the prophet Samuel to anoint him with the oil of anointing. Jesse, David's father, thought that his eldest son was worthy of the position for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. No sooner had Samuel set eyes on David than the Lord told him, "Arise, anoint him; for this is the one!" (1 Samuel 16:1-13), and Samuel immediately took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward (1 Samuel 16:1-3). David had not expected any of this, but the Lord honored him. Later the Lord told Nathan the prophet in a vision that Solomon, the son of David, would build the great temple (2 Samuel 7:17). How great is the election of grace! The Lord Jesus confirmed this fact as He said, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (John 15:16).
2. **An election for victory (verses 21-25):** Thanks to the Lord's faithfulness and mercy, David received help and victory over Goliath (1 Samuel 17) "So David went on and became great, and the LORD God of hosts was with him ... that they may dwell in a place of their own and move no more; nor shall the sons of wickedness oppress them anymore, as previously" (2 Samuel 5:10; 7:10). He made good His promise: "Also I will set his hand over the sea, and his right hand over the rivers" (verse 25). As a result his dominion extended from the Mediterranean in the west to the Euphrates in the northeast according to God's promise to Abraham (Genesis 15:18) and Moses (Exodus 23:31). Solomon "had dominion over all the region on this side of the River from Tiphshah even to Gaza" (1 Kings 4:24).
3. **An election for adoption:** "He shall cry to Me, 'You are my Father, My God, and the rock of my salvation.' Also I will make him My firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth" (verses 26,27). It is apparent that this great promise was fulfilled only in Christ, the Son of David, who "has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS" (Revelation 19:16). The firstborn is the greatest because he inherits a double portion over his brothers. He is the head and the leader of his family and also functions as priest on its behalf.
4. **A permanent election (verses 28,29):** God kept His faithfulness and covenant for David, sustained his descendants, and established his throne as He had promised him in the vision that Nathan the prophet saw: "He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever ... And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:13,16). This prophet, however, was completely fulfilled in Christ, who was crucified, buried and rose on the third day from the dead. He ascended on high, sat on the right hand of the Father as a mediator, and will return to the world to judge the living and the dead.

5. **An election conditional on the chastisement of the sinner (verses 30-34):** God's promise to David was conditional on the obedience of his descendants. If they were not faithful He would punish and chastise them as the father would his beloved children. This was the content of Nathan's vision to David: "I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men" (2 Samuel 7:14). "Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?" (Hebrews 12:9). The punishment of the sinner is part and parcel of the covenant. But God remains faithful and does not abandon His covenant. "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:13).
6. **An election with a permanent promise (verses 35-37):** God swore to David by His own holiness, that is by His holy being, therefore the promise cannot fail. David and His descendants will continue to be kings as long as the sun remains and the moon exists. "Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for a light by day, the ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night" (Jeremiah 31:35). God is our "faithful witness in the sky." Job said, "Surely even now my witness is in heaven, and my evidence is on high" (Job 16:19). He has set a rainbow in the skies as a sign of His covenant with Noah and his descendants that He would not down the earth anymore with the flood (Genesis 9:13).

9.3. Third: The Psalmist Complains to God (verses 38-51)

1. **The complaint:** "But You..." (verses 38-45). The psalmist recalled the faithful and magnificent promises of a merciful and truthful God, but he had some questions due to the reality of life as he saw it. The reality was different from the promises he expected God to fulfil. Therefore he lifted the matter to the Lord, from whom and by whom and to whom all things belong. He complained because the great God did not help His people, but was rather furious with His anointed!
 1. **God rejected the king (verses 38-40):** With boldness that is only matched by that of Habakkuk, the psalmist reproved God on the grounds that He had revoked His covenant, profaning and destroying the strongholds (Habakkuk 1:2,13). The king's crown was profaned (2 Samuel 1:10), as well as the crown of the high priest (Exodus 29:6). The crown is a symbol of dedication to a certain position and is a statement of that honorable state. The psalmist linked the state of the king with that of the country, saying, "You have broken down all his hedges; You have brought his strongholds to ruin."
 2. **The derision of the king's enemies (verses 41-43):** The enemies' derision stirs the bitterness in the defeated soul, seeing how the enemy is exalted and the godly man is

- brought low. The enemy derides because he won, while the godly is ashamed because he was unable to defend himself.
3. **The king's glory ceased (verses 44,45):** The psalmist complains that God ended the king's splendor by extinguishing the radiance of the kingdom. God shortened the days of his youth so that his stature was bent with bitterness and humiliation. He aged prematurely. Perhaps the psalmist is referring to King Jehoiachin who became king when he was eighteen years old (2 Kings 24:8), and reigned for only a hundred days, spending the rest of his life in captivity.
2. **A request: "How long?" (verses 46:51).**
 1. **A request for a speedy mercy (verses 46-48):** The psalmist has long been waiting for deliverance, till his days neared their end. Nevertheless God's wrath is still kindled against him and his people. He asks, "For what futility have You created all the children of men?" (verse 47). Must man's life end in bitterness and humiliation? He asks for mercy before he dies, as though he were saying, "Indeed, You have made my days as handbreadths, and my age is as nothing before You ... When with rebukes You correct man for iniquity, You make his beauty melt away like a moth" (Psalm 39:5,11).
 2. **A request for the return of former lovingkindnesses (verses 49-51):** The psalmist asks in humility, "Lord, where are Your former lovingkindnesses, which You swore to David in Your truth?" Were these lovingkindnesses for a past generation, or have they gone to return no more? The psalmist must have recalled the mortification of King Jehoiachin when he was dragged through the streets of Babylon, as the throngs made fun of both him and his God. He says, "They have reproached the footsteps of Your anointed" (verse 51). Gideon had the same question on mind: "If the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has forsaken us" (Judges 6:13).

9.4. Fourth: A Final Doxology

(verse 52)

"Blessed be the LORD forevermore! Amen and Amen" (verse 52). At the conclusion of the fifth book of the psalms the psalmist blesses the Lord as he has done at the conclusion of the first book (Psalm 41:13) and the second book (Psalm 72:19). The final doxology crowns the psalmist's complaint with the Lord's answer. So he blesses the Lord for His goodness even when the circumstances are dark and dismal. He blesses the Lord in dark time like Job who said, "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21). We will bless the Lord even if we do not understand His mind, knowing the Christ must crush the head of the serpent. "I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever;

with my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations" is the first verse in our psalm, and the last verse of it says, "Blessed be the LORD forevermore! Amen and Amen." Let us all respond, "Amen and Amen." Hallelujah and praise be to the King who reigns over our lives!

9.5. Questions

1. Why does the psalmist sing about God's mercies?
2. In verses 15-18 the psalmist explains God's glory in the believers. What did he express?

10. Psalm Ninety

A Prayer of Moses the Man of God

1 A Prayer of Moses the man of God. LORD, You have been our dwelling place in all generations.

2 Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.

3 You turn man to destruction, and say, "Return, O children of men."

4 For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past, and like a watch in the night.

5 You carry them away like a flood; they are like a sleep. In the morning they are like grass which grows up:

6 In the morning it flourishes and grows up; in the evening it is cut down and withers.

7 For we have been consumed by Your anger, and by Your wrath we are terrified.

8 You have set our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your countenance.

9 For all our days have passed away in Your wrath; we finish our years like a sigh.

10 The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

11 Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath.

12 So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

13 Return, O LORD! How long? And have compassion on Your servants.

14 Oh, satisfy us early with Your mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days!

15 Make us glad according to the days in which You have afflicted us, the years in which we have seen evil.

16 Let Your work appear to Your servants, and Your glory to their children.

17 And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands for us;

yes, establish the work of our hands.

This psalm is the only one written by Moses, and most likely the oldest written psalm. Its style is similar to Moses' blessing which is recorded in Deuteronomy 33. What a lovely title Moses has at the beginning of psalm: "the man of God". This title also occurs at the start of Moses' blessing to the people (Deuteronomy 33:1), Caleb the son of Jephunneh used it about Moses when he spoke with Joshua the son of Nun (Joshua 14:6), and was used as a byname for Moses the author of the Torah by the inspiration of Holy Spirit (Ezra 3:2). Moses was called "the man of God" because he was chosen and called by God to get His people out of Egypt. Later God used him to get them out and lead them in the wilderness for forty years to the border of the Promised Land. He was dubbed "the man of God" because he honored and obeyed God. Yes, there were slips in Moses' life, what man does not slip up? It is Christ alone who made not a single mistake.

Moses loved God with his heart and decided to obey and serve Him. So he preferred rather "to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward" (Hebrews 11:25,26). Moses considered his stay in the Egyptian royal palace a sin, not because it was sinful in itself, but because it was the second priority in his life. Moses put his first priority first, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God because he was "the man of God." Let us pray to God to help us put His pleasure, doing His will, and waiting on Him first and foremost in our lives, so that we might be called "the man of God".

Most likely this psalm was written towards the end of the forty years of wandering in the wilderness, after Moses had seen God's punishment of the people. At the outset of the exodus journey Moses sent out spies to scout out the land that the Lord had promised to give to them. The men returned with great reports about the land that confirmed the accuracy of God's description of it, yet they were incapable of believing that they could possess it. As they saw the strong inhabitants of the land, they felt weak and said, "We were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight" (Numbers 13:33). But two great men, Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun, stood up and told the people that they were capable of possessing it, not of themselves but because God promised it. The people rose against Moses and Aaron, saying, "Let us select a leader and return to Egypt" (Numbers 14:4). They wanted to stone Moses and Aaron so that God said to Moses, "I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they" (Numbers 14:12). But although the uprising was against Moses himself, he entreated God in true jealousy and great love, and prayed with the wisdom of a leader who weighs things out precisely and cautiously, "Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy" (Numbers 14:19). God said, "I have pardoned, according to your word ... because all these men who have seen My glory ... and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, they certainly

shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers ... Say to them, '...The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness ... you shall by no means enter the land ... But your little ones ... I will bring in ... But as for you, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness'" (Numbers 14:20-32). Towards the end of the forty years Moses surveyed the generation that went out with from the land of Egypt and found that they were all dead. Thereupon he wrote down this psalm to commemorate God's eternal punishment of mortal man!

The psalm includes the following:

- First: God's greatness and man's mortality (verses 1-6)
- Second: God's wrath against man (verses 7-12)
- Third: Man's requests (verses 13-17)

10.1. First: God's Greatness and Man's Mortality

(verses 1-6)

1. God's greatness (verses 1-4):

1. **He is the Lord:** "LORD" (verse 1a). The Lord is the master; man addresses Him like dust, as our father Abraham said, "Indeed now, I who am but dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord" (Genesis 18:27). The Lord is the defender who guards His people, makes a way for them in the sea, and drowns their enemies in it! This Lord and Master is so near to His people that he was incarnated and became a man, was born in a stable and lived among us, was tempted like us in everything yet without sin, and died on the cross to open a way for us to the Holy of Holies. And we await His second coming as an impartial judge of the world.
2. **He is the dwelling place:** "You have been our dwelling place in all generations" (verse 1b). God delivered the oppressed from the woe of humiliation and the bondage of Pharaoh, parted the sea before them, and was their dwelling place in the Sinai Desert when they had no home to turn to, no field to till and harvest, and no river to draw water from. He fed them in the wilderness and given them quail, overshadowed them by day in a pillar of cloud and protected them by night from both enemies and beasts in a pillar of fire. Although they trudged in an arid desert forty years, their garments did not wear out on them, nor did their feet swell (Deuteronomy 8:4). He expressed the same fact as He spoke to Moses, saying, "And I have led you forty years in the wilderness. Your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandals have not worn out on your feet" (Deuteronomy 29:5). God never stopped looking after them; rather He was a permanent dwelling place for them throughout their generations. What a wonderful dwelling place He is for us in which always to take shelter!

3. **He is from everlasting to everlasting:** "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God" (verse 2). The Book of Genesis describes creation in these words, "This is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens" (Genesis 2:4). Before the Lord brought the mountains into existence, and before He formed the world, He is God, from everlasting to everlasting. He is not limited by time because He is the creator of time, without beginning or end, as He said, "I am He, I am the First, I am also the Last. Indeed My hand has laid the foundation of the earth, and My right hand has stretched out the heavens" (Isaiah 48:12,13). "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End", says the Lord, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty'" (Revelation 1:8).
 4. **He is in control of man's destiny:** "You turn man to destruction, and say, 'Return, O children of men'" (verse 3). Man's life is in God's hands. God said to Adam, "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19). The divine command "Return, O children of men" may mean that it is God who commands man's life to end in death. "All flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust" (Job 34:15). Or it may mean that God commands the dead to rise again to life after passing away, as Christ stated, "The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation" (John 5:28,29).
 5. **He is beyond the scope of time:** "For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past, and like a watch in the night" (verse 4). Generation after generation of people ends as though it were only yesterday! Methuselah lived 969 years, which is nothing compared to the endless eternity. In the divine memory it is like yesterday! "But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Peter 3:8). A thousand years in God's sight are even like a watch in the night. The Jews used to divide the night into three watches; the first from the falling of dark to midnight, the second from midnight to the crowing of the rooster, which is dawn, and the third from the crowing of the rooster to daybreak. The Romans, however, divided the night into four watches. A thousand years in God's sight are like a watch in the night that is not felt by those who slumber. There is no past or future with God; everything is present. There is no before or after in His sight; everything is now.
2. **Man's mortality (verses 5,6):** Here he gives three descriptions of mortal man:
 1. **Transient:** "You carry them away" (verse 5a). They are like a building erected on a sandy shore, washed away by the rising tide and wiped out of existence.

2. **Short-lived:** "They are like a sleep" (verse 5b). The Hebrew *shena* is a brief slumber or a dozing off. God also declares He will make His enemies sleep a perpetual sleep and not awake (Jeremiah 51:39).
3. **Like grass:** "In the morning they are like grass which grows up: In the morning it flourishes and grows up; in the evening it is cut down and withers" (verse 5c,6). What is man? If you compare him to the mountains or the earth he is nothing. How much less when comparing him to the creator who is from eternity to eternity? He is like the green grass at daybreak that withers before it has ended, only to be eaten by animals or cut off by man! God said through His prophet Isaiah, "The voice said, 'Cry out!' And he said, 'What shall I cry?' 'All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, because the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.'" (Isaiah 40:6-8). Job said, "Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower and fades away; he flees like a shadow and does not continue" (Job 14:1,2). By the end of the forty years of wandering in the wilderness, Moses surveyed his companions and found them all dead. This compelled him to examine himself, only to find that his hair turned gray. Life seemed inadequate and short, but he never turned his eyes away from his God, so he saw the Living and Everlasting One, who alone has immortality. Now if we look up to God we will realize He is our dwelling place, too, in all the stages of our life. And He is truly the only dwelling place that lasts forever.

10.2. Second: God's Wrath against Man

(verses 7-12)

1. **Consuming and terrifying wrath:** "For we have been consumed by Your anger, and by Your wrath we are terrified" (verse 7). The psalmist proclaims the weakness of man in the sight of divine wrath that consumes and terrifies the sinner. This is a picture of an army facing an impending disaster that cannot be averted. A good example of this situation is the defeat of the Benjamites in front of the rest of the tribes: "The men of Benjamin panicked, for they saw that disaster had come upon them" (Judges 20:41). One could also see terror on the faces of Joseph's brothers who had sold him. When he asked them, "Does my father still live?" They "could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence" (Genesis 45:3). Before they knew who Joseph was they thought they could fabricate a lie to deceive this great man so that they could take the grain and return to their families. But what could they possibly do now since their plot was discovered? They were terrified, thinking that he would destroy them. Now if this is how Joseph's brothers were terrified of their mortal brother, how much more will the terror of the unrepentant sinner be in the presence of the holy God?
2. **Wrath that uncovers iniquities:** "You have set our iniquities before You, our secret sins

in the light of Your countenance" (verse 8). When the people rose against Moses and wanted to return to Egypt, God was angry with them and no longer showed them the favor of His countenance. He did not cover their sins, but rather manifested and reproached them. He declared that their punishment must certainly come. This uprising was not in fact against Moses, but against God because the people had little faith in God's truthful and faithful promises, stated by Moses. On the other hand, Moses proved his faith in God's promises when he ordered Joseph's bones to be carried with them out of Egypt. Joseph had placed the children of Israel under solemn oath, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here with you" (Exodus 13:19). Despite all this, only Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh believed God's promises.

We are in such need for an immediate repentance of our sins as soon as we recognize them. We commit sins that are known to us, which we should confess and repent of immediately, praying, "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me" (Psalm 51:2,3). We also commit sins that are invisible to our eyes, yet open to Him whose eyes penetrate the thick screens of darkness and see everything. "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13). There are exposed sins and hidden sins, of which Paul said, "Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment [because they are open and known], but those of some men follow later [because they unseen, hidden and secret]. Likewise, the good works of some are clearly evident, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden" (1 Timothy 5:24,25). Moses, the man of God, says to the Lord that his sins and those of his people are evident and open, and that their wages is death. Yet he asks for mercy and covering for himself and for his people, too.

- 3. Wrath that shortens the life:** "For all our days have passed away in Your wrath; we finish our years like a sigh. The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away" (verses 9,10). As Moses ponders over the unbelieving generation, he sees their days have passed away in the severity of the divine wrath, as though he were saying with Jeremiah, "Woe to us, for the day goes away, for the shadows of the evening are lengthening" (Jeremiah 6:4). The lives of the early patriarchs were almost one thousand years; Adam, for example, lived 930 years, his son Seth 912 years, and Noah 950 years (Genesis 5:5,8; 9:29). But sin shortened the life-span of people, so the days of our lives have become seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow. When Pharaoh asked Jacob, the father of the tribes of Israel, "How old are you?" he answered, "One hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage" (Genesis 47:8,9).

Eliphaz said to Job, "Yet man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7).

But Moses the man of God says, "We finish our years like a sigh [or story]." A story ends quickly, be it long or short. But the effects a story has on the hearer do not end; they may lift his thoughts upward to a high moral standard, or lead him to unclean thinking. True, our lives are short, and they do end quickly, but their effects on those around us and on the coming generation do not end. What effects does your life have on the lives of your spouse, children, friends and grandchildren?

4. **A powerful wrath:** "Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath" (verse 11). Every one who knows the power of God's wrath against sin fears Him and avoids provoking Him to anger, as the philosopher said, "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate" (Proverbs 8:13). God said through Moses, "Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!" (Deuteronomy 5:29).
5. **Wrath that teaches wisdom:** "So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (verse 12). Moses has said in his poem towards the end of his life about his people, "They are a nation void of counsel, nor is there any understanding in them. Oh, that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!" (Deuteronomy 32:28,29). Now in his psalm he asks the Lord to teach him and us that our days are few and that their end is unknown, so that we should be wise in our decisions. "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26). If man knows how to number his days and realize how short they are, he will spend them preparing his soul for the happy eternity with God. Divine wisdom comes to us from God, according to the words of the apostle, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5).

10.3. Third: Man's Requests

(verses 13-17)

Moses watched his friends and companions closely during the forty years of wandering in Sinai. He saw them die one after one, so he lifted up his eyes to God in prayer. He requested four things:

1. **A request for mercy:** "Return, O LORD! How long? And have compassion on Your servants. Oh, satisfy us early with Your mercy" (verses 13,14a). Moses asks God to return from His anger against His people, and to shine upon them with the light of His mercy, so that they may be satisfied in the early morning. When the people molded a golden calf to worship it God was angry with them, therefore Moses prayed, "Turn from Your fierce wrath" (Exodus 32:12). Later David prayed, "My soul also is greatly

troubled; but You, O LORD; how long? Return, O LORD, deliver me! Oh, save me for Your mercies' sake!" (Psalm 6:3,4). Martin Luther also said that we would continue to be beggars of God's mercy, for no one deserves it. Christ narrated a parable about a Pharisee who thought himself worthy of God's acceptance, so he prayed boasting over himself and despising the others, and God rejected his prayer. Further off a tax-collector stood and would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" and God forgave his sins (Luke 18:10-13). Requesting mercy should always be accompanied by repentance and confession. We should be sorry for what we have done, resolve to leave our past and say, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way ... They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:12,23). But mercy came to us in the cross of Christ when the Perfect died for the imperfect, the Righteous of the unrighteous. He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, to make us children of God. He became what He had not been in order to make us what we could not be. This is true mercy. "God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ ... and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:4-6).

2. **Requesting joy:** "That we may rejoice and be glad all our days! Make us glad according to the days in which You have afflicted us, the years in which we have seen evil" (verses 14b,15). Moses asks the Lord to make them glad and make up for the days he let them taste affliction. He knew that when He returns from His wrath He shows mercy to the penitent sinner, who rejoices for having been forgiven. He is glad because the Lord is now pleased with him. His joy that stems from God's mercy to him is a permanent joy "all our days." Everyone who has been forgiven says, "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!" (1 John 3:1). They also sing:

- O happy day, O happy day
- When Jesus took my sins away

When God forgave his penitent people, He said, "'Comfort, yes, comfort My people!' says your God. 'Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins'" (Isaiah 40:1,2). How beautiful it is to lead a life of repentance because "there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance ... there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:7,10). The greatest joy, however, belongs to the penitent man who returns to God, because God will forgive him his sins, reconcile him to Himself, give permanent fellowship with Himself, and make him His own. This God,

who is wonderful in His love, affirms His continual presence with the repentant person and showers him continually with the blessings of heaven and earth. He will grant his requests, rescue him from trouble, and make him experience divine mercy every day and all day. This will lead him to say, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever" (Psalm 23:6).

- 3. Requesting a manifestation of God's power:** "Let Your work appear to Your servants, and Your glory to their children" (verse 16). Moses asks the Lord to manifest the acts of His providence in a visible manner as He did at the exodus from Egypt, when everybody saw the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud that the Lord used to lead His people in the Sinai Desert (Exodus 13:21,22). At that time the people of Israel witnessed the parting of the Red Sea, crossed it, and were delivered from Pharaoh (Exodus 14:21,28). God answered Moses' prayer, and both those who were far and near saw God's miraculous work on behalf of His servants, and the glory of His acts to their children. Again they saw the Jordan River parted (Joshua 3:13,15,16; 4:7) and came in touch with the works of God.

Our God works in history, as well as among us today and tomorrow: "I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread. He is ever merciful, and lends; and his descendants are blessed" (Psalm 37:25,26). "The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken" (Isaiah 40:5).

- 4. Requesting establishment of the work of our hands:** "And let the beauty [or grace] of the LORD our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands for us; yes, establish the work of our hands" (verse 17). Moses asks God to establish and support all the daily work that he performs. Would we therefore think that he would ask the Lord to establish his work unless it was a good work? Can he ask God to establish evil work for him? This must mean then that he asks God to give him the grace of having good works, for he cannot do good works unless God has worked inside him first. Paul explains this as follows: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

When we do anything, let us do it for the glory of God. May the grace of the Lord our God be upon us to make our work good, and establish the work of our hands for us to make it continue, grow and expand. What is the work that you are doing for the Lord? What is the ministry which you perform for Him so that you can pray, "Lord, grant me your grace, and establish the work of my hands for me"?

10.4. Questions

1. In verses 1-4 the psalmist explains God's greatness. What does he mention to prove his point of view?
2. In verses 12-17 the psalmist asks for four things. Write them down.

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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