

Meditations on the Psalms

Volume Twelve: Psalms 111-120

by Menes Abdul Noor

Table of contents

| | |
|---|----|
| 1 Psalm One Hundred and Eleven..... | 4 |
| 1.1 First: Glorifying the Good God..... | 5 |
| 1.2 Second: Evidences of the Lord's Goodness..... | 6 |
| 1.3 Third: Fear of the Good Lord..... | 12 |
| 1.4 Questions..... | 13 |
| 2 Psalm Hundred and Twelve..... | 13 |
| 2.1 First: The House of the God-fearing Person..... | 14 |
| 2.2 Second: The Steadfastness of the God-Fearing Person..... | 17 |
| 2.3 Questions..... | 20 |
| 3 Psalm Hundred and Thirteen..... | 20 |
| 3.1 First: A General Call to Praise the Lord..... | 22 |
| 3.2 Second: Praising the Lord for the Greatness of His Character..... | 24 |
| 3.3 Third: Praising the Lord for the Greatness of His Work..... | 25 |
| 3.4 Questions..... | 27 |
| 4 Psalm Hundred and Fourteen..... | 27 |
| 4.1 First: The Lord Brings His People out of Egypt..... | 28 |
| 4.2 Second: The Miracles that Accompanied the Exodus..... | 30 |
| 4.3 Third: The Repetition of the Miracles of the Exodus..... | 31 |
| 4.4 Questions..... | 32 |
| 5 Psalm Hundred and Fifteen..... | 33 |
| 5.1 First: A Petition to Glorify the Name of Lord..... | 34 |

| | |
|--|----|
| 5.2 Second: Contrast between the Lord and Idols..... | 36 |
| 5.3 Third: An Exhortation to Trust in the Lord..... | 37 |
| 5.4 Fourth: The Blessing of Trusting in the Lord..... | 38 |
| 5.5 Questions..... | 40 |
| 6 Psalm Hundred and Sixteen..... | 40 |
| 6.1 First: The Psalmist Calls upon the Lord..... | 42 |
| 6.2 Second: The Lord Answers the Psalmist..... | 44 |
| 6.3 Third: The Psalmist Thanks the Lord..... | 45 |
| 6.4 Questions..... | 50 |
| 7 Psalm Hundred and Seventeen..... | 50 |
| 7.1 First: A Command to Praise..... | 51 |
| 7.2 Second: Reasons for Praise..... | 52 |
| 7.3 Questions..... | 53 |
| 8 Psalm Hundred and Eighteen..... | 53 |
| 8.1 First: An Invitation to the House of the Lord..... | 55 |
| 8.2 Second: Singing on the Way to the House of the Lord..... | 56 |
| 8.3 Third: Singing in the House of the Lord..... | 59 |
| 8.4 Questions..... | 61 |
| 9 Psalm Hundred and Nineteen..... | 62 |
| 9.1 SECTION ONE..... | 64 |
| 9.1.1 First: The Lord's Law Lifts up the Heart..... | 66 |
| 9.1.2 Second: The Psalmist Seeks Purity..... | 67 |
| 9.1.3 Third: The Psalmist Seeks the Knowledge of the Word..... | 70 |
| 9.1.4 Fourth: The Psalmist Seeks Truth..... | 72 |
| 9.2 SECTION TWO..... | 74 |
| 9.2.1 First: The Psalmist's Needs..... | 76 |
| 9.2.2 Second: Incentives to Asking..... | 81 |
| 9.2.3 Third: Gratitude for the Answer..... | 83 |
| 9.3 SECTION THREE..... | 86 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| 9.3.1 First: The Psalmist's Trouble from his Enemies..... | 88 |
| 9.3.2 Second: Hope in Divine Deliverance..... | 91 |
| 9.3.3 Third: The Persecuted Loves and Serves the Lord..... | 94 |
| 9.4 SECTION FOUR..... | 97 |
| 9.4.1 First: The Psalmist Seeks a Victorious Life..... | 99 |
| 9.4.2 Second: The Psalmist Leads a Victorious Life..... | 102 |
| 9.4.3 Third: Two Fruits of the Victorious Life..... | 104 |
| 9.5 Questions..... | 107 |
| 10 Psalm Hundred and Twenty..... | 107 |
| 10.1 First: God Answers..... | 109 |
| 10.2 Second: A Complaint of the Enemy..... | 109 |
| 10.3 Third: A Complaint of His Alienation..... | 111 |
| 10.4 Questions..... | 112 |
| 11 Quiz..... | 113 |

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

All scripture quotations marked "NIV" are from THE HOLY BIBLE: NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION(r). NIV(r). Copyright (c) 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

1. Psalm One Hundred and Eleven

The Goodness of the Lord

1 Praise the LORD! I will praise the LORD with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright and in the congregation.

2 The works of the LORD are great, studied by all who have pleasure in them.

3 His work is honorable and glorious, and His righteousness endures forever.

4 He has made His wonderful works to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and full of compassion.

5 He has given food to those who fear Him; He will ever be mindful of His covenant.

6 He has declared to His people the power of His works, in giving them the heritage of the nations.

7 The works of His hands are verity and justice; all His precepts are sure.

8 They stand fast forever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness.

9 He has sent redemption to His people; He has commanded His covenant forever: Holy and awesome is His name.

10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever.

Psalm 111 and 112 are related and similar in language, structure and content. They both open with the phrase "Praise the LORD!" At the beginning of Psalm 111 we can see God's power, goodness and uprightness, and in Psalm 112 the prosperity, goodness and uprightness of the godly. The goodness of the Lord leads the believer to godliness, and stamps the attributes of his Lord on his heart. The two psalms explain Christ's command: "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48), and the apostolic command: "Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma" (Ephesians 5:1,2). The difference between God's attributes and the believer's attributes is that God's attributes are absolute and perfect from eternity past to eternity future, whereas the believer's righteousness is relative to how faithful he is to the Lord. This righteousness begins the day he comes to know the Lord, and lets Him be Master of his life.

Psalm 111 and 112 together make up an acrostic of ten verses, divided into twenty-two lines, with each line beginning with a consecutive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Psalm 112 picks up where Psalm 111 leaves off. Psalm 111 ends with "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom," and Psalm 112 opens with blessing "the man who fears the LORD," because the fear of the Lord leads to happiness in life.

After Psalm 111 and 112 come six psalms (113-118), which the Israelites called "Psalms of Egyptian Praise" because in them they praise the Lord who set them free from the slavery of Pharaoh. They used to sing Psalms 113 and 114 before having the Passover meal. Then after the meal they would sing Psalms 115 and 118, which are the songs Christ and His disciples are said to have sung before going out to the Mount of Olives the night Christ was arrested (Mark 14:26).

The psalm contains the following:

- First: Glorifying the good God (verse 1)
- Second: Evidences of the Lord's goodness (verses 2-9)
- Third: Fear of the good Lord (verse 10)

1.1. First: Glorifying the Good God

(verse 1)

1. **We glorify Him with praise:** "Praise the LORD!"(verse 1a). The Hebrew simply says "*Hallelujah*", which has become an international word in the languages of the world, just like another Hebrew word "*Amen*", which means "steadfast, constant and trustworthy". When we say "Amen" after a prayer, we mean, "May it be so," or "May you answer, Lord, because You are constant, steadfast and trustworthy. You must fulfil Your promises to answer whoever calls upon You." The psalm praises the Lord and calls others to do the same, "For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and praise is beautiful"(Psalm 147:1).
2. **We glorify Him with a whole heart:** "I will praise the LORD with my whole heart"(verse 1b). The psalmist praises the good Lord with his whole heart because of their love relationship, for "The secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant" (Psalm 25:14). The Lord deserves to be praised with a heart united in fear of Him, for He is the one and holy God to whom we pray both in public and in secret, at times of joy as well as at times of sadness, as the apostle admonishes: "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms"(James 5:13).
3. **We glorify Him with the upright:** "In the assembly of the upright and in the congregation"(verse 1c). The psalmist praises Him in the assembly of his private circle,

where he meets his upright friends. They are the godly ones who agree with him in loving the Lord. His motto is: "As for the saints who are on the earth, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight" (Psalm 16:3). As though he says to them, "Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous! For praise from the upright is beautiful"(Psalm 33:1). For He is a God who "...is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be held in reverence by all those around Him" (Psalm 89:7).

1.2. Second: Evidences of the Lord's Goodness

(verses 2-9)

The manifestations of God's goodness are many. The psalmist lists five of them:

1. **The Lord's works are great:** "The works of the LORD are great, studied by all who have pleasure in them"(verse 2). The goodness of the great Lord is evident in the great good works of the Lord, in terms of their power, impact and abundance. "How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand; when I awake, I am still with You"(Psalm 139:17,18). He gives to all liberally and without reproach, and He is good to all those who truly seek Him. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. 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 1:17,18). He created the universe and man, then saw that what He made was very good (Genesis 1:31). His care is great and good, for "He waters the hills from His upper chambers; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of Your works ... O LORD, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all. The earth is full of Your possessions ... May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in His works" (Psalm 104:13,24,31).

Great also are the works of Christ; all of which are in agreement with His statements. He fed five thousand people with five loaves of bread and two fish (John 6:1-15) because He did not want to send them away hungry to their own houses, in case they should faint on the way. Then He said "I am the bread which came down from heaven" (John 6:41). Again he 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), then opened the eyes of the one born blind (John 9). Again He said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (John 11:25,26), and commanded Lazarus, who had died four days earlier, to come out of his tomb, and Lazarus rose again (John 11:43).

Yet the greatest of all God's good works is changing man's heart and forgiving his sins. This is the work of divine grace. In this respect the Scriptures say about the believers, "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). The Lord makes a new man out of the wicked, as the Bible says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17). This is what happens to the penitent person who returns to God.

These good works are "studied by all who have pleasure in them" People must study them, ponder on them and think them over. "Blessed is the man ... [whose] delight is in the law of the LORD, and on His law he meditates day and night"(Psalm 1:2).

2. **The Lord's works are just:** "His work is honorable and glorious, and His righteousness endures forever"(verse 3). The Lord's works are honourable and glorious, showing His constant, unchangeable justice. This powerful Lord is just in all He does. His spokesman Moses said about Him, "He is the Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He" (Deuteronomy 32:4). And God said through His prophet Isaiah, "Ask Me of things to come concerning My sons; and concerning the work of My hands, you command Me. I have made the earth, and created man on it. I—My hands—stretched out the heavens, And all their host I have commanded" (Isaiah 45:11,12).

We may wonder: Since God is so honourable and glorious in all He does, and since His justice is constant and active, why does He then allow the weak to be harmed? Why does He let the believers suffer at the hands of the wicked? Why does He allow the strong to hurt others, or to force their will on them? How often do we see injustice done by employers to employees, by landowners to labourers, and by rulers to their subjects? The answer is that God's treatment of the wicked is one of justice. He gives him freedom of action because He forces no one to do good, and He is patient with the wicked person that he may repent. But at the same time He must deliver the believer from his temporary trouble, just as Christ said that the tribulation of the angel of the church of Smyrna will only last "ten days" (Revelation 2:10). It neither lasts nor continues. The Scriptures say to the suffering believers, "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:6,7).

3. **The Lord's works are wonderful (verses 4-6):**

1. **His dealings are wonderful:** "He has made His wonderful works to be remembered"(verse 4a). We make God's wonderful works to be remembered when we celebrate Christmas and Easter, remembering God's love as seen in Christ, the incarnated Word, and in Christ's death and resurrection for our salvation. The Israelites celebrated the Passover to remember the miracle of the Exodus from Pharaoh's bondage. God had commanded them, "This day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall

keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance ... And it shall be, when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' that you shall say, 'It is the Passover sacrifice of the LORD, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households'" (Exodus 12:14,26,27). Christians celebrate their Passover by taking part in the Lord's Supper, because they remember "Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (1 Corinthians 5:7). They celebrate Him according to the Scripture: "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

Every one who experiences the new life in Christ remembers how Christ set him free from the bondage of the devil, which is a glorious, unforgettable experience. This experience is clear with some, with a story to be remembered and retold, as was the case with Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:4). But with others there is no dramatic story, as was the case with Timothy, to whom Paul said, "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 ... and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15). But Timothy would never forget the Holy Scriptures that made him wise to know the way of salvation.

2. **His compassions are wonderful:** "The LORD is gracious and full of compassion"(verse 4b). Perhaps the best description of this gracious One is the statement: "There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God ... There is none who does good, no, not one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed" (Romans 3:10-12,23,24,25). There is a beautiful description of divine mercy that says, "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)" (Ephesians 2:4,5). The Lord is gracious and compassionate even if His people sin, as Nehemiah said about the children of Israel, "They refused to obey, and they were not mindful of Your wonders that You did among them ... But You are God, ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness, and

did not forsake them ... In Your great mercy You did not utterly consume them nor forsake them; for You are God, gracious and merciful" (Nehemiah 9:17,31). "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"(Isaiah 49:15).

3. **His gifts are wonderful:** "He has given food to those who fear Him"(verse 5a). God is a generous host. The psalmist said to Him, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over" (Psalm 23:5). He said to His people in the wilderness of Sinai, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day ... So it was that quails came up at evening and covered the camp, and in the morning the dew lay all around the camp ... And Moses said to them, "This is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat"(Exodus 16:4,13,15). When the people were thirsty, God commanded Moses to strike the rock to bring forth water (Exodus 17:6). Christ calls to us, "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" (Matthew 6:26).

True satisfaction, however, is the spiritual satisfaction in Christ, who said, " am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world" (John 6:51).

4. **His covenant is wonderful:** "He will ever be mindful of His covenant"(verse 5b). God said to His friend Abraham, "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions"(Genesis 15:13,14). God was true to His promise. For when Pharaoh humiliated the children of Israel "God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob... And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel whom the Egyptians keep in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant"(Exodus 2:24; 6:5). God's promises to the believer are true and Amen, for He says, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). When He enters the ship of our life, He calms down the waves and causes the wind to subside, because He says, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid" (Mark 6:50). If our strength fails on the way or if we are buffeted by the waves of life, He rushes to our aid.
5. **His inheritance is wonderful:** "He has declared to His people the power of His works, in giving them the heritage of the nations. The works of His hands are verity and justice"(verses 6,7a). Moses said that God promised His people that He would "drive out before you nations greater and stronger than you and to bring you into their land to give it to you for your inheritance" (Deuteronomy 4:38 NIV). The Lord gave

the land to the oppressed people, who left Egypt in humiliation, unlearned in military skills, carrying no weapons and incapable of defending themselves. Giving the land to the descendants of Abraham was an act of truth and justice, because the inhabitants of those lands were sinful and they corrupted the land. Moses said to the people, "It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you go in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD your God drives them out from before you, and that He may fulfill the word which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob... You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods... and because of these abominations the LORD your God drives them out from before you"(Deuteronomy 9:5; 12:31; 18:12).

Believers look forward to the eternal inheritance in heaven, which Christ promised them. They respond to such faithfulness by saying, "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 for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time"(1 Peter 1:3-5)

4. The Lord's words are good (verses 7b,8):

1. **The Word is recorded faithfully:** "All His precepts are sure"(verse 7b). They are good and sure precepts in that they make the man who obeys them happy, and make the foolish who are willing to learn from them wise. "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" (Psalm 19:7-9). They are sure and are meant to reassure, because "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16,17). This is so because "prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). "So it was, when Moses had completed writing the words of this law in a book, when they were finished, that Moses commanded the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying: 'Take this Book of the Law, and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there as a witness against you'" (Deuteronomy 31:24-26). This means that the text of the Torah has been recorded since Moses' time, and every king had to keep a copy of the Torah as the constitution of his government. The Word of God was passed around year after year

among the believers who loved God and His Word, who kept it more dearly than their own lives.

2. **The Word is steadfast:** "They stand fast forever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness"(verse 8). God does not change, and therefore His Word cannot change or be altered, because it's the Word of the King of kings. The psalmist said, "Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven" (Psalm 119:89). And the prophet Isaiah said, "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever" (Isaiah 40:8). Christ confirmed this and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled" (Matthew 5:18), and also, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away" (Matthew 24:35). God inspired His Word, and He Himself guarantees that it will not be tampered with. If an earthly king does not allow his word to be tampered with, how much more will God keep His own Word from alteration, falsification or change, especially since it is the only way to salvation!

All God's promises are true and sure. Moses, who talked to God face to face, said, "Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments" (Deuteronomy 7:9). Joshua added, "Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth. And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spoke concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one word of them has failed"(Joshua 23:14). Solomon also said, "Blessed be the LORD, who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised. There has not failed one word of all His good promise, which He promised through His servant Moses" (1 Kings 8:56). And finally Paul said, "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord"(1 Corinthians 1:9).

5. **The Lord's redemption is good:** "He has sent redemption to His people; He has commanded His covenant forever: Holy and awesome is His name"(verse 9). A redeemer is someone who ransoms a prisoner, or releases the debtor from his debts. The redeemer is also the next of kin, the care-taker and the saviour. To say that the Lord redeemed His people is to say that He is near them, that He is their care-taker. Christ declared that He had come to proclaim the Jubilee, "the acceptable year of the LORD" in which the prisoners are to be released and the broken-hearted are to be set free (Luke 4:19). Thus He declared that He is our Redeemer, our care-taker, our next of kin, who alone can redeem us from our sins. He also said, "No longer do I call you servants... but I have called you friends" (John 15:15). God sent redemption to His people when He brought them out of Pharaoh's bondage, and made Pharaoh and his army a ransom for them. Then again He sent redemption to His people when He brought them back from captivity, and said to them through the prophet Jeremiah, "If you can break My covenant with the day

and My covenant with the night, so that there will not be day and night in their season, then My covenant may also be broken with David My servant, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and with the Levites, the priests, My ministers. As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, nor the sand of the sea measured, so will I multiply the descendants of David My servant and the Levites who minister to Me" (Jeremiah 33:20-22).

Through this redemption from the bondage of the devil and the bondage of Pharaoh the Lord showed that He is the holy One who deserves our love, glorification, reverence, fear, adoration and worship, so that every knee should bow to Him, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth (Philippians 2:10).

1.3. Third: Fear of the Good Lord

(verse 10)

1. **The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom:** "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments"(verse 10a,b). The kind of wisdom meant here is not the mere head knowledge of philosophical matters, but rather the practical application of God's commandments. This is true piety. Moses advised his people, saying, "And now, Israel, 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). Solomon the wise admonished, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). And the apostle Peter gives us this piece of wisdom, "Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king" (1 Peter 2:17).

Piety and fear of the Lord give a man understanding and wisdom in all he does. Job says, "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding" (Job 28:28). Solomon the wise also says, "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding" (Proverbs 4:7). And Hosea adds, "Who is wise? Let him understand these things. Who is prudent? Let him know them. For the ways of the LORD are right; the righteous walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them" (Hosea 14:9). Christ said, "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock" (Matthew 7:24,25). And finally: "Good understanding gains favor" (Proverbs 13:15).

2. **The fear of Lord inspires praise to Him:** "His praise endures forever"(verse 10c). The psalmist ends the psalm with praise, just as he started it. He said, "His righteousness endures forever"(verse 3), and so do all His attributes, which inspire the believer and

encourage him to lead a life of piety and to praise God here on earth. Later, when the believer comes into his heavenly inheritance, he will continue to praise Him for ever. "I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. May my meditation be sweet to Him; I will be glad in the LORD" (Psalm 104:33,34).

1.4. Questions

1. What is the meaning of "hallelujah" and "amen"?
2. What do we mean when we say that God is our Redeemer?

2. Psalm Hundred and Twelve

The Goodness of the God-Fearing Man

1 Praise the LORD! Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who delights greatly in His commandments.

2 His descendants will be mighty on earth; the generation of the upright will be blessed.

3 Wealth and riches will be in his house, and his righteousness endures forever.

4 Unto the upright there arises light in the darkness; He is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous.

5 A good man deals graciously and lends; He will guide his affairs with discretion.

6 Surely he will never be shaken; the righteous will be in everlasting remembrance.

7 He will not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD.

8 His heart is established; he will not be afraid, until he sees his desire upon his enemies.

9 He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever; His horn will be exalted with honor.

10 The wicked will see it and be grieved; He will gnash his teeth and melt away; The desire of the wicked shall perish.

Whenever we reflect on God's attributes and works, His holy and loving nature is stamped on our hearts, because we usually imitate those we respect and walk in the footsteps of those we love. This is why we want to become good, as He is good. Nations follow the religion of their kings, so if God became King over the heart, the entire life would be affected by Him. The psalmist listed God's attributes in Psalm 111, and in this psalm he explains how the believer is affected by his God in his daily walk. There is an apostolic word of advice that says, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). Let us always reflect on God's attributes and works so that He may mould our lives in the crucible

of His divine goodness, so that our light may so shine before men, that they may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16).

The previous psalm ends with the statement: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever" Our psalm opens with the statement: "Praise the LORD! Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who delights greatly in His commandments." When we reflect on God we fear Him, and when we fear Him we are blessed and take delight in His commandments. No one will force us to obey His commands because of "the perfect law of liberty" (James 1:25). This perfect law sets us free from fear, so that we may obey God not under pressure, but voluntarily, out of love.

The psalm contains the following:

1. First: The house of the God-fearing person (verses 1-5)
2. Second: The steadfastness of the God-fearing person (verses 6-10)

2.1. First: The House of the God-fearing Person

(verses 1-5)

1. **The father of the house:** "Praise the LORD! Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who delights greatly in His commandments"(verse 1). To fear the Lord is to love, revere and obey Him. The man who fears the Lord enjoys obeying His commandments day after day, and "his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night" (Psalm 1:2). He says, "I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart" (Psalm 40:8). He calls on God to "Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it ... Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day" (Psalm 119:35,97). Our conduct is shaped by the ideas with which we feed our minds. If we read disturbing news we get disturbed, and if we read profane books we make ourselves vulnerable to profane temptations. But if we read the Word of God and really enjoy it we find that it encourages us to fear God. How happy is the man who fears the Lord, because fearing the Lord is the basis of happiness for both the father of the house and its individuals. He raises a banner that says, "But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15). The God-fearing father of the house lifts up this prayer: "You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11).
2. **The children of the house:** "His descendants will be mighty on earth; The generation of the upright will be blessed"(verse 2). Since the time when God saw that it was not good that man should be alone, and He made him a helper suitable to him, we find that the Bible emphasizes the importance of the family and the necessity of both parents and children fearing God. The upright God-fearing man is blessed in his house and in his

mighty descendants who are known for their good reputation. The aroma of their piety spreads throughout the earth. The Scriptures say about them, "Who is the man that fears the LORD? Him shall He teach in the way He chooses. He himself shall dwell in prosperity, and his descendants shall inherit the earth" (Psalm 25:12,13). "But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace" (Psalm 37:11). Such a blessing was also given to Abraham: "Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him" (Genesis 18:18,19).

The God-fearing person will also have mighty descendants on earth. These are the spiritual descendants he wins over from the sinful world, like the apostle Paul did when he gave birth to spiritual descendants in the faith. He said to some of them, "I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you. For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me" (1 Corinthians 4:14-16). All those who return to God in repentance will hear: "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19).

3. **The riches of the house (verse 3):**

1. **The material riches:** "Wealth and riches will be in his house"(verse 3a). The Lord blesses the godly person who fears him so that he may lack nothing. Such a man says, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Psalm 23:1). The psalmist said, "Oh, fear the LORD, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him. The young lions lack and suffer hunger; but those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good thing" (Psalm 34:9,10). And he said again, "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 righteous is blessed in his house, descendants and personal piety: "They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth children for trouble; for they shall be the descendants of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them"(Isaiah 65:23).
2. **The spiritual riches:** "...and his righteousness endures forever"(verse 3b). The God-fearing person is rich in righteousness, which is to be blameless before God. Hence he acts justly, giving everyone what they deserve. This righteousness endures forever because it is a gift from the good God to the man who will be justified by faith. Such a man must recognize first that he is a sinner, and cry out, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" (Luke 18:13). He must believe that "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). Then he can say, "Therefore, having been justified by

faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

There are riches of grace in the house of the God-fearing person, so much so that Paul said, "as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (2 Corinthians 6:10). True riches are not material wealth or scientific knowledge. For these two will never be satisfied: a seeker for knowledge and a seeker for money. True riches, however, are the riches of godliness, which are profitable in all things, for it has the promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come (1 Timothy 4:8). How beautiful was Paul's description of Timothy's family when he said, "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). The grandmother lifted up prayers for the daughter, and both grandmother and daughter prayed for Timothy, and thus grandmother, daughter and grandson were all blessed. How happy is the man who can say, "I thank you, Lord, for the faith of my father and mother." If you do not have the chance to say so, you can still begin to be a blessing to your children and grandchildren in this way!

4. **The light of the house:** "Unto the upright there arises light in the darkness; He is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous"(verse 4). God may sometimes permit darkness to surround the righteous, or allow them to walk in darkness. But in the valley of the shadow of death they fear no evil, for the Lord is with them (Psalm 23:4). Christ said, "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). God's light will shine in darkness upon the upright, those who have a right standing with God, and it will be said about them: "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart" (Psalm 97:11). It will be said also, "If you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday" (Isaiah 58:10). Because the light of God "shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it" (John 1:5). In God's light we see light (Psalm 36:9).

As to the source of the light that arises over the believer in the midst of his darkness, it is the Lord's grace, compassion and righteousness. Therefore he says along with his fellow believers, "Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but to Your name give glory, because of Your mercy, because of Your truth" (Psalm 115:1). It is an act of the Lord's mercy that darkness does not alter the faith of the believer; rather it deepens it. When storms blow on a living tree planted by rivers of water, its roots grow even deeper into the earth. When a harsh trial afflicts the believer, it deepens his faith within him. Christ said much the same thing to Peter, "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; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren" (Luke 22:31,32).

5. **The generosity of the house:** "A good man deals graciously and lends"(verse 5a).

Despite the darkness that may surround the believer, he is generous and charitable, because he wants to be like the loving God, because he realizes that all he has is a gift from God. He is not the owner, but a steward entrusted by God to dispense what he has. He should use what he has wisely, sharing mercy, money, knowledge and good advice with those around him. In doing so he obeys the commandment: "If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs" (Deuteronomy 15:7,8). Solomon the wise said, "Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days" (Ecclesiastes 11:1). Isaiah advised, "Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?" (Isaiah 58:7). Christ Himself also commanded, "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you" (Luke 6:38). Paul encourages us to "share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality" (Romans 12:13 NIV).

David gave a generous donation for the building of the Lord's temple, then said, "But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly as this? For all things come from You, and of Your own we have given You" (1 Chronicles 29:14). Think of someone you can help to get back on his feet, so that your own heart may be filled with joy, for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7).

- 6. The discretion of the house:** "He will guide his affairs with discretion"(verse 5b). The God-fearing person who deals graciously and lends mercifully manages all his affairs in business and work with discretion, integrity and justice. He never wrongs anyone just to get rich or accepts a bribe to increase his wealth. Money is a stern master, and once love of money rules the heart corruption sets in. The rich are tempted to wrong the poor and the helpless, although Solomon the wise says, "He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, but he who honors Him has mercy on the needy" (Proverbs 14:31). The rich may also be afflicted with the disease of pride, because they assume that their wealth was a product of their own intelligence. They may make money their god and put their trust in it rather than in God. They may become too miserly to give to the poor, live in fear of losing their wealth, or be given to believe that their friends love them only as long as they can take advantage of them. But fearing God spares the God-fearing person these temptations and grants him victory over them. "Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out"(1 Timothy 6:6,7).

2.2. Second: The Steadfastness of the God-Fearing Person

(verses 6-10)

- 1. The steadfastness of the God-fearing person in this life:** "Surely he will never be shaken"(verse 6a). The God-fearing person is not afraid of injustice, the wicked or the future. He "will never be removed" (Proverbs 10:30) because he obeys the commandment: "Cast your burden on the LORD, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved" (Psalm 55:22). When bad news came to Job, one thing after the other, he did not sin nor charge God with wrong, so the Lord accepted him, restored his losses and gave him twice as much as he had before (Job 42:9,10). The prophetic utterance was fulfilled to him, "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You. Trust in the LORD forever, for in YAH, the LORD, is everlasting strength" (Isaiah 26:3,4).
- 2. The steadfastness of the God-fearing person's memory after his death:** "The righteous will be in everlasting remembrance"(verse 6b). The good memory of the righteous will remain forever with both men and God. The memory of many world leaders has been lost, and many others are only remembered for what they did wrong. The name of the righteous, however, is written in the book of life and his memory is sweet to God and to the heart of the people of his household and the members of his church. Who amongst us can forget David's psalms or Joseph's purity as he refused to sin? Who can forget God's answer to Hezekiah's prayer? Or ignore the apostle Paul's journey to take the good news of Christ to the nations? Who amongst us can forget their own God-fearing mother or righteous father? Truly "The memory of the righteous is blessed, but the name of the wicked will rot" (Proverbs 10:7).
- 3. The steadfastness of the God-fearing person in spite of the evil tidings:** "He will not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD. His heart is established; he will not be afraid, until he sees his desire upon his enemies"(verses 7,8). When one's conscience is set at ease he does not fear evil tidings, but says, "My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast" (Psalm 57:7). "Say to the righteous that it shall be well with them" (Isaiah 3:10). "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). It is like Peter who was sleeping in prison, although he was bound by chains, waiting for his execution the next day (Acts 12:1-11). As to the wicked, he flees when no one pursues (Proverbs 28:1) just like Cain said, "Anyone who finds me will kill me"(Genesis 4:14). It is very true that "The fear of the wicked will come upon him, and the desire of the righteous will be granted" (Proverbs 10:24).

Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who delights greatly in His commandments. He will not be afraid until he sees God's judgment inflicted upon his enemies, for "He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty ...A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you. Only with your eyes shall you look, and see the reward of the wicked"

(Psalm 91:1,7,8).

4. **The steadfastness of the God-fearing person in giving:** "He has dispersed abroad, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever; his horn will be exalted with honor"(verse 9). The God-fearing person is generous and open-handed, for "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). He disperses abroad and gives to the poor, and "There is one who scatters, yet increases more; and there is one who withholds more than is right, but it leads to poverty" (Proverbs 11:24). "He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully" (2 Corinthians 9:6). The apostle Paul quoted what the psalmist says here in Psalm 112 in his second epistle to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 9:9). Paul was talking about the rich churches that helped the poor churches. True believers disperse abroad and give to the poor, so their righteousness endures forever in God's sight and before men. On the Last Day they will hear Christ say, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world ... Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (Matthew 25:34,40). Even if all he has is a dry morsel of bread, the Lord will bless it for the believer who will eat with his family in peace and harmony. The Lord will make it better than a house full of feasting with strife (Proverbs 17:1). Solomon was right as he said, "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a fatted calf with hatred" (Proverbs 15:17).

The Lord rewards the believer who disperses abroad and gives to the poor by making his horn exalted with honour. This figure of speech is borrowed from the horn of an animal that lifts up its head after fighting another animal and defeating it. Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel, lifted up a song to God when He gave her a child after many years of barrenness, during which the other wife of her husband provoked her severely to make her miserable. She said, "My horn is exalted in the LORD" (1 Samuel 2:1). When the believer gives the tenth of his income to the Lord's work and to charity, the Lord lifts up his head.

5. **The steadfastness of the God-fearing person in the face of evil-doers:** "The wicked will see it and be grieved; he will gnash his teeth and melt away; the desire of the wicked shall perish"(verse 10). It is very strange that a man who fears God should have enemies. But unfortunately when God honours the godly, the wicked resents those blessings! But the resentment of the wicked and their gnashing of teeth will harm no one but the wicked himself. He will melt away in rage and grief, while the godly lifts his voice with grateful singing to God, saying with the psalmist, "The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me? The LORD is for me among those who help me; therefore I shall see my desire on those who hate me ... The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation. The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tents of the righteous;

the right hand of the LORD does valiantly" (Psalm 118:6,7,14,15).

In the final verse in the psalm, the psalmist calls the sinner to repentance in that he declares the blessing God bestows upon God-fearing people. They delight in the Lord who shall give them the desires of their hearts, while evildoers shall be cut off (Psalm 37:4,9). "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful ... He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper. The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away" (Psalm 1:1,3,4).

Would you not like to be God-fearing, so that the Lord may bless your life, house, offspring and work? Then "Depart from evil, and do good; and dwell forevermore. For the LORD loves justice, and does not forsake His saints; they are preserved forever, but the descendants of the wicked shall be cut off" (Psalm 37:27,28).

2.3. Questions

1. Explain this statement: "Our conduct is shaped by the thoughts with which we feed our minds."
2. How can you explain verse 3b of this psalm in the light of the statement, "as poor, yet making many rich"(2 Corinthians 6:10)?

3. Psalm Hundred and Thirteen

From the Rising of the Sun to its Going Down

1 Praise the LORD! Praise, O servants of the LORD, praise the name of the LORD!
2 Blessed be the name of the LORD from this time forth and forevermore!
3 From the rising of the sun to its going down the LORD's name is to be praised.
4 The LORD is high above all nations, His glory above the heavens.
5 Who is like the LORD our God, Who dwells on high,
6 Who humbles Himself to behold the things that are in the heavens and in the earth?
7 He raises the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the ash heap,
8 That He may seat him with princes— With the princes of His people.
9 He grants the barren woman a home, like a joyful mother of children. Praise the LORD!

Psalms 113 through 118 are known as "Psalms of Egyptian Hallel". This links them to the

song the Israelites lifted up at the time of the Exodus when God set them free from the captivity of Pharaoh, and sets them apart from the psalms of "Great Hallel" (Psalms 120-134), known also as "the Songs of Ascents". The Jews used to sing psalms of the "Great Hallel" on three of their feasts: the Passover, Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles. They also sang them at the beginning of every lunar month (except the first month of the year).

Passover was the greatest feast (Deuteronomy 16:1-6), because it was a memorial of the Israelites' deliverance from the bondage of Pharaoh and the Exodus out of Egypt. They used to sing Psalms 113 and 114 before having the Passover meal. Then after the meal they would sing Psalms 115 to 118.

Pentecost, or the Feast of Weeks, came fifty days after the Passover, and it served as an expression of thanksgiving for the harvest (Exodus 34:22).

The Feast of Tabernacles was the last major annual feast (Deuteronomy 16:16). During that feast the children of Israel used to live in huts made of tree branches, as a memorial to their living in the desert for forty years (Leviticus 23:43). The Church chose Psalm 113, 114 and 118 to be sung on the evening before Easter, because this feast replaced the three Jewish feasts, Passover, Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles.

If you remember the story of the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt, after Pharaoh had humiliated them severely, you will be amazed at the miracles that took place. The firstborn of the Egyptians were destroyed and the firstborn of the Israelites were spared, because the destroying angel passed over the houses on whose doors he saw the blood of the Passover lamb. Another amazing fact is that God fed a whole nation on manna and quail for forty years in the desert and provided them with water from the rock. The Exodus was a confrontation between the true God, the invisible "Jehovah", and the gods of the Egyptians, such as Apis, the Nile, etc... The Lord adopted a group of underdogs to save them from the tyranny of the most powerful ruler of the greatest empire at the time. It was expected that the superpower should crush the weaker, harmless nation. But the Lord saved the weaker nation and parted the Red Sea for them. In our amazement of the divine miracles we say, "Praise the LORD! Praise, O servants of the LORD, praise the name of the LORD! ... For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name ... If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Psalm 113:1; Luke 1:49; Romans 8:31). Truly, "Among the gods there is none like You, O Lord; nor are there any works like Your works... For You are great, and do wondrous things; You alone are God" (Psalm 86:8,10).

As for us today, even if we are of little significance or in a minority, we still have Christ's promise: "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). The living God still works miracles in our day. Perhaps you have not experienced a miracle like that of the Exodus in its magnitude, but you must have prayed for something, and then the Lord opened up a way of salvation that you had not seen. He

might have protected you from an oppressive power from which you could not deliver yourself. There are also miracles that the good Lord performed for you when he rescued you from dangers you could not see or feel, so that you cannot even thank Him for removing them. But once you know them, you will recognize how greatly He works for you. You will join the psalmist in a psalm of thanksgiving and praise to the wonder-working God, saying, "When the LORD brought back the captivity of Zion, we were like those who dream... The LORD has done great things for us, and we are glad" (Psalm 126:1,3).

Everyone who receives the new life in Christ will share the joy of the children of Israel as they crossed the Red Sea, because the new life is a crossing from bondage to freedom, from death to life, and from darkness to light. And those who were born again will say, "though I was blind, now I see" (John 9:25), and shout out loud, "Praise the LORD! Praise, O servants of the LORD, praise the name of the LORD!"

The psalm contains the following:

- First: A general call to praise the Lord (verses 1-3)
- Second: Praising the Lord for the greatness of His character (verses 4,5)
- Third: Praising the Lord for the greatness of His work (verses 6-9)

3.1. First: A General Call to Praise the Lord

(verses 1-3)

1. **The servants of the Lord praise the Lord:** "Praise the LORD! Praise, O servants of the LORD, praise the name of the LORD!"(verse 1). The psalmist calls his hearers to praise the Lord because they are His devoted, faithful servants, to whom the Lord says, "But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the descendants of Abraham My friend. You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest regions, and said to you, 'You are My servant, I have chosen you and have not cast you away'" (Isaiah 41:8,9). The believers are the servants of the Lord because He bought their souls and all that they possess. A servant or a slave used to be purchased with money, but the believers were purchased by Christ, not with gold or silver, "but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:19). By means of this purchase we became His own property, thus we begin to call to Him, submit to His directions and praise His name.

All creation belongs to the Lord who brought it into being, perfected it and sustained it. So, what can a servant offer to his Creator and Master but continual praise, for angels sing to Him, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isaiah 6:3). "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork ... You shall go out with joy, and be led out with peace; the mountains and the

hills shall break forth into singing before you, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands" (Psalm 19:1; Isaiah 55:12). "Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name" (Hebrews 13:15).

True believers cherish the title "servant of the Lord". It was the title given to Moses 18 times in the Old Testament (starting in Deuteronomy 34:5 and ending in 2 Chronicles 24:6,9). It was also the title of Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' successor (Joshua 24:29; Judges 2:8), as well as the title of Elijah the prophet who said to the Lord, "I am Your servant" (1 Kings 18:36). This was the title given by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, to the three young men whom he cast into a fiery furnace because they obeyed God rather than himself (Daniel 3:26). Even Mary, the mother of Jesus, used that title when the angel Gabriel gave her the good news of giving birth to the Saviour Messiah: "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." (Luke 1:38). It is a title that Paul held dear and almost always used in the introduction of his epistles. He wrote in Romans 1:1, "Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ" and in Titus 1:1, "Paul, a bondservant of God." He did not forget that he fell facedown before Christ's light, saying, "What shall I do, Lord?" (Acts 22:10). Both Peter and Jude cherished that title and used it to identify themselves in 2 Peter 1:1 and Jude 1:1 respectively.

When we disobey the Lord and take control of our life's rudder, we grow weary and find out that we have made a big mistake. We cry out to Jesus to be the King, the One who has control over our lives. We learn the lesson Jonah learned in the belly of the fish, as he headed in the direction opposite to where God wanted him to go. Instead of heading for the Iraqi Nineveh to the north-east, he headed for the Spanish Tarshish in the far west. He boarded a ship bound there, but a strong storm blew over the ship and threatened to sink it, endangering the passengers, the cargo and Jonah himself. Only when they threw him overboard were they saved. Then the fish swallowed Jonah and took him where God wanted him to be, back to the starting point (Jonah 1:3,17; 2:10). As Jonah obeyed God's command, God blessed him and the people of Nineveh through his preaching. As a result, the whole city repented and sat in sackcloth and ashes. Let us remember that we are God's servants, that we have no right to go anywhere other than where He wants us to go. Let our prayer be: "Make me Your servant, for then I will be free. Force me to give up my sword to You, for then I will be victorious. To reach the throne I must cast down my crown at Your feet, and to stand erect with my head lifted up I must bow down before You." Then we will praise God because we will be the servants of the Lord.

- 2. Praising the Lord through all ages:** "Blessed be the name of the LORD From this time forth and forevermore!"(verse 2). The name of the Lord is blessed everywhere and at all times. He is called, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name" (Matthew 6:9). Because people have gone far away from God, we sometimes believe, as Elijah did, that there is no one left to worship the Lord but us. But the Lord encourages us the way he did

Elijah and says, "I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him" (1 Kings 19:18). The apostle Peter said to the household of Cornelius, "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all—" (Acts 10:34-36). He is in truth Lord of all those who get to know Him as Saviour, those who say, "But we will bless the LORD from this time forth and forevermore. Praise the LORD!" (Psalm 115:18).

- 3. Praising the Lord everywhere:** "From the rising of the sun to its going down the LORD's name is to be praised"(verse 3). The name of the Lord is always praised everywhere, from East to West. The sun sets in one some place only to rise in another somewhere else on the earth. Everywhere that the sun rises or sets there is someone who praises and glorifies the Lord, because in that place He has a faithful people, of whom He says, "From the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; in every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering; for My name shall be great among the nations" (Malachi 1:11). Again He says, "Then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, that they all may call on the name of the LORD, to serve Him with one accord" (Zephaniah 3:9).

3.2. Second: Praising the Lord for the Greatness of His Character

(verses 4,5)

- 1. The greatness of the Lord owing to His exalted nature:** "The LORD is high above all nations, His glory above the heavens"(verse 4). "The LORD Most High is awesome; He is a great King over all the earth ... The LORD reigns; let the peoples tremble! He dwells between the cherubim; let the earth be moved! The LORD is great in Zion, and He is high above all the peoples. Let them praise Your great and awesome name— He is holy" (Psalms 47:2; 99:1-3). Solomon built a great temple for the Lord; it was a marvel of grandeur for Solomon and his people. But in his prayer at the temple's dedication he wondered in humility, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27). Solomon's temple was not small, but it was nothing compared to the Lord's greatness. Therefore all creation lifts up its song to Him and says, "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created"(Revelation 4:11). The redeemed creation will also shout and say, "Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!" (Revelation 5:13).
- 2. The greatness of the Lord owing to His uniqueness:** "Who is like the LORD our God, Who dwells on high"(verse 5). Moses and the children of Israel chanted this song to Him after the Exodus: "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 after crossing the Sinai desert, "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). The prophet Isaiah wondered, "To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him?" (Isaiah 40:18). Indeed, is the creature equal to the Creator? Is there any similarity between perfection and imperfection, or between strength and weakness? Is the generous rich person the same as the poor person who receives charity? God is characterized by perfect love; for "God is love" (1 John 4:8,16). He is indeed the Almighty, the Holy One and the absolute Truth. In His love He looks after His creation, be it flowers, birds or human beings. The very hairs of our heads are all numbered by Him (Matthew 10:30). Christ said that two sparrows were sold for a copper coin and five sparrows were sold for two copper coins, but the sparrow that was missed by the seller was not missed by God! Then He added, "You are of more value than many sparrows" (Luke 12:7).

God's greatness appears in the fact that He transforms the sinner to make a new man out of him. The prophet Jeremiah wondered, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots?" (Jeremiah 13:23). The answer is No. But in Christ the depraved man becomes a saint, because God creates a new man out of him. He transformed Zacchaeus, the tax-collector, from an unjust dealer to a man of generosity. He changed the Samaritan woman from a sinner with five husbands, who was living with a man out of wedlock at the time, so that after she had repented she became an evangelist to her fellow villagers. This is the Lord our God, who dwells on high, who came down to us in His love in Christ the Word.

3.3. Third: Praising the Lord for the Greatness of His Work

(verses 6-9)

1. **The Lord beholds things below:** "Who humbles Himself to behold the things that are in the heavens and in the earth?" (verse 6). For the Lord even the heavens are far below Him, not to mention the earth. He is the Creator of all things whether in heaven or on earth, yet He humbles Himself to meet the needs of the needy, deliver the oppressed and save sinners from their sins and troubles. The Lord looked into Pharaoh's prison and saw the righteous Joseph imprisoned for his purity. The Scriptures say about him, "They hurt his feet with fetters, he was laid in irons ... The king sent and released him, the ruler of the people let him go free. He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his possessions, to bind his princes at his pleasure, and teach his elders wisdom" (Psalm 105:18-22). The Lord humbled Himself to behold the lower regions of the prison of sin that Augustine made when he indulged in impure sexual relations. But God created out of him Saint Augustine, the bishop and expositor of the divine Word. God is still the Father, the Shepherd and the Guardian. For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous. And His ears

are open to their cry (Psalm 34:15), because "For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him"(2 Chronicles 16:9).

2. **The Lord raises the poor:** "He raises the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the ash heap, that He may seat him with princes— with the princes of His people"(verses 7,8). The Lord chose Gideon who was threshing wheat in the winepress, in order to hide it from the invading Midianites (Judges 6:11,14). He chose Saul the Benjaminite who was looking for the lost donkeys of his father (1 Samuel 9:3). And "He also chose David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the ewes that had young He brought him, to shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance. So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands" (Psalm 78:70-72). The blessed Virgin sang, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed ... He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly" (Luke 1:46-48,52). Christ chose a few fishermen to make disciples out of them, and to make them fishers of men (Matthew 4:19). The apostle Paul said, "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, that no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Corinthians 1:27-29). You may compare the condition of the prodigal son when he was far away from his father's house and did not even have pig food, with his condition after he returned to his father's house. A big celebration was held in his honour, in which the fattened calf was slaughtered, and he was given a pair of shoes to wear as a sign of sovereignty and a ring to put round his finger because his father's full trust in him was restored (Luke 15:22). In this way God replaces poverty with riches, disgrace with honour, the last row with the place of prominence, sadness with joy, the bondage of sin with the liberty of the glory of the sons of God, and blindness with spiritual sight. The greatest work of all was when Christ descended into the lower parts of the earth that He might fill all things. He gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists and some pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:9-11).
3. **The Lord gives to those who are deprived:** "He grants the barren woman a home, like a joyful mother of children. Praise the LORD!"(verse 9). Maybe the psalmist had Sarah, Abraham's wife, in mind. She had lost hope in giving her husband a child at the age of ninety. So she suggested that he marry her servant Hagar so that God's promise to Abraham could be fulfilled, that he could become the father of many nations. But the Lord performed the miracle with Sarah, and told her she would have a son. The promise was so strange that Sarah laughed and thought it impossible by human means. But God's true promise was fulfilled, and Sarah gave birth to Isaac (whose name means "laughter").

And Isaac was the father of Jacob, the father of the tribes of Israel.

Hannah, Elkanah's wife, was humiliated by her adversary Peninnah, because Peninnah had children while Hannah was barren. So Hannah went to the temple and complained to God of the bitterness of her soul in such a lengthy prayer that the high priest thought she was drunk. God answered her request and granted her Samuel, of whom she later said, "For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition which I asked of Him" (1 Samuel 1:27). Afterward, God made him a great leader of his people.

The Scriptures describe the Church in a spiritual sense as a mother giving birth to believers who love and obey God. A long time may pass till we see people returning to God in repentance, so we begin to pray and implore God to bring people back to Himself. As a result, believing children get born to the Church, and the old believers who have never won someone to repentance become spiritual parents. Thus the prophecy is fulfilled: "'Sing, O barren, you who have not borne! Break forth into singing, and cry aloud, you who have not labored with child! For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married woman,' says the LORD. 'Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; do not spare; lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes. For you shall expand to the right and to the left, and your descendants will inherit the nations, and make the desolate cities inhabited'" (Isaiah 54:1-3). Let us lift up our eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! Let us go out as labourers in the Lord's vineyard, calling people to repentance, so that every believer may become a spiritual mother who is overjoyed at her blessing. For then we will shout aloud the conclusion of our psalm, just as we started it: "Hallelujah." Praise the Lord!

3.4. Questions

1. Give the names of four persons who were proud to be called "servants of God".
2. Explain how God sees things below.

4. Psalm Hundred and Fourteen

The Exodus that Moved Nature

- 1 When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language,**
- 2 Judah became His sanctuary, and Israel His dominion.**
- 3 The sea saw it and fled; Jordan turned back.**
- 4 The mountains skipped like rams, the little hills like lambs.**
- 5 What ails you, O sea, that you fled? O Jordan, that you turned back?**
- 6 O mountains, that you skipped like rams? O little hills, like lambs?**

7 Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob,

8 Who turned the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a fountain of waters.

This is the second psalm of the six Egyptian Hallel (Psalms 113-118), which express the praise of the Israelites when the Lord brought them out of the land of Egypt. In the previous psalm we heard the psalmist talking of the Lord God "humbles Himself to behold" the poor and the needy. This psalm, however, proclaims God's power that saved those poor and needy people, because such power serves His active love. Our psalm depicts nature as though it were moved out of fear and trembling at the glory of the Lord who leads His people, saying to them, "Trust in the LORD forever, for in YAH, the LORD, is everlasting strength" (Isaiah 26:4).

The early Church used to sing this psalm as praise to God on Easter, because it expresses resurrection from the grave and death, for the children of Israel were dead in the grave of their slavery, torture and indignity. The Lord raised them up from their grave and set them free. This is what happens also in the New Testament by virtue of Christ's resurrection, who, having been crucified, buried and raised from the dead, became firstborn among many brethren (Romans 8:29). Through His own resurrection He granted the hope and promise of the resurrection from the grave of their sin to all those who believe in Him as Lord and Redeemer, according to His Word: "Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live" (John 5:25).

The miracle of Exodus is repeated in our lives both individually and corporately, just as the Lord repeated it with His people when He brought them back from seventy years of exile in Babylon. The exile was a second grave for the Israelites, after the grave of Egypt's slavery. The Lord brought them out of their exile after they tasted the bitterness of the temple's destruction, the cessation of worship, the humiliation of silence and refraining from singing the Lord's song in a foreign land (Psalm 137:4). The Lord still works new "Exodus" miracles for the souls of the believers, to bring them out of their exile in sickness, poverty and trouble. In response, they sing this psalm with thanksgiving and praise.

The psalm includes the following:

- First: The Lord brings His people out of Egypt (verses 1,2)
- Second: The miracles that accompanied the Exodus (verses 3-6)
- Third: The repetition of the miracles of the Exodus (verses 7,8)

4.1. First: The Lord Brings His People out of Egypt (verses 1,2)

1. **He brought them out:** "When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language"(verse 1). The Exodus of the Israelites out of Egypt makes every believer proud of the Lord's miraculous deeds for His own people. Equally, it is an object of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord who promised and will fulfil His promise. He remains faithful and cannot deny Himself. The Israelites were given an honourable reception when they first came to Egypt by Joseph's Pharaoh, and left it honourably after the defeat of Pharaoh of Exodus. Both in coming and going, God honoured His people! This is the experience of every believer who loves the Lord. God created man in His image, according to His likeness. Man was modelled after the Merciful One, and was given great authority and position by Him. But when man sinned, he came under God's just judgment. Therefore Christ came to restore everyone who believes in Him as Lord and Redeemer to his former life, through the second birth. For "just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—... much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:12,17).

Egypt was a land of bondage that did not know the Lord; it used a strange language in speech and worship and it worshipped foreign gods. But the Lord rescued His people from the scribe who recorded the names of slaves, from the tax-collector who received the taxes and from the architects who designed the towers that were built by slave labour. The prophet Isaiah said, "Your heart will meditate on terror: 'Where is the scribe? Where is he who weighs? Where is he who counts the towers?' You will not see a fierce people, a people of obscure speech, beyond perception, of a stammering tongue that you cannot understand" (Isaiah 33:18,19).

2. **He dwelt among them:** "Judah became His sanctuary, and Israel His dominion"(verse 2). The Lord brought His people out of the land of bondage and dwelt amongst them. He made them His sanctuary, the object of His attention, care and dominion. He commanded Moses to prepare a tabernacle where He could meet His people to reveal His will to them (Numbers 17:4). The tabernacle was also called "sanctuary", where He dwelt among His people (Exodus 25:8). The tent was in the middle of the camp of the children of Israel, according to the order explained in the Book of Numbers chapter 2. God's holiness was then revealed to them there through the ceremonies of worship that they practiced, as well as His holy presence. His grace was also confirmed, because being holy He humbled Himself to dwell among them so that they could love and worship Him. Every believer says about Him, "the God to whom I belong and whom I serve" (Acts 27:23). The psalmist did not settle for speaking only about the tent, but went on to consider the whole nation as a dwelling-place for the Lord. In doing so he was repeating what God had told them already, "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the

earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:4-6). Thus they became His sanctuary, namely His holy temple in which He glorified Himself, and it could be said about them, "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

4.2. Second: The Miracles that Accompanied the Exodus

(verses 3-6)

The Exodus out of Egypt was accompanied by miracles. The Egyptians were terrified in spite of their wisdom, and nature was terrified in spite of its might, so that they surrendered and declared their submission to the master of creation.

1. **Barriers fell:** "The sea saw it and fled; Jordan turned back"(verse 3). "The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace...Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night ... So the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry ground, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left" (Exodus 14:14,21,22). "The clouds poured out water; the skies sent out a sound; Your arrows also flashed about"(Psalm 77:17). "You divided the earth with rivers. The mountains saw You and trembled; the overflowing of the water passed by. The deep uttered its voice, and lifted its hands on high" (Habakkuk 3:9,10). When they tried to walk in the path the Lord created between the waves, the water closed up on the Egyptians, sinking them together with their chariots into the sea that God used to deliver His people. "When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD will lift up a standard against him" (Isaiah 59:19).

The psalmist mentions another incident when the water fled before the people of the Lord, on the day they crossed the Jordan under the leadership of Joshua. The Lord said to him, "'And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, that the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off, the waters that come down from upstream, and they shall stand as a heap' ... So the waters that went down into the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, failed, and were cut off; and the people crossed over opposite Jericho" (Joshua 3:13-17).

2. **Difficulties yielded:** "The mountains skipped like rams, the little hills like lambs"(verse 4). When God gave the Law to Moses "Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire ... and the whole mountain quaked greatly" (Exodus 19:18). "The mountains gushed before the LORD, this Sinai, before the LORD God of Israel" (Judges 5:5). Today, the haughty sinner stands in panic at the Lord's voice pronouncing judgment on the sinners. He will never rest nor have peace until he takes shelter in the atonement of Christ, the great sacrifice. God's Law condemns the sinner to

death. Yet, at the same time, it directs him to the way of salvation through redemption, which God provided in the cross, for without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins. Whoever takes shelter in the redeeming Christ can sing, "Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea"(Psalm 46:2).

- 3. The spectators were amazed:** "What ails you, O sea, that you fled? O Jordan, that you turned back? O mountains, that you skipped like rams? O little hills, like lambs?"(verses 5,6). When the psalmist wrote this psalm by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he felt as though he was transported by the Spirit to the time of the Exodus and stood among the survivors, viewing the work of the Lord set before him. So he asked the Red Sea and the Jordan River why they retreated before the people of God, and Mount Sinai together with the mountains surrounding it why they skipped like rams and lambs. He expressed his surprise at the speed with which nature obeyed and submitted to the command of the Lord, in contrast to Pharaoh and his people's disobedience! These unshakable mountains were shaken. Nowadays we still see the shaking of both physical and moral constants, on which we rest our lives. One such shaky constant is money and its purchasing power, which teaches us the lesson: "Do not trust in oppression, nor vainly hope in robbery; if riches increase, do not set your heart on them" (Psalm 62:10). Another is health, which totters at the attack of disease, just as it was with Job who said, "My bone clings to my skin and to my flesh, and I have escaped by the skin of my teeth" (Job 19:20). Friends are yet another shakeable constant of whom Paul said, "At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me" (2 Timothy 4:16,17). The same can apply to the family. They may desert you through betrayal or death, as Ruth expressed it, "...if anything but death parts you and me" (Ruth 1:17). All these flee or come to an end, and only God's faithfulness, love and care remain for us. These only are constant. Thus we can say to difficulty, "Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain!" (Zechariah 4:7).

4.3. Third: The Repetition of the Miracles of the Exodus

(verses 7,8)

- 1. The difficulties will yield:** "Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob"(verse 7). If the sea fled and mountains skipped like rams, why does not the earth tremble at the presence of the Lord, the Master over all the earth? "His lightnings light the world; the earth sees and trembles. The mountains melt like wax at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth. The heavens declare His righteousness, and all the peoples see His glory" (Psalm 97:4-6). "[His] voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, 'Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.' Now this, 'Yet once more,' indicates the removal of those

things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:26-29). The Master over all the earth is "the God of Jacob," "the God of the covenant" who reserved His revelations, mercies and promises to Jacob, the father of the tribes. He is the God of the covenant who did not deal with Jacob according to his works, but according to the abundance of His own love, which changed Jacob, turning him who was born second into someone who struggled with God. He is also the God of the New Testament who met the needs of the wedding in Cana of Galilee, granted Nicodemus a new birth, made the Samaritan woman repent, restored the lame man of Bethesda to health, provided bread for the hungry multitudes and opened the eyes of the man born blind. He is the light of the world, the Good Shepherd who protects His flock, and the Creator who raised Lazarus from the dead. Every time we partake of the Lord's Supper we hear the precious words, "This is My blood of the new] covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28). This God of the covenant is at work in nature and in the hearts of men. "I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well" (Psalm 139:14).

2. **The thirsty will be satisfied:** "Who turned the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a fountain of waters"(verse 8). He is the God of Providence. He brought His people out of bondage, walked with them in an arid desert for forty years, during which He filled them with manna and quail. When they murmured at the lack of water, He ordered Moses in the Wilderness of Sin to strike the rock to bring forth water to satisfy the people. "Moses did so ... So he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the contention of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, 'Is the LORD among us or not?'" (Exodus 17:6,7). But they soon forgot the Lord's deed, argued with Moses in the Wilderness of Zin for water. So he struck the rock. "Water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank.... This was the water of Meribah, because the children of Israel contended with the LORD, and He was hallowed among them" (Numbers 20:11,13).

With this great, good God all barriers of opposition fall down, and thirsty souls get satisfied, because with Him everything is possible. But without Him we can do nothing. So let us ask Him with hope, pray without ceasing and expect with patience, for He turns want into abundance. He will hasten it in its time, in His wise ways and merciful heart. "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:31,33).

4.4. Questions

1. Why did the early church sing this psalm at Easter time?
2. Name the three miracles that accompanied the Exodus.

5. Psalm Hundred and Fifteen

Not unto Us

1 Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but to Your name give glory, because of Your mercy, because of Your truth.

2 Why should the Gentiles say, "So where is their God?"

3 But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases.

4 Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands.

5 They have mouths, but they do not speak; eyes they have, but they do not see;

6 They have ears, but they do not hear; noses they have, but they do not smell;

7 They have hands, but they do not handle; feet they have, but they do not walk; nor do they mutter through their throat.

8 Those who make them are like them; so is everyone who trusts in them.

9 O Israel, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield.

10 O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield.

11 You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield.

12 The LORD has been mindful of us; He will bless us; He will bless the house of Israel; He will bless the house of Aaron.

13 He will bless those who fear the LORD, both small and great.

14 May the LORD give you increase more and more, you and your children.

15 May you be blessed by the LORD, Who made heaven and earth.

16 The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD's; but the earth He has given to the children of men.

17 The dead do not praise the LORD, nor any who go down into silence.

18 But we will bless the LORD from this time forth and forevermore. Praise the LORD!

This is the third psalm of the six "Egyptian Hallel". We saw in the first one (Psalm 113) God's humility and love for his lowly creatures, and in the second (Psalm 114) God's power working in the service of His love, and shaking the mountains and making the sea draw back. In this psalm we see that all these miracles have nothing to do with any goodness in us or the righteousness of our deeds. They are rather because of His name's sake, for He "leads me in

the paths of righteousness for His name's sake" (Psalm 23:3). This psalm resembles the last psalm of the Egyptian Hallel in that both make up a wonderful song of praise that describe the Lord's deliverance. The reader may review the introduction to the psalms of the "Egyptian Hallel" (Psalm 113, pg. 42) as an introduction to this psalm.

Our psalm sheds light upon the Lord's greatness as opposed to the uselessness of idols. It is a liturgical exchange in which the choir begins by singing verses 1-8, and from that point on the priest and the people take turns singing until the end of the psalm. This type of psalm was described by Nehemiah in this way, "The two thanksgiving choirs stood in the house of God, likewise I and the half of the rulers with me" (Nehemiah 12:40).

The psalm includes the following:

- First: A petition to glorify the name of Lord (verses 1-3)
- Second: Contrast between the Lord and idols (verses 4-8)
- Third: An exhortation to trust in the Lord (verses 9-11)
- Fourth: The blessing of trusting in the Lord (verses 12-18)

5.1. First: A Petition to Glorify the Name of Lord

(verses 1-3)

1. **His name is to be glorified in honour of His character:** "Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but to Your name give glory"(verse 1a). With all humility the choir begins to sing this psalm, asking the Lord to glorify His own name, because they are not worthy to ask this request of Him. They are not asking for themselves, but rather ask Him to glorify His name through the deliverance of His people, for he who persecutes them persecutes Him (Acts 9:4), and he who touches them touches the apple of His eye (Zechariah 2:8). This was Daniel's prayer: "O my God, incline Your ear and hear; open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the city which is called by Your name; for we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies. O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by Your name" (Daniel 9:18,19). The Lord answers, "Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name's sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went. And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the LORD," says the Lord GOD, "when I am hallowed in you before their eyes"" (Ezekiel 36:22,23). "For My name's sake I will defer My anger, and for My praise I will restrain it from you, so that I do not cut you off. For My own sake, for My own sake, I will do it; for how should My name be profaned?"

And I will not give My glory to another"(Isaiah 48:9,11).

The faithful believer lifts up his prayer to the Lord in Christ's name, because He accepts us on the ground of His salvation on the cross, and because through His intercession we wait for an answer. "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:1,2).

2. **His name is to be glorified in honour of His mercy and truth:** "Because of Your mercy, because of Your truth"(verse 1b). The singers go on to say to the Lord that if He does not intervene to deliver them, the heathen (as well as those who are weak in the faith) will assume the He did not show mercy on His people, nor fulfil what He had promised them. Yet such a claim cannot be reconciled with the Scripture: "And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth'" (Exodus 34:6). Therefore Moses said to the people, "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 called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him one promise, which He fulfilled in his mercy and truth. As for us, the New Testament believers, He has called us by His glory and virtue, granting us greater and more precious promises, through which we may be partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:3,4). How happy we are with His name by which we have been called and His promises given us in Christ our Redeemer.

3. **His name is to be glorified so that the heathen may be shamed:** "Why should the Gentiles say, 'So where is their God?'"(verse 2). The singers go on to request the name of the Lord to be glorified so that the heathen may not ask them, "Where is your God?" All the Lord's works are great, revealed and seen in creation, nature, providence and above all in redemption. But God is an invisible Spirit, therefore the heathen ask the people of the Lord, "Where is your God?" When the people of the Lord cry out and do not get an immediate answer, the heathen ask them further, "If your God is there, why does He not intervene on your behalf and save you?" One psalmist once cried out in the dejection of his soul, "My tears have been my food day and night, while they continually say to me, 'Where is your God?' ... Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God" (Psalm 42:3,11).
4. **His name is to be glorified to show His power:** "But our God is in heaven; He does

whatever He pleases"(verse 3). With this verse the singers answer the question of the heathen. Their God dwells in heaven, sees all their persecutors and hears their prayers. He is our Father in heaven, at work on earth, and does as He pleases. "He made the Pleiades and Orion; He turns the shadow of death into morning and makes the day dark as night; He calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the face of the earth; the LORD is His name" (Amos 5:8). If the heathen think He deserted His people simply because they are troubled, let them know that He is the living Saviour and that all the troubles His children go through are by His permission. Let the children say, "Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; when I fall, I will arise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me. I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against Him, until He pleads my case and executes justice for me. He will bring me forth to the light; I will see His righteousness" (Micah 7:8,9), and "Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it"(Hebrews 12:11).

5.2. Second: Contrast between the Lord and Idols

(verses 4-8)

1. **Idols are lifeless:** "Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak; eyes they have, but they do not see; They have ears, but they do not hear; noses they have, but they do not smell; They have hands, but they do not handle; feet they have, but they do not walk"(verses 4-7). These verses were quoted in Psalm 135:15-18. They are an extension to the choir's song, in which they answer the heathen who asked them, "What profit is the image, that its maker should carve it, the molded image, a teacher of lies, that the maker of its mold should trust in it, to make mute idols? Woe to him who says to wood, 'Awake!' to silent stone, 'Arise! It shall teach!' Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, yet in it there is no breath at all. But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him" (Habakkuk 2:18-20). They "have cast their gods into the fire; for they were not gods, but the work of men's hands—wood and stone. Therefore they destroyed them. 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 37:19,20). As to the Lord, Job says to Him, "Your hands have made me and fashioned me ... Did You not pour me out like milk, and curdle me like cheese... You have granted me life and favor, and Your care has preserved my spirit" (Job 10:8,10,12). Idols have mouths but they do not speak, but the Lord speaks through inspiration in the Bible and whispers words of love, counsel and peace in our hearts, deep within us, for "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds" (Hebrews 1:1,2).

Sadly, even today we still see people making idols to worship. Although these idols are

different in form from those the ancients tried to make, yet they are similar in their qualities. How many people worship the idols of knowledge, money, social status, sports, sex and drugs! These things are most important in their lives, and they turn away from worshipping the one true God, because "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21).

2. **Idol-worshippers are lifeless:** "Those who make them are like them; so is everyone who trusts in them"(verse 8). Worshippers resemble their deaf, dumb and blind idols. Although the breath of the Almighty gave them life to know and worship Him and to live for Him so that they may have life eternal, they walked after vanity and their hearts were darkened. "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4 NIV). Being past feeling, they no longer responded to the Lord's voice, thus condemning themselves to destruction. "For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live"(1 Corinthians 8:5,6).

5.3. Third: An Exhortation to Trust in the Lord

(verses 9-11)

In these verses the choir director asks all social classes of his nation three times to trust in the Lord. The choir answers him that the Lord is their help and their shield, representing all different classes of the nation. A shield used to be made of wood covered with skin and the carrier used it to ward off the arrows of the enemy.

1. **The call to the children of Israel:** "O Israel, trust in the LORD"(verse 9a). This call is extended by the choir director. Trusting in the Lord means having confidence in His power that raises up, carries and delivers. He is the One who said, "Listen to Me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been upheld by Me from birth, who have been carried from the womb: Even to your old age, I am He, and even to gray hairs I will carry you! I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you" (Isaiah 46:3,4). Trust also means complete submission and surrender to the good will of the Lord, that He will perform it. "Cast your burden on the LORD, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved" (Psalm 55:22).

The choir replies to the director, "He is their help and their shield" (verse 9b). "So we may boldly say: 'The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?'" (Hebrews 13:6).

2. **The call to the priests:** "O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD"(verse 10a). This call came from the director. The choir answers the director, "He is their help and their shield" (verse 10b).

- 3. The call to the God-fearers:** "You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD"(verse 11a). The director calls everyone who fears the Lord, from every tribe, tongue, nation and people, whose hearts have been enlightened by the Lord, those who knew Him and followed Him, to trust in Him for He "accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right" (Acts 10:35 NIV).

The choir answers the director, "He is their help and their shield" (verse 11b).

5.4. Fourth: The Blessing of Trusting in the Lord (verses 12-18)

In verses 12 and 13 the choir continues to sing their reply to the choir director.

- 1. The Lord is mindful of those who trust in Him:** "The LORD has been mindful of us; He will bless us"(verse 12a). He is Lord of the heavens, who is mindful of His creatures and looks after them. He does not even forget a sparrow that falls to the ground (Matthew 10:29). "For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways" (Psalm 91:11). "Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; For YAH, the LORD, is my strength and song; He also has become my salvation" (Isaiah 12:2). The God-fearing people may think in times of adversity that God has forgotten them, but He encourages them with the promises: "Can a woman forget her nursing child ... Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me" (Isaiah 49:14-16).

The Lord is mindful of man in his sinful state. He is eager to bring him to repentance, reminding him of the precious and great promises which He will fulfil for him. He is mindful of him in his material needs and blesses him. He is mindful of him in his sickness, so He heals him, saying, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me"(Revelation 3:20). The God-fearers will shout, "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits" (Psalm 103:2).

- 2. The Lord blesses those who trust in Him:** "He will bless the house of Israel; He will bless the house of Aaron. He will bless those who fear the LORD, both small and great"(verses 12b,13). The choir sang a reply to the director that God is mindful of all those who trust in Him. They sing that He blesses them with His blessing, which makes one rich, and He adds no sorrow with it (Proverbs 10:22). He blessed Abraham when he obeyed and made him a blessing (Genesis 12:2,3). And He blesses the believing descendants of Abraham from every race and people. He blesses those who fear the Lord, those who are small, young in age or in the faith. He blessed the repentant thief who called out to Him, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom" (Luke 23:42). He also blesses those who are great and advanced in age, those who spent a long life of intimacy, love and worship with Him. He blessed Simeon the elder and Anna the

prophetess who were awaiting the salvation of the Lord in the birth of Christ, and saw it with their own eyes (Luke 2). "Blessed is every one who fears the LORD, who walks in His ways ... You shall be happy, and it shall be well with you. Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine ... Your children like olive plants all around your table ... Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD"(Psalm 128).

3. **The Lord increases His blessing to those who trust in Him more and more:** "May the LORD give you increase more and more, you and your children. May you be blessed by the LORD, who made heaven and earth"(verses 14,15). These two verses are sung by the choir director. He gives them as an answer to the choir's statement that God is mindful and will bless. He says to the choir that the Lord will increase His blessing to them by increasing their number and bestowing upon them an abundance of blessings. The Lord fulfilled His promise to Abraham that his descendants will be as numerous as the sand on the seashore and the stars in the skies. As they came to Egypt following Joseph's invitation, the Israelites were only a small number. But as they left it, they were a large multitude. He had blessed them with all care and tenderness, as Moses said, "The LORD your God has multiplied you, and here you are today, as the stars of heaven in multitude. May the LORD God of your fathers make you a thousand times more numerous than you are, and bless you as He has promised you!" (Deuteronomy 1:10,11). The choir director asks the Lord to bless the members of his own generation, giving them one blessing after another and grace after grace, that they may be the Lord's own people and that their own offspring may be blessed and also become the Lord's people. As a result all of them will hold this motto: "But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15). "Their descendants shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people. All who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the posterity whom the LORD has blessed"(Isaiah 61:9), just as Timothy's faith was described as genuine faith, which dwelt first in his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5).

"May you be blessed by the LORD."The blessing of the Lord who created heaven and earth comes upon all those who fear Him. He gives them the treasures of heaven and earth, that they may praise Him and be blessed by Him and for Him. He makes them the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that their light may so shine before men, so that they may see their good works and glorify their Father in heaven (Matthew 5:13-15).

4. **All praise the Lord (verses 16-18):**Here the choir answers the director.
 1. **They bless the One who gave them the earth:** "The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD's; but the earth He has given to the children of men"(verse 16). The choir director said in verse 15 that the Lord created heaven and earth, and the choir answers him that, though He is their Creator, He made people His trustees and representatives on earth, to work it and keep it (Genesis 2:15). This was both a privilege He granted them, and a responsibility He charged them with: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5).

2. **They bless the One who gave them life:** "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!"(verses 17,18). The choir continues to say to the director that the people of the Lord use the present life to praise the Lord and sing to Him. The godly must live long so that praise to the Lord might continue uninterrupted. The singers did not mention anything here about singing in eternity because the concept of immortality was not known to them, which David expressed as follows: "For in death there is no remembrance of You; in the grave who will give You thanks?" (Psalm 6:5). King Hezekiah also said, "For Sheol cannot thank You, death cannot praise You; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for Your truth" (Isaiah 38:18). But we, the New Testament believers, thank God because the gospel brought life and immortality to light after Christ put an end to the sting of death and defeated hell (2 Timothy 1:10; 1 Corinthians 15:55). Thus we know that we always have a chance to sing and praise God on earth as well as in heaven. John saw ten thousands upon ten thousands shouting with a loud voice, "'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!' And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: 'Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!'"(Revelation 5:12,13).

God blesses the God-fearing ones with the blessings of heaven and earth, so they bless Him during their lifetime on earth, as well as when they stand before His throne crying out, "Hallelujah." Praise the Lord! Glory to God!

5.5. Questions

1. Explain how the psalmist expresses his humility in verse 1a.
2. How can the children of Israel show their trust in the Lord?

6. Psalm Hundred and Sixteen

What Shall I Render to the Lord?

- 1 I love the LORD, because He has heard My voice and my supplications.
- 2 Because He has inclined His ear to me, Therefore I will call upon Him as long as I live.
- 3 The pains of death surrounded me, And the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me; I found trouble and sorrow.
- 4 Then I called upon the name of the LORD: "O LORD, I implore You, deliver my soul!"
- 5 Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; Yes, our God is merciful.

6 The LORD preserves the simple; I was brought low, and He saved me.
7 Return to your rest, O my soul, For the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.
8 For You have delivered my soul from death, My eyes from tears, And my feet from falling.
9 I will walk before the LORD In the land of the living.
10 I believed, therefore I spoke, "I am greatly afflicted."
11 I said in my haste, "All men are liars."
12 What shall I render to the LORD For all His benefits toward me?
13 I will take up the cup of salvation, And call upon the name of the LORD.
14 I will pay my vows to the LORD Now in the presence of all His people.
15 Precious in the sight of the LORD Is the death of His saints.
16 O LORD, truly I am Your servant; I am Your servant, the son of Your maidservant; You have loosed my bonds.
17 I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving, And will call upon the name of the LORD.
18 I will pay my vows to the LORD Now in the presence of all His people,
19 In the courts of the LORD's house, In the midst of you, O Jerusalem. Praise the LORD!

The psalms of the "Egyptian Hallel" were written as praise to God for the salvation of the nation. The psalms are written in the plural because the Lord saved His people as a group from the humiliation of Pharaoh's bondage. This psalm stands in the middle of the "Egyptian Hallel" group and is talking about the salvation of the individual, which is not to be ignored for the sake of the collective salvation of the community. God's salvation is universal and comprehensive, but it is at the same time a personal and individual experience. The believer uses the singular to pray to God on the Passover, because the destroying angel passed by his house and did not put him to death, since the blood of the Passover Lamb was put on the doorposts and on the lintel. Perhaps the psalmist remembered a severe sickness that caused him a great deal of agony and grief. But the Lord must have healed him from it, wiped the tears from his eyes and saved his feet from falling into the grave. The psalmist's experience here is similar to that of King Hezekiah who was told by the prophet Isaiah, "Thus says the LORD: 'Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live'." Then Hezekiah prayed and asked for healing, and the Lord answered him. He did not die and the Lord gave him a sign: the sun would move back ten steps on the stairs by which it had gone down (Isaiah 38:1-8).

In this psalm the psalmist thanks the Lord and wonders what he can do to repay the Lord for His favours towards him. He answers that he will take up the cup of salvation, call upon the name of the LORD and pay his vows to the LORD in the presence of all God's people. The

Lord answered his prayer, so he came to the temple in the midst of the worshippers to speak of the Lord's grace, just as the sick man of the country of the Gadarenes did when Christ said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you" (Mark 5:19).

The psalm contains the following:

- First: The psalmist calls upon the Lord (verses 1-4)
- Second: The Lord answers the psalmist (verses 5-9)
- Third: The psalmist thanks the Lord (verses 10-19)

6.1. First: The Psalmist Calls upon the Lord

(verses 1-4)

1. **The psalmist loves prayer:** "I love the LORD, because He has heard my voice and my supplications"(verse 1). He loves to pray to the Lord because the Lord answers him. He says in another place, "I will love You, O LORD, my strength" (Psalm 18:1). The apostle John said, "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). God is love and all His works are out of love. It is He who said, "Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you" (Jeremiah 31:3). The verse could also mean that the psalmist loves to have his prayer heard by the Lord. In fact, the verse may be interpreted both ways. The psalmist loves to have his prayer heard by the Lord, because he entreats Him. He also loves the Lord Himself, and therefore he directs his prayer to Him and waits for the answer. Had he not loved the Lord, he would not have called upon Him, and had he not trusted in Him, he would not have called upon Him either.
2. **The psalmist continues to pray:** "Because He has inclined His ear to me, therefore I will call upon Him as long as I live"(verse 2). An answered prayer leads to more prayer. The Lord inclined His ear in compassion and affection for the psalmist, so he resolved to continue to pray as long as he would live: "Blessed be the LORD, because He has heard the voice of my supplications! ... Save Your people, and bless Your inheritance; shepherd them also, and bear them up forever"(Psalm 28:6,9). The psalmist is happy not only with the answer to his prayer, but also with the intimacy with God, because in prayer he speaks with his beloved. Some of us talk with Him only in time of need, and He listens to us because He says, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me"(Psalm 50:15).

But there are those who delight in talking with Him all the time. Some pray-ers may be tempted to stop praying because the Lord, they think, has delayed His answer, or is not going to answer at all. Those say, "We prayed but He did not hear. We will not go on

praying until He grants us what we asked for." But the believer knows that the Lord always answers. He may grant him what he asked for, He may delay it for some time, or He may not give him what he asked for because it is harmful to him and will do him no good. Christ said, "And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:7,8). In order to reassure us, the Bible uses a figure of speech from human activity, for it says about prayer that God "listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name" (Malachi 3:16). So let us continue praying in order to enjoy the Lord Himself before enjoying His gifts.

- 3. The motive to pray:** "The pains of death surrounded me, and the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me; I found trouble and sorrow. Then I called upon the name of the LORD: 'O LORD, I implore You, deliver my soul!'" (verses 3,4). The psalmist found himself impelled to pray to the Lord who answered him when he was suffering from a severe sickness that almost killed him, bringing him so close to death that he could feel its pains. His soul was filled with trouble and sorrow as he saw death and the grave closing in on him like hunters setting traps to catch him. The psalmist did not know Christ who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Timothy 1:10). But his strong faith made him seek refuge with God in the time of his trouble and call upon Him, because He had said, "I am the LORD, who heals you" (Exodus 15:26).

The Lord heals in His own way, owing to the favour of His love and according to what is best for the believer... He may heal by means of medicine, as He healed King Hezekiah using the medical prescription administered to him by Isaiah (2 Kings 20:1,7). Or He may answer and heal by means of a miracle, for He is the Lord who has not changed and still meets our needs. He may also respond without healing by strengthening the believer in his sickness with the amount of grace that is sufficient for him. He said to Paul after he had prayed three times for the thorn of his sickness to be removed from him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). The Lord may also answer by taking the sick person away from the world of pain and bring him into the heavenly glory, granting him a glorified body on the last day.

The Lord always answers the prayer of the distressed, for He is a refuge to the believer who calls upon Him to deliver the believer from trouble and grief. "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). Therefore the psalmist repeated his petition in this psalm four times: "I will call upon Him as long as I live... I called upon the name of the LORD... And call upon the name of the LORD ... And will call upon the name of the LORD" (verses 2,4,13,17). No wonder! To whom can we go but to the loving God who is in authority? Who will show compassion and bless us but

He? Both our spiritual and physical lives are gifts from Him, for He is the only refuge. Truly, "They looked to Him and were radiant, and their faces were not ashamed" (Psalm 34:5).

6.2. Second: The Lord Answers the Psalmist

(verses 5-9)

1. **Because the Lord is gracious:** "Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; yes, our God is merciful"(verse 5). He answers because He shows compassion on the weary. He answers despite man's unworthiness, because He is righteous, gracious and is faithful to fulfil His promises. "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth" (Exodus 34:6). "He has made His wonderful works to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and full of compassion" (Psalm 111:4). Out of the abundance of His grace He says, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7).
2. **Because the psalmist is weak:** "The LORD preserves the simple; I was brought low, and He saved me"(verse 6). In the face of his sickness and the surrounding dangers, the psalmist feels he is simple, in need of wisdom and experience. He knows that "the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple"(Psalm 19:7). He trusts that the Lord of heaven and earth has hidden wisdom from those who think they are wise and prudent, and has revealed it to the simple who are like children in their readiness to believe and be taught (Matthew 11:25). He is persuaded that God has chosen the despised and those who are not, to grant them favour (1 Corinthians 1:27-29). In his simplicity and lowliness, the psalmist cannot help himself, so he asks the Lord to save him, and cries out along with Hezekiah when Rabshakeh threatened him, "The LORD was ready to save me; therefore we will sing my songs with stringed instruments all the days of our life, in the house of the LORD"(Isaiah 38:14-20).
3. **Because the psalmist is waiting:** "Return to your rest, O my soul, for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you. For You have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living"(verses 7-9). The psalmist is waiting for his soul to be at rest once again, the way it was before troubles and pains of death surrounded him, so he tells his soul to quit worrying and rest assured. The psalmist had already asked himself, "Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance" (Psalm 42:5). At another time he said to his soul, "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" (Psalm 103:1,2). In Psalms 42 and 103 he called upon his soul to hope in God and thank Him, and in this psalm he calls upon it to rest in God, because God has dealt with it bountifully. Then the psalmist says, "I will sing to the LORD, because He has dealt bountifully with me" (Psalm 13:6).

The Hebrew word for "rest" here occurs in the plural. The meaning, then, is that the Lord dealt with the psalmist bountifully and gave him rest on all sides, as Solomon said. "But now the LORD my God has given me rest on every side; there is neither adversary nor evil occurrence" (1 Kings 5:4). It may be known that "Noah" means rest, and Noah's rest was in the ark. Our rest, however, is in Christ, the ark of deliverance for our lives, in whom we are saved. He said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Through His redemption, which forgives all transgressions, we obtain rest from the torture of conscience. Through the sanctification of His Holy Spirit we escape the power of sin because He overcomes it. Through His generous giving we get rid of anxiety because He is the God of Providence. Then we are "as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (2 Corinthians 6:10).

The psalmist's expectation of rest is owing to his previous great experiences with the Lord. He had delivered his soul from physical death and the death of sin, as well as his eyes from tears and his feet from falling. The psalmist expressed this idea elsewhere as follows: "He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps" (Psalm 40:2). The Lord is his Creator; He breathed into the dust and man became a living being (Genesis 2:7). He is the one who preserves life, for the psalmist says, "For You have delivered my soul from death. Have You not kept my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?" (Psalm 56:13). God comforts the grieving and wipes away the tears of those who are in pain, and He redeems their lives from destruction (Psalm 103:4). Thus they live and walk before the Lord in the land of the living, in the light of God's law and the light of His own person, enjoying His loving care, fixing their eyes on Him, being joyful in Him, trusting Him and having both inward and outward peace. There will come a day when "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).

6.3. Third: The Psalmist Thanks the Lord

(verses 10-19)

1. **Bewilderment that came before thanksgiving (verses 10,11):** In these two verses the psalmist declares his faith despite being confused by two problems: his affliction and the lies of those around him. In spite of them the believer is still thankful.
 1. **Bewilderment from affliction:** "I believed, therefore I spoke, 'I am greatly afflicted'" (verse 10). The psalmist was sure that the Lord would deliver him from his difficulties, no matter how many they were or how long they lasted, so he lifted up verses of thanksgiving to Him. His faith remained strong and steadfast under all the

harsh circumstances. This verse is a sincere expression of the psalmist's real condition and the truth about him. The apostle Paul said, " And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, 'I believed and therefore I spoke,' we also believe and therefore speak" (2 Corinthians 4:13). "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). It is true that the psalmist was afflicted, but his faith told him that the Lord will deliver him so that he may see light in the land of the living. The Lord will restore his soul to its previous state of rest, deal graciously with him, deliver him from death and wipe away his tears. "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame'"(Romans 10:9-11).

2. **Bewilderment from liars:** "I said in my haste, 'All men are liars'"(verse 11). The psalmist's friends must have pro-mised him much help during his time of trouble, but they never kept their promises to him, perhaps because they were not able to or because they did not want to. They were like Job's friends who dealt harshly with him in his painful trials, so he said to them, "Miserable comforters are you all!" (Job 16:2). Or they were like the friends of the prodigal son who rallied around him and cheered him when he had money, but deserted him when he ran out of funds, except for the one who sent him to look after the pigs in his fields (Luke 15:15). The psalmist had already been perplexed by his friends and said, "Give us help from trouble, for the help of man is useless ... Surely men of low degree are a vapor, men of high degree are a lie; if they are weighed on the scales, they are altogether lighter than vapor"(Psalm 60:11; 62:9). The psalmist's confidence in his friends must have been restored, because it is impossible for all men to be liars, and it must be that the distress of his soul made him pass a general judgment on all those around. How often do we depend on our friends' or relatives' promises, only to be disappointed? So we understand the psalmist's advice: "Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish. Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God"(Psalm 146:3-5).

2. An inquiry that preceded thanksgiving (verses 12-14):

1. **The inquiry:** "What shall I render to the LORD for all His benefits toward me?"(verse 12). The God-fearing person thinks of expressing his feeling of gratitude for God, the gracious benefactor. His inquiry is that of a debtor unable to meet a great debt, because in effect he was saying, "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). The more we enjoy the Lord's benefits the more we should ask that question.
2. **The answer to the inquiry (verses 13,14):**

1. **Taking up the cup of salvation:** "I will take up the cup of salvation"(verse 13a). The psalmist compares God's salvation to a cup full of a delightful drink that the Lord offered to him. In response, he accepts it and drinks it, saying, "My cup runs over" (Psalm 23:5). How many are those who think they are satisfied and do not need the cup of salvation, as though they were saying with the Pharisee, "God, I thank You that I am not like other men... I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess" (Luke 18:11,12). They may also join the ranks of those who say they are rich, have become wealthy and have need of nothing; and do not know that they are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. The Lord counsels them to buy from Him gold refined in the fire, that they may be rich; and white garments, that they may be clothed and covered (Revelation 3:17,18). They may rely on their elevated social status or their distinguished position or the position of their family in the church. But despite all this, they need to take the cup of salvation from the hand of the Lord every day. Salvation has three steps: We are saved from our past through forgiveness; in our present, which lasts as long as we live, through sanctification; and in the future when life on earth ends through glorification with God in heaven. In case you have not received salvation in the form of forgiveness through repentance and confidence in Christ's sacrificial death for you on the cross, you can receive it now.
 2. **Calling upon the name of the LORD:** "And call upon the name of the LORD"(verse 13b). In this continued calling the psalmist declares that the Lord alone is worthy of thanksgiving. "I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You" (Hebrews 2:12). He had called upon the name of the LORD to deliver him (verse 4), and promised to call upon His name with thanksgiving (verse 17). His whole life is full of calling upon the Lord, "In return for my love they are my accusers, but I give myself to prayer" (Psalm 109:4).
 3. **Paying the vow:** "I will pay my vows to the LORD now in the presence of all His people"(verse 14). A vow is a solemn promise to perform certain acts or to live in a certain way in return for a divine favour. For example, King Hezekiah vowed to go up to the house of the Lord if the Lord granted him healing (2 Kings 20:8). The laws pertaining to vows are listed in Numbers 6:2-21. We make many pledges to the Lord at the beginning of the year, or when our prayers are answered. But we must be faithful to perform what we have pledged to do. We must pay our vows to the Lord.
3. **Two reasons for giving thanks (verses 15,16):**
1. **The saint is precious:** "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints"(verse 15). The Lord is concerned with his saints' lives as much as with their death. He fixes the day of their birth and the day of their demise, for "Our God is the

God of salvation; and to GOD the Lord belong escapes from death" (Psalm 68:20). "He will redeem their life from oppression and violence; and precious shall be their blood in His sight" (Psalm 72:14). The word "precious" has at least three meanings in the Bible:

1. **Honoured:** "Since you were precious in My sight, you have been honored, and I have loved you; therefore I will give men for you, and people for your life"(Isaiah 43:4). Owing to this honour God transported Enoch to heaven without death and lifted him to a higher state (Genesis 5:24; Hebrews 11:5). The apostle Paul said, "I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better" (Philippians 1:23). For Christ promised his saints: "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:2,3). Although Christ completed the work of redemption and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:3), Stephen, the first martyr in Christendom, saw him "and said, 'Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!'" (Acts 7:56). Christ stood to give him an honoured reception as a martyr.
2. **Pleasant:**The Lord said of His people, whom He calls here Ephraim: "Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child?" (Jeremiah 31:20). Paul described the end of his life in these words: "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing"(2 Timothy 4:6-8).
3. **Costly:**It is dear; it is expensive. To save people from sin was very costly: "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). The death of the believer is precious in the eyes of the Lord because he goes from the struggling church to the triumphant one.
2. **The God-fearing person is the Lord's servant:** "O LORD, truly I am Your servant; I am Your servant, the son of Your maidservant; You have loosed my bonds"(verse 16). The psalmist says of himself that he is the Lord's devout servant and that his mother is the Lord's devout maidservant. The same phrase is repeated in Psalm 86:16: "Oh, turn to me, and have mercy on me! Give Your strength to Your servant, and save the son of Your maidservant." All believers are God's servants because He created them, sustains them and purchased them with His own blood. They are honoured to be His servants because this servanthood is perfect freedom. It means

belonging to the Lord of all the earth. One saint said, "I need your Lordship, but You do not need my servanthood." The title of a servant or a maidservant is cherished by the believers. It was used often of Moses (Deuteronomy 34:5; 1 Chronicles 6:49), Joshua (Joshua 24:29; Judges 2:8), Elijah (1 Kings 18:36), Daniel (Daniel 6:20), Paul (Roman 1:1), Peter (2 Peter 1:1), James (James 1:1) and of all those who were set free by Christ (1 Peter 2:16). The Virgin Mary applied it to herself as she said to the angel, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord!" (Luke 1:38).

The Old Testament distinguishes between the servant who was born in the house and the one bought by money. The servant born in the house is dearer because he belongs to the house (Genesis 14:14). How lovely is Timothy's house of which Paul said, "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).

The true believer is the one who says to the Lord, "I love my master ... I will not go out free" (Exodus 21:5). He speaks well of his master and the song of his heart says, "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" (Psalm 84:10).

4. How he gave thanks (verses 17-19):

- 1. He offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving:** "I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving"(verse 17a). The psalmist compares his praise to a sacrifice of thanksgiving that he offers at God's altar. Thus was the advice of the psalmist to us: "Offer to God thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High" (Psalm 50:14), and thus the prophet Hosea commanded the people: "Take words with you, and return to the LORD. Say to Him, 'Take away all iniquity; receive us graciously, for we will offer the sacrifices of our lips'" (Hosea 14:2). The Old Testament regulated how the peace offering and the thanksgiving offering should be made (Leviticus 11:7-13). The author of the epistle to the Hebrews says, "Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name" (Hebrews 13:15).
- 2. He calls upon the name of the LORD:** "And will call upon the name of the LORD"(verse 17b). In verse 12 he wondered what he should return to the Lord for all His benefits. In verse 13 he answered that he will call upon the name of the Lord and speak of his blessings with awe and pride. Men are used, when they have reached a material prosperity, to share the news of their prosperity with others. How much more fitting would it be for the God-fearing person to declare the news of his spiritual prosperity through God, the Lord of all the earth, who demonstrated His own love toward us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8)?
- 3. He pays his vows in the presence of all:** "I will pay my vows to the LORD now in

the presence of all His people, in the courts of the LORD's house, in the midst of you, O Jerusalem. Praise the LORD!"(verses 18,19). The psalmist made a vow, and he was resolved to perform it in the presence of all people in the house of the Lord. When we make a pledge to God we must perform it in the midst of the congregation of the believers, in the place that God chose to make holy, where He commanded to worship. Jerusalem was the spiritual and political capital of the psalmist. This teaches us to declare our gratitude to the Lord and perform our vows in the presence of all spiritual and political leaders, for the Lord is the King of kings and Lord of lords.

The psalm concludes with a call to "Praise the LORD!" We find the same ending in Psalm 104, 105, 106, 113 and 115.

6.4. Questions

1. Meditating on verses 7-9 of this psalm, what does the psalmist call upon his soul to do? What is the difference between this call and his call upon his soul in Psalms 42 and 103?
2. Mention two things that confused the psalmist. How did his confusion end?

7. Psalm Hundred and Seventeen

All Gentiles Praise the Lord

1 Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!

2 For His merciful kindness is great toward us, And the truth of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD!

This is the fifth psalm of the "Egyptian Hallel" (Psalms 113-118), which was sung during the Passover meal. This particular psalm used to be sung at the commencement and conclusion of worship. It is the shortest psalm, in contrast with Psalm 119, which is the longest. Our psalm calls upon all nations to praise the Lord, the one and true God, their Creator and Sustainer, for their lives came from Him and their hope is in Him, "that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust"(Matthew 5:45). Let them offer Him their heart-felt thanks and sincere adoration because He loved them as a favour, not owing to their goodness or righteousness, but because of the abundance of His mercy and the greatness of His goodness.

God's goodness and power appeared in the miracle of Exodus. This proves that He will deliver the oppressed and punish the oppressors, which makes everyone praise and thank Him. Let all the ends of the earth look to Him to be saved, for He is God, and there is no other (Isaiah 45:22). Thus all those who believe in Him from every nation will become one, worshipping the one God for "Salvation is found in no one else" (Acts 4:12 NIV).

The church considered this psalm to be a Messianic psalm (foretelling Christ) because the apostle Paul quoted its first verse in Romans 15:11 when mentioning that God's mercy extended to the pagan nations.

The psalm contains the following:

- First: A command to praise (verse 1)
- Second: Reasons for praise (verse 2)

7.1. First: A Command to Praise

(verse 1)

"Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!"(verse 1). The seed of Abraham are "Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises" (Romans 9:4). The heathen, however, had no share in the promise of blessing and inheritance until they received Christ, the redeeming Saviour. To those Paul said, "that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:12,13).

To those nations the psalmist extends the invitation to sing to the Lord, because He is good and He bore with them despite their evils and disobedience. He is generous and liberal in His gifts to them.

How could they possibly worship idols? The one who worships idols is blind, even if he sees, and ignorant, even if he is wise in the matters of his earthly life. Will an idolater compare his idols with the Lord who created heaven and earth, then blew into the dust and created Adam, the father of mankind, from it? Let him look at nature around him and find that "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork" (Psalm 19:1). It says to mankind, "Praise the LORD! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and praise is beautiful"(Psalm 147:1). "Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him!" (Psalm 34:8).

Many idolaters in Old Testament times heard the call of this psalm and others similar to it, believed in the one God, rejected their idols and became the elect of the Lord. The prostitute Rahab was one of those upon whom the Lord shone with His saving grace. She said to the spies sent by Joshua, "The LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath" (Joshua 2:11). Her faith in God was stronger than her love for her homeland. For this, God gave her the superior heavenly home. The Moabite Ruth was another one who chose to become a member of the Lord's people because she saw His mercies and faithfulness. Among them also was Hiram the king of Tyre, who blessed the Lord and

offered cedar, cypress logs and gold for the building of the house of the Lord (1 Kings 5). The queen of Sheba was also one of them, for she said to King Solomon, "Blessed be the LORD your God" (1 Kings 10:9). Likewise was Naaman the Syrian, the chief of the Syrian army, who received the blessing of healing from leprosy: "And he returned to the man of God, he and all his aides ... and he said, 'Indeed, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel; now therefore, please take a gift from your servant'" (2 Kings 5:15).

In this way the prophecies of the psalmists were fulfilled, who said, "The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek Him will praise the LORD. Let your heart live forever!" (Psalm 22:26). "Oh, clap your hands, all you peoples! Shout to God with the voice of triumph! For the LORD Most High is awesome; He is a great King over all the earth" (Psalm 47:1,2). "All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord, and shall glorify Your name. For You are great, and do wondrous things; You alone are God"(Psalm 86:9,10).

7.2. Second: Reasons for Praise

(verse 2)

1. **They praise Him for His kindness:** "For His merciful kindness is great toward us"(verse 2a). God's mercy must be strong because it was able to put up with the heavy load of humanity's sins. The believer exclaims, "For Your lovingkindness is before my eyes" (Psalm 26:3). Man needs God's strong kindness because He is weak. For all have turned aside, they have together become corrupt and fallen short of the glory of God. Therefore God's mercy was made manifest to all mankind "and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: 'For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, And sing to Your name.'" (Romans 15:9).

"His love is great" in the sense that it prevailed like the waters of the Great Flood, which covered all the high hills under the heavens (Genesis 7:18-20). The reason for this is to cover the abundance of our sins and to overflow with forgiveness: "When we were overwhelmed by sins, you forgave our transgressions" (Psalm 65:3 NIV). "But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more" (Romans 5:20). "And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 1:14) to save the sinner who is far away from God.

To prevail means to overcome. The source of mercy is the Most High Lord, who dwells in heaven. All those who live under His heavens seek to be at His mercy, so that He would prevail against and overcome all the powers of evil. His strong love overcomes the hardness of our stony hearts and turns them into hearts of flesh that call out to the living God. "For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:11,12).

Our need as human beings for God's mercy is as great as our need for life itself: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness ... being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 1:18; 3:24). "Therefore He says: 'Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light'" (Ephesians 5:14).

- 2. They praise Him for His truth:** "And the truth of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD!" (verse 2b). God is faithful in His character, promises and deeds. "He is the Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He" (Deuteronomy 32:4). David said to him, "And now, O Lord GOD, You are God, and Your words are true" (2 Samuel 7:28). "For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: 'That You may be justified in Your words, and may overcome when You are judged'" (Romans 3:3,4). The apostle Paul admonishes the believers from both Jewish and pagan backgrounds: "Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God. Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers (God's promises to Abraham in his descendants to send Christ) and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written (in Psalm 18:49): 'For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, and sing to Your name.' And again, he says (in Deuteronomy 32:43), 'Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!' And again (Psalm 117:1), 'Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!' And again, Isaiah says (Isaiah 11:1,10), 'There shall be a root of Jesse; and He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, in Him the Gentiles shall hope (for salvation)'" (Romans 15:7-12).

In Christ we see God's prevailing kindness: "Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17), as much as His constant faithfulness and truth because "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

7.3. Questions

1. Name three Gentiles who worshipped the true God.
2. What is the meaning of "His love is great"?

8. Psalm Hundred and Eighteen

Blessed is he who Comes in the Name of the Lord

1 Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.

2 Let Israel now say, "His mercy endures forever."

- 3 Let the house of Aaron now say, "His mercy endures forever."**
- 4 Let those who fear the LORD now say, "His mercy endures forever."**
- 5 I called on the LORD in distress; The LORD answered me and set me in a broad place.**
- 6 The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?**
- 7 The LORD is for me among those who help me; therefore I shall see my desire on those who hate me.**
- 8 It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man.**
- 9 It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes.**
- 10 All nations surrounded me, but in the name of the LORD I will destroy them.**
- 11 They surrounded me, yes, they surrounded me; but in the name of the LORD I will destroy them.**
- 12 They surrounded me like bees; they were quenched like a fire of thorns; for in the name of the LORD I will destroy them.**
- 13 You pushed me violently, that I might fall, but the LORD helped me.**
- 14 The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation.**
- 15 The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tents of the righteous; the right hand of the LORD does valiantly.**
- 16 The right hand of the LORD is exalted; the right hand of the LORD does valiantly.**
- 17 I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD.**
- 18 The LORD has chastened me severely, but He has not given me over to death.**
- 19 Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go through them, And I will praise the LORD.**
- 20 This is the gate of the LORD, through which the righteous shall enter.**
- 21 I will praise You, for You have answered me, and have become my salvation.**
- 22 The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.**
- 23 This was the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.**
- 24 This is the day the LORD has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.**
- 25 Save now, I pray, O LORD; O LORD, I pray, send now prosperity.**
- 26 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We have blessed you from the house of the LORD.**
- 27 God is the LORD, and He has given us light; bind the sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar.**
- 28 You are my God, and I will praise You; You are my God, I will exalt You.**

29 Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! for His mercy endures forever.

This is the last psalm of the "Egyptian Hallel" (Psalms 113-118), which were sung in celebration of the Exodus from Egypt. This psalm used to be sung by the people on their way to the temple of the Lord. It is written for a chorus and sung to an instrumental accompaniment. The theme is: "Let us praise the Lord in His temple. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

Many verses of this psalm are quoted in the New Testament. When Christ told the parable of the evil vinedressers who rejected and murdered the son of the owner, He quoted verses 22 and 23 of this psalm: "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?'" (Matthew 21:42). This prophecy was fulfilled in the crucifixion and resurrection, when the Jews, "the vinedressers", rejected and murdered the Saviour, Christ "the Son", although He is the Stone without whom their lives cannot be built or set up straight.

Quoting this psalm, the people shouted out loud as Christ triumphantly entered Jerusalem: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" (verse 26 quoted in Matthew 21:9).

Christ, too, sang this psalm together with His disciples after the Passover meal as He ordained the Lord's Supper before going on to the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:30). Peter, too, quoted verse 22 when the Jews opposed his announcement that Christ's power raised up the man who was crippled from his mother's womb. He said to them, "This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone'" (Acts 4:11). He quoted it another time to emphasize that whoever believes on Christ, the chief cornerstone, elect, precious, will by no means be put to shame. But to those who reject Him, the cornerstone will be a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence (1 Peter 2:6-8). This is an invitation to put our trust in Christ, our life's cornerstone, and we cannot enter into the house of the Lord and give Him acceptable worship without receiving Him. Neither can we enter His eternal home without putting all our trust in Him.

The psalm contains the following:

- First: An invitation to the house of the Lord (verses 1-4)
- Second: Singing on the way to the house of the Lord (verses 5-18)
- Third: Singing in the house of the Lord (verses 19-29)

8.1. First: An Invitation to the House of the Lord (verses 1-4)

Our psalm opens and closes with an invitation: "Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever." This invitation occurs 35 times in the Bible (26 times in Psalm 136; 1 Chronicles 16:34; 2 Chronicles 5:13; 7:3; Ezra 3:11; Psalms 100:5; 106:1; 107:1; 118:1,29; Jeremiah 33:11). The expression "For his mercy endures forever" occurs five times: in 1 Chronicles 16:41; 2 Chronicles 7:6; 20:21; Psalm 118:3,4.

1. **The motive for the invitation:** "Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever"(verse 1). The psalmist invites the people of the Lord in general to go up to the house of the Lord to offer Him thanksgiving and praise because our God is good and merciful; His mercy endures forever, it never ends. So they ought to shout to His mercy and sing to goodness. "'The voice of joy and the voice of gladness ...the voice of those who will say: 'Praise the LORD of hosts, for the LORD is good, for His mercy endures forever"— and of those who will bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the LORD. For I will cause the captives of the land to return as at the first,' says the LORD"(Jeremiah 33:11). He "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4).
2. **The recipients of the invitation (verses 2-4):**The psalmist invites three categories of people to go along with him to the temple of the Lord. These categories were repeated in Psalm 115:9-11 and 135:19.
 1. **The children of Israel:** "Let Israel now say, 'His mercy endures forever'"(verse 2). "I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever; with my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations" (Psalm 89:1). "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).
 2. **The priests:** "Let the house of Aaron now say, 'His mercy endures forever'"(verse 3).
 3. **Gentile God-fearing people:** "Let those who fear the LORD now say, 'His mercy endures forever'"(verse 4). They are those who embraced Judaism but were not biological descendents of Abraham. They believed the way Abraham did and thus feared God. Christ said, "And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd"(John 10:16).

8.2. Second: Singing on the Way to the House of the Lord (verses 5-18)

Joyous singing prevails over the Lord's community on their way to the Lord's house; the director sings and the choir responds:

1. **The director sings to thank the Lord for deliverance from distress:** "I called on the LORD in distress; the LORD answered me and set me in a broad place. The LORD is on

my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me? The LORD is for me among those who help me; therefore I shall see my desire on those who hate me"(verses 5-7). The director, who is perhaps a priest, walks ahead of the people, singing these verses by himself, surrounded by the choir, travelling Jerusalem's streets, heading for the temple to worship the Lord. The director mentions that he had called upon the Lord in his distress, and He answered and delivered him. He declares to the choir and those walking with him on the way to the temple that the Lord set him free from his distress. He is no more afraid because the Lord is among those who help him. He also provided helpers to assist him so that his enemies could not harm him. "When I cry out to You, then my enemies will turn back; this I know, because God is for me"(Psalm 56:9). "Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we may boldly say: 'The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?'" (Hebrews 13:5,6). "It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear" (Isaiah 65:24). "Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name" (Psalm 91:14).

2. **The choir declares the way to deliverance from distress:** "It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes"(verses 8,9). The choir answered the director and said that the Lord is the only refuge and protection. When King Artaxerxes gave Nehemiah letters for the governors of the different Persian regions, to provide him with whatever he needed to build the walls of Jerusalem, and to guard him on his way (Nehemiah 2:7-9), the enmity of Sanballat and Tobiah did not stop! The book of Nehemiah explains the continuous opposition by means of political threats: "Will you rebel against the king?" (Nehemiah 2:19); mockery: "Whatever they build, if even a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall" (Nehemiah 4:3); military resistance (Nehemiah 4:8); conspiracy to murder Nehemiah (Nehemiah 6:2; 10:11) and intimidating letters (Nehemiah 6:19). The main reason for Nehemiah's victory was that his heart was always directed toward God (Nehemiah 2:4). How true is the advice: "Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish" (Psalm 146:3,4).
3. **The director and the choir proclaim victory:**In verses 10-18 we hear the solo singing of the director indicating that danger is coming, but the choir confirms that victory is coming from the Lord. The director is persuaded and declares that his victory is through the name of the Lord.
 1. **The director says, "All nations surrounded me" (verse 10a).**Both the psalmist and his people were like a besieged city, as the psalmist said, "For dogs have surrounded Me; the congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet" (Psalm 22:16). Nehemiah described the situation like this: All our enemies heard

- of it, and all the nations around us, such as the Arabs, the Ammonites and the Philistines (Nehemiah 6:7,8,16; Ezra 4:7-23).
2. **The choir responds: "All nations surrounded me, but in the name of the LORD I will destroy them" (verse 10).**It is through the Lord who fulfills His promises. "The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe" (Proverbs 18:10).
 3. **The director says: "They surrounded me, yes, they surrounded me."**
 4. **The choir responds: "But in the name of the LORD I will destroy them" (verse 11).**
 5. **The director says: "They surrounded me like bees" (verse 12a)**just as Moses said, "And the Amorites who dwelt in that mountain came out against you and chased you as bees do, and drove you back from Seir to Hormah"(Deuteronomy 1:44).
 6. **The choir responds: "They were quenched like a fire of thorns; for in the name of the LORD I will destroy them" (verse 12).**The fire of thorns catches quickly and dies just as quickly. In a similar manner, the enemy's rage was ferocious and quick, but it ended as it started, because the Lord defends His people as they look and wonder (Exodus 14:14). This is what the psalmist said, "Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? ... He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure." (Psalm 2:1-5).
 7. **The director says: "You pushed me violently, that I might fall, but the LORD helped me. The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation. The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tents of the righteous; the right hand of the LORD does valiantly" (verses 13-15).**In the director's words he starts to address the enemy who tried to push him so that he might fall. But he then lifts up his eyes to the Lord who helped him, granting him support and victory. The psalmist must have recalled Moses' song: "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 15:2), and Isaiah's song: "Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; For YAH, the LORD, is my strength and song; He also has become my salvation" (Isaiah 12:2). The psalmist remembers the sound of the songs of salvation rising up from tents made of palm-tree fronds and tree branches during the joyful celebrations of the Feast of Tabernacles, the last major annual feast and the second harvest feast after the Day of Atonement. In that feast the Israelites commemorated their stay in huts in the wilderness by not planting or harvesting, for the Lord had sustained them with manna and quail and satisfied them with water running forth from the rock! In all this the director is more than victorious in the Lord, therefore he concludes by the statement: "The right hand of the LORD does valiantly." Moses lifted up a similar song, "Your right hand, O LORD, has become

- glorious in power; Your right hand, O LORD, has dashed the enemy in pieces... You stretched out Your right hand; the earth swallowed them" (Exodus 15:6,12).
8. **The choir responds: "The right hand of the LORD is exalted; the right hand of the LORD does valiantly" (verse 16).** This is a confirmation of the director's statement. When obstacles and barriers stand in our path, the heavens respond through a choir that shouts: "The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them" (Psalm 34:7).
 9. **The director says: "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD. The LORD has chastened me severely, but He has not given me over to death" (verses 17,18).** The Lord permits the enemy to make it hard for His children, and allows the believers to go through suffering and trials. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend" the wise man says, "but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful" (Proverbs 27:6). The godly believer, who trusts in the Lord, realizes that the Lord's hand is behind every situation. So let us submit ourselves to God's strong hand just as a clay vessel surrenders to the hand of the potter, so that he may make it a vessel for honour, in the knowledge that "Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:11). Thus we declare our own victory and the victory of all those who undergo similar circumstances, for both battle and destiny are in the one powerful and able hand: the hand of the Lord.

8.3. Third: Singing in the House of the Lord (verses 19-29)

The singers approach the gates of the temple, so the director calls out:

1. **The director: "Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go through them, and I will praise the LORD" (verse 19).** The gates of the temple were closed so that the music director should call out to have them opened. In this way the psalmist and his choir, along with the people joining them, could make known their desire to offer worship, singing and thanksgiving to the Lord. This is what David meant by saying, "Lift up your heads, O you gates! Lift up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in" (Psalm 24:9). The gates were already open, but the place had to be made ready for receiving the King of glory. The psalmist calls the temple gates "the gates of righteousness" because the just and righteous God dwells within them, and because the Lord justifies (makes righteous) whoever enters by them in worship, surrenders to Him and confesses his sins. To be made righteous means to have a right, acceptable standing with God. Christ entered that gate by His own merit, but we enter it by Christ's merits and his atoning work for us. "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

2. **The priests respond: "This is the gate of the LORD, through which the righteous shall enter" (verse 20).** Establishing the condition for entering the gates of righteousness, the priest says that entrance is restricted to those righteous who obtained their righteousness from God, because they cried out along with the tax collector, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" (Luke 18:13). He went down to his house justified. It will be said to them, "Open the gates, that the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in. You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You" (Isaiah 26:2,3).
3. **The director shouts aloud: "I will praise You, for You have answered me, and have become my salvation. The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes" (verses 21-23).** The psalmist met God's requirements, asked for His forgiveness, and God answered him and has become his salvation. Thus the stone that the builders rejected became the cornerstone of his life, because it is a formidable and huge stone, binding the walls together and completing the whole building. God said of it, "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; whoever believes will not act hastily" (Isaiah 28:16). This was the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes, because it symbolizes Christ Himself, according to what He revealed to us (in Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10,11; Luke 20:17). Yet, the children of Israel rejected Him saying, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). They used to wonder, "Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas?... So they were offended at Him" (Matthew 13:55,57). "He came to His own, and His own did not receive 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" (John 1:11,12). Talking to the Jews, the Apostle Peter revealed this truth: "This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.' 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 4:11,12). The apostle Paul, too, said this of Him as he wrote to the believers, "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:20).
4. **The choir sings: "This is the day the LORD has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. Save now, I pray, O LORD; O LORD, I pray, send now prosperity" (verses 24,25).** The choir singers were convinced that the day of salvation had come from the Lord. For Christ, the cornerstone, is the coming Saviour, and the day of His coming is a day of rejoicing. When the angel Gabriel announced to the Virgin that she would conceive and give birth to a child to be called "Jesus", she sang, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior" (Luke 1:46,47). "Do not be afraid," the angel said to the shepherds on the day of His birth, "for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people" (Luke 2:10). And the angelic choir sang,

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"(Luke 2:14). Now everyone who hears this good news should shout, "Save now, I pray, O LORD; O LORD, I pray, send now prosperity." Do not let the chance of salvation slip by for "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2).

5. **The priests respond: " Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We have blessed you from the house of the LORD" (verse 26).**When the righteous, who are in a right standing with God, enter into the Lord's temple, the priests bless them from the house of the Lord and say, "Hosanna", meaning "Save, O Lord". It is the shout that the people lifted up on the day of Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem: "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 21:9). Blessed is He who came to save and rescue. Blessed, too, is he who comes from the land of destruction to be saved by Christ and enjoy His fellowship. The priests bless Christ and glorify Him because He comes in the name of the Lord to save all those who turn to Him for protection and all those who receive Christ as Saviour.
6. **The shout of the priests, the director, and the choir: "God is the LORD, and He has given us light; bind the sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will praise You; You are my God, I will exalt You. Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever" (verses 27-29).**The Lord is God, and He is the light. Christ 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). "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined" (Isaiah 9:2). "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8).

Everyone upon whom the Lord shone His light must bind themselves to the horns of the altar as a sacrifice offered up to God, as the apostle commanded, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1). Why? Because the Lord drew them to Himself with "bands of love"(Hosea 11:4). Therefore the believer will be like the slave who said, "I love my master ... I will not go out free" (Exodus 21:5).

They all conclude their praise in the house of the Lord with a prayer that the Lord may be exalted in their lives and be their Master, the first and the last, as they shout, "You are my God, I will exalt You. Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever."

8.4. Questions

1. Mention two places where Psalm 118 was quoted in the New Testament.
2. In verses 2-4 of this psalm there is an invitation to three kinds of people for them to give

thanks. What are these three kinds?

9. Psalm Hundred and Nineteen

The ABC of God's Love

This psalm is the hymn of a believer who loves God and His Word, who wants His Word to be at the root of his daily goals and conduct, and to become the code regulating his life and moulding his thoughts. Here he explains the intimate relationship between himself and the Word of the Lord. He also makes known his faith in all the promises revealed by God, which were fulfilled in his own life. He makes known, too, his trust in God's care for him and the liberty He gave him. How many times has He rescued him and sanctified his life despite his enemies' opposition! All the verses of this psalm are prayers, except for four verses (1-3, 115). It consists of 176 verses, which are divided into 22 sections. Each section contains eight verses, each beginning with a consequent letter of the Hebrew alphabet. And just as essential as the alphabet is for reading, studying the Word of God is equally essential for starting a deep, trusting life of faith, because it is the basis. (Other acrostic psalms are 9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112 and 145).

This psalm was called "the psalm of the saints", because the saints love the Word of God, their thoughts are saturated by it and they live according to it. To such as these Christ says, "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you" (John 15:3). This psalm was also called "the ABC of God's love" because it describes the state of a heart that got to know God's commandments and obeyed the command: "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart ... You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (Deuteronomy 6:6,9). It is a heart that is filled with the Spirit of the covenant that God said He would "make with the house of Israel ... for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them ... For I will forgive their iniquity" (Jeremiah 31:33,34). It is a heart full of God's love despite the antagonism and opposition of enemies (Psalm 119:22,23,39).

To the hurried reader this psalm seems to repeat itself, but a careful reader who meditates and delights in it will discover depths of meanings and a diversity of styles. The psalmist seeks to know more of the Word of God, to have a deeper understanding of it, and to obey it constantly. Knowledge is followed by understanding and application, and when we make a mistake in application, we learn from our mistakes and try again without despair.

When Saint Augustine wrote a commentary on the psalms, he wrote on this psalm last and said that he approached it with hesitation and without self-confidence. He said that it was too deep to be interpreted, for the Word of the Lord is so vast: "I have seen the consummation of all perfection, but Your commandment is exceedingly broad" (verse 96). How often do we meditate on a certain verse and are blessed by it, but when we read it again we find a new

light and blessing in it!

In this psalm the psalmist made known his joy in the Lord's Word (verses 14,16), emphasized its value for himself (verse 72), and how much he loved it (verses 24,40,47,97 and 103). Then, he communicated how effectual it was, saying, "But my heart stands in awe of Your word" (verse 161), because it revealed his sins to him as well as God's amazing love for sinners. This happened to the Samaritan woman when she met Christ and He revealed a secret of hers that she had kept hidden from Him. She was shocked, but her shock grew as He revealed to her His love that surpasses knowledge. He confirmed His acceptance of her, and then satisfied her thirsty soul with living water. The psalmist stated that the Word sets free and leads to a broad place (verses 32,45), illuminates life (verse 105), revives the dead in their trespasses and sins (verses 17,37) and establishes the believer in the firm belief in and holding fast to God's promises (verses 49,50).

In this psalm the psalmist called the Word of God by several other names, each of which reflects a meaning that touches our lives today. He called it:

1. **Law:**In Hebrew the word is *torah* and in Greek *nomos* and means a way of conduct for education and teaching. It ought to be obeyed because it is the straight path of the Lord that leads to safety, rest and happiness: "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD!" (verse 1).
2. **Word:**The Greek word for this is *logos*. It is Christ's title as Creator: "In the beginning was the Word ... All things were made through Him" (John 1:1,3).

Here he speaks of the written Word that issued from God's mouth and reveals His mind: "How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word" (verse 9). The Word of the Lord is the means of communication between the Lord and mankind. He speaks with us to communicate with us. "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom" (Hebrews 1:1,2).

3. **Statutes:**A statute is an act imposed by an authority. The son says to his father, "Teach me Your statutes!" (verse 12) because the father lays down the statutes (regulations) for the house to ensure the safety of its members, the good of his children and the advancement of the whole family. Our church has two statutes: baptism and the Lord's supper. They are called statutes because they have been established by divine authority.
4. **Commandments:**Major commandments, such as the Ten Commandments, were inscribed on stone tablets. But they ought to be inscribed on the tablets of our hearts, as well. We ought to accept them and act upon them because they are good. They correct our path and keep us far away from error: "You have commanded us to keep Your precepts diligently" (verse 4).
5. **Judgments:**It's a legal term denoting the judgment of God, the just Judge, who will judge

the whole world. God already judged us when He said that man is sinful, that all have sinned, and that the soul that sins must die. But the same sentence says, too, that everyone who puts his trust in Christ's atonement will be reconciled with God by virtue of this atonement. If we are to live spiritually we must be reconciled with God through Christ's atonement. If we are to live in peace with God we must seek protection in Christ's atonement, and say, "I will praise You with uprightness of heart, when I learn Your righteous judgments" (verse 7).

6. **Testimony:** Because it testifies against us. The ark of testimony is called "the ark of the covenant of the LORD" (Deuteronomy 31:26) because the Lord wrote the commandments and ordered them to be kept in the ark of the covenant, because they were God's covenant between Himself and His people. The commandments testified against the people, their works and their faith because they did not keep the commandments. "Blessed are those who keep His testimonies"(verse 2). If we disobey, we have no excuse; He has told us. Paul said, "I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house" (Acts 20:20).
7. **Way:** God's Word shows us the path to the right conduct, and teaches us that it is a way: "They also do no iniquity; they walk in His ways" (verse 3). The Old Testament commanded "eye for eye, tooth for tooth"(Deuteronomy 19:21). But Christianity introduced a new way that says, "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you" (Matthew 5:44).

The psalm contains four main sections:

- First section: The psalmist lifts up his heart to God (verses 1-32)
- Second section: The Lord is a God of giving (verses 33-80)
- Third section: The Lord is a God of deliverance (verses 81-128)
- Fourth section: The Lord is a God of victory (verses 129-176)

9.1. SECTION ONE

The Psalmist Lifts up his Heart to God (verses 1-32)

1 Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD!

2 Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with the whole heart!

3 They also do no iniquity; they walk in His ways.

4 You have commanded us to keep Your precepts diligently.

5 Oh, that my ways were directed to keep Your statutes!

6 Then I would not be ashamed, when I look into all Your commandments.

7 I will praise You with uprightness of heart, when I learn Your righteous judgments.
8 I will keep Your statutes; Oh, do not forsake me utterly!
9 How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.
10 With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments!
11 Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.
12 Blessed are You, O LORD! Teach me Your statutes.
13 With my lips I have declared all the judgments of Your mouth.
14 I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, as much as in all riches.
15 I will meditate on Your precepts, and contemplate Your ways.
16 I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word.
17 Deal bountifully with Your servant, that I may live and keep Your word.
18 Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law.
19 I am a stranger in the earth; do not hide Your commandments from me.
20 My soul breaks with longing for Your judgments at all times.
21 You rebuke the proud—the cursed, who stray from Your commandments.
22 Remove from me reproach and contempt, for I have kept Your testimonies.
23 Princes also sit and speak against me, but Your servant meditates on Your statutes.
24 Your testimonies also are my delight and my counselors.
25 My soul clings to the dust; revive me according to Your word.
26 I have declared my ways, and You answered me; teach me Your statutes.
27 Make me understand the way of Your precepts; so shall I meditate on Your wonderful works.
28 My soul melts from heaviness; strengthen me according to Your word.
29 Remove from me the way of lying, and grant me Your law graciously.
30 I have chosen the way of truth; Your judgments I have laid before me.
31 I cling to Your testimonies; O LORD, do not put me to shame!
32 I will run the course of Your commandments, for You shall enlarge my heart.

This section contains the following:

- First: The Lord's law lifts up the heart (verses 1-8)

- Second: The psalmist seeks purity (verses 9-16)
- Third: The psalmist seeks the knowledge of the Word (verses 17-24)
- Fourth: The psalmist seeks truth (verses 25-32)

9.1.1. First: The Lord's Law Lifts up the Heart

(verses 1-8)

1. The law gladdens the heart (verses 1-3):

1. **The happiness of conduct:** "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, Who walk in the law of the LORD!"(verse 1). Just like Psalm 1 and 32, this psalm begins with a blessing: "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly ... But his delight is in the law of the LORD ... Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered"(Psalms 1:1,2; 32:1). The Sermon on the Mount also begins with a blessing: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). All people are entangled in the misery of sin, and they seek happiness. But they will find it only in God's law and instruction, which is worthy of obedience. In this way thus they become undefiled and blameless. Today we know that the way is Christ, who said, "I am the way" (John 14:6). It is He who said, "Enter by the narrow gate... Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13,14).

We are sinful by nature, removed from the way, but everyone who is washed clean by the blood that cleanses from every sin will be renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Lord will restore him to the paths of righteousness for His name's sake, make him walk before Him uprightly, and grant him enough grace to keep him on the right path. He "is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy - To God our Savior, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty" (Jude 24,25).

2. **The happiness of obedience:** "Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with the whole heart! They also do no iniquity; they walk in His ways"(verses 2,3). To keep something is to observe or cling to it. We keep what we love and cherish in our hearts. To keep the Word is to live under its authority. The Word is like a ruler that shows how tall we are spiritually or how short. It also points out whether we are crooked. This makes us feel the need for God's grace to complete what is lacking in us and straighten up what is crooked. Those who study the Word of God and resolve to walk according to it will walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise people, redeeming the time, because the days are evil (Ephesians 5:15,16). How happy Job was as he said, "My foot has held fast to His steps; I have kept His way and not turned aside" (Job 23:11). If we keep God's testimonies, they will keep us: "In keeping them there is great reward" (Psalm 19:11).

2. The law is the Lord's commands (verses 4-8):

1. **The godly person desires to obey it:** "You have commanded us to keep Your precepts diligently. Oh, that my ways were directed to keep Your statutes!"(verses 4,5). The godly person begins to obey the Word when he knows that the Lord inspired it. When the Lord speaks, obedience is the only option. The psalmist then reminds himself of his own responsibility and his people's responsibility; if they follow the way of the undefiled they are on the right path. How different man's way is from the Lord's: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God"(Romans 12:2). When faced with a problem, the believer may behave in a way similar to the manner of the people of this sinful age. He thinks that he may be let off if he lies, he may feel good if he takes revenge, and may even doubt God's love. But he soon discovers his mistake, returns to the Lord and directs his ways to keep His statutes. Then the description will fit him: "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You" (Isaiah 26:3).
2. **The godly is blessed by obeying it:** "Then I would not be ashamed, when I look into all Your commandments. I will praise You with uprightness of heart, when I learn Your righteous judgments"(verses 6,7). Sin produces shame, and if we get rid of it the cause of shame disappears. Our first father did not know shame before he listened to the words of the serpent, and was freed from it only after the loving God covered him with tunics of the skin of a sacrificed animal (Genesis 3:21). When we read His commandments and consider them carefully, we are not ashamed of them at all, but testify to others and say, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). We will never be truly godly unless we resolve to keep all the Lord's commandments. "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight"(1 John 3:21,22). He who seeks a life of holiness will thank the Lord with an upright heart, and praise will rise from his upright heart, which loves God.
3. **The godly lives in the presence of the Lord:** "I will keep Your statutes; Oh, do not forsake me utterly!"(verse 8). When the children of Israel sinned, the Lord was angry with them and let them be carried off. But he did not forsake them "utterly"; He made them return after seventy years. The psalmist asks his good God not to forsake him or punish him utterly, but to restore the psalmist to Himself as Job was restored and lived happily in the Lord's presence.

9.1.2. Second: The Psalmist Seeks Purity (verses 9-16)

The first passage of the psalm began with blessing the undefiled in the way, and the second passage begins with identifying the signposts of this undefiled way.

1. Purity as a result of obedience (verses 9-11):

1. **A question:** "How can a young man cleanse his way?"(verse 9a). To cleanse one's way is to keep oneself pure (1 Timothy 5:22). People are all sinful and ungrateful in general, and young people are more liable than others to youthful lusts. Let young people have a pure conscience and a good testimony. The time of youth is the time for planting the seeds in anticipation of a mature life and eternal life. How important it is to begin correctly and to continue in the good way! A young man must cleanse his way because one false step in his youth will inevitably lead to many further false steps. How lovely is the admonition: "Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, 'I have no pleasure in them'"(Ecclesiastes 12:1). To answer his own question, the psalmist said, "By taking heed according to Your word" (Psalm 119:9b). The greatness of the Word is evident in its ability to bring about the required cleansing. Now the Bible is the Word of God, and it is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). Let us beseech God, saying, "Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; according to Your mercy remember me, for Your goodness' sake, O LORD" (Psalm 25:7).
2. **A request:** "With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments!"(verse 10). The psalmist has sought the Lord with his whole heart to be his master, counsellor and friend so that he could be reassured and continue on his path, not veering away from it. He sought deliverance from falling into sin because he loved holiness with all his heart. "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12) because "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death"(Proverbs 14:12).
3. **Carefulness:** "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You"(verse 11). The psalmist understood, believed and loved the Word, so he carefully hid it in his heart, a safe place, like a treasure too precious to be lost. Whoever hides God's Word in his heart will be ready to face temptations: "My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, ... Discretion will preserve you; understanding will keep you, to deliver you from the way of evil, from the man who speaks perverse things"(Proverbs 2:1,11,12). Christ overcame the devil by the written Word. When ridiculed by the hearers for speaking in other tongues on the Day of Pentecost, Peter defended himself and his associates, as well as his own message by quoting the Word (Acts 2:16). God's Word reveals God's mind and will to you. If you obey God every day and submit to the Master Potter He will turn you into a vessel for honour, sanctified and useful for the Master (2 Timothy 2:21).

2. Purity as a result of studying the Word (verses 12-16):

1. **Learning the Word:** "Blessed are You, O LORD! Teach me Your statutes"(verse 12). The psalmist praised and blessed the Lord for what He revealed to him and did with him. Then he asked the Lord to teach him His statutes, which none could learn except those who learned from the One who said, "Learn from Me"(Matthew 11:29). God's statutes pave the way to holiness, so let us learn them as disciples in the Lord's school, under this teacher, and "...as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct" (1 Peter 1:15).
2. **Repeating the Word:** "With my lips I have declared all the judgments of Your mouth"(verse 13). The psalmist declared loudly all God's judgments after he had hidden them in his heart. They manifested themselves on his lips, because out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (Matthew 12:34). He believed, therefore he spoke (Psalm 116:10). That is why even his conscience testified to him that he preached what he learned of God's Word to others, not hiding the good news from them. For out of the good treasure of his heart he brought forth good things (Matthew 12:35). He was like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old (Matthew 13:52). His heart was filled of God's Word to his satisfaction, so he wanted to satisfy others, for whoever scatters will increase more (Proverbs 11:24). The psalmist went forth to proclaim God's judgments because he recognized the responsibility of the statement: "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house" (Matthew 5:14,15).
3. **Joy in the Word:** "I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, as much as in all riches. I will meditate on Your precepts, and contemplate Your ways. I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word"(verses 14-16). In these three verses there are five verbs worthy of note: I rejoice, I meditate, I consider, I delight myself and I will not neglect. No joy surpasses knowing God's Word and acting on it. The more complete the obedience, the more intense joy becomes. The one who desires to enjoy the days of heaven here on earth should derive his joy from obedience to God's commandments. Rejoicing in the Word is an indication of its influence on the heart and cleansing power in one's life. God's testimonies are greater than all riches of the earth. The psalmist rejoiced in the Word more than the rich rejoiced in their wealth. David was a rich king, to whom the wealth of the nations came as spoils of war; but his heart was not set on them, and he consecrated them for the building of the house of the Lord. The people of the world rejoice in the riches of the world, but what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul (Matthew 16:26)? "One's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses" (Luke 12:15).

Because of the abundance of the psalmist's joy in the Word of God he meditated on it and repeated it, then contemplated it. That is, he related what his mouth uttered to the kind of

life he was leading. Meditating on the Word of God is the way to practical godliness. Whoever experiences God's grace continues walking with Him and obeys the commandment: "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success" (Joshua 1:8).

9.1.3. Third: The Psalmist Seeks the Knowledge of the Word

(verses 17-24)

1. Knowing the Word is a gift from God (verses 17,18):

1. **Because it is life-giving:** "Deal bountifully with Your servant, that I may live and keep Your word"(verse 17). Physical and spiritual life alike are a bounty from the Lord, for we cannot know God in a life-giving manner unless we accept His Word. This in itself is an act of God's grace. The psalmist admits he is only a servant, not worthy to demand anything, not having any merit within himself. Rather he trusted in God and sought his abundant mercy. "But 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)" (Ephesians 2:4,5). By grace God accepts from us the gift of spending our lives in His ministry as we adopt Paul's statement: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).
2. **Because it is wondrous:** "Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law"(verse 18). Our natural lives are wrapped up in spiritual darkness, and ordinary insight cannot penetrate the mysteries of divine revelation. So the psalmist asked the Lord to open his eyes to see the wonders of the law, as Elisha prayed for his servant, " 'LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.' Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha" (2 Kings 6:17). The young man realized that those who were with them were far more than those who were against them. Now if the psalmist saw wonders in the law, how much more would he see them in the gospel! "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints" (Ephesians 1:17,18 NIV). This is what Christ did with the disciples from Emmaus when "He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures" (Luke 24:45). But those who are far removed from God's grace, "their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their

heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away"(2 Corinthians 3:13-16). We need spiritual insight that we may see all that the Lord stored away for us in His Word and deeds.

2. The psalmist needs knowledge (verses 19-24):

- 1. Because he is a stranger:** "am a stranger in the earth; do not hide Your commandments from me"(verse 19). The psalmist recognized that he was a stranger in this present life, which is ruled by the devil, the ruler of this world (John 14:30; 16:11). The constitution governing it is satanic, because "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4 NIV). The psalmist believes he is a stranger because his principles are different from the principles of those around him. All God's people admit that they are strangers because heaven is their home country and the earth is nothing but a place of pilgrimage. They need a guide, a comforter and a companion until the time of their sojourn is finished. The godly are like their Christ who, being a stranger in our world, said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here"(John 18:36).
- 2. Because he longs for knowledge:** "My soul breaks with longing for Your judgments at all times"(verse 20). His soul broke with longing for knowing God's judgments on the issues in which people's opinions differ. The Word of God is the judge that settles all differences. A believer is to know God's will by it, and approve the things that are excellent (Romans 2:18). The psalmist was able to express his longings because he always turned away from evil, never faltered between two opinions and never served two masters.
- 3. Because he is surrounded by evil people:** "You rebuke the proud—the cursed, who stray from Your commandments. Remove from me reproach and contempt, for I have kept Your testimonies. Princes also sit and speak against me, but Your servant meditates on Your statutes. Your testimonies also are my delight and my counselors"(verses 21-24). The psalmist sees the wrong logic of the world and the wicked, so he is disturbed: "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a native green tree"(Psalm 37:35). They exalt themselves above God and act against His will. "And they say, 'How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?'" (Psalm 73:11). But the psalmist knows that "Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD; though they join forces, none will go unpunished" (Proverbs 16:5). "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil" he says, "Pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate" (Proverbs 8:13). He asks the Lord that evil company should not corrupt his good habits (1 Corinthians 15:33), and to remove from him reproach and contempt. His enemies had reproached

and insulted him because he kept the Lord's testimonies, so he put up with the reproach, saying, "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter" (Romans 8:36). Consequently, he experienced how "He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly"(Luke 1:52). The more we are subjected to reproach the greater is our comfort in our Saviour who Himself has suffered, was tempted and is able to aid those who are tempted (Hebrews 2:18). He silences the lying lips, raises the needy from the dust and gives grace to endure false accusations. We trust that He will defend us in due time and "He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday"(Psalm 37:6). But sadly, some accusations that are laid at our feet may be correct. In this case we need to listen to the advice: "For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God"(1 Peter 2:20).

In all this the Lord's testimonies were the psalmist's delight and his counsellors; he loved the wise testimonies of the Lord at the time of confusion when he was at a cross-roads, overtaken by fear and anxiety, and in a desperate need. "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" (Philippians 1:9-11).

9.1.4. Fourth: The Psalmist Seeks Truth

(verses 25-32)

1. **Because he is persecuted:** "My soul clings to the dust; revive me according to Your word"(verse 25). The psalmist depicts himself as fallen on the ground, unable to rise and wanting to know the reason: Is it his natural corruption that makes him, when he is willing, unable to perform what is good (Romans 7:18)? Or is it the troubles that are both within him and outside of him? He knows that man's soul dwells in a house of dust, and because of its sinful nature it clings to the dust. Therefore, he confesses his helplessness and asks the Lord to revive him. He says, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"(John 6:68,69). In God's Word there is a life-giving power, so that if we seek it, we may "walk before the LORD in the land of the living" (Psalm 116:9). Then we are "born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever" (1 Peter 1:23). Let our prayer be: "Will You not revive us again, that Your people may rejoice in You? Show us Your mercy, LORD, and grant us Your salvation" (Psalm 85:6,7).
2. **Because he loves the commandments:** "I have declared my ways, and You answered me; teach me Your statutes. Make me understand the way of Your precepts; so shall I

meditate on Your wonderful works"(verses 26,27). The psalmist declares his ways to the Lord, confesses to Him, complains of his troubles and asks to be taught His statutes. As a result he meditates on the wonders of providence, saying, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1). If we are sad He comforts us; if we are weak He makes us strong; if we are confused He guides us. "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). Everyone who seeks to understand God's commandments will hear: "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye" (Psalm 32:8). "Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom; I am understanding, I have strength" (Proverbs 8:14). God said to the people of old, "This is the way" (Isaiah 30:21) and Christ said to us, "I am the way" (John 14:6). Therefore we ask Him to make us understand because He is our teacher, who said, "If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority"(John 7:17). When we know and understand, we communicate what we have learned to others, saying, "The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to hear as the learned" (Isaiah 50:4). Thus we and our nation will be blessed.

3. **Because he hates lying:** "My soul melts from heaviness; strengthen me according to Your word. Remove from me the way of lying, and grant me Your law graciously"(verses 28,29). A repentant soul melts with grief over its sins, and pours out its supplications to God. And a persecuted soul melts with grief over the false accusations of liars, for the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one, and is led by a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). The way of lying is the way of sin and error, and the life of sin is one big lie from beginning to end. The psalmist's soul melted from grief for those two reasons, so that it turned into tears poured out before God, as Job said, "My eyes pour out tears to God" (Job 16:20). Our hearts are often weighed down with grief so much that we feel we are being poured out. But it is better for us to melt from heaviness than to have our hearts hardened by lack of repentance. Let us be among those who pass through the Valley of Baca, making it a spring (Psalm 84:6), who, in the intensity of their grief, seek grace from God to be able to endure sorrow without failing. Those will hear the promise: "As your days, so shall your strength be" (Deuteronomy 33:25), and shout, "You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; You have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness" (Psalm 30:11). How great is the mercy of God, who gave us His law that keeps us from error and the way of lying. "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).
4. **Because he loves the truth:** "I have chosen the way of truth; Your judgments I have laid before me. I cling to Your testimonies; O LORD, do not put me to shame! I will run the course of Your commandments, for You shall enlarge my heart"(verses 30-32). There are

three verbs in these verses: "**I have chosen**," namely I have made up my mind to hate the way of lying and love the way of truth, for there is no good in a believer who falters between two opinions or serves two masters. Those who choose the way of truth are those whom God foreknew, those whom He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. He called them and justified them, and will surely glorify them.

Then the psalmist says, "**I cling to**," namely I united myself with what I have decided and shall never let it go. The person who holds fast to God's Word trusts and believes that he is acceptable to Him. The psalmist began this part of the psalm with the statement "My soul clings to the dust" (the literal translation of verse 25a) but then God revived him by His Word. As a result he said, "I [cling] to Your testimonies," and followed this up with the request: "O LORD, do not put me to shame!" Thus he was more than a conqueror through Him who loved him.

After that he said, "**I will run** the course of Your commandments" away from the world and nearer to You. "Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things" (1 Corinthians 9:24,25).

By answering the psalmist's three wishes, i.e. "I have chosen," "I cling to" and "I will run," the Lord enlarged his heart. Thus his heart became large enough to receive God's Word, which is "boundless" (Psalm 119:96). God enlarges the hearts of His people by the operation of the Holy Spirit upon them, and by imparting divine wisdom to them, so that they could say, "Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have relieved me in my distress; have mercy on me, and hear my prayer" (Psalm 4:1). When the Lord pours His love in our hearts, all we do will be done through God's grace that works in us. Thus we become like Moses, "choosing 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). We also become like Paul who said, "I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me... I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12-14).

The psalmist clung to the Word of God, who enlarged his heart. And when he rested from his troubles he used his strength for that which was more excellent.

9.2. SECTION TWO

The Lord is a God of Giving (verses 33-80)

33 Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes, and I shall keep it to the end.

34 Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law; indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart.

- 35 Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it.**
- 36 Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to covetousness.**
- 37 Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me in Your way.**
- 38 Establish Your word to Your servant, who is devoted to fearing You.**
- 39 Turn away my reproach which I dread, for Your judgments are good.**
- 40 Behold, I long for Your precepts; revive me in Your righteousness.**
- 41 Let Your mercies come also to me, O LORD— Your salvation according to Your word.**
- 42 So shall I have an answer for him who reproaches me, for I trust in Your word.**
- 43 And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, for I have hoped in Your ordinances.**
- 44 So shall I keep Your law continually, forever and ever.**
- 45 And I will walk at liberty, for I seek Your precepts.**
- 46 I will speak of Your testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed.**
- 47 And I will delight myself in Your commandments, which I love.**
- 48 My hands also I will lift up to Your commandments, which I love, And I will meditate on Your statutes.**
- 49 Remember the word to Your servant, upon which You have caused me to hope.**
- 50 This is my comfort in my affliction, for Your word has given me life.**
- 51 The proud have me in great derision, yet I do not turn aside from Your law.**
- 52 I remembered Your judgments of old, O LORD, and have comforted myself.**
- 53 Indignation has taken hold of me because of the wicked, who forsake Your law.**
- 54 Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.**
- 55 I remember Your name in the night, O LORD, and I keep Your law.**
- 56 This has become mine, because I kept Your precepts.**
- 57 You are my portion, O LORD; I have said that I would keep Your words.**
- 58 I entreated Your favor with my whole heart; be merciful to me according to Your word.**
- 59 I thought about my ways, and turned my feet to Your testimonies.**
- 60 I made haste, and did not delay to keep Your commandments.**
- 61 The cords of the wicked have bound me, but I have not forgotten Your law.**
- 62 At midnight I will rise to give thanks to You, because of Your righteous judgments.**

63 I am a companion of all who fear You, and of those who keep Your precepts.
64 The earth, O LORD, is full of Your mercy; teach me Your statutes.
65 You have dealt well with Your servant, O LORD, according to Your word.
66 Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe Your commandments.
67 Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word.
68 You are good, and do good; teach me Your statutes.
69 The proud have forged a lie against me, but I will keep Your precepts with my whole heart.
70 Their heart is as fat as grease, but I delight in Your law.
71 It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes.
72 The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of coins of gold and silver.
73 Your hands have made me and fashioned me; give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments.
74 Those who fear You will be glad when they see me, because I have hoped in Your word.
75 I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me.
76 Let, I pray, Your merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to Your word to Your servant.
77 Let Your tender mercies come to me, that I may live; for Your law is my delight.
78 Let the proud be ashamed, for they treated me wrongfully with falsehood; but I will meditate on Your precepts.
79 Let those who fear You turn to me, those who know Your testimonies.
80 Let my heart be blameless regarding Your statutes, that I may not be ashamed.

The section contains the following:

- First: The psalmist's needs (verses 33-48)
- Second: Incentives to asking (verses 49-64)
- Third: Gratitude for the answer (verses 65-80)

9.2.1. First: The Psalmist's Needs

(verses 33-48)

1. The need for knowledge (verses 33-35):

1. **Teach me, and I shall keep:** "Teach me, O LORD, to follow your decrees; then I will keep them to the end"(verse 33). The psalmist makes known that his prime need

- is for knowledge and learning. Now knowledge is the information that enters our heads, whereas learning is the humble submission to what we have learned in our daily encounters: "Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways. He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way" (Psalm 25:8,9). The psalmist asks the Lord to teach him a way in which he could walk to his life's end, when he could receive the divine reward. For "By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward" (Psalm 19:11). The psalmist wanted to know the way to practical holiness, and the Lord satisfied his heartfelt desire. The Lord responds to such a request, for He has loved us completely and there is no limit to His grace that is at work within the believer, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6). For "God is exalted in his power. Who is a teacher like him?" (Job 36:22).
2. **Give me understanding, and I shall keep:** "Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart"(verse 34). After learning, the psalmist asked for understanding, because "It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way"(Proverbs 19:2). Once he began to put what he had learned into practice he clashed with the wicked who piled up stumbling blocks in his way. This led him to ask for an enlightened mind and a holy understanding, because the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of the written Word will make us understand all things. "The Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true" (1 John 5:20). Sadly, though, there are people who are wise in their own eyes and do not seek heavenly understanding: "Although they claimed to be wise, they were fools" (Romans 1:22). Let us, therefore, seek heavenly understanding, for "Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding" (Proverbs 4:7). Observe His law and hold fast to it with all your heart: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21).
 3. **Make me walk, for I delight:** "Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight"(verse 35). The psalmist asks for a heavenly training course so that his own will could be submitted to the Lord, for it is the Lord who works in him both to will and to do for His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13). Through training we learn by trial and error to recognize what is right, to obey the Word in the face of opposition, and to lay hold of it joyfully because heavenly help comes to us from the Lord. Though we stumble, we will not fall, for the LORD holds our hand (Psalm 37:24). "For though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down by calamity" (Proverbs 24:16), and he will share with Solomon the fulfillment of his desire as the Lord said to him, "You have asked for ... discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart"(1 Kings 3:11,12). The psalmist asked for guidance and training in

order to walk in the path of God's commandments in which all the faithful servants of the Lord walked, as David said, "Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place" (Psalm 51:6).

2. The need for sanctification (verses 36,37):

1. **Love for the Word:** "Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain"(verse 36). In order to achieve a holy life the psalmist asks the Lord to incline his heart to His testimonies, not to dishonest gain (The Hebrew *betsa'* means greed or covetousness, especially for money). Thus he can be considered as one "who walks righteously and speaks what is right, who rejects gain from extortion and keeps his hand from accepting bribes" (Isaiah 33:15). He asked the Lord to keep him away from covetousness, which shuts the heart off from the Lord's testimonies, so that he may obey Christ's commandment: "Take heed and beware of covetousness" (Luke 12:15), for the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. He who desires to incline his heart to the love of God and His Word, must stop loving the world because this is hatred toward God (James 4:4).
2. **Running away from worthless things:** "Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me in Your way"(verse 37). The person who loves the Word will run from worthless to holy things. To achieve a life of holiness the psalmist asked God to turn his eyes away from the temporary, worthless, untrue things, because he wanted to walk in a straight path and resist the temptations of the devil, who perverts the straight ways. He wants to obey the commandment: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:15-17). In turning one's eyes away from worthless things and fixing them upon the way of the Lord, the Lord reigns over the believer's life, enabling him to perform what is good.

3. The need for fulfilling the promises (verses 38-40):

1. **God's words are promises:** "Establish Your word to Your servant, who is devoted to fearing You"(verse 38). The Lord promised many spiritual and physical blessings to those who fear Him. If they seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, He will add all these things to them (Matthew 6:33). In this request the psalmist asks the Lord to fulfil His true and trustworthy promises to him (Revelation 21:5). He says, "Blessed be the LORD, who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised. There has not failed one word of all His good promise, which He promised through His servant Moses"(1 Kings 8:56).
2. **The promises are good:** "Turn away my reproach which I dread, for Your judgments are good. Behold, I long for Your precepts; revive me in Your righteousness"(verses

39,40). God's promises must be fulfilled because they are given by God. They will surely remove the psalmist's disgrace, which he received from his enemies because he obeyed God. He says, "Deliver me from all my transgressions; do not make me the reproach of the foolish"(Psalm 39:8). Yet reproach may come upon the believer because he did wrong, and this sort of reproach brings discredit to both God and the believer. If, however, reproach comes as a result of obedience to God and doing His commandments, blessed is he who receives such reproach. Christ said, "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake" (Matthew 5:11). It was also said, "If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you" (1 Peter 4:14). The psalmist desires the good divine promises and trusts in divine justice to be just and fair. So he does not care about the people's judgments of him, but cares only about the Lord's judgments.

4. The need for mercy (verses 41-48):

1. **Mercy saves:** "Let Your mercies come also to me, O LORD— Your salvation according to Your word"(verse 41). Divine mercy, which the Lord promised us, saves us from our sins, troubles, enemies and want. "Have mercy upon me, O God"the sinner humbly pleaded to the Lord, "According to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions" (Psalm 51:1). "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" (Luke 18:13). The psalmist bases his request upon his faith in the sufficiency of God's lovingkindness, which is better than life (Psalm 63:3). When mercy comes upon us, salvation comes along according to his statement: "When You said, 'Seek My face,' my heart said to You, 'Your face, LORD, I will seek'" (Psalm 27:8). The psalmist knows full well that his present salvation is the pledge of his eternal salvation: "Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid" (Isaiah 12:2). This salvation springs from God's mercy, not from any personal merit within us: "By grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:5). By faith we obtain the promises, just as Abraham believed "and He accounted it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:6).
2. **Mercy answers him who reproaches:** "So shall I have an answer for him who reproaches me, for I trust in Your word. And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, for I have hoped in Your ordinances. So shall I keep Your law continually, forever and ever"(verses 42-44). When God's mercy comes to us, it delivers us and enables us to have an answer for them who reproach us who have long said, "There is no help for him in God" (Psalm 3:2). We answer them, "Rather, God's promises are true and faithful, upon which we depend as on a steadfast rock, for God 'is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy' (Jude 24)."

In humility the psalmist asks the Lord not to take the Word of truth out of his mouth.

- Because he hopes in His ordinances, he will utter nothing but the truth. He will speak the Word of truth in its time for the righteous glory of God, and will be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks him the reason for the hope that is in him (1 Peter 3:15). This, in turn, will lead him to keep God's Word to the end of his life, and he may become the complete man of God, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:17). Although the believer may go through moments of weakness in the face of the enemy's opposition, he recognizes this weakness, and asks the Lord to help him keep His law until the end of his life, regardless of the reproaches of the scoffer.
3. **Mercy makes us testify:** "And I will walk at liberty, for I seek Your precepts. I will speak of Your testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed"(verses 45,46). God's mercy makes us walk in liberty, in a broad space where there is no fear or persecution. Because the Lord gives us peace, we walk at liberty without fear. Because grace liberates him from all sin, the believer is no longer a prisoner of his sins; he does good willingly, not by compulsion. Whether troubles come from within the believer's soul - such as fear, doubts or anxiety over the future - or from outside him - such as reproach and persecution - he will rely on His God, obey His commandments and experience liberty. Because he loves the Lord's commandments, he will speak of His testimonies before governors and kings, and will not be ashamed. His liberty bears witness that His God lives, as the prophet Elijah bore witness before King Ahab (1 Kings 18:41-46), the three young men before the king of Babylon (Daniel 3), the apostle Paul before the governors Felix and Festus (Acts 24) and before King Agrippa (Acts 26). "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ," Paul said, "for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek"(Romans 1:16).
 4. **Mercy gives delight and leads to worship:** "And I will delight myself in Your commandments, which I love. My hands also I will lift up to Your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on Your statutes"(verses 47,48). Where our treasure is, there our heart will be also. A person who loves God's Word will delight in listening to it, repeating it and speaking it. The believer is happy when he conquers fear and doubt, and the enemy's threats cannot enter his soul. He trusts God, and abides in God's words and promises that were fulfilled to him: "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"(Psalm 19:9,10). As a result, he will lift up his hands to the Lord's commandments, which are full of promises, on which he meditates and ponders. To lift up the hands is to offer a desperate prayer for help, saying, "Hear the voice of my supplications when I cry to You, when I lift up my hands toward Your holy sanctuary" (Psalm 28:2), the way Moses lifted up his hands

as his people defeated the Amalekites (Exodus 17:8-13). To lift up the hands also means to keep the hands away from worldly preoccupations and to involve them in things which are above, where Christ is sitting (Colossians 3:1). It can also mean to pray incessantly as Ezra did (Ezra 9:5). It means confidence that help will come: "My help comes from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:2). "Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their masters, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God, until He has mercy on us" (Psalm 123:2).

9.2.2. Second: Incentives to Asking

(verses 49-64)

1. **The Lord's promises:** "Remember the word to Your servant, upon which You have caused me to hope. This is my comfort in my affliction, for Your word has given me life"(verses 49,50). The Lord's promises were the first incentive to make the psalmist turn to the Lord. He appealed to the Lord to remember His encouraging promises, which had made him hope in the Lord in the first place: "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me" (Psalm 50:15). In response, he will say along with David, "And now, O LORD, the word which You have spoken concerning Your servant and concerning his house, let it be established forever, and do as You have said" (1 Chronicles 17:23). He reminds the Lord of His faithful promises because they were his comfort in his affliction, and because they give him the better life that the Lord had promised him, in the assurance that God will remember and not forget.
2. **The psalmist's troubles:** "The proud have me in great derision, yet I do not turn aside from Your law. I remembered Your judgments of old, O LORD, and have comforted myself. Indignation has taken hold of me because of the wicked, who forsake Your law"(verses 51-53). Troubles encouraged the psalmist and prompted him to complain and seek deliverance from the severe harassment of those who held him in derision for his faith. Those who ridicule are the worst sort of sinners because they not only reject the Word but also scoff at those who accept it. Christ said of such people, "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces" (Matthew 7:6). The psalmist clung to the law that the proud mockers rejected, never turning aside from it in spite of their derision, so his soul was filled with comfort and rest. But the derision in which those scoffers held God's Word filled him with holy anger. He felt very indignant. Ezra must have had a similar feeling when he said, "O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens" (Ezra 9:6). Yet, the psalmist must have also feared for the destiny of those scoffers and the destiny of their children, because wickedness not only harms the wicked but those around him, too.

3. **The psalmist's pilgrimage:** "Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage. I remember Your name in the night, O LORD, and I keep Your law. This has become mine, because I kept Your precepts"(verses 54-56). The third incentive that prompted the psalmist to seek God and appeal to His generosity was the fact that he was a pilgrim on his way to heaven. His body was on the earth, but his spirit was heaven-bound. Only the Lord filled his soul and mind, and he stayed up by night to meditate on His Word. The sense of pilgrimage while in the world is natural for believers, for "Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life"" (Genesis 47:9). The believers need a heavenly joy that they express in songs, i.e. poems sung to the accompaniment of music, which are easy to commit to memory and to repeat. When the psalmist sings he mentions the Lord's name, which embodies all His attributes, and says, "We give thanks to You, O God, we give thanks! For Your wondrous works declare that Your name is near" (Psalm 75:1). In the dark of the night and the melancholy of grief the psalmist takes refuge in the name of the Lord, which is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe (Proverbs 18:10). Again he says, "At midnight I will rise to give thanks to You, because of Your righteous judgments" (Psalm 119:62).
4. **The psalmist's belonging:** "You are my portion, O LORD; I have said that I would keep Your words. I entreated Your favor with my whole heart; be merciful to me according to Your word. I thought about my ways, and turned my feet to Your testimonies. I made haste, and did not delay to keep Your commandments"(verses 57-60). This is the fourth incentive that encouraged the psalmist to appeal to God's generosity: he is sure that he belongs to God, because the Lord is his portion. "But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:42). Jeremiah said, "'The LORD is my portion,' says my soul, 'Therefore I hope in Him!'"(Lamentations 3:24). When someone makes the Lord his portion He will become the object of his joy. The Lord's commandments will steer the course of his life as he resolves to persevere to the end. He prefers God's Word to all the riches and enjoyments of the world, for "More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it" (Luke 11:28).

To belong to the Lord is to love Him, keep His Word and seek His favour, saying, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!" (Genesis 32:26). We are not to leave off seeking His favour and mercy, thinking about our ways and examining our conduct continually, saying, "And see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:24). "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). The psalmist found his treasure in the Lord's commandments, and his belonging to Him prompted him to pray and appeal to His generosity.

5. **The psalmist's tenacity:** "The cords of the wicked have bound me, but I have not forgotten Your law. At midnight I will rise to give thanks to You, because of Your

righteous judgments. I am a companion of all who fear You, and of those who keep Your precepts. The earth, O LORD, is full of Your mercy; teach me Your statutes"(verses 61-64). The psalmist was in a dangerous position because the cords of the wicked were wound around him like a trap or like a net cast upon him to strangle him. The wicked people wanted him imprisoned or dead. But in all this he maintained that he never forgot God's law. Rather he held on to it tenaciously, never ceasing to seek the Lord's favour and walking in His obedience: "The wicked have laid a snare for me, yet I have not strayed from Your precepts" (Psalm 119:110). In the middle of the night, while people were asleep, he woke up to kneel and glorify the Lord for His judgments. He was sure that God would avenge him because He is a just God. He did not care to be seen by anyone, but he gave thanks to his heavenly Father who sees in secret and will reward him openly. Our example in prayer is Christ Himself who used to rise up in the early morning to pray (Mark 1:35) and to pray all night (Luke 6:12).

Because the psalmist held on to God's Word, he also held on to his fellow-believers and found his delight in them, as it was said, "As for the saints who are on the earth, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight"(Psalm 16:3). When the believers hold fast to God's Word and love one another, the whole world will be full of the goodness of God who "loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the goodness of the LORD" (Psalm 33:5).

9.2.3. Third: Gratitude for the Answer

(verses 65-80)

1. **Gratitude for the Lord's good gifts:** "You have dealt well with Your servant, O LORD, according to Your word. Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe Your commandments. Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word"(verses 65-67). The psalmist gives thanks because the Lord dealt well with him. Everything the Lord does to His servants is for their own good. Sickness is for their own good. The departure of friends is for their own good. Loss is for their own good. "Say to the righteous that it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings"(Isaiah 3:10). No doubt the experience of distress is painful, but "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31). Because God gave the psalmist good things, he asks for good judgment from Him in order to be able to use those good things to spread the benefit he received: "For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away"(Matthew 25:29). Good judgment is good taste, the power to discern between good and evil, to teach others to taste and see that the LORD is good (Psalm 34:8). "For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Hebrews 5:13,14). Let us

obey the commandment: "Receive my instruction, and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold; for wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things one may desire cannot be compared with her" (Proverbs 8:10,11).

The psalmist recalls a previous experience when he went astray from the Lord and was chastised, and said, "I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,' and You forgave the iniquity of my sin" (Psalm 32:5). God does not have children who do not sin, but all His children repent and say, "Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; when I fall, I will arise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me. I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against Him, until He pleads my case and executes justice for me. He will bring me forth to the light; I will see His righteousness" (Micah 7:8,9). We should not condemn the sinner, but rather pray for him: "Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand" (Romans 14:4).

2. **Gratitude for the Lord's righteousness:** "You are good, and do good; teach me Your statutes. The proud have forged a lie against me, but I will keep Your precepts with my whole heart. Their heart is as fat as grease, but I delight in Your law. It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes. The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of coins of gold and silver"(verses 68-72). The psalmist repeats his thanks for God's generosity because He is good and is a doer of good. He is good by nature and He does good to His created beings. Goodness in man is an attribute or a gift, but with God it is His very nature, for no one is good but One, that is, God (Mark 10:18). God's bountiful acts testify that He is good. "Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness"(Acts 14:17). A person may do good to someone he loves, but God does good to those who do not deserve it. Christ said, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!" (Matthew 7:11). The heavenly Father did good to the psalmist in that He granted him the adoption of sons (John 1:12), then gave him all that he lacked (Psalm 23:1). Therefore he decided to obey God with all his heart and to delight in His fellowship, despite the fact that he was surrounded by wicked people who fabricated lies against him; proud and lying men whose heart seemed to be covered with a layer of fat that spiritual truths could not penetrate. The psalmist thanked the Lord for his troubles because they made him cling to Him and rely on Him more than ever before. He said, "And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope" (Romans 5:3,4). He knew that his light affliction, which is but for a moment, was working for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory (2 Corinthians 4:17). He admitted that God's law was better than all riches. It is not

wrong to possess gold or silver; the mistake is to let these things occupy the place of the law in man's heart, or to obtain such items by unlawful means.

3. **Gratitude for the Lord's works:** "Your hands have made me and fashioned me; give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments. Those who fear You will be glad when they see me, because I have hoped in Your word. I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me"(verses 73-75). The psalmist thanks His Lord because He created him, as Job said, "Why then have You brought me out of the womb? Oh, that I had perished and no eye had seen me!" (Job 10:8). The psalmist also said, "My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them"(Psalm 139:15,16). After writing the Torah, Moses asked in his poem, "Do you thus deal with the LORD, O foolish and unwise people? Is He not your Father, who bought you? Has He not made you and established you?" (Deuteronomy 32:6). When the believer falls into sin and loses the way, God will remake him into a new creation as the potter can reform a clay pot (Jeremiah 18). Through the first birth we came into the world of the flesh, and "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" (John 3:6). Through the second birth, however, we enter into the world of the spirit, because that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. "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). God often allows people to suffer affliction and trouble to make them draw near to Him, as Moses said to his people, "And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way ... He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you ... that He might make you know" (Deuteronomy 8:2,3). Thus was the psalmist made to know that God's judgments are right and that only in faithfulness and justice would He humble or afflict him - always yielding good results. "Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints!"(Revelation 15:3).
4. **Gratitude for the Lord's mercy:** "Let, I pray, Your merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to Your word to Your servant. Let Your tender mercies come to me, that I may live; for Your law is my delight"(verses 76,77). Again the psalmist seeks the divine mercy and requests the fulfilment of the divine promises to all of God's people in general, and to him in particular "according to Your word to Your servant." Then he requests comfort as a result of God's mercies, which are new every morning (Lamentations 3:23). For "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but 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). True, "As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem" (Isaiah 66:13). "Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old, together; for I will turn their mourning to

joy, will comfort them, and make them rejoice rather than sorrow. I will satiate the soul of the priests with abundance, and My people shall be satisfied with My goodness,' says the LORD" (Jeremiah 31:13,14). "Revive me, O LORD, for Your name's sake! For Your righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble" (Psalm 143:11).

5. **Gratitude for the Lord's victory:** "Let the proud be ashamed, for they treated me wrongfully with falsehood; but I will meditate on Your precepts. Let those who fear You turn to me, those who know Your testimonies. Let my heart be blameless regarding Your statutes, that I may not be ashamed"(verses 78-80). The psalmist is sure that God will grant him victory, putting to shame his wicked enemies who treated him unjustly. Perhaps the psalmist re-called the victory God granted to David when his son Absalom re-volted against him. All the rebels that rose against David were put to shame, while David remained king and sang songs of thanks-giving and joy to God. Thus those who feared God returned to Him, thanked and praised Him for the triumph of the truth and the defeat of falsehood. The psalmist requested what David had re-quested: To have a blameless heart so that his victory would continue and that he would not be put to shame by anyone. He knew that the proud fabricated lies against him and hated him for no reason. For his love they repaid him with evil, but the Lord was gracious to him. Now he wanted to repay the Lord by having a blameless heart. Blamelessness here means that his intentions are pure, not that he is absolutely blameless. The psalmist resolved with all his heart to serve and worship the Lord, and not to be ashamed of Him because "if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight" (1 John 3:21,22).

9.3. SECTION THREE

The Lord is a God of Deliverance (verses 81-128)

- 81 My soul faints for Your salvation, but I hope in Your word.
- 82 My eyes fail from searching Your word, saying, "When will You comfort me?"
- 83 For I have become like a wineskin in smoke, yet I do not forget Your statutes.
- 84 How many are the days of Your servant? When will You execute judgment on those who persecute me?
- 85 The proud have dug pits for me, which is not according to Your law.
- 86 All Your commandments are faithful; they persecute me wrongfully; Help me!
- 87 They almost made an end of me on earth, but I did not forsake Your precepts.
- 88 Revive me according to Your lovingkindness, so that I may keep the testimony of Your mouth.
- 89 Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven.

90 Your faithfulness endures to all generations; You established the earth, and it abides.

91 They continue this day according to Your ordinances, for all are Your servants.

92 Unless Your law had been my delight, I would then have perished in my affliction.

93 I will never forget Your precepts, for by them You have given me life.

94 I am Yours, save me; for I have sought Your precepts.

95 The wicked wait for me to destroy me, but I will consider Your testimonies.

96 I have seen the consummation of all perfection, but Your commandment is exceedingly broad.

97 Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.

98 You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever with me.

99 I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation.

100 I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Your precepts.

101 I have restrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep Your word.

102 I have not departed from Your judgments, for You Yourself have taught me.

103 How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

104 Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.

105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

106 I have sworn and confirmed that I will keep Your righteous judgments.

107 I am afflicted very much; revive me, O LORD, according to Your word.

108 Accept, I pray, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD, and teach me Your judgments.

109 My life is continually in my hand, yet I do not forget Your law.

110 The wicked have laid a snare for me, yet I have not strayed from Your precepts.

111 Your testimonies I have taken as a heritage forever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart.

112 I have inclined my heart to perform Your statutes forever, to the very end.

113 I hate the double-minded, but I love Your law.

114 You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in Your word.

115 Depart from me, you evildoers, for I will keep the commandments of my God!

116 Uphold me according to Your word, that I may live; and do not let me be ashamed of my hope.

117 Hold me up, and I shall be safe, and I shall observe Your statutes continually.

118 You reject all those who stray from Your statutes, for their deceit is falsehood.
119 You put away all the wicked of the earth like dross; therefore I love Your testimonies.
120 My flesh trembles for fear of You, and I am afraid of Your judgments.
121 I have done justice and righteousness; do not leave me to my oppressors.
122 Be surety for Your servant for good; do not let the proud oppress me.
123 My eyes fail from seeking Your salvation and Your righteous word.
124 Deal with Your servant according to Your mercy, and teach me Your statutes.
125 I am Your servant; give me understanding, that I may know Your testimonies.
126 It is time for You to act, O LORD, for they have regarded Your law as void.
127 Therefore I love Your commandments more than gold, yes, than fine gold!
128 Therefore all Your precepts concerning all things I consider to be right; I hate every false way.

This section contains the following:

- First: The psalmist's trouble from his enemies (verses 81-96)
- Second: Hope in divine deliverance (verses 97-112)
- Third: The persecuted loves and serves the Lord (verses 113-128)

9.3.1. First: The Psalmist's Trouble from his Enemies

(verses 81-96)

1. The psalmist is persecuted (verses 81-88):

1. **His persecution lasted long:** "My soul faints for Your salvation, but I hope in Your word. My eyes fail from searching Your word, saying, 'When will You comfort me?'"(verses 81,82). In the intensity of the psalmist's troubles he yearned for the salvation of his God and hoped in His deliverance patiently and eagerly. But he waited for a long time, and grew weak and feeble. Nevertheless, he remained firm, hoping in God and acquainting himself with His Word that is full of precious promises. But when they were not fulfilled quickly he wondered, "When will You comfort me?" God's answer is that there is an appointed time for everything that is hoped for, and salvation must come; it will not tarry (Habakkuk 2:3). He is filled with the assurance that "those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31).
2. **He has become like a wineskin in smoke:** "For I have become like a wineskin in

smoke, yet I do not forget Your statutes"(verse 83). This expression may be interpreted in two different ways. The psalmist is either comparing himself to an empty wineskin that was hung up from the ceiling until it turned black and was full of cracks from the smoke from burning wood for heating and cooking. It lost both its value and shape because it was left unused. Or he is comparing himself to a full wineskin that was hung up in the smoke to improve the flavour of the wine within. Then the expression could mean that the Lord let the psalmist suffer persecution in order to shape his character. Although he was merely a wineskin, he still did not forget God's statutes, and thus was able to see the good that ensued from his troubles. "Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it"(Hebrews 12:11).

3. **His lifespan is short:** "How many are the days of Your servant? When will You execute judgment on those who persecute me?"(verse 84). The psalmist says that his short life may run out quickly before he can see God's deliverance and the punishment of the wicked. "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" (Psalm 90:10). If he spends most of them being persecuted, what will remain for him? He is afraid that his life will come to an end before he sees deliverance from his persecutors. He beseeches God to execute His just judgment upon them so that they would pay for their wrongdoings, for He is the just Judge, "He upholds the cause of the oppressed ... The LORD sets prisoners free" (Psalm 146:7 NIV).
4. **The evils of his persecutors:** "The proud have dug pits for me, which is not according to Your law. All Your commandments are faithful; they persecute me wrongfully; help me! They almost made an end of me on earth, but I did not forsake Your precepts. Revive me according to Your lovingkindness, so that I may keep the testimony of Your mouth"(verses 85-88). The proud are those who do not humble themselves under the mighty hand of God; they resist His instructions, pile up stumbling blocks in the path of the righteous and dig pits for them. But the psalmist recognizes that all God's commandments are faithful, leading him into safe paths. They are also a trust he must keep. He knows that the Lord is faithful to fulfil His promises, and He must deliver the persecuted and the oppressed. He says, "Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins (or from proud ones)"(Psalm 19:13). He adds, "They have prepared a net for my steps; my soul is bowed down; they have dug a pit before me; into the midst of it they themselves have fallen"(Psalm 57:6). This was the case with Jeremiah, whose enemies said about him, "Come and let us devise plans against Jeremiah ... Come and let us attack him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words"(Jeremiah 18:18). So he prayed, "Then they said, 'Come and let us devise plans against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the

priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come and let us attack him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words.' Give heed to me, O LORD, and listen to the voice of those who contend with me! Shall evil be repaid for good? For they have dug a pit for my life. Remember that I stood before You to speak good for them, to turn away Your wrath from them" (Jeremiah 18:18-20). When God's mercy catches up with the psalmist he says, "But I have trusted in Your mercy; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation" (Psalm 13:5).

2. The persecuted holds fast to the commandments (verses 89-96):

- 1. Because they are established:** "Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven. Your faithfulness endures to all generations; You established the earth, and it abides. They continue this day according to Your ordinances, for all are Your servants"(verses 89-91). God's Word is His message of love for mankind, and it is as established as God's constant love. It is from heaven and as high as the heavens, and is guarded by the Lord of the heavens. None can alter any part of it. Christ said, "For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled" (Matthew 5:18). And again He said, "My words will by no means pass away" (Matthew 24:35). "All flesh is as grass," Peter explained, "and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the LORD endures forever. Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you" (1 Peter 1:24,25). Whoever sees the stars established in heaven and the earth established in its orbit will know that God's natural laws are firm and unchangeable. This assures us that God must also keep His Word without change or alteration. No man's hands can tamper with it, for it is preserved just as the Ten Commandments were in the Ark of the Covenant. God keeps His promises to those who fear Him, so that no enemy could hurt them, because they hold fast to Him.
- 2. Because they give life:** "Unless Your law had been my delight, I would then have perished in my affliction. I will never forget Your precepts, for by them You have given me life. I am Yours, save me; for I have sought Your precepts. The wicked wait for me to destroy me, but I will consider Your testimonies"(verses 92-95). The enemies joined together against the persecuted psalmist and fabricated all sorts of lies against him. They could have destroyed him but for the fact that he held on to God's law and rested in the assurance of the divine promises. Thus, God's living Word became a source of spiritual and physical life to him. The wicked found their delight in their evil doings, but the psalmist experienced pleasure, satisfaction and joy in God's Word, which he sought, stuck to and did not forget. God's Word, in turn, filled his soul with reassurance and made him trust his God and ask Him for salvation and deliverance according to His good promises. "In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul"(Psalm 94:19). As the believer falls ill, suffers

pain or loses a dear one, he turns to the comforting Word, saying, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4). When he feels lonely even as he is surrounded by many people, he finds the Lord a refuge and a stronghold, and says, "I sought the LORD, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears" (Psalm 34:4), because he trusts in Christ's promise: "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). The psalmist had obeyed God's commandment: "You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the LORD" (Leviticus 18:5), and the commandment of the sage: "My son, do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commands" (Proverbs 3:1). Therefore he received the fulfilment of the promise: "Because he has set his love upon Me," says the LORD, "therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name. He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation" (Psalm 91:14-16).

3. **Because they are broad:** "I have seen the consummation of all perfection, but Your commandment is exceedingly broad"(verse 96). All the glories, riches, wisdom and power of man are limited and short-lived. Every human perfection is imperfect and nothing on earth has reached absolute perfection. Even every decision we make has its good and bad side. The Scripture says, "For behold, Your enemies, O LORD, for behold, Your enemies shall perish; all the workers of iniquity shall be scattered" (Psalm 92:9). God's Word, however, is perfect and flawless; it is broad enough to encompass everything that is related to our life of faith. It has shown us clearly the way of salvation and taught us how to have a personal relationship with God. It also shows us the conditions for obtaining forgiveness and answered prayer. The psalmist believed that "Your righteousness is like the great mountains; Your judgments are a great deep; O LORD, You preserve man and beast" (Psalm 36:6). How much we need God's promise: "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye" (Psalm 32:8). If you are afraid of witnessing to others about Christ, the Word will give you the inspiration and the courage. If you quarrel with those who offend you, it will show you how to be reconciled with them. If you are anxious, it will open up to you the way to joy. If you go through a financial crisis, it reassures you that God has a way of escape for you. In every circumstance you will find that God's Word is exceedingly broad. Great is the believer who studies the Word, and miserable is he who neglects it. The Bible keeps you away from sin, and sin keeps you away from the Bible.

9.3.2. Second: Hope in Divine Deliverance

(verses 97-112)

1. Because He made him act wisely (verses 97-104):

1. **Increasing wisdom:** "Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Your precepts"(verses 97-100). The psalmist could not describe how deeply he loved God's Word, so he said, "Oh, how I love!" His love for God's Word was a reflection of God's love for him and the beauty and perfection of His revelations: "The purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith" (1 Timothy 1:5). The psalmist hoped for God's deliverance because He had given him wisdom that made him wiser, more understanding and more prudent than all his enemies combined. Outwardly they seemed stronger than he, but in fact he became stronger than they because "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple" (Psalm 19:7). After studying the Word, the psalmist became smarter than those who taught him the arts of war. He even exceeded the well-experienced elders in wisdom because God's commandments were his text-book, and the Lord his private teacher. His wisdom came from a higher source. "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth" Christ said, "that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight" (Luke 10:21). James said, "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).
2. **Wisdom to turn away from evil:** "I have restrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep Your word. I have not departed from Your judgments, for You Yourself have taught me"(verses 101,102). In order to save the persecuted God-fearer, God made him turn away from evil, because evil weakens the strong. It is the weak spot in the armour through which the enemy wreaks havoc. The believer restrained his feet from the way of the wicked and did not depart from the straight path because God taught him: "Do not turn to the right or the left; remove your foot from evil" (Proverbs 4:27). Therefore he said, " By the word of Your lips, I have kept away from the paths of the destroyer" (Psalm 17:4), and prayed, "Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth; unite my heart to fear Your name" (Psalm 86:11).
3. **Wisdom to delight in the Word:** "How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way"(verse 103,104). In order to deliver the persecuted believer, the Lord granted him knowledge of the love of God's Word. It is the heavenly music that makes all other worldly music sound like mere noise. Not only did the psalmist listen to the Word, but he also fed on it, delighted in it and was satisfied. He hated every false way, "When wisdom enters your heart, and knowledge is pleasant to your soul, Discretion will preserve you; understanding will keep you" (Proverbs 2:10,11). The

Word gave him a good heart that rejected all falsehood, even if many others considered it useful.

2. **Because He provided him with light (verses 105-112):**

1. **The light of the Word:** "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path"(verse 105). The Lord delivers the psalmist by making His light shine upon him and providing him with a lamp, for "the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light" (Proverbs 6:23). He gave him a way (path) for his feet, so that He could lead him in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake (Psalm 23:3). By means of the lamp he can have light: "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8). This way he makes sure that he is walking confidently and safely in the way God guides him. Lamps are lit by night, for night is the time of troubles and persecutions. "And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts" (2 Peter 1:19). We are enlightened by the written Word, as well as by the living Word, for Christ 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).
2. **The light of faithfulness:** "I have sworn and confirmed that I will keep Your righteous judgments. I am afflicted very much; revive me, O LORD, according to Your word"(verses 106,107). As the believer is enlightened by the Word of God, he confirms (Hebrew *qum* meaning "to make good") his oaths. He tries to fulfil all that he claimed he would do and lay himself under the obligations of his oaths until he has carried out all he pledged. He "in whose eyes a vile person is despised, But he honors those who fear the LORD; He who swears to his own hurt and does not change" (Psalm 15:4). The psalmist swore and pledged to be obedient to God, and suffered all sorts of persecution and trouble for the sake of this obedience. He asked his God to assist him to live faithfully, no matter the cost, so that he could live according to the Word of the Lord, in obedience to the instruction: "Offer to God thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High" (Psalm 50:14).
3. **The light of adoration:** "Accept, I pray, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD, and teach me Your judgments. My life is continually in my hand, yet I do not forget Your law. The wicked have laid a snare for me, yet I have not strayed from Your precepts"(verses 108-110). Freewill offerings are offerings that exceed the requirements of the law. They are sacrifices of prayer and praise. Obviously, the psalmist had already met the requirements of the law. Then he offered adoration that was not required, because he loved God. The Jews used to pray three times a day, so the psalmist must have prayed and sung at the set times, but even added to them as acknowledgement of the Lord's gracious acts, as it was said, "Take words with you, and return to the LORD. Say to Him, 'Take away all iniquity; receive us graciously,

for we will offer the sacrifices of our lips"(Hosea 14:2). "Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Hebrews 13:15,16). Let us repeat with Paul, "But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God"(Acts 20:24).

Since the psalmist was a joyful worshipper and a giver of freewill offerings, the wicked hated him and laid snares and traps for him. Undaunted, he held onto the divine law all the more, crying out, "Blessed be the LORD, who has not given us as prey to their teeth. Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have escaped" (Psalm 124:6,7).

4. **The light of obedience:** "Your testimonies I have taken as a heritage forever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart. I have inclined my heart to perform Your statutes forever, to the very end"(verses 111,112). A heritage is a precious thing because it is bequeathed by one's parents. The psalmist cherished the Word of God, considered it his own inheritance, which he got without having to work for it, so he would never squander it. In the Orient it is a disgrace to squander or sell your inheritance. Besides, God's Word was a joy to the psalmist. He loved the One who spoke it and, therefore, turned away from anything that could hamper his enjoyment of it. He continued to do this to the very end. He did not allow his emotions to lead him into a wrong direction, but let his mind control his emotions and direct them in the right direction. He loved his Lord, together with His commandments, because he knew that Jesus had said, "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 14:23).

9.3.3. Third: The Persecuted Loves and Serves the Lord

(verses 113-128)

In these verses the psalmist expresses how he took shelter in the secret place of the Almighty who had delivered him from the wicked. He makes two promises to his Deliverer:

1. A promise to love God (verses 113-120):

1. **To keep away from the wicked:** "I hate the double-minded, but I love Your law. You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in Your word. Depart from me, you evildoers, for I will keep the commandments of my God!"(verses 113-115). The wicked are double-minded, and as such they are unstable in all their ways (James 1:8). They divide their hearts into two: with one half they worship God, and with the other they adore the world. According to Elijah's description, they "falter between two opinions" (1 Kings 18:21). According to Christ's description, they "serve two

masters" (Matthew 6:24). The psalmist, on the other hand, makes known his love for God and obedience to His Word. He made up his mind to keep away from evil and those who practice it, acting on the advice: "Evil company corrupts good habits"(1 Corinthians 15:33). He knew that evil company leads to evil, and "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper"(Psalm 1:1-3). "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?" (2 Corinthians 6:14,15). Whoever desires to run the good race must lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares him (Hebrews 12:1).

2. **To rely on God more:** "Uphold me according to Your word, that I may live; and do not let me be ashamed of my hope. Hold me up, and I shall be safe, and I shall observe Your statutes continually. You reject all those who stray from Your statutes, for their deceit is falsehood. You put away all the wicked of the earth like dross; therefore I love Your testimonies. My flesh trembles for fear of You, and I am afraid of Your judgments"(verses 116-120). The psalmist relied on his beloved Lord, and asked him to make him rely on Him more and more. He expressed this desire through three requests:
 1. **"Uphold me"(verse 116)**meaning: Support me and back me up. He hoped in God's grace that was sufficient for him.
 2. **"Do not let me be ashamed of my hope"(verse 116)**,because he hoped in Him and waited for Him, and those who "look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame" (Psalm 34:5 NIV).
 3. **"Hold me up"(verse 117)**,namely stand by my side and raise me so that I may live for You. "The LORD opens the eyes of the blind; the LORD raises those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous" (Psalm 146:8). "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:37).

Similarly, he expressed his desire to rely more on the Lord through three commitments: "I shall observe... continually" (verse 117), namely to take heed of God's precepts and say, "I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart" (Psalm 40:8). "I love"(verse 119) i.e. his reliance on God was out of love and willingness: "I will love You, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold" (Psalm 18:1,2). "My flesh trembles ... I am afraid" (verse 120), he shook with dread and was terrified by God's wrath against

the wicked, because "Who is able to stand before this holy LORD God? And to whom shall it go up from us?" (1 Samuel 6:20). This holy fear is a sign of godliness, as Habakkuk said, "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; in wrath remember mercy ... When I heard, my body trembled; my lips quivered at the voice; rottenness entered my bones; and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble. When he comes up to the people, he will invade them with his troops" (Habakkuk 3:2,16). As he relied more on the Lord he knew God would do two things: "You reject all those who stray" (verse 118), for the Lord rejects those who reject His law, and He will commit them to shame and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2). "You put away all the wicked of the earth like dross" (verse 119): He will separate the righteous from the unrighteous here on earth, as well as in the afterlife. Christ said, "At the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, 'First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn'" (Matthew 13:30).

2. **A promise to serve God (verses 121-128):** The psalmist described himself as "Your servant" three times (verses 122, 124, 125), and promised to remain a faithful servant to Him.
 1. **Serving by doing justice:** "I have done justice and righteousness; do not leave me to my oppressors. Be surety for Your servant for good; do not let the proud oppress me. My eyes fail from seeking Your salvation and Your righteous word"(verses 121-123). To serve society is to serve God, for "He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD" (Proverbs 19:17). The psalmist is the Lord's servant, completely submitted to Him, and he follows His example in doing justice and performing good deeds. If these were David's words, then his evaluation of himself was correct, because this is how the Scripture described him: "David reigned over all Israel; and David administered judgment and justice to all his people" (2 Samuel 8:15). The psalmist demands that the Lord treat him the way he treated others, to administer justice to him and not give him up to his oppressors. He calls upon God to ensure that it will be well with him, so that he may continue to do good and not be harmed by the oppression of the wicked, just as the psalmist said, "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" (Psalm 86:17). Similarly, Job said, "Now put down a pledge for me with Yourself" (Job 17:3). His eyes were fixed on the God of his salvation, and he kept on looking at Him in expectation of His just Word until his eyes grew tired from looking and waiting for the fulfilment of the divine promise to him.
 2. **Serving by acting for the Lord:** "Deal with Your servant according to Your mercy, and teach me Your statutes. I am Your servant; give me understanding, that I may know Your testimonies. It is time for You to act, O LORD, for they have regarded

Your law as void"(verses 124-126). "It is time for You to act, O LORD" to defend Your Word and work among us. It is also a suitable time for the psalmist to act for the Lord, because he is His servant who desires to serve Him. The psalmist did not say, "Your law is being broken; it is time for You to act," because his eyes were fixed on the Lord first. He expected the Lord to act through him to stem the tide of corruption resulting from violating the law. He did not look first at the dark side of violating the law, but rather to the bright side of God acting through him and within him. Consequently, he vowed to serve the Lord with all humility. He admitted that he was slow to understand and asked the Lord to be patient with him as He teaches the divine statutes and explains the divine revelations to him. He begged the Lord to be merciful with him so that he could act upon the commandments in his daily life, rather than just performing his service to the Lord. He did not see any worth or power within himself, but saw the great need instead. Therefore he offered himself to the Lord's service with all meekness. Let us learn to serve from the psalmist, and have an attitude of servanthood, as we hear the Lord say to us, "Son, go, work today in my vineyard"(Matthew 21:28).

3. **Serving by leading a godly life:** "Therefore I love Your commandments more than gold, yes, than fine gold! Therefore all Your precepts concerning all things I consider to be right; I hate every false way"(verses 127,128). While the psalmist was thinking of serving God and promising to do so, he perceived that the basis of successful service was leading a godly life. He must obey God unreservedly in all things, and love His Word more than material gain. God's Word is right and renders his life free from falsehood and hypocrisy. It is worthy of obedience, thus the psalmist acted on the Word, and was not a hearer only, deceiving himself (James 1:22).

9.4. SECTION FOUR

The Lord is a God of Victory (verses 129-176)

129 Your testimonies are wonderful; therefore my soul keeps them.

130 The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.

131 I opened my mouth and panted, for I longed for Your commandments.

132 Look upon me and be merciful to me, as Your custom is toward those who love Your name.

133 Direct my steps by Your word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me.

134 Redeem me from the oppression of man, that I may keep Your precepts.

135 Make Your face shine upon Your servant, and teach me Your statutes.

136 Rivers of water run down from my eyes, because men do not keep Your law.

137 Righteous are You, O LORD, and upright are Your judgments.

- 138 Your testimonies, which You have commanded, are righteous and very faithful.
- 139 My zeal has consumed me, because my enemies have forgotten Your words.
- 140 Your word is very pure; therefore Your servant loves it.
- 141 I am small and despised, yet I do not forget Your precepts.
- 142 Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Your law is truth.
- 143 Trouble and anguish have overtaken me, yet Your commandments are my delights.
- 144 The righteousness of Your testimonies is everlasting; give me understanding, and I shall live.
- 145 I cry out with my whole heart; hear me, O LORD! I will keep Your statutes.
- 146 I cry out to You; save me, and I will keep Your testimonies.
- 147 I rise before the dawning of the morning, and cry for help; I hope in Your word.
- 148 My eyes are awake through the night watches, that I may meditate on Your word.
- 149 Hear my voice according to Your lovingkindness; O LORD, revive me according to Your justice.
- 150 They draw near who follow after wickedness; they are far from Your law.
- 151 You are near, O LORD, and all Your commandments are truth.
- 152 Concerning Your testimonies, I have known of old that You have founded them forever.
- 153 Consider my affliction and deliver me, for I do not forget Your law.
- 154 Plead my cause and redeem me; revive me according to Your word.
- 155 Salvation is far from the wicked, for they do not seek Your statutes.
- 156 Great are Your tender mercies, O LORD; revive me according to Your judgments.
- 157 Many are my persecutors and my enemies, yet I do not turn from Your testimonies.
- 158 I see the treacherous, and am disgusted, because they do not keep Your word.
- 159 Consider how I love Your precepts; revive me, O LORD, according to Your lovingkindness.
- 160 The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever.
- 161 Princes persecute me without a cause, but my heart stands in awe of Your word.
- 162 I rejoice at Your word as one who finds great treasure.
- 163 I hate and abhor lying, but I love Your law.
- 164 Seven times a day I praise You, because of Your righteous judgments.
- 165 Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble.

166 LORD, I hope for Your salvation, and I do Your commandments.
167 My soul keeps Your testimonies, and I love them exceedingly.
168 I keep Your precepts and Your testimonies, for all my ways are before You.
169 Let my cry come before You, O LORD; five me understanding according to Your word.
170 Let my supplication come before You; deliver me according to Your word.
171 My lips shall utter praise, for You teach me Your statutes.
172 My tongue shall speak of Your word, for all Your commandments are righteousness.
173 Let Your hand become my help, for I have chosen Your precepts.
174 I long for Your salvation, O LORD, and Your law is my delight.
175 Let my soul live, and it shall praise You; and let Your judgments help me.
176 I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant, for I do not forget Your commandments.

This section contains the following:

- First: The psalmist seeks a victorious life (verses 129-144)
- Second: The psalmist leads a victorious life (verses 145-160)
- Third: Two fruits of the victorious life (verses 161-176)

9.4.1. First: The Psalmist Seeks a Victorious Life

(verses 129-144)

1. **Because the Word encouraged him to do so (verses 129-131):**The psalmist listed three descriptions of God's Word that assisted him in leading a victorious life:
 1. **It is wonderful:** "Your testimonies are wonderful; therefore my soul keeps them"(verse 129). The psalmist studied the writings of the nations around him and then the law of Moses, and discerned the great difference between man-made writings and divine revelation. He decided that the divine revelation is more superior because its source was God. It pointed out God's love for mankind, and had a deep and effective impact. The Word of God penetrates into the deep recesses of man and convicts him of his sins. If he repents, it assures him of salvation, comforts him and encourages him. It is a precious treasure that must be kept in the heart, thus granting one victory so that he might not sin against God (Psalm 119:11).
 2. **It illuminates:** "The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple"(verse 130). Daily the psalmist opened God's Word (Hebrew *petach* can mean either entrance or opening) and studied it, so his eyes were enlightened and he gained

- understanding. He knew how to discern between good and evil and set the right course for himself in this life. This is what happened with the two disciples from Emmaus whom Jesus met. He opened their understanding to know the Scriptures. Once their eyes were opened and they knew Him, "they said to one another, 'Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?'" (Luke 24:32).
3. **It satisfies:** "I opened my mouth and panted, for I longed for Your commandments"(verse 131). For a new believer God's Word is like pure milk (1 Peter 2:2), and for a mature believer it is a satisfying food, as Jeremiah said, "Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts" (Jeremiah 15:16). Ezekiel's experience was much the same: "Eat what you find... So I opened my mouth, and He caused me to eat that scroll... and it was in my mouth like honey in sweetness" (Ezekiel 3:1-3). When the believer was filled with the Word of the Lord, his faith was strengthened and he was able to lead a life of victory.
2. **Because the psalmist wanted such a life (verses 132-138):** Yearning for a victorious life, the psalmist asked for five things to aid him against iniquity:
 1. **Divine mercy:** "Look upon me and be merciful to me, Aas Your custom is toward those who love Your name"(verse 132). The believer will not know victory unless God reaches out to him in His mercy. Yet, God's mercy will reach out to those who love His good name, and call upon Him: "God, have mercy on me, a sinner" (Luke 18:13).
 2. **Divine guidance:** "Direct my steps by Your word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me"(verse 133). Christ left the believers an example, that they should follow His steps (1 Peter 2:21), and revealed to them the steps they should take in applying His holy Word. If they walk in the way of the Living Word and the written Word, they will gain victory over iniquity, which attacks them from inside and outside of their souls. If one of them falls into iniquity, the Word of God will reveal it and guide him to the way of victory, for "The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, and He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the LORD upholds him with His hand" (Psalm 37:23,24).
 3. **Divine redemption:** "Redeem me from the oppression of man, that I may keep Your precepts"(verse 134). Redemption is liberty from imprisonment or slavery. Every sinner is a slave to his sins or the injustice he inflicts upon his fellow-man; only through redemption or ransom by the close relative, as stated in the Mosaic law (Ruth 4:6), can he have victory. Man is incapable of redeeming himself because he is a prisoner; only God can redeem the believer: "The LORD redeems the soul of His servants, and none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned" (Psalm 34:22). He redeems them from the injustice of man, which causes them to say, "If it had not been

- the LORD who was on our side, when men rose up against us, then they would have swallowed us alive, when their wrath was kindled against us" (Psalm 124:2,3).
4. **Divine approval:** "Make Your face shine upon Your servant, and teach me Your statutes. Rivers of water run down from my eyes, because men do not keep Your law"(verses 135,136). The psalmist asked the Lord to take away the darkness around him by the light of His approval, as he said elsewhere, "Make Your face shine upon Your servant; save me for Your mercies' sake" (Psalm 31:16). When the Lord approves of the believer, He teaches him His Word, which makes him recognize how great and fathomless God's love for sinners is. Thus he can overcome his hatred for the oppressor who persecutes him and he can weep over the sinners who are alienated from God. Jeremiah said, "My eyes overflow with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people" (Lamentations 3:48), and Christ wept over Jerusalem, saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side"(Luke 19:42,43).
 5. **Divine justice:** "Righteous are You, O LORD, and upright are Your judgments. Your testimonies, which You have commanded, are righteous and very faithful"(verses 137,138). After suffering and weeping over the lostness of the sinners, the psalmist prayed for divine justice (righteousness) to prevail over his society and environment, because God is righteous and His Word is true and faithful. He justifies the penitent who seeks refuge in His mercies. Being thus encouraged, the psalmist asked for victory because the Lord does not withhold His comfort from the righteous, but rather teaches him righteousness and uprightness. "If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him" (1 John 2:29). The psalmist says, as well, that the Lord wants him to be victorious, and expresses that he wants to walk in obedience to the Lord, because the will of God is his sanctification (1 Thessalonians 4:3).
3. **Because he is zealous against evil (verses 139-144):**
1. **His zeal caused him troubles:** "My zeal has consumed me, because my enemies have forgotten Your words. Your word is very pure; therefore Your servant loves it. I am small and despised, yet I do not forget Your precepts"(verses 139-141). Seeing the evil of the wicked, the psalmist was consumed with zeal; his heart hurt for God's Word and for seeing His commandments done. Likewise, seeing the house of God turned into a den of thieves and a marketplace, Christ was consumed with zeal as it is written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up" (John 2:17). The psalmist regarded those who forgot God's Word as his own enemies, because they are God's enemies who hate His Word, although His Word is very pure, with no dross at all: "The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven

- times" (Psalm 12:6). Because he kept the law, the psalmist became small and despised in the eyes of the people. This, however, did not keep him from obeying God. Christ said, "If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world... therefore the world hates you"(John 15:18,19).
2. **Holding fast to the Word despite the troubles:** "Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Your law is truth. Trouble and anguish have overtaken me, yet Your commandments are my delights. The righteousness of Your testimonies is everlasting; give me understanding, and I shall live"(verses 142-144). God's righteousness, just like God Himself, is unchangeable, and His Word endures forever and ever, because it is the law of truth. It is a law for conduct, a guide to life and a way to happiness. Despite all his troubles, the psalmist prayed to understand this Word more, although obedience to the Word had already caused him many troubles and adversities from the wicked. He fought against injustice and was not willing to compromise his principles to gain the approval of the wicked, thus his obedience to God's Word caused him trouble. In the same way we are to seek spiritual understanding of the Word of God, in obedience to the commandment: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Colossians 3:16).

9.4.2. Second: The Psalmist Leads a Victorious Life

(verses 145-160)

1. The psalmist kept the statutes (verses 145-152):

1. **He kept them because he prayed:** "I cry out with my whole heart; Hear me, O LORD! I will keep Your statutes. I cry out to You; Save me, and I will keep Your testimonies"(verses 145,146). The psalmist kept God's commandments because he was always in contact with Him in prayer. His prayer was the petition of someone who loves the Lord with all his heart and is afraid of committing any transgression that might arouse the anger of his beloved. Prayer was his way of life, thus he was able to keep God's Word and act on it. Crying out with his whole heart, he implores God to rush to his aid, for he desires to obey the commandments. His heart is united in petition, and all his longings are focused upon the living God. As we strive and cry out to the Lord in prayer, we gain victory, just as Jacob strove and said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!" (Genesis 32:26). God looks at the heart and sincerity of the person who prays, not at his embellished sentences, the length of his prayer, nor how often he prays. For "One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination"(Proverbs 28:9). "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear"(Psalm 66:18).
2. **He kept them because he continued to pray:** "I rise before the dawning of the

morning, and cry for help; I hope in Your word. My eyes are awake through the night watches, that I may meditate on Your word"(verses 147,148). Perhaps the author of this part of the psalm was a priest with some sort of responsibility in the temple. He woke up early to perform his religious ministry, and to cry out for a life of obedience and victory. His eyes anticipated the night watches with eagerness to perform his prayers. Jews used to divide the night into three periods: the first watch at the beginning of the night, then the second watch in the middle of it, and the third watch, which was also called the morning watch. The Romans, however, divided it into four periods: evening, midnight, rooster crow and the morning. Obviously, the psalmist did not have a device to wake him up like we have today. Therefore he was awakened by an inner call, much more powerful than any watch or alarm clock. He redeemed the time to study God's Word and pray.

3. **He kept them despite the opposition:** "They draw near who follow after wickedness; they are far from Your law. You are near, O LORD, and all Your commandments are truth. Concerning Your testimonies, I have known of old that You have founded them forever"(verses 150-152). In these verses there is nearness and distance. The wicked drew near to the psalmist in order to hurt him because they were far from the law of the Lord. So the psalmist drew near to God because God is near. Everyone who is far from God will draw near to people to hurt them, but the believer is reassured because "The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth" (Psalm 145:18). The godly is reassured by God's commandments because they are true, because he knew and believed that the Lord founded His promises upon His faithfulness, in which there is Yes and Amen, to the glory of God (2 Corinthians 1:20). He had known the usefulness of the law for a long time, and all difficulties did not hinder him from keeping them because "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?... For I am persuaded that neither death nor life... shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:35-39).

2. **The psalmist continued to keep God's statutes (verses 153-160):**

1. **He does not forget them even in tribulation:** "Consider my affliction and deliver me, for I do not forget Your law. Plead my cause and redeem me; revive me according to Your word. Salvation is far from the wicked, for they do not seek Your statutes"(verses 153-155). The psalmist will continue to keep God's commandments even if the wicked oppose him and afflict him. He knows that God is the defender and protector, and thus says along with the prophet Micah, "He pleads my case and executes justice for me. He will bring me forth to the light; I will see His righteousness" (Micah 7:9). He asks the Lord to redeem him, i.e. to pay his debt, and release him from the sinners' grip. He asks for the life of quality, the abundant life,

which God promised to those who love Him (John 10:10). He appeals to the Lord because the Lord is his intercessor. He knows, too, that salvation is far from the wicked because they do not seek God's statutes. But when the psalmist sought them, salvation drew near to him.

2. **He obeys them because God's mercy is great:** "Great are Your tender mercies, O LORD; revive me according to Your judgments. Many are my persecutors and my enemies, yet I do not turn from Your testimonies. I see the treacherous, and am disgusted, because they do not keep Your word. Consider how I love Your precepts; revive me, O LORD, according to Your lovingkindness. The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever"(verses 156-160). In these verses we encounter the greatness of the mercy of God, who loves the psalmist and is loved by him. At the same time, we find many enemies who hate the psalmist, and whose actions the psalmist hates. He said, "Great are Your tender mercies" (verse 156) and "Many are my persecutors and my enemies" (verse 157). In both verses there is one word for "great" and "many" in the original Hebrew. Mercy precedes persecution, yet it follows the believer, too, for he says, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life"(Psalm 23:6). Mercy was both before him and behind him, be-cause he held on to God's commandment and testimonies, and as a result he was no longer afraid of persecution. He walked constantly in the way of the Lord, saying, "I foresaw the LORD always before my face, for He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken" (Acts 2:25).

In these verses we see two actions that seem to be contradictory: "I see the treacherous **and am disgusted**"(verse 158), and "**I love** Your precepts" (verse 159). But there is no contradiction in this at all. If you love God's commandments you will be disgusted with the evil of the treacherous and grieve over those who love sin and do not keep God's Word. He loathes the hardness of their hearts and their sins as much as he loves God's commandments which brought about all this change in his life. In verses 156 and 159 the psalmist repeats the request: "**Revive me** according to Your judgments" (verse 156) and "**Revive me**, O LORD, according to Your lovingkindness" (verse 159). He wants to live according to God's judgments, but he is familiar with his own weaknesses and lapses, so he also asks to live according to His mercy. Life in both verses is God-given. It is according to God's mercy and good promises because "all the good things have come upon you which the LORD your God promised you" (Joshua 23:15; compare Joshua 21:45 and 1 Kings 8:56).

9.4.3. Third: Two Fruits of the Victorious Life

(verses 161-176)

1. The fruit of peace (verses 161-168):

1. **Peace even in the midst of persecution:** "Princes persecute me without a cause, but

my heart stands in awe of Your word. I rejoice at Your word as one who finds great treasure. I hate and abhor lying, but I love Your law. Seven times a day I praise You, because of Your righteous judgments"(verses 161-164). The wicked hate the godly and persecute them. This was the oft-repeated theme of this psalm. He was persecuted by the princes (leaders) whom God gave the authority and the law to judge justly, but instead they abused their authority and persecuted him for no reason. Yet he remained at peace in spite of persecution, because the Lord stood by him and strengthened him, as though He were saying to him, "Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you" (Jeremiah 1:8). The psalmist, therefore, set the Lord's promises before him at all times and obeyed God more than man, in accordance with Christ's commandment: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body... Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell" (Luke 12:4,5). Faith in the Word produces holy awe in the heart of the godly, which keeps him from evil, comforts and reassures him in the midst of his tribulations. The reassurance toward the Lord's Word has created joy in the heart of the believer as if he were a digger who found a great treasure. So he said, "You have put gladness in my heart, more than in the season that their grain and wine increased. I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety" (Psalm 4:7,8). Christ has said, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word" (John 14:23). The psalmist loved the law because the law of his Lord is perfect, converting the soul. He experienced two opposites: love for and joy in the Word, and hatred for lying because it is abominable to the Lord. Tradition required the Jews to pray three times daily -- in the morning, at noon and in the evening -- but the psalmist praises the Lord seven times a day (the number of perfection) for His righteous judgments.

2. **The peace of the lovers of the law:** "Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble. LORD, I hope for Your salvation, and I do Your commandments. My soul keeps Your testimonies, and I love them exceedingly. I keep Your precepts and Your testimonies, for all my ways are before You"(verses 165-168). God's peace is great and bountiful. It is not a result of the way people treat the believer, for they set up stumbling blocks for him. The believer has peace because he loves the Word of God and finds in it both reassurance and joy. Therefore God gave him the chance to enjoy Christ's promise: "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). This peace makes every godly person increase in grace, so that he hopes and waits for God's salvation more and more. The psalmist relates hope to obedience. The more powerful the life of the believer is, the greater his assurance of things hoped for and certainty of things not seen, and the greater his obedience in anticipation of the fulfilment of the promise: "in the way of Your judgments, O LORD, we have waited for You"(Isaiah 26:8).

2. **The fruit of joy (verses 169-176):**

1. **The joy of answered prayer:** "Let my cry come before You, O LORD; give me understanding according to Your word. Let my supplication come before You; deliver me according to Your word. My lips shall utter praise, for You teach me Your statutes. My tongue shall speak of Your word, for all Your commandments are righteousness"(verses 169-172). At first the psalmist cries out like a fearful child who has turned to his father for protection, then he calms down and asks to understand his Father's faithful words and promises. He desires that his request reach God's ears so that the promises of deliverance should be fulfilled to him, thus attaining the fruition of the statement: "And the LORD listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name" (Malachi 3:16). Then the psalmist's lips will utter thankful praises for the abundance of learning he received from the Lord's commandments, so that he may be like a piece of land filled to overflowing with water, which started to give instead of just receiving.
2. **The joy of obedience:** "Let Your hand become my help, for I have chosen Your precepts. I long for Your salvation, O LORD, and Your law is my delight. Let my soul live, and it shall praise You; and let Your judgments help me. I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant, for I do not forget Your commandments"(verses 173-176). How great is the joy of the obedient believer as he hears the Lord praise him. The psalmist's obedience is evident in four things he said:
 1. **"For I have chosen Your precepts"(verse 173):**The choice to follow the commandments was the first cause of joy. Because he chose to follow the commandments he received the Lord's help, which increased his joy and guaranteed its continuation. God never forces anyone to obey Him: "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15).
 2. **"Your law is my delight"(verse 174):**The psalmist delighted in God's Word, therefore he obeyed it. This was a source of deep spiritual joy for him. And since God's law was truly his delight, he had the right to hope for the Lord's salvation as promised in God's Word, as the apostle Peter said, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12 NIV). Everyone who finds his delight in God's law has the right to rejoice.
 3. **"Let Your judgments help me"(verse 175):**God's judgments and commands were a source of help to him to lead a life of obedience. When the believer carries out God's judgments and lets his promises help him in times of affliction, he will experience a joyful and meaningful life. His days on earth will be longer, not in quantity but in quality. Whoever receives the help of God's judgments will experience the abundant life that Christ made available to us, and will say, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20), and add, "You have

made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence" (Acts 2:28).

4. **"I do not forget Your commandments"(verse 176):**The psalmist remembered God's commandments at all times, which increased his delight and joy. Yet, it is unusual for the psalmist to end the psalm with such a statement as: "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant, for I do not forget Your commandments." We may wonder how he can say that after he had expressed his whole-hearted love for the Lord, his enjoyment of His peace and joy, and the fact that he did not forget His commandments. The truth is that every God-fearing believer realizes that he is weak, prone to go astray at any time. If he does not cast himself upon the grace of God, he will lose the way and will not know how to return. He must have thought like this: "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). "All we like sheep have gone astray" and remain so. But the Lord says, "Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock... so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them... I will feed them... I will feed them in good pasture... will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick" (Ezekiel 34:11-16). This brings assurance to the believer, for the Good Shepherd will not forsake him, because He says, "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. I and My Father are one"(John 10:27-30).

9.5. Questions

1. Why is Psalm 119 called "the psalm of the saints"?
2. Psalm 119 calls the Word of God by seven other names. Write them down.

10. Psalm Hundred and Twenty

From a Far Country

In my distress I cried to the LORD, and He heard me.

2 Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips and from a deceitful tongue.

3 What shall be given to you, or what shall be done to you, you false tongue?

4 Sharp arrows of the warrior, with coals of the broom tree!

5 Woe is me, that I dwell in Meshech, that I dwell among the tents of Kedar!

6 My soul has dwelt too long with one who hates peace.

7 I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war.

Our psalm is the first amongst fifteen psalms (from 120 to 134) that are called "The Psalms of Ascents." The children of Israel used to sing them every year on the pilgrimage up to Jerusalem, their religious and political capital, to celebrate the Passover Feast, which commemorated their forefathers' crossing of the Red Sea and deliverance from the bondage of Pharaoh. "Ascents" probably refers to the fact that the pilgrims had to "ascend" to the mountain of the Lord, where His temple, which was built by Solomon, was located. These fifteen psalms are divided into two groups, each comprising seven psalms, with one psalm of Solomon in between. In five of each group the name of the author is not mentioned, while two belong to David. Commentators cite five possible occasions for writing them:

1. They are the songs of those who returned from the Babylonian captivity under the leadership of Ezra the scribe, and they sang them on their way back to Jerusalem as they were looking up to the mountain on which the temple of the Lord was built. The Bible says, "This Ezra came up from Babylon... Some of the children of Israel... came up to Jerusalem... On the first day of the first month he began his journey from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him" (Ezra 7:6,7,9).
2. They are hymns that were sung by the Levites on fifteen steps of the stairs in the second Temple, which connected the women's court with the men's court. The Levites used to sing one psalm on each step of these fifteen steps.
3. They commemorate God's answer to the righteous King Hezekiah, when He added fifteen years to his lifespan. These fifteen psalms were written to celebrate those fifteen additional years (Isaiah 38:5,8,20).
4. They are psalms the pilgrims used to sing as they ascended to Jerusalem to celebrate three times a year, in the three main feasts (Leviticus 23), as God commanded: "You shall have a song as in the night when a holy festival is kept, and gladness of heart as when one goes with a flute, to come into the mountain of the LORD, to the Mighty One of Israel" (Isaiah 30:29).
5. They signify spiritual ascension, i.e. the exalted spiritual life that all the believers in all ages are called to lead, thus fulfilling the apostle's injunction: "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen" (2 Peter 3:18).

The psalms of ascents begin with this psalm, which is the cry of someone suffering from living in a far country away from the temple. He wants to stand at the threshold of the temple, where he would ask the Lord to lift the bitterness of absence from home, so that he

could worship and celebrate Him in the temple. He is disturbed by being away from the place of worship and the ill treatment of the wicked. He ascends in his mind to his spiritual roots. He longs to worship His God, in whom he lives and moves and has his being. This psalm gives expression to the longings of all believers to be in God's presence and worship him, which could be summed up in the Scripture: "O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water" (Psalm 63:1).

The psalm contains the following:

- First: God answers (verse 1)
- Second: A complaint of the enemy (verses 2-4)
- Third: A complaint of the alienation (verses 5-7)

10.1. First: God Answers

(verse 1)

"In my distress I cried to the LORD, and He heard me"(verse 1). In times of distress the soul gets anxious and cries out, like a child calling for the help of his mother, who, in turn, rushes to help and reassure him. Peter cried out when he saw the strong wind and began to drown, "Lord, save me!" and immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him (Matthew 14:30,31). The celebrating psalmist recalls his distress in the far country away from the house of the Lord, how he prayed and the Lord answered and heard his complaint. In the light of this answer and its preceding experiences, he asked for new help because his soul was distressed by his enemies and his alienation from the house of the Lord. He agonized over the slanders of the wicked, crying to the Lord in humility and faith. And knowing that the Lord must hear him, he is comforted and encouraged, because he says, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me" (Psalm 50:15). He responds, "I cried to the LORD with my voice, and He heard me from His holy hill" (Psalm 3:4).

In the far country, amongst the wicked, the psalmist suffered affliction and deadly arrows, so he turned to the house of the Lord, where he could hear His Word, find liberty and say, "And I will walk at liberty, for I seek Your precepts... I have seen the consummation of all perfection, but Your commandment is exceedingly broad" (Psalm 119:45,96). Truly, God is "Ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness" (Nehemiah 9:17). He welcomes the psalmist in His holy place and answers him.

10.2. Second: A Complaint of the Enemy

(verses 2-4)

1. **The enemy launches a verbal attack:** "Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips and

from a deceitful tongue"(verse 2). Lying and false accusations abound in our world. The psalmist said about the liars, "For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is destruction; their throat is an open tomb; they flatter with their tongue" (Psalm 5:9). "They speak idly everyone with his neighbor; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak. May the LORD cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaks proud things, who have said, 'With our tongue we will prevail; our lips are our own; who is lord over us?'" (Psalm 12:2-4). People may try to rationalize their lying, claiming that it is a white lie or a small lie, but the commandment clearly says, "Therefore, putting away lying, 'Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,' for we are members of one another"(Ephesians 4:25). A deceitful tongue twists what is straightforward and "It defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell... It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison" (James 3:6-9).

This complaint was picked up by all the Israelites in the land of their captivity as they felt the persecution of the majority who worshipped idols all around them. They, a minority, worshipped Yahweh, the only living God who commanded them: "Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Mark 12:29). This complaint can also express the condition of a certain person in a specific place suffering from a specific difficulty. Whether this was a collective or a personal complaint, it was obviously the object of the Lord's concern.

Christ experienced the same thing that the suffering psalmist experienced, and said to those who rejected His doctrine, "Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me" (John 8:43-45).

- 2. The Lord punishes the deceitful tongue:** "What shall be given to you, or what shall be done to you, you false tongue? Sharp arrows of the warrior, with coals of the broom tree!"(verses 3,4). In these two verses the psalmist asks the wicked: What is the payment you expect from ruining the reputation of your brother? What will you gain? "For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light" (Mark 4:22). "But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:36,37). The arrows of God's judgment and the fire of His justice must be turned against the wicked. "God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day. If he does not turn back, He will sharpen His sword; He bends His bow and makes it ready. He also prepares for Himself instruments of death; He makes His arrows into fiery shafts" (Psalm 7:11-13). "Who sharpen their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows—bitter

words, that they may shoot in secret at the blameless; suddenly they shoot at him and do not fear... But God shall shoot at them with an arrow; suddenly they shall be wounded. So He will make them stumble over their own tongue; all who see them shall flee away"(Psalm 64:3,4,7,8).

The arrows of the warrior, the Lord, will hit every wicked man "with coals of the broom tree"! The people used the roots of broom trees for burning because they would burn for a long time and produce a good, strong fire. This is what is described by the psalmist as he says, "Let burning coals fall upon them; let them be cast into the fire, into deep pits, that they rise not up again"(Psalm 140:10). Whoever runs away from the Lord will incur upon himself coals of the broom tree that burn for a long time. This is what happened to Cain after killing his brother Abel; he ran away from the presence of the Lord and dwelt in the land of Nod (a Hebrew word meaning "wandering" and "drudgery"). The believer suffers pain from the lying lips and the deceitful tongue. But the Lord shall bring forth his righteousness as the light, and his justice as the noonday (Psalm 37:6). He will assist him in enduring the lies, which must be exposed and punished, for the trial is but for a moment and the victory must surely come. Just as Christ's resurrection came after His crucifixion, so must the believer be lifted up above his troubles.

10.3. Third: A Complaint of His Alienation

(verses 5-7)

1. **It is an alienation in far countries:** "Woe is me, that I dwell in Meshech, that I dwell among the tents of Kedar!"(verse 5). Meshech was the son of Japheth (Genesis 10:2). His descendants inhabited what is now western Iran and Armenia. The modern-day name Moscow may have been derived from Meshech. Kedar was the second son of Ishmael (Genesis 25:13). His descendants were a tribe of nomadic Bedouins who lived in Arabia and were continually fighting each other and their neighbours (Genesis 16:12). How far removed were Meshech and Kedar from God's temple! Most likely the psalmist does not mean that he lived in Meshech in the far North or in Kedar in the far South, rather he expresses a state of emotional alienation as though he were living in a far country among people who trouble him, in the midst of a heathen, godless society. In those far countries the psalmist did not have any chance of offering sacrifices to God or worshipping in His temple.
2. **It has gone on for too long:** "My soul has dwelt too long with one who hates peace. I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war"(verses 6,7). The psalmist's woes continued because the neighbours among whom he was living were warlike. They did not love peace the way he did. The Scripture says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9). The psalmist had described himself as a man of prayer (Psalm 109:4). This is why it was hard for him, being devoted to prayer and peace, to live among those who hated peace and loved war. In order to avoid the sufferings the

psalmist went through, we must obey the exhortation of the apostle Paul: "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God... Therefore 'Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters'... Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God"(2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1).

To every believer who says, "I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war" we offer two pieces of advice:

1. **Remove yourself geographically:** "Remove your foot from evil"(Proverbs 4:27). Do not have a direct relationship with the wicked. Do not go somewhere or take a job knowing that God refuses to be with you there. When there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock, Abram said to Lot, "Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or, if you go to the right, then I will go to the left"(Genesis 13:5-9). But Abraham's heart was not removed from Lot, for when Lot was taken captive Abraham pursued his captors to rescue him (Genesis 14).
2. **Patiently endure:** Love endures all things. "Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. Therefore 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:17-21).

If you have already surrendered your life to the Lord and then departed from Him and dwelt in a far country resulting in a weakened spiritual life and a sense of alienation and distress in the midst of those who hate peace, let these distresses be an incentive to you to return to the Lord who restores you soul and leads you in the paths of righteousness. Let us return to God from the far country, from the land of weakness and spiritual lukewarmness, and ascend the mountain of God with singing and a joyful noise.

10.4. Questions

1. Mention two of the five possibilities of the occasion for writing Psalms 120-134.
2. How does God punish the deceitful tongue?

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.

Call of Hope- P.O. Box 100827 - 70007 Stuttgart - Germany