

Meditations on the Psalms

Volume Fourteen: Psalms 131-140

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1. Psalm One Hundred and Thirty-One

The Humble Soul

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

1 LORD, my heart is not haughty, Nor my eyes lofty. Neither do I concern myself with great matters, Nor with things too profound for me.

2 Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul, Like a weaned child with his mother; Like a weaned child is my soul within me.

3 O Israel, hope in the LORD From this time forth and forever.

This psalm is an excellent expression of submission to God and total surrender to His will. It encourages the believers to be filled with a living hope in their good God. David, the author of the psalm, learned to be humble before God. He placed all his earthly ambitions in their rightful place, giving the first priority to doing the will of God.

As the pilgrims celebrated the feasts in God's presence and God's house, they sang the Psalm of Repentance (Psalm 130). Then, with all humility, they sang this psalm, recalling God's favours towards them, which would make them more humble. Such humility was felt by their ancestor Jacob as he exclaimed, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant; for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two companies" (Genesis 32:10).

This psalm of David is a song describing his true and honest humility. Since he was anointed by Samuel, the Spirit of the Lord had fallen upon him, yet he did not contract the disease of pride. When enquiring about the reward of the man who would defeat Goliath, his big brother Eliab was angry with him and said, "I know your pride and the insolence of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle." David, however, did not answer his brother in the same cruel way his brother spoke to him, but was content to say, "What have I done now? Is there not a cause?" (1 Samuel 17:28,29). Later, after David was made king, he never abandoned his humility. When the ark of the Lord was brought up to the City of David with gladness, David danced before the LORD with all his might. Michal his wife, Saul's daughter, looked through a window and saw him leaping and whirling before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart. As she met him afterwards, she scolded him. He answered that

his humility was "before the LORD, who chose me instead of your father and all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the LORD, over Israel. Therefore I will play music before the LORD. And I will be even more undignified than this, and will be humble in my own sight. But as for the maidservants of whom you have spoken, by them I will be held in honor" (2 Samuel 6:12-22).

David learned humility in the school of suffering. He put all his trust in the Lord when Saul was pursuing him, and the Lord stood by him and rescued him. From that time on he knew that he owed his life and what he possessed to the Lord.

Charles Spurgeon said that this psalm is one of the shortest psalms when you read it, but one the longest when it comes to learning and applying its lessons.

The psalm contains the following:

- First: Giving expression to humility (verse 1)
- Second: Humility teaches submission (verse 2)
- Third: Humility teaches hope (verse 3)

1.1. First: Giving Expression to Humility

(verse 1)

1. **He did not wax proud:** "LORD, my heart is not haughty" (verse 1a). David addresses God in all humility with the word "LORD," because He is his Creator, Master, Leader and King. Pride did not enter his heart after he was made king. Solomon, his son, learned the same principle from him, for he said, "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life ... Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD" (Proverbs 4:23; 16:5). David neither spoke of his own humility nor overestimated himself. He neither gloried in his humility, nor praised his psalms, nor felt superior because of his godliness. He neither boasted over his past since it was God's gift, nor over his present since only the Lord knew it and secured it. Therefore the Lord testified in his favour, saying, "I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will" (Acts 13:22).

Anyone who boasts is like the Pharisee who, according to Christ's parable, stood and prayed thus, "God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector." But David was like the tax collector who went to the temple and, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" Christ said that the repentant sinner went down to his house justified, rather than the proud Pharisee. Then He added, "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (see Luke 18:9-14).

David ruled his spirit and was humble, so the Lord exalted him because "Better... a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city" (Proverbs 16:32 NIV). But his descendant, Hezekiah, learned the lesson of humility at a great price. The Scripture says that "Hezekiah did not repay according to the favor shown him, for his heart was lifted up; therefore wrath was looming over him and over Judah and Jerusalem. 26 Then Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the LORD did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah" (2 Chronicles 32:25,26) "For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones' " (Isaiah 57:15). So let us thank the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, yet who dwells with the contrite and humble in spirit.

2. **He did not covet:** "Nor my eyes lofty" (verse 1b). What the heart desires will show in the eyes. The pride in one's heart will also show in one's looks. "The lamp of the body is the eye" Christ said. "If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matthew 6:22,23). What great advice God gave Baruch (Jeremiah's secretary), "And do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them" (Jeremiah 45:5). All we see in the world is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. This is not of the Father but 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 2:16,17). The desires of David's heart were under God's control, so he was able to control his looks and say to the Lord, "You will save the humble people, but will bring down haughty looks" (Psalm 18:27). For the Lord says, "the one who has a haughty look and a proud heart, him I will not endure" (Psalm 101:5).

Christ said, "Whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:26-28). As He noticed how the guests of a certain banquet chose the best places He said to them, "When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; and he who invited you and him come and say to you, 'Give place to this man,' and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, 'Friend, go up higher.' Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:7-11)

3. **He was not greedy:** "Neither do I concern myself with great matters, nor with things too profound for me" (verse 1c,d). David did not aspire to take more than what the Lord gave him. He did not rush the fulfilment of the divine promise to be king over Israel. When

King Saul was pursuing him to kill him, David was sure that Saul's role was over and that his own role had already begun. Twice Saul fell into the hands of David, who could have killed him and assumed the role of king, which the Lord had promised him. Even his own followers urged him, "This is the day of which the LORD said to you, 'Behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand, that you may do to him as it seems good to you'" But he replied, "The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD" (1 Samuel 24:4,6; 26:11). With his heart submitted to the Lord, David comprehended the meaning of the wise saying: "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time" (1 Peter 5:6).

David never strove to gain a position that was not his, unlike Saul, his predecessor, who assumed the office of priest and offered up a sacrifice. Because of this incident the prophet Samuel said to him, "You have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel" (1 Samuel 15:26). How often are we not content with what the Lord gave us and look to what He did not give us. It is a good thing to receive the great things He gives us out of the goodness of His heart. But even if He does not give those things to us, we ought to know that they might be good for others. Let anyone of us not "think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but ... think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith" (Romans 12:3). "God resists the proud," said Peter, "but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5; see also Proverbs 3:34; James 4:6).

1.2. Second: Humility Teaches Submission

(verse 2)

David's heart was not proud, nor his eyes lofty, therefore he learned true submission.

1. **Submission to learn:** "Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with his mother" (verse 2a,b). David succeeded in reaching a state of spiritual calm and quiet after he moved spiritually from a state of nursing to a state of weaning. A nursing baby shouts for food, but a weaned child is usually calm and content. He is no longer in need of a baby's food; he begins to eat solid, adult food. At weaning the child, for the first time, feels deprivation of what he was used to have since he was born. When a child is weaned, he screams, not necessarily because of being hungry, but because he protests against his mother and doesn't like how she behaves towards him. The mother knows she must wean him for his own good. She will not leave him hungry, but will give him food suitable for his age. After so much screaming and protesting, he submits in defeat, calms down and suddenly feels happy and grateful. Now he is bigger and more mature.

At the beginning David saw himself as an agitated, enraged weanling. He felt his emotional needs speaking loud and rebelling. He knew, though, that this rebellion is not

good for him, so he made up his mind to calm and quiet his soul. He managed to subdue his emotions like a child who still cherished his mother although she stopped nursing him. She is his mother, nonetheless, even if she denies what he used to consider his inherent rights. The soul of every believer goes through the same experience. As a result, it learns to be humble and surrenders to God because He is the Creator, the Caretaker and the Redeemer, even if it seems to the believer that God deprives him of things he desires. He knows that God only denies him things to bring his faith to maturity and increase his reliance on Him. The more the believer practices the acceptance of deprivation that God allows, the more he learns submission, because the Giver and His love satisfy him more than the gift. The Lord Himself becomes the source of his comfort and joy, not the things he receives from Him. At that time he will be able to join Habakkuk in saying, "Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls— Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation " (Habakkuk 3:17,18). Truly, "it is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD" (Lamentations 3:26).

2. **Submission of prudence:** "Like a weaned child is my soul within me" (verse 2b). After the psalmist managed to calm and quiet his soul, the psalmist's soul was like a submissive weaned child within him. He applied good judgment and reason, and his emotions submitted completely to his reason after he had lost what he loved. His will only had to follow the right principles, as Paul said, "Everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things... I discipline my body and bring it into subjection" (1 Corinthians 9:25,27). Blessed is the man who suffers with the result that his suffering helps him subdue and wean his emotions, so that he may become mature and learn to be spiritually balanced. This, in turn, teaches him to love God in good times as well as in times of suffering and tribulation. It would do him good, too, to learn from Job, who thanked God in his prosperity as well as in his misfortune, and said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD... Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" (Job 1:21; 2:10). Thus he may be able to say with Paul, "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:11-13).

1.3. Third: Humility Teaches Hope

(verse 3)

1. **Hope in the Lord:** "O Israel, hope in the LORD" (verse 3). After the psalmist humbled himself and calmed his soul before God, the Lord Himself became the object of his hope

and comfort, as he had said earlier, "Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him " (Psalm 42:5). The Israel that hopes in God is the people who love Him and obey Him everywhere, regardless of background, language or country. The Bible says, "they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham... That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed" (Romans 9:6-8). This means that there is an "Israel" that is the descendants of Abraham, yet who do not have the faith of Abraham. These are the physical Israel. There is also "the Israel of God." They are those from every tribe and nation that believe like Abraham. The physical Israel do not receive the blessing because they rejected Christ who "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). "The Israel of God" is the new creation that accepted Christ. They are those who bear in their bodies the marks of Christ, those who crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. The scripture says, "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God" (Galatians 6:15-16). Peace be upon the spiritual Israel, i.e., all those who have the faith of Abraham, God's friend, and follow the Lord with determination and strength of heart.

The coming of the Messiah was the greatest hope of Israel. They still wait for the fulfilment of the prophecy: "The virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel... For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6). This hope came true when Christ came, born of a virgin. And today we hope for Christ's second coming to the earth to judge all beings with justice. His first coming was humble, but His second coming will be glorious: "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matthew 24:30,31).

Our hope, however, is not confined to things to come; it is a matter of the present and it lasts forever. Therefore we say, "Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You... God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Psalm 73:25,26).

2. **Hope for now:** "From this time forth" (verse 3b). We do not simply live on the hope of eternal life, but we lead now a life of hope in God and His love and power. Everyone who puts his trust in God does not rely on his knowledge no matter how knowledgeable he is,

or his greatness no matter how elevated his status is, or his wealth no matter how wealthy he is, or his family no matter how respectable it is. All these things change and do not last long. "My soul, wait silently for God alone, for my expectation is from Him... 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. Do not trust in oppression, nor vainly hope in robbery; if riches increase, do not set your heart on them" (Psalm 62:5,9,10). We may lose things or loved ones but the Lord's face remains with those who love Him.

3. **Hope forever:** "And forever" (verse 3b). This hope in the Lord will last forever. This is why we wait for the resurrection from the dead and the life of the world to come, because Jesus is and was and is to come. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. Let the believers hope in the Lord from this time forth and forever.

1.4. Questions

1. How did King David show his humility?
2. What does the psalmist mean by saying, "Like a weaned child is my soul within me"?

2. Psalm One Hundred and Thirty-Two

David's Vow and the Lord's Covenant

A Song of Ascents.

1 LORD, remember David And all his afflictions;

2 How he swore to the LORD, And vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob:

3 "Surely I will not go into the chamber of my house, Or go up to the comfort of my bed;

4 I will not give sleep to my eyes Or slumber to my eyelids,

5 Until I find a place for the LORD, A dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob."

6 Behold, we heard of it in Ephrathah; We found it in the fields of the woods.

7 Let us go into His tabernacle; Let us worship at His footstool.

8 Arise, O LORD, to Your resting place, You and the ark of Your strength.

9 Let Your priests be clothed with righteousness, And let Your saints shout for joy.

10 For Your servant David's sake, Do not turn away the face of Your Anointed.

11 The LORD has sworn in truth to David; He will not turn from it: "I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body.

12 If your sons will keep My covenant And My testimony which I shall teach them, Their sons also shall sit upon your throne forevermore."

13 For the LORD has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His dwelling place:

14 "This is My resting place forever; Here I will dwell, for I have desired it.

15 I will abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her poor with bread.

16 I will also clothe her priests with salvation, And her saints shall shout aloud for joy.

17 There I will make the horn of David grow; I will prepare a lamp for My Anointed.

18 His enemies I will clothe with shame, But upon Himself His crown shall flourish."

This psalm speaks of King David's desire to build a house for the Lord as a dwelling place for the ark, which symbolized the Lord's presence among His people. Until that time the ark kept on moving from one place to another. During the wandering years in the Sinai Desert it was carried along during their journey. Whenever they camped in a place and pitched the tent of congregation they would place the ark inside it in the middle of the camps of the twelve tribes of Israel. When the Israelites crossed the Jordan River to enter the Promised Land, the ark went ahead of them to be left first in Gilgal, then in Shiloh where it remained between 300 and 400 years. Once they took the ark to go before them in war. But they were defeated and the enemies took the ark away from them and placed it in the house of their god Dagon, whose upper body was like a man and lower body like a fish. The idol fell over and broke before the ark of the Lord (1 Samuel 5:1-7). The Lord punished the enemies with painful diseases until they returned the ark to the house of Abinadab in Kirjath Jearim (1 Samuel 6-7:1). From there it was moved to the house of Obed-Edom and the Lord blessed the house of Obed-Edom (2 Samuel 6:12). When King David learned that the house of Abinadab was blessed, he brought up the ark to the "City of David" with gladness. David grew more and more uncomfortable living in a palace while the ark of the Lord was lodging in a tent. Therefore he resolved to have a temple built for the ark of the Lord to dwell in. However, the Lord sent Nathan the prophet to say to him, "Would you build a house for Me to dwell in? ... I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (2 Samuel 7:5,12,13). Although God released him from his intention to build the temple, David still decided to prepare all the materials he could for building it. He had stone, iron, wood, silver and gold gathered to assist his son Solomon in building the house.

This psalm was most likely written for the occasion of transferring the ark from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David, as a reminder to the people of David's desire and vow, and of the Lord's reward to him.

The psalm contains the following:

- First: The people's prayer for David (verses 1-5)
- Second: The people's cooperation with David (verses 6-10)

- Third: The Lord's response to the people's prayer (verses 11-18)

2.1. First: The People's Prayer for David

(verses 1-5)

1. **They ask the Lord to remember David's affliction:** "LORD, remember David and all his afflictions" (verse 1). Would the Lord forget anything despite the fact that He said, "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). There is "a scroll of remembrance" before the Lord in which both our past and present are written, together with our needs (Malachi 3:16). Every believer testifies to God's goodness and love for the children of men. God remembered Noah and stopped the flood (Genesis 8:1), remembered Abraham and visited Sarah to give them a son in their old age as He had promised (Genesis 21:1), restored Job's losses and gave him twice as much as he had before (Job 42:10), and remembered the children of Israel and brought them out of Egypt by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm (Exodus 3:7). He still remembers His love and His faithfulness (Psalm 98:3), and will remember His covenant forever (Psalm 105:8). This same LORD remembers both you and me without ceasing.

The intended meaning of this request is to remember David in order to reward him. His past life was full of troubles. After defeating Goliath, King Saul envied him, bore a grudge against him and pursued him with the purpose of killing him, which greatly afflicted David and wore him out. Again David must have seen affliction and trouble as he attempted to capture the Jebusite stronghold, which he later called "The City of David" (2 Samuel 5:6-9). He brought the ark up to it, and there his son Solomon had the temple of the Lord built. David must have been afflicted, too, as he tried to transfer the ark of the Lord's covenant in a way contrary to what God had prescribed. As a result, the Lord was angry against a young man named Uzza and put him to death because he stretched out his hand disrespectfully to the ark of God (2 Samuel 6). Another affliction befell David when his request to build a house for the Lord was turned down. David said in response, "Indeed I have taken much trouble to prepare for the house of the LORD ... gold, ... silver, and bronze and iron beyond measure, for it is so abundant. I have prepared timber and stone also" (1 Chronicles 22:14).

2. **They ask the Lord to remember David's vow:** "How he swore to the LORD, And vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob: 'Surely I will not go into the chamber of my house, or go up to the comfort of my bed; I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for the LORD, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob'" (verses 2-5). These verses explain David's insistence on building a house for the Lord. He has made a vow to the Mighty One of Jacob, and his mind would not be at peace, nor his heart and soul at rest, until he has built a "place for the Lord" as the Lord had said to

Moses: "Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8). David swears by the Mighty One of Jacob because Jacob his forefather had already vowed to build a house for the Lord in Bethel and said, "If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going... this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You" (Genesis 28:20,22). True to his word, "Jacob ... came to Luz (that is, Bethel) ... And he built an altar there and called the place El Bethel" (Genesis 35:6,7).

We know today that the dwelling place of God among His people is a spiritual one. The Scripture says, "'Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist,' says the LORD. 'But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word' " (Isaiah 66:1,2). Christ blessed those who were poor in spirit and come to the Lord with empty hands, seek-ing help and mercy, confessing their sins. They tremble at the Lord's word in obedience to the advice of the apostle Paul, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). This is the heart in which the Lord dwells; this is his true dwelling place: "Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God" (1 Corinthians 6:19).

2.2. Second: The People's Cooperation with David

(verses 6-10)

1. **Their enthusiasm for transferring the ark:** "Behold, we heard of it in Ephrathah; we found it in the fields of the woods" (verse 6). The transportation of the ark was a national event because the ark symbolized the Lord's presence in the midst of His people. This verse shows how this great zeal was passed on from David's heart to the heart of all the people. It infused them with an intense desire to move the ark to the City of David. They had heard that the ark was in Ephrathah, which means "fertile valleys" or "wooded fields." This was the region of Kirjath Jearim (which also means "woods"). They found the ark in the fields of the woods, where Abinadab's house was. They went and brought it, because he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.
2. **Their enthusiasm for worship:** "Let us go into His tabernacle; let us worship at His footstool" (verse 7). The psalmist pleads with his audience to come and worship in the dwelling place of the Mighty One of Jacob. The Israelites showed such enthusiasm under King David and transported the ark to the City of David. They worshipped at God's footstool to show gratitude for allowing them to move the ark of His covenant. The Hebrew uses *mishkenoth* for "tabernacle." The word is in the plural and can be translated "dwelling places", i.e. the places where the ark was set up before it came to rest in the City of David. First, it dwelt in Gilgal, then it was moved to Bethel, then to Shiloh, afterwards to Kirjath Jearim and finally to Jerusalem. Every place in which the ark rested

was considered its dwelling place, and wherever the Lord dwells He reveals His presence and the place becomes His temple. On the other hand, Christ is the ultimate divine revelation to mankind, for after God had spoken in the past to the fathers by the prophets, He has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, in whom "dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2:9). In Christ we see God, for He said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Whoever accepts Christ's salvation, Christ Himself will enter his heart, as the apostle urges us, "May (Christ) dwell in your hearts through faith" (Ephesians 3:17), so that our hearts may become the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19) to guide people to the way of salvation, which we have found.

3. **Their joy in worship:** The people rejoiced in three things, which Solomon requested in his prayer as he inaugurated the temple. He prayed, "Now therefore, arise, O LORD God, to Your resting place, You and the ark of Your strength. Let Your priests, O LORD God, be clothed with salvation, and let Your saints rejoice in goodness. O LORD God, do not turn away the face of Your Anointed; remember the mercies of Your servant David " (2 Chronicles 6:41,42).
 1. **They rejoiced in transferring the ark:** "Arise, O LORD, to Your resting place, You and the ark of Your strength" (verse 8). This was the prayer Moses and the people used to pray to God in the Sinai Desert whenever they moved from place to place preceded by the ark of the Lord's covenant. "So it was, whenever the ark set out, that Moses said: 'Rise up, O LORD! Let Your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee before You.' And when it rested, he said: 'Return, O LORD, to the many thousands of Israel' " (Numbers 10:35,36). David said, "Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered; let those also who hate Him flee before Him" (Psalm 68:1).
 2. **They rejoiced in the priests and the saints:** "Let Your priests be clothed with righteousness, and let Your saints shout for joy" (verse 9). The psalmist states that the Lord clothes his priest with righteousness, namely that He justifies them to be acceptable before Him and fit for serving the righteous God. He justifies them by clothing them with His righteousness like a garment that covers their nakedness, just as He covered the nakedness of Adam and Eve in the garden. Then the priests may shout, "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels" (Isaiah 61:10). All believers rejoice in obedience to the prophet's instruction: "Open the gates, that the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in" (Isaiah 26:2). They say along with Job, "I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my justice was like a robe and a turban" (Job 29:14).
 3. **They rejoiced in the king:** "For Your servant David's sake, do not turn away the face of Your Anointed" (verse 10). The Lord made David a promise, saying, "Your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be

established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16). So here the psalmist claims the fulfilment of that promise to King David, so that He may not refuse him any requests that he makes for the good of his people: "For You, O LORD, will bless the righteous; with favor You will surround him as with a shield" (Psalm 5:12).

2.3. Third: The Lord's Response to the People's Prayer

(verses 11-18)

1. **The response with regard to the Messiah:** "The LORD has sworn in truth to David; He will not turn from it: 'I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body. If your sons will keep My covenant and My testimony which I shall teach them, their sons also shall sit upon your throne forevermore'" (verses 11,12). The Lord had promised David to raise up kings from his descendants to reign over his people. He confirmed His promise with an oath that He would neither break nor change, for He is the same yesterday, today and forever. This promise says, "I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (2 Samuel 7:12,13). In response, David said to the Lord, "For You, O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, have revealed this to Your servant, saying, 'I will build you a house.' Therefore Your servant has found it in his heart to pray this prayer to You. And now, O Lord GOD, You are God, and Your words are true, and You have promised this goodness to Your servant" (2 Samuel 7:27,28). Ethan the Ezrahite made this promise into a poem as follows: "I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to My servant David ... Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David" (Psalm 89:3,35). Not all David's descendants were good, which caused the kingdom to split during the reign of Rehoboam (King David's grandson). It was divided into a Northern Kingdom with Samaria as its capital, which was made up of ten tribes and ruled by Jeroboam the son of Nebat; and a Southern Kingdom with Jerusalem as its capital, ruled by Rehoboam. Both kingdoms went into exile because they did not keep the Lord's covenant. The Lord's promise to David was bound with the clear condition of keeping His covenant. Nevertheless, God's promise was fully accomplished in Christ the Son of David who "had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth" (Isaiah 53:9), for "the government will be upon His shoulder... Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this" (Isaiah 9:6,7). Ethan the Ezrahite had said about the kingdom of Christ, "My hand will sustain him; surely my arm will strengthen him... through my name his horn will be exalted... He will call out to me, 'You are my Father, my God, the Rock my Saviour.' I will also appoint him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth... I will establish his line forever, his throne as long as the heavens endure" (Psalm 89:21,24,26,27,29 NIV).

2. **The response with regard to Zion:** "For the LORD has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His dwelling place: 'This is My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her poor with bread' (verses 13-15). The Israelites believed that God had chosen Mount Zion as a building site for the temple even before He chose David to be king over His people. Asaph said, "But (He) chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion which He loved. And He built His sanctuary like the heights, like the earth which He has established forever. He also chose David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds" (Psalm 78:68-70). The Israelites also believed that by saying "This is My resting place forever," which is not actually recorded as is but rather proven by fact, the Lord chose Mount Moriah as a building site for the temple where He dwelt, rested and received the prayers and sacrifices of His people, which they made to gain His favour. Likewise, Christ chose His disciples and said to them, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you" (John 15:16). What a great privilege to be the chosen of the King, who called us out of darkness into His marvellous light, making us a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people (1 Peter 2:9)!

God says of Zion, "I will bless her with abundant provisions; her poor will I satisfy with food." Yes, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven... Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Matthew 5:3,6). Christ said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). The apostle Paul said, "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32). He "who gives us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Timothy 6:17).

3. **The response with regard to the priests:** "I will also clothe her priests with salvation, and her saints shall shout aloud for joy" (verse 16). Here the Lord responds to the people's prayer with regard to the priests. He will clothe them with the greatest robe, the robe of righteousness and the garments of salvation, which conceal all deficiencies, make up for all imperfections and qualify the priest to carry out an acceptable service.
4. **The response with regard to the king:** "There I will make the horn of David grow; I will prepare a lamp for My Anointed. His enemies I will clothe with shame, but upon Himself His crown shall flourish" (verses 17,18). In these two verses the Lord promises to answer the people's prayer for the king in three different ways:
1. **He will give him a horn:** The horn is a symbol of power. God will give David the power to fight his enemies and subdue them, as Ethan the Ezrahite said, "For You are the glory of their strength, and in Your favor our horn is exalted. For our shield belongs to the LORD, and our king to the Holy One of Israel" (Psalm 89:17,18).
 2. **He will give him a lamp:** The lamp is a symbol of descendants and extension of the

family line. The Scripture says about King Abijam, "Nevertheless for David's sake the LORD his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, by setting up his son after him and by establishing Jerusalem" (1 Kings 15:4). The natural extension of David's kingdom, however, is Christ, the Son of David, the shining Lamp, who said about Himself, "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).

3. **He will give him a crown:** The crown is a symbol of the king's dedication to the service of God through serving His people. Crowns were given to kings and priests alike (Exodus 29:6). His crown will flourish; that is, it will shine with life and the truth, so that all around him should see it. "Take the silver and gold, make an elaborate crown," said the Lord, "and set it on the head of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest... From His place He shall branch out, And He shall build the temple of the LORD; Yes, He shall build the temple of the LORD. He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule on His throne; so He shall be a priest on His throne" (Zechariah 6:11-13).

Let us pray to God to make us humble like David, faithful to our vows and covenants with the Lord, just as God is faithful to us.

2.4. Questions

1. What is God's dwelling place among His people today?
2. In verse 17 of this psalm, what is the meant by giving the king a horn and a lamp?

3. Psalm One Hundred and Thirty-Three

The Unity of the Spirit

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

1 Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brethren to dwell together in unity!

2 It is like the precious oil upon the head, Running down on the beard, The beard of Aaron, Running down on the edge of his garments.

3 It is like the dew of Hermon, Descending upon the mountains of Zion; For there the LORD commanded the blessing— Life forevermore

This psalm smells as sweet as perfume. It is as tender as dew. It has no requests or complaints. It is free from all feelings of guilt. It is a haven of rest, for it describes a religious conference of high spirituality. There was such meaningful intimacy with the Lord that the hearts rejoiced in fulfilling His promise: "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). Those present felt as though they

were on a Mount of Transfiguration. They had dropped the cares of the world and rejoiced together with united hearts, minds and wills, in prayer, singing and worship, through the presence of the Holy Spirit amongst them and in them, who blessed them jointly and severally.

The believers had gone up to make the pilgrimage to the temple, performed all the rites of celebration, and their festive journey was almost finished. Now their journey back to their home countries was about to begin, where they would face the responsibilities and difficulties of daily life and, empowered by the grace and blessing bestowed on them, take on the ministry that God entrusted to them. The Lord's promise to Abraham was fulfilled in them, "I will bless you" and now it is time for them to hear "And you shall be a blessing." The worshippers, therefore, stood up to sing this psalm as an expression of their happiness to be worshiping the Lord and their joy in having their hearts so united and brought together round the one true God who owns and rules them. They knew that once they got down to the world, they would be out of the presence of God physically, but in the Spirit they would continue to live in His presence. They must live out their faith in the midst of society, wherever they may be, because God lives in them through His Spirit, making them shine like lights in the world to dispel the darkness of the devil, that people may see their good works and glorify their Father in heaven.

In Psalm 132 we saw how the people of the Lord united together in such a spiritual unity around the invisible God, and how happy they were to worship around His ark, which symbolized His presence in their midst. In this psalm, however, they declared their love for one another. Today, the believers are united in the love of Christ, which fuses their hearts together, making them help and defend each other, as much as the grace and strength that God gives them allow.

In unity there is power, victory, triumph and encouragement. "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).

The psalm contains the following:

- First: The beauty of spiritual unity (verse 1)
- Second: Description of spiritual unity (verses 2,3a)
- Third: The blessings of spiritual unity (verse 3b)

3.1. First: The Beauty of Spiritual Unity

(verse 1)

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (verse 1).

1. **Behold:** Meditate on, watch and see this thing that rarely happens in our world! It is true brotherhood! By nature, man is an unrelenting tyrant; he does not have pity on his fellow-man when he loses power, stumbles or offends him. When a man makes a mistake, he hastens to blame someone else, accusing him, reproaching him and passing unjust judgments against him. Yet, if we are weighed on the scales, we are altogether lighter than vapour! "They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, no, not one" (Psalm 14:3).

On the contrary, those worshippers united together, standing in the temple of God, so as to join their hearts both spatially and spiritually. Their appearance was strange and uncommon to our wrestling, fighting world. Seeing the beauty of unity in worship, the psalmist broke forth in singing of what had happened, and called everyone to behold this admirable spectacle, in which the participants have endeavoured to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3). In doing so they have become like the pyramids of Egypt that have withstood the tyranny of time for five thousand years, testifying to the greatness and strength of unity. Had the rocks of the pyramids been scattered, the pyramids would have ceased to exist as one of the Seven Wonders of the World! They would have been reduced to huge rocks-- nothing more!

2. **How good!:** When the believers worship together harmony, coordination and suitability abound! This is much like the coordination and harmony of different musical instruments as they play one tune that gladdens the heart and fills the spirit with exhilaration.
3. **How pleasant!:** What a pleasant atmosphere that pervades among the believers! It is heavenly! Sometimes the devil deludes us into thinking of something as pleasant, as he did with Adam and Eve in the Garden: "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes..." (Genesis 3:6). But the psalmist tells us what is truly good and pleasant. These are the holy things that come from God, who makes the worshippers happy and He Himself rejoices in them. He rejoices over those who return to Him, just like the shepherd who carries his lost sheep, after having found it, to bring it back to the sheepfold. The hearts of the worshippers so rejoiced in the Lord that they exclaim, "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go into the house of the LORD'" (Psalm 122:1). "Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; let such as love Your salvation say continually, 'The LORD be magnified!'" (Psalm 40:16).
4. **To dwell in unity:** Physical or permanent dwelling is not intended here, but rather the spiritual and emotional dwelling or settling down that takes place when the believers are open to one another and feel at ease with each other. They blend together in the unity of the Spirit, which they keep strong through love and participation in ministry. The apostle Paul said, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who

plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building" (1 Corinthians 3:6-9). The believers have a sense of protection and unitedness in belonging to the one body: "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body ... and have all been made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13).

5. **Brethren together:** We are all brethren, because we are God's creation and because we are born of the same father, i.e. Adam, as the apostle Paul said in his sermon to the Athenians, "God, who made the world and everything in it ... has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:24,26). Abraham, the friend of God, expressed this physical unity when a quarrel transpired between his herdsmen and the herdsmen of Lot. In the height of the dispute, Abraham said to his nephew Lot, "Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren" (Genesis 13:8). Though Abraham was Lot's uncle, he called him a brother owing to the physical brotherhood, the blood relation between them.

Still, there is a stronger brotherhood: the spiritual brotherhood, the brotherhood of the second birth from the Holy Spirit, of which the Scriptures say, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Ephesians 4:4-6). The believers are all brethren: they have one Lord who rules over their lives, one objective for which they live and the same consolation from the Spirit that refreshes and inspires them. How pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

3.2. Second: Description of Spiritual Unity

(verses 2,3a)

The psalmist gives two descriptions of the holy unity of the believers:

1. **It is like a precious oil:** "It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments" (verse 2).
 1. **A sanctifying oil:** The psalmist compares spiritual unity between the believers to the sanctifying oil that covered Aaron entirely. The precious oil upon the head of Aaron is the oil of the holy anointing whose recipe God gave to Moses to anoint the tent of meeting, the ark of the Testimony, and to pour it over Aaron's head so that it may run down on his beard and on the edge of his garments. All Aaron's body was to be covered, so as to bless, sanctify and dedicate him as high priest to the ministry of God and the teaching of the people (Exodus 30:22-33).
 2. **A blessing oil:** Spiritual unity blesses those who unite together, just as the precious oil used to bless Aaron and all the people he led in worship. It used to run down on

the onyx stones in the breastplate of Aaron, on which the names of the twelve tribes of Israel were inscribed, thus the Lord would spread His blessing over them along with Aaron (Exodus 28:29). The psalmist describes the precious oil as "running down" twice, as though to emphasize the blessing of the Lord, who showers us with blessings from on high. When we try to rise to the source of blessing, we find ourselves of low spiritual stature and confess that we are unprofitable servants. For that reason the Lord freely bestows upon us the oil that runs down from Himself, and the dew that issues from His presence, because He is the source of salvation that comes down from above: "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven" (John 3:13), to raise the poor from the dust and lift the beggar from the ash heap, to seat them among princes (1 Samuel 2:8).

3. **A gladdening oil:** Oil stands for gladness, as the psalmist says, "You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions" (Psalm 45:7). It is "the oil of gladness instead of mourning" (Isaiah 61:3 NIV). Spiritual unity gladdens the heart and there is nothing in all the world better or more pleasant!

The believer enjoys a true and permanent joy, because it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22). "For thus says the LORD: 'Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river ... As one whom his mother comforts, So I will comfort you; ... When you see this, your heart shall rejoice, And your bones shall flourish like grass'" (Isaiah 66:12-14). The joy of the celebrants was like that of their forefathers at the dedication of Aaron as high priest. He was to carry out the ministry in the house of the Lord and stand as mediator between God and His people, so that they may obtain His favour. As to us, we greatly rejoice in Christ, our High Priest, who said, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). We also rejoice in the dedication of any minister of God because we know that the Lord will bless His people through His minister.

Our hearts will surely rejoice in the midst of a world full of tribulations, evil and struggle for material gain, because we take shelter in our only refuge who changes our sorrows into joy.

4. **A unique oil:** Spiritual unity is unique. There is nothing comparable to it in our world. It is like the oil of anointing. "Do not make any oil with the same formula." said God. "It is sacred, and you are to consider it sacred" (Exodus 30:32 NIV). It is a unique oil! Thus it will be said to the people of the Church, which Christ chose for Himself, "You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy" (1 Peter

- 2:9,10).
5. **An aromatic oil:** This "oil" has a sweet smell. True believers are the aroma of Christ, diffusing the sweetest smell everywhere they may be found. "Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing" (2 Corinthians 2:14,15).
 2. **Like dew:** "It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion" (verse 3a). Mount Hermon is the highest mountain in the Land of Israel, and from it the dew descends upon Mount Zion (on which the temple was built), which is not as high. Rain and dew alike descend from above to the lower regions, covering the mountains and saturating the valleys, producing fruit to rejoice the heart of both sower and reaper. The people of the Lord await this blessing that descends from above, to cover them and satisfy them, so that they may yield fruit.

As the Lord gives dew so that plants may grow and produce fruit, the pastures increase and welfare abounds, thus the Lord satisfies our hearts with His own Person, quenching the thirst in our souls, saying to us, "As the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it. 'For 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'" (Isaiah 55:10-12).

3.3. Third: The Blessings of Spiritual Unity

(verse 3b)

"For there the LORD commanded the blessing— Life forevermore" (verse 3b). The celebrants are eternally blessed. Also their children are blessed, from generation to generation. The Lord blessed Abraham, his son Isaac, and his grandson Jacob. He also blesses all those who share their faith and obedience, so that the blessing may extend forward to the coming generations without interruption. The apostle Paul said to his disciple Timothy, "I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also" (2 Timothy 1:5 NIV). The believers request a heavenly blessing for their children and grandchildren, that they may worship the Lord and walk in His fear and love in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, as light to the world and salt to the earth. How admirable is unity and closeness, and how much we need both! How pleasant it is to feel our union with Christ the Vine, firmly established in Him as branches, bearing much fruit and enjoying the fulfilment of His promise, "and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

3.4. Questions

1. Why is it strange and pleasant that brethren dwell together in unity?
2. Why did the psalmist say that the unity of the believers is precious?

4. Psalm One Hundred and Thirty-Four

A Talk between the Celebrants and the Watchmen

A Song of Ascents.

1 Behold, bless the LORD, All you servants of the LORD, Who by night stand in the house of the LORD!

2 Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, And bless the LORD.

3 The LORD who made heaven and earth Bless you from Zion!

This psalm is the last Psalm of Ascent. As mentioned before, there are fifteen Psalms of Ascent (from Psalm 120 to Psalm 134). The celebrants used to sing this psalm in the last night before returning home, after offering the evening sacrifice and closing the temple gates, and before beginning the night watch, which lasted from sunset to sunrise. This watch was carried out by 24 Levites, three priests and the high priest. The celebrants could not leave the temple, with all its holiness and joy, without shedding tears of farewell, so they sang Psalm 134. It begins with the people's loud call to the watchmen, "Behold, bless the LORD, all you servants of the LORD ... Lift up your hands in the sanctuary." In answer to this call, the vigilant watchmen reply, "The LORD ... bless you." All day long the watchmen remember the song of the visitors, who called on them to praise and thank the Lord while they kept the fire of the altar burning through the night, fed the temple lamps with pure olive oil and kept watch over the temple premises. They may slumber as they discharge their watch for lack of variety in this holy service. It may become monotonous to them after doing it so many nights and days, and they may end up just going through the motions. But the vigilant celebrants called upon the watchmen to watch and pray. They told them of their expectations of spending a lively night, full of worship and thanksgiving to the Lord for the honour He conferred upon them in commissioning them to serve Him continually in His holy temple.

The psalm contains the following:

- First: The people call upon the temple watchmen (verses 1,2)
- Second: The watchmen bless the people (verse 3)

4.1. First: The people Call upon the Temple Watchmen

(verses 1,2)

"Behold, bless the LORD, all you servants of the LORD, who by night stand in the house of the LORD! Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the LORD" ' (verses 1-2). Preparing to go back home, the people call upon the temple watchmen to watch, pray and thank the Lord. The priests had blessed the people when they taught them about the Lord during the feast, and now it was time for the priests to bless the Lord, feeling grateful to Him for selecting them for His ministry, so that they could offer Him true worship for their own good and the good of the people they served. Thus all of them would say, "But it is good for me to draw near to God" (Psalm 73:28).

Like Psalm 133, our psalm opens with the imperative "Behold." It means: look, watch out and be alert! The people say to the priests, "We have come, and now we are going back. But you are staying behind. Therefore, with all zeal and vigour perform your important and holy ministry, which the Lord has chosen you to do, so that you may prove yourselves worthy of its honour. 'Therefore ... whatever you do, do all to the glory of God'" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

"Bless the LORD," that is, think of Him and make Him the object of your busyness. Say something good about Him. Respect Him with reverence. Draw near to Him with love. Acknowledge His great favour towards you and thank Him that He allowed you to serve Him. Praise and laud Him, and say to your souls what David 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).

Bless Him by loving Him and continuing to love Him. Love Him for who He is and express your love for Him, saying to all, "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

Bless Him by obeying and surrendering to His will, and by happily carrying out whatever He charges you with.

Bless Him by praying to Him and keeping up a loving conversation and a continued fellowship with Him day and night, so that your prayer may be the conversation of both the conscious and the subconscious mind. Speak directly to Him through prayer, and also through praise and singing to His divine majesty. "Praise the LORD! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and praise is beautiful" (Psalm 147:1).

The celebrants give the watchmen three reasons for blessing the Lord:

1. **They are the servants of the Lord:** The Lord assigned the tribe of Levi to His own ministry, and called them to work in the temple. "At that time the LORD separated the tribe of Levi to bear the ark of the covenant of the LORD, to stand before the LORD to minister to Him and to bless in His name, to this day. Therefore Levi has no portion nor inheritance with his brethren; the LORD is his inheritance, just as the LORD your God promised him" (Deuteronomy 10:8,9).

All the believers are the Lord's servants because He created them, sustains them and has purchased them by redemption. They are honoured to be His servants because this servanthood is perfect freedom. It is a 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 29:24; 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). David used it to describe his own mother: "O LORD, truly I am Your servant; I am Your servant, the son of Your maidservant; You have loosed my bonds" (Psalm 116:16). 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 have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also" (2 Timothy 1:5 NIV).

The true believer is the one that 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 is: "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).

2. **They keep watch in the house of the Lord:** "Who by night stand in the house of the LORD" Some priests had to work day and night. "These are the singers, heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites, who lodged in the chambers, and were free from other duties; for they were employed in that work day and night" (1 Chronicles 9:33). King David has employed them "to stand every morning to thank and praise the LORD, and likewise at evening" (1 Chronicles 23:30).

Standing by night could be understood in the literal sense, or in a moral sense. That is, it could mean enduring the nights of adverse circumstances and days of difficulties. When people err doctrinally or behaviourally, ministers of the Lord stay up during the night in prayers and supplication to guard the doctrine and reveal the truth, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15), preaching the word, being ready to do so in season and out of season, convincing, rebuking, exhorting, with all longsuffering and teaching (2 Timothy 4:2). The Lord named them watchmen who "shall never hold their peace day or night. You who make mention of the LORD, do not keep silent" (Isaiah 62:6).

3. **They pray to the Lord:** They lift up their hands toward the sanctuary, as David said, "Hear the voice of my supplications when I cry to You, when I lift up my hands toward Your holy sanctuary" (Psalm 28:2). The apostle Paul desired that the men should pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, for those in positions of responsibility and authority in

their countries (1 Timothy 2:8).

Lifting up the hands means directing the heart wholly toward the Lord, for then the hands are busy with worship and nothing else. It can also mean focusing the attentions on the Lord's voice and responding to His directions, saying, "Speak, LORD, for Your servant hears" (1 Samuel 3:9).

It also means looking up, pleadingly and hopefully, to the source of blessing, saying, "I will lift up my eyes to the hills— From whence comes my help? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:1,2).

Again, it signifies the lifting up and dedication of all that is in the pray-er as an offering to the Lord, in accordance with the apostle's command: "Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1).

Lifting up the hands served historically as a sign of seeking divine help and waiting for the divine answer, as Moses did when the Amalekites attacked the Israelites in the Sinai Desert. Moses lifted up his hands in prayer, asking for protection. When his hand was held up the Israelites gained victory and whenever he lowered it the Amalekites would win. "Moses' hands became heavy ... And Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun." And that was how they won (Exodus 17:8-13).

The churches built in Gothic style, with arching and intersecting stone ribs supporting a high, vaulted roof and high spires show this. The architecture itself makes the congregation lift up their eyes, thoughts and hearts toward the Lord confidently, enthusiastically and expectantly, saying, "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).

4.2. Second: The Watchmen Bless the People

(verse 3)

The vigilant watchmen respond to the congregation of celebrants who are on their way back to their home countries. They exchange wishes of blessing, saying, "The LORD who made heaven and earth bless you from Zion!"

1. **Blessing from the Lord:** The believer blesses the Lord by thanking Him and offering him continually "the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name" (Hebrews 13:15). And the Lord blesses the believer through forgiveness, so that the believer may say, "Bless the LORD, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from

destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's" (Psalm 103:1-5). He blesses the believer by changing him from within and transforming him "into the same image from glory to glory" (2 Corinthians 3:18), forming him as "a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work" (2 Timothy 2:21). He also makes him a blessing to those around him in the society, the family and the church. He blesses him by meeting all his spiritual, material, mental and emotional needs exceedingly abundantly above all that he asks or thinks (Ephesians 3:20). He encourages Him, saying, "Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:24). This blessing "is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

2. **Blessing from Zion:** The church is the spiritual Zion, in which the priests bless the people, saying, "The LORD bless you and keep you; The LORD make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace " (Numbers 6:24-26). The blessing in the original Hebrew is in the singular, because the people of the Lord assemble together as one man. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). Being thus given in the singular, the blessing may also be to each one of the people, because the Lord knows everyone by name, and says to them, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5).

In the Old Testament, Zion meant the following:

1. **The stronghold of David:** This is the place where the temple was erected, where God dwelt among His people. Blessing comes to us when we enter the house of the Lord to listen to His word, thus Christ's prayer may be fulfilled in us: "Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are... do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one" (John 17:11,15).
2. **The city of the covenant:** It is called this because it is the seat of the ark of the Covenant. God has brought every believer into a new covenant with Himself, sealed with the blood of Christ. Every time the believer partakes of Holy Communion he hears Christ say, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28).
3. **Blessing from the Creator:** "The LORD who made heaven and earth Bless you...!" The Lord holds absolute authority in both heaven and earth. He bestows His blessing because He is a loving and good God, who is able to perform what He promises owing to His absolute authority. How great is the heavenly authority that forgives sins, answers prayers, intercedes for the believers and sends forth God's angels to minister to them,

accompanied by the promise, "And try Me now in this ... if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it" (Malachi 3:10). His authority on earth includes all things. "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes" (Proverbs 21:1). He parted the Red Sea for His people to cross, and said about the years of wandering, "I have led you forty years in the wilderness. Your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandals have not worn out on your feet... that you may know that I am the LORD your God" (Deuteronomy 29:5,6).

Let us lift up prayers for those who minister to us, and ask God to give them ears attentive to the requests of the people they serve. Let ministers, too, ask for the blessing of God upon the people they serve as they preach the word of His true inspiration to them.

4.3. Questions

1. Mention four ways by which we can bless the Lord.
2. Give four meanings of lifting up the hands toward the sanctuary.

5. Psalm One Hundred and Thirty-Five

You who Fear the Lord, Bless the Lord!

Praise to God in Creation and Redemption

1 Praise the LORD! Praise the name of the LORD; Praise Him, O you servants of the LORD!

2 You who stand in the house of the LORD, In the courts of the house of our God,

3 Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good; Sing praises to His name, for it is pleasant.

4 For the LORD has chosen Jacob for Himself, Israel for His special treasure.

5 For I know that the LORD is great, And our Lord is above all gods.

6 Whatever the LORD pleases He does, In heaven and in earth, In the seas and in all deep places.

7 He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightning for the rain; He brings the wind out of His treasuries.

8 He destroyed the firstborn of Egypt, Both of man and beast.

9 He sent signs and wonders into the midst of you, O Egypt, Upon Pharaoh and all his servants.

10 He defeated many nations And slew mighty kings—

11 Sihon king of the Amorites, Og king of Bashan, And all the kingdoms of Canaan—

12 And gave their land as a heritage, A heritage to Israel His people.

13 Your name, O LORD, endures forever, Your fame, O LORD, throughout all generations.

14 For the LORD will judge His people, And He will have compassion on His servants.

15 The idols of the nations are silver and gold, The work of men's hands.

16 They have mouths, but they do not speak; Eyes they have, but they do not see;

17 They have ears, but they do not hear; Nor is there any breath in their mouths.

18 Those who make them are like them; So is everyone who trusts in them.

19 Bless the LORD, O house of Israel! Bless the LORD, O house of Aaron!

20 Bless the LORD, O house of Levi! You who fear the LORD, bless the LORD!

21 Blessed be the LORD out of Zion, Who dwells in Jerusalem! Praise the LORD!

This psalm is a call to praise the Lord who brought back His people from captivity. The people began to rebuild the temple that had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, but they soon became discouraged. To encourage them to build the temple, God sent them Haggai and Zechariah the prophets. This second temple was very humble in comparison to the great temple which Solomon had built, because those who built it were poor and few in number. When the elders among the people saw how slight this temple was when compared to the former one, they were very sad. But the Lord encouraged them by the fact that the glory of this latter temple should be greater than the former if they worshiped Him in it in spirit and in truth (Haggai 2:9). It was for the occasion of rebuilding the temple that the people sang this present psalm. How lovely it is to offer to God songs of thanksgiving, springing forth from our hearts and overflowing to our tongues, in which we say, "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).

Our psalm picks up where Psalm 134 left off. Psalm 134 was the last of the Psalms of Ascent and in it the people called upon the Levites to pray and bless the people. Our psalm calls upon all those who fear the Lord, together with the house of Aaron and the house of Levi, to bless the Lord.

The psalm contains the following:

- First: The praisers (verses 1-4)
- Second: Praising the Lord of nature (verses 5-7)
- Third: Praising the Lord of history (verses 8-12)
- Fourth: Praising the Lord of lords (verses 13-18)
- Fifth: An invitation to praise (verses 19-21)

5.1. First: The praisers

(verses 1-4)

1. **They praise because praise is necessary:** "Praise the LORD! Praise the name of the LORD" (verse 1a). All creation praises its great Creator, of whom and through whom and to whom are all things (Romans 11:36). He opens His hand, and all of His creatures are filled with good (Psalm 104:28). His name and remembrance are the desire of our soul (Isaiah 26:8). The angels sing to Him, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!" (Isaiah 6:3). It seems as if the psalmist urges all those who fear the Lord to say, "My heart is overflowing with a good theme; I recite my composition concerning the King; my tongue is the pen of a ready writer" (Psalm 45:1). Then the sounds of praise will rise up to Him who alone is worthy to take the sacrifice of praise; that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name (Hebrews 13:15). Everybody should praise the Lord's name, which reveals His character, the perfection of His works and the greatness of His attributes. There are four great attributes of God; first: "God is love," second: holiness, third: wisdom, and fourth: power. God is holy love, and there is a human love that does not lead to holiness. God is wise love who chooses the best for us, and there is human love devoid of wisdom. God is powerful love and is able to carry out His deeds of love, and every other love is feeble and temporary. So, let us praise the name of the holy, wise and powerful Lord.
2. **They praise because they are His servants:** "Praise Him, O you servants of the LORD! You who stand in the house of the LORD, in the courts of the house of our God" (verses 1b,2). Those who fear the Lord serve and worship Him because He created and purchased them. He made them in His image, according to His likeness. When they went astray, He redeemed them and created them anew. We find an illustration of this in the work of the potter. When the vessel that he makes of clay is marred in his hand, he makes it into another vessel, as seems best to him (Jeremiah 18:4). God did not purchase those who fear Him with silver or gold, "but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:19). Those who fear Him are His servants and His own possession by virtue of creation and by virtue of acquisition. What a glorious privilege the servants of the Lord have! They have the right to draw near to Him and offer Him their service. As He commissions His servants to serve Him, they respond, "But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all Your works" (Psalm 73:28). And "Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them" (Luke 12:37).
3. **They praise because He is good:** "Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good" (verse 3a). "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" (James 1:17). He who

loves the good God loves His commandments and hides them in his heart, that he might not sin against Him (Psalm 119:11). And " good man obtains favor from the LORD, but a man of wicked intentions He will condemn" (Proverbs 12:2).

4. **They praise because praise is pleasant:** "Sing praises to His name, for it is pleasant" (verse 3b). The adjective "pleasant" may qualify the name of the Lord or the singing: "Praise the LORD! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and praise is beautiful" (Psalm 147:1). But we know from the testimony of history and the testimony of our own experiences that the Lord is pleasant and worthy of praise. We praise Him because He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who keeps covenant and truth. We praise Him because He takes care of us and helps us through all our lives that we may not lack any good thing. We praise because He is good: "Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him!" (Psalm 34:8). When we sing praises to His name our eyes open up more to His pleasant nature and see how pleasant it is to sing to Him. As a result, His radiant face shines upon us and beams down upon us with a smile of acceptance. We, therefore, cast off all burdens weighing us down, and every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough ways smooth; and we shall see the salvation of God (Luke 3:5,6). "And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isaiah 35:10). "Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous! For praise from the upright is beautiful" (Psalm 33:1). "It is good to give thanks to the LORD, And to sing praises to Your name, O Most High" (Psalm 92:1).
5. **They praise because He chose them:** "For the LORD has chosen Jacob for Himself, Israel for His special treasure" (verse 4). This is a special relationship based on the Lord's grace alone, as Christ said, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you" (John 15:16). The Lord bestows this election of grace individually and specifically, not for any righteousness in us but because of the divine love, which we do not deserve. The Lord commanded Moses to say to the children of Israel, "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 19:3-6). He elected them for a specific mission: to spread His word, serve as stewards of the divine mysteries and keep the true form of worship among the Gentiles. He chose them for "His special treasure" and said to them, "For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. 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 7:6-8).

God chose Jacob, the one who follows, and changed his life. He made him Israel, the one who struggles with God, and from his descendants came the Messiah Saviour. God chose those who believe in Him from every tribe, tongue, people and nation to make them kings and priests (Revelation 5:10,11), "that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:7,8). It is not the believers that come to the Lord; it is He who deigned to descend and bid them come to Himself. All the credit goes back to the election of this rich grace. He chose the believers to bless them, so that their mouths should be filled with His praise, and He chose them to make them a blessing to those around them.

5.2. Second: Praising the Lord of Nature

(verses 5-7)

1. **The great Creator:** "For I know that the LORD is great, and our Lord is above all gods" (verse 5). "I know" indicates that the psalmist had an experiential knowledge. His knowledge did not stop at mere hearing, but he saw with his own eyes and made sure in His own heart. This knowledge reached him by divine revelation, as well as through his own daily experience, as the apostle John said, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled" (1 John 1:1). He knows that the Lord is great in His works and that He is above all the idols of the heathen; above the gods of the Egyptians and Dagon of the Philistines (1 Samuel 5:3). Elijah prayed to Him, "Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that You are the LORD God,... Then the fire of the LORD fell... Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, 'The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!'" (1 Kings 18:36-39). He is Lord over all man-made deities whether in the past, present or future.
2. **The powerful Creator:** "Whatever the LORD pleases He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deep places. He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightning for the rain; He brings the wind out of His treasures" (verses 6,7). We praise the powerful God whose purposes cannot be thwarted by anyone and whose authority is not to be hemmed in by anything, for whatever He pleases He does. He spread out the skies without pillars, set the sun, the moon and the stars in them to give light to the earth and to regulate the succession of the seasons. He made the earth and caused it to bring forth grass, plants and fruitful trees. He made the waters pour forth fish and created the birds that fly in the air (Genesis 1). He brings up the clouds from the sea and turns them back into water in the form of rain pouring over the earth, accompanied by peals of thunder and flashes of lightning. It seems that He stores the wind in storehouses that we cannot see and brings it out whenever He pleases. "The wind blows

where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes" (John 3:8).

This is the great God who "has made the earth by His power, He has established the world by His wisdom, and has stretched out the heavens at His discretion. When He utters His voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens: And He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth. He makes lightning for the rain, He brings the wind out of His treasuries" (Jeremiah 10:12,13). "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge... Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world" (Psalm 19:1-4). All authority has been given to Christ in heaven and on earth-- this is why He calmed down the tempest, the sea and the winds obeyed Him (Matthew 8:23-27), and He came to meet His disciples walking on the sea (Matthew 14:22-33).

5.3. Third: Praising the Lord of History

(verses 8-12)

1. **His history with regard to Egypt:** "He destroyed the firstborn of Egypt, both of man and beast. He sent signs and wonders into the midst of you, O Egypt, upon Pharaoh and all his servants" (verses 8,9). The historical fact of the Exodus bears witness to the Lord's authority and the victory of His people against Egypt, the greatest and most powerful kingdom at the time. The Lord commanded Moses to say to Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD: 'Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn'" (Exodus 4:22,23). Then the Lord struck Egypt with ten plagues, the last of which was the death of the firstborn. The plagues were aimed at the idols of the Egyptians to let them know that only the LORD is God. They worshiped the Nile and offered it a bride every year, so the Lord struck the water of the Nile and turned it into blood. They worshiped the calf Apis, so He destroyed all their cattle. The wonders that the Lord performed were a confrontation between Jehovah, the Maker of heaven and earth, and the idols. The Lord did not want to destroy Pharaoh, but rather to arouse him to know who the Lord is. Since he refused to do so, both he and his people paid a high price: "And it came to pass at midnight that the LORD struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of livestock. So Pharaoh rose in the night, he, all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead" (Exodus 12:29,30)
2. **His history with regard to many countries:** "He defeated many nations and slew mighty kings— Sihon king of the Amorites, Og king of Bashan, and all the kingdoms of Canaan— and gave their land as a heritage, a heritage to Israel His people" (verses

10-12). The psalmist mentions the names of the first two kings who stood against the Israelites after their departure from the land of Egypt. He also mentions many other nations against which the Lord gave victory to His people and gave them their lands as inheritance (see Numbers 21:21-26; Joshua 12:7-24); "driving out from before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in, to give you their land as an inheritance, as it is this day" (Deuteronomy 4:38). The feeble slaves defeated the mighty kings, because the war is the Lord's, as it is written, "'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' Says the LORD of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6). From the victory that the Lord granted His people we learn about the Lord's mercy upon those who fear him, His punishment of the wicked, and the fact that He defends His people. "So the LORD of hosts will come down to fight for Mount Zion and for its hill. Like birds flying about, so will the LORD of hosts defend Jerusalem. Defending, He will also deliver it; passing over, He will preserve it" (Isaiah 31:4,5). We also learn about the Lord's constancy and unchangeability, for He is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). This strengthens our faith and leads us to praise and glorify the Lord, saying with a shout, "Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ" (2 Corinthians 2:14).

5.4. Fourth: Praising the Lord of Lords

(verses 13-18)

1. **The Lord is from eternity past to eternity future:** "Your name, O LORD, endures forever, Your fame, O LORD, throughout all generations" (verse 13). The Lord is God, and He alone is the eternal Master. His name will last forever and will never cease or change; He is the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy (Isaiah 57:15). His fame will remain from generation to generation because His miracles are superior and His wonders are many. His character is unforgettable; His commandments are unforgettable; His gospel tells of His gifts, His healing and the greatness of His might. Those who fear Him worship Him, and He holds this conversation with them: "Come now, and let us reason together" (Isaiah 1:18). He inclines His ear to hear their petitions; He feels their pains and hastens to their rescue. "In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them; In His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bore them and carried them all the days of old" (Isaiah 63:9).
2. **The Lord loves His people:** "For the LORD will judge His people, and He will have compassion on His servants" (verse 14). The Lord judges His people when they fall into error; He punishes them Himself. But because He has compassion on them, He does not allow the enemies to destroy them: "Whom the LORD loves He corrects, Just as a father the son in whom he delights" (Proverbs 3:12). David chose well when, as a consequence of sinning, the Lord offered Him three punishments to choose from: Seven years of famine, fleeing three months before his enemies or three days of plague. David's reply

was, "Please let us fall into the hand of the LORD, for His mercies are great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man" (2 Samuel 24:10-14).

3. **Idols are lifeless:** "The idols of the nations 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; nor is there any breath in their mouths" (verses 15-17). There were idols of stone, wood, gold and other materials. Nowadays, we have other idols, but both kinds do not last long. Some worship authority and crave for the power to control everything; some worship knowledge and sacrifice themselves at the altar of science; others worship money on the false grounds that it accomplishes a lot. They all forget that authority is delegated from God, that science without the knowledge of the Lord is destructive, that money without the fear of God turns into a harsh master, and those who love it stray from the faith in their greediness and pierce themselves through with many sorrows (1 Timothy 6:10). Idolaters have made for themselves idols that neither speak, hear nor see. They have made them, yet they worshiped them! They may have been so smart in the affairs of their worldly lives, but so stupid in the affairs of their religion. The prophet Isaiah so exquisitely explains the stupidity of the idolater in the fact that he cuts down a log of wood, burns a part of it to warm himself, and say, "Ah! I am warm, I have seen the fire." And the rest of it he makes into a god, to which he falls down to worship and pray, saying, "Deliver me, for you are my god!" (Isaiah 44:12-17).
4. **The makers of idols will be like their idols:** "Those who make them are like them; so is everyone who trusts in them" (verse 18). A thing is like its owner. Christ said about this kind of person, "Seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand" (Matthew 13:13). They are useless and hopeless because they have set their hearts on that which does not profit. They have forsaken the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water (Jeremiah 2:13).

5.5. Fifth: An Invitation to Praise

(verses 19-21)

In the final verses of the psalm the psalmist extends an invitation to the house of Israel, the house of Aaron, the house of Levi, and those who fear the Lord "who dwells in Jerusalem." They are invited to bless the Lord. The author of Psalm 115 commanded Israel, the house of Aaron, and those who fear the Lord to trust in Him (verses 9-11), just as the author of Psalm 118 (verses 2-4) commanded Israel, the house of Aaron, and those who fear the Lord to shout, "His mercy endures forever." In our psalm the psalmist adds "house of Levi" to the list. The blessing comes from Jerusalem, the seat of the Lord's worship, and His people lift up to Him praises of thanksgiving, resulting in His showering them with His blessings and bringing gladness into their hearts.

5.6. Questions

1. Verses 1-4 of this psalm mention five reasons for praising the Lord. Write them down.
2. Why did God chose the children of Israel?

6. Psalm One Hundred and Thirty-Six

His Mercy Knows no End!

Thanksgiving to God for His Enduring Mercy

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

2 Oh, give thanks to the God of gods! For His mercy endures forever.

3 Oh, give thanks to the Lord of lords! For His mercy endures forever:

4 To Him who alone does great wonders, For His mercy endures forever.

5 To Him who by wisdom made the heavens, For His mercy endures forever.

6 To Him who laid out the earth above the waters, For His mercy endures forever.

7 To Him who made great lights, For His mercy endures forever—

8 The sun to rule by day, For His mercy endures forever.

9 The moon and stars to rule by night, For His mercy endures forever.

10 To Him who struck Egypt in their firstborn, For His mercy endures forever.

11 And brought out Israel from among them, For His mercy endures forever.

12 With a strong hand, and with an outstretched arm, For His mercy endures forever.

13 To Him who divided the Red Sea in two, For His mercy endures forever.

14 And made Israel pass through the midst of it, For His mercy endures forever.

15 But overthrew Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea, For His mercy endures forever.

16 To Him who led His people through the wilderness, For His mercy endures forever.

17 To Him who struck down great kings, For His mercy endures forever.

18 And slew famous kings, For His mercy endures forever—

19 Sihon king of the Amorites, For His mercy endures forever.

20 And Og king of Bashan, For His mercy endures forever—

21 And gave their land as a heritage, For His mercy endures forever.

22 A heritage to Israel His servant, For His mercy endures forever.

23 Who remembered us in our lowly state, For His mercy endures forever.

24 And rescued us from our enemies, For His mercy endures forever.

25 Who gives food to all flesh, For His mercy endures forever.

26 Oh, give thanks to the God of heaven! For His mercy endures forever.

This is a psalm of thanksgiving to God for His goodness, the multitude of His mercies and the power of His wonders. The author of the psalm joins the author of Psalm 135 in calling the people to lift up praise to the one wise God, whose mercies are so great toward those who fear Him. The children of Israel sinned and were taken into captivity; they thought that God's mercy towards them had ceased. But He brought them out of their exile and proved that His love for them does not end, that His mercy on them endures forever. The expression "His mercy endures forever" is repeated 26 times in the 26 verses of the psalm. This repetition emphasises the words. The psalmist repeats this sentence after mentioning each act of love done by God. "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). The Israelites used to repeat the expression "For He is good! For His mercy endures forever" in their public worship. It occurs 36 times in the Bible (26 in our psalm; as well as in 1 Chronicles 16:34; 2 Chronicles 5:13; 7:3; Ezra 3:11; Psalm 100:5; 106:1; 107:1, 118:1,29; Jeremiah 33:11). The expression "His mercy endures forever" by itself occurs five times: in 1 Chronicles 16:41; 2 Chronicles 7:6; 20:21; Psalm 118:3,4. From studying biblical references one can gather that the psalm was sung on the day David had the ark of the Lord removed to the tent he had had made specifically for it in the stronghold of Zion (1 Chronicles 16:4), on the day Solomon completed the building of the temple (2 Chronicles 5:13), at the end of Solomon's prayer when he inaugurated the temple (2 Chronicles 7:3), and when the foundations of the second temple were laid (Ezra 3:11). Either the people replied, "His mercy endures forever" to the singers, or the Levites to the leader of the choir. As we meditate on God's endless love we ought to repeat it, too. The Lord says, "Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you" (Jeremiah 31:3).

The psalm contains the following:

- First: An invitation to thanksgiving (verses 1-3)
- Second: Giving thanks to the Creator God (verses 4-9)
- Third: Giving thanks to the Deliverer God (verses 10-15)
- Fourth: Giving thanks to the gracious God (verses 16-26)

6.1. First: An Invitation to Thanksgiving

(verses 1-3)

1. **Giving thanks to the good God:** "Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever" (verse 1). The psalmist invites us to give thanks to the good God, the source of all good and the doer of all good, and say to Him, "You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You" (Psalm 86:5). He is the Lord who desires what is good and rewards those who do it: "but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good" (Romans 2:10).
2. **Giving thanks to the God of gods:** "Oh, give thanks to the God of gods! For His mercy endures forever" (verse 2). The heathen worshiped gods made of wood, stone and metal, which the Lord created out of nothing, which makes Him the God of gods -- He created them all. They perish but He remains forever. The Lord is high and above all others in power and everlasting authority. During the Babylonian captivity King Darius set up Daniel as his prime minister, which caused the king's governors and satraps to look for some charge against Daniel. They could find no charge except for the charge against his God. They denounced him to the king and he was thrown into a den of lions. The king said to Daniel, "Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you" (Daniel 6:16). Then, very early in the morning, Daniel was brought out of the den and no injury whatever was found on him because he believed in His God. Thereupon the king wrote this announcement to all the peoples, "I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. For He is the living God, and steadfast forever; His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall endure to the end" (Daniel 6:26).
3. **Giving thanks to the Lord of lords:** "Oh, give thanks to the Lord of lords! For His mercy endures forever" (verse 3). This title gives God dominion over all those in a position of authority, and declares that to Him submit all authorities in heaven and on earth. Many are lords of their domains; the father is the lord of the house, the employer is the lord of the business, and so on. But the Lord is Lord over all of those. Further, there are kings, presidents and people of authority whom the Lord set up and commanded us to submit to, as well as commanded them to submit to Him. He is indeed Lord over all of them: "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes" (Proverbs 21:1). "For high official watches over high official, and higher officials are over them" (Ecclesiastes 5:8). He says, "Tell and bring forth your case; yes, let them take counsel together. Who has declared this from ancient time? Who has told it from that time? Have not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me... that to Me every knee shall bow, Every tongue shall take an oath" (Isaiah 45:21-23).

6.2. Second: Giving Thanks to the Creator God

(verses 4-9)

1. **The only Creator:** "To Him who alone does great wonders" (verse 4). He is the eternal, wonderful, exclusive Author of the universe. "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:3). He alone performed wonders in the land of Egypt to free the enslaved children of Israel with His uplifted arm. His divine authority is still at work on earth. Man has made inroads into space and has so far explored the moon. Man still aspires to more, but he could hardly accomplish this without the laws of nature that God has set in place! God's rod will continue to devour the rod of mankind, even if, by their sorcery, they could turn it into serpents; it is God who gave men the intellects by means of which they excel (Exodus 7:8-13). "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?... For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things" (Romans 11:33-36). He is the Eternal, who still performs miracles for us today, and to Him belongs escape from death (Psalm 68:20). How often does He heal His children from sickness, rescue them from enemies, give them victory over sin, and qualify them to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light (Colossians 1:12)!
2. **The wise Creator:** "To Him who by wisdom made the heavens" (verse 5). How obvious is the divine wisdom behind all creation! Nothing oversteps the bounds assigned to it. Everything is under strict control. God assisted man in inventing many things, but everything man makes has faults and defects and is in continual need for modification, alteration and maintenance. Man has launched satellites into space, but he keeps on altering their courses. But "The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding He established the heavens; By His knowledge the depths were broken up, and clouds drop down the dew" (Proverbs 3:19,20). His wisdom becomes clear to us when we use a telescope to watch things so far away from us, as well as when we use a microscope to inspect minute things; all things, great and small, testify to His wisdom. In our daily lives, too, we see Him providing big and small things equally. "To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen" (Jude 25).
3. **The powerful Creator:** "To Him who laid out the earth above the waters" (verse 6). "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.... darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters... Then God said, 'Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters...' Then God said, 'Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear'; and it was so" (Genesis 1:1,2,6,9). Water covered everything until the Creator, the absolute Master, commanded the water to subside and

solid land to appear. He set limits to the water so that it should not overstep them, except by His order. As man's sins increased and the whole earth was full of violence, He destroyed it by a flood. But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD, so He said to him, "The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopherwood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch " (Genesis 6:13-14). Then the flood came and the waters prevailed on the earth 150 days, at the end of which God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters subsided (Genesis 6-8). Because of their iniquity, the Lord destroyed the inhabitants of the earth, except for eight people: Noah, his wife and his three sons together with their wives. Then "the LORD smelled a soothing aroma. Then the LORD said in His heart, 'I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done'" (Genesis 8:21).

4. **The enlightening Creator:** "Who made the great lights... the sun to govern the day... the moon and stars to govern the night..." (verses 7-9). "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5), and in His light we see light (Psalm 36:9). When the earth was without form and void, and darkness was on the face of the deep, God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light ... Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night ... Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night (Genesis 1). This is the wise God, who wisely does whatever He pleases, and leaves nothing to coincidence. He made the sun to rule the day; so that His creatures may wake up to do what He assigned them to do. He made the moon to rule the night; so that He may give His beloved sleep (Psalm 127:2). "The living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them... 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 14:15,17). He shines upon His Church with His light so that His glory may be seen upon her, and says to her, "Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you... The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising" (Isaiah 60:1-3).

6.3. Third: Giving Thanks to the Deliverer God (verses 10-15)

1. **The miracle of the exodus:** "To Him who struck Egypt in their firstborn... and brought out Israel from among them... with a strong hand, and with an outstretched arm..." (verses 10-12). The psalmist offered up thanksgiving to the Deliverer Lord, then declared what great things the Lord has done for His people, and how He had compassion on them to deliver them from the hand of their taskmasters by striking and bringing them out with a strong hand. The Lord loved His people and wanted to deliver them from their affliction,

just as He has shown His love for Pharaoh by bearing with him, giving him several chances to repent of his erroneous pattern of thinking, and warning him with mighty signs and wonders. When he was stubborn and refused, God struck Egypt together with all its firstborn, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of livestock (Exodus 12:29). He struck the oppressor to let the oppressed go free. "Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear... Therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; and His own righteousness, it sustained Him" (Isaiah 59:1,16).

2. **The drowning of the enemy:** "To Him who divided the Red Sea in two... and made Israel pass through the midst of it... overthrew Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea..." (verses 13-15). He parted the sea, made His people cross and drowned the oppressor. He commanded the sea and the winds and they obeyed Him; the sea became a watery wall to the right and to the left so that His people could cross in the midst of the waves, and when the enemy came in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD drove him along (Isaiah 59:19). He split the rock, bringing forth water to quench their thirst. "In His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bore them and carried them all the days of old" (Isaiah 63:9). He thrust the strongman and his army into the sea, so that the weak might cross over and say, "I am strong" for the Lord was their strength (Joel 3:10). Though His people were neither pious nor perfect, in His love, He said to them, "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you" (Isaiah 43:1,2). The memorable event of the Exodus has come to be commemorated every year in the Passover celebration. Now, in Christ, we no longer celebrate the Passover; we rather celebrate the Lord's Communion, in which we present ourselves at the Lord's table and hear Him say, "This is My body which is broken for you" Then we partake of the cup and hear Him say, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do... in remembrance of me" (1 Corinthians 11:24,25). We celebrate Christ, our Passover, who was sacrificed for us (1 Corinthians 5:7), and give Him thanks because He made us cross over to the shore of safety.

6.4. Fourth: Giving Thanks to the Gracious God

(verses 16-26)

1. **He graciously guided them:** "To Him who led His people through the wilderness" (verse 16). Like a king, He led His people, and guided them with skilful hands (Psalm 78:72). He shaded them by day and guided them with a pillar of cloud; lighting the way for them, defending them against wild animals, and directing them by night with a pillar of fire. "The LORD is your keeper... The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by

night... The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore" (Psalm 121:5,6,8). He sustained them in the wilderness for forty years; He fed them manna and they did not hunger; He gave them water to drink from a rock. He said to them, "Your garments did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years... And I have led you forty years in the wilderness. Your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandals have not worn out on your feet" (Deuteronomy 8:4; 29:5).

2. **He graciously defended them:** "To Him who struck down great kings... and slew famous kings... Sihon king of the Amorites... and Og king of Bashan..." (verses 17-20). The Lord prepared a way for His people in the wilderness, going before them and protecting them from behind. He struck great Pharaoh so that he should permit them to go out of the humiliation of slavery. Then the Lord struck great kings to enable them to pass through to the Promised Land, fighting mighty kings on their behalf, like Sihon king of the Amorites and Og king of Bashan. "Then Israel defeated him with the edge of the sword, and took possession of his land from the Arnon to the Jabbok, as far as the people of Ammon; for the border of the people of Ammon was fortified" (Numbers 21:24), "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Do not fear him, for I have delivered him into your hand, with all his people and his land...'" (Numbers 21:34). The people of the Lord are still going through a spiritual wilderness, surrounded by temptations, confronted with unyielding adversaries, but they trust in the Lord's promise, "The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace" (Exodus 14:14). It behoves the believers to follow the apostle's commandment, "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11).
3. **He graciously gave them an inheritance:** "And gave their land as a heritage... a heritage to Israel His servant..." (verses 21,22). The Lord wiped out His idol-worshipping enemies, destroyed the enemies of His people, wrenching away from them the land He owned and giving it as an inheritance to His people who worship Him: "The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell therein" (Psalm 24:1). In New Testament terms, God graciously grants adoption to the believers, severing them from the spirit of bondage: "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together" (Romans 8:16,17), "to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:4).
4. **He graciously granted them freedom:** "Who remembered us in our lowly state... and rescued us from our enemies..." (verses 23,24). The psalmist calls on his people to give thanks to the God who neither slumbers nor sleeps, who stretched out His hand and delivered them from their affliction. He says that God "remembered us." Would God possibly forget? "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). The believers often suffer affliction, but they are aware of the meaning of the Scripture, "By faith Moses... refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God... esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward." (Hebrews 11:24-26). For this reason the martyrs were not dismayed at the affliction of martyrdom; rather those who put them to death were dismayed, and the blood of martyrs has become the seed of the Church, growing like a bush burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed (Exodus 3:2).

Yet, the biggest affliction ever is the affliction of sin; whoever commits sin is a slave of sin (John 8:34). God remembers the lost sinner and seeks him out till He finds him. This is what Jesus did with the penitent thief who said, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom" (Luke 23:42). He answered him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). And the one who comes to Him He will by no means cast out (John 6:37).

5. **He graciously provided food:** "Who gives food to all flesh... Oh, give thanks to the God of heaven!..." (verses 25,26). The Lord does not forget His creatures because they are His handiwork; He looks after them, nourishes them, and provides them with bread to satisfaction: "The eyes of all look expectantly to You, and You give them their food in due season. You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing" (Psalm 145:15,16). He taught us to pray, "Our Father in heaven ... Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:9-13).

Yet, the highest bread He gives to us is the food of the Spirit. He said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6). Further, He said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world... I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever" (John 6:32,33,51).

"Oh, give thanks to the God of heaven! For His mercy endures forever" (Psalm 136:26).

6.5. Questions

1. Complete the sentence "Man has launched satellites into space, but..."
2. The Lord's graciousness was clarified to the Children of Israel in five ways. Mention four of them.

7. Psalm One Hundred and Thirty-Seven

Weeping at the Rivers of Babylon

Longing for Zion in a Foreign Land

1 By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down, yea, we wept When we remembered Zion.

2 We hung our harps Upon the willows in the midst of it.

3 For there those who carried us away captive asked of us a song, And those who plundered us requested mirth, Saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"

4 How shall we sing the LORD's song In a foreign land?

5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem, Let my right hand forget its skill!

6 If I do not remember you, Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth— If I do not exalt Jerusalem Above my chief joy.

7 Remember, O LORD, against the sons of Edom The day of Jerusalem, Who said, "Raze it, raze it, To its very foundation!"

8 O daughter of Babylon, who are to be destroyed, Happy the one who repays you as you have served us!

9 Happy the one who takes and dashes Your little ones against the rock!

This psalm depicts the situation of the people of Israel in their Babylonian captivity as the result of the desertion of the kingdom of Judah from the true worship. Some paid homage to idols, while others mixed the worship of God with idol worship. Those who feared God were but a handful -- and none would listen to their admonition. How often had the prophets given them warnings, but the hearers were not concerned with reforming their ways, instead they made fun of their preaching! Eventually God let King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon carry them off in 586 BC, plunder the temple of Solomon and destroy it. During the years of captivity, the kingdom of Babylon grew weaker and lost its position of power, while, at the same time, the star of the kingdom of Persia started to rise on the horizon. After seventy years of captivity the Lord fulfilled His promise to bring the people back, as Jeremiah had earlier prophesied. King Cyrus of Persia decreed the return of the Israelites to their homeland, returned the contents of the temple that Nebuchadnezzar had plundered from them, and commanded them to rebuild it with the assistance of the Persian government, provided that they should pray to their God to bless the life and kingdom of Cyrus. The Israelites returned with decrees of rebuilding the place with materials from the treasuries of the king himself. But they were shocked to see the extensive devastation of the country, the abject poverty of those who had remained behind, and the fierce opposition of the enemies who inhabited the land and how they disrupted the rebuilding of the Lord's temple.

Most likely the psalmist composed this psalm shortly after the return from captivity. In the opening verses of the psalm he wrote about the sad years of captivity in the past tense (verses 1-3), then concluded the psalm with an invocation of more woes upon Babylon (verses 7-9).

The psalm contains the following:

- First: Sorrows of captivity (verses 1-3)
- Second: Memories of Jerusalem (verses 4-6)
- Third: Punishment of the enemy (verses 7-9)

7.1. First: The Sorrows of Captivity

(verses 1-3)

1. **The psalmist that did not rejoice:** "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion" (verse 1). The Land of Canaan was a hill land watered by rain, and the Land of Babylon, in contrast, was watered by many rivers, such as the Tigris, Euphrates and Chebar (where the prophet Ezekiel stayed; see Ezekiel 1:1). By these rivers the captives sat down, away from the people, as mourners do (Isaiah 47:1,5), pondering over the sad memories. There they washed themselves in the waters of the rivers according to requirements of the Law before performing the ordinances of their worship, because they were unable to build a synagogue for worship (this happened again much later in the city of Philippi in Acts 16:13). There was a great distance separating them from their home, where the temple of Solomon was, and the blessed state they used to enjoy as they sang out, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brethren to dwell together in unity!... For there the LORD commanded the blessing— life forevermore." (Psalm 133).

The memories gave way to heartaches. They sat down reminiscing and weeping, comparing their situation in Babylon to their situation in the land of their fathers and the temple of their God, where they used to worship. With an overpowering sense of guilt and fear that the Lord has rejected them, they shed unhappy tears that ran down with the running waters of the river. The tears of their repentance mixed with the water, with which they washed themselves for purification as they pleaded to God to return them to the Promised Land. This is the situation of everyone who departs from the Lord and His house-- the situation of someone who gets thirsty and drinks salty water, who gets hungry and eats the food of pigs in a far country. But thanks be to the good, compassionate God who accepts the repentance of the sinner who returns to Him. "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).

2. **The harps that did not play:** "We hung our harps upon the willows in the midst of it." (verse 2). Weeping willow trees grew alongside the rivers of Babylon. When the exiles sat under their shade, they paid no attention to their arresting beauty, nor did they notice their hanging branches and full green leaves, nor did they feel the river breeze cooling their burning tears; rather the dew drops seemed to them like tears shed by nature in

sympathy with their own weeping and mourning. When their weeping turned into wailing, they left off playing their harps and hang them on the branches. It is better to hang the harps on branches than to break them, which desperate people are prone to do, thus smashing a good source of joy; or, even worse, they may break themselves or those nearest to them. Hanging the harps is also better than using them to sing to the idols. This act on their part indicates that they did not lose hope, for they were "hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed" (2 Corinthians 4:8,9). They hung their harps because they were reminders of the bygone glory of praise in the first temple, and they might have the chance again to use them and sing with them praises to the Lord, saying, "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).

- 3. The song that was not sung:** "For there those who carried us away captive asked of us a song, And those who plundered us requested mirth, Saying, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion!'" (verse 3). Tearful sorrow gripped the psalmist's heart in his disgrace and exile, and past memories overwhelmed his emotions, yet the oppressor who exploited him told him to use what was sacred to him for singing the praises of his God to entertain his captors! The request was harsh because it came from an enemy who gloated over his grief and made fun of what he held sacred. Not content with the plundering, ransacking and devastation they brought upon the Israelites, as well as the humiliation and indignity they put them under, the invaders added a new humiliation by their request. Maybe they thought Jehovah was an idol similar to their gods and no more capable of assisting His worshippers. What they did not know was that by means of the years of captivity, this great God meant to lead His people to repent from idolatry forever. This is exactly what happened as the Israelites witnessed the corruption connected with idolatry; they hated even to hear the mention of idols. This painful Babylonian experience finally weaned them from idolatry. The Lord may let us taste a bitter cup to keep us away from something worse. He may dispel our earthly joys in order not to deny us His eternal blessings.

7.2. Second: Memories of Jerusalem

(verses 4-6)

- 1. Singing in Jerusalem:** "How shall we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land?" (verse 4). The psalmist recalls the grand choir that had often praised the Lord with David's psalms in Solomon's temple, which filled the hearts of the congregation with awe and thanksgiving for God. Now when asked to sing the songs of Zion in a foreign land, the Jews refused the request to sing when far away from Jerusalem. They considered this a betrayal of their religion and country because the songs of the Lord were connected in their minds with a majestic, holy place, the temple of Solomon.

Some people today ask, "How shall we sing?" for reasons other than the one given by the psalmist. Some will not sing because they are busy with material things, while others are ashamed to sing outside the place of worship. Those who fear God, however, will join Paul and Silas in singing, even if they are in the inner prison (Acts 16:24,25). They will say, "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). This is what the black people of America did when they were captured by slave-traders in Africa and sold as slaves to do the hardest and most difficult jobs. They found comfort in the Lord, wrote hymns of deep spiritual meaning known today as "Negro Spirituals". Some of these hymns were even translated into Arabic, such as "We are climbing Jacob's ladder." In their suffering they saw the ladder put up on the earth with its top reaching to heaven, and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it (Genesis 28:12), as though they were saying, "We were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance" (Romans 8:24,25). Just as the black people of America sang hymns under the harshest circumstances ever, in the same way everyone sings who experiences Christ's salvation. "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms" (James 5:13) everywhere, because the whole earth belongs to the Lord and every place we sing in becomes His holy temple. Today, a person who believes in Christ lives in the midst of an antagonistic, opposing, unyielding society. If he is asked to sing the song of the Lord he will sing it without losing his unflinching peace, because it is established on the Rock. Sing to the Lord, therefore, and give a defence to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you (1 Peter 3:15).

2. **Unforgettable Jerusalem:** "If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill! If I do not remember you, let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth— If I do not exalt Jerusalem above my chief joy" (verses 5,6). Jerusalem held a special place in the hearts of the Israelites; it was the stronghold of David, the seat of the ark of the covenant, and the place where sacrifices were offered. No God-fearing believer would ever forget it, because if he does he would forget God's forgiveness, mercy, promises and love, and will only see God's wrath and punishment. The psalmist wants to say that if he forgets Jerusalem his right hand will be disabled or paralysed. He would no longer be able to plant or reap, and will be reduced to utter poverty. He would not be able to carry the harp to play, and, being denied the ability to speak, he will cease to praise and sing and will yield to grief and depression. He says that these disabilities will befall him if he does not give Jerusalem the first priority in his life, making her his highest joy. He must have had in mind the Lord's statement, "Because My people have forgotten Me, they have burned incense to worthless idols. And they have caused themselves to stumble in their ways, from the ancient paths, to walk in pathways and not on a highway" (Jeremiah 18:15).

When a believer forgets the house of the Lord and its exaltation, whether in act or speech, he becomes vulnerable to physical, mental and spiritual agony as a result of feeling guilty. How can we today forget the upper room of the Lord's Supper, the garden of Gethsemane, the hill of Calvary, the cross of redemption and salvation, the empty grave and the Day of Pentecost? Every God-fearing believer, who neither forgets his Lord nor His worship, will hear Him say, "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. 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).

7.3. Third: Punishment of the Enemy

(verses 7-9)

1. **Punishment of those who gloated:** "Remember, O LORD, against the sons of Edom the day of Jerusalem, who said, 'Raze it, raze it, to its very foundation!'" (verse 7). The sons of Edom were the descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother, and the cousins of the Israelites. They were, at the same time, their neighbours. Despite the physical and geographical proximity, they always showed complete hatred for the Israelites and gloated over every misfortune that happened to them. When "the gold has become dim! How changed the fine gold! The stones of the sanctuary are scattered at the head of every street" (Lamentations 4:1), so that the foundations of Jerusalem and the temple were laid bare, the Edomites shouted, "Raze it, raze it, to its very foundation!" that she may never again put up any resistance. For this reason the Lord said to them, "For violence against your brother Jacob, Shame shall cover you, And you shall be cut off forever... For the day of the LORD upon all the nations is near; As you have done, it shall be done to you; Your reprisal shall return upon your own head" (Obadiah 10,15).
2. **Punishment of the destroyers:** "O daughter of Babylon, who are to be destroyed, happy the one who repays you as you have served us! Happy the one who takes and dashes your little ones against the rock!" (verses 8,9). The psalmist expects the destruction of Babylon as repayment for destroying Jerusalem: "all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matthew 26:52). He pronounces happy whoever does this to her, whoever lays her waste and dashes her little ones against the rock, that her heart may bleed and her agony be great. No doubt the psalmist suffered from such a deep wound that he demanded a repayment in kind, that he may look with his eyes and see the reward of the wicked. Nothing hurts a man more than his pain for his children. But now we are in the dispensation of grace; and in the spirit of the cross, we do not seek the destruction of the sinner, but pray that he should turn away from his evil way and repent. That is why we pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matthew 6:12) and give heed to the commandment, "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves... 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 12:19-21).

Two problems with the Jewish nation:

- **The problem of distinction and the rejection of the "other":** The Jews misunderstood God's election as making them distinct from other nations and superior to them all. They hardly recognized that the purpose of electing them was to devote them to world evangelism-- to preach the gospel to the whole world! God said to them, "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 19:5,6). Yet, they did not understand the purpose of God's election, developed a superior attitude to the Gentiles, and kept the word of God to themselves. For example, they had no dealings with the Samaritans (John 4:9) and refused to let other peoples share with them in rebuilding the temple of Jerusalem (Ezra 4:2). They forgot the commandment, "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18) and replaced it with "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy" (Matthew 5:43).
- **The problem of connecting worship with one specific place:** This place came to be the temple of Jerusalem in which sacrifices were offered exclusively, although there were many synagogues for worship. After the destruction of the temple, the offering of sacrifices ceased. The Samaritan woman expressed this idea when she asked Christ, " 'Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.' Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father... God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth' " (John 4:20-24). We thank God who revealed His love for us in the unforgettable statement, "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). He loves all peoples, tribes, tongues and nations without distinction "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" (Romans 3:23,24).

7.4. Questions

1. Some people today ask, "How shall we sing?" Give their reasons.
2. What are the two problems with the Jewish nation?

8. Psalm One Hundred and Thirty-Eight

You Made me Bold

A Psalm of David.

1 I will praise You with my whole heart; Before the gods I will sing praises to You.

2 I will worship toward Your holy temple, And praise Your name For Your lovingkindness and Your truth; For You have magnified Your word above all Your name.

3 In the day when I cried out, You answered me, And made me bold with strength in my soul.

4 All the kings of the earth shall praise You, O LORD, When they hear the words of Your mouth.

5 Yes, they shall sing of the ways of the LORD, For great is the glory of the LORD.

6 Though the LORD is on high, Yet He regards the lowly; But the proud He knows from afar.

7 Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me; You will stretch out Your hand Against the wrath of my enemies, And Your right hand will save me.

8 The LORD will perfect that which concerns me; Your mercy, O LORD, endures forever; Do not forsake the works of Your hands.

This is a psalm of thanksgiving and declaration of trust in the good and just God who deals graciously with His people and returns them from their captivity. The psalmist speaks in it about God's favour towards him before all peoples, believing that He equally answers the prayer of an individual and of the people, and that He is faithful to His promises. This makes the kings and peoples of the earth believe in the Lord and give Him thanks; for the glory of the Lord is great, and He will defend the oppressed and save the afflicted.

The psalm contains the following:

- First: The psalmist gives thanks to the Lord (verses 1-3)
- Second: Kings give thanks to the Lord (verses 4-6)
- Third: The psalmist hopes in the Lord (verses 7,8)

8.1. First: The Psalmist Gives Thanks to the Lord

(verses 1-3)

In these three verses the psalmist addresses God without mentioning His name because He sees God through the eyes of faith. He, therefore, offers Him his praise and worship. In these verses he describes both himself and his God:

1. The psalmist's qualities:

1. **Zealous:** "I will praise You with my whole heart" (verse 1a). In his spiritual zeal he offers the Lord a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of his lips, giving thanks to His name and His favour. His heart overflows with gratitude to the holy and living God, the

- benefactor who bestows innumerable benefits and countless gifts. "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).
2. **Bold:** "Before the gods I will sing praises to You" (verse 1b). "Gods" in this context means the mighty men and judges of the earth, those in authority who judge among the people. Before these the psalmist sings his hymns fearlessly, in the knowledge that "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31). In his boldness he follows Jesus' example, to whom Pilate said " 'Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?' Jesus answered, 'You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin'" (John 19:10,11). He says, "I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart; I have declared Your faithfulness and Your salvation; I have not concealed Your lovingkindness and Your truth from the great assembly" (Psalm 40:10). For Christ has said, "I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God. But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God" (Luke 12:8,9).
 3. **Worshipful:** "I will worship toward Your holy temple" (verse 2a). King David bows down in the presence of the heavenly King, and his heart bows down in his God's temple in awe and reverence for the possessor of everlasting dominion. God has taken him from following the sheep, set him up as king, established his kingdom and made his people submit to him. Therefore he could not find a better place than the holy temple of the Lord to worship his Lord in intimacy and love, as he said, "How lovely is Your tabernacle, O LORD of hosts! My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God" (Psalm 84:1,2). Then he calls upon everyone, "Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand" (Psalm 95:6,7).
2. **God's qualities:**
1. **Loving:** "And praise Your name for Your lovingkindness" (verse 2a). A name bears all the characteristics of a person, and as such the Lord's name reveals His qualities, majesty, authority, power and love. These are seen in his mercy for the lost sinner, to whom Christ came down and who he raised up from the abyss, dealing kindly with him, forgiving him and no more counting his sins against him. He rather removed his transgressions from him as far as the east is from the west. As a result, the sinner says, " It is good to give thanks to the LORD, and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High; To declare Your lovingkindness in the morning, and Your faithfulness every night" (Psalm 92:1,2).
 2. **Faithful:** "And praise Your name for Your ... truth" (verse 2a). The Lord is faithful,

true and just. When people wronged the psalmist, the Lord heard his complaint and avenged him. When others neglected him, the Lord remembered him and gave him boldness. When they denied him his rights, the Lord rewarded him openly because he acted on the advice that says, "Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday" (Psalm 37:5,6). " 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).

3. **Great:** "For You have magnified Your word above all Your name" (verse 2b). This verse may be translated this way: "For You have magnified Your word. Your name is above everything." The whole verse may be understood as meaning: "The fulfilment of Your promises, Lord, surpassed all that You have revealed about Yourself. Your acts of salvation have soared higher than all our expectations as we waited and meditated on Your qualities, which are revealed in Your name." "His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:3,4). Now He "is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Ephesians 3:20,21).

His "living Word" is Christ Himself who revealed to us God's righteousness and perfect attributes. It is Christ whose name is exalted above all names, so that to Him every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

4. **Answers prayer:** "In the day when I cried out, You answered me, and made me bold with strength in my soul" (verse 3). The psalmist experienced and tasted how good the Lord was; he had the experience of the past, the trust of the present and the hope of the future. He called upon the Lord, who heard him, answered him, and did not let him down; it is He who took the initiative and said, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me" (Psalm 50:15). "It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear" (Isaiah 65:24). Sometime we think He does not hear us, so we call on Him, "How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?" (Psalm 13:1). "To You I will cry, O LORD my Rock: Do not be silent to me, lest, if You are silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit" (Psalm 28:1). But the Lord listens and hears; He even writes a book of remembrance for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name (Malachi 3:16). "I tell you that He will avenge them speedily" (Luke 18:8).

When the psalmist was able to hear the Lord, he said, "You ... made me bold with

strength in my soul." This strength comes from the answer to prayer and from the power of the Holy Spirit, which drives out weakness and defeatism. It is the spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline (2 Timothy 1:7). It is the encouraging power that issued from Christ and healed the woman who had a flow of blood (Luke 8:43-48). It is the power that encouraged Paul as he prayed three times so that the Lord may remove the thorn in his flesh. The Lord answered him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

8.2. Second: Kings Give Thanks to the Lord

(verses 4-6)

1. **The kings sing:** "All the kings of the earth shall praise You, O LORD, when they hear the words of Your mouth. Yes, they shall sing of the ways of the LORD, for great is the glory of the LORD" (verses 4,5). The psalmist's mouth broke forth in spontaneous expression of what flowed over from his heart. He told how much the Lord has done for him, and how he had mercy on him, as though he were shouting with Jeremiah, "Inasmuch as there is none like You, O LORD (You are great, and Your name is great in might), Who would not fear You, O King of the nations? For this is Your rightful due. For among all the wise men of the nations, and in all their kingdoms, there is none like You" (Jeremiah 10:6,7). Hearing his shout, the kings of the earth saw the glory of the great God and what He has done with them. They believed and sang to the glory of the great God, just as the heathen Persian king Darius believed in the God of Daniel when he saw that He had delivered His servant from the hungry lions. The king declared, "Peace be multiplied to you. I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. For He is the living God, and steadfast forever; His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall endure to the end. He delivers and rescues, and He works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions " (Daniel 6:25-27). "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

But "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (Romans 10:14). So David was the preacher, doing what Isaiah had done when he heard the Lord ask, "'Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?' Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me.'" (Isaiah 6:8). All the mighty men of the earth heard and sang to the mighty God, who is glorious in power and strength, who chose them and set them up as leaders of their peoples, to walk in His straight ways and judge with justice, so that He might reward them by His blessings, support and victory, establishing their dominion and giving them times of peace and welfare so that His glory might be seen upon them.

2. **The kings submit:** "Though the LORD is on high, yet He regards the lowly; but the proud He knows from afar" (verse 6). The Lord is on high in terms of holiness, power, love and gifts. He is also on high in terms of His place in the hearts of His worshippers. From His high place He sees the universe and all that is in it and knows the hidden secrets of the hearts. He rewards the humble one who receives God's word, treasures it in his heart and walks in its light, taking it as a lamp to his feet and a light to his path (Psalm 119:105), as well as a fire surrounding him for protection. He imitates Christ in His humility, who made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being born in a manger, He humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name (Philippians 2:7-9). He also imitates the humility of the Virgin Mary who accepted the good news of the angel and kept the word of the Lord, pondering on it in her heart, and obeyed Him, saying, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word... 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 He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name" (Luke 1:38,46-49).

Though the Lord is on high and to be praised by all the kings of the earth, yet there are those who refuse to submit to Him out of pride. The Lord knows the proud from afar off, and says about him "The one who has a haughty look and a proud heart, him I will not endure" (Psalm 101:5). "Surely He scorns the scornful, but gives grace to the humble" (Proverbs 3:34). "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). How lovely it is to hear the apostle's advice, "All of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for 'God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.'" (1 Peter 5:5). "For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones' " (Isaiah 57:15).

8.3. Third: The Psalmist Hopes in the Lord

(verses 7,8)

The psalmist had already experienced the Lord's care and assistance in the past, as well as the continuation of blessing in the present. Therefore his heart was filled with assurance for the future and declared his trust in the divine help that comes from the inexhaustible source of love and endless outpouring of mercy.

1. **Hope in life:** "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me" (verse 7a). Christ said, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). David said, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want... 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 23:1,4). It becomes clear, then, that if the believer is afflicted, his affliction will not last long. He will only walk in it, and God must surely get him out of it to a broad and open place, revive his soul and hopes, thus restoring his soul and leading him in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake (Psalm 23:3). In response, he says, "You, who have shown me great and severe troubles, shall revive me again, and bring me up again from the depths of the earth" (Psalm 71:20). The Lord refreshes the believer just as He refreshed Jonathan who, when he became hungry, ate of the honey and his countenance brightened (1 Samuel 14:27).

2. **Hope in deliverance:** "You will stretch out Your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and Your right hand will save me" (verse 7b). The wrath of the enemy is as severe as blazing fire, as destructive as a bottomless pit. But the active hand of God stretches out with salvation, as Moses said to his people, "And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day" (Deuteronomy 5:15). Truly "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). This hand that is stretched out against the enemy is the same loving and delivering hand that set the Israelites free from the servitude and humiliation of their taskmasters in Egypt, and led them for forty years in the desert till it brought them into a land that flowed with milk and honey.
3. **Hope in protection:** "The LORD will perfect that which concerns me" (verse 8a). The psalmist trusted in the Lord with all his heart and did not lean on his own strength (Proverbs 3:5). His soul filled with the assurance that his life was safe in the hand of the Almighty, protecting God. He no longer feared even if an army should attack him, or war should rise against him (Psalm 27:3). He was reassured because the Lord has clothed him with the whole armour, given him the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, so he was able to stand against the wiles of the devil (Ephesians 6:11). He no longer feared: "You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday" (Psalm 91:5,6).
4. **Hope in companionship:** "Your mercy, O LORD, endures forever; Do not forsake the works of Your hands" (verse 8b). The psalmist concludes his psalm with the hope of the Lord's unending companionship, for He is with the psalmist always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). When this ages draws to its end, the coming age will begin in the divine presence. He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6). The Lord does not forsake those who belong to Him because they are the work of His hands, who trust in His everlasting mercy not to forsake them or leave them. Their experience testifies, " have been young, and now am old; yet I

have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread" (Psalm 37:25).
"Your mercy, O LORD, endures forever."

8.4. Questions

1. In verses 1-3 of this psalm the psalmist describes himself with three qualities. He describes God with four. Mention the seven qualities.
2. In verses 7,8 the psalmist hopes four things in the Lord. Mention these three.

9. Psalm One Hundred and Thirty-Nine

Divine Perfection

For the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.

1 O LORD, You have searched me and known me.

2 You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off.

3 You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways.

4 For there is not a word on my tongue, But behold, O LORD, You know it altogether.

5 You have hedged me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me.

6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain it.

7 Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?

8 If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.

9 If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

10 Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me.

11 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me," Even the night shall be light about me;

12 Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day; The darkness and the light are both alike to You.

13 For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb.

14 I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well.

15 My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.

16 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.

17 How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them!

18 If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand; When I awake, I am still with You.

19 Oh, that You would slay the wicked, O God! Depart from me, therefore, you bloodthirsty men.

20 For they speak against You wickedly; Your enemies take Your name in vain.

21 Do I not hate them, O LORD, who hate You? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You?

22 I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies.

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties;

24 And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.

In this psalm the psalmist praises God the All-perfect, the Omniscient, the Omnipresent, the Holy, the Infallible One. He does not deal with these attributes in rational, doctrinal way, but in a personal way that brings to light the psalmist's close relationship to his Lord. The psalm is an expression of a worshipper to his Creator and a son to his Father. The psalmist says at the opening of the psalm that God has searched him and known him (verse 1), and he is happy that his God knows everything about him and that He is always present with him.

At the close of the psalm the psalmist tells the Lord to search him, know him and purify him from any fault and make him cleaner (verses 23,24). When God does that, the psalmist's eyes will be open to see any fault in him and keep away from it, as though he says, "Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Psalm 51:6,7).

A believer who loves God will love to see Him continually with the eyes of faith, as well as love for God to see the believer continually. He realizes that God's eyes upon him are like a mother's eyes on her child. A person who fears God may be tempted to run away from his Father but he soon remembers that there is no life apart from him, and that without his Father he can do nothing.

This psalm addresses every person who is far away from God and says to him that he cannot escape God's notice, for He is omnipresent and omniscient, and it advises him that repentance is the right decision to make. The psalm addresses the person who fears God, too, and encourages him to lead a life of deeper godliness.

The psalm contains the following:

- First: God is perfect in His knowledge (verses 1-6)
- Second: God is perfect in His presence (verses 7-12)
- Third: God is perfect in His wisdom (verses 13-18)

- Fourth: God is perfect in His holiness (verses 19-24)

9.1. First: God is Perfect in His Knowledge

(verses 1-6)

1. **He knows both past and present:** "O LORD, You have searched me and known me" (verse 1). The Lord has searched and known the psalmist because he is the work of His own hands. He has known everything about his spiritual, psychological, emotional and physical life, for He said, "I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings" (Jeremiah 17:10). He does not search someone in order to look for his weaknesses; rather to strengthen the weak and give support to the fallen so that they may say to Him, "You have tested my heart; You have visited me in the night; You have tried me and have found nothing; I have purposed that my mouth shall not transgress" (Psalm 17:3). He knows all about man. He perfectly foreknows his character, mind, utterance and work. Such knowledge puts to shame the person who is proud of his learning, warns the sinner away from indulging in sin, and makes the godly guard against committing transgression. Besides, such knowledge gives assurance to the hearts of the citizens of the kingdom of God. Their King, being perfect in His knowledge, perfects every defect in them and straightens out whatever is crooked. It gives assurance to you as you pray, "For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him" (Matthew 6:8).
2. **He knows the stillness and movements:** "You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways" (verses 2,3). The Lord knows about all the stillness ("my sitting down") of the psalmist, as well as all his movements ("my rising up"). The Lord in His heavens knows everything that comes to the psalmist's mind and all he intends to do. He knows his travelling ("my path") as well as his dwelling place ("my lying down"). He is acquainted with "all [his] ways"; i.e., all his motives and patterns of thinking.
3. **He knows the hidden things:** "For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O LORD, You know it altogether. You have hedged me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me" (verses 4,5). Even as the word is on the tip of the psalmist's tongue the Lord knows about it. He knows the word that has been uttered and the one that will be uttered. He knows the motives for uttering it as well as the implications behind it and what it really means. He is near to man; He hedges him on all sides like a father concerned about his little one. The imagery is of a city beleaguered by a commander until it surrenders, which He will then "lay his hand on" to reconcile it and bring it nearer to himself. A man who fears God will reach the peak of happiness when he completely surrenders to God.

- 4. His knowledge is astonishing:** "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain it" (verse 6). The psalmist stands amazed and astonished at this absolute knowledge. It is perfect, both before and after the fact; it makes the sinner repent and the believer reassured. The believer finds new dimensions to it every day. "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! 'For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?' 'Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?' For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen" (Romans 11:33-36).

9.2. Second: God is Perfect in His Presence

(verses 7-12)

- 1. Omnipresent:** "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me" (verses 7-10). His Holy Spirit and awesome presence are everywhere. He dwells in heaven and nothing that happens on earth or under the earth is hidden from His eyes; no man can escape His notice. He said, "Can anyone hide himself in secret places, So I shall not see him?... Do I not fill heaven and earth?" (Jeremiah 23:24). And about His sinful people He said, "Though they dig into hell, from there My hand shall take them; Though they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down; And though they hide themselves on top of Carmel, from there I will search and take them; Though they hide from My sight at the bottom of the sea, from there I will command the serpent, and it shall bite them" (Amos 9:2,3). When Adam hid himself from the Lord, He found him and asked him where he was (Genesis 3:9); when Elijah lost hope of fulfilling his mission and escaped, the Lord sent him an angel to seek him out (1 Kings 19:5); when Jonah fled the Lord's commission, the Lord prepared a fish to bring him back (Jonah 1:17). The psalmist says that if he takes "the wings of the morning," if he runs with the speed of lightning from east to west, the hand of the Lord will be there to accompany and lead him; the Lord flies "on the wings of the wind" (Psalm 18:10) and sends His healing in the wings of the sun (Malachi 4:2). If the psalmist takes up residence "in the uttermost parts of the sea," the Lord's right hand will reach him there and catch him, not the way a police officer catches a thief, rather like a father catching up with his runaway child.

Those who fear God will enjoy Christ's promise, "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). Having the Lord Himself with them makes them so happy that they say, "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from

the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38,39).

- 2. He sees all things:** "If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall fall on me,' even the night shall be light about me; Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, but the night shines as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to You" (verses 11,12). God's eyes penetrate through the screens of darkness: "There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13). "His eyes are on the ways of man, and He sees all his steps" (Job 34:21). The prophet Jeremiah said to Him, "You are great in counsel and mighty in work, for Your eyes are open to all the ways of the sons of men, to give everyone according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings" (Jeremiah 32:19). Truly, "This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5); He dwells in unapproachable light (1 Timothy 6:16). He is the true light (John 1:9) and He is the light of the world (John 8:12). His presence is active and enlightening, is felt by the godly soul and shunned by the sinful one, which fulfils Christ's statement, "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God" (John 3:19-21).

9.3. Third: God is Perfect in His Wisdom

(verses 13-18)

- 1. His wisdom in creation:** "For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well" (verses 13,14). The Lord formed the inward parts (Heb. "kidneys") of the psalmist; that is, He shaped his inward person. The ancient Hebrews considered the kidneys (inward parts) the seat of emotions, which is what we say now about the heart. God wisely and creatively created him, physically, psychologically and spiritually. He "covered" him; i.e., knit him (according to the Hebrew) as an embryo in his mother's womb out of many colours, forms and organs. To each was given a specific function to keep the body alive, some are obvious while others are hidden.

He knows the beginning of his life as well as its end and eternal destiny. Job said to Him, "Your hands have made me and fashioned me, an intricate unity; yet You would destroy me. Remember, I pray, that You have made me like clay. And will You turn me into dust again? Did You not pour me out like milk, and curdle me like cheese, clothe me with skin and flesh, and knit me together with bones and sinews? You have granted me life and favor, and Your care has preserved my spirit " (Job 10:8-12). In astonishment he ponders

God's wonderful creation; he does not know how he was created, but he knows that God's wisdom is evident in creation.

2. **His wisdom in planning:** "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" (verses 15,16). When the psalmist's bones were formed as he was an embryo in his mothers' womb, his skeleton was known to God. When he was skilfully wrought in the deep and dark womb, which is compared to the unknown, lowest parts of the earth, he was visible to God's eyes who numbers all the hairs of our head (Matthew 10:30). Everything that happens to him was recorded in God's book, for He plans the life of every person according to His good purpose and holy will. The Lord has recorded every man's past, present and future, and His plan must be accomplished according to his sublime wisdom and eternal power. He makes sure to see this plan carried out under His direct supervision. "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). He says to the man who fears the Lord, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5). "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye" (Psalm 32:8).
3. **His wisdom is astonishing:** "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" (verses 17,18). The psalmist meditates on God's surpassing wisdom, which is evident in all aspects of life, those known and unknown to him equally, and sees it as exceedingly great! He shouts in amazement, astonishment and wonder, "How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings" (Psalm 36:7). "O LORD, how great are Your works! Your thoughts are very deep" (Psalm 92:5). If the psalmist wonders at the planning wisdom of the Creator he wonders even more at the redeeming love of God, saying. "For the redemption of their souls is costly, and it shall cease forever... But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for He shall receive me" (Psalm 49:8,15).

Since these divine thoughts are precious and many, they continue to occupy the psalmist until he falls asleep. They are the first thing he enjoys as he wakes up, so that when he wakes up he is still in the divine presence: "When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches" (Psalm 63:6). "Nevertheless I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand" (Psalm 73:23).

9.4. Fourth: God is Perfect in His Holiness

(verses 19-24)

When we reflect on the perfection of God's knowledge and presence everywhere, as well as on His comprehensive wisdom, we wonder, "How does He permit the wicked to commit such evil?" We ask along with Habakkuk, "Why do You show me iniquity, and cause me to see trouble? for plundering and violence are before me; there is strife, and contention arises" (Habakkuk 1:3). And now comes the answer to these questions:

1. **The Holy One punishes the sinner:** "Oh, that You would slay the wicked, O God! Depart from me, therefore, you bloodthirsty men. For they speak against You wickedly; your enemies take Your name in vain" (verses 19,20). The psalmist saw evil embodied in those wicked men, so he wished them put to death to make an end to their evil. Earlier on Job asked, "Why do the wicked live and become old, yes, become mighty in power? Their descendants are established with them in their sight, ynd their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them ...They sing to the tambourine and harp, and rejoice to the sound of the flute. They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave " (Job 21:7-9,12,13).

The psalmist tells the wicked to depart from him so as to stop persecuting him and so that he might avoid joining in their wicked doings, and thus escape their inevitable doom. He seems to be saying, "Depart from me, you evildoers, for I will keep the commandments of my God!" (Psalm 119:115). He calls them "wicked", i.e., those who overstepped the boundary that God designed for them. He calls them "bloodthirsty men" because they eagerly shed the blood of the poor. He calls them "wicked speakers and those who take Your name in vain" and "Your enemies" because they are of one father the devil, and the desires of their father they want to do (John 8:44). No wonder God inflicts punishment upon them.

Under the dispensation of grace we do not call God to kill the wicked, but to make them repent and stop practicing their sins, so that heaven would rejoice over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7). We admonish them as Christ did, "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3,5).

2. **The Holy One possesses the believer's emotions:** "Do I not hate them, O LORD, who hate You? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies" (verses 21,22). The psalmist saw in those who hate the Lord and those who rise up against Him enemies and opponents of His kingdom. Since he himself belongs to the Lord and is a member of His kingdom, he declares and dedicates himself to holy causes, giving himself totally to the advance of the Lord's glory and the commitment to His covenant, so much so that he adopts the motto, "I hate the double-minded, but I love Your law.... I see the treacherous, and am disgusted, because they do not keep Your word" (Psalm 119:113,158).
3. **The Holy One cleanses the believer:** "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me,

and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (verses 23,24). The psalmist concludes his psalm with a heartfelt request from the Lord to reveal any latent transgression in his heart or mind in order to leave it behind. He also asks for God's guidance to lead him away from this wicked way to an everlasting way, the path of eternal life (Psalm 16:11), the path of righteousness (Psalm 23:3), the way of peace (Isaiah 59:8). He asks for the inevitable divine testing and asks for guidance, having resolved never to leave it, because "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults... 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 19:12,14).

This prayer for purification desires deliverance from evil; it is a bold prayer that is ready for changing whatever God points to in both the subconscious and the conscious mind and says it must be changed. Change always costs something. It may cost us to abandon an impure relationship, to keep away from bad company, to get rid of a wicked book, or to repent from negative emotions. The price for all this divine searching is to repent from all that contradicts practical godliness and faith, to give up one's pride, and strive for whatever God commands us to do. It is the way to the abundant life here on earth and the eternal life in the presence of God. It is the way taken by those who heed the old wise advice, "Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk in it'" (Jeremiah 6:16).

Come, let us ask for this divine experience and submit to every heavenly direction.

9.5. Questions

1. How can you see God's wisdom in creating you?
2. How can God, the Holy One possess your emotions?

10. Psalm One Hundred and Forty

Deliver me from Evil Men

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.

1 Deliver me, O LORD, from evil men; Preserve me from violent men,

2 Who plan evil things in their hearts; They continually gather together for war.

3 They sharpen their tongues like a serpent; The poison of asps is under their lips. Selah

4 Keep me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked; Preserve me from violent men, Who have purposed to make my steps stumble.

5 The proud have hidden a snare for me, and cords; They have spread a net by the wayside; They have set traps for me. Selah

6 I said to the LORD: "You are my God"; Hear the voice of my supplications, O LORD.

7 O GOD the Lord, the strength of my salvation, You have covered my head in the day of battle.

8 Do not grant, O LORD, the desires of the wicked; Do not further his wicked scheme, Lest they be exalted. Selah

9 "As for the head of those who surround me, Let the evil of their lips cover them;

10 Let burning coals fall upon them; Let them be cast into the fire, Into deep pits, that they rise not up again.

11 Let not a slanderer be established in the earth; Let evil hunt the violent man to overthrow him."

12 I know that the LORD will maintain The cause of the afflicted, And justice for the poor.

13 Surely the righteous shall give thanks to Your name; The upright shall dwell in Your presence.

This psalm depicts the troubles of a godly believer surrounded and persecuted by the enemies, who desire to win him over to their wicked ways and make his firm steps in the Lord's way stumble. He cries out for God's protection and justice, and the Lord answers his plea. Then he concludes his psalm with a declaration of his confidence.

This psalm teaches us that there is a continuous war between good and evil on the outside of man, as Christ said to His enemies, "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" (John 8:44). There is also another war raging on within man, "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law" (Galatians 5:17,18).

The psalm contains the following:

- First: Persecution of the wicked people (verses 1-5)
- Second: A request for protection (verses 6,7)
- Third: A request for justice (verses 8-11)
- Fourth: The psalmist's confidence (12,13)

10.1. First: Persecution of the Wicked People (verses 1-5)

1. **Irritating persecution:** "Deliver me, O LORD, from evil men; preserve me from violent men" (verse 1). The psalmist was irritated by a group of people he called "evil men" who were motivated by violence. Yes, they did not kill him, but they irritated him long enough that he cried out to the Lord who had rescued him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. Therefore he addressed this psalm to the Lord, saying, "The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; the God of my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge; my Savior, You save me from violence. I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from my enemiesI will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from my enemies" (2 Samuel 22:1-4,49).
2. **Deadly harassments:** "Who plan evil things in their hearts; they continually gather together for war" (verse 2). The psalmist's enemies conspired against him and assembled to fight him. About such belligerent wicked men who persist in their evil Christ says, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. 20 Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me" (John 15:18-21).
3. **Verbal persecution:** "They sharpen their tongues like a serpent; the poison of asps is under their lips" (verse 3). The apostle Paul quoted this verse in this way, "Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit; The poison of asps is under their lips" (Romans 3:13). The psalmists have also described verbal harassments as follows: "His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and oppression; under his tongue is trouble and iniquity" (Psalm 10:7). "Your tongue devises destruction, like a sharp razor, working deceitfully"(Psalm 52:2); "My soul is among lions; I lie among the sons of men who are set on fire, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword" (Psalm 57:4); "Who sharpen their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows—bitter words" (Psalm 64:3); "Indeed, they belch with their mouth; swords are in their lips" (Psalm 59:7). They persecuted him with lies, rumours, threats and reproaches.
4. **Tripping persecution:** "Keep me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked; preserve me from violent men, who have purposed to make my steps stumble. The proud have hidden a snare for me, and cords; they have spread a net by the wayside; they have set traps for me" (verses 4,5). The wicked have pushed the psalmist's life to the verge of the abyss and pursued him step by step to entangle him in all sorts of intrigues: "Those also who seek my life lay snares for me; those who seek my hurt speak of destruction, and plan deception all the day long" (Psalm 38:12). The Lord, however, preserved the psalmist from stumbling, therefore the psalmist said, "The wicked have laid a snare for me, yet I

have not strayed from Your precepts" (Psalm 119:110). This is what Christ's enemies did when "the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in His talk" (Matthew 22:15); but they failed. This also happened to the psalmist, after which he said, "You pushed me violently, that I might fall, But the LORD helped me" (Psalm 118:13).

10.2. Second: A Request for Protection

(verses 6,7)

1. **Protection is from the Lord:** "I said to the LORD: 'You are my God; Hear the voice of my supplications, O LORD'" (verse 6). The enemies harassed the psalmist in such irritating ways; they tried to smear his reputation and snuff him out.

He, therefore, cried out asking for protection from his Lord and Master, the One who holds absolute authority in heaven and on earth, who, at the same time, is his beloved and worthy God. He owns the psalmist like a master owns his slave, therefore the psalmist says to Him, "My beloved is mine, and I am his" (Song of Songs 2:16) and "the God to whom I belong and whom I serve" (Acts 27:23). How reassuring to know that when security is gone prayer remains as a source of encouragement, exaltation and help to the believer, who says, "Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my meditation. Give heed to the voice of my cry, my King and my God, for to You I will pray" (Psalm 5:1,2) "Preserve me, O God, for in You I put my trust. O my soul, you have said to the LORD, 'You are my Lord, My goodness is nothing apart from You'" (Psalm 16:1,2). "But as for me, I trust in You, O LORD; I say, 'You are my God'" (Psalm 31:14).

2. **Protection comes from the Saviour:** "O GOD the Lord, the strength of my salvation, you have covered my head in the day of battle" (verse 7). In the day of battle the Lord saved the godly who cried out to him. He covered his head as with a helmet, so that neither swords reached him nor arrows came near him. He knows full well that the mighty God who saved and covered him, will continue to save and cover his head. The Scripture commands us, "Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17). This means that we should take protection in the mighty Lord for salvation. We should hold on to His word and hide it in our hearts, meditating on it day and night, and say, "But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation" (1 Thessalonians 5:8). The enemy attacks our heads with doubts in God's love for us, but the helmet of salvation affirms to us that those who are in the Lord's hand none can snatch them away (John 10:28,29). "Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear" (Isaiah 59:1). The Lord's salvation covers both our material and spiritual needs; He saves us from sickness by healing, from anxiety by peace, from doubts by faith, and from guilt by forgiveness.

10.3. Third: A Request for Justice

(verses 8-11)

1. **The wicked will not prosper:** "Do not grant, O LORD, the desires of the wicked; do not further his wicked scheme, lest they be exalted" (verse 8). The desires of the wicked are all evil; he desires to harm the writer and intends to destroy his relationship with God. Therefore, the writer pleads with the divine justice not to grant the desire of the wicked or to further his schemes, so that he would not become proud, puffed up and exalted. Going through a similar experience, the apostle Paul said to the Corinthians, "We do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us" (2 Corinthians 1:8-10).
2. **The wicked will be put to shame:** "As for the head of those who surround me, let the evil of their lips cover them" (verse 9). When the wicked spoke against the psalmist he said, "They sharpen their tongues like a serpent; the poison of asps is under their lips" (verse 3). In his distraction from their harsh words he asked the divine justice to cover the heads of those liars with evil, to repay them for what they said against him, so that their arrows may rebound to their hearts and shame and disgrace may cover them. He seems to be saying, "Behold, the wicked brings forth iniquity; yes, he conceives trouble and brings forth falsehood. He made a pit and dug it out, and has fallen into the ditch which he made. His trouble shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down on his own crown" (Psalm 7:14-16).
3. **The wicked will perish:** "Let burning coals fall upon them; let them be cast into the fire, into deep pits, that they rise not up again. Let not a slanderer be established in the earth; let evil hunt the violent man to overthrow him" (verses 10,11). The psalmist pleads with the divine justice to administer punishment to the wicked, for the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Burning coals will fall upon them just as Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed (Genesis 19:24,25). They will fall into the deep oceans just as Noah's neighbours perished (Genesis 7:11,12). The earth will swallow them as it did the children of Korah, wiping all of them out (Numbers 16:31-33). It is impossible for the slanderer to be established in the earth, for the earth is the Lord's (Leviticus 25:23). No, he will receive the fulfilment of the prophecy, "Upon the wicked He will rain coals; fire and brimstone and a burning wind shall be the portion of their cup" (Psalm 11:6). Also the violent man must perish with violence, as evil hunts him to overthrow him, for "Evil pursues sinners, but to the righteous, good shall be repaid" (Proverbs 13:21).

10.4. Fourth: The Psalmist's Confidence

(verses 12,13)

1. **The Lord avenges the poor:** " know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and justice for the poor" (verse 12). From his past experiences the psalmist knew that God was a just Judge who avenged all the oppressed, as he had already said, "The LORD shall judge the peoples; judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness, and according to my integrity within me. Oh, let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, but establish the just; for the righteous God tests the hearts and minds" (Psalm 7:8,9). "For You have maintained my right and my cause; you sat on the throne judging in righteousness" (Psalm 9:4). This is a testimony from his own experience; it exhorts all those who fear the Lord to tell that their Redeemer lives, that He will grant them victory, for He returns to the oppressed what was unjustly taken from them and gives justice to the poor. In response they say, "Now I know that the LORD saves His anointed; He will answer him from His holy heaven with the saving strength of His right hand" (Psalm 20:6). "When I cry out to You, then my enemies will turn back; This I know, because God is for me" (Psalm 56:9).
2. **The psalmist praises God:** "Surely the righteous shall give thanks to Your name; the upright shall dwell in Your presence" (verse 13). In his confidence in the divine justice, the psalmist gives thanks to the name of the Lord, feels His abiding presence with him, and dwells in His presence continually. For the Lord's countenance beholds the upright (Psalm 11:7), "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). "You have made him most blessed forever; You have made him exceedingly glad with Your presence" (Psalm 21:6) that he says, "As for me, You uphold me in my integrity, And set me before Your face forever" (Psalm 41:12). "Whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:4,5).

None will dwell in the presence of the Lord but the righteous and the upright, those who have a right standing with God, those who say, "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). At the end they will experience this: "And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever" (Revelation 22:3-5).

10.5. Questions

1. Verses 8-11 of this psalm mention three punishments that befall the wicked. What are they?

2. Verses 12,13 tells the confidence of the psalmist. Explain why.

11. Quiz

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

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