

Meditations on the Psalms

Volume Two: Psalms 11-20

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1. Psalm Eleven

If the Foundations are Destroyed

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.

1 In the Lord I put my trust; how can you say to my soul, "Flee as a bird to your mountain"?

2 For look! The wicked bend their bow, they make ready their arrow on the string, that they may shoot secretly at the upright in heart.

3 If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?

4 The Lord is in His holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men.

5 The Lord tests the righteous, but the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates.

6 Upon the wicked He will rain coals; fire and brimstone and a burning wind shall be the portion of their cup.

7 For the Lord is righteous, He loves righteousness; His countenance beholds the upright.

This psalm was most probably written by David during his flight from King Saul, who attempted to kill him several times; once with a spear, and another with a javelin, then by scheming to trap him many times. David's friends advised him to flee to the mountainous areas of Judah to escape from the danger that would threaten him if he were to remain where he was. But David did not take their advice, as logical and sincere as it was, and said, "In the Lord I put my trust." He saw that his ministry as God's anointed was among his people, and did not want to save himself at the expense of His cause. Committed to his calling, he didn't want to defend himself and neglect his calling, so he rejected his friends' idea and said, "How can you say to my soul, 'Flee as a bird to your mountain'?" (verse 1). He concluded the psalm with the statement: "The upright beholds His countenance" (verse 7), both on earth and in heaven, in this life and the one to come.

Nehemiah took a similar attitude to David's after returning from captivity. As he started to build the walls of Jerusalem, the enemies rose against him and began to mock him. But he prayed, "Now therefore, My Lord, strengthen my hands" (Nehemiah 6:9). Shemaiah advised Nehemiah to go into the temple and close its doors, because the enemies were coming to kill

him, but Nehemiah refused and said, "Should such a man as I flee? And who is there such as I who would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in!" (Nehemiah 6:11). He knew that his enemies would even go into the temple to kill him, had the Lord given him into their hands. How dare he keep himself safe at the expense of his calling? If he acted on Shemaiah's advice he would destroy himself and hinder the fulfilment of his calling.

Christ took the same attitude. His friends advised Him to leave the dangerous place where He was for a safer one, and said, "Get out and depart from here, for Herod wants to kill You." But He replied, "Go, tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected'... for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem" (Luke 13:31-33).

David's friends' advice was logical in the natural realm, but David discerned another dimension to the situation that was deeper than the dimension his friends could discern: He saw Him who cannot be seen. He saw God beyond all these difficult situations, and drew their attention to the reality of God's presence and protection of His children. David was sure that the little bird is not alone and helpless, for he could hear God say to him, "Because you have made the Lord, who is my refuge, even the Most High, your habitation, no evil shall befall you" (Psalm 91:9,10).

This psalm reveals to us heroism of faith in the midst of an atmosphere of moral confusion and human advice. It shows us the believer who continues to fulfil the duties of his divine calling, who is not disobedient to the heavenly vision. The Arab poet correctly said, "When souls are lofty the bodies toil to fulfil their desires."

The psalm includes the following:

- First: Warnings to the hero (verses 1-3)
- Second: The steadfastness of the hero (verses 4-6)
- Third: The hero beholds the countenance of the Lord (verse 7)

1.1. First: Warnings to the Hero

(verses 1-3)

In verse one David's friends advised him to take his hands off his cause because it would be impossible for him to win. They suggested to him to hide away from the battleground and to consider his own safety above the interest of his cause. They said to him, "Flee as a bird to your mountain." A little bird can neither face the falcons, nor the darts of the hunter, and has no refuge other than to flee. They rationalised this advice in two ways:

1. **The wicked are about to kill him:** "For look! The wicked bend their bow, they make ready their arrow on the string, that they may shoot secretly at the upright in heart" (verse

2). They bend the bow, and in secret they direct the arrow to shoot David, who is upright in heart. Their offensive weapons are ready, and each one of them took his position to kill him. They know that his heart is upright, therefore they want to shoot him with an arrow secretly because they have no courage to confront him. The Hebrew word translated "secretly" could mean "at heart". They also might want to shoot him with arrows in his heart to make sure he is done away with. For this reason his friends advised him to escape to the mountains of the Land of Judah. David, however, was carrying the shield of faith with which he was able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one (Ephesians 6:16).

2. **Justice is absent from the land:** "If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?" (verse 3). Similarly, David's friends warned him that the wiles of the wicked may come through, because the foundations of justice in the kingdom of Saul were destroyed, so that he sought to kill David. There was no more justice or uprightness, and the senior men (the foundations), on whom David could have depended in the face of impending evil and destruction, were no longer there to protect him. The righteous was left with no safe harbour to turn to. Even the righteous people were no longer upholding their cause; they advised him, "You have no hope. Stop dealing righteously and run for your life!" Yet David had found the answer to his question: "What can the righteous do?" He placed his trust in the invincible heavenly justice, and made up his mind to brave danger. Earlier he had faced Goliath with a stick, a sling and five smooth stones (1 Samuel 17:40) and won. There is no reason he could not win again, so long as the Lord was with him. This is what the righteous should do.

Many times friends give us pieces of advice out of a sincere heart, but with the wrong attitude. They advise us to abandon the way of obedience because it is narrow and rugged, and to take the wide and easy way that seems to go upward. When Christ announced that the Son of man must suffer much and be rejected by the elders, the high priests and the scribes, be killed and rise up from the dead after three days, Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, "We don't want You to die. Why do You want to go to Jerusalem? They are going to kill You there. Why risk Your life?" There is some sense in what Peter said to the Lord, but it was totally contrary to what He came to do. Jesus rebuked Peter and said to him, "Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men" (Mark 8:33). According to human reason, it was right for Peter to love and have zeal, but his zeal was carnal, and it did not let him see the spiritual dimension for Christ's coming to the earth.

We often hear people advise us the same way Peter advised Jesus and the same way David's friends advised him: "Run away like a bird!" This advice focuses on the danger involved, the uselessness of resistance, the foolishness of sacrificing for the sake of hopeless cause. Yet one thing is missing: the divine will and organisational responsibility. May God protect us from such an advice and keep us on the alert for it.

1.2. Second: The Steadfastness of the Hero

(verses 4-6)

David heard his friends' advice, but he stood on the rock, and said, "In the Lord I put my trust." Then he began to draw his friends' attention to the fact that those who were with him were more than those who were against him (2 Kings 6:16), that He who is within them is greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4). These facts were bound to change their judgement.

1. **He laid open to them the omnipresence of the Lord:** "The Lord is in His holy temple" (verse 4a). He is alive and present in the midst of the believers, His holy temple, to hear their prayers, receive their adoration and lift them high above their hard circumstances. He sends you help from the sanctuary (Psalm 20:2).

God commanded Moses to set up the tabernacle of meeting (the place of worship) in the midst of the camp of the tribes of Israel, telling him, "...that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8,9). John saw seven gold lamp-stands, representing the seven churches, and Christ among them (Revelations 1:13). Christ said, "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). How then could they say to David, "Flee as a bird to your mountain," while the Lord is in His holy temple?

The New Testament teaches us that the temple of the Lord is made up of all believers, that the Lord is the centre of the believer's life, and that it is around Him that all believers gather. The Lord never leaves His community, or His holy temple.

2. **He laid open to them the greatness of the Lord:** "The Lord's throne is in heaven" (verse 4b). God is here with me and there in heaven. He has full authority both in heaven and on earth. He is far above all earthly and satanic power. He is the One seated upon the throne.
3. **He laid open to them the omniscience of the Lord:** "His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men" (verse 4c). He sees us and knows all about us. "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him" (2 Chronicles 16:9). He neither slumbers nor sleeps (Psalm 121:4). But why does he refer to "His eyelids"? Wasn't it enough to say, "His eyes behold"? The answer is: When someone wants to look at a certain scene, he gazes at it, narrowing his eyelids, to see the picture clearly and thoroughly. So the eyes of the Lord behold, but also His eyelids make sure that He sees the whole situation. His eyes are like flames of fire that penetrate the covers of darkness, watching the righteous and the unrighteous, to establish those who stick to their right cause and to bring forth the truth.
4. **He laid open to them the righteousness of the Lord:** "The Lord tests the righteous, but

the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates. Upon the wicked He will rain coals, fire and brimstone and a burning wind; this will be the portion of their cup" (verses 5,6). The Lord tests the just and the righteous, demonstrates their success and accepts him. As for the wicked, He tests him and proves him unacceptable. God tested the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, and did not find even ten righteous people, so he rained brimstone and fire on them (Genesis 19:24). He tested His friend Abraham, requiring from him to offer his only son Isaac as a sacrifice, and he obeyed. God approved of His friend and bestowed upon him success *summa cum laude* as He said to him, "In blessing I will bless you... In your seed shall the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice" (Genesis 22:15-19). The Lord tests the righteous through difficulties to see how deep his spiritual life is, and to bring forth his righteousness as the light, and his justice as the noonday (Psalm 37:6). Job said as he was tested, "When He has tested I shall come forth like gold" (Job 23:10). On the other hand, Satan tempts the believer to destroy his faith and make him lose hope. God allows the righteous to be tested until his spiritual arms are well-trained and strong. The wicked cannot harm him except as much as the Lord permits them. "But the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates," and He puts him in his place so that he won't keep on harming the believer. A good example of this is what the Lord did to Haman, who was hanged on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai (Esther 7:10). The "burning wind", i.e. the *simoom*, became the portion of Haman, a destructive, hot, dry, dust-laden wind from Asian deserts.

The clergy may stop being good and the ruler may abandon justice, but God remains just and dependable. This is why the writer said of Him, "In the Lord I put my trust."

1.3. Third: The Hero Beholds the Countenance of the Lord

(verse 7)

"The Lord is righteous, He loves righteousness; His countenance beholds the upright" (verse 7). The last part of the verse could be read, "The upright beholds His countenance." David trusted in the justice of the Lord, who would defend him and not leave him as a prey to his enemies. He would surely come against them and attack their evils, destroying the oppressors and leaving only the upright and the righteous in the presence of God.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). Those who shake off the darkness of sin and disobedience will see God spiritually, namely enjoy Him and have the light of His countenance shine on them (Psalm 4:6). The psalmist says, "As for me I will see Your face in righteousness, I shall be satisfied when I will awake in Your likeness" (Psalm 17:15). The psalmist wondered, "Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy mountain?" and answered himself, "He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart" (Psalm 15:1,2). Such righteous

people will say as Jesus comes again, "We know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). And in the afterlife they will receive the fulfilment of the prophecy: "They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads" (Revelations 22:4). God is well-pleased with them as Christ has been formed in them (Galatians 4:19).

Now we round off the meditations on this psalm with two ideas:

1. **Believers are to expect opposition:** Their thoughts, quality of life and actions are different from those of the wicked who live around them. Therefore they are met with opposition. Yet, opposition should not discourage or scare them off, but rather encourage them to resist evil with good.
2. **The upright must be eagles, not little birds:** David's friends advised him to flee like a bird, but he decided he to be an eagle, soaring and rising high above the clouds, to see the bright sun of righteousness, behold the face of His God, enjoy His presence and thus put an end to the temporary opposition by means of the everlasting, shining victory.

Come, let us place ourselves in love at the Lord's feet, to do His will and let Him work out His divine purposes through us, that we may see His countenance. Keep up the good fight for His kingdom's cause, regardless of the difficulties, and resist the devil, steadfast in the faith (1 Peter 5:9).

1.4. Questions

1. David refused his friends' advice. Why? How was Nehemiah affected by David's decision?
2. Psalm 11:7 says, "The upright will see his face." Comment.

2. Psalm Twelve

Has the Godly Man Ceased?

To the Chief Musician. On an eight-stringed harp. A Psalm of David.

1 Help, Lord, for the godly man ceases! For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men.

2 They speak idly everyone with his neighbor; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak.

3 May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaks proud things,

4 Who have said, "With our tongue we will prevail; our lips are our own; who is lord over us?"

5 "For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now I will arise," says the Lord; "I will set him in the safety for which he yearns."

6 The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.

7 You shall keep them, O Lord, You shall preserve them from this generation forever.

8 The wicked prowl on every side, when vileness is exalted among the sons of men.

David wrote this psalm at a time of loneliness. As he worshipped God all alone, he said, "The godly man ceases! For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men." The prophet Elijah shared the same feelings when he said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life" (1 Kings 19:10).

The land was full of moral corruption at that time, and David was opposing the dishonesty of his contemporaries. He was the king of the land. He could glory in the cultural progress in his kingdom, for his time was the golden era in literature and arts. The country had developed in the areas of poetry and music. The psalms, which were mostly composed under him, are enough evidence of this fact. The highly organised temple choir, headed by "the chief musician", used all kinds of instruments that inspired the worshippers and filled them with delight. The country underwent an architectural revival, since David built his palace of cedar and had many building materials prepared to help his son Solomon build the temple of Jerusalem. Trade between the kingdom of David and the other kingdoms picked up and thrived. Military armament was increasing after a period of military weakness and stagnation during the reign of the judges and King Saul.

David saw a kingdom in which palaces were being erected, carts trundled up and down the roads, and gold increased in the hands of the citizens. Yet, all this could not make him forget the dangerous point of weakness: the serious moral imperfection that prevailed over the land, for the godly men ceased and the faithful disappeared from among the sons of men.

As Paul went to Athens, we would expect him to be intrigued by the philosophical debates, the poetry, the arts, the museums and the palaces. Nevertheless, the historian who recorded the Book of Acts wrote down the most interesting thing for Paul, as he said, "Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there" (Acts 17:16,17).

It is true that "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34).

It has been mentioned earlier that David's time was one of progress. Now every economical progress has three successive phases:

1. In the first phase a country flourishes economically and citizens get their material needs

with ease. Sciences and technology become widespread because of much travelling and trade, and people communicate and exchange benefits.

2. In the second phase the country prospers, new arts and sciences are developed, making people's lives more comfortable. It seems then that they are happier.
3. In the third phase a little group of people becomes extravagantly rich, while the majority remains in severe poverty. The number of oppressors increases and the number of the oppressed multiplies. People belonging the lower classes start to complain and principles start to be neglected. At this point a country starts to suffer from economic failure due to moral failure, and the society goes back again to look for material prosperity.

It seems that David saw his people reach the third phase, so he wrote this psalm to rebuke the evils of his time.

The psalm includes the following:

- First: A prayer (verses 1-4)
- Second: An answer (verses 5-8)

2.1. First: A Prayer

(verses 1-4)

In his prayer that takes up half of the psalm David asks God for help (verses 1,2), then asks for the judgement of the wicked (verses 3,4).

1. **He asks God for help:** "Help, Lord." He mentions two points where he needs God's help:
 1. **The lack of faithfulness:** "The godly man ceases! ...the faithful disappear from among the sons of men" (verse 1). This matter is worthy of prayer, because the absence of godliness and the lack of faithfulness damages the common welfare and the wicked equally. "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions ...be made ...for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence" (1 Timothy 2:1,2).
 2. **The spread of lying:** "They speak idly everyone with his neighbour; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak [i.e. they are dishonest]" (verse 2). "Double heart" is a Hebrew expression (*lev va lev*) which repeats the word "heart" twice, as if everyone has two hearts with which he faces another person and as soon as he leaves he switches on to the other heart. They are double-crossers; they have a double standard and double way of speaking! They pretend they are something they are not. There are harsh people who are described as "heartless", but he who has a double heart is more dangerous. He speaks sweetly to you and then stabs you in the back. He is like Judas Iscariot who betrayed his Lord!

2. **He asks for the judgement of the wicked:** "May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaks proud things, who have said, 'With our tongue we will prevail; our lips are our own; who is lord over us?'" (verses 3,4). He asks the Lord to cut off their speech members. Asking for the judgement of the wicked may be a prophetic revelation of the end of those dissimulating liars. It could also be a request for God to destroy them in keeping with the principle the psalmist believes in: "Eye for eye" (Exodus 21:24). These wicked people thought their prosperity was the result of their smartness, craftiness, effort and power, so they said, "With our tongue we will prevail; our lips are our own; who is lord over us?" They speak as though the destinies of others hang on one word from their lips. "Our lips are our own" with which we could justify our doings and prove them to be right, win our causes by cheating, twist and manipulate the law and interpret it for our good; there is no lord over us but ourselves!

They forgot that God is the Creator of their mortal bodies, the real Owner of them. We may also forget today that we do not belong to ourselves, because Christ bought us. "For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:20).

2.2. Second: An Answer

(verses 5-8)

Every prayer has an answer. The writer asked God for help and requested that the wicked be judged, so the Lord, who hears prayer, answered. He must bring about justice to His chosen ones who cry out to Him day and night (Luke 18:7) because He is a just Judge. On the one hand His justice has mercy for the oppressed, but on the other punishment for the oppressor.

There are two points in the answer: A promise of help (verses 5,6) and the fulfilment of the promise (verses 7,8).

1. **A promise of help:** The psalmist receives two promises from God; a direct instant one from God (verse 5), and a written one that has been recorded by inspiration (verse 6).

1. **An instant promise:** "For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now I will arise,' says the Lord; 'I will set him in the safety for which he yearns.'" (verse 5).

Oppression is so rampant in the earth. Man is so cruel to his fellow man! Pharaoh treated the children of Israel so cruelly that they cried out for deliverance. God heard their cry, called Moses, and told him, "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians... Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come

now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt" (Exodus 3:6-10). The Lord made good His promise to them, and delivered them.

During the time of the prophet Amos social injustice reached its climax. God, therefore, sent the prophet Amos calling for social justice, and describing as follows: "They sell the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals... pervert the way of the humble... They lie down by every altar on clothes taken in pledge, and drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their god" (Amos 2:6-8). The rich became richer and the poor became poorer because of greed and avarice. Those who were suffering in the earth cried out to Him who lives on high, and God heard their cry and sent the prophet Amos to encourage them and promise them salvation. Sure enough, all the things God promised came to pass.

The unjust imagines that God has forgotten him, but the Lord says to him, "Now I will arise... I will set him in the safety for which he yearns." The New International Version of the Bible says, "I will protect them from those who malign them." Those who malign [literally, breathe out] are the oppressors, who do as Saul of Tarsus did with the Christians. The Bible says that he was breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord (Acts 9:1). The Lord will set the oppressed, who cry out to Him, in safety and spaciousness, and they will no longer stay in distress. "The gloom will not be upon her who is distressed" (Isaiah 9:1).

The darkest part of the night is that which comes directly before dawn. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning. Resurrection must follow crucifixion, and after the dark of Friday the bright morning of Sunday must break.

2. **A written promise:** The oppressed always depends on God's reliable promise, for "The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times" (verse 6). Gold and silver are purified to be free from dross and other impurities. God's words are highly purified and are dross-free. God's words are as good as silver that has been purified seven times (which is the number of perfection). What a difference there is between man's promises, which may or may not be fulfilled according to whether they can do so or not, and God's true and reliable promises! Joshua said to the children of Israel, "You know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things of which the Lord your God spoke concerning you. All have come to pass for you, and not one word of them has failed" (Joshua 23:14). Also Solomon said, "Blessed be the Lord who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that he promised. There has not failed one word of all His good promise, which He promised through His servant Moses" (1 Kings 8:56). How reliable are the words of the Bible! It is the infallible, trustworthy word of God, which is free from error, confusion, distortion or alteration. If the law of the

Medes and the Persians cannot be abrogated, will the word of God be (Daniel 6:8)? The words of the God are tried and proven. Penitent sinners have tried them and received forgiveness, justification and peace through them. The oppressed who were crying out tried them and received deliverance and rest. In all our affliction he is afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saves us (Isaiah 63:9). You can depend on God and say, "In the Lord I put my trust," and you will be reassured.

2. **The fulfilment of the promise of help:** "You shall keep them, O Lord, You shall preserve them from this generation forever. The wicked prowled on every side, when vileness is exalted among the sons of men" (verse 7,8). God promised that He would arise and set in safety the oppressed who are in distress. The psalmist said to Him, "You, Lord, shall keep the oppressed, who are in distress, who call upon You." Daniel was in the den of lions when the king asked him, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?" Daniel replied, "O king, live forever! My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you" (Daniel 6:20-22).

Every generation has its own advantages and characteristics. The Lord will keep His people from "this" corrupt and oppressive generation. Irrespective of the characteristics of the people among whom you live, God promises you protection and preservation. David described a time when vice and vileness prevailed, when the wicked walked here and there self-importantly, as if they owned everything; the earth and those who were on it. But the Lord promised all the godly and the faithful that He will watch over them. No matter the character of the time in which you live, the eternal God confirms His help and salvation to you. He has established His church and promised that the gates of hell would not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). He says to the members of the church, "...you who are kept by the power of God..." (1 Peter 1:5).

Final triumph is the portion of those who love the Lord, therefore love the Lord with all your heart, so that peace and assurance should reign over your life.

2.3. Questions

1. In Psalm 12:1-2 David complains of two things. What are they? Do you have the same complaint today?
2. Psalm 12:5 gives two promises from the Lord. What are they?

3. Psalm Thirteen

How Long will You Forget Me?

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.

- 1 How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?**
- 2 How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted over me?**
- 3 Consider and hear me, O Lord my God; enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death;**
- 4 Lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed against him"; lest those who trouble me rejoice when I am moved.**
- 5 But I have trusted in Your mercy; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation.**
- 6 I will sing to the Lord, because He has dealt bountifully with me.**

It is not known for sure when David wrote this psalm. Most probably he wrote it when Saul was pursuing him to kill him. Yet, there are many occasions in David's life that this psalm could reflect. As he was playing on the harp for Saul, Saul twice threw a spear to pin him to the wall (1 Samuel 18:11). David must have wondered, "I did good, so why do I get evil for recompense? Why does he want to kill me, although I am trying to cure him with my music?"

When violence did not work, Saul used stratagem and gimmickry, and offered David his daughter in marriage, provided that the wedding-gift should be to slaughter a hundred Philistines. Saul wished that the enemies would finish him off before he could reach number one hundred. David, however, killed two hundred and was not hurt at all (1 Samuel 18:27).

Saul even went to the extreme of attempting to kill him in his new home with his wife, but Michal's love for her husband was stronger than her obedience to her father's orders. So she let him escape (1 Samuel 19:16).

Saul kept on pursuing David from place to place, until he fell into David's hands. But David pardoned him and rebuked him, saying, "After whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom do you pursue? A dead dog? A flea?" (1 Samuel 24:14).

David must have got weary of all these pursuits, so he wrote down this psalm, complaining about God to God. He also complained to God about himself and his enemies!

This psalm includes the following:

- First: A complaint (verses 1,2)
- Second: A prayer (verses 3,4)
- Third: Jubilation (verses 5,6)

3.1. First: A Complaint

(verses 1,2)

In David's distress and bitterness of heart he complained to God, repeating the phrase "How long..." four times. "How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted over me?" (verses 1,2).

The first thing that occurs to the believer in distress is to turn to God.

1. **He complains to God about God:** "How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever?" (verse 1a). When David thinks rationally he knows that God has not forgotten him. It seems that he was saying, "I know that You have not forgotten me, but it seems that You forgot!" He had said earlier, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are troubled. My soul also is greatly troubled; but You, O Lord- how long?" (Psalm 6:2,3). He also said, "I will say to God my Rock, 'Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go morning because of the oppression of the enemy?'" (Psalm 42:9). The prophet Jeremiah lodged the same complaint: "Why do You forget us forever, and forsake us for so long a time?" (Lamentations 5:20). Habakkuk asked, "O Lord, how long shall I cry, and will You not hear? Even cry out to You, 'Violence!' and You will not save?" (Habakkuk 1:2). This is a cry of someone suffering and reproaching the Lord because he loves Him. God listens to such a complaint with understanding and sympathy. He addresses the sufferer, saying, "But Zion said, 'The Lord has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me.' Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; you walls are continually before Me" (Isaiah 49:14-16).

By way of complaining to God David asks, "How long will You hide Your face from me?" (verse 1b). When God's face shines upon us with a loving smile, the whole world shines for us, but when life seems to frown to us we imagine that God has hidden His face from us, therefore we say, "You hid Your face and I was troubled" (Psalm 30:7). A hidden face does not equal a rejecting or a heedless one; it only means that the believer feels anxious and frightened. Therefore many people ask, "Who will show us any good? Lord, lift up the right of Your countenance upon us" (Psalm 4:6). "God be merciful to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us" (Psalm 67:1).

2. **Then he complains to God about himself:** "How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily?" (verse 2a). He feels sorry for his own weakness, anxiety and worries, as if he is saying, "How long will I bear these cares? How long will anxiety debilitate and frighten me? My soul is too weak to have victory over the circumstances that oppress me. All my plans went awry, so how long will you keep on rearranging all my plans? How will I try with no success?"

When the believer loses his trust in God's love and loses his self-confidence, he loses "the

joy of salvation" (Psalm 51:12), but he does not lose his salvation. Because of sin he will live in spiritual darkness, and fail to see God's loving and reassuring face. He cannot possibly be restored to fellowship with the Father unless he repents and gains back his lost relationship with the Lord.

3. **Then he complains to God about the enemy:** "How long will my enemy be exalted over me?" (verse 2b). The prophet Samuel paid a visit to his father's house, called him in from following the sheep and anointed him as king. A king, yes, but on the run! When then will God's promises to him be fulfilled?

David's situation looks like the scene that the revelation of John describes: "When He [the Lamb] opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' And a white robe was given to each of them, and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, and both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed" (Revelations 6:9-11).

3.2. Second: A Prayer

(verses 3,4)

David asked "How long?" four times, then he gave God four requests concerning the four complaints. He addresses God in these requests as "Lord, my God". There is a sense of belonging to God and an adherence to the God of the promise, whose good words never fail.

1. **A request of consideration:** "Consider" (verse 3a). This request addresses His complaint, "How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever?" The truth is that God never forgot him; it was the hard circumstances that made him have this wrong thought. When God approves of a believer He will surely release him from the emotional problems he faces.
2. **A request of a hearing:** "Hear me, O Lord my God" (verse 3b). This request addresses His complaint, "How long will You hide Your face from me?" God never hides His face from the believer nor turns His back on him. It is the tears in his eyes that obscure the beauty of the face that never fades away. "When You said, 'Seek My face,' my heart said to You, 'Your face, Lord, I will seek'" (Psalm 27:8). The psalmist does not request a hearing because he is inquisitive, but because God said, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7). Christ said to His disciples, "Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask and you will receive, that your joy maybe full" (John 16:24).
3. **A request of enlightenment:** "Enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death" (verse

3c). This request addresses His complaint, "How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily?" The psalmist asks the Lord to remove the darkness of discouragement from his sick eyes, which cannot see God's mercy clearly. This was the experience of Ezra the scribe, who described this enlightenment as "for a little while grace has been shown from the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival in our bondage. For we were slaves. Yet our God did not forsake us in our bondage; but He extended mercy to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to revive us" (Ezra 9:8,9). The Lord will raise us up. The Lord will enlighten our eyes and revive us in the light of His face.

4. **A request that his enemy may not rejoice over him:** "Lest my enemy say, 'I have prevailed against him'; lest those who trouble me rejoice when I am moved" (verse 4). This request addresses His complaint, "How long will my enemy be exalted over me?" There is an enemy who is trying to exalt himself over the believer and prevail against him, but the Lord will not let this happen. If the believer fails he brings shame on the Lord's name and gives the enemy an opportunity to say, "There is no help for him in God" (Psalm 3:2). Moreover, there is unity between the Lord and the believer, which Christ compares to the relationship between the branch and the vine (John 15:5). Whatever harms the branch harms the vine, and whoever persecutes the believers withstands the will of God who loves the believers. The believer gets the glory, though, when God glorifies him and is glorified through him.

3.3. Third: Jubilation

(verses 5,6)

No one knows exactly how much time has elapsed between the time of the complaint and the prayer at the beginning of the psalm, and the time of the joy that he expresses at the end of it. We know, however, that God has appointed a time for everything under the heavens (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Sometimes He appears to put us off, from our point of view, but His answer is speedy, from His point of view. Christ elucidated this concept as He said, "Shall not God avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them [in our viewpoint]? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily [from His vantage point]. Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will He really find faith on earth [i.e.: will He really find people anticipating His divine timing]?" (Luke 18:7,8). Faith always anticipates an answer to prayer. When prayer is answered faith gains more strength. We ask, receive an answer, our faith gains more strength, so we ask again more confidently than before, with hearts leaping with joy. Thus we proceed from glory to glory, experiencing God's goodness every day. When this becomes the norm, we say, "But I have trusted in Your mercy; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the Lord because He has dealt bountifully with me" (verses 5,6).

People rear their children up to be independent from them, and to stand on their feet. God, however, raises His children up to be even more dependent on Him, never to be independent from Him. Therefore the psalmist says, "But I have trusted in Your mercy." He renews his trust in the Lord, who, in turn, enlightens the way before him. His reaction, in effect, seems to say, "For I know whom I believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that day" (2 Timothy 1:12).

When you grow weary of yourself and assume that God has forgotten you, when you see yourself surrounded and overwhelmed by the enemies, do not give up. The loving Father will hear your voice, see your tears and help up out your troubles. It was for this reason that Christ came to the world; it was the main purpose of Christ's ministry: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness" (Isaiah 61:1-3).

The psalmist received the fulfilment of all these:

1. **God is the source of the believer's happiness:** He turned to Him, lifted up his complaint to get relief, saying, "How long, O Lord?" (verse 1). The Lord never forsakes those who believe in Him.
2. **God is the source of the believer's wisdom:** He complained to Him of his inadequate thoughts and unsuccessful plans, saying, "How long shall I take counsel in my soul?" (verse 2). The Lord raised the believers above their own counsel and cares, because they are "casting all your care upon Him, for He takes care for you" (1 Peter 5:7).
3. **God is the source of the believer's strength:** He rushed to Him when he was overcome by the enemy, saying, "How long will my enemy be exalted over me?" (verse 2). The enemy will not be exalted over the believer because final triumph belongs to the Lion of the tribe of Judah, who went conquering and to conquer (Revelations 5:5; 6:2).
4. **God is the source of the believer's life:** For this reason he said, "my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death" (verse 3). Christ is the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Him, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Him shall never die (John 11:25).

God gave the believer happiness, wisdom, strength and a joyous life, therefore he shouts out loud, "My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation." He rounded the psalm off by saying, "I will sing to the Lord because He has dealt bountifully with me." He no longer thinks that the Lord forgot him, and all his cares and sorrows vanished in thin air; his enemy no longer overcomes him. He experienced the Lord's statement: "For a mere moment I have forsaken you, but with

great mercies I will gather you. With a little wrath I hid my face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you" (Isaiah 54:7,8).

3.4. Questions

1. In Psalm 13 David has three complaints. Mention them.
2. What made the difference between verses 1 and 5 in Psalm 13?

4. Psalm Fourteen

They have all Turned Aside

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.

1 The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none who does good.

2 The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God.

3 They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, no, not one.

4 Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge, who eat up my people as they eat bread, and do not call on the Lord?

5 There they are in great fear, for God is with the generation of the righteous.

6 You shame the counsel of the poor, but the Lord is his refuge.

7 Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion! When the Lord brings back the captivity of His people, let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad.

Psalms 14 and 53 are almost identical, except for a small difference in 14:5,6, where it says, "There they are in great fear, for God is with the generation of the righteous. You shame the counsel of the poor, but the Lord is his refuge", whereas it says in 53:5, "There they are in great fear, where no fear was, for God has scattered the bones of him who encamps against you; You have put them to shame, because God has despised them." Perhaps the reason for the change was the desire of the writer to refer to the fear that fell upon the king of Aram (Syria) where there was no reason for fear (2 Kings 7:6,7) or the unexpected defeat of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, and the death of 185,000 of his soldiers in one night (2 Kings 19:35,36). There is still another difference; Psalm 14 uses God's name *YHWH* (translated the Lord), while Psalm 53 uses *Elohim* (translated God).

Both psalms are evangelistic: they speak first of the folly of the sinner who strays away from God. They unmask the danger involved in ignoring the Lord. The sinner is a fool who does

not behave properly. His is headed for doom. The psalmist moves on to speak of the conscience of the foolish sinner which he made numb, although the Lord is trying to arouse it. The two psalms are rounded off with a word on the salvation, joy and gladness of the believer.

The psalms offers us a call to repentance, deliverance and salvation, saying to those who have gone away from God, "You don't know how much you are losing, or how much danger threatens you. Sin is useless. It is devastating." He concludes his calls by saying that the sinner is saved when the Lord lives in his heart, setting him free from sin and bringing back his captivity, so he will rejoice and be glad in His salvation and liberty. This clear call makes the soul that is far away from God yearn to return to him in repentance. Why, then, do we continue living in sin when living with God is joy itself?

	Psalm 14	Psalm 53
First: The folly of the sinner	(verses 1-3)	(verses 1-3)
Second: The conscience of the sinner	(verses 4-6)	(verses 4, 5)
Third: The joy of the believer	(verse 6)	(verse 7)

4.1. First: The Folly of the Sinner

(verses 14:1-3; 53:1-3)

1. **The folly of the sinner starts with a wrong thought:** "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'" (verse 1a). He says this through his behaviour "in his heart", living contrary to God's law; or he says it through his behaviour and declares his godlessness by his mouth. Some philosophers deny that God exists and try to convince others of this fallacy, although the word "philosophy" means "love of wisdom" in Greek. The psalmist regards them as mere fools, for the sinner who denies the existence of God, by word or action, is just a fool. He claims that he loves wisdom, but he is, in fact, as far as can be from it because "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Psalm 111:10). Denying the existence of fire does not keep him who enters it from burning. Similarly, doubting the existence of God does not keep God from administering His just judgement on those who reject His salvation. We thank God for many philosophers who believe in Him and prove their faith in Him in logical ways. Only the fool will deny the existence of God, because the existence of the invisible all around us is manifest both in His visible creation and His daily dealings with us. Above all, we see Him in the mystery of godliness, "God was manifested in flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16). Christ's coming into our world was the most convincing proof of God's existence.

The Hebrew word for "fool" is *nabal*, which was also the name of a foolish man who

wasted his life, so that it was said of him, "As his name is, so is he: Nabal is his name". Nabal denied that David even existed, denied he had any knowledge of him and asked, "Who is David, and who is the son of Jesse?" Nevertheless, David was famous, for he was the one who saved his people from the threats of Goliath the heathen! Moreover, Nabal knew David quite well, because David and his men used to keep watch of Nabal's flocks. But the fool said, "Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat... and give it to men when I do not know where they are from?" (1 Samuel 25:10,11). Doesn't the fool who denies the existence of God do the same thing, although it is God who gives him life and takes care of him? It is He also who will eventually take back his life from him!

2. **The sinner's folly increases with his wrong actions:** "They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none who does good" (verse 1b). God created man innocent by nature but man's disobedience to God corrupted his original nature and his daily works, and spoiled his social relationships. Yes, men became corrupt, committing sins of commission and omission. Man's state before the Flood was described as follows: "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually... The earth also was corrupt before God [meaning its inhabitants], and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth" (Genesis 6:5,11,12).

Abomination means an ugly deed, horridness and uncleanness. In the Bible it refers to idols and idolatry. God created man in His image to worship Him, but man strayed to idol-worship and all the abomination linked with it.

The fool sometimes denies God's existence because of a sin he committed that weighs on his conscience, and he does not want to be reconciled to God in the proper way. Instead, he dodges God by claiming that He does not exist. He forgets, or rather pretends to forget, that God has prepared for him the way to redemption and salvation through Christ's atonement on the cross.

3. **The seriousness of the sinner's folly:** "The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God" (verse 2). God bears long with the sinner to lead him to repentance, but in his folly he thinks that God will not do good, nor will He do evil (Zephaniah 1:12), or that he does not exist at all. Nonetheless "The Lord looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men. From the place of His habitation He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth; He fashions their hearts individually; He considers all their works" (Psalm 33:13-15). In "human" terms the Old Testament pictures God as though He "came down to see" the situation of Babel, and Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 11:5; 18:21).

God looks down on "the children of men" of all nationalities, because He is the Creator

of them all. He endowed every nation with moral light in nature and in conscience.

"Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17).

"Because what could be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse" (Romans 1:19,20).

"The Lord looks down from heaven to see." He loves man and says, "My delight was with the sons of men" (Proverbs 8:31). He is the Good Shepherd who searches for the lost one till He finds him, no matter the cost of searching. He does not desire the damnation of the sinner, but his repentance. He expects men to act according to the light they have. God searches in every nation to see if there is anyone who "understands" himself, his weakness, his sin, his duty and his destiny; and if there is anyone who "understands" God's love and searching for the sinner to redeem him.

All who deny God's existence deny Elohim, who reigns over the whole world, and deny the truth of God, because sin is a revolt against God and His laws. Therefore David admits, "You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight" (Psalm 51:4).

4. **The totality of men's folly:** "They all turned aside, they have together become corrupt" (verse 3). Man is corrupt by nature and action. Since the fall of our first parents in the garden of Eden we started to see man killing his brother, not due to starvation or want, nor due to housing crises, but because he is evil by nature. Corruption of mankind is an absolute fact, for man cannot please God by his natural birth, actions or intents. The root of the tree is rotten, therefore it gives forth a rotten fruit. The spring is bitter, and yields bitter water. Even though God takes care of men so that they say, "I shall not want", they still go astray. They need someone to restore their souls to the paths of righteousness, not due to their own goodness, but "for His name's sake" (Psalm 23:1,3).

Paul quoted these verses in Romans chapter 3 to confirm the corruption of all men, their liability to eternal damnation, and also to reveal that God provided deliverance through Christ for the fools who harmed themselves. "For all have sinned... being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a propitiation by His blood" (Romans 3:23,24). "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6).

4.2. Second: The Conscience of the Sinner

(verses 14:4-6; 53:4,5)

1. **A dormant conscience:** "Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge, who eat up My

people as they eat bread?" (verse 4). This is the sin of the dormant conscience of those who know that God is the just Judge, who must punish the violent man. Yet they work iniquity and eat up the God-fearing believers like they eat bread, without remorse or compunction (Micah 3:3). They are ignorant, or perhaps they just ignore and pretend not to know! They do not match their knowledge to their deeds! Have they no knowledge? They work iniquity in ignorance, and in ignorance they eat up God's people as though it were natural and necessary. They neither communicate with God nor call on Him to come into their lives! They are odd, and we marvel at them as Christ did at the people of Nazareth who did not believe in Him, and as a result left them and went about the surrounding villages, teaching (Mark 6:6).

"And do not call on the Lord." They act without asking for God's help and blessing on what they do, or consulting Him on what they will embark on. Were they to call on Him, He would guide them in the paths of righteousness. Thus they were driven by their actions in the wrong direction.

The works of the godless are contrary to reason and good sense, which tells one that the wages of sin is death. They are against history and experience, which affirm that whatever man sows, he will also reap. Working iniquity is not a childlike mistake, but a wilful crime of an adult who says to God, "Depart from us, for we do not desire the knowledge of Your ways" (Job 21:14; 22:17).

2. **A conscience that could be aroused:** "There they are in great fear, for God is with the generation of the righteous" (verse 5). The workers of iniquity always see the punishment they would get and the protection offered by God to the believers, because God always sets apart His holy men for Himself (Psalm 4:3). "There where they ate up His people; "there" where they thought they were eating bread; "there" where they ignored the Lord, terrible fear came upon them and horrified them, as they witnessed God rushing to protect the "generation of the righteous". The more the sinner compares his terror and anxiety with the peace the believer enjoys, the more his fear increases, because he sees the effect but not the cause; he sees the help but not the Helper; he sees a hand writing on the wall but not the Writer! When Sarah, Abraham's wife, died, Abraham went to the Hittites and said, "I am a foreigner and a sojourner among you. Give me property for a burial place among you, that I may bury my dead." "You are a mighty prince among us", they answered him, because they saw and felt that God was with him (Genesis 23:6). Also Abimelech, the king of Gerar, together with Phicol, the commander of his army, came to Isaac to arrange a reconciliation with him, despite the fact that they had opposed and chased him out of Gerar. They said to him, "We have certainly seen that the Lord is with you. So we said, 'Let there now be an oath between us'" (Genesis 26:28).

God always arouses the conscience of the sinner by showing him how very favourably heaven deals with the godly. This has two reasons: First, to encourage the godly; and,

second, to bring the sinners to repentance. He is a God of love. Psalm 14:6 says, "You shame the counsel of the poor, but the Lord is his refuge." These words arouse the conscience of the unrighteous, who shames the counsel of those who are poor in spirit. The Lord proves the counsel of the godly to be correct, because it is based on what He has revealed in His law. This divine proof makes the unrighteous reconsider himself, his thoughts and counsels, and turn back from the path of unrighteousness, and live.

Psalm 53:5 says, "There they are in great fear, where no fear was, for God has scattered the bones of him who encamps against you." The enemy is strong and sure of his victory, and the godly are only a handful. But the Lord turns the tide against them, pronounces His divine justice, thus destroying those who encamp against them and releasing those who are hemmed in!

4.3. Third: The Joy of the Believer

(verses 14:7; 53:6)

"Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion! When the Lord brings back the captivity of His people, let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad." Zion is the hill upon which the temple was erected, for salvation comes from worshipping and following God. He says, "Oh, that..." because many people are not saved, because they do not worship! Christ's salvation came from Zion, fulfilling the prophecy: "The Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression" (Isaiah 59:20).

In the last verse of the psalm the writer mentions two things that God does to His people: He saves them, and brings back their captivity.

1. **God saves His people:** "Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion!" (verse 7a). Zion was the place where the ark of the covenant was located, which symbolised at least two things:
 1. **God is in the midst of His people:** The tabernacle of meeting, which contained the ark of the covenant, stood in the midst of the camp of the Israelites. All the tribes could see the ark of the covenant in their midst. If you want salvation for your home, place the Lord in the midst of it. If you want salvation from a problem, make the Lord master of your life and in full control of it.
 2. **God is faithful in His covenant with His people:** God entered a covenant with us before we ever entered a covenant with Him. It is a covenant that is sealed with blood. Christ brought us into a new covenant which He calls "the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you" (Luke 22:20). Let us enter into this covenant with God. When the people around us see that we faithfully entered into this covenant with the Lord, that God is in our hearts and in our midst, they will repent; because they will realise the loss they are suffering as result of being alienated from God. The

following statement will apply to us: "That they may see your good works and glorify Your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). The word "good" in the Greek means aesthetically beautiful or attractive.

- 2. God brings back the captivity of His people:** "When the Lord brings back the captivity of His people, let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad" (verse 7b). To bring back the captivity of someone means idiomatically to restore his losses and bring his prosperity back to him, as it was used in Job 42:10: "And the Lord turned the captivity of Job" (KJV). So let us ask God to bring back to us what we have forfeited by our weakness. If you have lived a life of joy and peace with the Lord, but lost it for anxiety, lack of prayer or lack of faithfulness to God, then pray: "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation" (Psalm 51:12). In response, God will fulfil His promise: "I will bring back the captives of My people Israel; they will build the waste cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them. I will plant them in their land, and no longer shall they be pulled up from the land I have given them" (Amos 9:14,15).

Oh, that the Lord would restore our spiritual strength and our first love, so we would stand on our feet close to Him and love Him with all our heart, soul and mind. When it is made known that God is in the generation of righteousness, we will rejoice and be glad because our salvation comes from our God.

4.4. Questions

1. Who is the fool?
2. Describe the conscience of the sinner.

5. Psalm Fifteen

Who may Abide in Your Tabernacle?

A Psalm of David.

1 Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?

2 He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart;

3 He who does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor does he take up a reproach against his friend;

4 In whose eyes a vile person is despised, but he honors those who fear the Lord; he who swears to his own hurt and does not change;

5 He who does not put out his money at usury, nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved.

David wrote this psalm on the same occasion as Psalm 24, namely the transfer of the ark of

the covenant to the tabernacle, which David prepared for it in the Mount of Zion (2 Samuel 6:17). The mount was duly sanctified and dubbed "the holy mountain of God". You must be wondering: "What are the qualifications of the people among whom God would dwell?" God said, "For I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:44). Sanctity of life, then, which is seen in one's behaviour and practical life, is the prerequisite for abiding on God's holy mountain. "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

This is one of the psalms that foretell Christ's ascension. For He said, upon entering God's presence after His ascension, and after having completed the work for which He had been incarnated, "I have finished the work which You have given Me to do" (John 17:4).

The psalm includes the following:

- First: A question (verse 1)
- Second: An answer to the question (verses 2-5 a,b)
- Third: The conclusion of the psalm (verse 5c)

5.1. First: A Question

(verse 1)

"Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?" "Abiding" means being a guest for some time. "Dwelling", on the other hand, conveys a sense of continuity, it describes the state of a landlord. One begins his spiritual life by being a guest in the Lord's house. He falls in love with the Lord with all his heart, and asks to stay with Him forever. But is it possible for sinful man to abide in God's tabernacle? Didn't Isaiah cry out when he saw the Lord in His temple, "Woe is me, for I am undone!" (Isaiah 6:5)? Didn't Peter ask Jesus to get out of his boat after witnessing His magnificent miracle, since he was a sinful man (Luke 5:8)? The answer: It is possible, provided that God adopt him out of grace, thus he becomes a member of the household of God and a habitation of God (John 1:12; Ephesians 2:19,22). This is exactly what Isaiah said, "The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness has seized the hypocrites: 'Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burning? He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, he who despises the gain of oppressions, who gestures with his hands refusing bribes, who stops his ear from hearing of bloodshed, and shuts his eyes from seeing evil: he will dwell on high, his place of defence will be the fortress of rocks; bread will be given him, his water will be sure. Your eyes will see the King in His beauty..." (Isaiah 33:14-17).

All who received Jesus as Saviour, who tasted and saw that the Lord was good (Psalm 34:8) and experienced the sweetness of abiding in His tabernacle, will ask to stay on His holy

mountain, to go deeper in their knowledge of Him. With every day that passes the Lord becomes dearer and dearer to us, so we go into depth to enjoy living with Him, till we say, "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Psalm 23:6).

The person who starts off as a guest in God's place and progresses spiritually will dwell in God's presence and be able to say like Elijah, "As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stood," [literally, from Hebrew] and then say afterward, "As the Lord of hosts lives, before whom I stand" continually (1 Kings 17:1; 18:15). Continuing to stand before the Lord reminds us of Anna the prophetess, who continued to worship day and night in the temple for 88 years with fasting and prayers (Luke 2:37).

The person who abides and dwells in the holy mountain of God enjoys the Christ's promise: "-He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love Him and manifest Myself to him... If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him" (John 14:21,23).

He who abides and dwells with the Lord receives care because the Lord of the house is loving, rich and generous, whose guests always say, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want... You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies" (Psalm 23:1,5). With the Lord he enjoys protection because "He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (Psalm 91:1). With Him he enjoys the robe of righteousness and the garment of salvation as he attends the banquet of the heavenly King (Isaiah 61:10; Matthew 22:11).

The question "Who dwells?" makes us eager to dwell with the Lord, and love to be found in His presence continually.

5.2. Second: An Answer to the Question

(verses 2-5b)

The psalmist lists eight qualifications for the inhabitant of the mountain of God, which should be practised consistently till they work themselves into the heart of his daily life. The psalmist records them as actions, which are in fact the fruit of the operation of the Holy Spirit in the dweller of the Lord's house:

1. **Behaves well:** "He who walks uprightly" (verse 2a). Conduct is more important than words, because it is a revelation of one's faith through good deeds. This active faith is unlike the inactive faith that is devoid of deeds. "Upright" in the Hebrew (*tamim*) describes the flawless sacrifice. When applied to man in a general sense it means: faithful and blameless. It also describes acceptable adoration to God, and upright and honest dealings with people. The upright is perfect, accomplished, not dented or tainted. This is

what God required of Abraham: "Walk before Me and be blameless" (Genesis 17:1), and His people: "You shall be blameless before the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 18:13). Christ also repeated the same requirement: "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

These scriptures do not refer to absolute perfection, for this is an exclusively divine attribute. It is rather the blamelessness of intent and purpose, when a believer purposes with his whole heart to live for the Lord and walk uprightly.

2. **Behaves righteously:** "And works righteousness" (verse 2b). Righteousness is honesty, probity and justice. The one who works righteousness is the one who is honest with himself, who is conscious of his own weakness and sins, and hurries away crying out to God, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" (Luke 18:13). This way he takes his thirsty soul to the Lord in order to be quenched, and leads his broken heart to where it could find divine healing, praying, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit with me" (Psalm 51:10). When we love ourselves we get saved, because we go to the blood of Jesus that cleanses us from all sin. As a result we become able to love others, because the commandment says, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Mark 12:31). The one who works righteousness is the one who lives out his Christian faith on the street, and deals honestly inside and outside the house of the Lord, because "He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous" (1 John 3:7).
3. **Tells the truth:** "And speaks truth in his heart" (verse 2c). Of course, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). When one is truthful at heart his mouth automatically speaks the truth. A famous expression of the Lord was "Truly, truly I say to you..." (John 3:3 NASB). He also said, "I am... the truth" (John 14:6). For this reason He commands us to be truthful and honest at heart. He said, "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). When Christ sets us free from our old life He transforms it and turns it into a new one, establishing the truth in our hearts and releasing our tongues to tell it.

There are so many lies around us: ambiguous words, harmless lies, half truths and hypocrisy. The devil is the liar and the father of lies (John 8:44).

A believer said, "Before you speak, ask yourself three questions: Is it true what I will say? If so, must I say it? And if I must, how can I bring it through in a tender way that benefits the others?"

4. **Controls his tongue (verse 3):** This can be seen in three things:
 1. **"He who does not backbite with his tongue":** To backbite is to tell something negative about others in order to do them harm, trap them and kindle the fire of enmity between them. Therefore God said, "You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people" (Leviticus 19:16). Asaph says, describing a talebearer, "You give

- your mouth to evil, and your tongue frames deceit. You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother's son" (Psalm 50:19,20). He who dwells in the mountain of the God controls his tongue, does not harm people by telling false news about them, or news that is not necessary to be told, because "love covers all sins" (Proverbs 10:12).
2. **"Nor does evil to his neighbour":** Many evils stem from misuse of the tongue: "Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell... Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing" (James 3:5,6,10).
 3. **"Nor does he take up a reproach against his friend":** To take up a reproach is to taunt someone for a personal weakness. It is so painful a thing that a friend cannot bear it. The psalmist said concerning the same thing, "Reproach has broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness; I looked for someone to take pity, but there was none" (Psalm 69:20). It was well said that whoever reproaches his friend carries a devil in his tongue, and whoever laughs in ridicule carries a devil in his ears!
 5. **Does not associate with the vile:** "In whose eyes a vile person is despised" (verse 4a). The person who dwells in the mountain of God does not associate with those who love and practice vileness, no matter what social status they may have, nor follows their example, nor condones the mistakes they make. He who dwells in the mountain of God does not, in fact, despise the vile person himself, rather the vileness that is within him. God loves the sinner, although He hates sin. When a godly person despises the vileness of the vile person he fulfils the prophetic statement: "The foolish person will no longer be called generous, nor the miser said to be bountiful" (Isaiah 32:5). Each one will get his due title.
 6. **Respects the godly:** "But he honours those who fear the Lord" (verse 4b). "But a generous man devises generous things, and by generosity he shall stand" (Isaiah 32:8). The inhabitant of the holy mountain, who despises the vile person, honours those who fear the Lord, because the Lord has made them vessels for honour (Romans 9:21,23). He said, "Those who honour Me I will honour, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed" (1 Samuel 2:30). He honours them because they belong to the same spiritual family as he, and because they are like him "the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19). He obeys the command that exhorts him to "be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honour giving preference to one another" (Romans 12:10). He fulfils the statement of Christ: "If anyone serves me, him My Father will honour" (John 12:26). Let every believer maintain his brother's honour, and let our motto be "The saints who are on the earth... in whom is all my delight" (Psalm 16:3).
 7. **True to his promises:** "He who swears to his own hurt and does not change" (verse 4c).

He carries out his promises and vows even to his own detriment, because he is true to his word and promises. He has uttered them before the Lord, and committed himself to see them done. The Lord commanded His people not to break their promises (Leviticus 5:4; 27:10). The psalmist simply obeys this command.

The inhabitant of the holy mountain follows the example of God as His beloved son (Ephesians 5:1). Since God always makes good His promises to us, we ought to stick to what we promised. Many times we make promises and vows at the beginning of a new year, when we celebrate our birthday, when we go through a crisis, or after we attend a spiritual conference or a revival. Let us be true to our promises even though they cost us much, in order to be worthy of dwelling on His holy mountain. Our example in this business is Christ, who said as He came into the world, "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifice for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come -- In the volume of the Book it is written of Me -- to do Your will, O God'" (Hebrews 10:5-7). He promised and kept His promise in spite of the enormous sacrifice He had to make for our sake.

8. **He uses money sensibly (verse 5):** This could be seen in two things:

1. **"He who does not put out his money at usury" (verse 5a):** God forbids usury that causes harm, which Nehemiah and the people agreed on (Nehemiah 5:1-13). The Mosaic law permitted lending money to foreigners at interest, but the Jew was supposed to lend to his Jewish brother without interest. This is how the Torah states it: "You shall not charge interest to your brother- interest on money or food or anything that is lent out at interest. To a foreigner you may charge interest, but to your brother you shall not charge interest, that the Lord your God may bless you..." (Deuteronomy 23:19). Evidently, the Jewish law encourages mercy among the Jews only, which is not extended to the Gentiles. Christianity, on the other hand, teaches that all human beings are brothers and sisters, for God has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth (Acts 17:26). Christ taught us to pray, "Our Father in heaven" (Matthew 6:9).

The reason for forbidding usury is the fact that the creditor is in a stronger position than the debtor. A debtor takes a loan to fulfil a need, therefore we ought to help him. Nowadays the weak person deposits his "silver" at the bank so that the bank may invest it for him, because he is unable to invest it himself. The debtor (the bank in this case) has the upper hand, while the creditor is in a weaker position. In this case there is no injustice or harm done when the stronger bank pays interests to the weaker creditor!

The New Testament pictures investment in a way different from the Mosaic law. Christ narrated a parable of a financier who gave his servants some "talents" to invest. Since one of them did not use what he received, the financier told him, "You ought to

have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest" (Matthew 25:27). Bankers invest the money and share the profits with the depositor, and there is nothing wrong with such mutual benefit. Christ's words teach us that investment is a duty, but outrageous interest and exploitation are unacceptable.

2. **"Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent" (verse 5b):** Bribery perverts judgement. When a man gives bribes to get something that does not belong to him by right, he commits a crime and is as good as a thief who steals something that is not his. As to the receiver of bribes, he is a thief on all sides: he helps another thief to take something that does not belong to him, and gives something that does not belong to him either.

In some societies, where corruption has gone rampant, the lawful citizen cannot get what he is entitled to unless he bribes, and he does not regard it as bribery any more than a "service charge". Yet, Christians should regard it as weakness of faith. Such a man should have patience and wait for the Lord to give him what rightfully belongs to him. The receiver of bribes in this case is also a thief, because he received bribes for giving someone something that is legally his to start off with.

Some people refuse to give bribes, believing that God will give them their rights in His time, so they wait on the Lord. They are strong in the faith, and God will definitely honour their faith and say to them, "According to your faith let it be to you" (Matthew 9:29).

These eight qualifications depict a perfect character, with faith working through love, which carries out all its responsibilities to the smallest and biggest details alike. A person with this character carries out his responsibility faithfully, because the love of God has been poured out in his heart by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5).

5.3. Third: The Conclusion of the Psalm

(verse 5c)

The psalm concludes with this statement: "He who does these things shall never be moved." A person with these qualities will not only stand in God's presence, but also will be under His protection, which ensures his continual success. Therefore he says, "I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved" (Psalm 16:8).

At this point we are faced with a question: How can we practice these qualities in our lives? The answer: We can practice them when we obtain the righteousness of Christ and be sure that we are abiding in the Lord, being controlled by the Holy Spirit. This happens, of course, when we commit our lives to the Lord Jesus and receive from Him the fruit of the Holy

Spirit, which is: "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22,23).

Some people try to reform and decorate their lives, but self-reformation does not help at all. What is needed is a change, a transformation, because patching up an old shirt with a new piece of cloth won't hold together (Mark 2:21). What is needed is a new shirt. The renewal takes place in our lives through the power of the Holy Spirit, because "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Ask God for a change.

We are faced with yet another question: Doesn't this psalm imply that deeds are the means to salvation? The answer: The writer of the psalm speaks of the inhabitant of God's holy mountain, who has completed all the sacrifices required by the Mosaic law. He knows that without the shedding of blood no remission of sins can happen, and that through atonement only can a man enter God's tabernacle. Faith is the initial prerequisite, then good deeds come as a result of redemption through the blood. The person who receives justification through redemption must manifest the fruit of this through a godly life. We are justified before God by faith in what Christ did on our behalf on the cross, just as Abraham was justified (Genesis 15:6). We are justified before men by our good deeds, as Abraham also was justified (Genesis 22; James 2:21-23). If good deeds follow faith, then our faith will work through love.

On the other hand, those who reject redemption through the blood, and glory in their good deeds as a personal means of salvation cannot please God, because they exclude the way that God ordained for our salvation. "By the deeds of the law no flesh shall be justified in His sight... being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:20,24).

5.4. Questions

1. The one who dwells in God's sanctuary uses his tongue wisely. Comment on this.
2. The one who dwells in God's sanctuary uses his money wisely. Comment on this.

6. Psalm Sixteen

In your Presence is Fullness of Joy

A Michtam of David.

1 Preserve me, O God, for in You I put my trust.

2 O my soul, you have said to the Lord, "You are my Lord, my goodness is nothing apart from You."

3 As for the saints who are on the earth, "They are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight."

4 Their sorrows shall be multiplied who hasten after another god; their drink offerings of blood I will not offer, nor take up their names on my lips.

5 O Lord, You are the portion of my inheritance and my cup; You maintain my lot.

6 The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; yes, I have a good inheritance.

7 I will bless the Lord who has given me counsel; my heart also instructs me in the night seasons.

8 I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved.

9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will rest in hope.

10 For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.

11 You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

This psalm is a *michtam* of forgiveness, meaning that it is a golden psalm of precious import. Five other psalms have the same heading (56-60).

Psalm 16 expresses overwhelming joy filled with faith, hope and love. In Psalm 16 there is a happy anticipation of God, resulting from fellowship with Him. Most likely David wrote this psalm when he forgave Saul, who was chasing him, and as he fell into his hands. Saul promised to stop chasing David, but broke his promise and chased him again. Saul fell into David's hands a second time, and said as he recognised his voice, "Is that your voice, my son David?" David said, "It is my voice, my lord, O king. Why does my lord thus pursue his servant? For what have I done, or what evil is in my hand? ...If the Lord has stirred you against me, let Him accept an offering. But if it is the children of men, may they be cursed before the Lord." Why? "...for they have driven me out this day from abiding in the inheritance of the Lord, saying, 'Go, serve other gods.'" (1 Samuel 26:17-20). Because of being pursued David was deprived of worshipping God, but as God recompensed him he said, "You, O Lord, are the portion of my inheritance and my cup; You maintain my lot. The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; yes, I have a good inheritance" (Psalm 16:5,6).

This psalm is a prophecy of the risen Christ, from which Peter quoted verse 8 in Acts 2:25, saying, "For David says concerning Him, 'I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken.'" Paul, as well, quoted verse 10 in Acts 13:35-39: "'You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.' For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption. Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man [the risen Christ] is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified..."

The psalm includes the following:

- First: The psalmist's relationship with God (verses 1,2)
- Second: The psalmist's relationship with people; both righteous and unrighteous (verses 3,4)
- Third: The psalmist and his earthly life (verses 5-8)
- Fourth: The psalmist and his eternal life (verses 9,10)
- Fifth: The triple blessing of the psalmist (verse 11)

6.1. First: The Psalmist's Relationship with God (verses 1,2)

The psalmist begins the psalm by speaking of his relationship with the Lord, calling Him to preserve him, not from a specific danger, but from any danger that could beset him, whether he could feel it coming upon him or not. He realises his own weakness and the magnitude of the danger that King Saul poses to him. For this reason he puts his trust in the Lord and explains his special relationship to Him.

1. **God is trustworthy:** "Preserve me, O God, for in You I put my trust" (verse 1). To trust means to depend on, with confidence in whom you trust. An example of this trust is shown in the way a patient surrenders to the surgeon's scalpel, or a man gives a lawyer a full power of attorney, both out of confidence. Christ prayed for the believers, "Keep through Your name those whom You have given Me" (John 17:11). The believer realises that the name of the Lord is "a strong tower [bulwark]; the righteous run to it and are safe" (Proverbs 18:10). Only God is the tower of salvation and deliverance, upon whom the believer calls: "Show Your marvellous loving-kindness by Your right hand, O You who save those who trust in You from those who rise up against them" (Psalm 17:7).
2. **God is the Lord:** "My soul, you have said to the Lord, 'You are my Lord'" (verse 2a). He said, "Give Your strength to Your servant, and save the son of Your maidservant" (Psalm 86:16). He also said, "O Lord, I am Your servant; I am Your servant, the son of Your maidservant" (Psalm 116:16). David belongs to the Lord and has been called by His name. He is a self-appointed servant who says, "I love my master... I will not go out free" (Exodus 21:5). When he makes himself a servant to God he becomes free, safe and secure. God is our Master because He is our Creator, and our rightful Owner because He bought us by the blood of Jesus. Our knowledge of these two blessed truths makes us admit He is Lord over our lives because we are the creation of His hands, and because we are redeemed by His blood.
3. **God is the source of goodness:** "My goodness is nothing apart from You" (verse 2b). God Himself is the goodness of the psalmist, and it is He who gives the psalmist every good thing. Every goodness he desires is in and with God. He says, to Him, therefore, "Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides

You" (Psalm 73:25). David's confidence in the Lord shaped his thought and life pattern. His heart turns to God continually, in times of danger as well in times of safety, just as the compass turns to the north pole or iron to a magnet. He turns to God in times of temptation as well as in times of invulnerability, in times of fear as well in times of peace. God has become His point of reference all the time, therefore he says to Him, "I delight to do Your will, O my God" (Psalm 40:8).

6.2. Second: The Psalmist's Relationship with People, Both Righteous and Unrighteous

(verses 3,4)

1. **The psalmist's relationship with the righteous:** "And to the saints who are on the earth, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight" (verse 3). The psalmist turns from God in His heaven to the believers on His earth, expressing that they are "my delight". He has a delightful and delighted relationship with those who love the Lord the same way he does. It is based on unity of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:3). "Everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments" (1 John 5:1,2).

The writer gives the righteous two titles: the saints, and the excellent ones.

1. **"The saints":** They are saints because God called them to be His kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6). "Saints" means the pure who live a holy life, as He who called them is holy, who have become saints in all their conduct (1 Peter 1:15). He calls them "saints" in the sense of being set apart for God, dedicated to Him, who have given themselves unreservedly to loving Him. He calls them "saints" because he saw them different from the others, because the Holy Spirit within them gives them a quality of living that is different from that which is in the world. "In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest" (1 John 3:10). He who is in them is greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4). He calls them "saints" because he saw them high and lifted up, just as Isaiah saw the divine throne (Isaiah 6:1-3). Their spiritual level is higher than that of the people around them. Sanctity originates from Christ's cleansing work on the cross, "We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10:10), and it results from their acceptance of this redemptive work, for "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love" (Ephesians 1:4).

Yet, he saw them "on the earth". Yes, they have to be on earth, therefore Christ prayed for them, saying, "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one" (John 17:15). They have to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13,14), that they may become

blameless and harmless in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, shining as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life (Philippians 2:15). In spite of being engulfed by the mire of the world, they were able to keep a heart of "saints". This applies to us today: we can live in holiness in a world full of evil only if the Holy Spirit is in control of our actions, and if we say to the Lord, "You are my Lord. My goodness is nothing apart from You."

2. **"The excellent ones"**: They are noble, of good reputation, to whom this statement of Christ applies, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

The psalmist does not say that his delight is in the rich or the powerful, but in those who joined the Lord, opened their hearts for Him, and whom He gave a good name. There is a special attraction that the Holy Spirit puts in the believers' hearts toward each other because Christ dwells in them and is the Lord of their lives, who draws them to each other with cords of love. Yet, many believers still don't appreciate each other as they ought to, and some denominations belittle others. All believers are saints and excellent owing to their place in Christ. This is how we should look at them, because this is how God looks at them.

2. - **The psalmist's relationship with the unrighteous**: "Their sorrows shall be multiplied who hasten after another god; their drink offering of blood I will not offer, nor take up their names on my lips" (verse 4). He speaks of the error of the unrighteous and God's punishment of them, then declares that he will keep away from their mode of worship.

1. **"Their sorrows shall be multiplied who hasten after another god"**: In other words: "My people have changed their Glory for what does not profit... For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living water, and hewn themselves cisterns -- broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:11,13). They have been attracted by the pleasures of the world and snatched away by its idols, so they hasten after error, in a dangerous descent that banishes their spiritual peace and eternal destiny. By following such a spiritual error they have wronged themselves and multiplied their own sorrows. The prodigal son in the far country gives us a good example of these multiple sorrows (Luke 15:11-32). The first of these is banishment from the fatherly presence; the second is deprivation of divine blessing; the third is floundering in illusions, evils and the deception of exploiting friends. The sad end is eternal death.
2. **The psalmist's withdrawal from their mode of worship**: "Their drink offering of blood I will not offer, nor take up their names on my lips." Perhaps this means that the writer will not join them in their heathen worship, for they pour out blood over their sacrifices, contrary to what he would do. Or perhaps it means that they offer sacrifices to their idols with hands stained with blood. God said, through Isaiah,

concerning people who offer unacceptable offerings, "He who kills a bull is as if he slays a man, he who sacrifices a lamb, as if he breaks a dog's neck; he who offers a grain offering, as if he offers swine's blood; he who burns incense, as if he blesses an idol" (Isaiah 66:3).

As to saying, "...nor take up their names on my lips", it means that he would not mention even the names of their idols. David had spent some time as a fugitive in idol-worshipping lands, and the people of the land must have encouraged him to ask their gods for succour, assuming that they could help him. His reaction was one of total refusal even to mention the name of their idols! This seems easy and convenient when the circumstances are nice, but when the going gets tough one needs strong love and loyalty to the Lord. David's loyalty to God was undivided and absolute.

6.3. Third: The Psalmist and his Earthly Life

(verses 5-8)

David says in these four verses that the Lord is His desire and portion, and that his eternal destiny is in His hands (verse 5), the One who chooses and divides for him, so what a good inheritance he has (verse 6)! The Lord advises and guides him (verse 7), as well as establishes him so that he won't be moved (verse 8).

1. **The Lord is his portion:** "You, O Lord, are the portion of my inheritance and my cup" (verse 5a). Portion and cup refer to man's share of food, drink and domicile. God fulfils all these needs for the believer. This was the case with the Levites, for God said to Aaron, "You shall have no inheritance in their land nor shall you have any portion among them." Why? "I am your portion and your inheritance among the children of Israel" (Numbers 18:20). "Therefore Levi has no portion nor inheritance with his brethren; the Lord is his inheritance" (Deuteronomy 10:9). The psalmist says, "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?" (Psalm 42:2). "And Jesus said to them. '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). Therefore the psalmist says, "'You, O Lord, are the portion of my inheritance and cup' from whom I quench my thirst. You are my lot in life. You appoint what I should experience." The cup may be bitter or sweet. When sweet, he says, "My cup runs over", namely it has become full of goodness to overflowing (Psalm 23:5). As to the bitter one, Christ's attitude to it was: "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26:39).

The believer finds joy as he looks up at God as his portion and cup, but many are those who are not content with the lots that God has appointed to them. Refusing the cup that the Lord offers them, they go on seeking other portions and cups, not knowing that in doing so they wrong themselves and make a very bad choice.

Afterward the psalmist says of the Lord, "You maintain my lot" (verse 5b). The Lord picks out the believer's portion and gives it to him, so that no one could rob him of it. When the lots are cast the Lord chooses for the believer; whether it be a job, a partner, difficult circumstances conducive to maturity, as well as comfortable circumstances that evoke thanksgiving and praise. Since the believer's destiny is in the hands of the Lord, he does not have to live under coincidence. Everything that we pass through and everything that passes by us is by divine predestination or previous appointment, and in accordance with the unfathomable divine wisdom.

2. **The Lord chooses for him:** "The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; yes, I have a good inheritance" (verse 6). In the past lands were divided among the heirs by means of lines of measurement. The psalmist's lines seem to have fallen "in pleasant places", namely in a delightful and fertile land, and in happy times. This verse reads in a modern translation, "How pleasant it is what You have appointed to me! How beautiful is my inheritance!" The ones who experience who God is know that he always chooses the best place and the best time. Sometimes we grumble because God gave a place we don't really like, or gave it to us at an inappropriate time. But after a while, when we contemplate God's dealings, we find out that He gave the best thing at the right time.
3. **The Lord advises him:** "I will bless the Lord who has given me counsel" (verse 7a). The psalmist gives thanks to God because He advises him continually to choose the Lord and follow Him in confidence, love and obedience. Christ is the Counsellor (Isaiah 9:6) who gives the greatest advice: "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (Romans 8:14). Again God says, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye" (Psalm 32:8). The prophet Jeremiah said, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). How much are we in need of divine direction! And how much are we in need of obeying God's direction by walking according in it.

Sometimes God offers advice that we refuse. Consequently, He reproves us and our hearts condemn us. The psalmist describes this as follows: "My heart also instructs me in the night seasons" (verse 7b). The ancients considered the heart to be the seat of emotions. The expression "My heart instructs me" means that his conscience reproached him. When the Lord advises but the believer does not take His advice, He warns him during the night, reproaching him for what he did, and convicts him through the operation of the Holy Spirit in him! The more often the believer listens to the Lord's voice, the more spiritual wisdom and inner knowledge he gains. Besides, he gets the fulfilment of the promise: "Your teachers will not be moved into a corner anymore, but your eyes shall see your teachers. Your ears shall hear a word behind you saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left hand" (Isaiah 30:20,21).

4. **The Lord establishes him:** "I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my

right hand I shall not moved" (verse 8). After all these blessings, do you think that the psalmist would set anything else or anyone else before him other than the Lord? The Lord is "before" him, to lead and guide him. He is the example and the ideal. The Lord is also "at his right hand", to keep and protect him. A good shepherd keeps his sheep, and gives his own life watching over them. To such a Good Shepherd we say, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).

6.4. Fourth: The Psalmist and his Eternal Life

(verses 9,10)

The psalmist speaks of his eternal future with all hope and expectation.

1. **The object of hope:** "Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; my flesh shall also rest in hope" (verse 9). His life here is full of God's presence, so his life there will also be. In this verse the psalmist looks forward to his eternal inheritance joyfully and confidently. His heart is glad, his soul rejoices and as his body will be covered with dust he will rest in the hope and expectation of the glorious resurrection.

Many people are scared of death, but the believer who has been established in the Lord says together with David, "my flesh shall also rest in hope". Death for him is not the end, but the beginning of a new life. Christ said, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:2,3). Now we are at home in the body and are absent from the Lord, but the time will come when we will be absent from the body and be present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:6,8). Simeon the elder said, "Lord, You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation" (Luke 2:29,30). The believer does not fear for his body in death because it is the temple of the Holy Spirit. When Jesus comes again He will transform our lowly body to be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able to subdue all things to Himself (Philippians 3:21).

2. **The cause of hope:** "For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption" (verse 10). God did not leave Christ's body in the grave; but He rose from the dead on the third day. In His love He allows the believer to say the same words concerning His eternity, for what happened to Christ is the cause and basis for what will happen to us. Christ illuminated our lives and our eternity through the gospel (2 Timothy 1:10). Christ said, "Because I live, you will live also" (John 14:9). The believer's present is wonderful, but his future is even more wonderful. The believer's tomorrow is better than today, and his future than his present, because he builds his hope on the resurrection of Christ, the Son of David, which is the earnest and surety our resurrection.

The psalm is a prophecy concerning Christ's resurrection, for David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, died, was buried with his fathers and saw

corruption. Christ however, was raised by God, saw no corruption; and when he comes to our world, the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised incorruptible (Acts 2:25; 13:35-38; 1 Corinthians 15:52).

6.5. Fifth: The Triple Blessing of the Psalmist

(verse 11)

Whoever abides in the Lord and sets Him at his right hand, the Lord stands at his right hand so that he won't be shaken. At this point one experiences what David said: "You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (verse 11). The verse lists three blessings of the believer; the first covers his past, the second his present, the third his future:

1. **Knowing the path of life:** This takes place as God leads him into a life of deep and intimate fellowship with God, which is the only life that deserves to be called "life", because this is the kind of life that Christ came to give freely to His beloved ones: "I have come that they may have life and, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). For "he who keeps instruction is in the way of life" (Proverbs 10:17). "The path of life" does not mean the path to life, but the way we live and walk, which is the way of righteousness. "In the way of righteousness is life, and in its pathway there is no death" (Proverbs 12:28).
2. **"Fullness of joy":** Sin makes man run away from God's presence and says, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself" (Genesis 3:10). Sorrow is mixed with joy in the lives of human beings, but the Lord turns the sorrow in a believer's life into joy. The person who gets to know the path of life with God becomes filled with joy, because a godly heart can contain that kind of joy. He gets filled with the joy of forgiveness, sanctification, the knowledge of God, trust, peace and confidence. "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).
3. **"Pleasures forevermore":** The Lord's strong hand stretches out to provide and give peace. His pleasures are everlasting: the pleasure of adoption, forgiveness and eternal life. All these begin here and now, and they never end! True, there are pleasures that do not last forever, because the day will come when we will stop eating and our physical possessions will cease. The Lord, however, grants His pleasures to His beloved ones both in this age and in the age to come!

The psalm concludes with such a beautiful declaration of Christ's triumph, which becomes ours so long as we abide in Him. "But God, who is rich in mercy... even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ... and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:5-7).

Dear believers, I congratulate you because the Lord Himself shows you the path of life. Your present is wonderful, you have fullness of joy ahead of you and your future is even more wonderful: Pleasures forevermore!

6.6. Questions

1. In Psalm 16:1-2 David describes his relationship with God in three ways. What are these ways?
2. In Psalm 16:9,10 David describes his eternity. Give a summary of this.

7. Psalm Seventeen

Your Eyes Look on Things that Are Upright

A Prayer of David.

1 Hear a just cause, O Lord, attend to my cry; give ear to my prayer which is not from deceitful lips.

2 Let my vindication come from Your presence; let Your eyes look on the things that are upright.

3 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.

4 Concerning the works of men, by the word of Your lips, I have kept away from the paths of the destroyer.

5 Uphold my steps in Your paths, that my footsteps may not slip.

6 I have called upon You, for You will hear me, O God; incline Your ear to me, and hear my speech.

7 Show Your marvelous lovingkindness by Your right hand, O You who save those who trust in You from those who rise up against them.

8 Keep me as the apple of Your eye; hide me under the shadow of Your wings,

9 From the wicked who oppress me, from my deadly enemies who surround me.

10 They have closed up their fat hearts; with their mouths they speak proudly.

11 They have now surrounded us in our steps; they have set their eyes, crouching down to the earth,

12 As a lion is eager to tear his prey, and like a young lion lurking in secret places.

13 Arise, O Lord, confront him, cast him down; deliver my life from the wicked with Your sword,

14 With Your hand from men, O Lord, from men of the world who have their portion in this life, and whose belly You fill with Your hidden treasure. They are satisfied with children, and leave the rest of their possession for their babes.

15 As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness.

This is one of the five psalms that are entitled: "prayer". Three of them belong to David, which are 17,86,142. One belongs to Moses, which is Psalm 90. Psalm 102 belongs to "the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed". One of God's expressions of grace for us is turning adversities into blessings for us, since they cause us to kneel down and cry out for His assistance. Like a lion that is eager to tear his prey David's enemies surrounded him and his friends (verse 12), so they cried out to God, "They have now surrounded us in our steps" (verse 11). The occasion of writing this psalm might be when Saul "pursued David in the Wilderness of Maon... David made haste to get away from Saul, for Saul and his men were encircling David and his men to take them" (1 Samuel 23:25-27).

The psalms are another grace of God's. They teach us to pray, saying, "My heart said to You, Lord, 'Your face, Lord, I will seek.'" (Psalm 27:8). The motto of our lives becomes: "But I give myself to prayer" (Psalm 109:4). They help us fulfil Christ's commandment: "Men always ought to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1).

Let us ask the Lord, therefore, to make the first verse of this psalm our motto: "Give ear to my prayer that is not from deceitful lips", and to make the last verse of it our daily experience: "I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness." This way we can be satisfied in the Lord and in his favour on us in the wilderness of this life.

The psalm includes the following:

- First: The psalmist asks for help on account of his innocence (verses 1-5)
- Second: The psalmist asks for help on account of his enemies' wickedness (verses 6-14)
- Third: The psalmist declares his joy in the Lord (verse 15)

7.1. First: The Psalmist Asks for Help on Account of his Innocence

(verses 1-5)

1. **The Lord hears the just cause:** "Hear a just cause, O Lord, attend to my cry; give ear to my prayer that is not from deceitful lips" (verse 1). The psalmist makes his weak voice to be heard to the powerful God in three different expressions: "hear", "attend" and "give ear". He does not want his requests to be lost in the noise of his enemies' unjust acts, nor does he want his voice to be weak when it reaches the ears of his just Judge. Prayer is pouring out one's soul (1 Samuel 1:15), and pouring out one's heart (Psalm 62:8). In his supplication David does not base his cry on his self-righteousness, nor on his absolute innocence of all evil. Psalm 51 shows us very clearly how he hurried to confess his sin as soon as he recognised it, due to the sensitivity of his conscience. Under the given circumstances of this psalm he speaks of a specific situation in which he was blameless, when the reviling enemy was in hot pursuit after him though he was innocent. He cried

out for help and rescue on account of being innocent in that particular situation. His whole life was not flawless, but he could say here, "If I regard any iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear. But certainly God has heard me; he has attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God who has not turned away my prayer, nor His mercy from me!" (Psalm 66:18-20). David's cause was valid, because he was right. He could say, "Judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness, and according to my integrity within me" (Psalm 7:8). He knew that he was addressing the just Judge as he said, "You sat on the throne judging in righteousness" (Psalm 9:4).

The psalmist prays as a child who cries out to his father for help. The prayer of the innocent does not deserve to be heard on its own merits; rather it becomes accepted due to the fact that it is directed to the loving Father and just Judge.

- The Lord justifies:** "Let my vindication come from Your presence; Your eyes look on the things that are upright" (verse 2a). By this David means to account for the basis of his right attitude, which is justice. It is God who places him side by side with the righteous. There are two Hebrew words for righteousness in the Old Testament; the first *yosher* describes righteousness in the sight of men, whereas the second *zedeq* or *zdaqah* describes righteousness in the sight of God. The Bible uses the first one in speaking of Job: "This man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil [*yashar*]" (Job 1:1). Men saw Job's devoutness, uprightness, equity and righteousness. Righteousness in God's sight is spoken of in Bible in these terms: "He shall receive blessing from the Lord, and righteousness [*zdaqah*] from the God of his salvation" (Psalm 24:5). The Lord says concerning this righteousness, "My righteousness [*zedeq*] is near, My salvation has gone forth, and My arms will judge the peoples" (Isaiah 51:5).

David said to God, "Your eyes look on the things that are upright [*mesharim*]" (verse 2b). God's eyes look not only on upright things but upright people as well. Who is upright among people except those who take refuge in Christ's atonement and are recognised by God as acceptable? Atonement in Hebrew means covering and concealing, of which the Bible says, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile" (Psalm 32:1,2). "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). Let us confess our sins and take refuge in Christ's righteousness because: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). At this point we can say to the Lord, "Your eyes look on the things that are upright" and depend on Christ's righteousness.

- The Lord examines:** "You have tested my heart; You have visited me in the night; You have tried me and have found nothing; I purposed that my mouth shall not transgress" (verse 3). As the writer went to bed thoughts began to swirl around his head, and he reviewed the things that happened to him during the day. So he lifted his face up to God

thanking Him that He kept him from evil, that it might not cause him pain. The Lord tested the heart of His prophet: "The righteous God tests the hearts and minds... For You, O God, have proved us. You have refined us as silver is refined... My heart also instructs me in the night seasons" (Psalm 7:9; 66:10; 16:7). Examination proved the psalmist's attitude to be right in action and speech. It seems the David wanted to say, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You" (John 21:17). "If our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God" (1 John 3:21). God tested the words of His prophet and found that his mouth does not transgress, like those in whose "mouth there was found no guile, for they are without fault before the throne of God" (Revelations 14:5).

4. **The Lord protects:** "Concerning the works of men, by the word of Your lips, I have kept myself from the paths of the destroyer. Uphold my steps in Your paths, that my footsteps may not slip" (verses 4,5). The writer compared himself with others and found that he obeyed God, rejected the path of the destructive people who treat others cruelly and harmfully, who rob and who shed blood (Ezekiel 18:10). He neither made friends with them nor imitated their actions, because their ways are the opposite of his way of life. He followed the wise way which the wise man recommends: "Remove your foot from evil" (Proverbs 4:27) and took Paul's advice: "Abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:22). As he stood in the Lord's presence, and was cleansed by His word, he said, "Uphold my steps in Your paths, that my footsteps may not slip" (verse 5). If we want the Lord's help we ought to watch our steps. It is not the outer things that disturb the believers, but their inner deviation and perversion. The psalmist keeps himself from evil through the word of the Lord, that he may not sin (Psalm 119:11). The word of the Lord is "the sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:17) and it will be said to anyone who holds fast to it, "I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one" (1 John 2:14).

7.2. Second: The Psalmist Asks for Help on Account of his Enemies' Wickedness (verses 6-14)

1. **The Lord is the only Deliverer:** "I have called upon You, for You will hear me, O God; incline Your ear to me, and hear my speech. Show Your marvellous loving-kindness by Your right hand, O You who save those who trust in You from those who rise up against them. Keep me as the apple of Your eye; hide me under the shadow of Your wings" (verses 6-8). It is wonderful to turn to God out of our experience of His faithfulness, goodness and love, which are borne out by the fact that He responded when we called. "In the day when I cried out, You answered me, and made me bold with strength in my soul" (Psalm 138:3). This how the answering God always responds, because He is unchangeable and we are needy. Therefore we say, "Incline Your ear to me, and hear my speech." It is wonderful be a member of a believing family, and glory in the fact that you are the spiritual descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This means that we have an

old heritage of answered prayers. If we don't have such a spiritual heritage in our families, we can, through the grace of God, start that heritage in our families today. Say to God, "Work on me first!"

Then the psalmist says, "Show Your marvellous loving-kindness by Your right hand, O You who save those who trust in You from those who rise up against them" (verse 7). He asks for a special and extraordinary intervention of divine loving-kindness because he has a great need and God's power is greater. God's right hand is powerful, wise, experienced by the sons of men, strong and always near. "Show Your marvellous loving-kindness" to the intellect so that it may be released from ignorance, and to the heart so that its fears may be dispersed. God must show His marvellous loving-kindness right in time of need, for he has saved, still saves and will save those who trust in Him.

It is noteworthy in this prayer that it focuses on divine love before it focuses on the wickedness of the enemies. When we adopt this right attitude we learn not to focus our prayers on the problem, but to keep our minds away from the difficulty and look up to the author and finisher of our faith, who will solve our problems with His love and power.

The psalmist says, "Keep me as the apple of Your eye" (verse 8a). When we ask a big favour we go to someone we trust much, and know that he cherishes us just as much. The more you realise the place you have in God's heart the bolder your request will be. The psalmist asks God to regard him "as the apple of His eye", which is the most tender and precious part that needs care and concern. No doubt David recollected Moses' words when he expounded to the people the experiences of the wilderness in the barren desert of Sinai: "He [God] encircled him [the people of Israel], He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye" (Deuteronomy 32:10). It is a true saying that "he who touches you touches the apple of His eye" (Zechariah 2:8).

The psalmist expresses his confidence in God's love, saying, "Hide me under the shadow of Your wings" (verse 8b). This is a creative expression of a mother's care for her little ones, such as a hen would do (Matthew 23:37). "How precious is Your loving-kindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings" (Psalm 36:7). "For my soul trusts in You; and in the shadow of Your wings I will take my refuge, until these calamities have passed by" (Psalm 57:1). "Because You have been my help, therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice" (Psalm 63:7).

2. **The psalmist's enemies are bad and cruel (verses 9-12):** They "oppress" and destroy the body, and "surround" and encircle the psalmist to fill his life with terror. They have cruel hearts and no mercy. "They have closed up their fat hearts." Their speech spells out their pride. They follow him wherever he goes, and watch him closely to knock him down! They are like a lion that is eager to tear its prey apart, and as a young lion lurking in the secret places. They just do what their chief does- "because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). They not

only attack the psalmist, but all the assembly of the Lord. This is why he says, "...oppress me" (verse 9) and, "surround us" (verse 11).

Since he is sure that the Lord is his only Deliverer, and is confident in His care for him and protection of him, he turns to Him with all his heart, crying out to Him because of the menacing enemies who surround him and want to prey on him with merciless and malicious hearts.

- 3. The psalmist's enemies deny God's favour:** "Arise, O Lord, confront him, cast him down; deliver my life from the wicked with Your sword, with Your hand from men, O Lord, from men of the world who have their portion in this life, and whose belly You fill with Your hidden treasure" (verses 13,14). "Arise, O Lord" to confront the enemy. "Confront him" that he may admit You are the Almighty and the Most High. "Cast him down" as a lion casts down its prey. "Deliver my life from the wicked with Your sword", which is Your word, for You speak and it is done, You command and it comes into being. God's word delivers the psalmist from anxiety, fear and danger. Often the wicked believes he is ahead of us and that he has everything under control. Has not Saul rallied a whole army against one man-- David? But the Lord goes before the believer, turning the tide against the wicked, who believes he is something, who proves to be nothing at the end.

"Whose belly You fill with Your hidden treasure [good gifts]." Yet they alienate themselves from the truth and fill their hearts with the love of the world. They are in a far country, away from God, wasting their possessions with prodigal living, not wanting to live with God, and reluctant to return to Him in repentance. They enjoy His good gifts but refuse to acknowledge His authority! "They said to God, 'Depart from us! What can the Almighty do to them?'" (Job 22:17). Christ said, "For He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). Paul says to those who deny God's grace, "Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?" (Romans 2:4).

7.3. Third: The Psalmist Declares his Joy in the Lord

(verse 15)

- 1. He declares his joy in the Lord here on earth:** "As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness" (verse 15a). What a great difference there is between someone who loves the Lord and someone who absents himself from Him. Sin hides God's face from us, but when Christ justifies us we look into His face, thus receiving the fulfilment of His word: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). Because "...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).

There is a world of difference between the destiny of the persecuted wicked believer and the persecutor. The believer obtains his portions from the Lord and dwells in God's precious presence eternally, whereas the wicked receives his good things here in his earthly life, and is headed for everlasting destruction. The believer compares his spiritual aspirations with those of the wicked, without complaining of the earthly prosperity of the latter, because he recognises that his ultimate goal is to see God's face, even if he has to wait patiently on Him. The righteousness he receives from God makes him belong to God, while sin separates him from God. Moses enjoyed God, and God said of him, "I speak with him face to face, even plainly, and not in dark sayings; and he sees the form of the Lord" (Numbers 12:8).

- 2. He declares his joy in the Lord in eternity:** "I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness" (verse 15b). The calamities that passed by seemed like a long night, but he awoke afterward to be filled with the likeness of the Lord, which designates a renewal of his relationship with Him. He says elsewhere, "When I awake I am still with You" (Psalm 139:18). His being in the presence of the Lord is a living experience, a reality not an illusion. A day will come when he will be translated from this earthly life into a happy eternity. As his body is lowered down into the earth his soul will be expecting Christ's second coming to the earth to raise the dead. This translation is called "sleep", from which the believer wakes up to find himself in the radiant presence of the Lord He says, "I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness."

Today one reads the words of the psalmist in the light of the New Testament and sees them fulfilled in the words of the Apostle: "For in it [the gospel of Christ] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'" (Romans 1:17). The gospel is the declaration of the way of salvation.

These words were also fulfilled in the incarnation of Christ the Saviour, for he who has seen Him has seen the Father (John 14:9).

All these will be completely fulfilled when Christ comes again: "We know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). "They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads" (Revelations 22:4). Yes, Christ will come, and "will transform out lowly body, that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself" (Philippians 3:21).

What do you want to be? Do you want to "fill your belly with hidden treasures", thus making your earthly life your ultimate desire? Or see His face in righteousness, and be satisfied when you wake in His likeness? Choose life and live!

7.4. Questions

1. According to Psalm 17:1-5 God did four things to David. What are they?
2. In Psalm 17:15 David mentions two reasons for his joy. Mention them and comment briefly on each of them.

8. Psalm Eighteen

I will Love You, O Lord

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David the Servant of the Lord, who spoke to the Lord the words of this song on the day that the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. And he said:

1 I will love You, O Lord, my strength.

2 The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

3 I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from my enemies.

4 The pangs of death surrounded me, and the floods of ungodliness made me afraid.

5 The sorrows of Sheol surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me.

6 In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry came before Him, even to His ears.

7 Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations of the hills also quaked and were shaken, because He was angry.

8 Smoke went up from His nostrils, and devouring fire from His mouth; coals were kindled by it.

9 He bowed the heavens also, and came down with darkness under His feet.

10 And He rode upon a cherub, and flew; He flew upon the wings of the wind.

11 He made darkness His secret place; His canopy around Him was dark waters and thick clouds of the skies.

12 From the brightness before Him, His thick clouds passed with hailstones and coals of fire.

13 The Lord thundered from heaven, and the Most High uttered His voice, hailstones and coals of fire.

14 He sent out His arrows and scattered the foe, lightnings in abundance, and He vanquished them.

15 Then the channels of the sea were seen, the foundations of the world were uncovered at Your rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the breath of Your nostrils.

16 He sent from above, He took me; He drew me out of many waters.

- 17 He delivered me from my strong enemy, from those who hated me, for they were too strong for me.**
- 18 They confronted me in the day of my calamity, but the Lord was my support.**
- 19 He also brought me out into a broad place; He delivered me because He delighted in me.**
- 20 The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands He has recompensed me.**
- 21 For I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God.**
- 22 For all His judgments were before me, and I did not put away His statutes from me.**
- 23 I was also blameless before Him, and I kept myself from my iniquity.**
- 24 Therefore the Lord has recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in His sight.**
- 25 With the merciful You will show Yourself merciful; with a blameless man You will show Yourself blameless;**
- 26 With the pure You will show Yourself pure; and with the devious You will show Yourself shrewd.**
- 27 For You will save the humble people, but will bring down haughty looks.**
- 28 For You will light my lamp; the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness.**
- 29 For by You I can run against a troop, by my God I can leap over a wall.**
- 30 As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the Lord is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him.**
- 31 For who is God, except the Lord? And who is a rock, except our God?**
- 32 It is God who arms me with strength, and makes my way perfect.**
- 33 He makes my feet like the feet of deer, and sets me on my high places.**
- 34 He teaches my hands to make war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.**
- 35 You have also given me the shield of Your salvation; Your right hand has held me up, Your gentleness has made me great.**
- 36 You enlarged my path under me, so my feet did not slip.**
- 37 I have pursued my enemies and overtaken them; neither did I turn back again till they were destroyed.**
- 38 I have wounded them, so that they could not rise; they have fallen under my feet.**
- 39 For You have armed me with strength for the battle; You have subdued under me those who rose up against me.**
- 40 You have also given me the necks of my enemies, so that I destroyed those who hated me.**

- 41 They cried out, but there was none to save; even to the Lord, but He did not answer them.**
- 42 Then I beat them as fine as the dust before the wind; I cast them out like dirt in the streets.**
- 43 You have delivered me from the strivings of the people; You have made me the head of the nations; a people I have not known shall serve me.**
- 44 As soon as they hear of me they obey me; the foreigners submit to me.**
- 45 The foreigners fade away, and come frightened from their hideouts.**
- 46 The Lord lives! Blessed be my Rock! Let the God of my salvation be exalted.**
- 47 It is God who avenges me, and subdues the peoples under me;**
- 48 He delivers me from my enemies. You also lift me up above those who rise against me; You have delivered me from the violent man.**
- 49 Therefore I will give thanks to You, O Lord, among the Gentiles, and sing praises to Your name.**
- 50 Great deliverance He gives to His king, and shows mercy to His anointed, to David and his descendants forevermore.**

David wrote this psalm after his troubles with King Saul, who had pursued him, were ended, and after he got rid of his enemies who had harassed him continually. By that time he was king in Jerusalem. God had sent Nathan the prophet to him, "I took you from the sheepfold, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people, over Israel. And I have been with you wherever you have gone, and have cut off all your enemies from before you, and have made you a great name, like the name of the great men who are on the earth... Also the Lord tells you that He will make you a house" (2 Samuel 7:8-11). David considered his past life, saw God's grace in each step he took, and his heart overflowed with gratitude to the loving and faithful God who raised him up to be a king, and helped him defeat his enemies-- both from without and within. Therefore he wrote this psalm to sing it first with his family, as we read in 2 Samuel 22. He revised it later to be sung in public worship, as it is found in this psalm. Although he thanks God who enthroned him as king, David calls himself in the heading of the psalm "the servant of the Lord", not the king of Israel. He considered his servanthood to God a higher privilege than kingship. This is the same precious title Moses received (Joshua 2:1,13,15). David did not write down this psalm to boast about the things God gave him, but to admit how graciously God dealt with him. This is what all of us should do.

This is a Messianic psalm, i.e. a prophetic psalm concerning Jesus Christ who came into the world, faced troubles, overcame them and extended His kingdom over all the earth. The author of the Hebrews quoted the second verse of the psalm and put it into Christ's mouth: "'I will put My trust in Him.'" And again: 'Here am I and the children whom You have given Me.'" (Hebrews 2:13). Paul quoted verse 49 of our psalm in Romans 15:9. "And that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written, 'For this reason I will confess to

You [or give thanks to You] among the Gentiles, and sing to Your name." This is exactly what happened to the Gentiles in Christ's time.

The victory of King David pointed forward to the victory of the Messiah the Son of David. And indeed one greater than David is here! Similarly, Christ's victory is the victory of all who love Him and belong to Him, as the last verse of our psalm states, "Great deliverance He gives to His king, and shows mercy to His anointed, to David and his descendants forevermore."

The psalm includes the following:

- Part one: Celebrating a miraculous deliverance (verses 1-24)
- Part two: Celebrating a military victory (verses 25-50)

8.1. PART ONE - Celebrating a Miraculous Deliverance

(verses 1-24)

In these verses we see the psalmist:

- First: Declaring his love for the Lord (verses 1-3)
- Second: Delivered miraculously (verses 4-19)
- Third: Pledging to consecrate himself to the Lord (verses 20-24)

8.1.1. First: The Psalmist Declares his Love for the Lord

(verses 1-3)

1. **The Lord is the object of the psalmist's love:** "I will love You, O Lord, my strength" (verse 1). Here are a child's emotions being expressed to his Father so tenderly, for God is his first and strongest love. By this he declared his obedience to the first and greatest commandment (Matthew 22:36). We, likewise, should respond to His love with genuine love, for we love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). As David came into power, he must have recalled many factors that helped him rise to the throne. They were his friends (like Jonathan) who helped him and whom he loved; his friends' concern for his personal safety in accordance with the divine commandment: "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Matthew 19:19); and his love for nature and the universe that inspired him to compose the psalms and lift his morale. Nevertheless, he puts first things first, for God is the One who deserves to be loved and held dear first and above all. Out of this love for God flows all love for other creatures. For everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him (1 John 5:1). It is a true believer who loves God more than God's gifts, who sings out the words of Paul: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or

sword? As it is written: 'For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.' Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. 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 8:35-39).

Christ asked His disciple Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You'" (John 21:15). Neither Peter nor anyone else could have such love unless the Lord is his "strength". The Lord gave His disciples the power of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and from that time on they began to love through the power He had given them, because apart from Him they could do nothing (Acts 1:8). God is indeed the strength of our life, accomplishment and victory; He is our life itself and apart from Him we are lifeless.

2. **The motive for love (verses 2,3):** The perfection of God's attributes make us love Him. The psalmist lists in verse 2 seven attributes, which is the number of divine perfection.
 1. **The Lord is "my rock":** David recalled the rocks and the caves that provided him with shelter as Saul was chasing him, but never managing to catch or harm him (1 Samuel 23:25,28). The same imagery is employed by Moses in his song (Deuteronomy 32:4,18,30,31,37). The Lord is the believer's rock of shelter and hiding place; the unchanging rock.
 2. **The Lord is "my fortress":** A fortress is a stronghold (1 Samuel 22:4; 24:2). The believer's stronghold is the name of the Lord, the strong tower to which the righteous run and are safe (Proverbs 18:10). We take refuge in the Lord when we abide in Him and He in us.
 3. **The Lord is "my deliverer":** This expressed a greater trust in God's love, for a warrior may stand on a rock but still get hurt by a deadly arrow. He may be in the safety of a fortress, but the fortress may collapse or be stormed by the enemies. David says, however, that the Lord is the deliverer. "Though war should rise against me, in this I will be confident" (Psalm 27:3b).
 4. **The Lord is "my God":** "...with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning" (James 1:17). Though the Creator of heaven and earth, He condescends in love and allows the believer to call him "my God". "My beloved is mine, and I am his" (Song of Solomon 2:16).
 5. **The Lord is "my shield":** The shield is a piece of wood covered with leather. It has a chain at the back, with which the soldier holds the shield in his left hand to defend him from the arrows and firebrands shot in his direction. In the same way, the Lord protects us like a shield from all the shots of the enemy, be this enemy a man, an animal or a demon.

6. **The Lord is "the horn of my salvation":** The horn signified irresistible power. It was used both as an offensive and defensive weapon. Likewise, the Lord is the "horn" of the believer; He keeps him from getting hurt and grants him victory.
7. **The Lord is "my stronghold":** A stronghold is usually built on a mountain-top, surrounded by high walls that make it inaccessible. The Hebrew word may also refer to the city of refuge to which an unintentional manslayer may flee, and where he may take refuge as long as he stays in it.
3. **The result of this love:** "I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised so shall I be saved from my enemies" (verse 3). The psalmist puts his trust in the Lord in present and future, for the Lord Himself is the deliverer. Therefore the psalmist calls upon Him in the confidence of love, asking for everlasting salvation from his enemies. Whenever and wherever the enemy comes as an attacking lion, God rescues His servant, owing to the intimate personal relationship between them. For this reason the psalmist calls upon the Lord to rescue him from the evil enemy, and from the evil day. If the enemy has a chance to attack the believer on an evil day, Providence, which is always at hand, will rush to his aid and give him security.

8.1.2. Second: The Psalmist's Miraculous Deliverance

(verses 4-19)

1. **The danger he escaped from (verses 4,5):** The psalmist was delivered from a great danger, which he describes with four figures of speech: As gallows set up for him to ensure death, as a man drowning in roaring waters who cannot rescue himself, as a captive who fell into a net and as someone who was trapped in a snare. He says, "The pangs [lit. cords] of death encompassed me, and the floods of ungodliness made me afraid" (verse 4). Saul's ungodly counsels aimed at destroying him, but the Lord rescued him from sure death. He was in danger of being buried: "The sorrows [lit. ropes] of Sheol surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me" (verse 5). It seemed like there was a rope pulling him to the grave, but the Lord rescued him. The more severe the dangers we face the stronger and clearer God's salvation becomes.
2. **Prayer is the means of deliverance:** "In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry came before Him, even to His ears" (verse 6). His prayers were continual and so persistent that God heard them from His temple (Solomon's temple had not been built yet). Sometimes he prayed in a low voice, "called". Other time he saw the danger and "cried out". In both cases the Lord was not irritated with him, but heard and rescued him. Whether we call upon the Lord with groans or whispers, or whether we cry out, He still hears us. Prayer is a higher door to heaven, where "my God" dwells, the One who hears prayer and to whom all flesh comes, especially his believing children.
3. **The description of deliverance (verses 7-19)**

1. **It is by the power of the divine Helper:** "Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations of the hills also quaked and were shaken, because He was angry. Smoke went up from His nostrils, and devouring fire from His mouth; coals were kindled by it. He bowed the heavens also, and came down with darkness under feet" (verses 7-9). This descriptive picture shows us that God intervened in a powerful way. The steadfast things have been moved, for because of the abundance of God's power the house was shaken (Acts 4:31), the prison gates were opened (Acts 16:26) and hard hearts trembled (Acts 16:29). The One who established the earth terrifies and shakes it, while no eyelid of His children's flickers! As God reveals His wrath against those who persecute His people, fire seems to come out from His mouth to devour them, and smoke rises up from His nostrils, because "he who touches you touches the apple of His eye" (Zechariah 2:8). God descended to rescue the believer: "He bowed the heavens... and came down." How great is His compassion in Christ, yet many people do not understand it because "the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it" (John 1:5)! As to those who comprehend the Holy Spirit, He enlightens their insights to see how "every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; the crooked places shall be made straight, and the rough places shall be made smooth" (Isaiah 40:4). For "I who speak in righteousness, [am] mighty to save," says the Lord (Isaiah 63:1).
2. **It is a speedy deliverance:** "He rode upon a cherub, and flew; He flew upon the wings of the wind" (verse 10). A cherub is a servant two-winged angel who guarded the way to the tree of life (Genesis 3:24). Moses had two figures made in the form of real cherubim and placed them on the cover of the ark of the covenant (Exodus 25:17-22) to express the dwelling of the Lord's glory. The prophet Ezekiel saw "cherubim" (the plural of cherub) in the presence of the Lord (Ezekiel 10:1-3). In this eloquent poetical image we see the speed and power of divine deliverance, for deliverance rushes like a bird that flies "upon the wings of the wind". The baby Moses in the ark was delivered in this way (Exodus 2:5). Peter was imprisoned and the church was praying for him, and suddenly God sent His angel to open the prison gates, loose Peter of his chains and lead him out into the open (Acts 12). The Lord is slow to anger but quick to mercy; He does not desire to destroy people, but that all should come to repentance.
3. **It is through secret methods:** "He made darkness His secret place; His canopy around Him was dark waters and thick clouds of the skies" (verse 11). The soldiers guarded the sealed grave very carefully, and their chiefs had told them that the disciples of Christ would come to steal his body from the grave. Yet, they could see neither Christ who rose nor the angels who came down to celebrate His resurrection (Matthew 28). There were 16 soldiers guarding Peter in prison, but they could not see the angel who came to release him (Acts 12). God has His own secret methods of delivering the believers, which could only be perceived by the eyes of faith, because

- they are a characteristic of God's dealings which are not manifest to the enemy. It has been said that God is a God "who hides Himself" (Isaiah 45:15). Yes, He hides Himself from the eyes of the enemy. For "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter" (Proverbs 25:2).
4. **It is manifest for everyone to see:** "From the brightness before Him, His thick clouds passed with hailstones and coals of fire" (verse 12). This is an image of thunder that accompanies lightning, thus sound and light together declare the greatness of divine power, as it happened the day when God smote the Egyptians with hail (Exodus 9:23,24). Help came secretly, but its result was manifest for all to see. The same happened with David: Saul wanted to kill him, but the end result was that Saul took his own life, and David ascended to the throne after being unanimously elected by all the people.
 5. **It reveals God's divine might:** (verses 13-18) God's might is evident in four things:
 1. **God's voice:** "The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the Most High uttered His voice, hailstones and coals of fire" (verse 13). David's object of thanksgiving was the same thing that terrified his enemies, because the Most High God is his help, the One who dwells on high, whose name is holy. God's judgement to the wicked brings comfort to the believer. The amazing thing is that God uses opposites: hailstones and coals of fire. He is the Master of nature!
 2. **God's arsenal:** "He sent out His arrows and scattered the foe, lightnings in abundance, and He vanquished them" (verse 14). Lightning flashed like mighty arrows, causing the foe to be scattered. "The sun and moon stood still in their habitation; at the light of Your arrows they went, at the shining of Your glittering spear" (Habakkuk 3:11).
 3. **God's power:** "Then the channels of water were seen, and the foundations of the world were uncovered at Your rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the breath of Your nostrils" (verse 15). The water of the Red Sea and the Jordan River receded, so that the ground could be seen! "With the blast of Your nostrils the waters were gathered together; the floods stood upright like a heap; and the depth congealed in the heart of the sea" (Exodus 15:8). The Egyptians had the most advanced technology of the day, and the children of Israel were an oppressed, helpless people. Nevertheless, Providence divided the sea and protected the congregation of believers.
 4. **God's deliverance:** "He sent from above, He took me; He drew out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy, from those who hated me, for they were too strong for me. They confronted me in the day of my calamity, but the Lord was my support" (verses 16-18). A support is a staff on which a tired or weak person supports himself when he cannot stand on his own for a long time.

6. **Totality of His help:** "He also brought me out into a broad place; He delivered me because He delighted in me" (verse 19). Free grace is the basis for all God's dealings with His people. He does not spare any effort till He has saved the believer. Such was the experience of all believers in all ages. It was the experience of Joseph as he came out of prison into the palace, of David as he came out from the cave of Adullam to the throne, and of Peter as Christ called him to be fisher of men and not an ordinary fisherman! God delivers those who wait for Him and love Him from the distress of their sins and the torment of their conscience through forgiveness, as well as from all danger that threatens their bodies. They are saved by a loving hand stretched down from above. God saves them because He delights in them, for His delight is with the sons of men (Proverbs 8:31). This free gift of grace prompts them to give their lives over completely to Him, which the psalmist pledged to do in verses 20-24.

8.1.3. Third: The Psalmist Pledges to Consecrate himself to the Lord (verses 20-24)

The psalmist began his pledge of consecration (verse 20) and concluded it with a declaration of his innocence from Saul's accusations (verse 24). David was a worthy soldier of Saul's, a loyal son-in-law, a faithful follower and a noble forgiver. For when Saul fell into his hands twice he did not hurt him, but rather said, "The Lord forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the Lord's anointed" (1 Samuel 24,26). David was innocent in the people's eyes, but was not absolutely innocent in God's eyes, for in God's eyes no one is good but God. Still, David said in that situation, "The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands He has recompensed me... Therefore the Lord has recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in His sight" (verses 20,24).

David's testimony of his righteousness is true, for it is not based on his good deeds, and does not deny complete dependence on God's grace. It is a testimony of this life-changing grace. Those who have not experienced God's saving grace cannot justify themselves before men.

Where then does righteousness come from? The answer can be found in Paul's statements: "not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith" (Philippians 3:9). "...knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified" (Galatians 2:16). "...being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24). So the Lord will reward the psalmist according to the righteousness He has imparted to him, for God who made him a vessel for honour, will surely honour him (2 Timothy 2:21).

Between verse 20 and verse 24 there are three verses that speak of three pledges the psalmist

made to God:

1. **A pledge of obedience:** "For I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God" (verse 21). Christ said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15), which could only be kept by means of the Holy Spirit who dwells in the believers. "I have kept" and "have not wickedly departed"-- the two go together, for obedience is accompanied by listening and not departing. The believer who loves the Lord keeps the ways of the Lord and obeys Him, and does not find the Lord's commandments heavy on him owing to his love for Him (1 John 5:3). "For the love of the Lord constrains us, because we judge this: that if one died for all, then all died" (2 Corinthians 5:14).
2. **A pledge of studying the word of God:** "For all His judgements were before me, and I did not put away His statutes from me" (verse 22). The psalmist put God's word before his eyes, fulfilling the commandment of the wise man: "Bind them continually upon your heart; tie them around your neck... Bind them on your fingers. Write them on the tablet of your heart" (Proverbs 6:21; 7:3). His motto was: "Then I would not be ashamed, when I look into all Your commandments... Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (Psalm 119:6,11). He could say, "I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved" (Psalm 16:8).
3. **A pledge of cleanness of heart:** "I was also blameless before Him, and I kept myself from iniquity" (verse 23). Iniquity is perverseness. David purposed to be blameless, so that God testified of him, saying, "I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all my will" (Acts 13:22). He got rid of the sin that so easily ensnared him, so the Lord repaid him according to his righteousness and cleanness of hands, and took him from keeping watch over the sheep to watching over His people.

8.2. PART TWO - Celebrating a Military Victory

(verses 25-50)

This part includes the following:

- First: God's moral law (verses 25,26)
- Second: All victory is from the Lord (verses 27-36)
- Third: Total defeat of the enemy (verses 37-42)
- Fourth: The kingdom's security from within and without (verses 43-45)
- Fifth: Thanksgiving and praise to the Lord (46-50)

8.2.1. First: God's Moral Law

(verses 25,26)

The psalmist spells out a moral law, which is the fact that God is merciful, blameless and pure to the merciful, blameless and pure person. However, with the devious God is shrewd! Man's attitude determines God's attitude toward him. A person must have some good qualities before God can show him mercy, blamelessness and holiness. The meaning is clear: "Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7). Again Christ said, "Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them" (Matthew 7:12). God's mercy is shown to the merciful: "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7). Each and every man will be weighed in the divine balance, and with the same measure he uses, it will be measured back to him. God leaves the perverse who doesn't want to repent in his own perversion to destroy himself, as He said, "If you walk contrary to Me, then I will walk contrary to you, and I will punish you yet seven times for your sins" (Leviticus 26:23,24), and as Eliphaz said, "He catches the wise in their own craftiness, and the counsel of the cunning comes quickly upon them" (Job 5:13). Solomon expressed it this way, "The curse of God is on the house of the wicked, but He blesses the habitation of the just. Surely He scorns the scornful, but gives grace to the humble" (Proverbs 3:33,34). Paul said, "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting" (Romans 1:28). Far be it from God to be shrewd, He only punishes the devious by delivering him into the hands of a more devious person, just as Jacob, who cheated his father and brother, was delivered into the hands of his uncle, who in turn cheated him, then into the hands of his children who sold his son Joseph as a slave!

No doubt David remembers how God honoured him and all the faithful people in the earth, as much as he remembered the painful end of Saul (1 Samuel 31:1-7), Absalom (2 Samuel 18:6-9) and Ahitophel (2 Samuel 17:23). In all this God was merciful with the merciful, and gave the devious one to drink from the same cup he gave others to drink from!

8.2.2. Second: All Victory is from the Lord

(verses 27-36)

After stating God's moral law, David said that his personal experience proves the validity of this law. The Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever he chooses (Daniel 4:32). He chose to give the kingdom to His servant David.

1. David's experience:

- 1. God saves the humble:** "For You save the humble people, but will bring down haughty looks" (verse 27). The humble are those who learned humility in the school of suffering and persecution, as God said, "I will leave in your midst a meek and humble people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord" (Zephaniah 3:12). The people who have haughty looks, however, are the proud whom the Lord hates (Proverbs 6:17). The prophet said concerning them, "The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be

- exalted in that day. For the day of the Lord of hosts shall come upon everything proud and lofty, upon everything lifted up" (Isaiah 2:11,12).
2. **The Lord enlightens the lives of the humble:** "For You will light my lamp; the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness" (verse 28). Since David was humble the Lord lit his lamp, so that strong winds could not put it out. Enlightening the darkness means that He extended mercy to him forever and granted him a prosperous life, for "The light of the righteous rejoices, but the lamp of the wicked will be put out" (Proverbs 13:9). "Truly the light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun" (Ecclesiastes 11:7). Christ is the light of the humble who follow Him, for He said, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12). This is true because "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4). Therefore David was called "the lamp of Israel" (2 Samuel 22:17). God's presence with the believer sheds light on his life, so that he says to the Lord, "In Your light we see light" (Psalm 36:9).
 3. **God gives victory to the humble:** "For by You I can run against a troop, and by my God I can leap over a wall" (verse 29). Perhaps David was referring to the way he took the stronghold of Zion from the Jebusites (2 Samuel 5:6-10). Thanks to God's salvation (verse 27) and to the light of life he received from God (verse 28), David ran against the troops of his enemies and won by climbing over the walls of their fortified cities. The same thing happened when he attacked the invaders from Ziklag and defeated them (1 Samuel 30). The Lord gave him victory to scale the walls of the stronghold of Zion and call it "the City of David".
 4. **God's promises to the humble:** "As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the Lord is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him" (verse 30). After so many times of experiencing the Lord, Moses said in his last song, "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). He gives true promises: "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart" (Psalm 19:7,8). Solomon said, "Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him" (Proverbs 30:5).
2. **David's victory (verses 31-36):**

In these verses David says that there are certain necessary military qualities for a king who usually leads his people into battle. All these qualities were granted to David by God. God kept David whole and healthy and trained him on how to use the sling, the sword, and the spear as he defended his sheep. Likewise, God taught him how to wait for God in every difficult circumstance. All these were experiences and skills that supported him as he rose from keeping watch over the sheep to watching over God's people.

1. **God is the only God:** "For who is God, except the Lord? And who is a rock, except our God?" (verse 31). The heathen worship many idols, but there is only One true God, the Creator of heaven and earth, of whom Moses said in his song, comparing Him with the idols, "For their rock is not like our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges" (Deuteronomy 32:31). Pharaoh's army was drowned in the sea, and the humble escaped, although Pharaoh was a strong ruler.
2. **God is the only beneficent (verses 32-36)**
 1. **He removes the obstacles from the way of the believer:** "It is God who arms me with strength, and makes my way perfect" (verse 32). He strengthens His servant, bracing his loins with the girdle of truth (Ephesians 6:14). He prepares the way for him by removing all pitfalls and difficulties from before him until victory is completed. God's way is perfect (verse 30) and He makes the way of His servant perfect, too. He commanded, "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). What a great difference there is between divine perfection and human perfection; for human perfection is the blamelessness of intent, while God's perfection is an absolute one.
 2. **He strengthens the feet of the believer:** "He makes my feet like the feet of deer, and sets me on my high places" (verse 33). Thus he can attack and retreat as swiftly as an agile deer without slipping. God gave him a higher place than all his enemies, which was the fulfilment of Moses' blessing: "Your enemies shall submit to you, and you shall tread down their high places" (Deuteronomy 33:29). He experienced that "The Lord God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, and He will make me walk on my high hills" (Habakkuk 3:19).
 3. **He strengthens the hands of the believer:** "He teaches my hands to make war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze" (verse 34).
 4. **He rescues the believer:** "You have also given me the shield of Your salvation; Your right hand has held me up, Your gentleness has made me great" (verse 35). The shield of salvation is the shield of trust in the Lord. This verse lists three things through which God rescues David in his wars: salvation, help and greatness. Salvation is by the protection that the shield of the Lord offers, help is by God's support, and God's gentleness and kindness made him great. David will be able, through God's help, to run fast to attack and defend, and will have the strength to bend metals, but he will still need someone to defend him: He still needs the Lord to be his shield, his support and the One who makes him great. David seems to be joining his ancestor Jacob in saying, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant" (Genesis 32:10).
 5. **He makes room for the believer:** "You enlarged my path under me; so that my feet did not slip" (verse 36). God gives His servant enough room to move freely,

and enough strength to move forward steadily: "When you walk, your steps will not be hindered, and when you run, you will not stumble" (Proverbs 4:12). What a great blessing it is to be free to move without slipping.

8.2.3. Third: Total Defeat of the Enemy

(verses 37-42)

The psalmist was able to defeat his enemies through the power God gave him, which he explained in verses 31-36.

He ran after his enemies and overtook them, and determined not to turn back again till they were destroyed (verse 37). He crushed them to a point where they fell at his feet and could no more rise again (verse 38). The Lord reinforced Him with strength till he was able to subdue the enemies under him (verse 39), and those who survived turned their backs and ran (verse 40). God's promise to Moses was fulfilled in his life: "The Lord will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before your face; they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways" (Deuteronomy 28:7). Triumph belongs to the Lord, so thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ (2 Corinthians 2:14).

The defeated enemies cried out bitterly, asking their friends for help, then their idols. Lastly, they asked the Lord's help in desperation, but He did not hear them (verses 41,42) according to the moral law he had illustrated in verses 25,26. Prayer is an effective weapon that all people turn to when in danger, just as the seamen of Jonah's ship did on their way to Tarshish. The Lord hears prayer; to Him all flesh comes. He answers the prayer of a penitent sinner as he calls upon Him, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" He gives him of the abundance of His riches so that he should know how much He loves him and that He does not desire to destroy him. But out of love He admonishes sinners, saying, "Give glory to the Lord your God before He cause darkness, and before your feet stumble on the dark mountains, and while you are looking for light, He turns it into... dense darkness" (Jeremiah 13:16).

Today, in the light of Christ's teachings, pray to God for our enemies. Ask Him to change their hearts and attitudes, and ask for the blessing of repentance on their behalf, saying the same thing a certain pious man said, "I kill my enemies by making them my friends." At the same time, we realise that the only war we are supposed to join is that against one's soul's desires, which lust against the spirit. Therefore we crucify our physical passions and desires (Galatians 5:24). We struggle against this present, evil world, not loving the world nor the things in the world, whose standards and conceptions differ from divine ones, and raising the motto: "God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14). Again we struggle against the wiles of the devil "Lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Corinthians 2:11). The Apostle Paul said, "I fear, lest somehow, as the

serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:3). Let us endeavour, therefore, to keep our minds under the control of the Holy Spirit, "And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you" (Romans 16:20).

8.2.4. Fourth: Establishing the Kingdom from Within and Without

(verses 43-45)

David met with great opposition from within and without, and the Lord delivered him from both. He said about the opposition from within, "You have delivered me from the strivings of the people" (verse 43a), and about the opposition from without, "A people I have not known serve me" (verse 43b).

At the beginning of his reign David confronted a lot of inner opposition as he was in Saul's house and partly involved in the government (2 Samuel 3:1). He met the same kind of opposition during the unsuccessful coup d'état led by Absalom (2 Samuel 15). The Lord delivered him from all these. As to the opposition from without, it was from the surrounding nations, which he also defeated (2 Samuel 8:1-14). It was during his reign that it was said, "And when all the kings who were servants to Hadadezer saw that they were defeated by Israel, they made peace with Israel and served them. So the Syrians were afraid to help the people of Ammon any more" (2 Samuel 10:19). Again the Lord delivered him from all these, and raised him as a ruler over his people.

8.2.5. Fifth: Thanksgiving and Praise

(verses 46-50)

David began this psalm with a declaration of his love for the Lord and attributed seven attributes to Him, which mean perfection of attributes. Throughout the psalm David praised the Lord who raised him up as king and bestowed total victory on him from within and without. In the last five verses he repeats this thanksgiving again in a final doxology, in which he lists seven great attributes of God.

1. **"The Lord lives!"**: (verse 46) He is not like the dead idols. David experienced the goodness of the Lord of all the earth. What Joshua said came to happen with David, "By this you shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites..." (Joshua 3:10). God is alive, and will grant life to those who believe in Him and abide in Him.
2. **"Blessed be my Rock!"**: (verse 46) The God who has no variation or shadow of turning deserves to be blessed and thanked.
3. **"Let the God of my salvation be exalted!"**: (verse 46) He is exalted high above everything that exalts itself against Him, His will and His people. Christ also was raised

up to the right hand of God and received a name above all names. As we kneel down to Him in surrender and obedience, He lifts us up above falling into sin, and establishes our feet on the rock.

4. **"It is God who avenges me"**: (verse 47) David did not avenge himself, but let God avenge him (Romans 12:19). This was his attitude to Saul (1 Samuel 24:12), Nabal (1 Samuel 25:29), and the rest of his opponents after God delivered the government into his hands (2 Samuel 4:8).
5. **"And subdues the peoples under me"**: (verse 47) he does not say that in pride, but in order to give credit to the One who did it through him.
6. **"He delivers me from my enemies"**: (verse 48) "Who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us" (2 Corinthians 1:10).
7. **"You also lift me up above those who rise against me"**: (verse 48) The uplifted God lifted up and rescued His servant David.

For all these reasons David decided to sing a song of thanksgiving to the Lord among his people and the Gentiles (verse 49), which Paul quoted in Romans 15:9, telling the Lord that He gives "great deliverance to His king" (verse 50). Then he thanks the Lord who extended His mercy to David and his descendants forevermore.

This prophecy was completely fulfilled in Christ: "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 judgement and justice from that time forward, even for ever" (Isaiah 9:7). Finally, we find it interesting to mention that the original Hebrew uses the singular when talking about David's descendants, pointing to one person in particular: Christ (Galatians 3:16).

To this great Christ we submit ourselves and surrender, saying together with Thomas, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28).

8.3. Questions

1. In Psalm 18:2 the psalmist says seven things about God. Record them.
2. In Psalm 18:21-23 the psalmist makes three vows. What are they?

9. Psalm Nineteen

God Reveals Himself

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.

1 The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork.

2 Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge.

3 There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard.

4 Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them He has set a tabernacle for the sun,

5 Which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoices like a strong man to run its race.

6 Its rising is from one end of heaven, and its circuit to the other end; and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

7 The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;

8 The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;

9 The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

10 More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

11 Moreover by them Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward.

12 Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults.

13 Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression.

14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.

This psalm emphasises God's continual revelation of himself, and His continual communication with mankind. He has never been silent, because he loves mankind, communicates with them and speaks with them. He has revealed Himself in nature: in its beauty, accuracy and order. In the past he spoke to the patriarchs through prophets in many and diverse ways, and recorded His words in the Holy Bible: in the Pentateuch, the Writings and the Old Testament. He also speaks to people of His character through the pious and the righteous, whose good works the world sees and glorifies their Father in heaven. It was through God's revelation of Himself through nature and through His inspired word that the world was prepared to receive the final Word and the perfect revelation in Christ, His living Word.

Today we can see God in nature, and in His holy and inspired Word, as well as in the conduct of believers who love Him. Yet, we have a crystal-clear vision of Him in the person of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, who said, "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John

14:9).

The psalm includes the following:

- First: God reveals His character in nature (verses 1-6)
- Second: God reveals His character in His holy Word (verses 7-11)
- Third: God reveals His character in the believers (verses 12-14)

9.1. First: God Reveals His Character in Nature

(verses 1-6)

The psalmist says that the whole universe speaks of God's glory and tells of the work of His hands. The universe is a colossal temple, full of preachers who preach that there is a perfect Creator. Perhaps the best preacher of all is the sun. These preachers speak volumes of God's greatness and love. In the first six verses of the psalm the following can be seen:

1. **The object of nature's discourse:** Nature glorifies the Lord and tells us about Him.
 1. **It shows us the glory of God:** His glory is the revelation of His presence with might and brightness. It is a specific glory of His own character, which is too awesome for a flesh-and-blood man to look upon.
 2. **It shows us God's power:** "For behold, he who forms mountains, and creates the wind, who declares to man what his thought is... He made the Pleiades and Orion, He turns the shadow of death into morning and makes the day dark as night; He calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the face of the earth; the Lord is His name" (Amos 4:13; 5:8). This creative power is the same power that keeps all things under control, for it holds the planets in their orbits, ensures the continuity of creation, since all things exist and were created by His will (Revelations 4:11).
 3. **It shows God's wisdom:** The universe runs with such a terrific order that surpasses man's ability. "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth... For He spoke and it was done; He commanded and it stood fast" (Psalm 33:6,9). "Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things, who brings out their host by number; He calls them all by name, by the greatness of His might and the strength of His power; not one is missing" (Isaiah 40:26).
 4. **It shows us God's faithfulness:** The earth will continue bringing forth grass, the herb that yields seed according to its kind, and the tree that yields fruit, whose seed is in itself according to its kind. The two great lights will continue ruling the day and the night, and they will be for signs and season, and for days and years (Genesis 1). The faithful God grants His full blessings to people every day, day in and day out.

2. The characteristics of nature's discourse:

1. **Continual:** It goes from day to day and from night to night, as if it were a choir whose voices form an uninterrupted sequence of praise; it "utters speech" (verse 2a). He calls us for work by day, so we get up and go to work and witness God's hand with us in all we do. "And night unto night reveals knowledge" (verse 2b). He calls us to rest as we go to bed, keeps us through the darkness of the night, giving us a chance to meditate on the incidents of the day; in order to review our attitudes and readjust the course of our lives, to thank Him for His benefits, renew our commitments to live with Him and obey Him, and resign ourselves completely to Him, so that He would grant us a new beginning. The night is a call for rest, meditation and preparation for what the next day will bring. The word "reveals" has the connotation of an fluent and effusive, yet silent, discourse.
2. **Quiet:** "There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard" (verse 3). Truly, how eloquent silence is! It is the language that all creatures understand in the universe!
3. **Universal:** "Their line has gone out through the earth, and their words to the end of the world" (verse 4). Paul says, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed: 'Their sound has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world'" (Romans 10:17,18).
4. **Clear:** (verses 4-6) The psalmist chooses the sun as the greatest witness of God's glory, and pictures him as a hero-king, for whom God set a tabernacle (a tent or a decorated canopy in the higher heavens), from which he goes out with full splendour as a bridegroom full of vigour, elegance and gladness. The sun is also pictured here as an athlete who enjoys running the race in his orbit, making his presence felt by all people as he disseminates light and warmth throughout the universe. When men look up to the sun, they realise the magnificence and beauty of its Creator, who brought it into being with all His wisdom, might and faithfulness, in such a way that nothing is hidden from its heat.

Mankind, however, needs a stronger and more satisfactory revelation. Even if nature's revelation to man before the fall was satisfactory, it is no more satisfactory to the sinner who needs to be reconciled to God. Therefore, man in his fallen and lost state paid homage to the sun, the moon and the stars. Sin separates man from God, and man is left with a need for someone to guide him to a way of reconciliation with God. For this reason God reveals the way to salvation as He speaks to us in His inspired word, as well as in the person of Jesus Christ, who is the living word of God. Jesus is the "sun of righteousness" (Malachi 4:2). "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth... And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace" (John 1:14,16).

9.2. Second: God Reveals His Character in His Holy Word

(verses 7-11)

Nature has told man of God's greatness, but man went astray and worshipped the things God created. In his lost state he does not know how to return, so God gives him His word to bring him back to the truth. In these five verses we see:

1. The characteristics of God's word (verses 7-9)

1. **Perfect:** "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul" (verse 7a). The law of the Lord refers to the law of Moses, which includes all the divine regulations recorded in the Pentateuch. The law converts the soul in two ways: By revealing to man how inadequate he is, and by pointing him to the way to salvation. When a man compares his state with what the perfect law expects of him he finds out that he is inadequate, as well as perverse and in need of someone to restore him. The law reveals our inadequacy, weakness and inability to reach what God wants for us. This urges us to turn to the eternal mercies of God that are embodied in the atonement. Thus we obtain what the Apostle spoke of as he said, "Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Galatians 3:24). The righteousness of Christ does not stop at restoring our souls; it goes further to bring us back to the place where we fell into sin, and places us at the beginning of the path of holiness.
2. **Sure:** "The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple" (verse 7b). He calls it testimony because it testifies to the divine, inspired truth, and in the same sense the gospel is called a witness (1 John 5:9). It is a sure testimony that never deceives or offers a part of the truth. According to the apostolic command to "test all things" (1 Thessalonians 5:21), we have to test any message that we get. The message of the Holy Spirit that we find on the pages of the Bible, though, does not need to be tested because the testimonies of the Lord are sure and truthful always. When a man humbles himself and in meekness accepts the Word of God, the word can save him from his folly (James 1:21). All the promises in this Book are sure and trustworthy.
3. **Right:** "The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart" (verse 8a). The word is perfect, converting the lost; sure, making wise the simple; and right, rejoicing the heart of whoever accepts it. It is right, without any perversity, and is not partial at all, nor changes according the circumstances. As we read the Bible we never find a commandment cancelling a previous one, or one yet to be issued! God's mind is clear and the words that come from God are upright just as He is. Because they are God-breathed they can lead whoever believes them to an upright life.
4. **Pure:** "The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eye" (verse 8b). Its purity is derived from the purity of the One who gave it. It makes us eager to live a

pure life, and shows us the way to it. It reveals to us all that is on God's mind: "For the commandment is a lamp, and law is light; reproofs of instruction are the way of life" (Proverbs 6:23). It is the pure milk needed for our growth (1 Peter 2:2). It enlightens the eye to see whatever things are true, noble, just, pure, lovely and of good report (Philippians 4:8).

5. **Enduring:** "The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever" (verse 9a). The psalmist calls the Word of God the fear of the Lord because the Word of God makes the one who reads and hears it fear God and revere Him. It is enduring because God preserves it. He has given His divine revelation to mankind in order to save them from their sins, and He will surely preserve this revelation forever. Christ said, "For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled" (Matthew 5:18). God's promises, too, endure forever: "Not a word failed of any good thing which the Lord had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass" (Joshua 21:45; 23:14). That is why the word of God must be our constitution and guide at all times.
6. **True:** "The judgements of the Lord are true and righteous altogether" (verse 9b). He calls them the judgements of the Lord because they are the decisive words of God. They are always true because they are just. When God's word says to man, "You are a sinner", then he is a sinner indeed. When it says to him that God expects him to be righteous, then this is what God really expects from him. When it tells him that his personal inadequacy can only be covered by the cross and blood of Christ, then this must be a very true saying.

2. The work of the word of God (verses 7-9)

1. **It converts the soul:** "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul" (verse 7a). Isn't it strange that those who can see God's greatness in nature go astray from Him, as well as those who get their lives, breath and daily nourishment from Him. "They have turned aside, they have together become corrupt" (Psalm 14:3). But in His love, God gave man His perfect law to bring him back to himself, and to bring him back to the better life after having been destroyed by sin. As a response, man says, "Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved!" (Psalm 80:19).
2. **Makes wise the simple:** "The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple" (verse 7b). A simple person is the person who opens his heart and mind to right and wrong at the same time. He does not close it to divine teaching, but has no ability to apply the right principles. "The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple" (Psalm 119:130). This happened with Timothy, who from child had known the Holy Scriptures, which were able to make him wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 3:15). May God give spiritual wisdom for the salvation and restoration of our souls to Him, making us

- wise, so that we will pursue the life of repentance with Him without going astray as we did in past times. May His word, which is able to make us wise for salvation through repentance, guide us and bring us back to Him and live a pure and pious life, free from all contamination of sin that used to mar it.
3. **Rejoices:** "The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart" (verse 8a). Whoever follows them rejoices because he becomes a member of the household of God, now that he has received the free gift of adoption. Heaven will rejoice over one sinner who repents, and the penitent sinner rejoices even more than all, because he receives forgiveness for his sins and now lives in an awareness of God's acceptance of him.
 4. **Enlightens:** "The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eye" (verse 8b). "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105). Also Christ said, "I am the light of the world. He who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12).
3. **The importance of the words of God:** "More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward" (verse 10,11).
1. **Their intellectual importance:** We run after them because "More to be desired are they than gold." We, as human beings, have a spiritual dimension. Now if fine gold is important for us because by means of it we get our physical needs fulfilled, the word of God equally attracts our attention because it satisfies our spiritual dimension.
 2. **Their emotional importance:** "...sweeter also than honey and honeycomb." A honeycomb is a place in which bees make honey. The person who is aware of his need for the divine word, perceives with his heart how beautiful and delightful it is to his soul, as Jeremiah the prophet said, "Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts" (Jeremiah 15:16).
 3. **Their practical importance:** "Moreover by them Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward." Reward is first received here on earth because it turns away from sin, so that we live a pure life. We also get rewarded when we hear Christ say, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34).

9.3. Third: God Reveals His Character in the Believers

(verses 12-14)

A wise philosopher once said, "I see heaven above me with its stars, and within me I hear the voice of my conscience explaining to me the moral law, therefore my soul is filled with an increasing veneration for the great Creator." For this reason the psalmist says, "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults. Keep back Your servant also from

presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression" (verses 12,13). This is also what Christ has commanded us: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Each and every true believer ought to be the fifth gospel for all people to read and hear.

The psalmist begs God to keep him from three sorts of sin, then asks Him to help him do what is acceptable to Him.

1. He begs God to keep him from three sins:

1. **The unintentional errors:** "Who can understand his errors?" (verse 12a). They are mistakes that someone makes without knowing it. Maybe others know about them and feel them, but he himself is not conscious of them. The Mosaic law stated that a sin offering must be offered "If a person sins unintentionally against any of the commandments of the Lord in anything which ought not to be done, and does any of them" (Leviticus 4:2). The psalmist asks the Lord to make him aware of these unintentional errors that he may repent of them and make sure not to repeat them again.

The Apostle Paul said, "For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord" (1 Corinthians 4:4). Paul did not think he was remiss in fulfilling the duties of his ministry to God, neither did his conscience convict him, yet lack of feeling unfaithful is no evidence of faithfulness. There might be some area in his ministry that he does not know of, that is defective. He asks the Lord to check his heart to make him feel all the defects that he does not know.

2. **The sins that he felt but no one else could feel:** "Cleanse me from secret faults" (verse 12b). These are sins known only to the persons who do them, but pass entirely unnoticed by those around them. This is characteristic of deceit and hypocrisy, when society establishes a very bright image for a certain person that is completely different from his real image. Presumptuous sins, such as pride, fall under this category, as well as pent-up anger that is not expressed in audible words, profane fantasies which are not put into words, and envy and jealousy that eat up a person from within. Toward the end of his life, Saint Augustine wrote down a list of the commitments he never fulfilled. Likewise, anyone who is true to himself should pray to God and ask for healing from these secret faults. They are a lethal disease that consumes a person on the inside, which could only be cured by God's medicine.
3. **Sins that have dominion over him that are known to him:** "Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me" (verse 13a). The presumptuous are either the wicked people who force the believer to sin, or the wickedness itself that controls man so much that he cannot be delivered from it or have victory over it. Both the wicked and the wickedness are presumptuous in this

respect, for they cause man to fall into doing what he would not do otherwise. The psalmist asks God to keep him from the presumptuous sins because the Mosaic law had no provisions or atonement for such intentional sins that defy God's will.

2. **The psalmist asks God to appoint him to do what is acceptable to Him:** "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord my strength and redeemer" (verse 14). The psalmist considers his prayer, whether in secret or in public, as a sacrifice he lifts up to God: "Let my prayer be set before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as evening sacrifice" (Psalm 141:2). The prophet Hosea ordered the people to pray, saying, "Take away all iniquity; receive us graciously, for we will offer the sacrifices of our lips" (Hosea 14:2).

In this prayer the psalmist asks God's approval first of his words, and second of his thoughts. The reason for this is that the people around him listen to what he says and judge him and God's grace within him according to the words he utters, "For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:37). The meditation of his heart, however, is something that only he and God know. But since God reveals His character through the believers' actions, the psalmist asks for God's approval of the audible and visible things he does, although they are the result of the hidden and inward things of the heart. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). Hence, God said, "I will restore to the peoples a pure language, that they all may call on the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one accord... The remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness and speak no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth" (Zephaniah 3:9,13). As God told King Solomon to ask whatever he wanted, his request was an expression of the meditation of his heart, because Solomon's heart was pondering over his prospective ministry. Also as the prophet Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit, he foresaw the responsibility that was to be given him. Suppose we were allowed to ask whatever we would like to have. Would we say, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and redeemer"?

In this request the psalmist ascribes two attributes to God: (1) "My strength" on whom I depend for victory, and to whom I refer as authority over my life. He is the One who gives me victory and helps me overcome my troubles and sins. (2) "My Redeemer" my overseer, who has full control of my life and gives me victory to overcome my troubles and my sins.

What a great honour it is for man to take part, together with nature and the law, in offering a clear testimony of God in the midst of the community in which he lives. Do you have such a radiant testimony of God? Do those who see your work glorify your Father in heaven?

9.4. Questions

1. Psalm 19 says that God declares himself in three ways. What are they?
2. In Psalm 19:12-13 the psalmist asks God to save him from three sins. What are they?

10. Psalm Twenty

A Prayer of Victory for the King

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.

1 May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble; may the name of the God of Jacob defend you;

2 May He send you help from the sanctuary, and strengthen you out of Zion;

3 May He remember all your offerings, and accept your burnt sacrifice. Selah

4 May He grant you according to your heart's desire, and fulfill all your purpose.

5 We will rejoice in your salvation, and in the name of our God we will set up our banners! May the Lord fulfill all your petitions.

6 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.

7 Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God.

8 They have bowed down and fallen; but we have risen and stand upright.

9 Save, Lord! May the King answer us when we call.

Psalm 20 is a prayer to be lifted up by the whole nation to God, to give victory to the king and answer his prayer. It is connected with Psalm 21 in which the king lifts up a prayer of thanksgiving on behalf of the nation. The theme of the two psalms centres round the king and his victory over the enemies as a representative of God and the people.

Before starting any campaign the king used to offer sacrifices to God and commit himself to Him. During the offering of sacrifices the people would sing Psalm 20 as an expression of their deep faith in the Lord. As to Psalm 21, it was sung after the war had ended to thank the Lord, who gave them victory, and to express their trust that He will continue to give them victory in the coming battles.

This psalm can be prayed for the kingdom of God, saying, "'Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.' For just as the angels in heaven are always ready to do Your commandments without apology or delay, so let the whole earth do Your desires without hesitation."

We can pray the words of this psalm as a family lifting up their father before the mercy-seat, as well as in the church for the pastor. We can also pray it at work for our boss in the firm, asking the Lord to bless him. Moreover, we can pray it for the leader of our country, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence (1 Timothy 2:2). The psalm is a prayer for everyone filling a certain office of responsibility. If we pray for all those in authority the Lord will answer us from His holy temple, giving a great blessing to the pray-ers and those prayed for, just as Christ said to His disciples, "Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:24).

The psalm includes the following:

- First: The whole nation prays for the king (verses 1-5)
- Second: The chief musician confirms the answer to the prayer (verses 6-8)
- Third: A final prayer from all the people (verse 9)

10.1. First: The Whole Nation Prays for the King

(verses 1-5)

The nation lifts up five requests to God for the king:

1. **A request for defence in time of trouble:** "May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble; may the name of the God of Jacob defend you" (verse 1). He rallies the whole nation together with one accord and in one voice to sing an harmonious song, asking for an answer. Hence we learn that prayer is a prophylactic procedure; we should not delay prayer till trouble is already upon us, but pray even before the day of trouble comes, so that God would not lead us into harmful things! The prayer of today blesses tomorrow. God truly encourages us to seek Him in the day of trouble (Psalm 50:15), yet this does not mean that we should do so only in times of trouble.

Many people pray as a reaction to the challenges of life that face them, but it is a happy man who prays daily and continually, making prayer the motto of his life: "But I give myself to prayer" (Psalm 109:4). Confident of Christ's words, "Without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5), he depends on Christ who enables him to do all things (Philippians 4:13). Christ our Saviour went through a time of grief, turned it into a prayer-time and prayed even more earnestly during His struggle, so that His sweat fell down like drops of blood on the ground, and an angel from heaven appeared to strengthen Him. Having fulfilled our salvation, He gained victory on our behalf (Luke 22:43,44).

The people pray to the "God of Jacob" to defend their king above difficulties and enemies, lest he dash his foot against a stone (Psalm 91:21), believing that it is the "name of the God of Jacob" that defends. The name of someone denotes their personal characteristics. For God is a God who works through history, of whom Jacob said that he

"answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone" (Genesis 35:3). God must do the same thing to the king who is going out to war. "God's name is still a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe" (Proverbs 18:10).

The God of Jacob is the God of the covenant who promised Jacob deliverance and blessing (Genesis 28:12-15), who also must fulfil His promise to the descendants of Jacob.

When Elijah was taken up to heaven, his disciple Elisha wondered, "Where is the Lord the God of Elijah?" and when he had struck the water, it divided this way and that way, and Elisha crossed over (2 Kings 2:14). God had opened before him a way that no one can shut. How blessed he is to fall back on the God of his fathers, as Paul wrote to Timothy, "I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also" (2 Timothy 1:5).

2. **A request for help and strengthening from the place of worship:** "May He send you help from His sanctuary, and strengthen you out of Zion" (verse 2). It was as if they said to the king, "Our leader, you have come to the house of the Lord to worship Him; you knelt down before Him, waited for His blessing, so the blessing will surely come from His sanctuary."

When we go into the house of the Lord we find blessing, therefore we say, "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord'" (Psalm 122:1). For then we will willingly apply the Apostle's command: "not forgetting the assembling of ourselves together... but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25).

3. **A request for accepting worship:** "May He remember all your offerings, and accept your burnt sacrifice" (verse 3). In the original Hebrew the verb "accept" used here means to find fat, namely acceptable. So the king not only lifted up his prayers in the house of the Lord, but also offered up the best of the fat and flawless animals as sacrifices and offerings to God. He burnt all the fat on the altar, which was the best part of the sacrifice. They call upon God to accept the sacrifices of the king, by which he intended to have access to God. May God look upon the king with favour since he completed the divine commandment: "Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed. Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which He has given him" (Deuteronomy 16:16,17).

Today we take our protection from the atonement of the greatest sacrifice, the sacrifice of Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He is the burnt offering,

since He was burning to redeem us and finish our salvation as He said, "I thirst!" (John 19:28). "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). As He completed his sacrifice, He said, "It is finished!" (John 19:30).

4. **A request for success:** "May He grant you according to your heart's desire, and fulfil all your purpose" (verse 4). "If you ask anything in My name, I will do it" (John 14:14). "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us" (1 John 5:14). May He grant you according to your heart's desire because your heart's desires are after God's heart, and because your purpose is in harmony with His own. Saint Augustine states, "When you do God's will as your own, God does your will as His own" for "the desire of the righteous will be granted" (Proverbs 10:24).

Let us check our purposes, dreams and visions for our economical, scientific, social and spiritual life, and see if they are consistent with God's will, knowing that such consistency is the guarantee for God's answer.

5. **A request for joy:** "We will rejoice in Your salvation, and in the name of our God we will set up our banners" (verse 5). The salvation in which we will rejoice is the perfect redemption which Christ finished on the cross. For that reason we pray to God to lift up the banner of the cross of His love, so that believers may understand more and more the significance of divine love, and renew their commitment with God continually, because the love of Christ constrains them (2 Corinthians 5:14). They love Him because He first loved them (1 John 4:19).

The Israelites meant by salvation, above all, salvation from a fighting enemy. So when the Lord rescued them from danger and answered their five requests for their king, they lifted up verses of thanksgiving to Him who hears prayer. Oh, how much we need to learn how to thank! We often succeed and rejoice in our success to such an extent that we forget our teacher who taught us, or our parents who laboured with us through the school-year. Little children often forget, and we often remain children in spirituality when we rejoice in the gift rather than in the Giver, and celebrate the victory but forget all about the victory-giver!

"May the Lord fulfil all your petitions, O king", namely: May the five requests which we have asked on your behalf be granted, and may you continue to wait for the Lord's salvation. "I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry" (Psalm 40:1).

10.2. Second: The Chief Musician Confirms the Answer to the Prayer

(verses 6-8)

The king offered his sacrifices to the Lord, and all the people lifted up their five requests to God for their king. Their faith expected a sure answer, for faith sees what eyes cannot see.

The leader of the choir stood up to sing, confirming to all the people that the Lord has heard them:

1. **The answer comes from the Almighty God:** "Now I know that the Lord saved His anointed; He will answer Him from His holy heaven with the saving strength of His right hand" (verse 6). This part is a solo that was sung by the choir leader, or a priest, confirming to the people that God answered their prayers. The word "anointed" refers to the king as being anointed with holy oil for consecration and dedication to the special ministry God assigned him to do (2 Corinthians 1:21). The Mosaic law stated that people, places and vessels could be anointed (Exodus 40:9; Numbers 7:1,10), as well as priests (Exodus 28:41), prophets (1 Chronicles 16:22) and kings (2 Samuel 19:10). When the psalmist says that "the Lord saved His anointed" he means that God saves everyone He chooses for a special ministry, for no one goes to war at his own expense (1 Corinthians 9:7).

I have never in my life seen a dedicated full-time minister for whom the Lord has not graciously provided. I do not mean preachers only, but everyone who renders a service to God, no matter how small and simple it may be, such as giving a cup of cold water to a thirsty soul (Matthew 10:42) or cleaning the church. God will never be in debt for a man. I invite you to serve God whole-heartedly, no matter how small your service is, and you will see how He will richly bless you and how "He will answer you from His holy heaven" with comprehensive salvation "with the saving strength of His right hand." God's salvation from sin is mighty. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18). His salvation from the malicious intrigues of the enemies is also mighty. They will surely be repelled and fall down, and the believer will surely be delivered.

2. **There are two sources of power:** "Some trust in chariots and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God" (verse 6). The leader mentioned two sources of power: The first was used by the enemy, and the second was used by the Lord's people. The enemy depended on his chariots and horses because they are visible to him, just as Pharaoh (Exodus 14) and Sennacherib (2 Kings 19:23) did. The people of the Lord, on the other hand, trusted the Lord, remembering Him always because He is the only who does not disappoint those who wait for Him, even if their physical eyes do not see Him (Isaiah 49:23). This is what David said to Goliath, "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the Lord of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied" (1 Samuel 17:45). This is also what the Lord has commanded the people of Israel to do through Moses: "So it shall be, when you are on the verge of battle, that the priest shall approach and speak to the people. And he shall say to them, 'Hear O Israel: Today you are on the verge of battle with your enemies; do not let your heart faint, do not be afraid, and do not tremble and do not be terrified because of them; for the Lord your God is He who goes with you, to fight

for you against your enemies, and save you." (Deuteronomy 20:2-4). The enemies of the Lord may be on top while His people are down, but that won't continue. The victory of God and those who belong to Him is as sure as the daybreak.

- 3. There are two different results from trusting either one of the two sources of power:** "They have bowed down and fallen; but we have risen and stand upright" (verse 8). It seems that the countenance of the believers fell down, or they fell down literally before the enemy, but the Lord delivered them, and they stood up from the bowed position. God's community must lift up its head: "But You, O Lord, are a shield for me, my glory and the One who lifts up my head" (Psalm 3:3).

The sinner may prosper at the beginning, but the final victory belongs to the Lord and His people. Yes, there is a cross, but there must come resurrection and ascension. The cross cannot be the end.

10.3. Third: A Final Prayer from all the People

(verse 9)

The people prayed to the heavenly King for their earthly one, and got the confirmation that the heavenly King had listened and heard, so they continued singing, "Save, Lord! May the King answer us when we call" (verse 9). They have lifted up requests to God for the king, knowing that the real King is the Lord.

We do well to pray for the head of the family, but we must bear in mind that the greatest Head of our family is the heavenly Father. We do well to pray for the pastor of our church, but let us be aware that the greatest Pastor is the Lord Jesus Christ. We do well, also, to call upon the Lord to bless the boss at work, but let us know that God is the real Chief, who is worthy of our service and One who rewards us at the end.

"May the King answer us when we call." May He bless our leader and our work.

10.4. Questions

1. In Psalm 20:1-5 the psalmist asks for five blessings to be given to his leader. Mention them.
2. Psalm 20:8 says, "They are brought to their knees and fall, but we rise up and stand firm." Please comment.

11. Quiz

There are two questions at the end of each chapter. You are invited to write and send us the answers to them. If you answer 15 of these questions correctly we will send you a book as a

prize. Or you may join our Bible school by correspondence and work toward a certificate.
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