

# Meditations on the Psalms

## Volume Fifteen: Psalms 141-150

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## **1. Psalm One Hundred and Forty-One**

### **Keep Watch over the Door of my Lips**

A psalm of David.

1 O LORD, I call to you; come quickly to me. Hear my voice when I call to you.

2 May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.

3 Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips.

4 Let not my heart be drawn to what is evil, to take part in wicked deeds with men who are evildoers; let me not eat of their delicacies.

5 Let a righteous man strike me--it is a kindness; let him rebuke me--it is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it. Yet my prayer is ever against the deeds of evildoers;

6 their rulers will be thrown down from the cliffs, and the wicked will learn that my words were well spoken.

7 They will say, "As one plows and breaks up the earth, so our bones have been scattered at the mouth of the grave."

8 But my eyes are fixed on you, O Sovereign LORD; in you I take refuge--do not give me over to death.

9 Keep me from the snares they have laid for me, from the traps set by evildoers.

10 Let the wicked fall into their own nets, while I pass by in safety.

The previous psalm is the believer's prayer as he faced the wiles of the enemy, and in this psalm he struggled to lead a pure life without compromising his principles under the pressure of the enemies. He turned down all compromises and did not join the wicked in doing evil, praying that God would preserve him from sinning either in thought, word or deed. He sought to live an honest life regardless of the pressures from within his soul--from an uncontrolled tongue and a heart set to reject advice--or from without--from stronger or hidden evil forces.

The early church used to recite this psalm at the opening of evening worship, because the second verse says, "May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice."

The psalm contains the following:

- First: The psalmist prays for himself (verses 1-5)
- Second: The psalmist advises his enemies (verses 6,7)
- Third: The psalmist declares his confidence (verses 8-10)

### 1.1. First: The Psalmist Prays for Himself

#### (verses 1-5)

##### 1. Requesting an answer (verses 1,2):

1. **The manner of request:** "O LORD, I call to you; come quickly to me. Hear my voice when I call to you" (verse 1). Out of fear of going along with the wicked and a desire to have a pure heart, the psalmist cries out for speedy divine help. How lovely it is for a man in temptation to hasten to ask for grace to overcome the temptation facing him, asking for purity when tempted by lust for impurity, and requesting long-suffering when about to lose his temper. A wise person does not wait until he falls into sin to ask for purification: he asks for immunity from sin as soon as he is tempted by it, before he ever falls into it.
2. **Two similes** (verse 2):
  1. **Prayer is like incense:** "May my prayer be set before you like incense" (verse 2a). To be "set" is to be established permanently and regularly, as was said of the worship during the time of King Hezekiah, "There were burnt offerings in abundance, together with the fat of the fellowship offerings and the drink offerings that accompanied the burnt offerings. So the service of the temple of the LORD was re-established" (2 Chronicles 29:35). The psalmist asks that his prayer should rise upward, giving off a sweet smell: " 'My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name...' says the LORD Almighty" (Malachi 1:11). It was also said, "And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints... Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand" (Revelation 5:8; 8:3,4).
  2. **Prayer is like an evening sacrifice:** "May the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice" (verse 2b). The Law of Moses commanded the Israelites to offer a morning and an evening sacrifice. Prayer is a sacrifice. The Lord commanded, "Take words with you and return to the LORD. Say to him: 'Forgive

all our sins and receive us graciously, that we may offer the fruit of our lips' " (Hosea 14:2). Praise, too, is a sacrifice, as the Scripture says, "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise--the fruit of lips that confess his name" (Hebrews 13:15). Doing good is a sacrifice, as it was said, "And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Hebrews 13:16). At the end of a day on which the psalmist did good, he lifted up his hands to God in praise and prayer, as he was used to, as if saying, "Hear my cry for mercy as I call to you for help, as I lift up my hands toward your Most Holy Place" (Psalm 28:2). This is what we must do today, because the Scriptures command us to pray, lifting up holy hands for those in responsibility and in high positions in our countries (1 Timothy 2:8).

Lifting up the hands means directing the heart wholly toward the Lord, for then the hands are busy with worship and nothing else. It can also mean focusing the attention on the Lord's voice and responding to His directions, saying, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening" (1 Samuel 3:9). It also means looking up, pleadingly and hopefully, to the source of blessing, saying, "I lift up my eyes to the hills--where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:1,2). Again it signifies the lifting up and dedication of all that is in the pray-er as an offering to the Lord, in accordance with the apostle's command: "Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1). Lifting up the hands served historically as a sign of seeking divine help and waiting for the divine answer, as Moses did when the Amalekites attacked the Israelites in the Sinai Desert. Moses lifted up his hand in prayer, asking for protection. When his hand was held up, the Israelites won, and whenever he lowered it, the Amalekites would win. "When Moses' hands grew tired... Aaron and Hur held his hands up--one on one side, one on the other--so that his hands remained steady till sunset." And this was how they won (Exodus 17:8-13).

## 2. **The requests** (verses 3-5):

1. **Setting a guard over the mouth:** "Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips" (verse 3). The psalmist asks the Lord to keep him from using the unbecoming language that his enemies use, according to the commandment, "keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies" (Psalm 34:13). Therefore he says, "I said, 'I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth as long as the wicked are in my presence' " (Psalm 39:1). The reason: "He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin" (Proverbs 13:3), and "He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity" (Proverbs 21:23). He says to the Lord, "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock

and my Redeemer" (Psalm 19:14). So the Lord answers him, "Then will I purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the LORD and serve him shoulder to shoulder... The remnant of Israel will do no wrong; they will speak no lies, nor will deceit be found in their mouths. They will eat and lie down and no one will make them afraid" (Zephaniah 3:9,13). So, let us heed the warning of the apostle James, "We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check... The tongue also is a fire... With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be" (James 3:2,6,9,10). No doubt that "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things" (Matthew 12:34,35). This is what the psalmist hastens to ask of the Lord.

2. **Purity of heart:** "Let not my heart be drawn to what is evil, to take part in wicked deeds with men who are evildoers; let me not eat of their delicacies" (verse 4). After asking the Lord to keep him away from sins of the tongue, the psalmist asks the Lord to purify his heart from sins of thought and action, so that he can say, "I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands... Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me" (Psalm 119:10,133). He does not want to do what the wicked do; he does not want to share in their iniquities, delicacies or physical pleasures: "They eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence" (Proverbs 4:17). The commandment says, "Do not envy wicked men, do not desire their company; for their hearts plot violence, and their lips talk about making trouble" (Proverbs 24:1,2).
3. **Bearing reproach:** "Let a righteous man strike me--it is a kindness; let him rebuke me--it is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it. Yet my prayer is ever against the deeds of evildoers" (verse 5). The wicked wanted the psalmist to join them in their joys and banquets, and maybe he felt like doing so. His believing friends seem to have heard of it and rebuked him. He was hurt by their rebuke and warning because it felt like they were hitting him on the head, although he knew full well that "Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses" (Proverbs 27:6). He did not refuse their rebuke and even considered the pain resulting from it a kindness and a pleasure as sweet as the smell of an aromatic oil, for "Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel" (Proverbs 27:9). "He who listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise. He who ignores discipline despises himself, but whoever heeds correction gains understanding" (Proverbs 15:31,32). "He who rebukes a man will in the end gain more favor than he who has a flattering tongue" (Proverbs 28:23).

Accepting rebuke from his friends, the psalmist continues to pray so that he may not

join the wicked in their evil deeds.

## **1.2. Second: The Psalmist Advises his Enemies**

### **(verses 6,7)**

1. **Advice to repent:** "Their rulers will be thrown down from the cliffs, and the wicked will learn that my words were well spoken" (verse 6). Throwing people over a cliff was a way of execution in ancient times (2 Chronicles 25:12). Since the judges were evil they had to meet their death by being thrown over a cliff, so that their limbs might be scattered all over the ground. The psalmist, however, neither grows proud nor gloats over the death of those people. He rather preaches using God's sweet words, warning the listeners of the sinners' destiny, calling them to repentance and proclaiming God's mercy to every repentant sinner who confesses his sins.
2. **Advice to declare their repentance:** "As one plows and breaks up the earth, so our bones have been scattered at the mouth of the grave" (verse 7). Most likely these words are the response of the hearers of God's sweet words, which give hope to the penitent and spare them the destiny of the sinners who perished, only if they received them and believed in them. The bones of the wicked leaders are smashed and scattered at the entrance of the graves for the lack of someone to bury them. The scene of the tragedy looks like a plot of land that has been thoroughly ploughed so that all twigs and rocks lying in the way of the ploughshares are crushed to bits. The penitent weep over the end of the dead wicked, heed the warning and return to God.

## **1.3. Third: The Psalmist Declares his Confidence**

### **(verses 8-10)**

1. **Because he looked up to the Lord:** "But my eyes are fixed on you, O Sovereign LORD; in you I take refuge--do not give me over to death" (verse 8). At the time of major catastrophe when the wicked leaders were destroyed, which led to the repentance of those who beheld their tragic destiny, the psalmist looked up to God in prayer and took shelter in Him from the destination of the wicked. He beseeched Him not to leave his soul destitute, not to waste his life as his enemies' lives were wasted. Whoever repents, to him is fulfilled the promise of Christ, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live" (John 5:24,25).
2. **Because he is under the protection of the Lord:** "Keep me from the snares they have laid for me, from the traps set by evildoers" (verse 9). Had the first wicked person died suddenly, the devil would have sent another to fight the believer, so that he would live in a continual war. The believer did win the battle, yet the evil enemy prepared another

battle for him. Therefore the Scripture says, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand" (Ephesians 6:10-13). Standing after everything has been done means that the battle will continue, therefore the apostle admonishes us, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings" (1 Peter 5:8,9).

3. **Because the wicked will fall:** "Let the wicked fall into their own nets, while I pass by in safety" (verse 10). The enemy must fall into the pit which he has dug. "The trouble he causes recoils on himself; his violence comes down on his own head... The LORD is known by his justice; the wicked are ensnared by the work of their hands" (Psalm 7:16; 9:16). When the wicked is entangled by the trap he himself has set, he no longer plans to do harm to the believer and thus the believer escapes safely. No doubt that God's punishment of the sinner affirms to the persecuted believer that God is a God of justice, deliverance and salvation.

#### 1.4. Questions

1. Why is prayer like incense?
2. In verses 3-5 of this psalm the psalmist requested three things. Mention them.

## 2. Psalm One Hundred and Forty-Two

### Bring my Soul out of Prison

A maskil of David. When he was in the cave. A prayer.

1 I cry aloud to the LORD; I lift up my voice to the LORD for mercy.

2 I pour out my complaint before him; before him I tell my trouble.

3 When my spirit grows faint within me, it is you who know my way. In the path where I walk men have hidden a snare for me.

4 Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life.

5 I cry to you, O LORD; I say, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living."

6 Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; rescue me from those who pursue me, for they are too strong for me.



7 Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name. Then the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me.

We saw the psalmist in Psalm 140 facing the wiles of the enemies, and in Psalm 141 under the pressure of the enemies he struggled not to surrender his principles and sacrifice them for his own safety. In this psalm, however, he complains of imprisonment, loneliness and helplessness. Most likely David composed this psalm during his stay in the cave of Adullam with his family and four hundred men who became leaders of his kingdom when he gained power (1 Samuel 22). He may also have composed it when he was hiding in the caves of En Gedi (1 Samuel 24). In his confinement and loneliness, David learnt through suffering and pain what he desires to teach us in this psalm, as well as in Psalm 57, which he sang when he escaped from Saul in the cave.

The psalm contains the following:

- First: The psalmist complains (verses 1-4)
- Second: The psalmist waits (verses 5-7)

## 2.1. First: The Psalmist Complains

### (verses 1-4)

1. **The manner of complaint:** "I cry aloud to the LORD; I lift up my voice to the LORD for mercy. I pour out my complaint before him; before him I tell my trouble" (verses 1,2). The psalmist complains with loud cries and supplications, pouring himself out before God. He was not content with a quiet prayer because his state of mind was rock-bottom. He was like blind Bartimaeus, who could only be healed of his blindness by the healing power of Christ, and therefore cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many rebuked him to be quiet, but he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Mark 10:47,48).
2. **The subject-matter of the complaint** (verses 3,4):
  1. **Weary without cause:** "When my spirit grows faint within me, it is you who know my way. In the path where I walk men have hidden a snare for me" (verse 3). The psalmist's spirit was so overwhelmed by the intensity of trouble that he nearly fainted. He almost lost his life, just as Jonah did in the belly of the fish (Jonah 2:7). But he knew that the Lord watched him and knew his path. He knew that he was innocent of the charges they made against him. His enemies, too, watched him and knew the ways he walked; they hid snares in them to trap him. What a world of difference between the destructive, plotting knowledge of the enemies and the caring, delivering knowledge of God. "Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will

- find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart" (Psalm 91:3,4).
2. **Weary without friends:** "Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life" (verse 4). The psalmist asked the Lord to look on his right side, where supporters would stand to lend him support, to see that there was none able to help him or none who even knew him. The Lord would see that the psalmist no longer had a refuge. His friends deserted him and no longer called on him. He was like the sick man of Bethesda, who spent 38 years waiting for a relative or a friend to help him by throwing him into the pool whenever the water stirred, but who found no one to care for his soul (John 5). No one appreciated the psalmist or the danger he was in. How lonely he must have felt! Christ provided the cure for this feeling as He said, "But a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me" (John 16:32). In a similar situation the apostle Paul said, "At my first defence, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (2 Timothy 4:16-18).

## 2.2. Second: The Psalmist Waits

### (verses 5-7)

1. **The Lord is the only refuge:** "I cry to you, O LORD; I say, 'You are my refuge' " (verse 5a). He had cried out and pleaded, and he still cried and waited for the Lord, the only refuge left for him. "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need... Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them." (Hebrews 4:15,16; 7:25).
2. **The Lord is the psalmist's portion:** "My portion in the land of the living" (verse 5b). The living are the people who live around him, both the godly and the ungodly. He had no assistance from them; the ungodly opposed him and the godly could not help him. Therefore he expected the Lord to be his portion, as though he were saying, "Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Psalm 73:25,26). "I say to myself, 'The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.' The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD" (Lamentations 3:24-26). And since the psalmist expected

the Lord to be his portion, he would live and not die, because he belonged to those who "have passed from death to life" (Romans 6:13) thanks to Christ's sacrificial death for them. They have said about Christ, "In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" (Ephesians 1:11).

3. **The Lord is the Hearer:** "Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; rescue me" (verse 6a). In the intensity of conflict and degradation, the psalmist urged the Lord to answer his prayer and deliver him. He was brought low by the neglect of his family and the persecution of his enemies, so he put his hope in the help of the One who does not degrade anyone. "Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my sighing. Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray. In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation" (Psalm 5:1-3). "And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:7,8).
4. **The Lord is the Deliverer:** "Rescue me from those who pursue me, for they are too strong for me. Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name" (verses 6b,7a). The psalmist was confined to his cave, be it Adullam or En Gedi, for fear of King Saul's violent attacks, for the king pursued him with his soldiers to kill him. He must have been longing to worship the Lord and sing to Him in the tabernacle of meeting. He waited for God to deliver him, so that he could join those who loved the Lord in praise and worship. When his request was granted, he asked, "How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me?" Then he answers, "O LORD, truly I am your servant; I am your servant, the son of your maidservant; you have freed me from my chains. I will sacrifice a thank offering to you and call on the name of the LORD" (Psalm 116:12,16,17).
5. **The believers are the only company:** "Then the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me" (verse 7b). The psalmist saw the Lord's answer coming through by faith, and saw the righteous gathering together for worship, lifting up thankful hands to God who dealt bountifully with them, singing, "I will sing to the LORD, for he has been good to me ... I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you. You who fear the LORD, praise him! ... For he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help" (Psalm 13:6; 22:22-24). "I said to the LORD, 'You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing.' As for the saints who are in the land, they are the glorious ones in whom is all my delight" (Psalm 16:2,3).

### 2.3. Questions

1. What comfort can a weary lonesome person find in this psalm?

2. What should you do to be able to say that the Lord is your portion?

### **3. Psalm One Hundred and Forty-Three**

#### **Do not Enter into Judgment with Your Servant**

A psalm of David.

1 O LORD, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for mercy; in your faithfulness and righteousness come to my relief.

2 Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before you.

3 The enemy pursues me, he crushes me to the ground; he makes me dwell in darkness like those long dead.

4 So my spirit grows faint within me; my heart within me is dismayed.

5 I remember the days of long ago; I meditate on all your works and consider what your hands have done.

6 I spread out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land. Selah

7 Answer me quickly, O LORD; my spirit fails. Do not hide your face from me or I will be like those who go down to the pit.

8 Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.

9 Rescue me from my enemies, O LORD, for I hide myself in you.

10 Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground.

11 For your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life; in your righteousness, bring me out of trouble.

12 In your unfailing love, silence my enemies; destroy all my foes, for I am your servant.

The Psalter has seven Psalms of Repentance, which are Psalms 6,32,38,51,102,130 and 143. Four of these psalms, namely Psalms 32,51,130 and 143 were called "The Pauline Psalms" by Martin Luther. The reason he gave them that title is that they show how forgiveness of sins belongs to everyone who believes and puts his trust in the redemption that God provided through Christ, a recurrent theme in the writings of the apostle Paul. Saint Augustine requested these psalms to be written down and hung on the wall across from his sick bed in his last days, so that he could read them and be comforted. We saw the enemy harassing the psalmist in Psalm 140, and in Psalm 141 under the pressure of the enemies the psalmist struggled not to surrender his principles and sacrifice them for his own safety. And in Psalm 142 he expressed his loneliness and helplessness. In this psalm he says that all men are sinful "for no one living is righteous before you" (verse 2) and that everyone equally needs God's guidance (verse 8). He knows that God will accept his repentance on the basis of His faithfulness and righteousness, which he experienced in the past (verses 1,5). The psalmist

concludes his psalm by requesting blessings from God, which only a penitent sinner has the right to ask for.

The psalm contains the following:

- First: Prayer of repentance (verses 1,2)
- Second: Grievs of sin (verses 3-6)
- Third: Hope of the penitent (verses 7-12)

### **3.1. First: Prayer of Repentance**

#### **(verses 1,2)**

1. **God's faithfulness and righteousness:** "O LORD, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for mercy; in your faithfulness and righteousness come to my relief" (verse 1). The psalmist lifts up a prayer of repentance depending on the Lord's faithfulness to his promises, for He had revealed that He was a keeper of mercy for thousands, a forgiver of iniquity, transgression and sin (Exodus 34:7). He also depended on the Lord's justice in inflicting the punishment for his sins on the substitutionary sacrifice so that he may go free, since God does not require the wages of sin twice. God "is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished" (Romans 3:22-25). The psalmist's supplications here are the prayer of the penitent who says, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner" (Luke 18:13). They are the cry of a sinner who says, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Such a cry will be answered, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:42,43). The Lord's acceptance of our prayer of repentance depends on Christ's work of atonement, who "is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them ... let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 7:25; 10:22,23).
2. **The psalmist's inability to justify himself:** "Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before you" (verse 2). If God brings the psalmist into judgment he will perish, so the psalmist, taking refuge with the divine mercy, asked the Lord not to judge him because "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). This is the same thing Job said, "Indeed, I

know that this is true. But how can a mortal be righteous before God? Though one wished to dispute with him, he could not answer him one time out of a thousand... He is not a man like me that I might answer him, that we might confront each other in court" (Job 9:2,3,32). The first excuse the psalmist makes for being exempted from judgment was the fact that he was a servant of the Lord: "I am Your servant" (verse 12). As servant, he was purchased by His Master, who now owned him and managed his affairs. His second excuse was that no one can possibly be justified before the Lord: "If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? ... with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption" (Psalm 130:3,7). Eliphaz the Temanite said, "What is man, that he could be pure, or one born of woman, that he could be righteous? If God places no trust in his holy ones, if even the heavens are not pure in his eyes, how much less man, who is vile and corrupt, who drinks up evil like water!" (Job 15:14-16).

### 3.2. Second: Grievances of Sin

#### (verses 3-6)

1. **Sin requires punishment:** "The enemy pursues me, he crushes me to the ground; he makes me dwell in darkness like those long dead. So my spirit grows faint within me; my heart within me is dismayed" (verses 3,4). The psalmist knew that the trouble he was going through must have been a result of his own disobedience, and recalled exhortation spoken to him as to a son: "And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: 'My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.' Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?" (Hebrews 12:5-7). He sinned and consequently he fell into the hands of an implacable enemy, who weighed him down, afflicted him, persecuted him, crushed him, imprisoned him and took away from him every enjoyment of life, so that he was close to death, and it seemed that both God and man forgot about him. His mind was distressed when he tried to know the reason for all this affliction. He was so confused that he began to wonder, "Has God rejected me as His son?"
2. **Sin ruins the fellowship with God:** "I remember the days of long ago; I meditate on all your works and consider what your hands have done. I spread out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land" (verses 5,6). The godly psalmist who was persecuted for his sin "remembered" his good old days when he was on intimate terms with his Lord, praying, praising and worshiping. He missed this intimate fellowship that he lost as a result of the sin that separated him from his God. He "meditated" on the kindnesses and blessings that the Lord had showered on him, and spoke again and again about the good deeds that God already had already done for him. He also "mused" on the previous works of God's hands, which carried him all the days of old, helped him,

granted him victory over his difficulties and challenges. Then he compared these masterworks with the dry land he stood on, devoid of spiritual joy as it were, with no intimacy with God. Evidently, a yearning for the glorious past surged over him, as though he shared Asaph's experience, "I thought about the former days, the years of long ago; I remembered my songs in the night. My heart mused and my spirit inquired: Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor again? Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time? ... I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds" (Psalm 77:5-8,12). The psalmist extended imploring hands toward God, as though they were the hands of a child taking refuge with his mother from hunger and thirst, seeking reassurance and entreating, "Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice... Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me" (Psalm 51:8,12). He seems to have said, like the prodigal son in the far country, as he came back to himself, "How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him" (Luke 15:17-20). He admitted the dryness of his soul, which was no longer watered by the water of life, so that it crumbled and bore no fruit. He expected God to give him the early and latter rain, satisfying his soul in drought, so that he may become like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail (Isaiah 58:8-11).

### **3.3. Third: Hope of the Penitent**

#### **(verses 7-12)**

1. **Divine mercy:** "Answer me quickly, O LORD; my spirit fails. Do not hide your face from me or I will be like those who go down to the pit. Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you" (verses 7,8a). The psalmist had already said, "My spirit grows faint within me" (verse 4), and now he says that it is failing. He asks the Lord to hasten to answer, to make His face shine upon him as a sign of approval, and lift him up from the pit into which his enemies made him fall. "Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, O God my Saviour" (Psalm 27:9). He asks the Lord to give him his request at sunrise, early in the morning, so that he may hear the news of God's loving kindness at the beginning of every day and be confident of the divine promises, that his darkness may be dispelled. Truly, "his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5).

2. **Saving knowledge:** "Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul" (verse 8b). After pleading for loving kindness to get him out of the pit, the psalmist pleads with the Lord to show him His way because he lifted up his soul to the Lord and extended his hands towards Him. In doing so he joins Moses in his prayer, "If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people" (Exodus 33:13). He begs together with the psalmist, "Show me your ways, O LORD, teach me your paths... Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name" (Psalm 25:4; 86:11). The Lord will answer him, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you" (Psalm 32:8), just as "He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel" (Psalm 103:7).
3. **Divine deliverance:** "Rescue me from my enemies, O LORD, for I hide myself in you" (verse 9). Those who make God their hiding-place are rescued, for He says, "Go, my people, enter your rooms and shut the doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until his wrath has passed by" (Isaiah 26:20). The believer responds, "For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock. Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his tabernacle will I sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the LORD" (Psalm 27:5,6). "Before I was born the LORD called me... in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver" (Isaiah 49:1,2).
4. **Divine guidance:** "Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground" (verse 10). God is the Lord and God of the psalmist's life because He delivers him from his enemies. Therefore he asks his God, in all humility and sense of need, to teach him His good will so that his heart may not incline to the crooked paths of the wicked, but rather say, "Teach me your way, O LORD; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors" (Psalm 27:11). This will give the psalmist a new life, and he will shout, "I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart" (Psalm 40:8). The psalmist entreats the good Spirit to guide him, just as Nehemiah prayed, "Because of your great compassion you did not abandon them in the desert. By day the pillar of cloud did not cease to guide them on their path, nor the pillar of fire by night to shine on the way they were to take. You gave your good Spirit to instruct them. You did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and you gave them water for their thirst" (Nehemiah 9:19,20). "The path of the righteous is level; O upright One, you make the way of the righteous smooth" (Isaiah 26:7). The Holy Spirit guides the believer in a land of uprightness, a smooth land, free from hardships and perils, which makes him say, "My feet stand on level ground; in the great assembly I will praise the LORD" (Psalm 26:12). The Holy Spirit is "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation" (Ephesians 1:17). He is the Teacher, "because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God" (Romans 8:14).



5. **The better life:** "For your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life; in your righteousness, bring me out of trouble" (verse 11). The psalmist asks for the better life for the sake of the Lord's name, not for any good thing within himself. "Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness" (Psalm 115:1). The better life is not only the opposite of death, but also the liberation from anything that would interrupt the blessed life and prevent us from enjoying it. It is the life of peace and joy that can only be experienced within a context of fellowship with God and obedience to His word, because "man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD" (Deuteronomy 8:3). God had already said to the Israelites, "Hear now, O Israel, the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live" (Deuteronomy 4:1). The Scriptures are full of references to the present better life, just as much as references to eternal life in God's presence in heaven. The psalmist says, "My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life... I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have preserved my life" (Psalm 119:50,93). "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3). "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). When man "lives" in Christ, God delivers his soul from all the distress in this world, and he also will not see distress in the world to come.
6. **Divine justice:** "In your unfailing love, silence my enemies; destroy all my foes, for I am your servant" (verse 12). The psalmist concludes his psalm with an entreaty to the divine justice. The enemies of the kingdom of God oppose the kingdom and persecute Christ Himself (Acts 9:4), therefore the cutting out of the psalmist's enemies and the destruction of those who afflict him are a mercy to the psalmist, for He is God's servant. The literal answer to this prayer is in keeping with the Old Testament law "eye for eye, tooth for tooth." Christians under the new covenant lift up this prayer in a spiritual way, saying, "Lord, cut out the enemies of Your kingdom by winning them over to Your kingdom, that they may be Your servants, not enemies of Your people." The Jews at the time of Christ used to say that heaven rejoiced at the destruction of a sinner so that the earth may be rid of his wickedness. Christ, however, said that heaven rejoices over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7,10). Thus is the earth rid of his wickedness, not because he perished, but because he repented from his wickedness. In this Christian, spiritual sense we understand this last verse of our psalm, and in the same way we are to apply it in our dealings.

### 3.4. Questions

1. What is the solution to one's disability to justify himself?
2. What are two griefs of sin?

## 4. Psalm One Hundred and Forty-Four

## **Blessed Be the Lord my Rock**

Of David.

1 Praise be to the LORD my Rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle.

2 He is my loving God and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer, my shield, in whom I take refuge, who subdues peoples under me.

3 O LORD, what is man that you care for him, the son of man that you think of him?

4 Man is like a breath; his days are like a fleeting shadow.

5 Part your heavens, O LORD, and come down; touch the mountains, so that they smoke.

6 Send forth lightning and scatter the enemies; shoot your arrows and rout them.

7 Reach down your hand from on high; deliver me and rescue me from the mighty waters, from the hands of foreigners

8 whose mouths are full of lies, whose right hands are deceitful.

9 I will sing a new song to you, O God; on the ten-stringed lyre I will make music to you,

10 to the One who gives victory to kings, who delivers his servant David from the deadly sword.

11 Deliver me and rescue me from the hands of foreigners whose mouths are full of lies, whose right hands are deceitful.

12 Then our sons in their youth will be like well-nurtured plants, and our daughters will be like pillars carved to adorn a palace.

13 Our barns will be filled with every kind of provision. Our sheep will increase by thousands, by tens of thousands in our fields;

14 our oxen will draw heavy loads. There will be no breaching of walls, no going into captivity, no cry of distress in our streets.

15 Blessed are the people of whom this is true; blessed are the people whose God is the LORD.

This psalm is the first of seven praise psalms that conclude the Psalter. In this psalm the psalmist praises the Lord who gives victory to His people. He is astounded that the great Lord is concerned with man, who is a mere breath or a passing shadow. He then proceeds to entreat the Lord to grant him and His people victory over the foreign enemy. Since he is sure of God's victory, he thanks Him with a new song, which he composed and sang on a harp of ten strings. Finally, he describes the prosperity of his people in terms of family, economy, security and spirituality thanks to God's grace. Most of the ideas of this psalm are copied from other psalms, which are Psalms 8,18,39,104 and 133. What characterizes this psalm is the reference to David in its main body (verse 10), not just in its superscription.

The psalm contains the following:

- First: The psalmist describes his present (verses 1-11)
- Second: The psalmist describes his future (verses 12-15)

#### **4.1. First: The Psalmist Describes his Present**

##### **(verses 1-11)**

1. **He belongs to a mighty God:** "Praise be to the LORD my Rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle. He is my loving God and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer, my shield, in whom I take refuge, who subdues peoples under me" (verses 1,2). In these two verses we have eight descriptions of God's might that aided the psalmist, who responded with a song of thanksgiving to the Lord:
  1. **"My Rock":** "Praise be to the LORD my Rock." The psalmist blesses God who has already blessed him, as it was said, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3). The psalmist also blesses his Lord because He was his mighty, unchangeable Rock, who can be completely trusted, who is the place of protection and rest: "The shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land" (Isaiah 32:2).
  2. **"My Trainer":** "Who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle." As a shepherd boy David killed a lion and a bear that took a sheep from his flock, then later killed Goliath who defied the armies of the Lord (1 Samuel 17). Shortly after that he said, "He trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze" (Psalm 18:34), for the believer is always engaged in spiritual warfare, both on the inside and the outside. The flesh within him lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. His adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking to devour him. Therefore the believer must receive the Lord's training to lead a life of victory, walking according to the Spirit and resisting the devil that he may flee from him. "Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand" (Ephesians 6:13). God trains the believer and says to him, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you" (Psalm 32:8).
  3. **"My loving kindness":** God's loving kindness is intense, constant and unchangeable. Man needs it everywhere and at all times. The believer assigns this divine loving kindness to himself, saying, "My loving kindness." Christ is the loving kindness of God because he carries the sins of all those who receive Him as Lord and Saviour. "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the

- dead" (1 Peter 1:3).
4. **"My fortress"**: To whom he runs in time of peril and when he finds complete protection he says, "For you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe. I long to dwell in your tent forever and take refuge in the shelter of your wings" (Psalm 61:3,4).
  5. **"My high tower"**: A warrior finds protection in his fortified tower; even when under siege he finds in it all the weapons, water and food supply he needs. Towers are usually erected on a high rock to be able to hold out. Although the Lord is a high tower, He does not hold Himself high above the God-fearer, but rather comes down to his level to deliver and protect him.
  6. **"My Deliverer"**: The Lord is the Rock whose work is perfect (Deuteronomy 32:4), who teaches those who fear Him how to defend themselves, as well as providing them with the refuge and shelter as they run to Him. "He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions" (Daniel 6:27).
  7. **"My shield"**: The One in whom the psalmist takes refuge. A shield is a piece of wood covered with leather. It was used by fighters to ward off arrows. "From the west, men will fear the name of the LORD, and from the rising of the sun, they will revere his glory. For he will come like a pent-up flood that the breath of the LORD drives along" (Isaiah 59:19). The fighter relies on the shield for protection against arrows, to keep his body from any harm or wounds. The arrows may even sink into the shield sometimes, so the fighter removes them and shoots them back at the enemy. Thus what was meant for evil turns out to be for good, protection and defence. This subdues the enemy and defeats him.
  8. **"My Patron"**: "Who subdues my people under me." Absalom made several attempts to overthrow his father David, and some of David's own friends took sides with Absalom against David. But the Lord delivered David and subdued his people under him (2 Samuel 15-19). "When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, he makes even his enemies live at peace with him" (Proverbs 16:7).
2. **He is astonished at God's love**: "O LORD, what is man that you care for him, the son of man that you think of him? Man is like a breath; his days are like a fleeting shadow" (verses 3,4). The psalmist expresses in these two verses his astonishment at the Lord's concern for him, and lists two descriptions of man:
1. **Man is a breath**: This was the name given to Abel by Adam, for his name means breath or vapour. "Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes" (James 4:14). The wicked hurt him and sickness weakens him. "You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is

- but a breath... each man is but a breath" (Psalm 39:5,11).
2. **Man is a shadow:** The psalmist wonders at God's concern for man, who is but a shifting shadow, never staying in one place, and when it ends it leaves no trace behind. A shadow seems to be something, but it is actually nothing. Its existence depends on the light falling on an object. "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?" (Psalm 8:4).
  3. **He belongs to a God who grants him victory:** "Part your heavens, O LORD, and come down; touch the mountains, so that they smoke. Send forth lightning and scatter the enemies; shoot your arrows and rout them. Reach down your hand from on high; deliver me and rescue me from the mighty waters, from the hands of foreigners whose mouths are full of lies, whose right hands are deceitful" (verses 5-8). A breath or a shadow cannot defend itself, and there must be someone else to defend and preserve it. Only the Lord fits this description of a defender. When Pharaoh pursued the Israelites, they were hemmed in by the sea ahead of them and the enemy behind them, and there seemed to be no escape looming on the horizon. But Moses said to them, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still" (Exodus 14:13,14). And it was so.
    1. **The Lord who granted victory:** The exodus is an example of this. The Lord frightened the enemy and cut him down to size. He granted victory to His servants by His divine glory, bringing down a pillar of cloud, making use of the wind and commanding the sea to deliver the godly and destroy the violent. By His divine power He flashed lightning and scattered them. "He shot his arrows and scattered the enemies, great bolts of lightning and routed them. The valleys of the sea were exposed and the foundations of the earth laid bare at your rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of breath from your nostrils" (Psalm 18:14,15).
    2. **The enemy who was defeated:** The enemies came along like a sweeping stream, but the Lord said to those who feared Him, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you" (Isaiah 43:2). The enemies are strangers to the faith; Christ said about them, "The time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me" (John 16:2,3). The right hand of the enemies is a false right hand. The right hand is lifted up for prayer, but the prayer of the enemies is false. It is also lifted up for confirming an oath, but the oaths and promises of the enemies are deceitful. Christ said to such enemies, "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44).

4. **He has confidence in divine victory:** "I will sing a new song to you, O God; on the ten-stringed lyre I will make music to you, to the One who gives victory to kings, who delivers his servant David from the deadly sword. Deliver me and rescue me from the hands of foreigners whose mouths are full of lies, whose right hands are deceitful" (verses 9-11).
1. **A confidence expressed through singing:** The psalmist was confident of the Lord's victory, so he prepared the people and composed a tune on a harp of ten strings. He walked in faith, not according to what his eyes could see, for faith sees what cannot be seen. Therefore he saw God's victory coming. "Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms" (James 5:13).
  2. **Confidence resulting from past dealings:** On recalling the past, the psalmist recognized that God saved David from the deadly sword, that is from the woes of war, as well as other leaders of His people. As a result his soul was reassured because "The eternal God is your refuge" (Deuteronomy 33:27).
  3. **Confidence because the enemy is defeated:** The psalmist was confident of the enemy's defeat because the enemy was wicked. The prayer he prayed as he lifted up his right hand was a hypocritical, insincere prayer because this same hand wielded the sword to slay the innocent. The right hand he lifted up to confirm an oath was also ready to swear falsely. Therefore he must be punished. "'No weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and this is their vindication from me,' declares the LORD" (Isaiah 54:17).

## 4.2. Second: The Psalmist Describes his Future

### (verses 12-15)

The Lord had already promised blessing to His people if they listened to the voice of the Lord their God and obeyed it. He said, "You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country. The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock--the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed" (Deuteronomy 28:3-5). In these four verses we see the fulfilment of four blessings:

1. **Familial future** (verse 12):
  1. **Sons:** "Then our sons in their youth will be like well-nurtured plants" (verse 12a). As a result of the Lord's blessings and powerful providence for weak man, his sons become like plants grown up at the time of their youth. This was described by the psalmist in the Psalms of Ascents in this way, "Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth... Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your sons will

- be like olive shoots around your table" (Psalm 127:3,4; 128:3). Sons are a real treasure; they are plants whose roots need to be grounded in good soil and suitable environment. They have the promise of a blessed future of growth, bloom and fruitfulness because they are watered by the living water. "Yet at the scent of water it will bud and put forth shoots like a plant" (Job 14:9).
2. **Daughters:** "And our daughters will be like pillars carved to adorn a palace" (verse 12b). In this happy condition the daughters, who required little trouble to raise them, are like sculptured pillars that bind the roof of the house together in harmony and unity. The psalmist must have been thinking of the beautiful, strong pillars with their grandeur and stability that adorn palaces when he saw his beautiful daughters in their bright garments and golden ornaments, with their bodies growing strong from abundant food and good health. Perhaps the psalmist also recalled the Scripture, "O daughters of Israel, weep for Saul, who clothed you in scarlet and finery, who adorned your garments with ornaments of gold" (2 Samuel 1:24). It is good if the psalmist was thinking of physical health, but it is better if he was thinking of intelligence. And it is better if he was thinking of spiritual progress. Today's daughters are tomorrow's mothers. "A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value" (Proverbs 31:10,11).
  2. **Economical future:** "Our barns will be filled with every kind of provision. Our sheep will increase by thousands, by tens of thousands in our fields" (verse 13). When the Lord grants victory to His people, their threshing floors abound with wheat, barley and all sorts of grain. Sheep give birth in the fields, causing the animal wealth to increase. Here the psalmist makes a song similar to the song of the end of the agricultural year: "You crown the year with your bounty, and your carts overflow with abundance. The grasslands of the desert overflow; the hills are clothed with gladness. The meadows are covered with flocks and the valleys are mantled with grain; they shout for joy and sing" (Psalm 65:11-13).
  3. **Secure future:** "Our oxen will draw heavy loads. There will be no breaching of walls, no going into captivity, no cry of distress in our streets" (verse 14). The psalmist describes the glorious future of the people who are protected by the Lord as safe and secure. Their oxen carry big burdens from the fields to the barns without being attacked by raiders. Nobody attacks or breaks into another's house. Nobody lifts an outcry against another. All are content and secure. Each one sits under his vine and fig tree with complete assurance, as was the case under King Solomon (1 Kings 4:25). This fulfils David's promise, "The LORD gives strength to his people; the LORD blesses his people with peace" (Psalm 29:11). "He grants peace to your borders and satisfies you with the finest of wheat" (Psalm 147:14). " 'And I myself will be a wall of fire around it,' declares the LORD, 'and I will be its glory within' " (Zechariah 2:5). "For the eyes of the LORD range

throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war" (2 Chronicles 16:9).

4. **Spiritual future:** "Blessed are the people of whom this is true; blessed are the people whose God is the LORD" (verse 15). The psalmist sees a wonderful spiritual future awaiting his people under the Lord's sovereignty: "Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people he chose for his inheritance" (Psalm 33:12).

The Psalter started off with a beatitude (Psalm 1:1), just as Christ started His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:3). How happy is the man who lives with the Lord, having given Him control over his life, for then the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount will apply to him. Christ started His ministry in Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God and saying, " 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!' " (Mark 1:15). Let us, therefore, open our hearts to receive the good news of the gospel, and let our hearts be good soil to understand and receive the seed of God's word and produce fruit (Matthew 13:23).

### 4.3. Questions

1. In verses 1,2 the psalmist describes his Lord with eight titles. Mention seven of them.
2. How did the psalmist express his confidence in divine victory?

## 5. Psalm One Hundred and Forty-Five

### I will Praise Your Name Forever

A psalm of praise. Of David.

- 1 I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever.
- 2 Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever.
- 3 Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom.
- 4 One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts.
- 5 They will speak of the glorious splendour of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works.
- 6 They will tell of the power of your awesome works, and I will proclaim your great deeds.
- 7 They will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness.
- 8 The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.
- 9 The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.
- 10 All you have made will praise you, O LORD; your saints will extol you.
- 11 They will tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might,



- 12 so that all men may know of your mighty acts and the glorious splendour of your kingdom.
- 13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made.
- 14 The LORD upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down.
- 15 The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time.
- 16 You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.
- 17 The LORD is righteous in all his ways and loving toward all he has made.
- 18 The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.
- 19 He fulfils the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them.
- 20 The LORD watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy.
- 21 My mouth will speak in praise of the LORD. Let every creature praise his holy name for ever and ever.

This psalm is the second of seven praise psalms that conclude the Psalter. It is the new song spoken of in Psalm 144:9: "I will sing a new song to you, O God; on the ten-stringed lyre I will make music to you." The heart of this psalmist seems to have been filled with the concluding doxology of the Lord's prayer: "Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory." He praises the eternal King, the Creator of all mankind, who is praised and glorified by all, because He loves His creatures and graciously meets all their needs. The Jews used to sing this psalm three times a day: twice during morning worship and a third time during evening worship. The early church, as well, used to recite it in daytime before having lunch. Verses 15 and 16 were an essential part of the prayer of thanksgiving over meals: "The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing." Saint John Chrysostom used to recite this psalm while partaking of the Lord's communion, considering it to be the believer's spiritual nourishment. In Psalm 142 David poured out his complaint, in Psalm 143 he lifted up a prayer of repentance and in Psalm 144 he asked the Lord to teach him how to fight the enemy and to grant him victory so that he might sing a new song. Now in this psalm comes joy and exaltation of the Lord for how He rendered justice to the psalmist by heeding his complaint, forgiving his sin and granting him victory over the enemy.

Our present psalm is an acrostic, each verse beginning with a consequent letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It does not have a verse beginning with the letter "nun", though. (Both Psalms 25 and 34 are acrostics, yet they do not have the letter "waw".) Some commentators have remarked that acrostic psalms containing verses that have all the letters of the alphabet speak of the righteous who have completed the race and arrived at the triumphant church in heaven. The psalms missing a verse that begins with a letter of the alphabet, however, speak of the righteous on earth, the members of the church, who still strive in the service and for the

glorification of God.

The psalm contains the following:

- First: Praising the great God (verses 1-7)
- Second: Praising the merciful God (verses 8-10)
- Third: Praising the sovereign God (verse 11-13)
- Fourth: Praising the generous God (verses 14-21)

### 5.1. First: Praising the Great God

#### (verses 1-7)

1. **Great in his kingship:** "I will exalt you, my God the King" (verse 1a). The Lord is King over the entire world. He created all things, He looks after all things, He redeemed all men from their sins through Christ's atonement. David called to Him, "Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray" (Psalm 5:2). "Your procession has come into view, O God, the procession of my God and King into the sanctuary" (Psalm 68:24).
2. **Great in His perpetuity:** "I will praise your name for ever and ever. Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever" (verses 1b,2). He is there every day and until eternity. "For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end" (Daniel 6:26). Therefore "anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). The psalmist's praise to the Lord will not cease as long as he lives on earth, and he will go on to praise Him in heaven.
3. **Great in righteousness:** "Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom" (verse 3). The Lord is good and His mercy endures for ever. None deserves praise but Him and the greatness of His righteousness knows no limits; it surpasses description. "Great is the LORD, and most worthy of praise, in the city of our God, his holy mountain" (Psalm 48:1). Eliphaz said about Him, "He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted" (Job 5:9). After speaking of God's redemptive work and His faithfulness to His promises despite the faithlessness of His people, Paul said, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!" (Romans 11:33).
4. **Great in working of wonders:** "One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts. They will speak of the glorious splendour of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works. They will tell of the power of your awesome works, and I will proclaim your great deeds. They will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness" (verses 4-7). The Lord works wonders

for His people every day, and therefore they "shall commend, tell and sing" as a people, just as the psalmist says He "will meditate and proclaim." Successive generations praise the Lord, both individually and as a group, for the miraculous deeds He has worked for their fathers, with confidence that He will work them with their children as well. Whenever the Israelites celebrated the Passover, the children would ask their parents, "What does this ceremony mean to you?" The parents would answer them, "It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians" (Exodus 12:26,27). Moses said in his poem, "Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you" (Deuteronomy 32:7). The believer also says, "Since my youth, O God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvellous deeds" (Psalm 71:17). Now Paul says, "Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us" (2 Corinthians 1:9,10).

## **5.2. Second: Praising the Merciful God**

### **(verses 8-10)**

- 1. His mercy is active:** "The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made" (verses 8,9). God had already declared His being merciful and gracious (Exodus 34:6). All the saints have repeated it in all ages. The psalmist made mention of it in Psalm 86:15 and 103:8; Nehemiah the governor repeated it in his prayer (Nehemiah 9:16,17), as well as the prophet Joel (Joel 2:13) and the prophet Jonah (4:2). God's mercy is not just feelings, but real and tangible acts. God shows mercy to the sinner by saving him, the wounded by comforting him and the perplexed by guiding him. The prophet Nahum said about Him, "The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him" (Nahum 1:7). His mercy shows in its perfect majesty in redemption, for the Scriptures say, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished--" (Romans 3:23-25). Again the Scriptures say, "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins... But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:1,4,5).
- 2. His mercy is praiseworthy:** "All you have made will praise you, O LORD; your saints will extol you" (verse 10). Nature submits to the laws of its Creator and bears witness to

His greatness through its immense vastness. The saints, however, sense the greatness of His unmerited mercy and bless Him. Their minds are impressed by His mercy, so they glorify Him. Their hearts are impressed by His mercy, so they love Him. Their wills are impressed by His mercy, so they obey Him. They shout, "But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, for he has been good to me" (Psalm 13:5,6).

### 5.3. Third: Praising the Sovereign God

#### (verse 11-13)

1. **Possessor of the glorious kingdom:** "They will tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might" (verse 11). His sovereignty is glorious, His power is great, spoken of by the saints. Noah and his family spoke of it as the flood destroyed the sinners, and Lot spoke of it as the flames of fire consumed Sodom and Gomorrah. This power submits to God's love; He is the loving Sovereign who says, "I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them" (Hosea 11:4). In His capacity as King and Sovereign He gave all those who received Christ the grace to be His own children (John 1:12). At the end of time He will say to every saint, "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' " (Matthew 25:21).
2. **Possessor of the revealed dominion:** "So that all men may know of your mighty acts and the glorious splendour of your kingdom" (verse 12). When the believers are awestruck by the glory of God's kingdom, they tell the people around them what God has done for them. Whenever we mention the wondrous work of redemption we fulfil Christ's commandment to us about taking the Lord's communion, "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). We also fulfil His commandment to the healed demon-possessed man: "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you" (Mark 5:19).
3. **Possessor of the eternal kingdom:** "Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made" (verse 13). This kingdom is from eternity past to eternity future, of which King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon said, "It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me. How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation" (Daniel 4:2,3).

### 5.4. Fourth: Praising the Generous God

**(verses 14-21)**

1. **He upholds the fallen:** "The LORD upholds all those who fall" (verse 14a). Man falls under the weight of sin that binds him with chains from which only the Lord, the upholder of the fallen, can loose him. Man may also fall under the pressure of grief, with nobody to lift him up but the Comforter of the sorrowful and the Soother of the troubled: "For the power of the wicked will be broken, but the LORD upholds the righteous... though he stumble, he will not fall, for the LORD upholds him with his hand" (Psalm 37:17,24). Therefore the psalmist calls Him, "Sustain me according to your promise, and I will live; do not let my hopes be dashed" (Psalm 119:116).
2. **He raises up those who are bowed down:** "And lifts up all who are bowed down" (verse 14b). Man may be bowed down under the burden of debts, because of a lost hope or owing to his inability to face up to certain situations. When he cries out to the Lord, He removes the burden from the man's shoulder or gives him strength to endure, just as Christ healed the woman who was bent over and could not stand or walk erect. As soon as He drove out the spirit of infirmity, she was made straight and glorified God (Luke 13:10-17). Similarly, concerning the thorn Paul had in the flesh, about which he had earlier entreated the Lord, the Lord said: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).
3. **He feeds all:** "The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing" (verses 15,16). "He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good... Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" (Matthew 5:45; 6:25-27). For that reason the psalmist said, "These all look to you to give them their food at the proper time. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things" (Psalm 104:27,28). His saints have their eyes on Him to feed them with Christ, the living bread that came down from heaven, of whom, if anyone eats, he will live forever (John 6:51).
4. **He works righteousness:** "The LORD is righteous in all his ways and loving toward all he has made" (verse 17). The Lord is righteous and just, but also gracious and merciful. His justice cannot be reconciled with His mercy except upon the cross of Christ, in which justice with all its requirements was satisfied, because Christ endured in Himself and His body the punishment of sin. God's mercy with all its power and beauty also appeared in the cross, as the psalmist said, "Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other" (Psalm 85:10). "That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them... God made him who had no sin to be sin for

us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:19,21). "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

5. **He answers prayer:** "The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfils the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them" (verses 18,19). The Lord is as near as a lover to his beloved, therefore He hastens to them and avenges them speedily (Luke 18:8). Nothing can separate the Lord from those who need His mercy; He is near to them and He inclines His ear, hears their cry and delivers them (Psalm 40:1). Scriptures encourage us, "Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near" (Isaiah 55:6). All those with an undivided and sincere heart, who call upon Him in truth will find Him listening and responding. The key is to call out with a believing and trusting heart that loves God and submits to Him. "What the righteous desire will be granted" (Proverbs 10:24). "What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him?" (Deuteronomy 4:7). "Yet you are near, O LORD, and all your commands are true" (Psalm 119:151).
6. **He administers justice:** "The LORD watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy" (verse 20). This King is gracious to the righteous; He preserves him from the evil of the wicked, from the temptations of the devil and from making the wrong decision. In His justice He destroys the wicked by means of his own evil. When he digs a pit he will fall into it, and when he rolls a stone he will have it roll back on him (Proverbs 26:27). This was the psalmist's experience and therefore he exclaimed, "They spread a net for my feet--I was bowed down in distress. They dug a pit in my path--but they have fallen into it themselves" (Psalm 57:6). Therefore Christ encouraged His disciples by the statement, "All men will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish. By standing firm you will gain life" (Luke 21:17-19). "He who watches over you will not slumber... The LORD watches over you--the LORD is your shade at your right hand" (Psalm 121:3,5).
7. **He deserves to be praised:** "My mouth will speak in praise of the LORD. Let every creature praise his holy name for ever and ever" (verse 21). The psalmist began his psalm by praising his God, his great, merciful and gracious King, and ended it by acknowledging God's great favor. Then he declared that all mankind who enjoyed His holy gift and holy righteousness share with him in praising the holy name in this age and forever; they all shout, "Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits" (Psalm 103:2).

"They will speak of the glorious splendour of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works" (Psalm 145:5).

### 5.5. Questions

1. The psalmist described God's greatness in four aspects. Name them.
2. In verses 14-21 of this psalm the psalmist praises the gracious Lord for seven reasons. Mention them.

## 6. Psalm One Hundred and Forty-Six

### Praising the Only Help

- 1 Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD, O my soul.
- 2 I will praise the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.
- 3 Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save.
- 4 When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing.
- 5 Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God,
- 6 the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them--the LORD, who remains faithful forever.
- 7 He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free,
- 8 the LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous.
- 9 The LORD watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.
- 10 The LORD reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD.

In this psalm the psalmist praises the Lord as the only Saviour and Deliverer. He also warns his audience not to rely on any creature. The creature may offer his help at the beginning, but his help does not last because he is subject to death. The Lord, on the other hand, lives forever. This psalm is the first amongst five psalms called the Hallelujahs (Psalms 146-150) because all of them begin and end with the word "Hallelujah", which is generally translated "Praise the Lord." These psalms were sung by the Jews in their morning worship. Jewish tradition has it that the prophets Haggai and Zechariah participated in collecting the five Hallelujahs, and the Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint adds the appellation "To Haggai and Zechariah" to the beginning of each one. The present psalm strongly calls for thanking the Creator rather than the created, for He is the hope of all mankind and the only source of all good and blessing. He executes justice and truth to all His saints, forgives sins by the power of His love and satisfies the hungry from the treasure of His riches.

The psalm contains the following:

- First: Praising the Lord (verses 1,2)
- Second: The powerlessness of man (verses 3,4)
- Third: The sufficiency of the Lord (verse 5-10)

## 6.1. First: Praising the Lord

### (verses 1,2)

The psalm begins with the imperative: "Praise the LORD!", which is *hallelujah* in Hebrew. It is used to glorify the Lord. Many languages of the world turned it into a verb. It has been borrowed as it is into most of the languages of the world, just like another Hebrew word *amen*, which means steadfast, constant, truthful or faithful. When "amen" is used to conclude a prayer, it is supposed to mean: "Let it be so," or "May You respond."

1. **The necessity of praise:** "Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD, O my soul" (verse 1). The psalmist called for praising the Lord in general, beginning with his own soul, saying to it in the imperative, "Praise the LORD, O my soul!" It seems as if he said, "Praise Him, my soul, since you trust in Him, experienced His goodness, and lived dependent on His help and benefits." "Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits" (Psalm 103:1,2). Praise, O my inner person and O my inner being that is hidden from people and exposed to God your Creator. Testify to His truth, majesty and love for you. Tell of the great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you. Sing to the Lord and rejoice in Him. Talk to Him intimately and lovingly; He hears you and delights in you. Let others see your joy in the Lord and know the reason for the hope that is in you, which can be in them also.
2. **The continuance of praise:** "I will praise the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live" (verse 2). The psalmist's praise did not issue from just his lips, but rather his entire life was a song of praise to the Lord. This praise is attested to by his thoughts and conduct. He resolved that as long as there was breath in him he would not cease or be weary of praise and thanksgiving. The believer praises the Lord even as he goes through troubles, "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (2 Corinthians 4:17). He praises the One who created him and carried him all the days of old, who will still carries him even to old age and even to grey hairs (Isaiah 46:4). Since the believer will live forever with Christ, his praise starts here on earth and never stops in heaven, where the Lord's servants will praise Him with the harps of God (Revelation 15:2).

## 6.2. Second: Powerlessness of Man



**(verses 3,4)**

1. **A trustworthy advice:** "Do not put your trust in princes" (verse 3a). The psalmist forbids us to rely on those who hold power, although their influence and power may far exceed ours. We sometimes turn to them thinking that their power will solve all our problems, but forget that they are subject to temptations just like us. They also have needs that they look for someone to meet and problems that need to be solved. One fatal concern of these people is how to keep the power they have got; although if others had kept it, it would not have become theirs in the first place! As for the rich, they are afraid they may lose their possessions. They are anxious to invest their money or are obsessed with amassing more money. They suspect the intentions of everyone who deals with them lest they should double-cross them. People often rely on people. Rabshakeh, the army general of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, reproached Hezekiah, king of Judah, saying, "On what are you basing this confidence of yours? ... Look now, you are depending on Egypt, that splintered reed of a staff, which pierces a man's hand and wounds him if he leans on it! Such is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who depend on him" (Isaiah 36:4,6). Sometimes we are tempted to rely on our personal influence, social or financial status and in a moment they are gone! So let us heed the saying of the wise man, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5). This does not mean to shun the assistance of our brothers and sisters, for a brother is born for adversity (Proverbs 17:17). But it means rather to look up to where our help comes from, for "My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:2).
2. **Justifications of the advice:** "Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing" (verses 3b,4). The psalmist cites four things as evidence for the trustworthiness of his advice:
  1. **Men are weak:** They are the sons of Adam. Adam is derived from the "adamah", the earth, for "the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7). The masters of today are the dust of tomorrow, to be trodden on by man and beast!
  2. **Men cannot deliver anyone:** "Who cannot save." Man cannot save himself, unless he receives help from above; neither can he redeem himself from the punishment of sin. Being unable to deliver himself, how much less is he able to deliver someone else!
  3. **Men are mortal:** "When their spirit departs, they return to the ground" (verse 4a). Man is like dust that is scattered by the wind. No matter how high he goes up in the air, his inevitable destiny is the grave. By the sweat of his face he shall eat bread till he returns to the ground, for out of it he was taken: "By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return" (Genesis 3:19). How then can we rely on

that which does not exist?

4. **Man's plans are short-lived:** "On that very day their plans come to nothing" (verse 4b). Man assumes that he will live forever, so he dreams, plans and aspires. But what is our life? It is a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away (James 4:14). We ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that" (James 4:15). A wise man is a man who prays, "Show me, O LORD, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life. You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath. Man is a mere phantom as he goes to and fro" (Psalm 39:4-6). How can we possibly trust in someone as frail as we are? "This is what the LORD says: 'Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD... But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him'" (Jeremiah 17:5,7).

### 6.3. Third: Sufficiency of the Lord

#### (verse 5-10)

1. **Blessing the man who trusts in the Lord:** "Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God" (verse 5). There is happiness, joy and hope for those whose help comes from the Lord, who changed "Jacob", the pursuer of his brother Esau, and made him "Israel," the one who struggled with God. In response, Jacob said, "I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant" (Genesis 32:10). Whoever has the Lord for a helper will have an abundance of blessing and an inexhaustible fountain of peace, from which he receives strength, protection and invulnerability to shame. For the Lord is good and faithful, and His faithfulness endures forever. Even if we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot disown Himself (2 Timothy 2:13). "Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods" (Psalm 40:4), but says, "In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame... For you have been my hope, O Sovereign LORD, my confidence since my youth" (Psalm 71:1,5).
2. **Reasons for trusting the Lord** (verses 6-10):
  1. **The Lord is the Creator:** "The Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them--the LORD, who remains faithful forever" (verse 6). The believer's sufficiency is in the Lord because He is the powerful Creator of the heavens and earth, the One who holds absolute authority in all of them. His authority is over the heavens as well as the sun, moon, stars and planets that exist in them. He is the author of the earth together with everything on it, the universe and those who inhabit it: "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases" (Proverbs 21:1). Therefore we say to Him, "You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on

- it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you" (Nehemiah 9:6).
2. **The Lord is faithful:** "Who remains faithful forever" (verse 6a). The believer's sufficiency is in the Lord because He is faithful to His promises, as Joshua said, "Not one of all the LORD's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled" (Joshua 21:45). Solomon the wise said, "Praise be to the LORD, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses" (1 Kings 8:56).
  3. **The Lord is compassionate** (verses 7-9): The believer's sufficiency is in the Lord because He shows compassion for all. Christ said, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18,19). The psalmist lists eight types of people for whom the Lord shows compassion:
    1. **The oppressed:** "He upholds the cause of the oppressed" (verse 7a). Man tends to oppress his fellow man but "The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed" (Psalm 103:6). If you have been wronged, complain to Him; wait and hope in Him. He will plead Your cause and bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday (Psalm 37:6).
    2. **The hungry:** "And gives food to the hungry" (verse 7b). He fed the Israelites for forty years in the wilderness on manna; and when they craved for meat, He gave them quail: "For he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things" (Psalm 107:9). Christ taught us to ask Him to give us our daily bread (Matthew 6:11), and He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think (Ephesians 3:20). More importantly, He satisfies our spiritual hunger with His own Person, for He said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty" (John 6:35).
    3. **The prisoner:** "The LORD sets prisoners free" (verse 7c). The Lord breaks fetters apart and sets the prisoner free. When Peter was imprisoned sixteen soldiers guarded him, but when the church prayed for him God sent His angel, who woke him up, made the chains fall from his hands and feet, opened the prison gate for him and set him free (Acts 12). When Paul and Silas were imprisoned in Philippi: "Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose" (Acts 16:26). Yet, the most serious and important release is that of the prisoners of sin, who have been bound by the devil. The Lord liberates them and gives them a new life just as Christ did with the Samaritan woman (John 4), the sinful woman (John 8) and Zacchaeus the tax collector (Luke 19). He also liberates from fear, despair, frustration, bitterness, grudges and bad habits. "The

LORD redeems his servants; no one will be condemned who takes refuge in him" (Psalm 34:22).

4. **The blind:** "The LORD gives sight to the blind" (verse 8a). He opens the physical eyes, as when He healed the man born blind (John 9) and the two blind men who cried out to Him and were healed according to their faith (Matthew 9). More importantly, He heals from blindness of insight, for He said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).
5. **The bowed down:** "The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down" (verse 8b). Christ healed the woman who was bowed down and could in no way raise herself up because the devil bound her for eighteen years: "Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God" (Luke 13:13). He also straightens all those who are bowed down by worries, because He is the One who said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).
6. **The righteous:** "The LORD loves the righteous" (verse 8c). The righteous one is the one who has a right standing with God. No one is righteous in himself but is made righteous or justified by Christ: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:1,2). The Lord loves the righteous because they do not try to justify themselves, but rather fall back on His mercy, saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" The Lord responds to such a supplication and they go down justified (Luke 18:13,14). "The salvation of the righteous comes from the LORD; he is their stronghold in time of trouble" (Psalm 37:39).
7. **The stranger:** "The LORD watches over the alien" (verse 9a). The Lord watches over the stranger, the passing traveller, the homeless, the refugee--all those who have no right of residency, because they are helpless. The Lord is concerned with the disadvantaged classes of society because He is their Creator and Father. He says to all those who look after them, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40). Being a stranger is not just being physically absent from home or away from one's family. There is an emotional feeling of being absent from home, of being lonely, even if the person is living among his own people. There is loneliness and absence from home in sickness, as we cry out to the Lord, "Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted" (Psalm 25:16). He answers us, restores our souls and leads us in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.
8. **The fatherless and widow:** "The LORD... sustains the fatherless and the widow"

(verse 9b). The Lord supports those who have no support. "Sing to God, sing praise to his name... A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling" (Psalm 68:4,5). The Lord supported the widow and her orphaned son after she had given the prophet Elijah the cake she baked, so that "the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah" (1 Kings 17:16). Christ, likewise, had pity on the widow of Nain, and raised her only child from the dead (Luke 7:12-15).

4. **The Lord punishes the wicked:** "But he frustrates the ways of the wicked" (verse 9c). The Lord is sufficient for the believer because He punishes the wicked, bringing a blessing for the believer out of his crookedness. "The LORD detests the way of the wicked but he loves those who pursue righteousness" (Proverbs 15:9) because it is a way departing from the Lord, not the way of the upright commandment, and those who depart from the Lord shall be written in the dust (Jeremiah 17:13). The Lord returns the evil of wicked upon his head, just as He said to King Ahab who killed Naboth the Jezreelite and usurped his vineyard, "In the place where dogs licked up Naboth's blood, dogs will lick up your blood--yes, yours!" (1 Kings 21:19). The Lord twists the way of the wicked to protect the believer from him, bringing out of the eater something to eat, and out of the strong something sweet (Judges 14:14). Such was the case with Joseph, who said to his brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Genesis 50:20).
5. **The Lord is King:** "The LORD reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD" (verse 10). The believer's sufficiency is in the Lord because He is the King of kings and Lord of lords, whose dominion knows no end. All the kings of the earth die and perish, but the Lord lives forever--the believer praises Him because He owns the believer's life, sits on the throne of his heart, deserves his thanksgiving, exaltation and praise. Therefore the believer declares His righteousness, makes known His goodness and tells everyone of His generosity. The Lord is the everlasting Master, not limited by space or place, not the God of just one people, for He says, "I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me" (Romans 10:20, quoting from Isaiah 65:1). He says, "Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name" (Revelation 3:12). Hallelujah! Praise Him, bless Him and glorify Him! Then He will bless you, keep you, make His face shine upon you, be gracious to you, lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace (Numbers 6:26).

## 6.4. Questions

1. Why should we not put our trust in people of authority?
2. The psalmist names eight kinds of people who need God's compassion. Name seven of them.

## **7. Psalm One Hundred and Forty-Seven**

### **It is Pleasant and Fitting to Praise**

1 Praise the LORD. How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him!

2 The LORD builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the exiles of Israel.

3 He heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds.

4 He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name.

5 Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit.

6 The LORD sustains the humble but casts the wicked to the ground.

7 Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; make music to our God on the harp.

8 He covers the sky with clouds; he supplies the earth with rain and makes grass grow on the hills.

9 He provides food for the cattle and for the young ravens when they call.

10 His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse, nor his delight in the legs of a man;

11 the LORD delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love.

12 Extol the LORD, O Jerusalem; praise your God, O Zion,

13 for he strengthens the bars of your gates and blesses your people within you.

14 He grants peace to your borders and satisfies you with the finest of wheat.

15 He sends his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly.

16 He spreads the snow like wool and scatters the frost like ashes.

17 He hurls down his hail like pebbles. Who can withstand his icy blast?

18 He sends his word and melts them; he stirs up his breezes, and the waters flow.

19 He has revealed his word to Jacob, his laws and decrees to Israel.

20 He has done this for no other nation; they do not know his laws. Praise the LORD.

This is a psalm of praise to God. It is not certain when it was written. It may have been written during the return from captivity. In this psalm the people gave thanks to God who gathered his people from the lands of their captivity and brought them back to their land in

fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecy, " 'The days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will bring my people Israel and Judah back from captivity and restore them to the land I gave their forefathers to possess,' says the LORD" (Jeremiah 30:3). Or maybe it was written for the occasion of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem under Nehemiah, as the Scripture says, "At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were sought out from where they lived and were brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps and lyres" (Nehemiah 12:27). Whatever the occasion of writing the psalm, it is an open invitation to all the people of the Lord to extol him and sing praises for his mercies and kindnesses. It is fitting, even needful to praise him at all times and under all circumstances, because he is good and his love never ceases or changes. We therefore shout, "I will sing to the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. May my meditation be pleasing to him, as I rejoice in the LORD" (Psalm 104:33,34).

This psalm divides naturally into three main sections, each of which starts with an invitation to praise, followed by an explanation of why we should praise and what to praise about. This serves as a reminder so that the believer may always remember the Lord's continual goodness, his extended arm and powerful right hand. "The LORD will be a refuge for his people" (Joel 3:16). "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deuteronomy 33:27).

The psalm contains the following:

1. First: Thanksgiving for bringing the exiles back (verses 1-6)
2. Second: Thanksgiving for divine care (verses 7-11)
3. Third: Thanksgiving for peace (verse 12-20)

## **7.1. First: Thanksgiving for Bringing the Exiles Back**

### **(verses 1-6)**

1. **An invitation to praise:** "Praise the LORD. How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him!" (verse 1). This at once an invitation and a command.
  1. **Praise is good:** "Praise the LORD. How good it is to sing praises to our God..." Lift up your voices with thanksgiving so that the good Lord may hear them, for "There is only One who is good" (Matthew 19:17) and it is praise that pleases him. Since all creation praises the Lord of the universe, it is only worthy for us to join it in magnifying Him, for He said, "He who sacrifices thank offerings honours me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God" (Psalm 50:23). Praise is good when it is directed to God who is good to all those who seek his face. He is the source of all goodness. When we sing praises to him, both our hearts and thoughts

- become good--we also rejoice, increase in strength and take heart. Despair and fear go away as we defeat the devil and overpower our enemies. It is good for those who hear us praise God because this prompts them to join us in the joys of praise, in accordance with the commandment, "Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise" (James 5:13). Praise is the best way to use language. It is the most enjoyable meeting, in which the brothers and sisters flow harmoniously together as they rejoice in the common Father to whom they sing.
2. **Praise is pleasant:** "How pleasant ... to praise him!" (verse 1b). It is equally pleasant to the Lord and the singer; it refreshes both mind and heart. "Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good; sing praise to his name, for that is pleasant" (Psalm 135:3).
  3. **Praise is fitting:** "How fitting to praise him!" (verse 1c). It is fitting for the Lord because He is our benefactor, for in Him we live and move and have our being, and apart from Him we can do nothing. It is fitting for the divine majesty, as much as it is fitting for us, so that we may return a little of his benefits, for everything we possess comes from Him. So "let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise--the fruit of lips that confess his name" (Hebrews 13:15). It is fitting to praise Him because it is an expression of our love to the One who has loved us out of the goodness of His heart. He gave Himself for us to restore our souls from captivity in the land of deception and bring us back to His sheepfold, to bless us, to make room for us after we have been distressed, to bring us closer to Himself after we have been far away, to heal us after being sick, to satisfy us after being hungry and to clothe us with the garment of righteousness after the nakedness of sin.
2. **The motivation to praise** (verses 2-6):
1. **God builds up and gathers:** "The LORD builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the exiles of Israel" (verse 2). When the Israelites disobeyed, the Lord let them be taken into exile to Babylon and they were thus denied access to His holy temple in Jerusalem, where they were supposed to worship Him. When the seventy years of exile came to an end, He brought them back home where they rebuilt the fallen walls of Jerusalem. Then their mouths were filled with laughter, their tongues with songs to the good Lord who gathered their scattered companies. They praised Him because He built up what the enemy tore down; He did not neglect his city, did not let His saints down, aided the weak and upheld the fallen. The prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled to them, "The ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away" (Isaiah 51:11). The Lord is still building up the believers as temples for the Lord after sin has torn them down and estranged them from God: "We are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people'" (2 Corinthians 6:16).



2. **God comforts:** "He heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds" (verse 3). How much did the Israelites grieve in their captivity as they remembered their city and sacred vessels, which the heathen profaned and destroyed! They also grieved for their sins, which gave them into the hands of a heathen nation that did not know God, so that their iniquities have separated them from their God and their place of worship. To express this, Nehemiah the governor said, "When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.... but I said to the king, '...Why should my face not look sad when the city where my fathers are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?' " (Nehemiah 1:4; 2:3). But the Lord comforted them and healed their broken hearts through his mercy. Today, the Lord comforts us, too, for Christ came to our planet to heal the broken-hearted (Luke 4:18) who are crushed by sin, the betrayal of someone dear to them, the loss of a relative or simply by giving up all hope. As the soul bows down under the this heavy load and cries to the Lord, He hears, binds up, restores, forgives, heals, redeems from the pit of despair and crowns life with love and compassion (Psalm 103). How glorious it is to remember that we have hope in Christ, who himself suffered when he was tempted and is able to help those who are being tempted (Hebrews 2:18).
3. **God knows:** "He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name. Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit" (verses 4,5). God said to his friend Abraham, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars--if indeed you can count them" (Genesis 15:5). Now he says to mankind, "Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing ... Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom" (Isaiah 40:26,28). Let us, therefore, praise the Creator of the universe, who knows the number of the stars He created and identifies them by name. None of them falls without His permission, for He is the Creator of all things and they exist by His command. His powerful word brought all things into being out of nothing, and it will sustain them forever. "The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths" (Psalm 135:6). He brought us into being and He looks after us. Even the very hairs of our head are all numbered, and none of them falls without his permission (Matthew 10:30). He knows us by name (John 10:3), He feels for us, is distressed with us and the angel of His presence saves us (Isaiah 63:9). He says to us, "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine" (Isaiah 43:1).
4. **God judges justly:** "The LORD sustains the humble but casts the wicked to the ground" (verse 6). When the Israelites sinned, God punished them with justice,

handing them over to their enemies. In captivity their hearts were broken over their sins, thus the merciful and just God fulfilled his promise to Solomon, "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14). God lifted up the countenance of gentle and humble Nehemiah who confessed the sins of the children of Israel, the sins of his father's house and his own sins (Nehemiah 1:6), and cast the wicked who delayed the building of the Lord's house to the ground. Truly, "the LORD loves the just and will not forsake his faithful ones. They will be protected forever, but the offspring of the wicked will be cut off; the righteous will inherit the land and dwell in it forever" (Psalm 37:28,29). "The LORD is known by his justice; the wicked are ensnared by the work of their hands. The wicked return to the grave, all the nations that forget God" (Psalm 9:16,17). As to the meek, blessed are they for they will inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5).

## 7.2. Second: Thanksgiving for Divine Care

### (verses 7-11)

1. **An invitation to praise:** "Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; make music to our God on the harp" (verse 7). The psalmist repeats the invitation to his people to respond to the Lord's kind acts with thanksgiving and singing, using both their voices and musical instruments. The Lord has brought back His exiled people, who had sinned against him, so His people must now respond to Him with thanksgiving and singing. When Adam sinned and disobeyed the Lord, he hid from the Lord. But the Lord sought him out because He wanted to cover his nakedness. Sinful Adam ought to have gone to the Lord, confessed his transgression and asked for forgiveness, but failing to do that, the Lord called him to cover him. The Lord still seeks out everyone who is lost until He finds him. "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them" (2 Corinthians 5:19). Let us respond to God's goodness with thanksgiving from both heart and mouth, and let our voices ring out with together with the instrument of music, saying, "The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation" (Psalm 118:14).
2. **The motivation to praise** (verses 8-11):
  1. **Giving thanks for the agricultural wealth:** "He covers the sky with clouds; he supplies the earth with rain and makes grass grow on the hills" (verse 8). The people must give thanks to the Lord because He did not create them just to leave them to fend for themselves, rather He took care of them and met all their needs. He prepared everything that makes plants and grass grow. Even the uninhabited mountains received their share of the Lord's providence just as abundantly as the valleys. "He waters the mountains from his upper chambers; the earth is satisfied by the fruit of his

- work. He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate--bringing forth food from the earth" (Psalm 104:13,14).
2. **Giving thanks for the animal wealth:** "He provides food for the cattle and for the young ravens when they call" (verse 9). We give thanks to the Lord who looks after all of his creation, both weak and strong. Cattle are big and strong in body and man uses them to help him, but the Lord gives them their food because they cannot provide food for themselves. As to the young ravens that cannot look after themselves, the Lord also provides for them. God asked Job, "Who provides food for the raven when its young cry out to God and wander about for lack of food?" (Job 38:41). Christ answered, "Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!" (Luke 12:24). Let us give thanks to the Lord who does not forget anyone.
  3. **Giving thanks for the divine pleasure:** "His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse, nor his delight in the legs of a man; the LORD delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love" (verses 10,11). Listing weapons of war in his days, the psalmist mentions the strength of the horse and the ability of men to run in attack and retreat. He seems to be saying that the Israelites, who could not stand in war against the armies of the Babylonian kingdom, returned to their land owing to the Lord's pleasure with them. Their return was not based on their military superiority, but on their fear of the Lord and hope in his unfailing love. The Lord honours those who fear Him and submit to Him in love and obedience. The psalmist said, "No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save. But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love" (Psalm 33:16-18).

### **7.3. Third: Thanksgiving for Peace**

#### **(verse 12-20)**

1. **An invitation to praise:** "Extol the LORD, O Jerusalem; praise your God, O Zion" (verse 12). The psalmist does not cease to call on his people and encourage them to extol the Lord who chose them to proclaim his truth and goodness to the world. He chose Jerusalem and the stronghold of Zion to be a site for building Solomon's temple. The Lord encourages His people so that they may rejoice and proclaim their joy in the divine privilege and election. And who else but the people of the Lord, who have been called by His name and brought back from exile by His grace, who should extol Him! Let us, therefore, extol this great God, to whom we belong and offer worship, saying with the psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you" (Psalm 73:25).
2. **The motivation to praise** (verses 14-20):

1. **God's care** (verses 13,14):

1. **Gives protection:** "For he strengthens the bars of your gates and blesses your people within you" (verse 13). The bars are the upper lintels with which the door is framed so that it may turn on itself to open and close easily (see Nehemiah 3:3,6,13-15). God strengthens the upper bars of the gates that they may not fall out; they open up for the members of the household who enter in peace, but shut up in the face of the enemies. As God protects His people "Like birds hovering overhead, the LORD Almighty will shield Jerusalem; he will shield it and deliver it, he will 'pass over' it and will rescue it" (Isaiah 31:5). God protected the firstborn of his people, who were inside their houses, from the destroying angel, while the firstborn of the Egyptians perished, because the Israelites obeyed the divine direction, "Take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses ... The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt" (Exodus 12:7,13). The Lord always protects the bars of his people's gates "and the gates of Hades will not overcome it" (Matthew 16:18) because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world (1 John 4:4). How lovely is the promise, "I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the LORD, give yourselves no rest" (Isaiah 62:6).
2. **Gives reassurance:** "He grants peace to your borders and satisfies you with the finest of wheat" (verse 14). God's care for His people makes their borders peaceful; no evil aggressor attacks them, but even makes their enemies at peace with them. He will say to them, "My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest" (Isaiah 32:18). Where peace reigns, blessing reigns, and the Lord will fill His people to over-flowing with the fatness of wheat according to his goodness: "Before that time there were no wages for man ... No one could go about his business safely because of his enemy ... But now ... The seed will grow well, the vine will yield its fruit, the ground will produce its crops, and the heavens will drop their dew. I will give all these things as an inheritance to the remnant of this people" (Zechariah 8:10-12).

2. **God's authority** (verses 15-20):

1. **The authority of his word:** "He sends his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly" (verse 15). The psalmist calls on his people to praise the Lord, the possessor of authority, who speaks things into being by His command: "Let there be." He commands and things come into existence. "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Genesis 1:3). His word runs swiftly to accomplish His good plans. Not one word has failed of all the good promises He gave (1 Kings 8:56). In ancient times, God's word came to His people through the prophets, but

nowadays God has spoken to us through His Son: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). The "Word" descended from His lofty home; the Most High humbled Himself; the owner of all riches was reduced to poverty, so that we may become rich. Prophets used this formula to deliver their messages: "Thus says the Lord." But Christ used to say, "I tell you the truth," because He is both the Word and the speaker, the message and the messenger, the prophet and the object of the prophecy, the One to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given. He said to the dead man, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" and the dead man sat up (Luke 7:14,15). "He ... rebuked the wind and said to the waves, 'Quiet! Be still!' Then the wind died down and it was completely calm ... They ... asked each other, 'Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!' " (Mark 4:39,41). His word is still at work in the hearts of men and women, because "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16,17).

2. **The authority of his power:** "He spreads the snow like wool and scatters the frost like ashes. He hurls down his hail like pebbles. Who can withstand his icy blast? He sends his word and melts them; he stirs up his breezes, and the waters flow" (verses 16-18). The psalmist calls his people to extol the Lord for His power that is evident in His authority over nature. In winter He spreads the snow like wool and scatters the grey frost like ashes. He brings down His hail like small pebbles, making man shiver in the cold. But soon spring comes, and all these melt with the blowing of the warm winds. There are tropical regions where rains pour down, as well as arctic regions that are covered with deep snow; in both regions there are different sorts of plants. In both regions live different races of men and types of plants, animals and birds. God has provided for each and every kind the suitable food and conditions that keep it alive. The psalmist compares snow to wool because both are white, both are created by God and both are necessary for life. The psalmist describes the different states of water as snow, frost and ice. When these melt, they turn into rain that waters the earth, making plants sprout, providing man, bird and animal with food and drink.
3. **The authority of his law:** "He has revealed his word to Jacob, his laws and decrees to Israel" (verse 19). The Lord loved the Israelites, blessed them with his law, preached to them through the prophets and made his laws and precepts known to them. Moses said to them, "Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations ... What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us ...? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of

laws ...?" (Deuteronomy 4:6-8). The Lord revealed His word to the Israelites, but spoke to us through Christ, the living Word. To everyone who receives Christ as Redeemer and Saviour, from any tribe, nation, people and tongue, He gives eternal life.

4. **The authority of his liberty:** "He has done this for no other nation; they do not know his laws. Praise the LORD" (verse 20). The Lord chose the Israelites to give them His law engraved on two tablets of stone, which He handed to Moses, so that they may be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). But they kept God's law to themselves and did not teach the heathens surrounding them; they even broke it and disobeyed it. He called them to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth; He chose them to tell the nations of His truth, as He said to Abraham, "I will bless you ... and you will be a blessing" (Genesis 12:2). But they kept the blessing to themselves, so He took it away from them and made it available to everyone who accepts Christ's redemption. The Scriptures say of Christ, "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:11,12). Those believers have become the nation that knows the law, who shout aloud with the author of our psalm, "Praise the LORD." Praise God who made faith available to all those who would accept it!

#### 7.4. Questions

1. Mention two motivations for praising God's care.
2. Mention two motivations for praising God for the peace He gives the believers.

### 8. Psalm One Hundred and Forty-Eight

#### Praise Him in the Heights Above

- 1 Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD from the heavens, praise him in the heights above.
- 2 Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his heavenly hosts.
- 3 Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars.
- 4 Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies.
- 5 Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created.
- 6 He set them in place for ever and ever; he gave a decree that will never pass away.
- 7 Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths,
- 8 lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding,
- 9 you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars,

10 wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds,  
11 kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on earth,  
12 young men and maidens, old men and children.  
13 Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his splendour is above the earth and the heavens.  
14 He has raised up for his people a horn, the praise of all his saints, of Israel, the people close to his heart. Praise the LORD.

This psalm begins and ends with the word "hallelujah." It is a Hebrew word which is generally translated "Praise the Lord!" The psalm is a song of praise to the Lord who grants victory to His people, brings them back from exile and draws them closer to himself, as the last verse says, "He has raised up for his people a horn, the praise of all his saints, of Israel, the people close to his heart. Praise the LORD." Perhaps this psalm was composed as a reply to the Levites' exhortation to the Israelites, " 'Stand up and praise the LORD your God, who is from everlasting to everlasting.' 'Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise. You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you' " (Nehemiah 9:5,6). In this psalm the psalmist calls upon heaven and all that is in it to praise the Lord. The earth responds to the praise of heaven and follows suit. Heaven starts and the earth replies, so that all creation sings in declaration of the goodness of the Lord who deserves to be glorified and praised. Like a complete musical choir, all creatures join in lifting up melodies of thanksgiving to the Lord, the Rock of ages, the Benefactor. We can almost see the author leap for joy as David and the children of Israel did when the ark of the Lord was brought up with shouts and the sound of trumpets. "David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the LORD with all his might" (2 Samuel 6:14). So let us say with the psalmist, "I will praise you with the harp for your faithfulness, O my God; I will sing praise to you with the lyre, O Holy One of Israel. My lips will shout for joy when I sing praise to you--I, whom you have redeemed" (Psalm 71:22,23).

The psalm contains the following:

- First: Heaven and all that is in it praises the Lord (verses 1-6)
- Second: The earth and all that is on it praises the Lord (verses 7-14)

### **8.1. First: Heaven and All that is in it Praises the Lord**

#### **(verses 1-6)**

Most people at the time of the psalmist worshipped false idols like angels, the sun, the moon

and the stars. The psalmist challenged these pagan idols to take the initiative and declare their allegiance to the only Deity to be worshipped, who is the Creator, so that those who worship them may be put to shame and kneel down before their Creator and the Creator of their idols. The psalmist, speaking on behalf of God, says to them, "Declare what is to be, present it--let them take counsel together. Who foretold this long ago, who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I, the LORD? And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Saviour; there is none but me" (Isaiah 45:21). It is strange, however, that even today we hear of people coming from far lands to visit the pyramids, sphinx and the other ancient Egyptian temples, where they perform religious rituals in honour of the sun. Also, there are still some primitive tribes that worship the creature and not the Creator. Our psalm holds us responsible for calling all those to worship the Lord, the Creator, by going into all the world and preaching the good news to all creation (Mark 16:15). "It is written: "As surely as I live," says the Lord, "every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God" ' " (Romans 14:11, quoted from Isaiah 45:23). John the theologian saw the four living creatures that represent the speechless creation, "never stop saying: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come' " (Revelation 4:8).

1. **An invitation to praise:** "Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD from the heavens, praise him in the heights above" (verse 1). Bildad the Shuhite, Job's friend, asked, "Can his forces be numbered? Upon whom does his light not rise?" (Job 25:3). In exultation the psalmist calls the creation in the heavens to extol the Lord in their lofty heights for the exaltation He imparted especially on them. He also calls the rest of mankind to join him in praising their creator, that their voices may rise up like a sweet aroma. Praise gladdens God's heart because in it He hears the voice of His own precious creation and the work of His own hands as they shout, "O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens" (Psalm 8:1).
2. **Those invited to praise** (verses 2-4):
  1. **The angels and His heavenly hosts:** "Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his heavenly hosts" (verse 2). This was David's appeal: "Praise the LORD, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will" (Psalm 103:20,21). This is also what Isaiah saw them doing when he said, "I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs ... And they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory' " (Isaiah 6:1-3). Angels did the same when Christ was born; a great company of the heavenly host appeared, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests" (Luke 2:13,14). John the author of Revelation said, "I looked and heard the voice of many angels ... They encircled the throne ... In a loud voice they sang: 'Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and



- honour and glory and praise!' Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!' " (Revelation 5:11-13). As his servants and ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation, they praise the Master of heaven and earth (Hebrews 1:14).
2. **The sun, the moon and the stars:** "Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars" (verse 3). God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5). The psalmist calls on all luminous creatures to lift up songs of praise to the source of their splendour and radiance, who works in them to make them give off light to the universe, for he "made two great lights--the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth" (Genesis 1:16,17). They rotate in their orbit declaring at all times the glory of the great Maker who loves his creation. "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge" (Psalm 19:1,2). Today, we praise the Lord who has not left us groping in the darkness of the world and the murkiness of sin, but rather sent us Christ, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). So, let us live as children of light (Ephesians 5:8), letting our light shine before men, that they may see our good deeds and praise our Father in heaven and join us in offering songs of praise to Him (Matthew 5:16).
  3. **The highest heavens and the waters:** "Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies" (verse 4). Moses said about the highest heavens, "To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it" (Deuteronomy 10:14). The apostle Paul ascended to the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2). Later Jewish writings claimed that there are seven heavens. Here the psalmist calls upon the highest heavens to extol their Creator, joined by the waters of the clouds, of which the book of Genesis says, "And God said, 'Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water.' So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so. God called the expanse 'sky.' And there was evening, and there was morning--the second day. And God said, 'Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.' And it was so" (Genesis 1:6-9). These waters are at the Lord's disposal, who in the six hundredth year of Noah's life, made all the springs of the great deep burst forth "and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights ... But God remembered Noah ... and the waters receded. Now the springs of the deep and the floodgates of the heavens had been closed, and the rain had stopped falling from the sky" (Genesis 7:11,12; 8:1,2).

**3. Topic of praise** (verses 5,6):

1. **He commanded and they were created:** "Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created" (verse 5). The psalmist says that the essential reason why these creatures praise God is that he brought them into being by his command. Had he not commanded, they would not have existed. All creation senses this privilege; that is why it praises the Lord and makes his glory and the greatness of handiwork known. Today, we praise Him because He created us physically when we were born physically. But there are those amongst us who praise him more because they have become a new, spiritual creation through the second birth, the birth from above. If you have not been born again, please listen to Christ's words, "No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit" (John 3:5,6). The Lord created us in his image, but we corrupted that image with our sins. But now, if we repent, He will re-create us, so that we may be able to say, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10).
2. **He set them in place:** "He set them in place for ever and ever" (verse 6a). The Lord's works praise Him because He created them and set them in place; all things are under His control and in Him all things hold together (Colossians 1:17). They all exist by His power and will and are set in place to testify to His goodness. "The word of the LORD is right and true; he is faithful in all he does. The LORD loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love. By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth" (Psalm 33:4-6).
3. **"He gave a decree that will never pass away"** (verse 6b). Creation praises God because He made laws and decrees for it that it cannot pass or overstep. It is the Lord who "appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar" (Jeremiah 31:35). He is also the one who established His covenant with day and night and the fixed laws of heaven and earth (Jeremiah 33:25).

What God did with nature He does with us, too. He created us and re-created us because "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17). He also set for us laws and decrees that we are not supposed to overstep, so that His favor may rest on us and we may live long in the land, not necessarily in terms of quantity, but rather in terms of depth and fullness in Christ, who said, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). So let us remain in Christ who also said, "Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me" (John 15:4).

## 8.2. Second: The Earth and All that is on it Praises the Lord

### (verses 7-14)

#### 1. Those invited to praise (verses 7-12):

1. **The seas and those that dwell in them:** "Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths" (verse 7). He calls upon the huge sea creatures and the reptiles of all kinds to praise the Lord who created them when "God said, 'Let the water teem with living creatures...' So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind" (Genesis 1:20,21). Let them praise Him because He looks after them and feeds them despite the huge amount of food they require. The psalmist calls on the ocean depths, where the great sea creatures live, to join in praising the Lord; for He made the oceans the dwelling place of such immense creatures as well as the small creatures. The mighty and fierce animals travel by sea, just as the weak and gentle. He made these waters carry the colossal ships as well as the small pleasure boats.
2. **The forces of nature:** "Lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding" (verse 8). The psalmist invites what we call the forces of nature to praise the Lord. They are in fact the forces of the Lord, whether visible or invisible, whose effect can be felt. "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going" (John 3:8). The psalmist saw in the storm the flashes of lightning, together with the peals of thunder, accompanied by hail at one time and snow at another, forming thick clouds. In all these the Lord reveals His power and through such natural phenomena He meets the needs of His creation: "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:10,11).
3. **The highlands and plants:** "You mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars" (verse 9). The psalmist invites the mountains and the hills to humble themselves before the lofty Lord, to magnify His name and sing praises to Him. He also invites the fruit trees and the tall, fragrant, evergreen cedars to join the mountains in singing and bowing before the Lord, who rules as a kind sovereign over them. "The mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands" (Isaiah 55:12). The believers learn from the high mountains and from the plants to realize that in the Lord they are exalted above the world and its sufferings. Thus they humble themselves under God's mighty hand, that He may lift them up in due time (1 Peter 5:6), and they become "like a tree planted by streams of

water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither" (Psalm 1:3).

4. **Dumb animals:** "Wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds" (verse 10). The psalmist invites wild animals that prey on others to get their food, the cattle that graze, all earth-bound animals, big and small, as well as the birds of the air, which do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet the Lord feeds them. He calls all of these to praise the Lord, who deserves to hear from us the sound of thanksgiving and praise because His compassions are new every morning.
5. **All mankind:** "Kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on earth, young men and maidens, old men and children" (verses 11,12). The invitation to praise ends with calling man, the crown of creation, to praise the Lord. The psalmist calls all mankind of all walks of life, ages, races and backgrounds to sing praises to God. He starts off with calling those in authority, such as kings and rulers, who have been commissioned by God to rule their peoples with justice when He installed them in their leadership position and presidential offices, and imparted them with enough wisdom to do His good will. Then He addresses all nations in general to offer praise to God, in which their tongues would give expression to their gratitude in the form of songs and hymns of praise and thanksgiving to the good Lord, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4).

After inviting all nations to praise, the psalmist specifically addressed some age groups, such as boys and girls in their budding years, to look up and see the beauty of the Lord, and anticipate a bright future. He also addressed the elders with their wisdom and dignity, as well as the youth with all their vigour and enthusiasm, to give emphasis to the fact that the Lord is God, that all else is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

## 2. **Topic of praise** (verses 13,14):

1. **They praise the glorious Name:** "Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his splendour is above the earth and the heavens" (verse 13). The name of the Lord signifies His character; it reveals His attributes, power and compassion. "His glory covered the heavens and his praise filled the earth" (Habakkuk 3:3). "Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing to the LORD, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world" (Isaiah 12:4,5). There is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12). He did acts of kindness and administered justice, and all the universe was full of His glory. He alone is worthy to receive glory and thanks and honour.
2. **They praise him because he granted victory to his people:** "He has raised up for his people a horn, the praise of all his saints" (verse 14a). The horn symbolizes

victorious power. When God raises up for His people a horn, it means that he grants them victory, exaltation and honour, to the praise and boasting of all His saints: "As it is written: 'Let him who boasts boast in the Lord' " (1 Corinthians 1:31, quoted from Jeremiah 9:23,24). "If you make the Most High your dwelling--even the LORD, who is my refuge--then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent ... 'Because he loves me' " (Psalm 91:9,10,14). "Yet the LORD set his affection on your forefathers and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations ... He is your praise; he is your God, who performed for you those great and awesome wonders you saw with your own eyes" (Deuteronomy 10:15,21).

3. **They praise Him because He brought them closer to Himself:** "Of Israel, the people close to his heart. Praise the LORD" (verse 14b). God chose the children of Israel and brought them closer to Himself, not because they were more numerous than other peoples, for they were the fewest of all peoples, but rather out of His love for them (Deuteronomy 7:7). To be close to God is to be reconciled to Him, because sin separates us from Him, but He reconciles us to Himself through Christ, "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them" (2 Corinthians 5:18,19). Closeness also implies a fellowship of intimacy and affection. This is why we say, "Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household" (Ephesians 2:19). Being close to Him makes us want to imitate Him in obedience to the apostle's command, "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children. and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Ephesians 5:1,2). Being close to Him puts us under His care and protection. It also means that we will be forever with Him, as the psalmist said, "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want ... and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever" (Psalm 23:1,6). The psalmist concludes the psalm with the expression "Praise the LORD!" So praise the Lord, magnify Him and extol Him!

### 8.3. Questions

1. Why should heaven and all that is in it praise the Lord?
2. What is the subject of praise of the earth and all that is in it?

## 9. Psalm One Hundred and Forty-Nine

### He Crowns the Humble with Salvation

1 Praise the LORD. Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the saints.

2 Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; let the people of Zion be glad in their King.  
3 Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with tambourine and harp.  
4 For the LORD takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with salvation.  
5 Let the saints rejoice in this honour and sing for joy on their beds.  
6 May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands,  
7 to inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples,  
8 to bind their kings with fetters, their nobles with shackles of iron,  
9 to carry out the sentence written against them. This is the glory of all his saints. Praise the LORD.

This psalm begins and ends with the word "hallelujah." It is a Hebrew word generally translated "Praise the Lord!" The psalmist calls the people of God to praise the Lord because He chose them for himself from every tribe, people, nation and tongue to give Him thanks, exalt His name, sing praises to glorify Him, do His will and fulfil His purposes. They are His own people whom He loved and saved and commissioned to bear His good news and truth to all nations. They are called to praise Him for their present life which is guaranteed by Him, as well as their future which He holds secure in His hand. The psalmist warns the nations that are hostile to worshipping God of their dreadful punishment: "For the nation or kingdom that will not serve you will perish; it will be utterly ruined" (Isaiah 60:12).

The psalm contains the following:

- First: Praising for the present (verses 1-4)
- Second: Praising for the future (verses 5-9)

## 9.1. First: Praising for the Present

### (verses 1-4)

#### 1. The qualities of those who praise (verses 1,2):

1. **They received a new blessing:** "Praise the LORD. Sing to the LORD a new song" (verse 1a). God has given the believers various blessings and these are renewed every day; great is His faithfulness (Lamentations 3:22,23). Whenever the believer receives a new blessing he sings a new song out of gratitude for the new kindness. The Lord's dealings with the believers are wonderful, various and generous beyond limits. He deserves to be thanked by them everyday. He has given them a new life when they had been on the verge of death, delivered them from certain perils and temptations far greater than their capacity to bear, and He supplies their everyday needs. He still gives liberally to His people to reveal His kindness, goodness and riches to them in

tangible and evident ways. This refreshes them and renews their strength as they enter a new depth with Him and learn a new lesson about Him. This makes them shout, "Sing to the LORD, you saints of his; praise his holy name ... weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:4,5). "Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him. Praise the LORD with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre. Sing to him a new song; play skilfully, and shout for joy" (Psalm 33:1-3). "Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day" (Psalm 96:1,2). In praise the believers express their love for the Lord, their gratitude for His kindness and their magnification of His person because He loved them first.

2. **They are saints:** "His praise in the assembly of the saints" (verse 1b). The sound of praise rings out in the midst of the assembly of the saints, those who fear the Lord, after they have attained the beginning of knowledge. The saints are those who are honest in doing their duties for the Lord, those who rejoice greatly in his commandments, which make wise the simple. The Scriptures say about them, "Praise the LORD. Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who finds great delight in his commands" (Psalm 112:1). They fear and revere the Lord, not for fear of punishment or in obedience to a harsh master, but in order to please Him as someone they love, honour and respect. The saints will sing a new song or rather a song that is renewed every day. Who could possibly praise the Lord like the saints?! Who could possibly proclaim his kindness like the elect?! They proclaim His kindness by word and action.
3. **They are joyful:** "Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; let the people of Zion be glad in their King" (verse 2). The psalmist calls those who love the Lord to sing to the Lord songs of joy for two reasons:
  1. **Because he is the creator:** They rejoice in their Lord, the skilful maker, the master potter who makes out of the saints instruments for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work (2 Timothy 2:21). "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17). He deserves to be offered a sacrifice of praise--the fruit of lips that confess his name (Hebrews 13:15). "Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care" (Psalm 95:6,7).
  2. **Because he is King:** They also rejoice in their Lord King, their law-giver, whose law is perfect, reviving the soul, guiding it in paths of righteousness and uprightness, which leads to the happy eternal life. The king's law challenges the liberty of the lawless in order to assure the obedient of their security and achievement of their goals. The law is as necessary to us as rails to the train. He,

as King, makes plans for His people, which are appreciated by the saint, who says, "I know, O LORD, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). The Lord replies, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you" (Psalm 32:8).

As King He takes care of His subjects' present and future lives, making plans to meet their material, emotional and social needs in such a way that they lack nothing. God is a King who defends His people. When faced with the sea before them and Pharaoh's army from behind Moses said to his people, "The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still" (Exodus 14:14). Christ said, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:27,28). Therefore the believers say, "Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident" (Psalm 27:3). He is a King who judges for His people: "But it is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another" (Psalm 75:7). His eyes see everything, He knows the hidden secrets of the heart. He is kind to all those who do His will and rewards them in public. But God punishes the wrongdoer and delivers those he oppresses, so that the oppressed may say, "My lips will shout for joy when I sing praise to you--I, whom you have redeemed. My tongue will tell of your righteous acts all day long, for those who wanted to harm me have been put to shame and confusion" (Psalm 71:23,24).

- 2. Giving expression to praise:** "Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with tambourine and harp" (verse 3). We express our praise to God in the way that suits our culture. In the time of the psalmist people were used to expressing their thanksgiving to God through dancing. They used the musical instruments available to them, such as the tambourine and the harp. Miriam, Aaron's sister, did the same at the time of the Exodus out of Egypt. The Scripture says, "Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing. Miriam sang to them: 'Sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea' " (Exodus 15:20,21). Miriam and the women who joined her expressed through words and music and dancing--verbally and bodily, with the heart and the mind--how happy they were with the Lord who delivered His people. Some of us today may criticize dancing, tambourines and harps as means of expressing our love for the Lord, as Michal criticized her husband David. The Scripture says, "David and the whole house of Israel were celebrating with all their might before the LORD, with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, sistrums and cymbals ... Michal ... came out to meet him and said, 'How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, disrobing in the sight of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!' " (2 Samuel 6:5,20). But our psalmist expressed his gratitude and praise to the



Lord in the manner that suited his culture.

**3. The motivations to praise** (verse 4):

1. **The Lord's delight:** "For the LORD takes delight in his people" (verse 4a). Man's greatest desire is for God to delight in him; for then he says, "You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound. I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety" (Psalm 4:7,8). The Lord is not delighted with us because of our own righteousness, but because of His abundant love: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Whoever takes shelter in Christ's atonement will please the Lord, because the Lord no longer sees the penitent's sins. He rather sees Christ's propitiatory work and credited Christ's own righteousness to him. That is why we can pray, "Forgive us our transgressions and atone for our sins."
2. **The beauty of life:** "He crowns the humble with salvation" (verse 4b). Disobedience has corrupted the beautiful, innocent picture and the pure nature, in which God created the first man. God "created man in his own image" (Genesis 1:27). All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt and man became immersed in wrongful deeds and unbelief. When God looks down from heaven to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God, He finds that they have all become corrupt. Therefore He calls out in love, "Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other" (Isaiah 45:22). He offers free salvation to everybody. Blessed are the poor in spirit who recognize their crushing need for God's mercy, and call out, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner" (Luke 18:13). They pray, "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10). God crowns the repentant sinner and clothes him with garments of salvation and arrays him in a robe of righteousness (Isaiah 61:10). This is the true robe of godliness that covers all misdeeds; it is a God-given garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair (Isaiah 61:3). When one puts on the garments of salvation he gets transformed in his own eyes and the eyes of others, because God who forgives us sanctifies us every day. The Scripture lists a number of different sins, after which it says to the believers, "And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11).

God runs the greatest beauty shop. He beautifies the lips with good words, the ears with listening to good words, the hands with good work and the feet with going to good places. How happy is the humble, meek and teachable person whom the Lord crowns and beautifies with salvation from his sins.

## **9.2. Second: Praising for the Future**

**(verses 5-9)**

**1. The qualities of those who praise** (verses 5,6):

1. **Honoured:** "Let the saints rejoice in this honour" (verse 5a). The saints are held in honour because they remain in the Lord, rejoicing in Him, their eyes gazing upon His beauty, deriving their code of conduct from His law and awaiting the glory with which God will crown them. They say after a pure life of battle, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7,8). Saints who revere the Lord and are fearful of disobeying the One they love will be like Stephen, the first Christian martyr. He "looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55). What magnificent glory and honour the saints enjoy here on earth as they live under God's protection. And what magnificent glory awaits them after death, as Christ said to the penitent thief, "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).
2. **Rested:** "Let the saints ... sing for joy on their beds" (verse 5b). At nightfall when the saint goes to bed, he retires to be by himself and recall God's kindness toward him. He says, "With singing lips my mouth will praise you. On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night. Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings" (Psalm 63:5-7). Then he calls his soul to account to evaluate what has been done through the day. If he has done good things, he gives thanks to God who was good to him and helped him do good things. And if he has done bad things, he repents to God in a heartfelt prayer, and God, in turn, confirms His forgiveness to him. Thus his heart is set at rest and his tongue breaks forth in jubilation on his bed. Even when a believer falls ill, he still sings because "The LORD will sustain him on his sickbed and restore him from his bed of illness" (Psalm 41:3), and because he knows that it is the LORD who heals him (Exodus 15:26).
3. **Expressive:** "May the praise of God be in their mouths" (verse 6a). They always give expression to their praise of God's kindness and greatness whenever they open their mouth. They meditate on His love, which loosens their tongues to praise the abundance of His compassions, make known all acts of His care and proclaim what He has done with them. Their delight is in the law of the LORD, and on His law they meditate day and night (Psalm 1:2). Let us, therefore, testify to the Lord and meditate on Him at all times, so that all fear may flee from us, all persecution may be removed, and all help, joy and victory may come to us.
4. **Armed:** "And a double-edged sword in their hands" (verse 6b). The psalmist is not speaking about an ordinary metal sword, such as would be used in ordinary warfare, but rather of the Word of the Lord, which is the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17). It is powerful and active, and being sharper than any double-edged sword, it

penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (Hebrews 4:12). The saint realizes that his weapon is spiritual, as the apostle said, "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds" (2 Corinthians 10:4). The Christian's attitude to the deadly, physical weapons of war is to be the same as that of Christ his Master, who, when Judas came to him, accompanied with "a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people ...one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. 'Put your sword back in its place,' Jesus said to him, 'for all who draw the sword will die by the sword' " (Matthew 26:47-54).

**2. The result of praise** (verses 7-9):

Every word of praise, as well as every meditation on the name of the Lord, carries a warning to sinners to repent, and a call to those afar off to turn back.

- 1. The judgment of the peoples:** "To inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples" (verse 7). Light hurts the sick eye. In the same way the believers' praises and joy light the way for those who love God, but hurt the eyes of the wicked since they expose their sins. That is why the wicked attack the people of light. "If the world hates you," said Christ, "keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you" (John 15:18,19). The believers' vengeance on the nations is not a matter of hatred on their part, nor a disciplinary punishment through devastating weapons and murderous armies, for the apostle commands, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.... Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.... On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head' " (Romans 12:14,17,20). The vengeance on the peoples is rather meted out through the proclamation of the message of love and salvation. This message becomes a blessing to whoever accepts it, and a curse to those who don't.
- 2. The capture of kings:** "To bind their kings with fetters, their nobles with shackles of iron" (verse 8). The believers who praise God capture kings. God has appointed the kings and the nobles to obey Him and administer His judgment. If they do not do that, He punishes them and gives them over to be defeated. It was customary in wars for the victorious army to take the defeated king captive, bound up and humiliated, and put the nobles in shackles of iron. The psalmist here is announcing the victory of the kingdom of God over the power of darkness, the binding up of its prince, the devil, and the chaining of the demonic host. This is a future vision because the kingdom of the Messiah will surely defeat the devil. Christ said, "I saw Satan fall like lightning

- from heaven" (Luke 10:18). The apostle Jude said, "And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home--these he [God] has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day" (Jude 6). Therefore the psalmist gives this advice to the disobedient kings, "Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him" (Psalm 2:10-12).
3. **The execution of divine sentence:** "To carry out the sentence written against them" (verse 9a). God has written a sentence that says, "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23) and "The soul who sins is the one who will die" (Ezekiel 18:20). "Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees" (Isaiah 10:1). God says, "See, it stands written before me: I will not keep silent but will pay back in full; I will pay it back into their laps" (Isaiah 65:6). Job said, "For you write down bitter things against me and make me inherit the sins of my youth" (Job 13:26). God will surely execute His written sentence, but He has delegated this task to the saints, for the Scriptures say, "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?" (1 Corinthians 6:2).
  4. **The glory of the saints:** "This is the glory of all his saints" (verse 9b). The wicked will be defeated and the believers will have victory; this is the glory of His saints. The Lord honours those who honour Him, but those who despise Him will be disdained (1 Samuel 2:30). Let us praise the Lord and proclaim His truth throughout the land, because our praise will lead some to repentance, while it condemns others to eternal destruction. Our singing is a testimony to the righteous God, and our acclamation is a proclamation of the blessedness, happiness and peacefulness of all those who follow Him in trust, love and obedience. This is when we hear Him say, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world" (Matthew 25:34). At the same time, He will pronounce this dreadful judgment on the wicked, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels ... Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life" (Matthew 25:41,46).

### 9.3. Questions

1. Meditating on verse 4, why are the saints joyful?
2. Mention four qualities of those who praise God for the future.

## 10. Psalm One Hundred and Fifty

### Let Everything that has Breath Praise the Lord

- 1 Praise the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens.
- 2 Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness.
- 3 Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre,
- 4 praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute,
- 5 praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals.
- 6 Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD.

This psalm concludes the Psalter, as well as the five Hallelujahs (Psalms 146-150). It is the culmination of praise and glorification to God. All the tears and groans of the God-fearing believer, as well as his grief for his sins, distress from his enemies and fear of his own weaknesses must end in a song of praise and thanksgiving to God because "weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5). In this psalm the psalmist calls everything that has breath to praise the Lord because he gives life to all creatures by the breath of His mouth. He calls upon all forces in heaven and earth, together with all visible and invisible creation to rejoice and share in a continual celebration of the everlasting God.

The psalmist urges mankind to play on every musical instrument available to them, be it their own or another nation's, and make sweet melodies of thanksgiving and worship to the Lord. If we worship something or someone else louder than God, then we have betrayed Him and given His glory to another, which is another type of idol worship. The apostle teaches, "Dear children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21). Whoever does not praise the Lord, robs Him of his well-deserved right. Everything that has breath should praise the Lord.

Both the first and the last psalms of the five Hallelujahs (Psalms 146-150) begin and end with the phrase "Praise the Lord" but they differ in content. The first psalm blesses the saint who meditates on the law of the Lord and explains the spiritual duties required from him, while the last psalm calls us to fill our lives with praise without being weary. Meditating on the law of the Lord day and night is closely related to praising the Lord, because when one's heart is full of the Word of God his mouth overflows with praise.

The invitation to praise is repeated thirteen times in this psalm. It is an invitation to all saints to praise the Lord who has adopted them by grace. Let us express our love for Him and the gratitude of our hearts for this unmerited divine gift, which was made possible only through the precious blood of the Lamb who redeemed us with a great sacrifice.

The psalm contains the following:

- First: Praising the Lord (verses 1,2)
- Second: The instruments of praise (verses 3-5)

- Third: Those who praise (verse 6)

## 10.1. First: Praising the Lord

### (verses 1,2)

1. **Where the Lord is praised:** "Praise the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens" (verse 1). "Praise the LORD" is a call to the servants of the holy God to lift up verses of exaltation and songs of praise and acclamation to the Holy One, the source of purity and love. "In his sanctuary" they must obey the apostle's commandment, "Just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy' " (1 Peter 1:16, quoted from Leviticus 11:44). The Lord's sanctuary is any place where His saints worship Him.
  1. **The Lord's sanctuary is the house of worship:** The Lord is present everywhere, but He is present in His house in a special way, as Christ explained, "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20). The psalmist advises us, "Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts. Worship the LORD in the splendour of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth" (Psalm 96:8,9) because "holiness adorns your house for endless days, O LORD" (Psalm 93:5). Let us praise Him in His house, where we sanctify and worship Him, and pray as Christ taught us, "Hallowed be your name." The place of worshipping God may not be a church building, but a jail. When Paul and Silas were put in jail in Philippi, they prayed aloud and sang hymns to God, and the other prisoners listened to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open and everybody's chains came loose (Acts 16:25,26).
  2. **The Lord's sanctuary is where the believer is alone with him:** Wherever the believer kneels down to pray is a sanctuary of the Lord. Christ commanded us, "But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (Matthew 6:6). How lovely it is to have the believer's prayers mixed with his praises to the Lord, as he gives thanks and requests, praising and supplicating.
  3. **The Lord's sanctuary is his heavens:** The psalmist said, "Praise him in his mighty heavens." The same word used for "heavens" is also translated in Genesis 1:7 "expanse". "The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD is on his heavenly throne" (Psalm 11:4). Heaven refers to different things: the skies where birds fly, the sphere of the stars and the higher heavens, where angels praise him. The prophet Isaiah heard the angels sing, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isaiah 6:1-3). And in heaven His saints, who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb sing, "Salvation belongs to our God, who

sits on the throne, and to the Lamb" (Revelation 7:10).

Praising God in His mighty heavens makes us ponder on God's power and holiness. Power without holiness is oppressive and wreaks havoc, and holiness without power cannot accomplish the goal. Through the power of God's holiness there is nothing impossible for Him, and every good gift comes from Him. So, let us praise this great, holy and all-powerful God everywhere we worship Him.

- 2. The reason for praising God:** "Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness" (verse 2). The believers praise the Lord because He works wonders and miracles for them according to His surpassing greatness. His acts of power are evident in creation; He spoke things into being that had not been there. He also renews the heart of the sinner by the new birth, the birth from above, and transforms the irreligious person into a saint "in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7). And "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17). His surpassing power is also manifest in His care of his creation. "Do you hunt the prey for the lioness," God asked Job, "and satisfy the hunger of the lions?" (Job 38:39). The psalmist said, "These all look to you to give them their food at the proper time. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things" (Psalm 104:27,28). Christ also said, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" (Matthew 6:25,26).

Yet, by far the greatest act of God's power is the act of His redemptive love. He loved our first parents, so that even before He created them He had prepared a garden for them to live in and to enjoy its fruit. But His love was manifest even more after their disobedience and consequent fall. He covered them with the skin of a sacrifice, and that cover served as symbol for the atonement that Christ was to provide through his death. The apostle Paul taught, "And [you] are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished--he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:24-26).

## **10.2. Second: The Instruments of Praise (verses 3-5)**

The psalmist calls upon the believers to employ every musical instrument available to them and to other nations, and make sweet melodies of praise to the holy God. The trumpet is the horn of old, which was widely used by the Itureans. The Acadians, on the other hand, made much use of the flute, which was like the harmonium or reed-organ. The Cretans used the harp, while the Egyptians used the tambourine. The Arabs used cymbals or castanets. The psalmist wanted praise to be delightful, and wanted the believers not to spare any effort to get hold of joyful musical instruments.

1. **The trumpet:** "Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet" (verse 3a). The trumpet was basically the horn of an ox or a ram. When blown, it produced a clear, loud sound that can be heard by everybody.
  1. **The trumpet announced the communication of the inspiration:** When God gave His law to His people, the event was accompanied by a very loud trumpet blast (Exodus 19:16). And when the Lord revealed a special message through the apostle John to the seven churches, the event was preceded by the sound of trumpet. John says, "On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: 'Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches ... Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this' " (Revelation 1:10,11; 4:1). The intended meaning is that God's voice is always clear and easily heard; no ear can miss it. "He who has ears, let him hear" (Matthew 13:9).
  2. **The trumpet blast announced the commencement of feasts:** The Israelites would blow the horn whenever a feast was about to start, as the Bible says, "Sound the ram's horn at the New Moon, and when the moon is full, on the day of our Feast" (Psalm 81:3). They also sounded the trumpet to announce the beginning of the jubilee year, when each one was to be released of his debts and the lands that were given in pledge were to be returned to their original owners (Leviticus 25:9,10). Christ referred to the true year of Jubilee, which started with His coming (Luke 4:19) because "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36).
  3. **The trumpet announced the approach of Yom Kippur:** The Jews announced the commencement of the great Day of Atonement throughout the land by means of a trumpet. It is the only day of fasting to the Jews, on which the high priest used to enter the Most Holy Place with blood on behalf of himself, then go out to return with more blood to atone for the sins of the people (Leviticus 16:34; 25:9). This was a symbol of Christ's sacrificial work on the cross, for Christ, our high priest, entered the Most Holy Place by His own blood (not with blood on behalf of Himself), having obtained eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:12).
  4. **The trumpet announced the mobilization for war:** The Israelites used to blow the trumpet to warn the nation and mobilize the people for war (Jeremiah 4:5). As for us today, we are engaged in a spiritual warfare with the devil and his angels. Therefore, let us always blow the trumpet in obedience to Christ's command, "Watch and pray so



that you will not fall into temptation" (Matthew 26:41). The apostle also exhorts us, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings" (1 Peter 5:8,9).

5. **The trumpet will announce Christ's second coming:** "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever" (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17; compare 1 Corinthians 15:52).
2. **Harp and lyre:** "Praise him with the harp and lyre" (verse 3b). Both are stringed instruments. The harp could have ten or sometimes twelve strings. Today there are other stringed instruments, like the piano and the violin. Playing on stringed instruments produces a sweet melody that captivates the hearts and draws the attention to the accompanying words and prayers. Let these instruments accompany the praise of the saints to the delight of both singers and hearers, and to the glory of God.
3. **Tambourine and dancing:** "Praise him with tambourine and dancing" (verse 4a). A tambourine is a small frame drum. The tambourine is normally played with the bare hands and often has jingles, pellet bells or snares attached to it. The different rhythms produced reflect the feelings of joy the praise experience in the Lord. Through dancing the body and the feet take part in the process, according to the tempo, to express one's transports of joy and gladness. Tambourines and dancing accompanied the songs of joy and praise during the crossing of the Red Sea when "Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing" (Exodus 15:20).
4. **Strings and flute:** "Praise him with the strings and flute" (verse 4b). Playing on musical instruments may sometimes be blended with stringed and wind instruments. The first person ever to use this blending was Jubal who was the father of all who play the harp and flute (Genesis 4:21).
5. **Clash of cymbals and resounding cymbals:** "Praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals" (verse 5). Clashing cymbals are the small castanets and the resounding cymbals are the larger variety. They are both percussion instruments that consist of plates of brass or of some other hard metal. Two plates were attached to each hand of the performer, and were struck together to produce a noise. They were used as musical accompaniment to enhance the people's joy when worshipping the Lord.

It is obvious from the words of the psalm that we are to use every instrument available together with every new invention to praise the Lord, in accompaniment with the singing of

our lips and the movements of our hands and feet, because "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Corinthians 3:17). "All Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the LORD with shouts, with the sounding of rams' horns and trumpets, and of cymbals, and the playing of lyres and harps. As the ark of the covenant of the LORD was entering the City of David, Michal daughter of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David dancing and celebrating, he despised him in her heart" (1 Chronicles 15:28,29).

### 10.3. Third: Those who Praise

#### (verse 6)

**"Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD"** (verse 6). This verse concludes the Psalter. The book calls everyone that has received the breath of life to praise his or her Creator. Thus all creation may unite in glorifying the Author of its being, and express its love to One who gave it life and grace. Let all creatures say, "I will praise the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live" (Psalm 146:2). With every breath of air that comes into our lungs to renew our lives, let our thanksgiving to God and promises of obedience to Him be renewed. Let us submit to Him and trust Him with all our hearts. Let us praise Him in the certain belief that He is the great and victorious God and that through and in Him we have the victory, and that "we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:37). Let us say to Him, "You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand" (Psalm 16:11). "And I--in righteousness I will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness" (Psalm 17:15).

Praise the Lord! Rejoice in the Lord always because the joy of the Lord is your strength. "It is good to praise the LORD and make music to your name, O Most High, to proclaim your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night, to the music of the ten-stringed lyre and the melody of the harp. For you make me glad by your deeds, O LORD; I sing for joy at the works of your hands. How great are your works, O LORD, how profound your thoughts!" (Psalm 92:1-5).

### 10.4. Questions

1. Name three places we can call "the Lord's sanctuary".
2. Mention five reasons for blowing the trumpet.

## 11. Quiz

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

*Meditations on the Psalms*

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