

Meditations on the Psalms

Volume One: Psalms 1-10

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1. Introduction

Psalms are praises to God. We come upon the first psalm of praise in Exodus 15, which Moses wrote to celebrate the deliverance from the bondage of Pharaoh. Miriam the prophetess took the tambourine, and the women of Israel followed her in singing and dancing: Sing to the Lord for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea! (Exodus 15:20,21). We read the song of Deborah the prophetess in Judges 5, and the song of Hannah, Samuel's mother (1 Samuel 2). We find also David's lament of King Saul (2 Samuel 1). The greater part of the psalms, however, is in the Psalter (Hebrew *tehillim*, meaning praises). The book starts off with blessing the one whom God blessed, and ends in praising the glory of the Lord who blessed man. Accompanied by playing on different musical instruments, psalms were songs of thanksgiving, worship and glorification to God. They are full of hope in God's goodness, love, wisdom, power, holiness and faithfulness. He is an infinite, righteous and good God. The psalmists speak of God more than they speak of themselves or of other people. They are aware of His closeness to them and that He is the God of salvation, the God who rescues from injustice and persecution, who is a Helper of the poor, the oppressed and the crushed who have no one to care for them. He is at work in nature, in man and in history. He hears alike those who cry for help and those who love and worship Him. He also answers both. He is the One who forgives sins and cleanses hearts. Martin Luther said well, "In the psalms one looks into the hearts of all the saints."

The psalmists praise God for saving the individual as well as the nation. He is the God of the individual, the God of the family and the God of the whole nation. He alone is the Saviour and Deliverer from distress, war, starvation and sin.

1.1. The Writers of the Psalter

God inspired a number of His prophets, through the Holy Spirit, to write down the psalms. The whole book was titled "The Psalms of David the Prophet" because, according to our study of the headings of the psalms, 73 psalms were written by him. So the whole book was named after him. It is evident from the Old Testament that David wrote Psalms 96 and 105 (cf. 1 Chronicles 16:23-26; 1 Chronicles 16:7-22). The New Testament ascribes to him Psalm 2 (Acts 4:25) and Psalm 95 (Hebrews 4:7). Asaph wrote 12 psalms, the sons of Korah 10

psalms, Solomon Psalms 72 and 127, Heman Psalm 88, Ethan Psalm 89, and Moses Psalm 90. There are 49 psalms written by anonymous writers.

Ezra collected these psalms, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, into one book.

1.2. The Divisions of the Psalter

The Jews divided the Psalter into five books, corresponding to the Five Books of the Law, each one of them ending in a final psalm of praise:

Book One is from Psalm 1-41, and corresponds with the Book of Genesis, which speaks of the supremacy and fall of man.

Book Two is from Psalm 42-72, and corresponds with the Book of Exodus, which focuses on the children of Israel.

Book Three is from Psalm 73-89, and corresponds with the Book of Leviticus, which speaks of the holy temple.

Book Four is from Psalm 90-106, and corresponds with the Book of Numbers, which speaks of the holy land,

Book Five is from Psalm 107-150, and corresponds with the Book of Deuteronomy, which stresses the word of God.

1.3. Psalms for Special Occasions

There are seven penitential psalms: 6,32,38,51,102,130,143.

There are seven psalms by David as he was chased by Saul: 7,34,52,54,56,57,142.

There are seven psalms in praise of God the King: 93,95-100.

There are six psalms called The Egyptian Hallel [praise]: 113-118.

There are fifteen psalms of ascents (to Jerusalem): 120-134.

There are six final praise psalms: 145-150.

1.4. Psalms Invoking God's Judgement

In many psalms one finds prayers in which the writer invokes the Lord's judgement upon his enemies, such as Psalms 35,69,109,137. This corresponds with the spirit of the law of Moses, which maintained eye for eye, tooth for tooth (Leviticus 24:19), but it conflicts with the spirit of Christ's teachings, which calls for forgiving ones enemies and praying for those who

spitefully use us (Matthew 5:43-48). Living under the Mosaic law, the psalmists lifted up their prayers with good conscience and without any overreaction or emotionalism. They hated sin, and therefore hated the sinner who committed sin. The psalmist often demanded that the sinner should be handed over to God to execute His justice upon him (Psalm 37:8,9), so that the just should see and fear (Psalm 52:6). The Jews used to say, "Heaven rejoices over one sinner who perishes because the earth will be relieved of his wickedness." Christ, however, teaches us that there will be joy in heaven over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7,10) because the earth will be relieved of his wickedness through his repentance, not his perdition.

Some expositors, however, hold that the psalmist was speaking of cause and effect, for the sinner must receive the wages of sin. Consequently, the curses he invokes are prophecies of what will happen to the sinner. Imprecations, therefore, are prayers lifted up to a just God who will surely establish the right of the oppressed and punish the oppressor.

1.5. The Numbering of the Psalms

According to the Masoretic text the Psalter consists of 150 psalms. In the middle of the second century BC, the psalms were translated into Greek for the benefit of the Greek-speaking Jewish diaspora. This translation came to be known as the Septuagint, from which Jerome translated his Latin version, the Vulgate. The Septuagint combined Psalms 9,10 and 114,115, and split up Psalms 116 and 147 each into two psalms, thus keeping the total number of the psalms 150.

The Septuagint contained an additional psalm (151). A Hebrew original of it was found among the Dead Sea Scrolls in the second cave (published in 1965-1967). The Greek text, however, mentions that Psalm 151 is extra-canonical. Evidently, the differences between the Septuagint and the Masoretic text do not affect the contents of the psalms; it only affects the numbering, which the Vulgate adopted, and which all the other versions followed.

1.6. The Headings of the Psalms

Thirty-four orphan psalms have no headings; the rest, however, (116 in number) have headings. Thirty-two psalms of these mention the occasion of writing the psalm (3,7,18,30,34,51,52,54,56,57,59,60,63,90,92,102,120-134,142). Twelve psalms mention the name of the tune to which they were sung. Sixteen psalms mention the name of the musical instrument which accompanies the singing of the psalm. A hundred and one psalms mention the names of their writers; 73 by David, (3-9,11-32,34-41,51-65,68-70,86,101,103,108-110,122,124,131,133,138-145), 12 by Asaph (50,73-83), 10 by the sons of Korah (42,44-49,84,85,87), 2 by Solomon (72,127), 1 by Heman the Ezrahite (88), 1 by Ethan the Ezrahite (89), and 1 by Moses (90). Commentators

say that the title "A psalm of David" does not necessarily mean that David was the writer, because this expression -- whether it be of David, of Solomon, or to the chief musician -- may have three meanings: First, that the writer is David (which is most likely the case). Second, that the psalm is dedicated to David. Third, that it concerns a certain experience that David went through.

1.7. Meaning of Some Repeated Words and Expressions in the Psalms

Selah: This is a musical expression that occurs 71 times in 39 psalms, but we do not know its exact meaning. Some expositors claim that it was meant to lend support and strength to the tune, as the singers stop singing and let only the instruments play. Others say that it indicated a musical pause, where both instruments and singers stop to meditate on what they had sung. James of Ruha says that it resembles Amen after prayer, and that it means, "Answer now." So Selah could mean: Give grace. (Selah also occurs three times in the prophecy of Habakkuk.)

To the chief musician: It occurs in the headings of 55 psalms; 4-6,8,9,11-14,18-22,31,36,39-42,44-47,49,51-62,64-70,75-77,80,81,84,85,88,109,139,140. There are many interpretations of this heading, the most accurate of all is that the temple's choirmaster (the chief musician) led the worshippers in singing these psalms at the temple. Or perhaps some poets dedicated them to the chief musician, as is the case with Psalm 4 "To the chief musician... A psalm of David." Apparently, David wrote the psalm and dedicated it to the choirmaster.

On an eight-stringed harp: It occurs in the headings of Psalm 6 and 12. It is a translation of the Hebrew word *shemenit*. Some expositors said that it is an eight-stringed instrument, whereas others said that it indicated a degradation of sound in the musical scale. Yet others said that the scale was unknown to the children of Israel.

Shiggaion: It appears in the heading of Psalm 7, and it is most probably of an Accadian origin. It means a sad song or a plaintive tune. (It occurs also in the plural in Habakkuk 3:1.)

The instrument of Gath: It appears in the headings of Psalms 8,81,84. It could be a musical instrument invented or used in the Philistine capital Gath, from where the Jews adopted it. It could also be the name of a tune of the song of the wine-press, which coincides with the Feast of Tabernacles.

Death of the Son: It appears in the heading of Psalm 9. It may be the name of a plaintive tune for the elegy of a son who had died, and borrowed to accompany the singing of the given psalm.

Meditation: It appears in Psalm 9:16. It was intended to direct the attention of the singers. It

could mean to soften the playing to give a chance to the singers to think and meditate quietly on the meanings of the words of the psalm.

Mikhtam:It appears in the heading of Psalms 16,56-60. It means "Laid with gold." The sentences of such psalms are always concise and as precious as gold.

To the deer of the dawn:It appears in the heading of Psalm 22. Its meaning is not known, but most probably it was the name of the tune to which the psalm was sung.

A contemplation:It appears in the headings of 13 psalms: 32,42,44,45,52-55,74,78, 88,89,142. This translation follows the Septuagint, which literally said, "A psalm of understanding." The original Hebrew means: "That which gives understanding and wisdom."

To bring to remembrance:It appears in the headings of Psalms 38,70. It was intended to remind the psalmist of certain events which he should not forget.

The lilies:It appears in the headings of Psalms 45,60,69,80. Its meaning is not known, but most probably it is the name of the tune to which the psalm was sung. The tune was used for singing these four psalms.

A song for Alamo:It appears in the heading of Psalm 46. It is the name of the tune to which the psalm was sung. It could be translated "The Tune of the Virgins."

The silent dove in distant lands:It appears in the heading of Psalm 56. Its meaning is not known, but most probably it is the name of tune to which the psalm was sung.

Do not destroy:It appears in the heading of Psalm 57-59,75. Perhaps it indicates the tune to which Moses prayer in Deuteronomy 9:26 was sung: "Therefore I prayed to the Lord, and said: 'O Lord God, do not destroy Your people and Your inheritance whom You have redeemed through Your greatness.'" The tune might have been used later to sing these four psalms.

To Jeduthun:It appears in the headings of Psalms 62 and 77. Jeduthun is a Hebrew name meaning praising or giving thanks". He was a man from the tribe of Levi, and one of the senior musicians appointed by David to lead the praise and worship in the temple (1 Chronicles 16:41-43; 25:1-3). Most probably it was Jeduthun who composed the tune to these two psalms.

A song of ascents:It appears as the heading of 15 psalms: 120-134. The children of Israel used to sing them while going up to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast.

1.8. The Gospel in the Psalms

Christians love the Psalms as Jesus does because they discover great spiritual lessons and

experiences in them, which were revealed in the New Testament.

- 1. Christ in the psalms:** Christ was a title given to all the kings of Israel (Psalm 89:38,51), as it also referred to David's firstborn, the saviour-king of Israel (Psalm 2:2). Christ, as a title, also referred to anyone who was anointed to fill a special office, such as prophets (Psalm 105:15). In the psalms there are many prophecies concerning the life of Christ, as He Himself indicated: "All things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me" (Luke 24:44). When the children shouted to Him on the day of His triumphant entry into Jerusalem, He quoted Psalm 8:3 (Matthew 21:16). As He was hanging on the cross, His mind turned to the Book of Psalms, so He called the Father using the first words of Psalm 22 (Matthew 26:46). He committed His spirit into His hands using the words of Psalm 31:5 (Luke 23:46), and in His thirst they gave Him vinegar to drink as in Psalm 69:21 (John 19:29). Psalm 22 captures the suffering of the crucifixion. The psalms describe Christ as the Son of God who will conquer His enemies (Psalm 2,72,110) and must destroy all His foes. The psalms also speak of the extension of His kingdom over the whole earth (Psalm 47,67,96-100,117). Psalms 2,8,16,22,40,45,69,72,89,102,109, 110,118,132 contain clear prophecies about Christ's life, death and resurrection.
- 2. Fellowship with God in the psalms:** The psalmist is aware of God's holiness, therefore he worships Him (as in Psalms 95-100), thirsts and pants after Him (as in Psalms 42,43,63), praises Him (as in Psalms 33,34,40,92,105), loves His house (as in Psalms 84,122), loves His word (as in Psalms 19,119) and experiences His constant presence (Psalms 23,91).
- 3. Salvation from sin:** The psalms focus on the fact that man has a tendency to sin, so the psalmist says, "If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?" (Psalm 130:3), and views sin as basically against God: "Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight" (Psalm 51:4). The psalms explain that the only hope of salvation from sin and its wages lies in redemption. Man cannot possibly redeem himself, nor can anyone redeem his brother: "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom from him- for the redemption of their souls is costly, and it shall cease forever" (Psalm 49:7,8). (The NIV says, "...the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough.") The only acceptable redemption is the blood sacrifice prescribed by the law of Moses (Psalm 51:19), which symbolised Christ the Lamb of God who takes away all the sins of the world (John 1:29). The psalmist says, "But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared" (Psalm 130:4), and "Blessed is the one to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity" (Psalm 32:2). Man finds salvation from his sins through confession and repentance (Psalm 32,51), then he can have the joy of salvation (Psalm 51:12).
- 4. Eternal life in the psalms:** The idea of eternal life was not clear in Old Testament theology, because it was Christ who annulled death and shed light on eternal life and

immortality through the gospel (2 Timothy 1:10). Some verses of the psalms seem to suggest that thanksgiving to God will stop when earthly life stops: "For in death there is no remembrance of You; in the grave who will give You thanks?" (Psalm 6:5). But eternal life is not denied altogether, for the psalmist also says, "My flesh also will rest in hope, for You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption" (Psalm 16:9,10). He knows the eternal joy he will have in God's presence after death: "I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness" (Psalm 17:15), and the eternal glory he will receive: "You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory" (Psalm 73:24). He says, "But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for he shall receive me" (Psalm 49:15).

Now let us look into Psalms 1-10, to praise God who created man and established him above all other creatures, and provided for his redemption and salvation when he fell into sin. Now we go up with the writers of the psalms to a higher level. So let us ask God to make our feet like deer's feet, and make us walk on our high hills (Habakkuk 3:19).

2. Psalm One

Two Kinds of People

1 Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful;

2 but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.

3 He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.

4 The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away.

5 Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

6 For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

The Jews divided the Book of Psalms into five books, corresponding to the Five Books of the Law. They said that Psalms 1-41 correspond to the Book of Genesis, which starts by mentioning the supremacy of man, whom God created in His image and according to His likeness. But unfortunately, man misused his free will to disobey his Creator, and fell into sin. Psalm 1 depicts man in his supremacy, while Psalm 2 depicts him in his rebellion against God.

Psalm 1 begins with the word "Blessed", which means "How happy!" This was the same expression Jesus used to begin His Sermon on the Mount, when He blessed the poor in spirit, the merciful, and the peace-makers (Matthew 5:3-13). The word in Hebrew is in the plural,

which speaks of manifold blessings.

From the benediction of Psalm 1 and the Sermon on the Mount, we can clearly see that the happy person is the one who derives his happiness from something within him, from the grace that fills his heart and reflects on his outward behaviour, thus making him self-sufficient. A truly happy person does not depend on circumstances to bring him happiness, nor on anything outside him, but on his inner soul. If we draw our happiness and peace from things outside ourselves, we may experience joy one day, but fail to experience it again with the same intensity and abundance the following day. There might even come a day when nothing joyful at all happens. The person who relies on circumstances to make him happy will always go up and down, ever fluctuating. Besides, his downs will be more than his ups, both quantitatively and qualitatively. But he is happy indeed who draws his happiness from what is within him. As an illustration of this, the Apostle Paul says, "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:11-13).

The psalm includes the following:

- First: The righteous man (verses 1-3)
- Second: The ungodly man (verses 4,5).
- Third: The basis of success and the cause of failure (verse 6).

2.1. First: The Righteous Person

(verses 1-3)

There are three pictures of the righteous person: negative, positive and descriptive:

1. **The negative picture:** "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful"(verse 1). To counsel someone means to give him advice or talk him into adopting a certain thought or action. A happy person is the one who does not incline his heart to the thought of the ungodly, nor stands in their path and as a result does not sit in the seat of the scornful. The ungodly thought leads us to stand, and standing ends up in sitting. It is an unhappy man who walks in the counsel and thought of the ungodly, and finds himself standing in the path of sinners, finally sitting in the council of the scornful. These are three stages; each leads to the other, and they end in total decline.

Sin starts with a simple thought, and ends in a downfall. This is because Satan is deceitful. He knows that we will resist the temptation to commit a big sin, which causes moral decline. But with deception he offers us a seemingly good thought, assuming the

role of a sincere advisor who cares for our welfare.

This deception became known when Satan suggested certain thoughts to Eve, by way of a seemingly innocent question, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?.... You will not surely die." The idea appealed to our first ancestors, so they stood before the tree in deep reflection, and found that it was ...pleasant to the eyes, and...desirable to make one wise. From just standing they were led to sitting down and actually eating of the forbidden tree (Genesis 3:1-7). If we take Satans advice, we automatically stand still and start reflecting over it, and wind up adopting his idea and actually doing it in the council of the scornful.

Just as walking leads to standing and ends in sitting as a gradual process of decline, dealing with the thoughts of the ungodly leads us to the path of sinners, which eventually ends in sitting with the scornful. The ungodly are the dissolute who do not go by any spiritual laws. They may respond to spiritual things, but they reject them as soon as they do not fall in line with their preferences and physical comfort. They are the unstable, who do not remain in one state. They are not in harmony with themselves, due to their vacillation and unsteadiness. How happy is the one who does not stop to hear the advice of the dissolute, unsettled, ungodly man, who moves from one immoral thought to another!

Sinners are those who miss the mark, who cannot accomplish God's purpose for their lives. They are in a more evil state than the ungodly.

The scornful are more wicked than the ungodly, and more sinful than sinners. They are those who do nothing else but mock religion and the religious. They are those who laugh at the worshippers. The status of a scornful person may be high, because he attracts people to him who gather around him to laugh. But he is so close to the gates of hell, and he will surely perish.

This was the negative description of the righteous man, who refrains from doing any of these three errors.

2. **The positive picture:** "But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night"(verse 2). We find here a delineation of the emotions of a happy man: His delight is in the law of the Lord. He loves the word of God. His delight in the law takes away of the pleasure of counselling with the ungodly.

We have here a delineation of his mentality: He eagerly meditates on the word of God day and night. The Hebrew word for meditate means to chew the cud. A camel, for example, gulps down his feed very quickly, and later on chews on it unhurriedly, savouring what it has gobbled in haste! The believer takes in God's word in a hurry, delighted to have heard it, and sits down afterward to meditate on it, by recalling it back

to his mind and heart. He reflects on it more in order to analyse its meanings, and start acting on it in his day-to-day life. He exerts a mental effort to know the meaning of these holy words, just like the believers of Berea, who were described as more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11).

The believer's delight in the word of the Lord protects him from sitting in the council of the scornful, because it rids him of the need of their company. He searches God's word to know God's good will. As a result it dwells in him richly, and he lives a godly life far away from evil. Blessed is the man who does not sit with the scornful, not because he compels himself to keep away from them, but because he lets God's word satisfy him and give him inner satisfaction.

The believers do not flee from sin for fear of consequent punishment, but because the Lord satisfies their hearts. They are filled, not deprived. The more they are filled, the deeper they meditate on God's word day and night, only to find happiness for their souls: Negatively, by keeping away from the evil thoughts that lead to a sinful stand, and end in a session with the scornful. And positively, because they rejoice in the law of the Lord and meditate on it day and night. "How can a young man cleanse His way? By taking heed according to Your word. Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (Psalm 119:9,11).

3. **A descriptive picture:**As a result of his negative attitude to sin and positive attitude to God's word, the believer becomes:

1. **A well-watered tree:** "Like a tree planted by the rivers of water..."(verse 3a). He does not plant himself, but the grace of God does. Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes. But her leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the day of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit (Jeremiah 17:7,8).

The believer is not planted by one river, but by many rivers, full of running and living waters, ever renewed. He always quenches his thirst from a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God (Psalm 46:4).

- He says as he quenches his spiritual thirst from the river of forgiveness that washes him, "Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow... Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Psalm 51:7,10).
- As he quenches his thirst from the river of God's promises under both happy and painful circumstances, being encouraged by His true word and faithful promises, he hears God whisper to him, "Be of good cheer. It is I; do not be afraid." God's promises disperse fear, fill needs and guide in perplexity.

- He quenches his thirst from the river of intimate fellowship with God; enjoying Him, rejoicing at His goodness and revelling in His love.
2. **A fruitful tree:** "That brings forth its fruit in its season..."(verse 3b). The believer is like a tree that always yields fruit in its season, and whose leaves are ever green. I wonder why the psalmist mentions the fruit first and the leaves second, even though the tree puts forth leaves first and yields fruit second. Perhaps he thinks about a perfect personality, such as Christ's, whom the Bible describes as follows: "All that Jesus began both to do and teach" (Acts 1:1). Jesus does first, and then teaches. This means that Christ's fruit appeared first before His leaves, and His deed before His word: "Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people" (Luke 24:19). The deed first and the word second!

The steadfast believer, who is planted by running waters, cares for the fruit first and the leaves second. Moreover, we cannot bring forth fruit but fail to leaf, because the believer is in fact beautiful from within and without; in his deed and his word, and in all things. For the Bible says that God "will beautify the humble with salvation" (Psalm 149:4).

3. **With green leaves:**Whose leaf also shall not wither (verse 3c). The believer is like an evergreen plant. The cold of winter does not destroy him, and the snow of life does not make his leaves fall off. He is like "a palm tree, he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing" (Psalm 92:12-14). His motto is "I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved... Though an army should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should arise against me, in this I will be confident... My heart is steadfast, O God, I will sing and give praise" (Psalm 16:8; 27:3; 57:7).

The deeds of the true believer may seem as simple as the leaves of the tree, but they bring blessing. The least it could do is overshadow those around him in a scorching, hot place. Happy is the believer to whom you speak when you are weary, and leave him refreshed and invigorated, because he can say, "The Lord God has given Me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary" (Isaiah 50:4). Let us be like a flourishing tree planted by streams of running water, always bringing forth our fruit in its season. Let people come to us seeking fruit, and be filled with the blessing and grace God bestowed upon us. Let "the leaves of the tree be for the healing of the nations" (Revelations 22:2). Be a means of healing to those around you, and a shade for those at loss and those who became weary searching for shelter.

4. **A prosperous man:**Whatever he does shall prosper (verse 3d). This sums up the

believer's life, because the Lord makes the way of the righteous prosperous, by turning his troubles and the thorns in his life into roses that please the beholders. Even the very area where he fails, God turns into something beautiful. The simplest word he may utter lasts forever, and the least act of love he does remains as an everlasting memory. Both his fruit and his leaves last! He neither loses his beauty, nor his fruit, because, in His love, God transforms his mistakes into lessons. When he makes a mistake, he runs to His heavenly Father and confesses it to Him, and He reassures him and shows him goodness. He brings out of the eater something to eat, and out of the strong something sweet (Judges 14:14).

In the trials and sorrows of the righteous there are hidden blessings. Job said, "When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10). This was also the experience of Joseph when his brothers sold him, but the Lord was with him and he was a successful man (Genesis 39:2). His father Jacob also said as he blessed him, "Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well; his branches run over the wall. The archers have bitterly grieved him, shot him and hated him. But his bow remained in strength" (Genesis 49:22-24).

2.2. Second: The Ungodly Person

(verses 4,5)

The psalmist gives us a dark picture of the ungodly man, to show us how bright the picture of the righteous is. He uses the principle: to whiten, surround with black. He may have had in mind the fact that in order to show how bright something is, you need to display it on a dark background, thus highlighting its radiance. It is true that the Lord marks out and sets the godly ones apart for Himself (Psalm 4:3).

1. **The ungodly in the present life:** "The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away"(verse 4). Being a living, green tree is a far cry from being dead, dried-up chaff! The tree is planted by the vine-dresser, but the chaff is dead, rootless, fruitless, worthless. The wind blows it away to unknown and undesired places. Thus is the ungodly who is carried by evil to unknown and undesired places. When he first commits any sin, he thinks that he has full authority over it, but soon he finds out that he is a slave of sin, paying the price of his misdeed! The ungodly has no control over his present or future, no matter what authority he may think he has.

Let us give thanks to the Lord because He planted us. We were chaff, and by His grace He made us green trees. But if one of you is like chaff that the wind blows away, the Lord calls you now to plant you by the running waters, that you may become a blooming tree.

2. **The ungodly in the coming life:** "Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgement"(verse 5). As an end result of their misconduct, the ungodly shall not be able

to stand on their feet on the Judgement Day. Because they will dread God, their knees will shake and their legs will not hold them.

They will not be able to rise or stand because they have been in sin for such a long time that their life pattern became a continual falling, and they no longer knew how to stand. They simply bow their heads in shame. Yet, when the books are opened, and their sins exposed, they will appear for who they really are and hear God say to them, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41).

The ungodly will not be able to stand the divine interrogation on the Day of Judgement. The psalmist says, "If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, who could stand?" (Psalm 130:3). Who can possibly stand in the divine court? Who can dare defend himself?

2.3. Third: The Basis of Success and the Cause of Failure

(verse 6)

1. **The basis of success:**For the Lord knows the way of the righteous. The Hebrew word for know means to know lovingly. The very hairs of your head are all numbered (Matthew 10:30). This means they all have numbers! Christ, the Good Shepherd, knows His own sheep and calls them by name (John 10:3). The Lord knows the believers, and knows their ways, too!

Be sure that you are not on your own! You can say, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for you are with me" (Psalm 23:4). How beautiful it is to know that Christ knows your way, because He walked it before you. He Himself has suffered, being tempted, and He is able to aid those who are being tempted. We belong to Him. "We are His people, the sheep of His pasture" (Psalm 100:3).

2. **The cause of failure:**But the way of the ungodly shall perish. God said, "Those who depart from Me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters" (Jeremiah 17:13). Please, do not follow an illusion, because the way of the ungodly will surely perish.

Now that we have seen how the Scriptures describe both the righteous and the unrighteous, who among us would like to remain unrighteous and far away from God? The Lord offers the greatest proposal to repent, and the greatest call for free salvation.

Oh, that every ungodly man would wake up from his false security, realise that however happy his way may seem, it will surely end in hell, and that he would turn away from it now. Oh, that every righteous man would take courage, as he says to the Lord, "But You, O Lord, know me; You have seen me, and You have tested my heart toward You" (Jeremiah 12:3).

Blessed is the righteous man because he has everlasting life in Christ. And woe to the ungodly man in this life, and in the eternal one!

2.4. Questions

1. Psalm 1:1 mentions three consecutive steps to sinning. What are they? How can we avoid them?
2. What does the psalmist mean by "The wicked will not stand in the judgement?"

3. Psalm Two

The Clay Plot

1 Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing?

2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying,

3 "Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us."

4 He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision.

5 Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure:

6 "Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion."

7 "I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.

8 Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession.

9 You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel."

10 Now therefore, be wise, O kings; be instructed, you judges of the earth.

11 Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.

12 Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.

Psalm 1 presented man in his supremacy as it said, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly... but his delight is in the law of the Lord." Psalm 2, however, presents man after having sinned, fallen down from his spiritual supremacy, and rebelled against God. This rebellion on man's part was unsuccessful, because it contradicted common sense. Therefore, Psalm 2 commences with a rhetorical question: Why do the nations rage?

Peter and John ascribed this psalm to David (after having been released from jail, to which they had been taken for healing the invalid), as they prayed, "Lord, You are God, who made

heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who by the mouth of Your servant David said: 'Why did the nations rage, and the people plot vain things? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ'" (Acts 4:24-26). The disciples explained the words of the psalm as follows: "For truly against Your Holy Servant Jesus, Whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done" (Acts 4:27-28).

So this revolt was not really against God, but was in fact a fulfilment of His will. True, the rebellious kings raged in ignorance, but their rebellion did the will God, who is the true King!

The disciples continued their prayer: "Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your Holy Servant Jesus" (Acts 4:29). They did not say, "Avenge us of them", nor "Annihilate them!" They said, "Stretch out Your hand to heal them!" As a result of this prayer, the place where they assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and spoke the word of God with boldness (Acts 4:31).

The nations raged in vain against God, and the place was shaken in truth by the power of the Lord. The raging of the nations was in vain, because it was a meaningless noise. But the shaking of the place was the result of God's blessing on those who were filled with the Holy Spirit, who forgave their enemies, prayed for their persecutors, and spoke God's word with boldness.

Psalm 2 furnishes the first prophecy in the psalms concerning Christ's work, glory, the resistance He would encounter and His ultimate triumph. This is a frequently repeated prophecy in the Bible. It has been fulfilled in church history, but will be perfectly and finally fulfilled at Christ's advent, when He will come in such great heavenly glory, to the consternation of those who withstand His will. He will break them with a rod of iron and dash them to pieces like a potters vessel, as punishment for their unsuccessful revolt. Today Christ is rejected as King by many, but the day will come when His triumph will be announced: "For to which of the angels did He ever say: 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You'? And again: 'I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son'?" (Hebrews 1:5). "So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You'" (Hebrews 5:5).

This psalm is a poem of four stanzas; each stanza consists of three verses. It speaks of God's fulfilment of His purpose in Christ His Son, through whom He will establish His kingdom. All those who oppose Him are in great danger, and all those who enthrone this powerful, triumphant King over their hearts will have great blessing.

God will act out His purposes in spite of the opposition of some ignorant people, whether they like it or not! Then all mankind will sing, "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for you created all things, and by your will they exist and were created."

Men's revolt against God is an unsuccessful and illogical one.

The psalm includes the following:

- First: Men's revolt against the Lord (verses 1-3)
- Second: How God the Father responded to this revolt (verses 4-6)
- Third: How Christ responded to this revolt (verses 7-9)
- Fourth: A call to wisdom (verses 10-12)

3.1. First: Men's Revolt against God (verses 1-3)

The first stanza of Psalm 2 starts off with a question: "Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and His Anointed, saying, 'Let us break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us.'" This describes how much hate there is in the hearts of many people against Christ, and out of this hate they foolishly revolt and rebel against Him.

Unaware of the goodness involved, those foolish men presumed that the divine law was bonds and cords that held them down. Have you ever heard of a train that revolted against the tracks because they limited its freedom? You see, those who oppose God's will are children in their spiritual mind; they do not know that they cannot do without bonds!

The whole world has joined a revolt against the Lord and His Anointed (Christ). The nations, the peoples, the kings and the rulers all rage like a turbulent sea, devising, resisting and plotting to break what they think of as the bonds of the Lord, and to cast away the cords that deny them their happiness. They make an agreement to fight the Prince of Peace, so they rebel against the divine rule! They want to be free to do whatever they desire. This thought is vain, untrue and useless. For God is the Creator, the One who holds all things in place, the supreme Sovereign in heaven and earth. He will surely reign and His coming is like a "refiners fire and like fuller's [launderers] soap... For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day that comes will burn them up... that will leave them neither root nor branch"(Malachi 3:2; 4:1).

As King Herod heard that a royal Child was born in Bethlehem, he tried to kill Him to keep the throne for himself and his descendants after him. Perhaps he thought that the throne belonged to him by right. Yet, it was entrusted to him by the King of kings! Herod

commanded that all the children who were two years old and less should be murdered, but the Lord commanded Joseph to take the Child and His mother to Egypt. Herod's kingdom ended, whereas the Kingdom of God will endure for ever and ever (Matthew 2:16)!

Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, the greatest king of his time, said after learning a lesson about the inexorable sovereignty of the Most High, "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to abase" (Daniel 4:37).

Why do the people plot a vain thing? They are fools! As for us, let us bow down before our Creator, our Sovereign God, who loves us and cares for us, who is worthy of our worship, obedience and adoration. Christ's yoke may seem hard on those who do not love Christ, yet it is easy and light on those who have enjoyed His salvation.

3.2. Second: How God the Father Responded to this Revolt (verses 4-6)

The second stanza of the psalm shows God's reaction to this unsuccessful revolt:

1. **The Lord laughs:** "He who sits in the heavens shall laugh"(verse 4). The nations rage, and He simply laughs in ridicule because His own creation opposes Him! Will a piece of clay say to its maker, "What are you doing?" It is an ineffective and feeble revolt. It is a meaningless, fruitless noise. They are like a child shouting at his parents, declaring his rebellion, only to run and hide under the bed as soon as he has finished. But the hand of the father can reach him there, because there is no use trying to avoid the plan of the loving father who cares only for the good and benefit of his child. In this verse we capture the glorious calmness that the Almighty God radiates, and the derision in which He holds the sinner, who rebels against the God in whom he lives and moves and has his being!

To where shall we escape from God? Jonah went down to the ship, but even there the big, loving hand reached out to send a tempest and prepare a big fish to swallow him and bring him back to where he should be. Don't we often do that when God communicates a message to us and we get too busy with other things? Sometimes when we do something wrong, the Lord says to us, "You are destroying your life by going far away from me. Where do you think you are going? Can you escape from the divine will? Till when will you keep on acting foolishly?!"

2. **The Lord rebukes:** "Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure"(verse 5). He touched them lovingly, but they did not respond; so it was time for rebuke. When our children run away from us we laugh at first, then we rebuke them when they do not answer the call of love, and misunderstand our parental interest in their welfare.

Heaven is still silent despite all the blasphemies of those who rebel against God. And God still declares the good news of His forgiveness and salvation. But the time will come when God makes His enemies His footstool, and terrifies them in His anger on the day of vengeance and wrath!

3. **The Lord declares:** "Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion"(verse 6). In verse 2 we saw the plot against the Anointed of the Lord. Here He declares that He has anointed His King with the Holy Spirit, to establish Christ's reign on earth, which is God's desire. They have to accept His will because it is best for them and because He loves them.

God laughs. God rebukes. God declares that His will is good, acceptable, perfect and foreordained. So may the will of the Lord of hosts be done!

This divine declaration shows that Christ is King over His people, to defend them, manage their affairs and plan their lives. He is King over His enemies and causes them to accomplish His plans unwittingly. God has declared that he has anointed His King over His holy hill of Zion the Fortress, on which service to the King of heaven and earth is offered.

3.3. Third: How Christ Responded to this Revolt

(verses 7-9)

The rulers take counsel together against the Lord and His Anointed so the Father declares that He has anointed His King despite their opposition. Christ responds to the nations revolt against Him by:

1. **Declaring His eternal past:** "I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to Me, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You.'"(verse 7). A human father would say to his son, "Today I have begotten you, you are my son." But the heavenly Father says to Christ, "You are My Son, today I have begotten You." He has already been Son before His birth. He is the Son of God before all the ages, and His birth from the Virgin only provided Him with the human body. Here Christ declares that He is born, not created, and that he is consubstantial, of the same substance, with the Father. Christ is the Son of God, the eternal Word, who is one with the Father, without beginning, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times (Micah 5:2).

"Today I have begotten You." This is How Christ entered the sphere of time, because "when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law" (Galatians 4:4). Christ is the Son of God since before the creation of the universe, and in the fullness of time He came to do the work assigned to Him. After He had finished it He said, "I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You

before the world was" (John 17:4,5).

The Son King says, "I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to Me, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You.'" By this Christ declared His rights as God's Anointed King. In verse 2 we saw the failure of a plot, and in verse 7 we see the Lord's decree.

2. **Declaring His kingdom:** He says that the Father said to Him, "Ask of Me, and I will give You nations for You inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession" (verse 8). Great kings were in the habit of granting their favourites whatever they wanted up to half of the kingdom (Esther 5:6; Matthew 14:7). This eternal Son, who entered the realm of time and place, was granted the kingdom by His heavenly Father. All the ends of the world shall remember and return to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You (Psalm 22:27). Every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10,11).

Christ's declaration of His kingdom shows us that our God is democratic, and that He tolerates opposition parties. He accepts the fact that the devil, who is the ruler of this world, and the nations and people that follow him, rage, devise things, rise and plot against Him, saying, "Let us break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us." Nevertheless, He is their provider, life-Giver, and it is He who empowers them to rise against Him. He bears with them, perhaps they might repent, because he desires that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Despite the unsuccessful opposition, He still is the supreme Ruler, entitled with full authority.

3. **Declaring the confirmation of His triumph:** "You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash to pieces like a potters vessel"(verse 9). They rose against Him, so He broke them to pieces, so that they could not rise again. A broken clay pot cannot be fixed, is good for nothing and cannot be remoulded again. In His love, God called people to return to Him and submit to Him. Everyone who accepts this call will be blessed, and everyone who declines will have to suffer punishment. For those who are not founded on the Rock will come to ruin.

3.4. Fourth: A Call to Wisdom

(verses 10-12)

After wondering about the reason for this unsuccessful revolt against God and His laws, and explaining God's and Christ's reaction to this revolt, David calls the nations and the peoples to be wise and instructed in the presence of God.

1. **He calls them to be wise:** "Be wise, O kings; be instructed, you judges of the earth"(verse 10). They are kings and judges because God granted them these ranks, in view of the fact that He is the Most High King and Judge, to whom they will have to give

an account! The fear of the Lord is the essence of wisdom, and the beginning of knowledge. Only the fools despise wisdom and instruction (Job 28:28; Proverbs 1:7). It is wise to listen and learn, because the heavenly instruction leads to our salvation, if we accept it. It advises us to use our minds and submit to it willingly.

Someone may say, "But I am neither a king nor a judge." The answer is: Each one of us is responsible for a job or a house, and we judge every day: we judge our children and our fellow-workers. So let us obey Christ and be wise and instructed in the fear of the Lord. Let us ask Him for mercy and wisdom.

2. **He calls them to serve:** "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling"(verse 11). Service is the same as worship. The Hebrew words for servant and worship come from the same root. When you worship you serve. Worship is the service we offer to God, not with words of tongue, but in deed and in truth. It is a call for serving with pious fear coupled with obedience. Much the same way, the shouts of rejoicing have to be mixed with holy fear, because fear without joy is torment, and joy without fear is pretence.
3. **He warns them from rebelling:** "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little"(verse 12). Kissing means three things in the Bible:
 1. **The kiss of greeting:**It says in the Old Testament that the prophet Samuel took a flask of oil and poured on King Saul's head, kissed him, and said, "The Lord has anointed you commander over His inheritance" (1 Samuel 10:1). This we must do with the beloved Son, the Anointed of the Lord. In kissing Him we declare that we accept His authority over our lives.
 2. **The kiss of worship:**God said to Elijah, "I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him" (1 Kings 19:18). Kissing here is an equivalent of worship. So let us bow down to Christ the Son, and say to him together with Thomas, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).
 3. **The kiss of love:**The Apostle Peter commanded the Christians of the early church to "Greet one another with a kiss of love" (1 Peter 5:14). So let us give a kiss of love to the Son, fulfilling the first and the greatest command: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30).

Let us submit to Christ, the Son King, and offer Him total service, honour and love, because He alone is worthy of all this. If we take this chance we will be blessed, and if we reject it we perish.

4. **He calls them to trust on Him:** "Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him"(verse 12). Trusting God means depending on Him and acting according to what He says, out of confidence in His instructions and promises. Let your dependence upon Christ be true,

and submit your will to the divine will.

In conclusion of this meditation on this psalm, I would like to refer back to Acts 4:31 where it says, "...the place... was shaken." Let us obey the divine command: Kiss the Son, so that the place would be shaken by His presence, and we be blessed because He is there- in our hearts, homes and churches. Worship Him and cry out in awe, that the place may be filled with His presence among us, and that we may all be filled with the Holy Spirit and go forth to proclaim God's word with boldness.

3.5. Questions

1. The disciples quoted Psalm 2:1 when they prayed in Acts 4:24-28. Write a short comment on the disciples' prayer.
2. Psalm 2:12 commands "Kiss the son". Give three possible meanings for this command.

4. Psalm Three

The Lifter of my Head

A Psalm of David when he fled from Absalom his son.

1 Lord, how they have increased who trouble me! Many are they who rise up against me.

2 Many are they who say of me, "There is no help for him in God." Selah

3 But You, O Lord, are a shield for me, My glory and the One who lifts up my head.

4 I cried to the Lord with my voice, and He heard me from His holy hill. Selah

5 I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the Lord sustained me.

6 I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around.

7 Arise, O Lord; save me, O my God! For You have struck all my enemies on the cheekbone; You have broken the teeth of the ungodly.

8 Salvation belongs to the Lord. Your blessing is upon Your people. Selah

David wrote Psalms 3 and 4 when he fled from Absalom his son, after the latter had attempted a coup d'tat against him. The situation was so hard on David, who was rejected as king by the majority of the people, and rejected as father by his own son! The majority of the people sided with Absalom, but a few faithful people remained with David. So he had to run from his palace barefooted, because there was no chance for getting ready to get out of the palace. In this harsh circumstance David found his comfort in the Lord, and lifted up a prayer in this early-morning psalm, which he composed after a night of extreme terror, "I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the Lord sustains me" (verse 5). And in Psalm 4, which is an evening

psalm that was composed after the good end of a dangerous day, he lifts up this prayer: "I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety" (verse 8).

The king fled from his palace under cover of night, and wrote down Psalm 3 when the day dawned on him and found him in safety. At the end of the fourth day of his flight he composed Psalm 4. It was a severe day, at the end of which David committed himself into the hands of his God. Similarly, when we face troubles at the beginning of the day, we can still end our day in the hands of a loving God. When troubles come by night we still know that "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5) because our God is with us. And if troubles come at the beginning of our lives, we know that we will end our lives in the hands of a loving God. When troubles assail us at the end of it, we know that our sun must set in the hands of a loving God.

Psalms 3 and 4 reassure us greatly, for our God is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. Our Alpha is from Him and our Omega goes back to Him. To Him we lift up the morning prayer and to Him we sing the evening thanksgiving song.

We saw in Psalm 2 a revolt raging on the outside against the Anointed of the Lord, and in Psalm 3 we see David encounter a revolt from within his household and kingdom, from people he never expected to do so. Although the distress we experience at the hands of those on the outside may be hard, the distress we experience at the hands of those who are very close to us is even harder. In the two psalms (3, 4) David shows us God's providence and the security of His children, whether distress assaults them from afar off or from nearby. He had said at the end of Psalm 2, "Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him"; concluded Psalm 3 by saying "Salvation belongs to the Lord" and concluded Psalm 4 by saying, "You alone... make me dwell in safety."

We read the story of Absalom's unsuccessful coup against his father in 2 Samuel 15-18. Afterward David sang this psalm.

The psalm includes the following:

- First: The psalmist's complaint (verses 1,2)
- Second: The psalmist's trust (verses 3,4)
- Third: The psalmist's security (verses 5,6)
- Fourth: The psalmist's prayer (verses 7,8)

4.1. First: The Psalmist's Complaint (verses 1,2)

David has every right to complain: his son has implemented a coup, and risen against him. He could not find any reason for this to happen, as he had to walk barefooted, with his head bowed. Perhaps some of his friends said that he had not disciplined his son properly. His enemies, on the other hand, must have said that David's sins and bad example turned his own son against him. His God must have forsaken him, since his son was able to plan this coup against him, and all his worship and songs were mere hypocrisy.

How often do we find ourselves in a position where we cannot complain to people, because we see criticism in their eyes? Because of this David approached God and said to Him, "I will tell You of my anxiety because I can get an answer from You. Lord, how many are those who trouble me! Many people rise against me. Many people say to my soul, 'His God cannot help him at all.'" The biblical historian says, "With Absalom went two hundred men from Jerusalem who were invited, and they went along innocently and did not know anything" (2 Samuel 15:11). David was a great king and rendered many a good service to the nobility in his kingdom; but here they are turning against him, some knowingly and some ignorantly. The greatest danger that David encountered came from those who stood against him, saying, "Your God cannot help you." It seems that these words upset David's mood and caused him to complain from deep within: "Had the thought occurred to my mind I would have banished it quickly, but my complaint has gone deep within me: You cannot stand by me anymore. Have You really banished me from Your presence?"

But thanks to God, David knew where to turn to lodge his complaint- and this was the reason for his delivery. Even if it was said to him that God abandoned him, he would still turn to Him for help, for he has none else but Him. "Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You" (Psalm 73:25).

David applied his complaint to the Lord, and wrote down this psalm for the godly to sing after he was gone, in order to proclaim the praises of Him who never disappoints anyone who complains to Him.

4.2. Second: The Psalmist's Trust

(verses 3,4)

The psalmist begins the second part of the psalm by turning to God, and saying to Him, "But You, O Lord, are a shield for me." Shields were usually made of a piece of wood covered with animal skin, with which the soldier defended himself against pointed arrows, which struck the shield.

As though David was saying, "Lord, I turn my gaze from the problem to You. The going is tough, and it seems, to all appearances, that there is no hope. I am a fugitive and my enemies are in hot pursuit after me. Yet, I see the invisible: I see You. I look up, not to the nations, and not to my own nation, but to You alone."

The psalmist sees the following in his God: A shield, a Lifter of his head and a Hearer of prayer.

1. **The Lord is the shield of the psalmist:** "But You, O Lord, are a shield for me"(verse 3a). Remember when he stood in front of Goliath the giant?! He was just a little child in front of an armored warrior, who, in spite of his strength, could not carry all his weapons, and another man had to follow him to carry his armour. David's weapons, on the other hand, were only a stick, a sling and five smooth stones! The shield could not shield the giant and he fell before David, the little child! David had no wooden shield, but he had the true shield: "But You, O Lord, are a shield for me." You are my protection; You are my fortress. I turn to You for help, and I take refuge in You.

The word shield occurs in the Bible for the first time in Genesis 15:1 when God said to Abraham, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward" (Genesis 15:1). David must have recalled how God helped Abraham, His friend, as he led the first and the last military battle to rescue his nephew Lot from his captors. Abraham expected King Chedorlaomer and the defeated kings to return to fight him since he posed a military threat to them. Perhaps Abraham was afraid. He rescued his nephew, who did not even say thank you, as the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah did. Neither did Lot ask his uncle to come back to live with him. Abraham was in a weak and fearful situation, but God reassured him, drove his fears away, and said, "Do not be afraid. I am your shield."

David knew that God would do the same with him, so he said to Him, "You are a shield for me." God is his protection.

2. **The Lord is the glory of the psalmist:** "You... are my glory"(verse 3b). The Lord was his glory even in his loneliness. David was king before the attempt to overthrow him. His glory was in his kingdom, throne, army and family. But now he is a pursued fugitive, barefoot and weeping. All his earthly, political glory was gone, and his friends who gathered around him showed him more pity than respect.

Even though David's visible glory was lost, the Lord was still his glory, which he can never lose.

We may glory in a famed family line, our university degree, our intelligence that we believe will get us out of trouble, or our health that we depend on. But all this can be lost in a moment, and only the Lord will remain, if He is our glory and if we have already established a personal relationship with Him. Only the person who has real glory can have David's attitude as he said when he lost all things, "But You, O Lord, are a shield for me."

3. **The Lord is the Lifter of the psalmist's head:** "The One who lifts up my head"(verse 3c). The recorder of the holy history describes David's flight: "So David went up by the ascent of the Mount of Olives, and wept as he went up; and he had his head covered and

he went barefoot. All the people that were with him covered their heads and went up, weeping as they went up" (2 Samuel 15:30). They covered their heads out of grief and shame. Only the Lord could lift up their heads. If the world causes us to bow our heads, only the Lord can lift them up if we love Him and follow Him.

4. **The Lord hears the prayer of the psalmist:** "I cried to the Lord with my voice, and He heard me from His holy hill"(verse 4). David was accustomed to call upon the Lord in prayer both in distress and comfort, and was used to getting an answer every time. And now he prays with confidence that God who stood by him always will stand by him on this critical day.

4.3. Third: The Psalmist's Security

(verses 5,6)

We see the peace that filled David's heart in verses 5 and 6 of the psalm. He proclaimed his trust in God his shield, the One who lifts up his head and hears his prayer, therefore he felt confident in his heart.

1. **The rest of the confident:** "I lay down and slept"(verse 5a). It was possible for any one of Absalom's men to attack David and kill him in his sleep. It was possible that one of those around him was a spy for Absalom and that he could have killed David while he was asleep. All this was possible. Nevertheless, he went on sleeping because God gives His beloved sleep (Psalm 127:2). This is not the sleep of those who have a false hope, but of those who trust in the Lord's loving care, and feel secure in it. He said as he woke up, "I woke, for the Lord sustained me" (verse 5b). The fact that he woke up proves that the Lord kept him alive.

Peter fell sound asleep in jail, although Herod was going to kill him the following day! He slept fettered with two chains between two soldiers. There were guards before the door. Then the angel came, and a heavenly light shone in the prison cell. Yet Peter didn't wake up! The angel struck Peter's side and woke him up, saying, "Arise quickly!" (Acts 12:6-8). Peter could sleep because he was aware that death could not harm him, and that it could only bring him to his eternal home to rest forever with his heavenly Father. Death does not alarm the believer because it is a transitional phase. The believer starts his eternal life here and now, and then moves on to be with the Lord in everlasting eternity. Therefore he sleeps in peace. He rests his head on his God's shoulder and sleeps in peace in the shadow of His wings, to wake up in safety. Whether he wakes up in the glorious presence of the Lord or among his loved ones on earth, he says to the Lord in both cases, "I lay down and slept; I woke, for the Lord sustained me."

2. **The peace of the confident:** "I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around"(verse 6). He had peace, not because of the circumstances, but in spite of them. David did not belittle the problem. His enemies were

numerous, zealous and shrewd, but he could also see the strong points on his side. There were ten thousands setting themselves against him, but he plus God were in the majority. He did not consider himself great, for he was not so. He could appreciate the power of the God he served, and compared the size of the problem he was facing with that of the divine authority, therefore he was filled with confidence and assurance.

4.4. Fourth: The Psalmist's Prayer

(verses 7,8)

After David made his complaint known, showed his confidence in the Lord who lifts up his head, and his heart brimmed with peace, he went back to pray. He hit on a sad and defeated tone at the start of the psalm when he said, "Lord, how they have increased who trouble me!" But at the end of it he lifted up a prayer of triumphant joy as he said, "Salvation belongs to the Lord. Your blessing is upon Your people." This is the triumphant conclusion of every difficulty the beloved of the Lord go through. They start with tears and end in joy.

David's prayer includes two requests:

1. **A request for himself:** "Arise, O Lord; save me, O my God!"(verse 7a). In the distress of his soul he called upon the Lord to arise and take action. He knew that God was alive and that he cared, so he called upon Him for help. To whom else but God could he turn? He is the Lord of hosts, who leads the hordes of angels to deliver weak David in his terrible situation. God's history with David testifies to the great salvation he received from his God, which prompted him to say, "For you have struck all my enemies on the cheekbone; You have broken the teeth of the ungodly" (verse 7b). David reviewed his past experiences, and remembered how a lion had attacked his flock and had taken away a lamb; but he managed to kill it and take the lamb out of its mouth (1 Samuel 17:35). He recalled how Goliath assaulted him, and how he knocked down that giant (1 Samuel 17:48-50). He recalled how King Saul and his army were in hot pursuit after him trying all they could to kill him, and how all their attempts failed. It was such a strange thing for a whole kingdom to rise against a single man, that David asked Saul, "After whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom do you pursue? A dead dog? A flea?"(1 Samuel 24:14; 26:20). But the whole kingdom of Saul could not do this self-named flea any harm as he jumped from one place to another, trying to run away from his chasers. David did not pray to God to avenge him of his enemy, but simply described what God did to the ungodly who opposed His good will. The Lord must strike them on the cheek that speak blasphemies, that sharpened their teeth to swallow God's people. The Lord crushes the head of the dragon!
2. **A request on behalf of his people:** "Salvation belongs to the Lord. Your blessing is upon Your people"(verse 8). He is confident that the Lord is the author of salvation. True, David sent one of his loyal counselors to Absalom to defeat the counsel of Ahitophel,

Absalom's counsellor, who was known for his wisdom. True, he sent two great priests to communicate the news from Absalom's camp to him. But this alone could not help David at all, for salvation does not come through his intelligence, management or worthiness, as necessary as these can be. Salvation comes from God alone.

Salvation belongs to the Lord because it is by grace from beginning to end. It is the work of God who is high above all, who has the upper hand that is stretched downward to draw out the lost. His grace chooses His elect, His Spirit brings them to life and His strength sustains them. "It is not of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy"(Romans 9:16).

Your blessing is upon Your people. At this point David asks for a blessing for the people walking along with him, and those who set themselves against him. This reminds us of the attitude of the Son of David who asked for a blessing and forgiveness for those who crucified Him when He said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do"(Luke 23:34).

Many have risen against David, but he says, "Lord, please bless Your people." Have you ever done someone a good turn but he paid you back with a bad one? If so, do not regret the good you have done and do not despair. Bless those who spitefully use you and irritate you, because salvation belongs to the Lord. "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse" (Romans 12:14).

Let us sing the words of Psalm 3 to the Lord every morning. And let us conclude our day with the words of Psalm 4. Let us deal with every problem as David did: complain to God because we trust in Him, and live in peace and in an intimate relationship with the God of love who makes us triumph in every difficulty.

4.5. Questions

1. Why did the enemies say to David, "God will not deliver him"?
2. How could David say "I lie down and sleep" during this time of turmoil?

5. Psalm Four

Who will Show us any Good?

To the Chief Musician. With stringed instruments. A Psalm of David.

1 Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have relieved me in my distress; have mercy on me, and hear my prayer.

2 How long, O you sons of men, will you turn my glory to shame? How long will you love worthlessness and seek falsehood? Selah

3 But know that the Lord has set apart for Himself him who is godly; the Lord will hear when I call to

Him.

4 Tremble and do not sin. Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still. Selah

5 Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord.

6 There are many who say, "Who will show us any good?" Lord, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us.

7 You have put gladness in my heart, more than in the season that their grain and wine increased.

8 I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; For You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.

Absalom attempted an unsuccessful coup against his father, as a result of which David had to leave his palace barefoot. Most of the people sided with Absalom. David spent the night in the open with a handful of his followers. On this occasion he wrote Psalms 3 and 4. We can read about this in 2 Samuel 15-18.

Psalm 3 is a morning psalm. David says in it, "I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the Lord sustains me." At the end of the day he wrote down Psalm 4 as an evening psalm, which he concluded by saying, "I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety."

Psalm 4 illustrates the depth of the personal relationship between the believer and the Lord, which is the essence of true faith. David is used to recalling the Lord's past mercies, and to ask for new help on their basis. He is like Samuel, who erected the stones of help and said, "Thus far the Lord has helped us" (1 Samuel 7:12). David trusted that the Lord was his Father, friend and beloved, who felt for him, responded to him and inclined His ear to listen to him when he called on Him. He was able to face people courageously because he lived in complete friendship with God.

The psalm includes the following:

- First: The psalmist addresses God (verse 1)
- Second: The psalmist addresses his enemies (verses 2-5)
- Third: The psalmist wonders: Where do we find any good? (verses 6-8)

5.1. First: The Psalmist Addresses God

(verse 1)

"Hear when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have relieved me when I was in distress; have mercy on me, and hear my prayer"(verse 1).

David's situation was extremely difficult. His own son turned against him and tried to usurp

the kingdom from him! The only solution to the problem was prayer and asking for justice. When we face a problem, we should start solving it by talking it over with God. Before you go to the doctor, the lawyer or a friend, turn to God. Knock on His door for this is the right beginning. Prayer is the safe refuge for God's people at all times because "The Lord is near to all who call upon Him... in truth" (Psalm 145:18). He says, "Before they call I will answer. While they are still speaking I will hear" (Isaiah 65:24). He says to them, "In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry came before Him, even to His ears" (Psalm 18:6).

David describes God with three attributes:

1. **A God of righteousness:** "Hear me... O God of righteousness." Righteousness is equity, uprightness and being in a right standing with God. God is the God of righteousness because He grants righteousness to all who take refuge in His protection, atonement and forgiveness. The Lord is the believer's righteousness because He justifies him and proves him innocent. He places him in a right standing where he does not feel ashamed before God, himself or people.

God grants righteousness and guarantees its continuity to the believer because He sanctifies whom He justifies through the work of the Holy Spirit, cleansing them from all sin.

God is the model of righteousness, justice, uprightness and right standing. He is the example and the pattern that we should follow. As the Son of Man He left us an example that we should copy (1 Peter 2:21).

The Lord judges in righteousness, because He is a righteous and just God. He does not wrong anybody and does not desire that anyone should perish. God had planned a precious justification to atone for our transgressions. Someone who thought himself virtuous said, "I cloak myself in a robe of my virtues." And a wise man, who knew God's word answered him, "The robe of our virtues is a shabby one, because our virtues are mixed with wickedness. Therefore, I cloak myself with the robe of Christ's righteousness. I take refuge in Him from my sin and nakedness. I repent and seek His mercy, covering and forgiveness." -- "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God" (Romans 5:1). "...not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ" (Philippians 3:9). When we place our trust in the Lord he covers us with the robe of His righteousness.

Do you think you can cover yourself before God with your good works and superior virtues? If so, you must realise that the works of your righteousness are all useless. This is the starting point! David could not have contact with God unless he saw Him as the God of righteousness who justifies and covers him.

2. **A God of relief:** "You have relieved me when I was in distress."The enemies closed in upon him, and the Lord opened up the paths of peace and goodness before him. How wonderfully strong David's memory was! The calamity that hit him unexpectedly from within his household did not blot out his memory and make him forget God's favour. May God give us a memory that does not forget His good deeds, and the common sense to realise that even if He allows us to be tried, He still sees us through, because His promise is faithful: "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). "I will never leave you nor forsake you"(Hebrews 13:5). "I will guide you with My eye"(Psalm 32:8). We get the greatest blessings while passing through the valley of weeping. As the enemy presses us, we look up to God and He relieves us.
3. **A God of mercy:** "Have mercy on me, and hear my prayer."He did not appeal to the justice of his case, but to God's mercy. Are you in trouble? Is anyone slandering you? Are you in hot water because of your family or the surrounding community? Appeal first to the God of righteousness, the God of relief, the God of mercy; because He will relieve you from your trouble, and have mercy on you.

After addressing God in the first verse, David could address his enemies in the following verses. When you address God you get rid your fear of your enemies, and your lips, which have been purified by prayer, will speak boldly and without shame. We can address our enemies courageously if we first address God.

5.2. Second: The Psalmist Addresses his Enemies

(verses 2-5)

After praying to God, David gave two pieces of advice to his enemies, his son Absalom included:

1. **Your opposition is useless:** "How long, O you sons of men, will you turn my glory to shame? How long will you love worthlessness and seek falsehood?"(verse 2). By calling them sons of men he implies that they are his brothers in humanity, and that they are all created of dust. They are limited, weak creatures, even though they are also created in the image of God in righteousness and true holiness. They are his relatives, as it were, and he is one of them, even though he has been set apart by God and called to His service. He accepted God's call on his life, and dedicated himself to Him, which was his glory. He also knows that he will enter his eternal glory after having served God's purpose in his own generation (Acts 13:36).

David wondered, "How long will my position be so shaky before them? How long will you so contemptuously reject me? How long will you put the glory that God gave me in the dust?"

He said, "But You, O Lord, are a shield for me, my glory and the One who lifts up my

head" (Psalm 3:3). Here he says, "How long will you turn my glory to shame?" that is, "How long will God, my glory, be the object of my shame?"

He said, "Many are they who say of me, 'There is no help for him in God.'" (Psalm 3:2), as though he was saying, "I am sure that my God will help me out and stand by me." And at this point he says, "How long will you love worthlessness and seek falsehood?" They slandered him, but they will soon realise that their opposition of him is useless.

He also gives two reasons for their opposition being useless:

1. **The Lord sets His godly one apart:** "But know that the Lord has set apart for Himself him who is godly"(verse 3a). No doubt that his enemies would laugh when they hear this, and say, "Do you consider yourself His godly one? How has He set you apart if you are running away from your son? You have lost the kingdom. What you say is groundless and untenable!" But being filled with faith and hope, David could see what his enemies could not. God had chosen him and set him apart as His godly one, His special one. He had favoured him by taking him from following the sheep, and made him king over the people of God. This is an established fact because it is established on the rock of divine discernment and election!

Can you express, thankfully, that you are His godly one?

2. **The Lord hears His godly one:** "The Lord will hear when I call Him"(verse 3b). How high man's status is in the sight of God! "For the Lord has chosen Jacob for Himself, Israel for His special treasure" (Psalm 135:4). The Lord says, "I will make them My own jewels" (Malachi 3:17). And Christ says about His church that it is a garden enclosed for Himself only (Song of Songs 4:12). How high David's status is, and how high in the sight of God is the status of all who love Him!
2. **Calling his enemies to repent (verses 4,5):**He forgot his drudgery and thought of his enemies' interests. Therefore he called them to repent in four expressions:
 1. **Fear God:** "Tremble and do not sin"(verse 4a). As though he was saying, "I beg you to have fear of what you are doing. Stand in awe, and do not be so precipitate." He called them to stand in awe of the results of their doings, so that they could correct their mistakes before it is too late. He admonishes them, "Plan before you carry out." And while planning, do not forget that the Lord has set apart for Himself a godly one, and that He hears when I call on Him. It is true that the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord, and each and every man will give an account of what he has done. So, let us stand in awe of Him, and have a repentant attitude.
 2. **Consider your attitudes:** "Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still"(verse 4b). He calls everybody to have an inner conversation with himself, "Am I doing the right thing?" Sometimes we find ourselves driven by the masses, doing what they do without any deliberate, personal thinking. David wanted his enemies to

think in quiet, away from the noise, to reconsider and evaluate their attitudes and repent. The quiet hours of the night, when man is left alone with himself, his conscience and His God, are the best time for soul-searching.

3. **Worship God: Offer the sacrifices of righteousness (verse 5a).** Instead of slaughtering men, slaughter a sacrifice that justifies you before Him. Offer Him an acceptable sacrifice. Make peace with God, so that you can appropriate Moses' blessing to the tribes of Zebulun and Issachar: "They shall call the peoples to the mountains; there they shall offer sacrifices of righteousness"(Deuteronomy 33:19).
4. **Put your trust in the Lord (verse 5b):** Trust is the behaviour that corresponds with knowledge, and the conduct that is based on confidence in God. When they have offered to God the sacrifices of righteousness, they become righteous in His sight, because the sacrifice makes peace between them and God. This results in peace that overwhelms the heart. Then they trust in God and have confidence in His forgiveness.

Today we know that the sacrifices required by the law of Moses symbolised Christ, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29,36). Without a vicarious sacrifice there is no salvation from the wages of sin, which is death, and without shedding of blood there is no remission (Hebrews 9:22). Christ our Saviour came to offer Himself to redeem us, and secured peace for us with God, who gives us peace with ourselves and those around us.

5.3. Third: The Psalmist Wonders: Where can we Find Good?

(verses 6-8)

In the last part of the psalm David answers a question that many of us ask, "Who will show us any good?" His enemies would surely ask it if they responded to his call for repentance.

He offers two answers to this primary and important question:

1. **Absalom assumed that he would find goodness when he usurped the kingdom from his father David,** and those who joined in his failed coup d'tat thought that they would get new positions in the government, thus improving their status. So where do we find any good? We actually find three things that characterise the unbeliever:
 1. **He asks, Who will show us?** because he is ignorant of or ignores the fact that God is the source of all goodness. He does not need to ask, for the answer is too well known: God is the only source of all goodness. "The blessing of the Lord makes one rich, and he adds no sorrow with it" (Proverbs 10:22).
 2. **He wants to see with the eyes of the flesh,** therefore he does not enjoy the blessing: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29).
 3. **He presumes that his good lies in the material things he owns;** such as grain and

wine.

2. The believer, on the other hand, knows that:

1. **The Lord Himself is goodness:** He is also the source of goodness; therefore he does not search for goodness and ask where to find it. He says, "Lord, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us", namely "Look on us with kindness and let Your smile shine upon us." Lifting up the light of God's countenance upon us means that He will turn to us and look after us. We only need His kindness and approval of us. Christ said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33). Those upon whom the Lord lifts up the light of countenance will themselves lift up their eyes, because the source of life is from above, and besides Him they need no one else.
2. **The goodness of the Lord is the greatest goodness:** "You have put gladness in my heart, more than in the season that their grain and wine increased"(verse 7). Those who have a right relationship with God know that He alone satisfies them with His gifts, gives them all their needs, and keeps them in want of nothing. Christ's dominion over life is much better than all the possessions of the world, for grain and wine are the product of the earth, but the light of God's countenance is the product of heaven. When the Lord smiles at you the whole universe takes on a luminous nature.
3. **Inner peace is the ultimate goodness:** Inner peace remains strong no matter what the outer troubles. He said, "I will... lie down in peace" (verse 8a) because he was not worried or afraid. He will both lie down and sleep; "for You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety" (verse 8b). He lost his confidence in his son Absalom who betrayed him, and in many of his retainers who left him to join Absalom. Only his confidence in the Lord remained, and none besides. The Lord alone was watching over him and He alone kept him. Christ, the Son of David, said to His disciples, "You will... leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me" (John 16:32).

David was like a child resting his head on his mother's breast, and falling in deep sleep. He knew that he was surrounded by love. O that we become like him, even in times of loneliness, because with God we are a big number, because minority plus God equals majority, and the loving-kindness of God is better than life.

5.4. Questions

1. God was given three characteristics by David in Psalm 4. Mention them and comment briefly on each one of them.
2. What is your answer to the question, "Who can show us any good?"

6. Psalm Five

Surrounded with Favour

To the Chief Musician. With flutes. A Psalm of David.

1 Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my meditation.

2 Give heed to the voice of my cry, my King and my God, for to You I will pray.

3 My voice You shall hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning I will direct it to You, and I will look up.

4 For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness, nor shall evil dwell with You.

5 The boastful shall not stand in Your sight; you hate all workers of iniquity.

6 You shall destroy those who speak falsehood; the Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.

7 But as for me, I will come into Your house in the multitude of Your mercy; in fear of You I will worship toward Your holy temple.

8 Lead me, O Lord, in Your righteousness because of my enemies; make Your way straight before my face.

9 For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is destruction; their throat is an open tomb; they flatter with their tongue.

10 Pronounce them guilty, O God! Let them fall by their own counsels; cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions, for they have rebelled against You.

11 But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You; let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them; let those also who love Your name be joyful in You.

12 For You, O Lord, will bless the righteous; with favour You will surround him as with a shield.

This is a morning psalm, which David sang after a night of danger. When it was morning, he said, "My voice You shall hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning I will direct it to You, and I will look up" (verse 3). It is like Psalms 3 and 4, which he sang at a time of exposure to danger from his dishonest enemies. Perhaps David composed this psalm during his ministry under King Saul, or during Absalom's unsuccessful revolt against him.

The psalm begins with a cry for help to the Lord. It is a prayer of faith out of a heart that realises that God is a shield for those who take refuge in Him. God does not approve of the evil of the wicked, recompenses those who seek Him, and, in His mercy, allows the psalmist stand in His holy presence. The whole psalm is saturated with a deep sense of the spread of evil and the deviation from God's ways. Beholding these ungodly deeds torments the soul of the righteous. The psalmist implores God to deliver him from the treachery of his enemies, and to punish them as evidence of His heavenly justice. In the midst of the fog of evil and tribulation, God shines with His light over the believer, producing perseverance out of tribulation, and character out of perseverance, which turns into hope and encouragement for

the persecuted believers (Romans 5:4).

This psalm includes the following:

- First: A prayer (verses 1-3)
- Second: The Lord punishes the wicked (verses 4-6)
- Third: The Lord blesses the believers (verses 7-12)

6.1. First: A Prayer

(verses 1-3)

1. **Ways of prayer** He says, "Give ear to my words, O Lord, and consider my meditation" (verse 1). After this he says, "Give heed to the voice of my cry" (verse 2). He speaks to the Lord, cries out to Him and calls on Him. The Lord is, indeed, the refuge of the believer. He is just and impartial. He is the only hope because He hears and answers. He is strength for the weak, peace for the fearful and comfort for the oppressed. We, too, need to speak to the Lord, as the psalmist did. We need to cry out to Him and call upon Him:

1. **By speaking to the Lord:** "Give ear to my words, O Lord"(verse 1a). God speaks to us through the Bible and through preaching. We respond by prayer. It seems that David was saying, "I listened to Your words and You encouraged me and filled my heart with peace and comfort. Now I call on You to hear the words that express my gratitude, my heart's desires and needs. How much I love you, O Lord! I want to have a constant dialogue between the two of us, because I ought to pray always and not lose heart."
2. **By crying out to the Lord:** "Consider my meditation"(verse 1b). Here the Hebrew could mean, "Give heed to my sighing." It seems that David wanted to say, "I am oppressed, and You are my Father, Saviour and Friend. Draw my soul out of this oppression. Grant me my request if it is righteous. If it is imperfect, make it perfect. And if it is unrighteous, reject it completely. I am like a child that cannot express itself through words, therefore it cries. This problem that faces me makes me like a child, therefore I call upon my Father. Answer in Your appointed time, and wipe away my tears."
3. **By calling upon the Lord:** "Give heed to the voice of my crying"(verse 2a). It seems that David was saying, "I call upon You and ask You not to force myself upon you, but because You said, 'Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.' Therefore, I call You, cry out to You and knock at Your door, my Master. Give heed to the voice of my crying."

The believer keeps a continuous dialogue going on between himself and the Lord under

all circumstances, and asks Him to give ear. This is a cry of the suffering soul who asks the Lord to pay attention to him, to take him into consideration, and give heed to him because he is oppressed. This is also a cry of need. The one in need demands the Lord's attention, and the Lord knows and recognises his voice, just as he himself knows and recognises the voice of his heavenly Father.

2. **The One who hears prayer:**He calls Him, My king and my God.

1. **He calls Him his King:**David was a king. He ruled and acted as judge for his subjects, but he knew that God was the King, Ruler and Judge of kings. So he paid full allegiance to the greater King, the God of the universe, the owner of full authority in heaven and on earth.

2. **He calls Him his God:**He is the Almighty, the Eternal, who is faithful to His covenants and promises.

3. **An appointment of prayer:** "My voice You shall hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning I will direct it [namely: I present my request and express my desires] to You, and I will look up"(verse 3).

In the morning, at every daybreak, the writer begins his day with a conversation with God, because he cannot face the world without the power he draws from Him. Therefore he directs his prayer to Him and waits. David used to shoot arrows with his bow. In this verse he compares himself to an archer who fixes an arrow in his bow, pulls it back and shoots it toward the target. Then he would look up to see where the arrow hit. David seemed to be saying, "Lord, my prayer rushes to You like an arrow. I look up, knowing that it will reach You. I am certain of Your answer, therefore I wait for You and for Your blessing. You are there; You are alive and active, and will meet my need."

"But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and shall not be weary, they shall walk and not faint"(Isaiah 40:31). Sometimes we face responsibilities that require a flying speed to fulfil them. And sometimes the responsibilities of the day require more than 24 hours, so we run trying to cope with them. Sometimes we only need a walking speed to do our day's work. In all these we wait for the Lord, who gives the sufficient strength to fulfil all of our commitments. Then we say, "I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry" (Psalm 40:1).

6.2. Second: The Lord Punishes the Wicked

(verses 4-6)

1. **The characteristics of the wicked:**The wicked is one who passes the line that God appointed for mankind, and oversteps the divine commandments, thus entering into the forbidden area. David lists in these verses some of characteristics of the wicked:

1. **Boastful:**It is strange that the created dust boasts in the presence of the great Creator. "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6).
 2. **Workers of iniquity:**Iniquity is perverseness. Those who work iniquity like perverse ways.
 3. **Speaking falsehood:**They are of their father the devil, who is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44).
 4. **Bloodthirsty:**They destroy people and reputations.
 5. **Deceitful:**They do not tell the truth.
 6. **Abhorred by the Lord:**The Lord knows their deeds. He hates wickedness, but loves the wicked.
2. **The characteristics of God:** "For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness."God is good and His mercy endures forever. He is not harsh, evil or brutal like the heathen gods, nor isolated and far away. He is close to us. The Apostle James says about God, "God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone [by evil]" (James 1:13). If a wicked man goes to heaven, he will not have rest there, because he will be different from all the people in heaven. Also, he will not feel comfortable with the atmosphere of the place.

We agree with David that God does not take pleasure in evil. But in the light of the New Testament we realise that God loves the sinner and wants him to repent. The Jews used to say, "Heaven rejoices over one sinner who perishes because the earth will be relieved of his wickedness." Christ, however, says, "Likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15:7). This teaches us that God loves the sinner and wants him to repent. He loves those who are far away and wants them to come close. He loves the weak and wants to strengthen them. He loves the unclean and wants to cleanse them.

3. **The punishment of the wicked:**

1. **Nor shall evil dwell with You (verse 4).**Evil will always stay away from the presence of God. He will never approve of it. There is no meeting-point between the evil of the wicked and the holiness of God. The wicked cannot bear to dwell with God. He is denied access to God and cannot enjoy His fellowship. This is the severest punishment he can ever get. Then a day will come when all evil doers and liars will be destroyed.
2. **The boastful shall not stand in Your sight (verse 5)**because they do not dare, and because God will not allow them to. The psalmist addresses God, saying, "You will... bring down haughty looks"(Psalm 18:27). God answers, "The one who has a haughty look and a proud heart, him I will not endure" (Psalm 101:5). Peter confirms this fact, saying, "Be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, but gives grace to the

humble" (1 Peter 5:5).

3. **You shall destroy those who speak falsehood (verse 6).** The lake that burns with fire and brimstone is the destiny of the devil and those who follow him.

Let us pray: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10). Lord, give me purity of heart to be able to dwell with You and stand in Your presence, saying, "My soul pants for the Lord."

6.3. Third: The Lord Blesses the Believers

(verses 7-12)

In these six verses David talks of the believer's attitude to the Lord, and the Lord's attitude to the believers. This takes up the second half of the psalm. David says, "But as for me, I will come into Your house in the multitude of Your mercy." "But" shows the contrast between the psalmist and the wicked. He himself is not better than they, because we all like sheep have gone astray. But it is only through the multitude of God's mercy. The rich mercy of God has laid hold of the psalmist and favoured him, because he returned to God in repentance.

David mentioned the wickedness of the wicked in verses 4-6, as though he wanted to say, "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ" (Ephesian's 2:4,5) God stretches out His loving hand to the wicked to draw him out from among the wicked, and spare him the punishment. Divine mercy catches up with him and opens his eyes to salvation. He would not be aware of this salvation and new life unless God's mercy lays hold of him.

In the last six verses David presents two main ideas; the believer's attitude to the Lord, and the Lord's attitude to the believer.

1. The believer's attitude to the Lord (verses 7-10):

1. **An attitude of worship:** "But as for me, I will come into Your house in the multitude of Your mercy" (verse 7). He will not stand afar off; he will go into his Father's house, throw himself onto His loving bosom, depending on His plentiful mercy. David was chased away, cut off from the place of worship, longing to go to the house of the Lord. The temple had not been built yet, but his heart was directed toward the place of worship, wherever it was. He knew he could not worship unless the Lord showed mercy on him, and brought him back to his original state. He was sure that God, in His mercies, would fulfil the longings of his worshipping heart, that he would come into the house of the Lord and bow down in it in fear and respect. For the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; it is godliness in practice.

Today we direct our hearts to heaven, the house of God, for it is not a must to worship in a certain place. Those who worship God must worship in Spirit and truth (John

4:24). Christ has given us the right to enter His holiest place by His blood (Hebrews 10:19).

2. **An attitude of following:** "Lead me, O Lord, in Your righteousness because of my enemies; make Your way straight before my face"(verse 8). If David wrote this psalm during his escape from Absalom, the meaning of his request would be: "Make me a just king, O Lord, so that my enemies find nothing in me to complain of. Make Your way straight before me, no matter what the cost and the sacrifice." "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it"(Matthew 7:13,14). It seems that King David asked the Lord to lead him into the narrow gate, and prayed for His help to make that difficult way straight and easy before him.

As children holding on to their Father's hand, we need the daily leading of the Lord. Then our way of life will be safe and comfortable, because we will be walking in His own righteousness, in His own way, which is a "Highway of Holiness... Whoever walks the road, although a fool, shall not go astray" (Isaiah 35:8).

3. **An attitude of seeking the judgement of sinners:** "Pronounce them guilty, O God!... for they have rebelled against You"(verse 10). Sinners will be judged, because they are liars, accusers, whose throat is an open tomb reeking with stench and whose tongues are as smooth as swords! Some said that the psalmist sought to avenge himself on the wicked. If this was the meaning, the psalmist would be applying the law of eye for eye, and tooth for tooth (Exodus 21:24). This, of course, is very different from the Spirit of Christ who teaches us to ask forgiveness on behalf of our offenders. Others said that the psalmist was declaring the punishment that would definitely fall upon the sinner according to God's justice. In this case the psalmist has foretold the end results in advance.

2. **The Lord's attitude to the believers (verse 11,12):**

1. **The Lord makes the believer rejoice:** "Let all those rejoice who put their trust in You; let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them; let those also who love Your name be joyful in You"(verse 11). The believer's life is filled with spiritual joy as a natural result of his attitude to the Lord. The Lord is the cause of his joy, and he rejoices over Him more than he does over the whole world. "You have put gladness in my heart, more than in the season that their grain and wine increased. I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety" (Psalm 4:7,8). His joy comes from the overflowing spring of joy, with a heart that found comfort with the Lord and soul that is filled with the daily spiritual food.

The psalmist gives in this verse two characteristics of the believers who rejoice in the Lord:

- They trust in You. They do not trust in their own righteousness, but in God's mercy and redemption. They do not rely on their own intelligence, riches or social relationships, but on the divine gifts. They not only trust, but act on their trust as well. They depend on God and commit themselves to his loving care.
 - They love Your name. The name of the Lord is loveable. They seem to say, "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Our love is only an echo of His great love. Let us say to Him with the Apostle Peter, "Lord, You know that I love You"(John 21:15).
2. **The Lord blesses the believer:** "For You, O Lord, will bless the righteous"(verse 12). The Lord has appointed His people as heirs of blessing, to fill them with the exquisite divine goodness. The Lord blesses the believer by giving him infinite grace and inexpressible glory. As the Lord blessed Abraham, he said to him, "I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed"(Genesis 12:2,3). Before His ascension, Christ blessed His disciples, and gave them the blessing of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:50,51).

The psalmist describes those whom the Lord blesses as righteous. The righteous are the upright people who are in right standing with God, to whom He imparts His own righteousness.

3. **The Lord protects the believer:** "With favour You will surround him as with a shield"(verse 12). He surrounds him with the shield of faith that can quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. What will harm us if the Lord surrounds us with His love? The Lord strips the enemy of his armour, brings the thoughts of the enemy to nothing and crushes him under our feet.

The shield is a piece of wood covered with leather, with which a soldier defends himself from the arrows shot at him. The arrowheads hit the leather-coated shield. The shield that protects us is God's favour. We are in Christ, members of His body, belonging to Him and abiding in Him. These words arouse our desire to become righteous, justified by Christ and protected by His atonement. This invitation to join the citizenship of Christ is extended to you. He will make you rejoice, protect you with His shield of favour, and you will rejoice in Him and shout for joy because He will defend you. He prays for you that your faith should not fail (Luke 22:32).

6.4. Questions

1. In Psalm 5:1 David mentions three ways of praying. He also describes God with two attributes. Write down these five points.

2. In Psalm 5:7-10 David describes his stand before God in three ways. Mention each one with a brief comment on each.

7. Psalm Six:

I Make my Bed Swim with Tears

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

1 O Lord, do not rebuke me in Your anger, nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure.

2 Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are troubled.

3 My soul also is greatly troubled; but You, O Lord--how long?

4 Return, O Lord, deliver me! Oh, save me for Your mercies' sake!

5 For in death there is no remembrance of You; in the grave who will give You thanks?

6 I am weary with my groaning; all night I make my bed swim; I drench my couch with my tears.

7 My eye wastes away because of grief; it grows old because of all my enemies.

8 Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity; for the Lord has heard the voice of my weeping.

9 The Lord has heard my supplication; the Lord will receive my prayer.

10 Let all my enemies be ashamed and greatly troubled; let them turn back and be ashamed suddenly.

There are seven psalms that are called the psalms of repentance (they are Psalms 6,32,38,51,102,130,143), because they show signs of a contrite heart returning to God in repentance and confessing his sins. These signs are sorrow, humility and hatred of sin. Psalm 6 is the first psalm in this category. The second one is Psalm 32, which begins with the statement: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered... I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden." The third one is Psalm 38, in which the writer says, "For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me." The fourth one is the well-known Psalm 51, which says in its onset, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your loving-kindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgression." The fifth one is Psalm 102 in which the writer says, "Do not hide Your face from me in the day of my trouble; incline Your ear to me; in the day that I call, answer me speedily." The sixth one is Psalm 143 in which the writer says, "Do not enter into judgement with Your servant, for in Your sight no one living is righteous." One can almost summarise each psalm with this quotation from the Proverbs: "He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13) and this quotation from the Apostle John: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John

1:8,9).

Psalm 6 explains the basic and prime experience that every man must have in order to gain God's favour: repentance and returning to God. During his last sickness, Saint Augustine asked for the seven psalms of repentance to be written and placed on the wall opposite his bed, in order to be able to read them all. He said, "The beginning of wisdom is to know yourself: that you are a sinner." Psalms of repentance should be used by penitent sinners, as well by the believers who ask the Lord every day to wash them from their sin. Martin Luther said, "I will remain all my life a beggar begging for God's mercy." This means that every man should lift up a psalm of repentance as he returns to God, likewise those who have already returned to Him should ask Him to cleanse them daily from their sin.

We live in a sinful world and the circumstances around us cause us to sin, because sin so easily ensnares us. Each one of us has his own weak points. Even if we do not commit sin wilfully and maliciously, we still find our white garment of salvation besmeared with the sins splashed on us, therefore we need a daily washing. There is an initial repentance in which the person opens the door of the heart to the Lord, declares his belonging to Him and becomes a new creation in Christ. Yet there is also the daily, continual repentance with which we guarantee for ourselves a clean living that pleases the Lord. There is an initial cleansing when God forgives us our sins, atones for our trespasses and adopts us. There is also a daily need to wash our feet as Christ said, "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean"(John 13:10). Walking in the wilderness of life exposes us to a lot of dirt, therefore, as believers, we always need the prayer of repentance.

In this psalm of repentance David speaks of God chastening him because of his failure, and his resulting repentance. The Bible says, "Whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives" (Hebrews 12:6).

The psalm includes the following:

- First: The Lord chastens the wrong-doer (verse 1)
- Second: The wrong-doer cries out on account of his chastisement (verses 2-7)
- Third: The Lord answers the penitent when he cries out (verses 8-10)

7.1. First: The Lord Chastens the One who Does Wrong (verse 1)

David confesses to the Lord that he sinned, and that he deserves to be rebuked. He did something wrong that he shouldn't have done, and asked the Lord to have patience with him, not to rebuke him in a state of anger and not to chasten him in a state of displeasure. He said, "Lord, do not rebuke me in Your anger, nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure."

No doubt that David as a father rebuked and chastened his children. Angry chastening must not have given any good results, because in his angry mood David must not have been able to correct the wrong. Instead he aroused his children's stubbornness even more. So David said to God, "God, I know that I deserve rebuke and chastening, but do not rebuke me in Your anger, nor chasten me in Your displeasure. You know my frame. You rebuke and chasten me, not to crush me and destroy me, but to straighten me out. You do not chasten forever, but only for a time and only when it is necessary. You chasten me to make a utensil out of me which is acceptable and pleasing to You. As much as wind is needful for the purging of grain, so is chastening for my soul. I do not reject chastening; I only ask for mercy in my chastisement. 'O Lord, correct me, but with justice, not in Your anger lest You bring me to nothing' (Jeremiah 10:24). You act in perfect righteousness and goodwill. You will cross out all my iniquities from Your account. You will cast all my sins into the depths of the sea and remember no more my lawless deeds (Micah 7:19, Hebrews 8:12). I confessed them to You, and poured out my heart before you in genuine repentance, so You accepted my repentance, forgave me and started all over again with me."

Martin Luther commented on this prayer: "The psalmist entreats God to accompany His rebuke and chastening with mercy, not with anger. This teaches us that God has two chastening rods: one for chastening with mercy, the other for chastening with anger."

The first verse shows parents how to chasten their children: that they should not punish them when angry. It also reveals for us one of our God's great qualities; that He chastens and corrects us in true love, to make us better persons, so that we can be better equipped as vessels to minister unto Him and do His will.

7.2. Second: The Wrong-doer Cries Out on Account of his Chastisement (verses 2-7)

David cries out because of the divine wrath that fell upon him for the wrong he has done. He mentions the reasons for this cry:

1. **He cries out because he is weak:** "Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak" (verse 2a). As though he says, "If you punish me according to my sin I will perish. Lord, I appeal to Your mercy upon my weak person." Most probably a weak person will burst in tears. These tears of repentance make God sympathise with us and have mercy upon us, just as the good Samaritan sympathised with the weak man who had been injured by robbers.

David not only asked God not to be angry with him, but also that He would remove the cause of that anger. That is the sin that resulted from his weakness. When we confess our weakness and sins, God's mercy always rushes to our aid.

2. **He cries out because he was troubled:** "O Lord, heal me, for my bones are troubled. My

soul also is greatly troubled; but You, O Lord- how long?"(verses 2b,3). It looks like the divine chastisement has touched his body, causing him the sickness that troubled his bones. Sinning makes the innermost being of the person troubled. This chastisement has also made him afraid of receiving more chastisement. His heart was filled with terror. His sense of guilt has even intensified his terror, because he has lost his favour with God, and consequently the joy of his salvation. The psalmist seemed to say, "If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord; who could stand before You? Yes I sinned, but I come to You now in a state of physical brokenness, and You accept my repentance."

The writer asks, "How long?" There is a time fixed by God for all those who carry a cross. He fixed 430 years for the children of Israel in Egypt, seventy in Babylon, nearly thirteen years for Joseph in Pharaoh's prison, and ten days for the angel of the church of Smyrna (Revelations 2:10). But God puts an end to the persecution of the ones who turn to Him in repentance.

- 3. He cries out because God is his Saviour:** "Return, O God, deliver me! Oh, save me for Your mercies sake!"(verse 4). Sin has created a gap between the psalmist and God. Now he seeks to restore his fellowship with Him, as he said, "Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation" (Psalm 51:11,12).

The psalmist asks God to deliver him from the punishment of his sin and from its evil consequences, because He is the only One who saves from sin. As much as his straying away from God brought about his misery, his returning back to God brought about his salvation. When we return to God and repent, God returns to us and delivers us.

"Save me for Your mercies sake!"In the light of the cross we comprehend the meaning of this verse more deeply, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men... looking for... our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed" (Titus 2:11-14).

- 4. He cries out because he thinks that the dead do not praise God:** "For in death there is no remembrance of You; in the grave who will give You thanks?"(verse 5). That is to say that the writer assumes that he will not be able to thank God in the grave in case He lets him die and be buried. However, if He has mercy on him and grants him a long life, he will praise Him here on earth forever and ever. Since the psalmist wants to declare the Lord's salvation and thank Him day and night, he asks Him to extend his life.

Or perhaps the psalmist was afraid of dying in his sin and going to eternal hell. So he entreated God to deliver his soul, to redeem him and save him from hell, for His mercies sake, so that he could give thanks to God on earth in heaven.

- 5. He cries out because he is repentant:** "I am weary with my groaning; all night I make my bed swim; I drench my couch with my tears. My eye wastes away because of grief; it

grows old because of all my enemies"(verses 6,7). His eye wastes away from too much weeping, like cloth that is consumed by moths. The more the psalmist groans in anguish over his sin, the more he makes his bed swim in the tears of his bitter weeping. This is reminiscent of Peter who went out and wept bitterly for having denied Christ (Luke 22:62).

It is true that sin is not worth the price paid for it. Every sinner ought to return to God as quickly as he can.

Three comments on grieving for sin:

1. **It is not the quantity of grief that matters as much as its quality:**We may not have the same quantity of tears as David, who made his bed swim every night with tears. We may not have heads full of water as Jeremiah wished: "Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night"(Jeremiah 9:1). We may not weep bitterly as Peter did. The quantity does not matter, but the quality of genuine grief does. The deep expression is enough.
2. **It is not necessary to show our grief before the people, but to have a genuine grief.**We need not say to others that we are sinners in need of God's forgiveness, but we need to be honest. As a container full of water may not leak any drop of its content, so our tears may not show to others even though our hearts are full of tears over our sin.
3. **It is not necessary to grieve for a certain period, but to have sincere grief.**An old legend has it that David started to weep after he did his notorious sin. Two drops of his tears fell on the ground, where two trees started growing: the weeping willow, which signifies the grief of the believer who weeps before God, and the incense tree, which symbolises the faith of the penitent and his love for God. The one whom much is forgiven loves God much, because he feels the favour of God's love.

7.3. Third: The Lord Answers the Penitent when He Cries Out (verses 8-10)

In the last part of the psalm we can see two ideas:

1. **The psalmist changed his attitude to his enemies:** "Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity; for the Lord has heard the voice of my weeping. The Lord has heard my supplication; the Lord will receive my prayer"(verses 8,9). God received David's repentance, so he altered his attitude to his enemies, who had led him to sin; for evil company corrupts good habits (1 Corinthians 15:33).

The penitent psalmist walked in the ways of sinners. Yet, after he repented and received forgiveness for his sins, he departed from them and from their ways. Light has no

communion with darkness. After David straightened out his attitude toward God, God straightened out David's attitude toward his enemies.

If there is anything that makes you weep, and if you are asking the Lord to wipe away your tears, first straighten out your relationship with God, alter your attitudes to Him, and consequently your attitudes toward those who hurt you will be changed. Basically our battle is not with people on the outside, but with our own selves on the inside. When we drive sin out of us by confession and repentance, our attitudes toward others change.

2. **How the psalmist was delivered from his enemies:** "Let all my enemies be ashamed and greatly troubled"(verse 10). He received the fulfilment of the promise: "When a man's ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him"(Proverbs 16:7).

The best treatment to relieve us of bad company is departing from it. "Remove your foot from evil"(Proverbs 4:27). It is not enough to weep over our sins; we have to depart from them and from their causes. Sin and grace do not go together.

How much do we need to go through these three experiences with David!

Say to the Lord, "Lord, please do not rebuke me in Your anger, nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure. Touch me with love and mercy."

Then say, "I take refuge in Your mercy, because I am weak."

7.4. Questions

1. There are seven psalms of repentance. Which ones are they? Why did St. Augustine want to see them all on his death bed?
2. Psalm 6:8-10 presents two ideas. Mention them, and write a brief comment on the first one.

8. Psalm Seven

My Defence Is of God

A Meditation of David, which he sang to the Lord concerning the words of Cush, a Benjaminite.

1 O Lord my God, in You I put my trust; save me from all those who persecute me; and deliver me,

2 Lest they tear me like a lion, rending me in pieces, while there is none to deliver.

3 O Lord my God, if I have done this: if there is iniquity in my hands,

4 If I have repaid evil to him who was at peace with me, or have plundered my enemy without cause,

5 Let the enemy pursue me and overtake me; yes, let him trample my life to the earth, and lay my

honour in the dust. Selah

6 Arise, O Lord, in Your anger; lift Yourself up because of the rage of my enemies; rise up for me to the judgment You have commanded!

7 So the congregation of the peoples shall surround You; for their sakes, therefore, return on high.

8 The Lord shall judge the peoples; judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness, and according to my integrity within me.

9 Oh, let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, but establish the just; for the righteous God tests the hearts and minds.

10 My defence is of God, who saves the upright in heart.

11 God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day.

12 If he does not turn back, He will sharpen His sword; He bends His bow and makes it ready.

13 He also prepares for Himself instruments of death; He makes His arrows into fiery shafts.

14 Behold, the wicked brings forth iniquity; yes, he conceives trouble and brings forth falsehood.

15 He made a pit and dug it out, and has fallen into the ditch which he made.

16 His trouble shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down on his own crown.

17 I will praise the Lord according to His righteousness, and will sing praise to the name of the Lord Most High.

This is one of seven psalms that St. Augustine called "the Psalms of the Chased". They are Psalms 7, 34, 52, 54, 56, 57 and 142. David wrote these psalms when he was fleeing from King Saul from one place to another, from one cave to another, and even to the land of the Philistines. The heading of this psalm is a Meditation of David which he sang to the Lord. The original Hebrew word for meditation is *shiggaion*, which means a sad song or a plaintive tune. It is the same heading as the prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, "on Shigionoth" (Habakkuk 3:1). Isn't it strange that the believer should sing a plaintive tune to the Lord? The truth is that all the troubles of the world cannot keep the believer from singing because his circumstances are not the resources of his life. He gets all his needs from the Lord. All the sufferings of life can never keep him from singing and praising the Lord, because he always experiences that the Lord goes with him into the fiery furnace!

David sang this *shiggaion* because Cush, a Benjamite, slandered him with King Saul, and claimed that he plotted to kill the king (1 Samuel 22:8). This false slander only aggravated the anger of King Saul, who had already been enraged with David. The only thing we know of Cush is that he was a Benjamite, and most probably a relation of Saul. Because of this slander, the king rallied his troops to arrest the innocent David and kill him. Therefore, David

lifted up his prayer in this *shiggaion*, which actually comprises many topics, ranging from triumph to bitter suffering. It is an example of the diverse experiences of the believer.

We find a big difference between the beginning and the end of Psalm 7. At the beginning God's justice seems vague, but at the end we see it active and strong. At the beginning the wicked seems victorious and oppressive, but at the end we see him weak and defeated. At the beginning we see the believer weeping and crying, but at the end we hear him shouting and triumphant. This is the way it always happens with those who love God. Sometimes it seems like there is no divine justice, and that the believer lost against the wicked. But the true believer always wins in the end. He thanks the Lord for His righteousness and justice, and sings for the name of the Most High. "No weapon against you shall prosper, and every tongue which rises against you, you shall condemn" (Isaiah 54:17).

This psalm includes:

- First: The dangerous situation of the psalmist (verses 1,2)
- Second: The psalmist pleads innocent (verses 3-5)
- Third: The psalmist calls on God for help (verses 6-10)
- Fourth: The psalmist addresses his enemies (verses 11-17)

8.1. First: The Dangerous Situation of the Psalmist

(verses 1,2)

The writer begins his psalm by turning to God, saying, "Lord my God, in You I put my trust" (verse 1). He turns to the Master of his life, and calls Him Lord. He also addresses Him as "my God".

There is an intimate relationship between the two of them. The Lord is his God, and he is the faithful servant and follower of this God. He has committed his life to the Lord, and made Him master and leader over himself. Thus the Lord has become his King, and his motto became: "God to whom I belong and whom I serve" (Acts 27:23). Since this personal relationship is deep and secure, he casts both himself and all his cares on the Lord his God, and says to Him, "In You I put my trust. Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). Therefore he cries out to Him, "Save me from the false slander, and pleads innocent of such a thing."

David expresses his dangerous situation by saying, "Save me from all those who persecute me; and deliver me, lest they tear me like a lion, rending me in pieces, while there is none to deliver" (verses 1b,2).

1. **His enemies are many:** They are so many that he has to say "all those who persecute me." Wherever he turns they surround him and attack him like a legion.

2. **His enemies are strong and malicious:** "They tear me like a lion, rending me in pieces." His arch-enemy will not have rest till he has put him to death. Saul was like a violent and fierce lion, but our enemy really is a lion, not only like a... lion (1 Peter 5:8).
3. **His enemy is deadly:** There is none to deliver. It seems there is no way of escape! Why then does he plead such a hopeless case with God? He must have remembered his previous experiences with God, when he kept his father's sheep. At that time a lion came and took away one lamb from the flock, so David went out after it, struck it and delivered the lamb from its mouth. When the lion attacked him, he caught it by its hair, struck and killed it (1 Samuel 17:34-36). Will God show less love to David than David's sheep? Never! God will not stand silent when His son is in danger. For this reason David could have hope in spite of the danger. This hope promoted him to lift up a prayer of trust, a prayer of faith, which is indeed the wealth of the children of God. Faith confirms God's power and love, while prayer takes us straight to the throne room!

8.2. Second: The Psalmist Pleads Innocent

(verses 3-5)

David was innocent. He pleaded innocent of the unjust accusation of Cush, saying, "O Lord my God, if I have done this: If there is iniquity in my hands, if I have repaid evil to him who was at peace with me, or have plundered my enemy without cause, let the enemy pursue and overtake me; yes, let him trample my life to the earth, and lay my honour in the dust"(verses 3-5).

David called upon heaven as a witness of his innocence. He declared his readiness to receive punishment in case he was proven guilty. Heaven knows that he did not hurt his enemy, who fell twice in his hands: once in the wilderness of En Gedi, and once in the wilderness of Ziph (1 Samuel 24,26). David had a clear conscience about Saul. One can truly say of him, "Our boasting is in this: the testimony of our conscience" (2 Corinthians 1:12) and "If our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God" (1 John 3:21).

Certainly no one can plead innocence of all guilt, because "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us... If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us" (1 John 1:8,10). David only pleaded innocence of this one accusation that Cush raised against him. He seemed to be saying to the Lord, "Lord, I am not guilty of this one!"

Job went through a similar experience when his friends accused him of committing certain sins that made God punish him. He said to his friends that he was innocent, and that all these calamities that befell him were not the result of his sins. He started to list the moral principles he adhered to, "If I have kept the poor from their desire, or caused the eyes of the widow to fail, or eaten my morsel by myself, so that the fatherless may not eat of it... Then let my arm

fall from my shoulder, let my arm be torn from the socket" (Job 31:16-22).

Even if we can plead innocent before the people we will not be able to do so before God. God's standards declare that there isn't any good man. Yet, we can plead innocent before God if we are protected by the atonement of Christ. Then our innocence will stem from his grace, redemption, favour and love for us. Then we can say, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1), and "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:1).

One can plead innocent before man only of one accusation. He can plead innocent before man of all the mistakes he has not made. But he cannot plead innocent before God, in whose sight no one living is righteous (Psalm 143:2).

8.3. Third: The Psalmist Calls on God for Help

(verses 6-10)

After pleading innocent, David calls on God for help:

1. **He asks God to judge his enemies publicly:** God will be the just Judge, sitting on His high throne to look through the false accusation raised against His abused prophet. He says, "Arise, O Lord, in Your anger; lift Yourself up because of the rage of my enemies, and rise up for me to the judgement You have commanded!" (verse 6). He asks Him to arise and lift Himself up high above injustice and the unjust. Afraid of his enemies David feared that God would keep silent and forsake him. For this reason he was bold and said to Him, "Arise", although He neither slumbers nor sleeps (Psalm 121:4). The Lord knew the situation of the psalmist, and accepted this expression.
2. **He asks that the nations should watch this judgement:** He wants them to witness this just judgement, in which a just judge will be presiding over all: over the unjust King Saul, and lying, slanderous Cush. He says, "The congregation of the peoples shall surround You; for their sakes, therefore, return on high" (verse 7). This means: "gather the nations around You, O Lord, and be seated above them on high. Your oppressed saints will present their complaints to Your Supreme Court."
3. **He knows that the Lord judges with righteousness:** He can see all the circumstances and their parts. The writer says, "The Lord shall judge the peoples; judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness, and according to my integrity with me" (verse 8).
4. **He knows that the justice of the Lord will put an end to evils:** "All wickedness and every form of evil will come to an end. He calls upon God to let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end" (verse 9a). This will be accomplished, either by the repentance of the wicked, so that he would no longer be an evil-doer, but one who applies the Apostles commandment: "Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labour, working

with hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need" (Ephesians 4:28). Or else the wickedness will come to an end as his life on earth stops, and he resumes it in hell, where he will live all eternity. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).

5. **He knows that God will save him:**Not only that, but He will also give him constancy in truth and faith, because God knows those who belong to Him. So he says, "Establish the just; for the righteous God tests the hearts and minds. My defence is of God, who saves the upright in heart" (verses 9b,10). The hearts and the minds encompass the depths and secrets of man; his thoughts, emotions and intents. David says that God knows the inner parts, that He will establish him in truth and goodness; for all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account (Hebrews 4:13). He realises that his shield (defence) is of God. Cush shot an arrow at David, planning to hurt him. But the Lord does not forsake the upright in heart; He will surely save and deliver them.

How happy are the upright in heart! The Lord Himself defends them and foils the conspiracies of their enemies. The Bible says to such men and women, "...your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgement of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 1:4-8).

We learn a wonderful lesson from the judgement of Jesus as He stood in the midst of a hotbed of hatred, lying and ingratitude. Not a single drop of that corruption entered His soul. He kept on loving even in the midst of the surrounding hatred, and said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34). In the midst of the physical pain, Christ gives us an example of the just who stands firm and does not let the sufferings of life hamper his ministry, stop his message or alter his principle!

8.4. Fourth: The Psalmist Addresses his Enemies

(verses 11-17)

1. **He warns his enemies of their dangerous situation:** "God is a just Judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day"(verse 11). God manifests His anger, but does not carry out His punishment straight away in order to give the wicked a chance to repent. The fact that the wicked still lives after he has done evil is a manifestation of God's plan for the wicked: that He does not desire to destroy him, but rather that he repents. The wicked ought to listen to reason and repent: "Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?" (Romans 2:4). God is angry every day, but He does not destroy, trying to

give the sinner a chance to repent!

2. **He calls his enemies to repent:** "If he [the wicked] does not turn back, He [God] will sharpen His sword; He bends His bow and makes it ready. He also prepares for Himself instruments of death; He makes His arrows into fiery shafts"(verses 12,13). God punishes in various ways, and carries out His punishment in such a strict manner that David calls his enemies to repent. Isn't it beautiful that he calls those who accuse him falsely to repent even while he is suffering from them, so that God should not draw out His sword and arrows to destroy them, putting an everlasting end to their wickedness!?
3. **He describes his enemies with two attributes (verses 14-16).**He describes them to show that wickedness does not profit the wicked; but it turns against him to destroy him.
 1. **David likens the wicked to a woman in labour:** "Behold the wicked travails with iniquity, conceives trouble and brings forth falsehood"(verse 14). His beginning, continuity and end are all vanity and grasping for the wind. He has no profit under the sun. He dreams of false things that are useless for him. He toils for no avail. "Truly what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Matthew 16:26).
 2. **He likens him to a hunter who digs a hole:**Hunters dig holes and cover them to trap the animals they want to capture. But sometimes they themselves fall into the trap! "He made a pit and dug it out, and has fallen into the ditch which he made. His trouble shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down on his own crown"(verses 15,16). Wickedness kills the wicked, and sin brings down, not up. Let us be careful not to dig holes for others, and try to lift them up so that we may be blessed with them. The one who digs falls down, and the one who lifts others up, he himself will be lifted up.
4. **He declares his final triumph:** "I will praise the Lord according to His righteousness, and will sing praise to the name of the Lord Most High"(verse 17). What a difference between the beginning and the end of the psalm! The *shiggaion*, the plaintive tune, gave way to the shouts of joy. Praise is the main business of believers on earth and in eternity. The cords of the believer's lyre may go slack because of the cares of persecution, and produce a sad tune. But they soon pick up their previous vigor, thanks to the righteous, just, upright Lord, who sees and avenges the oppressed on their oppressors!

8.5. Questions

1. How could David say in verses 3-5 that he is innocent while he says in Psalm 14:3 that all men have together become corrupt?
2. In Psalm 7:11-13 David gives his enemies two words of advice. What are they?

9. Psalm Eight

Crowned with Glory

To the Chief Musician. On the instrument of Gath. A Psalm of David.

1 O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth, who have set Your glory above the heavens!

2 Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength, because of Your enemies, that You may silence the enemy and the avenger.

3 When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained,

4 What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?

5 For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honour.

6 You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet,

7 All sheep and oxen-- even the beasts of the field,

8 The birds of the air, and the fish of the sea that pass through the paths of the seas.

9 O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth!

This is a psalm of magnification and thanksgiving to God. In it David praises the Lord for His goodness and love for man. It begins and ends with the same refrain: "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth!" After singing the psalm David realises how great God is, so he expresses the glory of His name in a deeper and better way; he speaks of God who is cloaked with wisdom and majesty.

As the writer of the psalm did, we also should start the day by offering a hymn of praise to God, and end with a similar one. As a matter of fact, we are more aware of God's graciousness at the end of the day, because then we can count our blessings and find them more excellent than those of yesterday. God is the Creator of man; He is mindful of him, visits him and crowns him.

This psalm was supposed to be sung on the instrument Gath, which is a musical instrument similar to the lyre and was used chiefly at Gath, the Philistine capital. The instrument of Gath was also mentioned in the heading of Psalms 81 and 84. The Hebrew word perhaps refers to either the song of the wine-press, which was sung by workers while pressing the grapes, or to the song of the Gittite guard (2 Samuel 15:18). The psalmist then composed the words of the psalm through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and chose a Philistine tune to go with it. All men join in praising God one way or another.

This psalm includes:

- First: How excellent is God's name in nature (verse 1)
- Second: How excellent is God's name in children (verse 2)
- Third: How excellent is God's name in weak human beings (verses 3,4)
- Fourth: How excellent is man's name, whom God has honoured (verses 5-8)
- Fifth: Doxology (verse 9)

9.1. First: How Excellent is God's Name in Nature

(verse 1)

The writer glorifies and praises God at the beginning and at the end of the psalm, because He is the Creator of nature, the earth and the heavens. These are the mirrors that reflect the brightness of God's glory, and the stage on which He carried out His glorious deeds.

Therefore the psalmist sings to the Lord, "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth, You who set Your glory above the heavens!" (verse 1). All creation speaks of His great wisdom and transcendent power, for He is upholding all things by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3). "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork" (Psalm 19:1). "You alone are the Lord; You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all things on it, the seas and all that is in them, and You preserve them all. The host of heaven worship You" (Nehemiah 9:6). "O Lord, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all. The earth is full of Your possessions- This great and wide sea, in which are teeming innumerable things, living things both small and great. There the ships sail about... These wait for You, that You may give them their food in due season. What You give them they gather in; You open Your hand and they are filled with goodness" (Psalm 104:24-28). Without words or noise nature declares the glory of God. It declares it equally to all. At every daybreak we see the sun rise, and at the end of every day we see the stars sparkling in the far space. When we look at all these our hearts fill with worship, thanksgiving and praise to God. We cannot help admitting that he is our Lord. Your glory is above the heavens, You whom the seraphim praise, saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!" (Isaiah 6:3) so much that the doorposts of the house of the Lord were shaken by the shouts of praise.

9.2. Second: How Excellent is God's Name in Children

(verse 2)

"Out of the mouth of babes and infants You have ordained strength." A child is always intrigued and amazed at every new thing, because he is not yet bored by routine. We need to learn from children how to be amazed at God's great works, and observe them with open eyes and hearts, wanting to learn more and more. Every one who will enter the kingdom of God will become like a child, impressed by God's greatness and trusting in His love (Matthew

18:3).

"Out of the mouth of babes and infants You have ordained strength, because of Your enemies, that You may silence the enemy and the avenger." These words were fulfilled to the letter through Christ's triumphant entry of Jerusalem. The evangelist says, "But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying in the temple and saying, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' they were indignant and said to Him, 'Do You hear what these are saying?' And Jesus said to them, 'Yes. Have you never read, "Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise"?' (Matthew 21:15,16). The Jewish leaders could not know Christ, so they did not shout for Him. Those little ones, however, knew Him in their hearts and shouted Hosanna for Him, which means: "Save us" (Matthew 21:9).

The ability of those children to express such transparent, genuine, spontaneous praise silences the enemies and the avengers. A thief wanted to steal fruit from a tree. He took his son along with him and told him, "Warn me when you see someone observing me." The father climbed the tree to steal from it, and suddenly the son called him, "Daddy, there is someone observing you." The father hurried down the tree and asked, "Who is it?" The son replied, "It is God." These words made the father repent.

When George Whitefield, the renowned British preacher, was preaching in New England a lady gave her life to Christ as a result of his ministry. This lady tried to lead her neighbours to be saved but was not successful. Therefore she focused on her daughter, who was then ten years old, and the daughter responded to the love of the Lord. The daughter asked her mother one time, "Mama, why don't we tell the good news to the people of our town?" The mother answered, "I tried many times and despaired." The daughter said, "I will do it." She dashed out and went into the first shop she found, which was a shoe-shop, and asked the shop-assistant, "Have you heard the good news of Christ the Saviour?" She told him about the joy that filled her heart and the change that happened at her home. The man was so moved that he prayed and accepted the Lord. Over two months 50 people from that village received Christ, because of an enthusiastic little girl who loved the Lord and wanted to do something. She did it, despite her mother's despair.

Martin Luther faced a lot of opposition one time that made him lose hope. His associate Melancthon was strolling down the streets of the town and noticed some children who gathered to pray for religious reformation. He returned with a big smile on his face and said to Luther, "We are saved. Even the children are praying for us."

We rejoice in our sons and daughters when they go to Sunday school, because the message they hear there makes them faithful witnesses of Christ. Out of their lives and mouths God perfects praise that shames the older sinners whose hearts were turned into stone for the excess of what they heard. To them the story of the cross has become just an historical

incident that no more impresses them nor drives them to thank God.

As to the devil, the avenging archenemy, he will be silenced last of all when we all shall hear the angel say, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our Lord, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren... has been cast down... Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them!" (Revelations 12:10-12).

9.3. Third: How Excellent is God's Name in Weak Human Beings

(verses 3,4)

The psalmist then glorifies the Lord because He takes care of human beings, who are, in comparison with great nature, weak and small. He says, "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?" (verses 3,4).

How little is our knowledge of God's works in creation! At the time I was writing these words I read about a team of European researchers who found a new galaxy between 13 to 17 billion light-years away from the earth. Thus, it was said, it proved to be the most distant galaxy ever found. The European Organisation for Astronomical Research announced that the light of that galaxy took 90% of the age of the universe to reach the organisation's telescope in Chile!

When one compares himself with the magnificence of nature, he realises how small he is. Man has lived for millions of years, yet he is of few days and full of trouble (Job 14:1). Moses said to God, "The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off and we fly away" (Psalm 90:10). Nature is powerful in earthquakes and volcanoes, in the roaring of waterfalls and the altitude of mountains, yet man is like grass which grows up: "in the morning it flourishes and grows up; in the evening it is cut down and withers"(Psalm 90:5,6).

Bildad the Shuhite, Job's friend, said of God, "Dominion and fear belong to Him... Is there any number to His armies?... If even the moon does not shine, and the stars are not pure in His sight, how much less man, who is a maggot, and the son of man, who is a worm?" (Job 25:2-5).

What is man that the Lord, our Lord, the One with the most excellent name in all heaven and earth, should visit him? Even though he is the Creator of all this, He considers ordinary man, who is a non-entity. Job said to God, "What is man, that You should magnify him, that You should set Your heart on him?" (Job 7:17). The psalmist said elsewhere, "Lord, what is man that You take knowledge of him? Or the son of man that You are mindful of him?" (Psalm 144:3).

The wicked may not see, in his pride, the magnificence of the universe and his own insignificance. But the humble is aware of this fact: "For thus says the High and Lofty One, who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isaiah 57:15).

When we consider the good news of the Lord's coming to us in the form of a man, incarnated in Christ, we cannot but say in astonishment and gratitude, "What is man that You are mindful of him?!"

9.4. Fourth: How Excellent is Man, whom God has Honoured

(verses 5-8)

1. **God raised man's value:** "For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honour"(verse 5a). After glorifying God for honouring the weak human beings, the psalmist glorifies God for raising their value. A little lower means less in duration or rank. Men are lower than angels because angels don't die, whereas man dies. Man's death, however, is temporary. "The hour is coming, in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth- those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation" (John 5:28,29). Man is lower than angels in rank on earth, but what about his rank after death? "You have crowned him with glory and honour" (verse 5b).

It says in Hebrews 2:16 that God does not give aid (salvation) to the angels who fell down, but He did provide for the salvation of Adam and his seed, because while we were still sinners Christ died for us.

2. **God gave man dominion:** "You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen- even the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea that pass through the paths of the seas"(verses 6-8).

God created Adam in His image (Genesis 1:26), placed him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it (Genesis 2:15) and gave him dominion over the earth and all things in it as an agent of God the Creator (Genesis 1:28). God put the whole creation under man's feet to use. He never meant for the creatures to have dominion over Adam. But when we make ourselves slaves to matter, we forfeit the blessing God intended to give us.

God glorified man through three blessings, which are found in verses 4,5: He is mindful of him, visited him and crowned him.

1. **You are mindful of him:**"Mindful of" means to consider or think of. Is God so concerned with mankind that he should think of them? What is man that You are

mindful of him and take him into account? Do You care for all men so much that You even number the very hairs of their heads?

2. **You have visited him:** This means he came to us. Yes, God visited us in Christ. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). Christ was walking in a procession with His disciples, surrounded by many crowds, when he lifted up His eyes and saw a sycamore tree and a sinner, short of stature, who had climbed it to have the pleasure of looking at Him. Then he called him by name, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must come to your house" (Luke 19:5). Jesus invited Himself to Zacchaeus' home, and visited him. Later on He said of him, "Today salvation has come to this house." So what is Zacchaeus that You visit him? How excellent is Your name in all the earth because You are mindful of Zacchaeus! You are Immanuel- God with us.

Now He visits you, and knocks at the door of your heart. Most of those who have not given their lives to Christ have not given Him their lives at the first knock. This is why He knocks again and again as though He is in need, when it is He who gives, blesses and imparts. Christ still comes to us, stretching out His hand and commanding His angels to protect and keep us in all our ways.

3. **You have crowned him:** He places crowns of glory on our heads. "And You have crowned him with glory and honour." "He washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father"(Revelations 1:5,6).

"You have put all things under his feet." "Do you want all things to be under your feet? If so, the answer is in the doxology at the beginning and the end of the psalm: "O Lord, our God." When God is the Lord and master of your life, you become master of all things. Give God authority over your life, and he will give you authority over His creatures. Give Christ a free hand to do whatever he wills with your life, and he will free you to do whatever you will.

Do you live a triumphant life? Do you have authority over yourself? Do you restrain your drives? "And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Galatians 5:24). The writer of Hebrews quotes verses 4-6 of our psalm and applies them to Christ: "For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels. But one testified in a certain place, saying: 'What is man that You are mindful of him, or the son of man that You take care of him? You made him a little lower than the angels; You crowned him with glory and honour, and set him over the works of Your hands. You have put all things in subjection under his feet.'" (Hebrews 2:5-8). These verses indicate that for the ordinary man Christ seems lower than the angels, because he assumed a human body. Christ, however, rose high above all when he was crowned with excellent glory, because He took on Himself the body of man to save man. When he has completed this salvation, all this submitted to

Him. No angel has ever reached this level of glory.

God never submitted the universe to the angels, but gave dominion over it to man and to Christ, the Son of man, who silenced the storm, calmed down the wind and raised the dead. The world to come also submits to Christ, for He is the Intercessor and the Judge, who, at His second coming, will usher in the end of the world and the beginning of judgement.

9.5. Fifth: A Final Doxology

(verse 9)

"O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth!" The psalm starts and concludes with this doxology. The psalmist sings this final doxology, with which he began the psalm, with a new understanding. He learns now to glorify and honour God, and consequently his desire to have dominion over nature and creatures started to take second place in his priorities, and worship and glorification of God began to take the first place in his life. So he says to him, "O Lord, our Lord."

By confessing God as our Lord we trust Him to take care of us, and our souls desire His name (Isaiah 26:8). Then we will seek to obey Him first, and worship and adore Him. We will await the second coming of His Christ from heaven.

9.6. Questions

1. How did God ordain praise from the lips of the children?
2. In Psalm 8:4-5 David says that God glorifies his people with three things. Mention them and comment on each one briefly.

10. Psalm Nine

You have Maintained my Right

To the Chief Musician. To the tune of "Death of the Son." A Psalm of David.

1 I will praise You, O Lord, with my whole heart; I will tell of all Your marvelous works.

2 I will be glad and rejoice in You; I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High.

3 When my enemies turn back, they shall fall and perish at Your presence.

4 For You have maintained my right and my cause; You sat on the throne judging in righteousness.

5 You have rebuked the nations, You have destroyed the wicked; You have blotted out their name forever and ever.

6 O enemy, destructions are finished forever! And you have destroyed cities; even their memory has perished.

7 But the Lord shall endure forever; He has prepared His throne for judgment.

8 He shall judge the world in righteousness, and He shall administer judgment for the peoples in uprightness.

9 The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble.

10 And those who know Your name will put their trust in You; for You, Lord, have not forsaken those who seek You.

11 Sing praises to the Lord, who dwells in Zion! Declare His deeds among the people.

12 When He avenges blood, He remembers them; He does not forget the cry of the humble.

13 Have mercy on me, O Lord! Consider my trouble from those who hate me, You who lift me up from the gates of death,

14 That I may tell of all Your praise in the gates of the daughter of Zion. I will rejoice in Your salvation.

15 The nations have sunk down in the pit which they made; in the net which they hid, their own foot is caught.

16 The Lord is known by the judgment He executes; the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands. Meditation. Selah

17 The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.

18 For the needy shall not always be forgotten; the expectation of the poor shall not perish forever.

19 Arise, O Lord, do not let man prevail; let the nations be judged in Your sight.

20 Put them in fear, O Lord, that the nations may know themselves to be but men. Selah

This psalm is a song of triumph; each two verses of it begin with one letter of the Hebrew alphabet (acrostic). It is divided into two main parts. In both parts there is an expression of gratitude to God because He gives victory to the believers over the wicked and the unjust. The writer has watched the raging struggle between good and evil, and saw the heathen and wicked nations attack his believing nation. Also he observed how the unjust overcame the innocent in his believing nation. Therefore he calls upon God to give victory to the innocent, just as He gave victory to His nation over the idolaters. He invokes God to punish the unjust, who deny His power and justice.

Evidently, David wrote this psalm. He speaks as a representative for his nation, regards the enemies of his nation as his own (verse 3), and considers the cause of the nation his own cause (verse 4). But, if the king himself had written this psalm and protested against the

unjust, we might wonder why didn't he do anything to remove the injustice from the people? The answer: As a result of the unjust government of King Saul, David was unable to control the conduct of the nobility, and could not establish the rules of justice. As he realised his inability, he turned to the Lord, the King of kings, to judge in righteousness.

The heading of the psalm says that it is to the tune of "Death of the Son". This tune is unknown to us today.

The psalm can be divided as follows:

	Part One	Part Two
	verses 1-12	verses 13-30
1.	1-4: Praise	13,14: Prayer
2.	5,6: God judged the wicked in righteousness	15,16: God judged the wicked in righteousness
3.	7-10: God will judge in righteousness and deliver the believer	17,18: God will judge in righteousness and deliver the believer
4.	11,12: Praise	19,20: Prayer

10.1. PART ONE

(Verses 1-12)

10.1.1. First: Praise

(Verses 1-4)

These verses capture the object of praise, the reason for praise and the nature of praise. They are respectively: I will sing praise to Your name, Your marvellous works and With my whole heart.

Now let us look into the nature of praise and list reasons for it:

The psalmist praises the Lord, saying, "I will praise You, O Lord, with my whole heart; I will tell of all Your marvellous works. I will be glad and rejoice in You; I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High" (verses 1,2).

1. The nature of praise:

1. **Heartfelt:** "With my whole heart"(verse 1a). The psalmist states in Psalm 103:1 something to the same effect: "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name" (Psalm 103:1)! He felt how great God's salvation was, and saw

- how the Lord set apart a holy one for Himself, so his lips resounded what filled his whole heart.
2. **Public:** "I will tell of all Your marvellous works"(verses 1b). He experienced the Lord's goodness, so he praised Him with all his heart and told all the people around him of what He had done for him. It is lovely to tell in our homes and our family what great things the Lord has done for us and how He has had compassion on us (Mark 5:19) because we cannot contain our joy anymore. How great are His acts of providence, redemption and sanctification!
 3. **Joyous:** "I will be glad and rejoice in You"(verse 2a). His enemies were jumping down his throat, but he was unable to defend himself. The Lord delivered him, so he was glad and rejoiced in his God. Let us rejoice because God will inevitably intervene on our behalf. He will surely bring relief and we will sing, "Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; for YAH, the Lord, is my strength and my song; he also has become my salvation. Therefore you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And in that day you will say, 'Praise the Lord, call upon His name; declare His deeds among the peoples'"(Isaiah 12:2-4).
 4. **Personal:** "I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High"(verse 2b). The psalmist is first of all glad in the Lord, and second in His gifts. He rejoiced in what he got and rejoiced all the more because the Most High was on his side. This meant that the Giver will continue giving and delivering. With such a spirit of praise one can surmount the difficulties that defeat those who give in to depression, for the joy of the Lord gives strength (Nehemiah 8:10).
2. **The reasons for praise:**
- "When my enemies turn back, they shall fall and perish at Your presence. For You have maintained my right and my cause; you sat in the throne judging in righteousness"(verses 3,4).
1. **God my Defence:**They advanced to attack, but the Lord turned them back, not because of the power, finances, diplomacy or friends of the psalmist, but through the divine power that defeats all the unjust, and with the heavenly love that delivers the pious. "'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6).
 2. **God my Advocate:** "For You have maintained my right and my cause"(verse 4a). God knows the intents of man. He maintains his right if he is right and advocates his cause if it is legitimate and just. One ought to make sure he is right first, so that the Lord may maintain his right, which the unjust try to cast to the ground. For then we can say, "Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; when I fall, I will arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him, until he pleads my case and executes justice for

me; He will bring me forth to the light, and I will see His righteousness" (Micah 7:8,9).

3. **God my Judge:** "You sat on the throne judging in righteousness"(verse 4b). The Lord condemns the wicked and the unjust who disregard His justice and believe that they would escape standing at the throne of His justice. God's condemnation is according to the truth, and He will never let His holy ones be at the mercy of the judgements of the unjust.

10.1.2. Second: God Judged the Wicked in Righteousness

(verses 5,6)

The psalmist says in these two verses, "You have rebuked the nations, You have destroyed the wicked; You have blotted out their name forever and ever. O enemy, destructions are finished forever! ...Even their memory has perished."

1. **God rebukes the wicked:**He censures them for their heathenism and injustice. Thus we know that the word of God is creative and life-giving, pointing to the paths of righteousness and turning the foolish man, who is willing to accept it, into a wise man. It is also like a judge, giving judgements against those who reject it. It seems that the wicked people he described here did not listen to the God's rebuke, nor feared Him, which brought about their punishment.
2. **God destroys the wicked and the unrepentant:**The heathen were the enemies of the psalmist. He does not face them when they are judged with justice, but his God does. This is what happened in the episode of the ten plagues (Exodus 7-12). All of them were a confrontation between the true God, the Creator of heaven and earth, and the gods of Pharaoh. God versus the Nile, the idol of the Egyptians! The water of the Nile turned into blood. God versus the calf Apis! All the oxen died. The confrontation goes on between our God, to whom we belong, and the idols of the enemy. God destroys and annihilates the wicked, blotting out his name, so that endless ruin overtakes him. As for the city of God, it lasts forever.

Please notice that the devil never gives up or gets frustrated. He may lose a battle but he repeats the attack again. He attacked Christ in the wilderness, was defeated by Him, but even though defeated he did not give up. The Bible says, "He departed from Him until an opportune time" (Luke 4:13), then repeated his attack again. The same thing happens with us over and over again. Winning one battle does not mean that there aren't any more battles. So let us be sober and alert to any new battle.

10.1.3. Third: God will Judge in Righteousness and Deliver the Believer

(verses 7-10)

In these verses the psalmist speaks of the Lord as a refuge for the crushed and distressed; he pictures Him as a supreme Judge who is always there to defend the oppressed against the oppressor. Whoever experienced God's faithfulness and protection in the past cannot doubt His protection in the future. These four verses give us two descriptions of the Lord, and two of the believer:

1. Two descriptions of the Lord:

1. **He executes eternal judgement:** "But the Lord shall endure [lit. sit] forever; He has prepared His throne for His judgement"(verse 7). The psalmist said in verse 4, "You have maintained my right... You sat on the throne judging in righteousness."The Lord rises to judge in justice, and sits down after administering it. He rises to deliver, and sits down after delivering. He judges forever, and sits after rescuing His children. His kingdom will rule over everybody, for He endures forever. Our experience of His goodness in the past fills us with confidence for the future.
2. **He establishes the right of the oppressed:** "He shall judge the world in righteousness, and He shall administer judgement for the peoples in uprightness. The Lord also shall be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble"(verses 8,9). God's tribunal is just and impartial. God's justice warns the sinner to repent, and reassures the oppressed believer to rely upon the just and righteous Lord, who rescues the humble from the hand of his oppressor.

Who crushed the oppressed? It is the devil. He crushed them with sin and rebellion. Sin is a hard and merciless master, and "whoever commits sin is a slave of sin"(John 8:34). Also sinners crush their fellow-men, because the devil carries out his plans through his followers.

The Lord is a refuge from sin, oppression and injustice. He is a tower and a fortress that protects from sin, and the brutal onslaught and wiles of the evil one. The Lord Himself is the refuge, "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe" (Proverbs 18:10). Peter said to Christ, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).

2. Two descriptions of the believer:

1. **He knows the name of the Lord:** "Those who know Your name will put their trust in You"(verse 10a). The believer knows from the divine revelations, which he believes and trusts that the Lord is Saviour and Redeemer. He knows that He atoned for his transgressions through the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God, the great Sacrifice. "He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love, in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sin" (Colossians 1:13-14). This is the redemptive knowledge. He knows him in yet another way, in providential knowledge. He has experienced Him in

times of trouble and knows Him to be a just judge. This experience gave rise to more faith and made the believer depend on God even more. Thus the believer's life continues from one little experience to another bigger one, and from faith to more faith. So those who know Your name will put their trust in You, and say, "For I know whom I have believed" (2 Timothy 1:12).

2. **He seeks the Lord:** "For You, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek You"(verse 10b). "But those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing" (Psalm 34:10). "Let all those who seek You rejoice" (Psalm 40:16). "Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the Lord understand all" (Proverbs 28:5).

The believer seeks the Lord because he trusts in His love, and is sure that He searches for him as He has searched for him till He found him. Christ said, "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him... If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home within him" (John 14:21,23).

10.1.4. Fourth: Praise

(verses 11,12)

The first part of the psalm is concluded by praise in verses 11 and 12. After his heart overflowed with thanksgiving, he encourages others to join him in praise. He praises the Lord for four things:

1. **Because the Lord dwells among His people:** "Sing praises to the Lord, who dwells in Zion!"(verse 11a). Zion means a fortress. It was the political and religious capital. This means that our God is concerned with both our religious and secular affairs. He dwells among His people, receives their worship, listens to their prayers and provides their needs.
2. **Because the believers tell each other of His deeds:** "Declare His deeds among the people"(verse 11b). "Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day. Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples. For the Lord is great and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods" (Psalm 96:2-4).
3. **Because He is just:** "He avenges blood:"(verse 12a). He asked Cain on the day he murdered his brother Abel, "What have you done? The voice of your brothers blood cries out to Me from the ground" (Genesis 4:10). The tribunal of divine justice will convene on the Judgement Day to avenge the martyrs on their wicked murderers.
4. **Because He does not forsake anybody:** "He remembers them; He does not forget the cry of the humble"(verse 12b). "Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you"

(Isaiah 49:15). "Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will... Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:29,31).

And you who seek the Lord and love Him, give Him thanks and praise Him always.

10.2. PART TWO

(verses 13-20)

Part two of the psalm resembles part one, only that the writer replaces praise and thanksgiving with prayer and supplication. Prayer is the haven that provides shelter for all those whose lives are almost wrecked by the waves; it is a strong staff that provides support to those who are about to stumble and fall; it is the surest way to get blessings and keep them.

10.2.1. First: Prayer

(verses 13,14)

"Have mercy on me O Lord, consider my trouble from those who hate me. You who lift me up from the gates of death, that I may tell of Your praise in the gates of the daughter of Zion"(verses 13,14).

- 1. The enemy will continue attacking the believer:**In part one the psalmist praised the Lord because He delivered him from his enemies and granted him total victory. But the enemy will inevitably return to assault him afresh; for the devil and his lackeys do not take rest and are never ashamed of defeat. Therefore the victorious believer goes back again to prayer. He takes refuge in the gate of the Lord when the evil one attacks his gate. The evil one departs for a while, but the believer remains at the Lord's gate asking for new deliverance, while his eyes still look and see the old! The believer will always lift up prayers of request till the last day of his earthly life, bearing in mind Christ's statement: "Without me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).
- 2. The believer will continue testifying to God's grace:**He knows that the gates of Hades shall not prevail against him (Matthew 16:18) because the Lord lifts him up from the gates of death. Therefore he testifies to the Lord in the gates of the city, rejoicing in His salvation. The Lord lifted him up from the gates of death so that he should lift up others to the gates of life. God saves us to proclaim His praises, so that others might find the way to deliverance together with us.
- 3. There is a contrast between the gates of death (verse 13) and the gates of the daughter of Zion (verse 14):**The psalmist says, "You who lift me up from the gates of death", then he says "at the gates of the daughter of Zion". The gate of death is dark and depressive, but the gate of worship is the gate of life, assurance, deliverance, joy and light from the Lord.

The Lord transported the psalmist from darkness to light, and from death to life (John 5:24; 1 John 3:14). As a result of this he began to proclaim all the praises of the Lord. The same happens with everyone who turns back to the Lord in repentance. When the prodigal son returned to his father, the latter said, "This my son was dead and is alive again... was lost and is found" (Luke 15:24,32).

10.2.2. Second: God Judged the Wicked in Righteousness

(verses 15,16)

"The nations have sunk down in the pit which they made; in the net which they hid, their own foot is caught. The Lord is known by the judgement He executes; the wicked is snared in the work of his own hand"(verses 15,16).

The wicked destroyed himself, and the Lord judged him. He sank in the pit which he dug, and fell in the snare which he hid. This is how the Lord executes judgement, for He is known by His just dealings. The Lord made Himself known by His decrees, and the wicked was caught and taken by what his hands did.

The psalmist says, "The Lord is known...." He is known, not only by His judgement of the wicked who dissipate in sin and refuse to repent, but also by His love and justice for those who repent.

Saint Paul said, "...that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained it, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me" (Philippians 3:10-12).

At the end of these two verses we find these two words: Meditation [from Heb. *higgaion*]and Selah. This was a musical notation, most probably, for the playing of stringed instrument to increase here, then to have a period of quiet (which is most likely the meaning of Selah), so as to give both singers and hearers a chance to ponder the lofty meanings contained in the psalm. Then they would hear again that God is the same yesterday, today and forever; the One who delivered and the who will deliver still.

10.2.3. Third: God will Judge the Wicked in Righteousness and Deliver the Believer

(verses 17,18)

God, who delivers and to whom we sang and paused to ponder His goodness, will again deliver. "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God" (verse 17). The nations are dead because they forget God (cf. verses 7,8). Yet, "the needy shall not always be forgotten; the expectations of the poor shall not perish forever" (verses 18). You

are always on God's mind (cf. verses 9,10).

10.2.4. Fourth: Prayer

(verses 19,20)

The last two verses are a prayer that includes two requests:

1. **That the kingdom of God may have victory:** "Arise, O Lord, do not let man prevail; let the nations be judged in Your sight"(verse 19). The sinner thinks that God created the world and forgot all about it, so he acts as though he is the master of the situation, and counts so much on his strength and power. The world leaders may practice suppression, injustice and dictatorship, forgetting that high officials watch over high officials, and higher officials are over them (Ecclesiastes 5:8). The psalmist invokes God to put an end to injustice, and to uphold justice.
2. **That the wicked may repent:** "Put them in fear, O Lord, that the nations may know themselves to be but men"(verse 20). God frightens them as they sin, so that they realise God's power over them. Maybe this fear is the fear of sickness, the fear of defeat or the fear of being threatened by a higher power. As they are frightened, they realise that they are created of dust, to which they will return. This causes them to return to God and repent. The Lord says, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his own way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die?" (Ezekiel 33:11).

10.3. Questions

1. In Psalm 9:3-4 David mentions three reasons for praising God. What are they? Comment briefly on each.
2. Psalm 9:10 describes the believer in two ways. What are these two?

11. Psalm Ten

Why Do you Stand Afar Off?

- 1 Why do You stand afar off, O Lord? Why do You hide in times of trouble?
- 2 The wicked in his pride persecutes the poor; let them be caught in the plots which they have devised.
- 3 For the wicked boasts of his heart's desire; he blesses the greedy and renounces the Lord.
- 4 The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts.
- 5 His ways are always prospering; Your judgments are far above, out of his sight; as for all his enemies, he sneers at them.
- 6 He has said in his heart, "I shall not be moved; I shall never be in adversity."

7 His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and oppression; under his tongue is trouble and iniquity.

8 He sits in the lurking places of the villages; in the secret places he murders the innocent; his eyes are secretly fixed on the helpless.

9 He lies in wait secretly, as a lion in his den; he lies in wait to catch the poor; he catches the poor when he draws him into his net.

10 So he crouches, he lies low, that the helpless may fall by his strength.

11 He has said in his heart, "God has forgotten; He hides His face; He will never see."

12 Arise, O Lord! O God, lift up Your hand! Do not forget the humble.

13 Why do the wicked renounce God? He has said in his heart, "You will not require an account."

14 But You have seen, for You observe trouble and grief, to repay it by Your hand. The helpless commits himself to You; You are the helper of the fatherless.

15 Break the arm of the wicked and the evil man; seek out his wickedness until You find none.

16 The Lord is King forever and ever; the nations have perished out of His land.

17 Lord, You have heard the desire of the humble; You will prepare their heart; You will cause Your ear to hear,

18 To do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may oppress no more.

This psalm has no heading, and was written by an anonymous writer. The circumstances under which it was written are also unknown. In both the Septuagint and the Vulgate (of Jerome) it appears as a part of Psalm 9. The Masoretic text, however, regards it as a separate psalm.

Since the author of this psalm is unknown, it could be sung by everyone who is distressed and persecuted, at all times and in all places. It is a cry from a suffering soul that asks God: "Why all this distress? Why do you let the wicked do whatever he likes?" Then the soul cries for help and salvation.

The psalm includes the following:

- First: The persecuted asks: Why? (verses 1,2)
- Second: The characteristics and the deeds of the wicked (verses 3-11)
- Third: The persecuted prays (verses 12-15)
- Fourth: The persecuted is reassured (verses 16-18)

11.1. First: The Persecuted Asks: Why?

(verses 1, 2)

The suffering believer often thinks that God is standing far off as though He were hiding Himself, and has ceased to help in times of trouble. No doubt divine companionship is the greatest source of joy, and any doubt in this issue will disturb one's soul. In this disturbed state of mind the psalmist cried out, "Why do You stand afar off, O Lord? Why do You hide Yourself in times of trouble? The wicked in his pride persecutes the poor; let them be caught in the plots which they have devised"(verses 1,2).

1. **This is not a question of an inquisitor:**The psalmist does not want to know the secrets of divine will, because no one can know all about it. Solomon, who was himself a very wise man, said, "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter" (Proverbs 25:2). An earthly king would like to know everything, but the heavenly King conceals certain matters from us out of His extreme love, so as not to disturb us.
2. **This is not a question of a grumbling person:**He trusts that God the King loves him, and has a good purpose for all He does or allows to happen. One may happen to be in a dangerous place between two seas, on board a ship that is almost wrecked by the violence of the waves (Acts 27:41). But God would encourage him, saying, "Do not be afraid" and "If need be, you have been grieved by various trials" (1 Peter 1:6). "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:37). "Enter into the rock, and hide in the dust, from the terror of the Lord and the glory of his majesty" (Isaiah 3:10).
3. **This is not a question of a despairing person:**The psalmist realises that God is alive and there, and that He will ultimately save those who call on Him for help. True, the wicked says that God does not see and will not require an account. But the psalmist says that the eyes of the Lord are open and that his ears are attentive. If he were not sure of this he would not turn to God and say, "Why do You stand afar off, O Lord? Why do You hide Yourself in times of trouble?"
4. **It is a question of a bewildered person that loves the Lord:**He asks, "Why do You stand far away from me when I need You? Why do You hide Yourself in times of distress?" In his sorrow he says, "The wicked in his pride persecutes the poor." He invokes divine justice to come upon the wicked so that they would be caught in the plots which they have devised. This is what naturally happens to the wicked who digs a ditch for someone, only to fall into it himself.

11.2. Second: The Characteristics and the Deeds of the Wicked

(verses 3-11)

1. **The wicked boasts of his sins:** "For the wicked boasts of his heart's desire; he blesses the greedy and renounces the Lord. The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God;

God is in none of his thoughts"(verses 3,4). The wicked shamelessly brags about his ambitions without trying to hide them. He boasts that he gets all his desires, whether or not the ways to get them are in agreement with the divine will! This is a blasphemous renunciation of God, which is described elsewhere by the prophet as follows: "They have rejected the Lord of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 5:24). The wicked in his proud countenance says that God will not seek him out, and in his sick imagination assumes that there is no God to require the wages of sin from him. The only place that is void of the divine presence is the thought life of the fool who says, "There is no God"(Psalm 14:1). God is there, and He avenges blood (Psalm 9:12). The wicked must suffer because of his wickedness and pride.

2. **The wicked trusts his own potentials:** "His ways are always prospering; Your judgements are far above, out of his sight; as for all his enemies, he sneers at them. He has said in his heart, 'I shall not be moved; I shall never be in adversity'"(verses 5,6). The wicked boasts when his plans and ruses come true; he neither fears God nor regards man. The prophet wonders about this wicked man who trusts in his potentials: "Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are those happy who deal so treacherously? You have planted them, yes, they have taken root; they grow, yes, they bear fruit. You are near in their mouth but far from their mind" (Jeremiah 12:1,2). The wicked sneers at all his enemies in haughtiness and pride, as well as threatens those who offer him sincere advice, and attacks those who differ from him, as Saul of Tarsus sneered at, threatened and murdered the disciples of the Lord (Acts 9:1). Although God's judgements are high above the wicked, he cannot see them because of the blindness of his heart. Therefore he says, "I shall not be moved; I shall never be in adversity", as if he is sure about his present and future. He says exactly the same thing as the believer who relies on God. The only difference is that he says this out of dependence on his own potentials and resources, such as finances, health, family, knowledge and social relationships. Since God does not punish the sinner as soon as he commits sin, he assumes that he will get away with his evil. Yet, God only exerts long-suffering toward him to give him a chance to repent (Romans 2:4).
3. **The wicked oppresses the poor (verses 7-10):**
 1. **By speaking against him:**His mouth is full of cursing, deceit and oppression; under his tongue is trouble and iniquity (verse 7). Deceitful and oppressive words in the mouth of the wicked are like a scrumptious morsel of food, which he savours with relish. The wise man said to describe this wicked man, "The mouth of the wicked devours iniquity" (Proverbs 19:28). Eliphaz the Temanite, another wise man, said, "...who drinks iniquity like water"(Job 15:16). The Apostle Paul presents the picture in Romans 3:14.
 2. **By attacking him:** "He sits in the lurking places of the villages; in the secret places he murders the innocent"(verse 8). The prophet says of such a man, "Woe to those

- who devise iniquity, and work out evil on their beds! At morning light they practice it, because it is in the power of their hands. They covet fields and take them by violence, also houses, and seize them. So they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance" (Micah 2:1-3). In Proverbs 1:10-18 Solomon presents a picture of the wicked as a highwayman.
3. **By scheming against him:** "He lies in wait secretly, as a lion in his den; he lies in wait to catch the poor; he catches the poor when he draws him into his net"(verse 9).
 4. **By humiliating him:** "So he crouches, he lies low, that the helpless may fall by his strength"(v. 10). All the victims of the evil one are helpless people who have none to defend them. To the like of these Christ declared His public announcement: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor..." (Luke 4:18,19).
 4. **The wicked persists in his error:** "He has said in his heart, 'God has forgotten; He hides His face; He will never see it'"(verse 11). He had done evil, but the Lord did not punish him for it straight away, so he took it for granted that God overlooked or forgot the matter and no longer sees it. Yet, God declares, "I will... punish the men... who say in their heart, 'The Lord will not do good, nor will He do evil'"(Zephaniah 1:12).

11.3. Third: The Persecuted Prays

(verses 12-15)

1. **Prayer involves requests:** "Arise, O Lord! O God, lift up Your hand! Do not forget the humble"(verse 12). This verse contains three requests:
 1. **That the Lord should take action:** "Arise, O Lord"(verse 12a). The wicked says that he would not be moved (verse 6), but he is undoubtedly mistaken. The psalmist asks the Lord to prove his mistake, by arising and lifting up His hand to establish his right.
 2. **That the Lord should establish his right:** "O God, lift up Your hand!"(verse 12b). The wicked thinks that the Lord's hands are tied, and that He does not seek out the rights of the oppressed (verse 4). The psalmist, however, asks the Lord to lift up His hand and see that he gets his rights. He seems to say with the prophet, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord! Awake as in the ancient days, in the generations of old" (Isaiah 51:9).
 3. **That the Lord should remember him:** "Do not forget the humble"(verse 12c). The wicked says that the Lord forgets, that He hides His face, and that He will never see it (verse 11). The psalmist beseeches the Lord to remember Him in His mercies and not to forget him because he is humble.
2. **Prayer involves questions:** "Why do the wicked renounce God? He has said in his heart, 'You will not require an account'"(verse 13). The wicked did not renounce the psalmist, but the Lord Himself. Therefore the psalmist wonders as the prophet did, "Why do You

show me iniquity, and cause me to see trouble?" (Habakkuk 1:3).

- 3. Prayer involves waiting:** "But You have seen it, for You observe trouble and grief, to repay it by Your hand. The helpless commits himself to You; You are the helper of the fatherless. Break the arm of the wicked and the evil man; seek out his wickedness until You find none"(verses 14,15). The psalmist waits for the Lord to see his troubles, although the wicked says that the Lord does not see. God has an eye on His children's needs, and by His own hand He establishes their right and punishes their persecutors. The waiting of the believer is not dependent on the visible, but on God's unchangeable goodness.

The psalmist waits for the Lord to do something, to repay the righteous according to his righteousness and the wicked according to his wickedness, to stretch out His divine hand and act on his behalf. This confident waiting encourages the humble psalmist to commit himself to the executor of justice and righteousness, for the Lord is the helper of the fatherless, because in Him the fatherless finds mercy (Hosea 14:3). When unjust deeds encircle the believer, we say to him, "Say to the righteous that it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with them, for the reward of his hands shall be given him" (Isaiah 3:10,11).

The psalmist expects God to punish the wicked to prevent them from harming the innocent, and asks Him to break the arm of the lawless one to stop his lawless deeds. He asks the Lord to put an end to the wickedness of the wicked, so that it will be as non-existent. Seek out his wickedness until You find none.

11.4. Fourth: The Persecuted is Reassured

(verses 16-18)

- 1. He is reassured because the Lord is in authority:** "The Lord is King forever and ever; the nations have perished out of His land"(verse 16). "For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish" (Psalm 1:6). Christ said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18), then He commissioned His disciples to go and make disciples of all nations, to put an end to their alienation and estrangement from God, "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among the saints" (Acts 26:18). As to those who refuse to return, they will perish in their sins.

The Lord raises up rulers to judge for the oppressed and punish the oppressors, and He must do the same thing, "He removes kings and raises up kings" (Daniel 2:21), because He alone has authority on earth.

- 2. He is reassured because the Lord hears:** "Lord, You have heard the desire of the

humble; You will prepare their heart"(verse 17a, b). He not only hears the cry of the humble, but also their secret desires and the groanings of their heart. He hears prayer, and to Him all flesh will come. He inclines His ears to the humble, just as a mother inclines her ears to her child, and bends down in love and tenderness, because he is of low stature and spirits. He prepares [or establishes] the heart of the fearful by faith in the Lord's love, and grants him the grace of depending on Him, so as not to suspect His justice ever again.

- 3. He is reassured because the Lord does justice:** "You will cause Your ear to hear, to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may oppress no more"(verses 17c,18). This assurance embraces both present and future, and it comes from the One who says, "And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). God's justice rises above the man of the earth, who is created out of dust, and will have to return to dust. God says to the congregation of believers, "I, even I, am He who comforts you. Who are you that you should be afraid of a man who will die, and of the son of man who will be made like grass?"(Isaiah 51:12).

11.5. Answers to the question why

In the light of the New Testament one can give some answers to the question with which the psalmist began his psalm, i.e. "Why do You stand afar off, O Lord? Why do You hide Yourself in times of trouble?"

The right answer is that God always works everything for our good, so much that we can "glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance character; and character hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:3-5).

- 1. God uses tribulation for our spiritual good:**It makes us remember our sin, alienation from God, and the depth of our relationship with Him. King Nebuchadnezzar cast the three young men into the fiery furnace, but God untied them, and they started to walk freely without fetters. Fire had no power over their bodies, not a single hair of their heads was singed nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them (Daniel 3:23,25,27). When we go through a tribulation we may cry out, "Why do You stand afar off?" But soon we come to realise that God will not leave us, but rather works on cutting us loose of the bonds of sin, so as to rely totally on Him.
- 2. God uses tribulation to save sinners:**God draws sinners to the fold of His love. Christ suffered to save the sinners. On the cross He said, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). It was this suffering that fulfilled salvation. When you are troubled, you should realise that God is with you in trouble, and know that all things work together for good for you because you love God. You should depend on His grace, and be at peace. Your peace should be seen by those who are far from God, and they should wonder about the reason for the hope that is in you, and you give them an answer.

Thus you can win them to Christ, who gave you His peace that passes all understanding. This is the same experience of the three young men in the fiery furnace of King Nebuchadnezzar, which made the king say, "There is no other God who can deliver like this" (Daniel 3:29).

3. **God uses tribulation for His glory:** Tribulation makes us more mature persons. When a believer like Job suffers but remains in the love of God, he proves that he doesn't love God because of anything that He gave him, but because God deserves to be worshipped and loved for Himself, whether He gives or not. "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:37). Those who are far from God see in us how we receive all that He gives us in love and gratitude, knowing that His promise is true: I will never leave you nor forsake you. So we may boldly say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" (Hebrews 13:5,6).

11.6. Questions

1. In Psalm 10:12 the psalmist asks three things from God. What are they?
2. In Psalm 10:16-18 the psalmist mentions three reasons for his peace. What are these reasons?

12. Quiz

There are two questions at the end of each chapter. You are invited to write and send us the answers to them. If you answer 15 of these questions correctly we will send you a book as a prize. Or you may join our Bible school by correspondence and work toward a certificate.

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