

# The Reader's Companion *to* The Psalms

## The Five Day Bible Reading Schedule

The book of Psalms is an incredible and amazing collection. It contains praise, cries for help, prophecies of the Messiah, wisdom and more. Much more. However, it is not always an easy read. That's where this Companion comes in. Let's start with some notes and ideas that will assist you in reading the Psalms:

- The most important part of reading psalms is identifying the type of psalm you are reading. The major types of psalms are laments (cries to God for help), thanksgiving (thanking God for His help), royal (psalms about the king), trust (expressing faith in God), hymns (praising God), and wisdom psalms (teaching the wise way to live before God). Some of the more famous kinds of psalms (like psalms of confession) are simply subset of the major types (confession is a cry to God so those psalms are laments).
- The headings on the psalms are not inspired. Some of them vary in various ancient manuscripts, and are technically not part of the text. However, they are extremely old and represent a long tradition of what this psalm could be about. We have used them as we attempted to place the psalms in their historical and chronological sequence.
- The book of Psalms contains five collections or books (Psalm 1-41, 42-72, 73-89, 90-106, 107-150). Each book contains, to some degree, its own focus and feel. Paying attention to where we are in which "book" can help us better get a psalm's intention and purpose.
- English poetry often rhymes. It is our style. Hebrew poetry doesn't rhyme but instead employs parallelism. That means one line sets forth a thought, and then the next line says substantially the same thing. It is a parallel thought. However, it's not just repetition. The second line will build and expand the idea of the first line. Watch for this style of Hebrew poetry.
- Watch for word pictures that help convey the psalm's message. Consider the psalm's tone and attitude. Is it happy or sad? Confident or fearful?
- Read the psalm more than once. Read it slowly and read it in different translations.

**Psalm 19**

Our journey into the psalms begins with this psalm that extolls the two ways God has revealed Himself to people: creation and Law. It has been said “Ever man hears the sermon of the stars. It is translated into every language, and every willing mind can understand it.” That is what the psalm plays off in its opening stanza (verses 1-6). Then the psalmist asks “are you listening to the sermon of God’s law?” (verses 7-11). He employs a cornucopia of different terms here for God’s law but all come back to the authoritative pronouncement of God’s will and way. Verse 10 encourages a proper valuation of God’s word as the way to find delight in it. The psalm closes with concern that the psalmist act upon what he has learned of God by avoiding sin (verses 12-14).

**Psalm 104**

This long psalm is a creation hymn, praising God for His matchless work in creation. It (mostly) follows the Genesis order of creation. Verse 1 sets up the tone for the entire psalm. Jehovah is the Great King who is known for His might act of creation and whose splendor is known to everyone and to all. The psalm emphasizes not only the power of God’s creative activity but that cares for more than just humans but His animal creation as well (note verses 16-18, for example). There is a regularity to God’s created world (verses 19-23). Everything must look to and depend upon God (verses 27-30). Verse 26’s Leviathan is used in different ways in Scripture but here it simply designates a mighty sea beast of some kind. The psalm concludes with the response that God’s work demands: praise (verses 31-35).

**Psalm 148**

This psalm is also a creation hymn, a shorter version of Psalm 104. Psalms 146-150 form a final collection in the Psalms and this psalm is at its center. The psalm is highly structured. Watch how the call to praise the Lord starts and ends the psalm (verses 1, 14b). Verses 1-6 say God is praised in heaven. Verses 7-12 announce that God is praised on earth. The height of praise comes in verses 11-14 where people praise God. Creation must praise God because it was made to do so. People choose to praise God, which is what this psalm calls us to do.

**Psalm 1**

This is a wisdom psalm, and appears to be a specially composed introduction to the entire book of Psalms. Wisdom psalms teach us, warn us, advise us. Isn’t it interesting that the book of Psalms begins with that kind of psalm? It begins with instruction and teaching. As a wisdom psalm, Psalm 1 is directing the reader to see that the Psalms contain teaching about the life of faith, how to have faith in God, how to choose righteousness and how to avoid evil. Psalm 1 sets out the benefits of reading the Psalms and means the reader is required to respond to the psalms.

This is also a great place to get our bearings with the word “blessed.” Often we hear that this means “happy,” which is sort of true. The psalmist certainly is talking about a person who is happy. He has “delight” (verse 2) and he is steadfast and immovable (verse 3) and he prospers (verse 3). However the kind of happiness that Psalm 1 is speaking of (and Jesus too, in His famous beatitudes) is not the version of happiness that comes when we’re having fun, living it up, or even (God forbid) involved in sinful revelry and partying. In short, Psalm 1’s happiness has little to do with the American conception of happiness. Being blessed here is the man who is approved of God, especially and specifically because he is not involved in sinful living (verse 1). Let’s keep that in mind all through Psalms whenever we read “blessed.” Blessed is contentment and deep, inner joy that might summarized as “satisfied” or “fulfilled.” This comes only from God and only when we serve God.

Note the progression in verse 1. Sin leads us on and on until we’re in the middle of it and don’t even realize it! Instead the righteous man finds satisfaction in God and God’s law (verses 2-3). This gives him a permanence the wicked cannot match (verses 4-6).

**Psalm 107**

This is a unique psalm with some wisdom qualities to it (note verse 43), but it is clearly a thanksgiving

psalm. While we do not know who wrote it or when it surely seems to be saying something about the return from

Babylonian exile (verse 3). The psalmist sets forth four different scenes of God's deliverance as proof of God's power and love. Verses 4-9 show lost travelers, prisoners are depicted in verses 10-16, the sick are discussed in verses 17-22, and then in what is a very famous passage sailors and going to sea are discussed in verses 23-32. All of these scenarios are united by the common phrase "then they cried to the Lord in their trouble," (verses 6, 13, 19, 28). The psalm ends with praise for God's goodness, particularly celebrated here because God can bring about significant and real change (verses 33-43).

### **Psalm 4**

This evening prayer is a personal lament. There are so many troublesome times in David's life it is hard to tie this psalm to a specific incident but perhaps Absalom's rebellion is the background here. This psalm has the power to be a band-aid for the soul, as it is an evening prayer for rest and for peace of mind. Verses 2-3 are advice to David's enemies: stop your evil slander and do what is right, because God will protect me! Verse 4 (quoted in Ephesians 4:26) is fraught with translation problems but seems to say "don't let your anger get away from you and cause you to sin." Instead go and worship (verse 5). The psalm closes with confidence in God (verses 7-8).

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## **Week 3**

### **Psalm 11**

This psalm of David's is a psalm of trust. It is well known for its clear and emphatic question asking what will happen to the righteous if the foundations of society are destroyed (verse 3b), but really it is asking "what will the wicked do in bad times because God will care for the righteous!" The psalm begins with the "givens" or "default setting" for David: I trust God (verse 1). Some are urging running because enemies are preparing for war (bending the bow to string it, verses 2). The foundations - perhaps society's moral underpinnings or possibly leaders - are at risk (verse 3). In all of this David sees the constancy of God's rule and sovereignty (verse 4) and the certainty of God's judgment on the wicked (verses 5-6). The righteous will be fine despite everything that is breaking loose because God loves them, and they love God (verse 7).

### **Psalm 145**

The title tells us what this psalm is: a psalm of praise. It is an acrostic psalm, where each line begins with the corresponding letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Verse 13 has a marginal note that it is not in every manuscript but the Dead Sea scrolls include the verse, and it is necessary or one letter would be skipped in this "A to Z" recitation of why God is praised. It's theme is God is a great king (verse 10). He is to be praised for His works (verses 4-7), for His character (verses 7b-9), and for how God's works speak to His power and majesty (verses 10-13). Because of what God has done and who He is the righteous look to Him for deliverance (verses 14-17) and He hears and answers their prayers (verses 18-21).

### **Psalm 12**

Here David's cry for help, making this a psalm of lament, uses the idea of a war of words to encapsulate his faith in God. The wicked speak of their confidence in themselves (verse 4b), and they personify hypocrisy ("double heart," verse 2b). God then speaks, condemning oppression and injustice (verses 5), and speaking truth (verse 6). The words of God have value because they are pure. The psalm does not end with "and they lived happily ever after" but with the reality that the wicked are still at work (verse 8) but in calm confidence that God is at work too (verse 7)!

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## **Week 4**

### **Psalm 24**

This psalm is often seen as an "entrance song," the kind of praise song that was sung by worshipers as they came to the Temple. It may be a song composed for bearing the ark of God (see 1 Chronicles 13:8ff). The psalm establishes who is to be worshiped and why (God, because He is the Creator, verses 1-2), and then who can worship (verses 3-6), and then joins in the procession praising God, as even the gates and doors of the Temple are called to praise (verses 7-10). If the gates and doors are praising God what should worshipers do? The psalm resounds with praise for God! Jesus uses this psalm as the background to the sixth beatitude ("Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"). Note the phrasing of the beatitude comes from verses 4a, 5a and 6b. James uses these ideas as well in James 4:8.

## Psalm 108

This psalm is a combination of two other psalms! Verses 1-5 are from Psalm 57:7-11. Verses 6-11 are from Psalm 60:5-12. The author, perhaps David, perhaps someone else took these two psalms and put them together to make a new psalm. Working from Psalm 60's heading that means this psalm may be referencing trouble with the Edomites. These descendants of Esau were a constant problem for Esau's dependents, the children of Israel. This psalm begins with confidence in God (verses 1-5), asks for God's help in battle (verses 6-9), and then ends in confidence in God (verses 10-13). "Casting a shoe" (verse 9) is difficult. The Hebrew is hard to translate and what it means is harder still! It may be an insult, or be demeaning Edom as if they are a slave to whom you toss your shoes so they can be put away. This psalm's enduring contribution is in seeing how other psalms were re-combined to meet a new problem, thus opening up all of the psalter to worshipers today to use to meet the problems we face.

## Psalm 25

This acrostic psalm features a little bit of everything. It has elements of lament (verses 2, 11, 16-21), but also sings of trust in God (verses 8-10, 15, 22) while instructing in the way of wisdom (verses 4, 5, 8, 9, 12). The psalm is an acrostic which may account for how it seems to skip around. When a writer commits to a line from each letter of the alphabet the form dictates the content, even if that content isn't always completely tied to the psalm's main theme. Through the entire psalm runs a concern for sin and forgiveness (verses 7, 11b, 18b), reminding us that God's love and deliverance are not earned but they are not for those who flaunt God's laws and word. Deliverance comes to those who walk in integrity (verse 21).

## Week 5

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## Psalm 105

Songs of praise vary in why they call worshipers to praise God. Songs of sacred history, like Psalm 105, recount God's action through the history of His people. The psalmist points to what God has done all along the way to help, save, and deliver Israel which leads to praise and worship (verse 45b). That is the "deeds" and "wondrous works" (verses 1-2) this psalm speaks of. In particular Psalm 105 majors in the promises of God and how faithful He is to His covenants (verses 7-11, 42). It was important for Israel not to think they were so wonderful God rescued them from Egyptian bondage and gave them the land of Canaan on their own merit. He did this because of what He had promised. Joseph is listed as a special emissary of God's providence and plan (verses 16-22). Verse 28 begins a listing of the plagues, although only 8 of the 10 are mentioned and they are not in order. In everything nothing could stop God come from keeping His word so that His people could come to the land He gave them and obey Him in faithful trusting obedience! (Verses 44-45).

## Psalm 114

In the Old Testament the most significant event, the pinnacle event, is the Exodus. God's salvation of His people from Egyptian slavery is celebrated again and again in Scripture, and this psalm of praise joins the chorus. It is not hard to understand. The sea (verse 3) is the Red Sea the Israelites crossed miraculously leaving Egypt, while the Jordan (verse 3) references the miraculous crossing of the Jordan as they entered Canaan under Joshua's leadership. The shaking mountains of verse 4 could be Sinai when God gave the Law, or be a poetic image of Canaan's mountains fleeing before God and His people. Verse 8 speaks of the miracle at Kadesh in Numbers 20. All this was done so that the Israelites would become God's people, and He would dwell among them (verse 2). What a blessing and privilege this was! The Exodus made them the people of God.

## Week 6

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## Psalm 33

If the Exodus is the premier Old Testament event its sister act has to be creation. Psalm 33 is a hymn praising God as Creator. This matters in our day because often the assumption seems to be that what the Bible says about creation is only there to satisfy our curiosity about origins. That is a mistake. Creation helps us fit the world into its place, into where it fits in its relationship with God, and that helps us understand where we fit. This song calls for fresh and new praise of God (verses 1-3) praising His character (verses 4-5) and His work, creating everything (verses 6-9). That leads to the psalm's point: all must submit to the sovereignty of this all-powerful God (verses 10-12). Note the pounding repetition of "all," (verses 13-15). God's people know this and so are confident in His salvation (verses 13-19). The psalm ends with an appeal

to God to help His people (verses 20-22).

## Psalm 109

This is the first imprecatory psalm in our reading this year. Imprecatory psalms - or psalms of cursing (that is what an imprecation is, the pronouncement of a curse) are thorny and difficult. We will discuss these psalms and their use further as they reading schedule proceeds. Suffice it here to say that these requests for God to act against evil doers (verses 1-5) are not out of keeping with any part of Scripture. David is very specific in his desire that the evil who are hurting him would be dealt with fully and emphatically by the Lord (verses 6-15). An echo of Judas Iscariot is heard in verse 8 (see Acts 1:20). The logic of what is being prayed here is found in verses 16-20. These evildoers, or perhaps a single wicked person, has been guilty of terrible iniquity. The requests of verses 6-15 are simply for him to receive what he has dished out to others. We do well to remember how often in God's law and God's judgments this is precisely how God acts: the punishment fits the crime, and the crime decides the punishment. All of this points to how God is not and cannot be indifferent to sin or the plight of the innocent (verses 21-31).

## Psalm 90

Moses wrote this psalm of lament. It is the only psalm ascribed to him. The sad tone of the psalm reminds us of the Wilderness Wanderings, which may well be the motivation for what Moses composed. The key idea here is that God needs to bless His people again, even though they are sinners (verses 3-8). Verses 9-11 tell us that because of man's sin God's wrath is expressed against man, and that is why his life is brief. That leads to the petition for wisdom to understand life's brevity (verse 12), and for God to return and save and forgive His people (verses 13-17).

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## Week 7

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## Psalm 26

Do I pass the test, Lord? is the question Psalm 26 asks. This may be a lament, asking for deliverance (see verses 9-10) but it also could be the kind of psalm used as an entrance song before going into the Temple to worship. The big idea is "walking with integrity" which frames the psalm (verses 1, 11). The point of the psalmist writing about his righteousness (verses 4-5 remind of Psalm 1, don't they?) is not that he is perfect but that he is striving to be the kind of person who serves God and that God blesses. David is trusting in God, counting on God's faithfulness, not on his own righteousness. He is portraying himself as someone with integrity - sincerity and wholeness in life. He isn't using God while advancing his own agenda, like the hypocrites of verse 4. He doesn't sit with evildoers and the wicked and then come to the Temple and want to pretend he is a follower of God (verse 5). This all points to the close connection in life and worship. We can't live wicked and then think worshipping will "make up for it." That won't pass the test!

## Psalm 27

This psalm of trust is marked by repeated statements of confidence in God (verses 1, 3, 5, 6, 10, 13). The first three verses express confidence in God for the future (verse 1), because of the past (verse 2), which gives confidence in the present (verse 3). All of this is based on who God is, His very character, and His loving care (note verse 10). The "level path" of verse 11 isn't the easy path but is similar to the straight path or right path, i.e. the path of righteousness. Verses 13-14 end the song by announcing that David's rich relationship with God gives him confidence instead of worry.

Note: these two psalms may be two-thirds of a unit with Psalm 28. We will read that psalm and discuss these possibilities in week 10.

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## Week 8

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## Psalm 110

This famous psalm is clearly a royal psalm - it is obviously about the king. Beyond that its exact purpose is not easy to pinpoint. It may be a coronation psalm or it may celebrate a military victory. The psalm is simple in its structure: there are two promises (verses 1, 4), each followed by a statement of victory (verses 2-3, 5-7). The key to the psalm is that David is at its center. The psalm begins with Jehovah God saying to the king (David) "You are invited to the place of priority, honor and prominence next to Me. I will fight for you and destroy your enemies" (verse 1). Jehovah does the fighting while the king sits safely and at rest. God's rule goes on even though there are enemies (verse 2). While verse 3 is troublesome it seems to say that Jehovah does the fighting, but His tool is the Israelite army (the youth of verse 3) that freely volunteers to fight.

Verse 4 layers on another promise, of even more breathtaking proportions: you will be king-priest like



Melchizedek was. Melchizedek is the shadowy figure of Genesis 14 who blesses Abraham on his return from rescuing Lot. As he was a priest-king, so this king is to combine those roles as well. This part of the psalm must look to a future and grander fulfillment because David and his sons cannot function as priests. They are of the tribe of Judah and not Levi. So, while this may say something about how the king would have an important role of guiding the nation in its worship of God, this cannot be just about David. The ultimate fulfillment of this promise would have to wait for another day. The psalm concludes with more discussion of the victory God gives this special king (verses 5-7). The king will be refreshed by God (verse 7).

This psalm's importance is realized when we couple the mighty promises of 2 Samuel 7 to the New Testament. In 2 Samuel 7 God promises David an everlasting dynasty. His "house" (sons) will rule forever (2 Sam 7:12-13). The New Testament then quotes this psalm and applies it to Jesus in numerous places (see Matthew 21:42-45 where Jesus makes this specific application to Himself; also Matt. 26:63; Acts 2:29; 5:31; 7:55-56; 1 Cor. 15:25-26; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 5:6; 6:20; 7:17, 20-21; 8:1ff). The New Testament uses Psalm 110 to show Jesus, the Messiah, is our King and High Priest. He is the ultimate fulfillment of Psalm 110.

### **Psalm 111**

This is an acrostic psalm praising God's work. It and its sister psalm, 112 (which we will read next week), are both acrostics. That means that both of these psalms have 22 lines, and that each line begins with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet in order. It is, to put it roughly, the ABC's of praising God for His work. Like all acrostics it has its own rhythm and sometimes the subject matter can seem random because the psalmist needed the next letter and so couldn't necessarily flow what might seem to be the logical next idea. Form takes precedence over content in some ways in acrostics. However, it is helpful to watch how both God's character and actions are woven together (for example, the end of verse 3 and verse 4). "Forever" is also a key idea that is repeated several times (verses 3, 5, 8, and 9). Note the wisdom flavor of verses 9-10. All of life is made better by offering to God the worship He richly deserves.

### **Psalm 31**

This psalm has the sad and hopeful notes of a lament in it. While the psalm doesn't outline easily (it almost appears to cycle from anguish to assurance and back again) many have found solace in a psalm that deals with the trial of being slandered and gossiped about (Verses 11, 13, 17-18, 20). Jonah recalled verse 6 in the belly of the whale. Jeremiah repeatedly used a phrase from verse 13. Jesus used verse 5 for His last words on the cross. Verse 1's appeal for help is based in God's righteousness, not the worth of the psalmist or what he deserves (note verse 3). Verse 7 expresses trust in God by speaking of deliverance as if it has already happened. Verses 10-11 have four-fold descriptions of how awful the situation is. Verse 14-16 answer that with trust in God. Verses 19-20 re-state the greatness of God's character, the basis for deliverance and mercy. The psalm concludes with marvelous confidence in God (verses 23-24).

## **Week 9**

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### **Psalm 81**

Psalm is unusual. The psalms records man speaking to God, but this psalm is God speaking to man. It is a wisdom psalm or more to the point, a preaching psalm with God doing the preaching! The psalm seems to have been written during the time of the Judges when God's people weren't very obedient or mindful. It is set during the Feast of Tabernacles (compare verse 3 with Deuteronomy 31:9-11). That was a feast that commemorated the wilderness wandering. In that context God says "Listen to Me!" (verse 8). Listening and hearing are major themes (verses 8, 11, 13) and here they mean much more than just audible listening. Hearing and listening are to understand God's commands and obey them (verse 13 has "listen" in parallel to "walk in my ways"). Verse 15 is difficult and rendered differently in different translation but has the meaning of God's enemies are defeated. Part of worship can be a call to repentance, along with a reminder of how we hurt ourselves with sin by cutting ourselves off from God's blessings (verse 16).

### **Psalm 112**

This is the second of three psalms that all begin with "Hallelujah" or "Praise the Lord." Like Psalm 111 it is an acrostic. Psalm 111:10 ends by talking about those who practice the fear of the Lord. Psalm 112 then describes the man who does that. What does that person look like and how does he behave? That makes this a wisdom or teaching psalm. The godly man reflects God's character and compassion (verse 4), he is generous and just (verse 5), he is steadfast (verse 6), he trusts in the Lord and is unafraid (verses 7-8), and he helps the needy (verse 9). A life lived any other way is bitter and a failure (verse 10).

## Psalm 64

While this is a lament, a cry to God for help, it is a bit brighter than most laments. It expresses unwavering faith that God will respond. He says evil men attack (verses 2-6), but then God rescues (verses 7-10). “Suddenly” is the linking idea (verses 4, 7). Verse 1 has “complaint” but that is too strong and too unhappy. The idea is “my troubled thoughts” or “uneasy assessment of my situation.” Verse 8 is another illustration of the Old Testament principles of “the punishment fits the crime,” and “the evil you want to do boomerangs back on you.” Verse 10 brings the psalm back full circle, as God has answered “my complaint” of verse 1.

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## Week 10

## Psalm 28

Psalm 28 begins as a lament (verses 1-5) and then becomes a psalm of praise for deliverance (verses 6-9). This psalm seems to be related to Psalm 26 and 27 (which we read in week 7). There are keywords that are shared in all of these psalms, like “house” (26:8; 27:4, 6; 28:2) “evildoers” (26:5; 27:2; 28:3). The evil here is hypocrisy (verse 3) and a lack of regard for God (verse 5). These are the evil men of 26:9ff and the concern is injustice and oppression. Verses 8-9 end the psalm by expanding its blessing and trust in God beyond just the psalmist but to all of God’s people.

## Psalm 113

The Egyptian Hallel (hallel means praise), the collection of Psalms 113-118, begins here. This collection was sung at the Passover and these would be the psalms Jesus sang at the Last Supper (see Mark 14:26). It begins and ends with the “bookend” idea of “praise the Lord” (verses 1, 9). Verse 3 reminds us that God’s praise is universal - it should be done everywhere by everything and everyone. God is to be praised for His splendor (verses 4-6), and for what He has done and accomplished (verses 6-9). This psalm particularly celebrates God’s work on behalf of the downtrodden, impoverished, oppressed and barren. God cares for the hopeless and needy!

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## Week 11

## Psalm 35

David writes what amounts to a triple lament in Psalm 35. It divides easily into three stanzas (verses 1-10, 11-18, 19-28). It is placed right behind Psalm 34 and fits well there. Psalm 34 says “thanks” for deliverance, and this psalm describes the kind of deliverance that is often needed. Verse 2 describes a buckler which is a large shield. The heart of the problem is found in verse 7: David is innocent. This is made worse in verses 11-14, where David speaks of his friendship and care for these who are now his enemies. David is even being lied about (verse 21). The entire psalm breathes urgency but never lacks for complete trust that God will deliver. Special note: Jesus cites verse 19 of His own situation in John 15:25, giving us insight into how the Lord felt as He faced the cross.

## Psalm 36

This psalm is made of oil and water, darkness and light, wet and dry — you can’t ever mix the front of the psalm with the back of it because this psalm contrasts wickedness with goodness, with a special emphasis on God’s goodness. It is mainly a wisdom psalm, like Psalm 1. Verse 1 is hard to translate but the idea is that the wicked person has sin deep in his heart and he listens to that, rather than regard God. He listens to himself. He is his own guide. That leads to every kind of sin and wickedness, as arrogance, wrong speech and evil plotting pile up (verses 2-5). Then the contrast begins — away from darkness to light, God’s light (verses 5-9)! The psalm concludes with a prayer for God’s loving kindness (verse 10) and protection (verses 11-12).

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## Week 12

## Psalm 5

This morning prayer (verse 3) combines elements of a lament with expressions of confidence and trust in God. It divides easily into natural sections that alternate between God and the righteous versus the wicked. Verse 7 focuses on worship as a hallmark of the righteous, noting that we worship by grace. That worship should lead to a deeper relationship with God where we are seeking His guidance and will (verse 8). Verse 9 is quoted by Paul in Romans 3:13. Imagine how grotesque an open grave would be the hot climate of Israel! This psalm is very personal (“my King and my God” verse 2) but expands to include all the righteous who

will be blessed by God and His goodness (verses 11-12).

### **Psalm 115**

This worship psalm is part of the Egyptian Hallel (Psalms 113-118) that were used at Passover. It answers the nations who ask “Why don’t you have an image to worship? Where is your idol” (verse 2) by teaching that idols are useless (verses 4-7). Even worse, idols lead the idolaters to become like them (verse 8). While this verse is often cited to say that worshipers become like what they worship (which is true), in this context verse 8 is an insult. Idols are dumb and useless and the people who worship them are ... dumb and useless too! The true God protects His people (verses 9-11) and blesses them (verses 11-15). He is the powerful One (verses 15-16) who is truly worthy of praise and worship (verses 17-18).

### **Psalm 6**

David’s lament here is often listed among penitential psalms (32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143) there is not a specific confession here. Instead there is talk and prayer about being abandoned and a desire for God to return and save. The psalmist finds himself under the rebuke of God (verse 1). He is suffering, but that suffering is evidently tied to the chastening hand of His God. Thus, with reverent honesty, the psalmist will ask God how long, and complain that he cannot bear up much longer (verses 2-3). His pain is real (verses 6-7) but he will not give up on God and join with the wicked (verse 8; cited in Matt 7:23). In all of this honesty there is resolution as the psalm closes in great faith (verses 9-10).

## **Week 13**

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### **Psalm 13**

Like Psalm 6 from last week this lament psalm asks “How long?” (verses 1-2). We do not know what was happening in David’s life that prompted this cry for help. There are so many times in his life that this psalm could fit. As there is no discussion of sin in the psalmist’s life what is missing here is an explanation. Why am I suffering like this, God (verses 3-4)? David’s frankness in this psalm guides us in our praying when we are afflicted and do not understand why. We need to take our problems to God! It is not wrong to cry out to God in candor, but such prayers need to be always mindful of God’s past activity for us (note the contrast to the wicked - “but I,” verse 5a) and so we can be filled with future confidence (verses 5b-6).

### **Psalm 143**

This psalm is classified as a penitential psalm by many on the basis of verse 2, but does that verse really speak of David’s sin? What really stands out in the psalm is the movement from concern about personal problems and trials to concern about God’s will and way. Verse 1 establishes the grounds for answered prayer in the Lord’s gracious faithfulness to His people. Verse 6 finds David reaching out to God, and not just seeking what God can do for him. Three times in verses 8-10 David prays for God’s guidance. The final appeal is that God would act for His reputation’s sake and out of covenant faithfulness to save (verses 11-12).

### **Psalm 14**

We step away from lament psalms to read this wisdom psalm that discusses practical atheism. It is repeated nearly entirely in Psalm 53 (which we will read in Week 31 - see that psalm for discussion about why it is included twice in the Psalter). This psalm seems to deal with wicked Israelites. While there is an obvious application to the public and militant atheists in our society today, the fool of Psalm 14 isn’t writing books, going on talk shows or holding press conferences. He says to himself, in his heart that there is no God (verse 1). That makes him a fool. Biblically, fools aren’t clowns or court jesters. The term is closely associated with wickedness and being evil. The fool is the person who just doesn’t care about God, what God thinks, what God is doing, or what God wants him to be doing. He ignores the reality of God so he can live for himself as he pleases. That is practical atheism. Those people’s lives and actions become “corrupt” (verse 3), a term that can be translated “sour.” The folly of their lives is evident, for they oppose God (verse 6). The psalm ends with a very lament-sounding appeal to God for rescuing from these atheists who afflict God’s people (verse 7).

**Psalm 15**

There is an assumption among scholars that ancient temples had some kind of gatekeeper who would ask the approaching worshiper questions to determine worthiness. There may be a little of this in Psalm 15. However, instead of the question being about external actions this psalm probes the heart. This psalm describes the person after God's own heart and the kind of person, therefore, that God will accept into His fellowship. While it certainly has parts that feel like a worship psalm primarily this is a wisdom psalm, teaching us how to seek and gain the approval of God. How is that done? What is the life that God looks upon and then stamps "well done?" (verse 1). The response breaks down to a 3-3-2-2 pattern (verses 2-5). There are three positive traits, then 3 negatives, then 2 positives, then 2 more negatives. These fill life with integrity, the kind of life that cannot be shaken or moved (verse 5b).

**Psalm 116**

This joyful thanksgiving psalm is hard to outline but is wonderful to read as the psalmist counts his blessings. Verses 1-2 set the stage, thanking God for intervening and saving the psalmist's life. What God does reveals His character (verse 5), particularly in His saving of the weak who cannot save themselves (verse 6). The writer had maintained that trust even in grave difficulty (verses 10), and now wants to honor and praise God for His mercy (verses 12-14). This is not "payback" or "you scratch my back and now I scratch yours" but humble worship from a heart of gratitude. Verse 15's "precious" can confuse, making it seem as if God delights in the death of His people. The idea of "costly" is better here than precious. The idea is that God is pained by the death of His servants.

**Psalm 16**

A psalm of trust like Psalm 16 pairs well with Psalm 116. The psalm begins with a strong affirmation of single-mindedness, of wanting to serve God and God alone (verses 1-5). He is not like idol worshipers (verse 4) but chooses God as his portion his lot, his inheritance (verse 6). I want you God! He seeks God's ways (verse 7). "At the right hand" suggests a person standing ready to help, in battle or in court (verse 8). Verse 10 brings this trust to a crescendo, stating that not even death will end the relationship with God. This is one of three psalms that contain a hint of afterlife (73:24; 49:15). Most importantly, Peter quotes verses 9-10 at Pentecost in Acts 2, insisting that the language is too strong for just David. Only the Messiah has truly not known corruption! God's way leads to real life and genuine joy (verse 11).

**Psalm 17**

The psalms often contains statements of innocence. These should not be taken to mean the psalmist was perfect or that he thought God owed him anything. Instead they should be seen as the psalmist saying he is with God, he is on God's side, he is doing all he can to honor and obey God in his life. Psalm 17 is that kind of psalm. It contains element of lament (verses 1-2, 6-9, 13-14), along with cries of innocence (verses 3-5, 15). Watch especially David's three requests: God to hear him (verse 6), God to reveal Himself in deliverance (verse 7), and for God to protect Him (verses 8-9). The emphasis here is that it is in God's nature to help and to hear someone who lives like the psalmist does. Verse 14 is very difficult to translate, and thus hard to be certain of, but it may mean God will take care of these enemies who live only for this life (ESV translation).

**Psalm 146**

The last psalms, 146-150, are "hallelujah" psalms because they all begin and end with "hallelujah." It makes a most fitting doxology and close to the book of Psalms. Verses 3-5 contrast uncertain humanity with the certainty of God the Creator. Verses 6-10 celebrate the great acts of God. Princes and human political leaders do not last (verses 3-4) so we must trust in God who reigns forever (verse 10).

**Psalm 21**

We always begin by asking "What kind of psalm is this?" Verses 1, 3 and 7 make it clear that this is a royal psalm, a psalm about King David. Yet it really focuses on the relationship of the king to God. All of this is based in the promises of 2 Samuel 7 to David and his house. God had cared for the king in the past (verses 1-6), was in relationship with the king in the present (verse 7), and would bless the king in the future (verses 8-13). Some see a connection in this psalm and Psalm 20 (note 20:4). That is a psalm praying for blessing

and protection in battle, and this psalm may be the answer to that psalm, saying God did exactly that.

**Psalm 37**

This psalm is a little different because it is an acrostic. That means that every stanza begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Each stanza is usually four lines. Acrostic psalms are artistic, showing much thought went into the poetry here, as well as providing a way for the student to more easily memorize it. It may be a way of saying “We’ve covered this from A to Z.” However, acrostics are notoriously difficult to outline because rather than sticking to a plan the writer has to “jump around” to get whatever words he can find that start with the needed letter of the alphabet. This psalm offers the wisdom of God’s way, while urging that God’s people do not fret over evildoers (verses 1, 7) even if they seem to be in control (verses 12-15). God will deal with them in His time and way (verses 9-10). These ideas are repeated again then, with the wicked attacking (verses 12-15), while the righteous live their quiet and holy lives (verse 16) and God judging the wicked (verses 17-20), and then the cycle repeats several more times (verses 21-40). The emphasis is to take a long view of life (verses 27-31) and not give in to the temptation to join with the wicked who cannot last (verses 35-36).

**Psalm 120**

This is the first in the famous Psalms of Ascent (Psalms 120-134). These psalms were sung by pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem for the annual feasts. That means Jesus would have heard these psalms (and sung them) during His journeys to Jerusalem! This psalm is an appropriate starting point for those because it is a lament, calling on God to help (verse 1), and to bring judgment on evil doers (verse 3). It is voiced by those who dwell far away (verse 5), among those who want to attack God’s people (verse 6). Both of the places in verse 5 are far away from each other, so it is a figure of speech where the psalmist says “We might say “From Las Vegas to New York - I’m tired of living with sin all around me.” Take special note of verse 5’s terms “sojourn” and “dwell.” They are pilgrim words. They speak to a heart that is not at home in this world even if one owns a house (or a palace!) here. “I am among the wicked who hate me and I need God’s help,” is the cry of Psalm 120.

**Psalm 23**

This is easily the most famous psalm of trust in the Psalter, and maybe the most famous psalm in the Scriptures, period. It’s entire tone is upbeat, warm, and confident. It’s metaphor of choice is that of a sheep and its shepherd, something with great meaning to the average Israelite, and perhaps imagery that even evokes some royal ideas as God is the Great King and Shepherd. The intensely personal “my shepherd” leads the psalm (verse 1), that speaks of how God provides for all His sheep need - food, water, peace, and safety. This is one very content sheep! Verse 4’s famous “valley of the shadow of death” line may just convey the terror of darkness or may mean the sheep/author (David) was close to death. Verses 5-6 seem to change the metaphor to God providing a banquet. The whole psalm is about how great it is to know the Lord, to serve Him, to love Him, to be His sheep, to be at His table. All of this combines together to say God provides, God protects, God prepares and when we think on that we realize how incredibly blessed we are.

**Psalm 38**

A penitential psalm is a special kind of lament, where the author is appealing to God for help because he has sinned. The help he needs is forgiveness. There are not many of these penitential psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130 and 143 compose the usual list). The psalmist begins by saying he is in God’s cross-hairs (verses 1-2) but then reveals it is because of his own doing: he has sinned (verse 3). The result is he is sick (verses 4-8). His sin has isolated him from his companions (verses 10-11). Verse 12 reveals that enemies are plotting against him. In all that is going on, though, David waits on the Lord to forgive, to save and to help (verses 15-22). The psalm ends in confidence, as he openly confesses his sin (verse 18) that God will answer his prayer and “be not far from me!” (verse 21).

**Psalm 124**

This psalm probably fits in 2 Sam 5:17-25’s discussion of how difficult it was for David to re-take the territory lost to the Philistines during Saul’s miserable and awful reign. The Philistines launched a major offensive with the intent of ending David permanently. The key is the “if then” structure (verses 1-2). The psalm says God is with us, He is for us, He is helping us, and if that weren’t true we would be utterly lost (verses

3-5). The song just flows with joy that God is on their side, that Jehovah is their help. God's power as Cre-

ator is cited as the ultimate proof that with God the people of God are utterly secure (verse 8).

### **Psalm 39**

This is not an easy psalm to unravel. Why did David write this? What exactly is the trouble here? Who are the enemies and why are they afflicting David? How has David sinned? There are not easy answers available to us. The psalmist is under attack and has decided the best course of action is to keep his mouth shut (verses 1-3). He then asks God to help him see how humble and small and human he is (verses 4-6). He then asks for the forgiveness of his sins and an end to God's chastening hand (verses 7-11). Verse 6 sounds like Ecclesiastes and may reference that David is thinking his enemies also won't last long. The psalm concludes with a request to be restored to full fellowship with the Lord (verses 12-13).

## **Week 18**

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### **Psalm 59**

This is clearly a lament psalm (verse 1) but it has more to it than just the usual cry for God's help. This psalm of David's may be tied to the plot against him of 1 Samuel 19:11ff, but there are so many times David's life was in danger it is hard to be sure. Note the strong prayer of verse 4, for God surely does not sleep but the psalmist feels as if God must be "asleep on the job." David's frankness here may be a challenge for us who feel heavily the need for reverence! He describes his enemies as wild dogs (verses 6-7), which were greatly feared in the biblical world as wild, rabid animals. The psalm then moves toward trust in God (verses 8-10) and then takes an unfamiliar turn. David asks God to wait to destroy his enemies until they can be destroyed in a way that lets all know God consumed them because they were wicked (verses 11-13). That makes this an imprecatory psalm, something we will see on occasion in the psalter and we will deal more with as we journey through the psalms. The God who rules all nations (verses 5, 8) can and will save David (verses 16-17).

### **Psalm 57**

Again we read a lament psalm from David's pen. This psalm flows from the terrible time recounted in 1 Samuel 20:3. The psalm is not hard to understand. What impresses, and leaves us with wonder, is David's resolve in verse 7. How did he manage such faith under duress? Verses 7-10 gives us his secret: singing, be thankful, and resting in God's steadfast faithfulness. The refrain of verses 5 and 11 bind the psalm together. We will hear from verses 7-11 again, as they are repeated in the opening verses of Psalm 108.

### **Psalm 52**

Some would classify this as a wisdom psalm (teaching about God's judgment) but it really seems to be a psalm of great trust. It is the opposite number to Psalm 15. This is the man who hates who God instead of seeking after him. It is attached to 1 Samuel 22, where Doeg the Edomite not only tells Saul about David and the priests he then (acting on Saul's instructions) massacres the innocent priests of God. What bothered David was not only the act, but the boldness and shamelessness of the evil done. It could only come from a man who didn't care about God one bit! His values are upside down (verses 3-4). God must and will deal with such evil (verses 5-7). Meanwhile David continues to rest in God, trusting in Him (verses 8-9). Olive trees (verse 8) were extremely important in the Bible lands (see Deuteronomy 8:8). They grow well in the Mediterranean climate, and had an abundance of uses, including food, cooking oil, medicines, lamp oil and even worship. The contrast is clear: the wicked man is like an uprooted tree (verse 5), while the godly remain firmly planted and productive like an olive tree.

### **Psalm 54**

During the time Saul pursued and tried to kill David his life was one peril after another, jumping from the "frying pan to the fire" and back repeatedly. After Doeg informed on him to Saul David made his way to Keilah and rescued them from the Philistines (1 Sam 23:1-14). Yet when Saul came there David inquired of God who told him frankly that the men of Keilah would indeed give him up to Saul (verses 11-12). 23:19ff then says the people of Ziphite betrayed David to Saul too! Where was David to go? Psalm 54, a lament psalm, shows David turning to God again. He recognized that his enemies were without God (verse 3) so he had to stand with God (verse 4). In verse 5 David asks for the wickedness of his enemies to "boomerang" back up on them! Verses 6-7 have a slight change in tone, as the terms go from "will you deliver" to "God has delivered" (past tense). David has trusted in the Lord and God has saved him again!



**Psalm 96**

This psalm begins a unit of psalms through Psalm 99 that celebrate God's righteous rule as the Great King. It may be based in the account in 1 Chronicles 16:23ff of David finally moving the ark of God correctly into the city of Jerusalem. That makes this a very early psalm. It is also a lovely psalm, bursting with energy and joy as it celebrates God with something new (verse 1). Bringing God the stale and flat and old and tired is unthinkable. All people are to praise Him (verses 1, 3, 7, 10, 13), especially because He is not a fake god that is worthless (verse 5), because of His creative power (verse 5b) and because He judges righteously (verses 10, 13).

**Psalm 106**

This psalm seems linked to Psalm 105 (see week 5). It appears to have been written in the Babylonian captivity (see verse 47). This is a psalm of history but what history it recounts! There is nothing here of Israel's glory days under David. There is no recounting of how the Israelites faithfully marched around Jericho seven times and the city fell flat. Instead it is a long sad confession of how miserably and how often Israel has failed God. Verse 7 and verses 13-14 are the summary texts for the psalm. However, the point of this penitential psalm, a national confession of sin, is not to make Israel feel bad or look bad. Instead the psalmist points to God's amazing mercy and grace (verse 8) so the nation can look again to God for that same mercy and grace as God remains true to His covenant promises (verses 44-46). Verse 48 is the closing doxology for Book 4 (psalms 90-106).

**Psalm 122**

This psalm is part of the Psalms of Ascent (120-134), the psalms that were used by people journeying to Jerusalem for the annual feasts to sing along the way. These songs have a lot in common with the royal songs that celebrate the king and the songs of Zion that celebrate Jerusalem. It is a hymn of praise, spoken by an individual to a larger group, and has that "admonish" or "let's all learn together" feel to it. Verse 2 may be saying "we made it, we're here!" All of the psalm is tied tightly to Jerusalem (verses 3-9) because that is where the temple stood. The psalm advances the idea that all the land and nation would benefit from the holy city doing well because in its center was the presence of God.

**Psalm 60**

This is not an easy read. Psalm 60 is a national lament, where the nation has been defeated and they don't understand why. "God you have left us!" is its theme (verse 1). Why and how that happened is uncertain because there is no Edomite invasion and victory over Israel recorded in Scripture. While there is a lot of speculation about that we have to be content that the Bible doesn't give detail about everything that ever happened. Instead we focus on what the psalm does tell us: sometimes God's people are chastened and it requires much examination, prayer, and crying out to God (verses 1-3). Verse 4 is very difficult to translate and is uncertain. Verses 6-12 are incorporated into the 108:6ff. These verses remind the people that God is in control, and is sovereign even over the nations and territories around them. The psalm closes with an appeal for God's help once more (verses 9-11) and a strong statement of trust (verse 12).

**Psalm 132**

This royal psalm keeps David in the front and center of nearly every verse (note especially verse 10). It is well said that this is the promise of 2 Samuel 7 set to music! The psalm matches what David has done, especially in establishing Jerusalem as the center of God's worship (verses 1-10), with what God has done for David (verses 11-18). Pay extra attention to how the ark of the covenant functions as God's throne and footstool (verses 7-8; see Psalm 80:1; 99:1; 1 Chron 28:2). God's throne has been established by David and God now establishes David's throne, his ruling "house" forever. This promise becomes Messianic and is ultimately to be fulfilled in the Christ (verse 17). The term "sprout" there is the same word as "branch" in Isaiah 4.

**Psalm 89**

Psalm 89 pairs well with Psalm 132, because here God's promise for the Davidic throne seems to have failed. After the Babylonian captivity there was no king who was an heir of David ruling. Psalm 89 is a lament that

asks plaintively, “God what has happened?” (verses 1-4). “Faithfulness” is the key theme, appearing repeat-

edly (verses 1, 5, 8, 24, 49). God's great power isn't the problem, the psalmist says, for He made everything and rules over everything (verses 5-18). "Rahab" in verse 10 is probably a reference to Egypt. The grand promise to David is then recounted (verses 19-37). But the current situation doesn't reflect what the psalmist believes should be happening (verses 38-45). The psalm ends asking "how long God?" because the psalmist knows that God will act to fulfill His word and keep His promises (verses 49-52). Verse 52 is the closing doxology for Book Three of the psalms (psalms 73-89).

### **Psalm 51**

This is the most famous of the penitential psalms. Penitentials are special laments, and this is David's cry to God when convicted of sin by Nathan (see 2 Samuel 11-12). What is notable here is that many laments call to God for help and assert innocence. The idea is "I've done nothing to deserve the troubles I am here." There is none of that here. David is keenly aware that this is entirely his fault and he has no claim on God at all. He casts himself upon God's mercy (verse 1). God is entirely in the right (verse 4). While verse 5 is commonly used to establish Original Sin it simply is a figure of speech (note Psalm 58:3) where David says "I feel like I have been a sinner from the moment I arrived here." Verse 7's term "purge" is simply the word for sin with a negative in front of it - it is literally "un-sin me." Verse 9 asks God to "hide" from David's sin, which catches our eye because usually the psalmist will say "don't hide from me." The request for deep inward cleansing (verse 10) shows us the heart of genuine repentance. The full reference to the Holy Spirit in verse 11 is found only here and in Isaiah 63:10-11. David says when he is forgiven and restored to God then, and only then, can he properly worship and sing God's praises (verses 12-17), as every forgiven sinner must do. Verses 18-19 may be written later and added so that the nation could sing this psalm about national sin.

### **Psalm 32**

This is David's other penitential psalm, and may be the fulfillment of David's promise in 51:13-14. Psalm 32 moves from discussion of the blessing of being forgiven (verses 1-2) to the terrors of harboring unrepentant sin (verses 3-4), to a frank confession (verse 5), and then what this episode has taught David (verses 6-11). David's use of three terms for his sin (verses 1-2) are instructive. He highlights the idea of rebellion (transgression), intentionally missing the mark (sin), and iniquity (a crooked or wrong act). He then speaks of being forgiven (literally carried away, the removal of sin), and his sin being covered (atonement), and "counts no iniquity" (where God counts us righteous). That is a comprehensive description of our acts, and God's acts! Verse 11 ties it all together, re-connecting back to the joy of verse 1.

## **Week 21**

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### **Psalms 3**

This lament psalm is the first psalm in the collection of psalms ascribed to David (psalms 3-41). It is also the first time we read the term "selah," probably a musical notation perhaps meaning pause. The heading tells us this psalm was composed in a terrible time: the rebellion of Absalom (2 Samuel 15). David is sorting through turncoats and treachery as many joined with Absalom, and there is even talk that God has abandoned him (verse 2). In it all, David vows to trust God (verse 3-4), and to keep trusting in God (verses 7-8). The beautiful imagery of God being "the lifter of my head" (verse 3) comes from the idea of being how when we get depressed and despondent our heads get down. God lifts David's head up! The psalm ends by moving past David's concerns to all the people (verse 8).

### **Psalm 63**

This joyful song of deep devotion is unmatched in the psalter. Even as it concludes with a note of lament and call for help it is primarily centered on David's desire for God and his relationship with his God. That this may be composed during the rebellion of Absalom makes it all the more remarkable. Instead of crying for military victories and a return to the capitol in triumph what David wants is more of God (verses 1-4). While "fat and rich food" (verse 5) isn't on the menu for most of us the idea here is a banquet. Feasting is associated with happiness and good times - David says his relationship with God gives him that kind of contentment and joy. There is a special emphasis on past deliverance (verses 6-8) giving David great confidence for the future. Note the emphatic "shall" not "maybe" in the close (verses 9-10). David believes in God (verses 11)!

### **Psalm 34**

This song of thanksgiving is an acrostic psalm. That means each verse begins with the corresponding letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It is the second acrostic in the book of psalms (25th is the first). Acrostics are carefully structured, and were probably used to facilitate memorization of the scriptures and to give the reader the feel that this topic was covered from "A to Z." That makes this psalm the "ABC's" of praising God. It cele-

brates, according to the subtitles (not inspired but very old and helpful) when God saved David from the mess he got himself into in Gath in 1 Samuel 21:11ff. Notice how the psalm breathes with emotion and fervor but that the way of praise in the psalms is not some over-heated emotional display but rather a clear recounting of who God is and what He has done (verses 1-7). Verse 8 is borrowed by Peter in 1 Peter 2:3. The psalm begins to have a wisdom or teaching feel to it in verses 11-18. Who the Lord will save and how to be God's person is carefully recounted. The psalm then ties it all together with a stirring conclusion (verses 19-22), urging once again trust in the Lord, that God will save and deliver His people, and the wicked will be judged so "take refuge in Him." Verses 20 has clear Messianic connections (see John 19:36).

### **Psalm 18**

This song of thanksgiving is a royal psalm (centered on the king) and is very close to 2 Samuel 22. The central idea is God gives victory to the king. David launches the psalm with a flurry of powerful descriptions of God as His protector (verses 1-2). This begins a section praising God for delivering him (verses 1-19). Saul is probably the enemy in view here, but there are far too many times where David is nearly killed by this wicked king to be sure which episode Psalm 18 has in view. Verse 50 has such a high note to it that this may be a celebration of being delivered from Saul and all other enemies once David's throne was established (see 2 Samuel 22:1). God's power and fierce majesty are described in verses 6-15. This is the God who saves David! The psalm then turns to discuss why God delivered David: because he walks with God (verses 20-34). This is not a profession of merit or braggadocio on David's part but his distinguishing himself from the false and fake and wicked who do not serve God (note verse 27 to get the key concept here). Then verses 35-50 relay how David fights against his enemies with God's help. Paul uses verse 49 in Romans 15:9 to say God cares for the Gentiles. That reminds us that these royal psalms often fit Jesus better than any human king.

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## **Week 22**

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### **Psalm 78**

This massive psalm of history is a wisdom psalm that rephrases the old saying "those who don't learn from history are doomed to repeat it." Psalm 78 says again and again "we must not repeat our history." The psalm opens with a strong challenge to hear and learn (verses 1-8). "Parable" (verse 2) is the word that gives the book of Proverbs its name. It means a comparison. That is what the psalm does: it compares Israel's rebellion to God's faithfulness. Verse 8 is a marvelous, but sad, summary of so much of Israel's history. The psalm then traces how God's people forgot His works (verses 9-16), grumbled against Him (verses 11-31), and often engaged in fake repentance (verses 32-39). Important notes along the way include "Ephramites" (verse 9) is a term meaning all Israel because they were often the largest tribe. The parallelism of verse 22 is striking and a fine example of how that poetic device works. Line A ("did not believe in God") is echoed and enhanced by Line B ("did not trust His saving power"). At verse 40 the psalmist recounts the Exodus (verses 40-53) and entry into the Promised Land (verses 54-64), a time marked by faithlessness and ingratitude. Note the mention of Shiloh and the loss of the ark from 1 Samuel 4 (verses 60ff). The psalm concludes with hopes for better things in Israel's future, and that hope is bound up in the choice of David as king (verses 65-72).

### **Psalm 42 and 43**

We will take these psalms together because there is strong evidence they were once one psalm. Psalm 43 lacks a title, and there is a repeated refrain in 42:5, 11 and 43:5 that ties them together. Further some ancient manuscripts have them as one psalm. The psalm is famous for its panting deer (verse 1) but what is not as widely known is that it is a psalm about a sad and depressed worshiper. He wants to go and worship (verse 2) but cannot. That may be because he is in Babylonian exile (this psalm's date is uncertain), or there may be some other reason why he cannot join the pilgrims who head to Jerusalem to worship God. We do not know what the issue is, but we do know that as he works through his sorrow and feelings of despair one minute he soars to great heights as he contemplates God, and then the next races to the depths of depression because he can't go and worship. He is being taunted by enemies (verse 3, 10) and that adds to his pain. He is hopeful and optimistic (verse 8), even as he feels abandoned by God (verse 9). The psalms end triumphantly, certain that God will break down whatever barriers there are and the psalmist will worship (43:3-4).

**Psalm 7**

This heartfelt lament combines confidence in God with marvelous statements about who God helps: the righteous man. The title mentions “Cush, a Benjamite” but we know nothing of him. The psalm begins with a clear request for God to act (verses 1-2), but then shifts from God to the psalmist, declaring that he is the kind of person who serves the Lord faithfully (verses 3-5). Thus, the psalmist can ask God to arise and fight for him (verses 6-11) because God is opposed to the wicked. The fate of the wicked is sealed, because God judges them (verses 12-13), but even more because the evil of the wicked will “boomerang” back upon them (verses 14-16). This is a common idea in the psalms (see Psalm 9:15-16; 10:2; 141:10). The psalmist then concludes with his intent to keep worshipping as he awaits God’s help (verse 17).

**Psalm 144**

War and battle language in hymns today (like “Onward Christian Soldiers”) embarrasses some. It shouldn’t. Psalm 144 says God’s people are at war. There is a battle between good and evil, raging constantly and God’s people are foot soldiers in that struggle. It is a royal psalm, describing how God protects the king in battle (verses 1-2, 9-11), but it mixes in elements of lament, praise, and even wisdom psalms. There are even some phrases borrowed from Psalm 18, and verse 4 will remind of our next reading, Psalm 8. The prayer for God’s direct and decisive help with the king’s enemies (verses 5-11) is then contrasted to the peace of the people of God when He grants that peace (verses 12-15).

**Psalm 8**

While many would say this is a psalm about the glory of man, it is not. The repeated refrain of verses 1 and 9 put God as the centerpiece of Psalm 8. The psalm stresses God’s greatness, while wondering at how He has chosen to exalt part of His creation (humans) to a place of rulership and dominion. The psalmist uses contrasts to make this point, placing the massive and expansive (like the heavens, verses 1, 3 and the night time expanse of stars, verses 3-4) against tiny babies (verse 2) and people (verses 3-4). This drives the message of humility and being humbled that the psalmist wants his readers to take from his observations of God’s creation. It all means that even if man is given a place of rulership over nature (verses 5-8) it shouldn’t cause men to become prideful, but instead to exalt the majesty of the God who made everything and has given humans a special place in His world!

**Psalm 40**

This is a hybrid psalm, combining thanksgiving (verses 1-10) with lament (verses 11-17). It says “You have saved me before, O God, so please save me again.” For the psalmist trust is the key (verse 3, repeated verse 4), as past actions provide present faith (verse 5). Verses 6-8 are developed in Hebrews 10:5ff as applying in the ultimate sense to Christ. When you are delivered, the response in the Psalms is always to tell others and praise God (verses 9-10). The lament then makes the psalm turn from its joyful notes to more somber ones. Are the sins of verse 12 the king’s or is he representing the people’s sins before God? The material from verse 13 onward is repeated nearly identically in Psalm 70 (to be read in week 37). While the exact nature of the calamity (and sins) causing the psalmist to call out to God is not certain there is a clear intent to turn back to God (verses 16-17).

**Psalm 117**

This shortest of all the psalms is also the shortest chapter in the Bible. It is part of the Egyptian Hallel (psalms 113-117), which was used at Passover. Though short, it wonderfully captures the goal of creation, the center of what we do, and why we do it. The psalm calls on everyone to praise God. God is praised because of His faithful covenant love (verse 2). This is loving because you promised to love, this is the love that seeks the best for the other, this is the love that doesn’t stop even if the one loved isn’t worthy of it. This is God’s love for us, the psalmist says, and all nations should praise God for it.

**Psalm 41**

This lament finds David at one of his lowest moments. It is not enough that this David is going through sickness and trouble. He also has to contend with enemies who are vicious, circling him like buzzards wait-

ing for him to die. As if that is not enough, one of those “buzzards” used to be a close friend of the king’s! This

psalm offers healing and hope to all who are afflicted and needs God's help, especially if they help and serve others (verses 1-3). As the psalms so often do they talk about the kind of person that God will help. In this case it is the one who helps others. But even though the psalmist is sick his enemies wish no good thing upon him, instead hoping he will die (verses 4-10). Verses 9-10 may be about Ahithophel, who was one of David's best and most trusted counselors but in Absalom's rebellion he joined the rebels. Jesus applies this to Himself in John 13:18, speaking pointedly of Judas Iscariot. The psalm returns to the theme of who God will help, with an emphasis on integrity (verses 11-12). Verse 13 is not technically part of the psalm, as it is the doxology closing the first book of psalms (1-41).

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## Week 25

### Psalm 72

Some titles have this being for Solomon, while others say it is of or by Solomon. Either way, this is a royal psalm that seeks the Lord's favor upon the king. The psalm teaches much of what it means to be the king over God's people. It means ruling righteously (verses 2-7), an idea repeated in verses 12-14. The idea of the psalm is that God wants to work through the king to give life and prosperity to His people (note verse 3). How different could Israel's history have been if kings had ruled as verse 7 describes? Of course, with so much talk of a righteous king the reader naturally thinks of the Messiah and wonders if this is Messianic. For certain, there is no place in the NT that directly quotes it as being so. However, an examination of verse 17 finds language too large for any human fulfillment. Indeed, the whole psalm reminds us of Isaiah 11 and other messianic psalms. All of this reminds us that Israel's kings were only preparatory to the coming of The King. Verses 18-20 are the benediction and conclusion of Book Two of the psalms.

### Psalm 127

This song praises the family, and says we must find security in God as we raise our children. It is a wisdom psalm teaching values and the right way to live. The big question about this psalm is does it all go together? It almost sounds like two psalms, not one. There is material about building (verses 1-2) and then material about children (verses 3-5). It is, however, a unity. There is alliteration and some other word play in the original Hebrew that points to it all being about the same theme. Even more, the idea of building a house is a common way of referring to a family (see Gen. 16:2, Exo. 1:21). This psalm's main idea is that we need God's help in life to succeed, and that is even more true of the most important avenue in life, the home. Verse 1's "vain" isn't the word in Ecclesiastes for meaningless, but here has the idea of "it won't work, it will come to nothing." The joy of a "full quiver" in verse 4 gives the psalm a happy tone. The positive attitude of the psalms pushes forward the truth that we need God's help in building, and that He wants to assist us because He considers family one of the greatest blessings He can bestow.

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## Week 26

### Psalm 44

This has been termed "the prayer of a puzzled people." It contains a desperate plea for God's help so it is a lament, but it isn't a personal lament. This is a national lament from a nation in deep trouble (verses 9-16). It may fit the time of the Babylonian invasions or might be part of the difficult times of the Judges. However, each of these times features idolatry, something specifically excluded in this psalm (verses 17-21). There is a note of persecution in verse 22 but that doesn't make it any easier to decide precisely where this psalm fits in Israel's history. The psalm does provide a powerful template for our prayers. In a time of distress the psalmist remembers God's great works from before (verses 1-8), expresses uncertainty and fear (verses 9-16), affirms righteousness and a desire for God (verses 17-22), and then asks God for help (verses 23-26). The fact that Scripture contains these kind of honest, but searching, prayers on the part of the innocent is a loud testimony to the real difficulties of faith - something the Bible never dodges but urges us to deal with as the psalmist does: in prayer.

### Psalm 30

This is a unique psalm of thanksgiving because it is backward. Usually there is the cry to God and then praising God for rescue. This psalm reverses that order, and features a clear story line. Verses 1-5 say "God delivered me, so I praise God." Verses 6-7 begin the story. There was foolish boasting and self-sufficiency, leading to God turning away from the psalmist. Verses 8-12 tell of the psalmist crying to God and then being delivered. The alert reader will note the poverty of understanding about death and the state of the dead in

verse 9. Old Testament writers did not have the understanding we have now because it is the New Testa-



ment that gives us a fuller view of life after death.

### **Psalm 121**

This second in the Psalms of Ascent (a collection used by the Jews as they marched upward to Jerusalem for feasts, see notes for Psalm 120, week 16) and is a psalm of trust. Its key word is “keep” and “keeper.” It expresses a profound faith in God’s protection. The psalmist sees the hills (verse 1) where robbers and thieves could hide, or perhaps where pagan temples were located and wonders if he will be protected? Verse 2 announces that he looks higher than the hills and knows God will preserve him. The psalm then expresses that trust in beautiful metaphors (verses 3-8).

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## **Week 27**

### **Psalm 45**

As we read this week about Solomon this is a fitting psalm. It is a royal psalm, celebrating the wedding of the king. We get a picture of the king dressed in his finery and the queen to be dressed in her best. There is talk of the future and the blessings of the Lord are given to them. Note the description (verse 2) is of more than good looks but his character. He “speaks grace” and stands for what is right (verse 4). Verse 6-8 is specifically applied to Jesus in Hebrews 1:6-8, giving us a place where at one level the psalm may apply to a human king (Solomon) but the language is bigger than any human can carry and awaits a Messianic fulfillment. The bride is praised in verse 9-15. Yes, this is a wedding song but it is ultimately about the Ultimate King, Jesus.

### **Psalm 125**

This psalm is a beautiful reminder of how there are evil doers that would attack God’s people but God will protect them! This may be a psalm written during the time of the return from exile, when Ezra and Nehemiah led the people home from Babylonian captivity. Once home they found themselves surrounded by enemies. This is part of the psalms of ascent. It is a psalm of trust. Verse 1’s “Mount Zion” references more than one of Jerusalem’s hill. It is the symbol of God’s help (see Psalm 121:1-2) and His place in blessing and protecting His people. Verse 4’s phrase “upright in their hearts” is so descriptive of what God’s people have always needed to be. The NLT gives that as “whose hearts are in tune with you.” This psalm helps us see that stability comes from trusting in, and having, a relationship with God.

### **Psalm 46**

Psalm 46 is a psalm of trust or psalm of praise. It is the basis for Martin Luther’s famous hymn, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God.” Its theme is God’s help in times of trouble. We are not told what kind of trouble, and it doesn’t matter. The psalmist probably left this ambiguous so it would help everyone. The key is that the most stable things we know (mountains) aren’t stable but God is. Verses 4-5 moves that theme to the city of God, and locates safety there. While we don’t always know the “how” or “when” (and the psalmists sometimes cry out because of that!) verses 1, 7, 11 carry the confession that God will help. The Lord cares and He will help! Our God is a mighty fortress!

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## **Week 28**

### **Psalm 47**

This psalm is a hymn of praise, and has a coronation feel to it. Its theme is God reigns supreme over all peoples, and calls all nations to recognize Him as King and worship Him (verse 1). Even as all people worship God the Israelites are set forth as God’s people (verses 3-4, 9). The psalm says God loves His people (verse 4) and desires all people to be His people (verse 9), two marvelous notes that we don’t always associate with the Old Testament.

### **Psalm 119**

Psalm 119 is one of the most famous chapters in the Bible. It is the longest, with 176 verses all celebrating God’s Word. It is an acrostic, which means each stanza is named for a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and each of the eight verses in each stanza begin with that letter. This arrangement reflects great care and craftsmanship in composing the psalm. It is a wisdom psalm, teaching us about what God’s word can do for us if we will let it fill our hearts and guide our lives. Commentary on this grand psalm is far beyond this lit-

the reading guide but the reader will be helped to note all the different synonyms for the Word of God (law,

commands, decrees, judgments, etc.). Note also the joy the writer has in God's Word and that it brings him!

## Week 29

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### Psalm 129

When we read the psalms it's important to remember this is poetry, and no one was constraining the writer to fit into our conceptions of how things "ought" to be. Thus many psalms defy outlining, and sometimes even classifying them is difficult. This psalm could be a lament (requesting God's help), it may be thanksgiving for the work of God (see verse 4) and it even has an imprecation in it. Each reader will have to decide where to put this one! It is one of the Songs of Ascent that begin in Psalm 120. These are the songs sung as pilgrims made their way up to Jerusalem in NT times. It would have particularly meaning to Jews who by the time of the first century had certainly known much trouble and persecution. Clearly the psalmist has been in distress and even beaten and whipped (verses 1-3) but God has put a stop to that (verse 4). Now the psalmist asks God to take vengeance on these enemies who do not even acknowledge the Lord (verse 8). It is a psalm that praises God for preserving His servant (and by extension the nation) so drawing a lesson of humility here seems appropriate. God saves by His power. We don't save ourselves!

### Psalm 20

This psalm is a royal psalm. It is about the king (verse 9), and it shows careful construction (note "answer" in verse 1 and verse 9). The psalm is a prayer for the king, telling him what is being prayed on his behalf. There is some kind of crisis (probably a battle) and the king (David? Solomon?) needs God's help. Be careful not to lift verse 4 out of its context. It doesn't refer to any and every desire but the desire for the king to triumph so Israel will triumph. Verse 7 locates the source of Israel and the king's strength in God, not in military weaponry. The psalm strengthens us because it requests God's help but then expresses confidence the Lord will do so!

### Psalm 48

This is a hymn of Zion. Jerusalem and Zion are such an important part of Old Testament worship that there are several psalms that celebrate and praise Zion (76, 84, 87, and 122). Zion is one of the hills Jerusalem is built on. These songs of Zion appear to be about one of Jerusalem's mountains but really are about God and His presence with His people in Jerusalem (note Hebrews 12:22-24). This psalm seems to deal with a threat to the city (verse 4). God has routed them (verses 5-8), establishing safety for His people. The only appropriate response is to praise the Lord (verses 9-14). A key application of this psalm is confidence in the God who protects His people. Do we have that today?

## Week 30

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### Psalm 49

This is a wisdom psalm, set to music (verse 4). It is designed to teach us about the futility of wealth and money, noting that death always beats money (verses 7-9). Money has limits. It cannot prolong life (verse 10). There is a strong note of not fearing the wealthy because God will vindicate the righteous and judge the wicked (verse 15). Verse 12's refrain is repeated in verse 20. The rich who are not rich toward God will certainly come to a bad end.

### Psalm 131

This is part of the Psalms of Ascents. Verse 1's "eyes" parallel the heart. Lofty eyes are an example in Scripture of pride (Prov 30:13-14). The way to peace, the psalmist says, is to end pride, to not try and do great things beyond him (verse 1b), and instead to trust in God with childlike faith (verse 2). This is a psalm of trust.

### Psalm 50

Psalm 50 is a psalm of judgment. God calls His people into judgment, acting as both prosecutor and judge. God will speak (verse 3)! It is time for God's people to quit thinking sacrifices please God (verses 8-9) or enrich Him (verses 10-11) when there isn't real faith and dependence (verse 14-15). The wicked are then addressed (verses 16-20), and the psalm concludes with a powerful reminder not to forget God for He judges all (verses 22-23)!

**Psalm 53**

This is a kind of lament psalm, a cry for help (verse 6). But it is more than that. It pronounces the judgment of God on the wicked, and has almost a prophetic note to it. Nothing about the psalm is particularly surprising until the reader realizes that it is almost identical to Psalm 14 (only 53:5 and 14:5-6 differ). So why is it in the Bible twice? It may be that both psalms appear in their respective collections, and when the collections were combined into this great book of psalms the collectors didn't want to delete either one. However, the small difference in the two psalms may be significant. Psalm 14 may have evildoers who are Israelites but Psalm 53 seems to be about foreigners attacking Israel and the one verse that is different says God intervened to save Israel. That makes this a psalm reminding God's people that the judgment of the Lord falls on those who ignore Him. God's people need to know what happens to those who don't care about God. An important note from verse 1 is that this is not someone who is actively campaigning to do away with God, speaking out against theism, and manning the official Atheist's Association booth at the country fair. This is a practical atheist who chooses to disregard God in his daily life. That kind of atheism is becoming more popular!

**Psalm 55**

This great lament shows how the Psalms don't easily allow themselves to be outlined. There isn't always a nice, clean progression (with three Roman numeral points!) in the Psalms because pain and anxiety aren't nice and clean. David writes here of the betrayal Ahithophel (see 2 Samuel 15:31). He cries out (verses 1-8), then turns to God for judgment (verses 9-11), but then comes right back to the psalms' theme of "I can't believe my friend did this to me" (verses 12-15). The psalm ends, however, with confidence in God (verses 16-23). As Ahithophel's betrayal becomes the model for Judas Iscariot this psalm gives us insight into Christ's mind as He experienced the awfulness of betrayal from a close friend.

**Psalm 58**

Psalm 58 is a lament, but it is not the usual kind of lament. It contains strong language calling down the curses and judgment of God upon enemies. That makes it an imprecation. While the psalm is not hard to understand or work through what troubles us is the calling for enemies to dissolve like "snail slime" (verse 8) or for God to wreck such destruction on our enemies that we may "bathe our feet in their blood" (verse 10b). However distressing they may be, the imprecatory psalms help us in several ways. They show us we can be honest with God in our feelings. They appeal to God to deal with the problem of evil in His sovereignty. They reflect a passionate hatred of sin (verse 2). Best of all, they show us the power of the New Testament's teaching on the afterlife. On this side of the cross we do not worry about murderers getting off on technicalities, or someone cheating stockholders of millions and getting away with it. We know that there is no such thing as "getting away with it." We have a firm grasp on the doctrines of judgment to come and eternal hell. In Old Testament this was not nearly as clearly understood. The Old Testament does not major in discussing life after death, or the consequences there of being wicked. That doesn't mean it is never addressed (note Psalm 9:17 we will read next week) but it not treated in extensive detail. Life in the Old Testament is seen in very temporal, in very "this world" terms. If we obey God it rains, and our crops grow. If we don't, it doesn't. If we obey God, we win in battle. If we don't, we don't. In short, if we obey God then good things happen to us and those good things are in the here and now. With that mind set, if you are in the Old Testament, how do you plead to God to act against violence and wickedness before you? The answer is "God do something now. Fix it now! Make them suffer for what they've done." That perspective may help us as we deal with these troubling psalms. Note the highly figurative language describing the evil doers (verses 3-5 - no baby speaks at birth!). These are God's enemies and this is an appeal to God to deal with them before they hurt more of God's people.

**Psalm 61**

David prays, perhaps on the occasion of Absalom's terrible rebellion. Verse 4 seems to make it pre-Temple days so that would fix it in David's time. Today's reader needs to see that David marks out past deliverance (verses 3, 5) to give him courage that there will be a present deliverance. Verse 7 alludes to the rich promises of 2 Samuel 7. Make note of the powerful metaphors for God that fill this song with confidence. How do you see God? As a rock (think of Gibraltar!), as a fortress, as the One you can shelter under? This psalm leads us

to more trust in God.

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**Psalm 9**

The most important issue with Psalm 9 is does it belong to Psalm 10? Both of these psalms are acrostic psalms. That means that each line or stanza begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Psalm 119 is the most famous illustration of an acrostic psalm. In each stanza all the lines begin with the same letter of the alphabet, resulting in a beautiful song that praises the word of God from A to Z. Both Psalm 9 and 10 are acrostics (though not as perfectly constructed as 119). Psalm 9 covers the first eleven letters of the Hebrew alphabet (though one letter is missing in the pattern). Roughly speaking Psalm 9 is A through K (aleph through kaph). Some have tried to make Psalm 9 and 10 one psalm (and some versions and manuscripts do treat them as one). However, they don't deal with precisely the same theme. Psalm 10 is concerned with a wicked man, and seems to be an individual crying to God about the prosperity of the wicked (see 10:5). Psalm 9 is different. It is much more community oriented, involving everyone in the praise of God for how He deals with the kingdoms of men. The conclusion of the psalm is that God will do what is right, and the wicked will be judged (verse 16) and so God can be trusted and should be praised.

**Psalm 10**

The psalmist has been victimized (verses 1-11) and cries out to God for help and justice (verses 12-18). Verse 11 tells us how the wicked can remain wicked: they refuse to think past the moment. Short-term thinking is their only hope, because thoughts of God and judgment would force an end to their iniquity. That means the righteous need to be careful not to get caught up in short-term thinking that demands God act at once. We may hope and pray for such (verses 12-15) but we rest in knowing, in His time, God will do what is right (verse 18). The future is ours!

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**Psalm 22**

While this psalm has meaning in its original what stands out is that Jesus quotes this psalm on the cross. Perhaps like no other text this lets us "see" into the heart of the Christ as He died for us. It is so clear, so amazing, that it has been called the Fifth Gospel account of the crucifixion. Unfortunately while many know of the allusions to the cross (verses 1, 6-8, 14-18), what many don't know is that the psalm turns in verse 21. It is a psalm of trust! "You have rescued me" begins a long section of praise to God. David was pursued by his enemies and near death, and full of despair. That is the first twenty verses. Then God acted and he was saved and he praised God for it (verses 22-31). Verse 21 is the hinge the psalm turns on. David is the righteous sufferer who trusts in God and is delivered. So as Jesus quotes this psalm from the cross He signals that He is the ultimate righteous sufferer but the very scripture He uses shows His complete faith that He would be delivered. Jesus trusted even as He died!

**Psalm 118**

This psalm is difficult to classify. It praises God and even teaches with wisdom, and has a strong note of thanksgiving about it. It is part of the Egyptian Hallel These were psalms, beginning with 113, that were sung at the Passover (note Mark 14:26). The entire psalm has a note of joy about it and may have been sung in a triumphal procession. It celebrates reversal, quoting from Exodus 15's Song of the Red Sea (verses 14), and the Lord taking the rejected stone and using it as the most important piece in the building (verses 22-23). It is a happy song (verses 24), that begins and ends with the idea of God's steadfast or covenant love (verses 1, 29). The psalm finds great use in the New Testament, with verse 26 applied to the Triumphal Entry (see Luke 19:28), and verses 22-23 applied by Jesus specifically to Himself (see Mark 12:10ff).

**Psalm 62**

This is a psalm of trust, a psalm where David says "I'm trusting God in the midst of a crisis and I want you to trust in Him too." The key ingredient is the word "only" or "yes" or "truly," terms that introduce six verses (verses 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9). It is a remarkable psalm because mostly it is about God and does not speak to God until its end (verse 12).

**Psalm 65**

This harvest hymn rejoices in God's goodness and bounty. That said, don't miss the careful notes in the psalm where David says "Because God blesses you need to be a certain kind person." The psalm begins with grace (verses 2-4), moves to God's incredible deeds, especially those of creation (verses 6-8), and then turns it attention to God's care for the earth (verses 9-13). We do well to be reminded that God feeds the world every day!

**Psalm 66**

Psalm 66 is a praise song, bringing the entire community into the praise of God but especially focusing that praise in the heart of one worship (beginning verse 13). Significantly part of the praise of God offered here is for chastening (verses 8-15), something we do not often think of bringing into our praise. Am I thankful for being refined and tested (verses 10-12)? The psalmist is letting all of his experience, all of what life brings him, cause him to praise God, with a special emphasis of being thankful even for prayer itself (verses 19-20)!

**Psalm 67**

This a beautiful thanksgiving psalm. It based on Aaron's benediction in Numbers 6:24-26. However, here it receives an emphasis beyond what Aaron would have ever said. This psalm brings forth the idea of God blessing all peoples. That is its theme: all nations. The expression "peoples" is found in the center of the psalm (verses 3-5). The term "nations" is then found in verse 2 and is referred to in verse 7. The psalm works together to help us see what the world needs: "that Your way may be known on earth, your saving power to all nations." When people know God they will praise God!

**Psalm 123**

This is not a happy psalm. It is a lament, sung by the nation, in times of trial. It compares how servants wait for their master to act to God's people waiting (impatiently!) for Him to deliver and save. Unfortunately we cannot date the psalm accurately because there are so many occasions when Israel was hated and oppressed. It is part of the "Songs of Ascents" that begin in Psalm 120. Those are the songs sung by pilgrims as they made their way up to Jerusalem for the annual feasts. Fun fact: Jesus probably sang these songs, both as a boy and as an adult, as He made His way to Jerusalem for the Passover. What is not clear is exactly why the servants look to the master's hands (verse 2)? Are they looking for food, for a signal of approval, or even punishment? The reader will need to study this further. It is a metaphor that express the dependence of the slave upon his or her master.

**Psalm 68**

There is nothing easy about this psalm. The difficulties of interpreting Ps 68 are almost legendary. It features more than 15 words and expressions that are not found anywhere else in the Bible. Another twenty or more terms are used sparingly in the Old Testament. Even more, there are plenty of places we are not sure what the psalmist is getting at. An even more obvious difficulty is that we are not sure what exactly the psalmist is getting at in places.

After all the difficulties if the reader will work through the psalm its message rings clear. It is a victory hymn praising God for His great help to His people. Reading the "Song of Deborah" (Judges 5) may help as these two passages share some obvious parallels.

Verse 4 well captures the tone and spirit of the psalm. Rather than trying to impose a stiff outline on the psalm it is better to let it speak for itself, praising God for His past work (as in verse 7) while speaking of present deliverance (verse 21), and pleading for future salvation (verses 3, 29). Verses 32-35 are beautiful and not hard to understand: the glorify the God who rides the clouds to victory.

**Psalm 69**

This is a long psalm of lament. It features a little bit of everything, and is “all over the map,” with Messianic parts and even thanksgiving. The psalmist is being attacked for doing right, which always troubles our faith. He feels like he is drowning! This psalm offers great encouragement to the righteous sufferer. As Jesus is the ultimate righteous sufferer it is no surprise to find that Psalm 69 is the second most quoted psalm in the NT behind only Psalm 22. Verse 4 is applied to Jesus in John 15:23. Verse 9 is applied to Jesus’ zeal in John 2:17). The vinegar offered Jesus on the cross (Matthew 27:48) is referenced in verse 21. Judas Iscariot is in view in verse 25 (see Acts 1:20).

It is important to realize the psalmist is a righteous sufferer. He isn’t being attacked because he is hard to get along with, or a jerk (verses 4-5). Further, what the psalm is really about is God’s cause (verses 6-13).

The psalmist’s desperation is expressed in the imprecatory section of verses 22-28. Verse 30 shows great faith, as David anticipates that God will act to save Him. The close (verses 34-36) may reflect a later addition after David wrote the original psalm.

**Psalm 128**

This psalm expresses a desire for family blessing, and even expands the circles of blessings in verses 5-6. This wisdom psalm extols the value of godliness, hard work (verse 2), and family (verse 3). Everything centers on a proper reverence for God (verse 4).

**Psalm 70**

Psalm 70 is nearly identical to Psalm 40:13-17. Again, we see that when the collectors of the Psalms put it together sometimes a psalm found elsewhere was reproduced. This should point us to importance, not boring repetition. The Holy Spirit thought this to be important enough to put in Psalms twice! This psalm is a lament, where the psalmist is the subject of some kind of assassination attempt (verse 2), and verbal harassment (verse 3). Note the contrast in what the wicked say (verse 3) and what the righteous say (verse 4). The psalm’s ending (verse 5) echoes the opening lines of verse 1, bringing the psalm full circle to a strong conclusion: God I need your help and could you hurry?! The frankness of the prayers in psalms helps us in our approach to God when we are need. We are to always be reverent but we can be honest and full express our emotions and fears.

**Psalm 71**

This is a senior psalm (verse 9). It is a lament for an aging servant of the Lord who finds himself in trouble. The psalm is not difficult to understand. Only verse 7 creates problems. The translation there is uncertain. The ESV has “I have been a portent to many.” The NASB has “marvel,” while the NKJV has “wonder.” The word references an extraordinary event that points to God’s power. That can be punishment (the curses in Deuteronomy 28:45-46), or even plagues (like in Egypt, Exodus 7:3). The psalmist may mean that he has been delivered by God from some illness or adversity in a way that glorifies God or it could be that some take his present bad circumstances as proof that God is against him. Regardless the psalmist continues to trust in God. The psalm ends with confidence. Note the future tense promises of “I will praise” as the psalmist trusts that God will deliver him (verses 22-24).

**Psalm 149**

This victory psalm begins and ends with the same idea: “praise the Lord” (verse 1, 9). In the psalms the praise of God is always substantive so the astute reader will look to see why the Lord is being praised in the psalm. Here it is because of His kindness (verse 3), His choice of the humble (verse 3b), and for His desire to establish justice and righteousness (verses 4-9a). It is possible that this psalm “grew” out of Psalm 148:14.

**Psalm 73**

This is one of the most powerful of all psalms because it expresses the feelings of the righteous when they see the wicked prosper. Asaph, its author, confesses to envying evildoers who seem to be exempt from life’s problems while everything they do “turns up roses” (verses 1-12). Meanwhile his faith does him no good at



all (verses 12-14). Further thought, especially in worship (verses 17a) causes Asaph to understand that life

isn't all about only this life. He "observed their end" (verse 17b). The wicked will know God's judgment one day in God's time (verses 18-19). The psalmist realizes he has God, which is far better and also permanent (verses 20-26). Verses 26-27 form a powerful conclusion to a dilemma many believers have experienced. Why do bad people do so well? Psalm 73's answer is "they won't always ... God will put an end to the unfaithful" (verse 27).

## Week 39

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### Psalm 74

This psalm is not an easy read. It deals with the destruction of the temple, one of the most horrific events in the Old Testament. For God's people seeing His temple burned to the ground was incomprehensible. How could that happen? It was God's house!

The psalm does not delve into theological explanations (see Jeremiah 7; 26:5-6; 2 Kings 17:7-13 for those) but instead gives voice to a confused and despairing worshiper, who speaks for his entire community. How can this be? Have you cast us off forever O God?

Verses 1-11 build to a crescendo of destruction and havoc, made all the harder because God allowed it. Verses 12-17 turn the psalm in a more hopeful direction, remembering God's past victories as a reason for faith in the future. The sea monsters and Leviathan (verse 13-14) were legendary beasts that Baal (supposedly) had beaten. The psalmist says God has actually done this. God defeats all His enemies. That idea sets up the closing stanza (verses 18-23), where God is asked to intervene again. Significantly the basis of prayer is God's name being reviled (verse 18). God's reputation is at stake!

### Psalm 130

There are only seven penitential psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143). These are special laments where the call for help from above takes the form of "I need forgiveness." This psalm celebrates God's goodness (verses 4, 7, 8), the basis of forgiveness. The "waiting" (verses 5) may be waiting for the sacrifice being offered, a sin offering, to be finished. Watch how the psalm moves from almost total hopelessness (verse 1) to calm confidence in God's mercy (verses 7-8).

## Week 40

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### Psalm 76

Psalm 76 is traditionally considered to be one to the Songs of Zion. Other psalms in this category are 46, 48, 84, 87, and 122. Psalms of Zion rejoice and praise Zion because it is where God dwells and is blessed by His presence. Here God acted to save Zion (verses 7-8), which may be a reference to the deliverance of king Hezekiah and Judah from the Assyrian invasion (see 2 Kings 18-19). "Feared" is a repeated key (verses 7, 8, 11, 12) reminding the reader that God is not to be trifled with, but must be respected and revered.

### Psalm 77

This lament psalm provides a road map for what to do when we are down and discouraged. The psalmist is in a time of trouble (verses 1-9), where he even questions if God has forsaken him. The answer is to remember what God has done in the past (verses 10-19). Contemplate the works of the Lord (verse 12) and be reminded of His power and love for His people. Much of verses 16-20 is a not-so-subtle attack on Baal, the fake storm god. Israel's God is the real God of the storm! Note how all the references to "I" at the beginning go away and the psalm is filled with talk of God and His works by its end.

### Psalm 133

Psalm 133 praises the joys of unity. It is a source of joy like when Aaron is anointed with the special oil used for priests (verse 2; Leviticus 8:10-12). In a society where everyone bathes regularly we may have lost the impact of sweet smelling oil that would make the high priest smell wonderful, and equip him to go and minister. Just as important as Aaron's anointing would be the dew on Mount Hermon. The mountain is over 100 miles from Jerusalem but it watered the land through its streams. Dew on Hermon was essential in a land where there is often not nearly enough rain. Unity is like the delightful oil used on the high priest and the needed dew on the mountain. It is there - where brethren are united - that God will bring blessing (verse 3b).

**Psalm 79**

This psalm was written in the ruins of Jerusalem after it was ravaged by Babylonian armies in 586 BC. It is made up of many other scriptures, pieced together here in a lament of agony. Jerusalem is destroyed (verses 1-4)! Again the psalms turn their attention to the question every sufferer has: why? (Verse 5). Aren't there other nations more deserving of judgment, more wicked than we are? (Verses 6-8). Verses 6-7 are identical to Jeremiah 10:25. For God's name sake (verse 9) God must act to save and deliver (verses 8-13).

**Psalm 126**

This psalm dovetails with Psalm 79's bleak and sad outlook. It is more hopeful and bright, but it is still a lament. It asks for God's help (verse 4). It remembers the good things God has done in the past (verses 1-3) but then beseeches God to do those things again (verses 4-6). It does conclude with a wonderful note of confidence in God (verses 5-6). There was glory in the past but now the present needs to catch up with the past!

**Psalm 137**

This is easily one of the saddest psalms in all of Scripture. Written during the Babylonian captivity (verse 1) it pleads with God to have mercy upon His people. Verses 5-6 form the heart of the psalm, with its clear promise to remember the holy city, Jerusalem. The psalmist announces he will not be absorbed into Babylonian culture. He longs for home and a return to God's favor. The psalm then ends on a strong, and in some ways, disconcerting imprecation (verse 9). See the comments in Week 32 with Psalm 58 for more on imprecatory psalms.

**Psalm 147**

Psalm 147 sings of God's power and control, especially over the weather (verses 8, 16-18). Such power is unmatched by any pagan god that a foreign nation might worship (verses 19-20). Only Israel knows the true God, who has created everything (verses 7-10). The genius of the psalm is how it tenderly applies the great majesty and power of God to God's people, reassuring and comforting them how near God will be to the brokenhearted and humble (verses 3, 10-11). Such a God is worthy of praise!

**Psalm 80**

Here is a psalm that we might expect we major in confession and repentance, as it laments the loss of the northern tribes (verses 2, 4-7). Instead there is talk of how God established Israel (note the vine imagery of verse 8; this is used by the prophets and especially Jesus in John 15) and the nation thrived (verses 8-11). Now they have been destroyed (verses 12-13). The psalmist seems genuinely puzzled and asks for God's help (verses 14-19).

**Psalm 82**

Everything about this psalm is difficult. We do not know the date or author. Worse, we don't know exactly how to categorize this psalm. Some think it is a prophetic psalm. Others offer that it is a wisdom psalm. Summary: it is a completely unique psalm. There just isn't anything else like it. All that said it really isn't too hard to get the main message of the psalm: God is judging those who have failed to care for the poor. The scene painted is God's throne room, or perhaps a court room, with God ready to render His verdict. But who is God judging? Who are these "gods" (verse 1b), especially since the Bible teaches there are no other Gods?

The most common explanation is that these are human judges. They have failed because they don't defend the poor (see Ezek 34). While it is true there are a few verses where people are referred to as gods (Exo 4:16) this explanation seems unsatisfying. Verse 7 says they will "die like men," but how is that a punishment if they are men?

What if we take a different tact and place ourselves in the time of the Psalms. In the time of the Old Testament what would "He judges among the gods" mean? It would refer to idols, wouldn't it? Isn't that what the

people would think of who had heard prophets say “You chase after other gods” or “You will be punished for

“serving other gods?” The objection here is to false gods being called to assemble before Jehovah but this is poetry, not doctrine. It is a figure of speech. That figure is used elsewhere (Isaiah 41:21; Psalm 95:3). Remember, Elijah told the priests of Baal to build their altar and cry to their god but that doesn’t mean he believed Baal was real (1 Kings 18:24). That is what we have here: talk of God being greater than any false god. The false gods are judged, put down, destroyed. That doesn’t mean the writer of the psalm believed in them, it is just the way he chose to express the truth that God reigns.

In verses 2-5 the false gods are seen to be failures. Those who invest their faith in them are not served by them. The weak, fatherless, impoverished and downtrodden people who need rescue receive nothing from those who they have placed their faith in. Only God can deliver and save (verse 8). The world must seek after the true God.

### **Psalm 83**

This is a national, or corporate, lament. It pleads for God’s help from enemies who are determined to destroy them (verses 3-4). The date is difficult to determine because there are so many times foreign nations came against Israel – it’s just hard to choose one! But the purpose here is not hard to discern: bolster faith for dealing with present problems. This psalm helps the reader find faith that God will deliver from those who attack His people (verses 9-12). As God has acted in the past for His people the psalmist prays He will act again now (verses 13-18).

### **Psalm 136**

In this Jewish tradition this is the Great Psalm of Praise. This beautiful psalm of sacred history that makes worship real and substantive by calling out God’s specific deeds. Each line is then followed by the refrain “His steadfast love endures forever,” where “love” is *hesed*, the special Hebrew word for covenant faithfulness. This is love that determines to love because it is promised, not deserved.

The emphasis is on God’s character and God’s deeds. God is praised primarily for creating everything (verses 4-9), and for the Exodus (verses 10-22). Woven into that, over and over, is the line about God’s character and His love. The net effect is to say “God is wonderful” and we should be thankful to Him (verse 26).

## **Week 44**

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### **Psalm 84**

This is a psalm of thanksgiving. For background there is a lot of “don’t know.” We don’t know when it was written, and we don’t know who wrote it. The reference to the “anointed” in (verse 9) would seem to say it is before the exile, before the end of the kings. Many scholars believe it was a pilgrim song, and pilgrims sang it on their way to the annual feasts in Jerusalem. The language in the psalm suggests that it may be late summer and hot and dry – that would then mean the pilgrims were going up for the feast of Tabernacles. There are three beatitudes in the psalm (verses 4, 5, 12) and those beautifully sum up this psalm: this is about longing to be in God’s presence. Verse 10 is very famous but makes the reader ask, “Is that how I really feel?” Do I long for the presence of God, that special presence, that comes only in worship?

### **Psalm 134**

Psalm 134 is short and features a mix of hymn elements and thanksgiving. It is the last of the Songs of Ascent. These songs conclude by calling on the “night shift” to continue its praise of God (verse 1). It provides an opportunity for the reader to consider what it means to “bless God” (verse 2). That might not even seem possible, as God is the “blesser,” He gives, not receives! Of course, blessing God never means that somehow we are making God better, strengthening or helping Him. God needs nothing from us. To “bless the Lord” is to recognize God’s greatness and majesty and to acknowledge our dependence and delight in Him. It is close to “be thankful” (see Psalm 16:7; 26:12) but is more, and has a slightly different flavor to it. The reading is short today. If you have an extra moment or two venture over to Psalm 34:1 (blessing the Lord is paralleled to praising the Lord), Psalm 96:2-3 (there it means declaring the good works of God), Psalm 103:2 (there it is synonymous with counting your blessings), and Psalm 104:1 (there it means saying things like “God you are very great!”). In Psalm 135:20 blessing the Lord is the domain of those who “fear the Lord.” Today’s psalm is short but it should lead us to “bless the Lord” and be blessed by Him (verse 3).

### **Psalm 85**

There isn’t any doubt this is a lament psalm, but the complaint (or request for help) is more implied than

stated. Much of what this psalm is about becomes clear when we view it as written after the return from Babylonian captivity. There is much discussion about the origins, author, and time frame for the psalm but setting it in the return from captivity is helpful. God has “restored” them (verse 1), which is amazing and based on God’s merciful forgiveness (verse 2). However, the people’s situation when they returned to Judea were not good (verses 4-7). Ezra and Nehemiah, along with Haggai, testify to the difficulties the returnees experienced. This psalm is a prayer for more of God’s blessings (verses 8-13). Note the interest in “the land” (verse 12). They needed their crops to make! The psalm exudes confidence that God will bless them.

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## Week 45

### Psalm 86

This plaintive personal lament provides a virtual roadmap for how to approach God in prayer. It begins with a request to be heard (verses 1-7), that ends by glorifying God and praising His attributes (note verse 5). That gives way to a full stanza of praise (verses 8-13). Then the psalmist petitions for help (verses 14-17). Note how the prayer for guidance is rooted in a desire to do God’s will and go God’s way, not get God to do whatever the psalmist wants (verse 11). If all our praying would follow this reverent model how much better for the pray-er and for our prayers!

### Psalm 87

The psalmist turns his attention to the glorious city of God, Zion in his hymn. This psalm has a fair amount of puzzle to it, but it’s clear intent is to say that some day all nations will be part of the “city of God” (verse 4). Interestingly, these nations mentioned (“Rahab” is a poetic name for Egypt (see also 30:7) like Babylon, Philistia, Tyre and Cush (Ethiopia) are all various powers that dominated Israel or caused them troubles. Yet God will accept them someday! This certainly seems to be looking forward to heaven (Hebrews 12:22-23), rather than a literal fulfillment in literal Jerusalem.

### Psalm 135

This song of praise covers nearly all the ground there is to cover when it comes to praising God. It is composed of a mosaic of numerous other scriptures, psalms and O.T. citations, all woven together into one beautiful call to praise the Lord. He is to be praised for who He is (verse 3), what He has done (verses 4, 7), with a particular emphasis on the Exodus (verses 8-12). God is seen to be superior to all other gods (verse 5) which should not cause the reader to believe in polytheism but simply realize the world of the psalmist was full of “gods.” Those gods are nothing but useless idols (verses 15-18). God is great and sovereign (verses 5-6). Note that the reference to the Lord’s name as “good,” or “lovely” (NASB95) is about God’s character, not the Hebrew letters of His name.

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## Week 46

### Psalm 88

This is the saddest psalm in the entire psalter. It is a lament that features terrible pain and suffering and has no “turning point” where God delivers or even any kind of “I am sure God will deliver me” or “God hears me” statement. It is just unrelenting gloom and misery. In the Hebrew text, the psalm ends with the Hebrew word for “darkness,” and there is no closing note of triumph as in other psalms that begin with pain and perplexity. We are not sure what the writer is suffering with. He has suffered a long time (verse 15). He is ostracized from friends and family (verses 8, 18), and he has looked to God regularly for help but in vain (verses 9, 13). Don’t be confused by the very Old Testament view of death (verses 3-4, 10-11). The psalmists did not have access to the tons of information Jesus and the apostles give us about life after death and judgment day. The Old Testament operates on a very “here and now” plane (for the most part - there are exceptions, see 2 Samuel 12:23; Daniel 12:2). That is simply all they knew. The psalm does teach us that unanswered prayer is a reality. We may not understand it and we don’t like it but it is part of the walk of faith. Perhaps much of the value in this sad psalm is seen in God’s inclusion in His book. God knows that sometimes we feel abandoned and is not afraid to let us pray with one who feels that way and writes of it in Psalm 88.

### Psalm 91

This wisdom psalm appears to share some connection with the psalms around it. There are similar terms like “dwelling” (90:1; 91:1, 9), “grass” (90:5; 92:7), “deeds” (90:16; 92:4) and “Most High” (91:1, 9; 92:1) that

appear through these psalms. The reader may wish to read Psalm 90 and 92 along with 91 today to see these ideas. The judgment of the wicked is featured as well (see 91:8 and 92:11). In addition Psalm 91 begins in the first person (“I will say,” verse 2) and then switches to third person (“you, verse 3), giving it a strong teaching flavor.

The psalm is not hard to understand. It extols God’s protection for His people. The difficulty here is that bad things still happen to good people. What then do we make of all the praising of God for caring for His people (verses 3-13). This is when it is helpful to recognize a psalm’s type. As a wisdom psalm this should be treated like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Wisdom sayings and wisdom teaching are not meant as absolutes. This is not doctrinal like Ephesians or Hebrews. The psalmist expresses general truths about God’s good care, and that the righteous will be spared unnecessary and avoidable difficulties. Just as psalm 90:10 isn’t a guarantee that all the righteous will live to be eighty this psalm isn’t guaranteeing that nothing bad will ever happen to God’s people. However, it does show us that while bad things may happen to good people only good people have the means to cope with them, survive them, and triumph over them. Their faith in God’s ultimate deliverance enables them to carry on (verses 14-16). There is cautionary note here about constantly testing God to see if He is “there” or will deliver, as well. Verses 11-12 are quoted by the devil to Jesus Christ in Matthew 4:5-7. Jesus’ response is that genuine trust does not test God. So what God has done and is doing ought to build our faith so that we do not fall prey to the temptation of Satan: “let’s just see if God is on the job today.” God’s people will trust God!

## Week 47

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### Psalm 92

This powerful psalm resists being pigeon-holed. It contains both elements of thanksgiving and wisdom. The heading lists it as a “A Song for the Sabbath,” the only psalm with that sort of title. While we recognize that the headings in Psalms are not inspired they are very old. That heading would designate this as a song of worship. The psalmist begins by praising God (verses 1-5), which is why people worship. Unfortunately, the wicked do not understand or see the power and majesty of God (verses 6-9). The “stupid man” of verse 6 is not a person of low IQ but the person who does not want to know God. In contrast are those who are righteous and who as such will worship God endlessly (verses 10-15). The astute reader will observe that the covenant name of God, Jehovah, is used seven times in this short psalm. It is a psalm about God and worshipping Him!

### Psalm 138

This psalm provides an oft-needed reminder: in our prayers we ask God for so much, but do we ever thank God for answering our requests? This psalm of thanksgiving is about exactly that. The psalmist is thankful for God graciously responding to his prayers (verse 3). There are some textual questions around the last phrase of verse 2 but the overall meaning is clear: God is great and to be praised! God is greater than false gods (verse 1) and rulers (verse 4), but what makes Him truly great is that He stoops down to meet our needs. The key to knowing this great God (and having prayers answered) is found in verse 6, which speaks of humility. Verse 8 says God is at work in the psalmist’s life (possibly David, see the title to the psalm) and he is thankful even for this. The psalm begins with the praise of God’s hesed, or steadfast love in verse 2 and ends there as well (verse 8).

### Psalm 93

This psalm of praise is thought by many scholars to be a very early piece of Hebrew poetry. It concisely but compellingly sets forth the majesty and sovereignty of God. That power is expressed in creation (verse 1), but also in God’s complete domination of the sea (verses 3-4). The Israelites, generally speaking, feared the sea. They were not sea-going people and for them the sea represented darkness, chaos, and even evil. So the psalmist takes pains to point out God’s complete control of even “the floods.” Canaanite legends and myths about their gods, like Baal, had them fighting the sea for control. There is no fight here. God makes all things, and as Creator is simply mightier than what He created.

## Psalm 94

There is uncertainty about who composed this psalm, and even when it was written. Even more, it is hard to firmly categorize it. In places it has a lament feel, crying for help (verses 2-3), but it also teaches and warns (verses 8-11), while celebrating God's care and deliverance (verses 16-23). The wicked are again oppressing the righteous, ignorantly believing God doesn't see what they do (verse 7). They think God does not "perceive" (verse 7b) but they are called on to "perceive" or "understand" (verse 8) that God, who made all things, is not blind to what they do. The beatitude of verses 12-13 speaks assurance to troubled hearts. In the midst of evil, injustice, and persecution this psalm says God's people trust their God!

## Psalm 95

This psalm stitches together worship and obedience, in its call for God's people to do both. God is to be worshiped for who He is (verse 3), for what He has done (created all things, verses 4-5), and because He is our God who has entered into a covenant with Him (verse 7). The result of that worship should be deep fidelity that issues forth in faithful obedience (verse 8). This is contrasted with faithless and disobedient Israel's conduct in the wilderness (verses 8b-11). This text is used in Hebrews 3:7ff to point the Hebrew writer's audience to the same truths: the need for a perseverance in faith that causes obedience. Note the psalmist's emphasis on the heart (verse 10). Following God has always been a heart-level matter.

## Psalm 139

This is the book of Psalms version of the old favorite hymn, "How Great Thou Art!" It is a psalm of praise. Its structure psalm is simple, perfectly balanced with four paragraphs of six verses each. The big idea in the psalm is that God knows the psalmist intimately, and that there is no place one can go where God is not and does not see and know what we are doing. God is all-seeing (verses 1-6), and God is omni-present (verses 7-12), because God is the creator of all (verses 13-16). Note how the psalmist gets very personal in verses 13-16, using "my" repeatedly. God the Creator becomes very personal here. God is interested in me, the writer affirms! The psalm then ends with an affirmation of God's all-consuming holiness (verses 17-24), and the psalmist expresses his desire to be just as holy.

## Psalm 97

Psalm 96 (see week 19) through Psalm 99 are a unit, as these psalms celebrate God's righteous rule (note 96:10, 13; 97:6; 98:9; 99:4). This hymn immediately announces that God reigns and rules (verse 1). No one and nothing can withstand Him (verses 2-3). These verses have an ominous feel to them for all who dare to challenge God's dominion and sovereignty. He is the Most High, ruling in righteousness (verses 7-9). The psalmist makes a special note of how He is far superior to fake gods, idols (verses 7, 9), and then calls God's worshippers to obedience and holiness (verses 10-12).

## Psalm 98

This hymn of praise people to worship and then it gives the reasons for worship. As we read in the psalms we see this again and again. The call to praise is followed by why we are praising because in the Scriptures worship is informed, rational, and intelligent. It is based on what God is doing, or has done, or will do, or who God is – but it's not just mindless "Praise the Lord" for no reason. While this psalm shares a kinship with Psalm 96 this psalm has a more joyous feel to it. God is praised for His past acts of deliverance and salvation (verses 1-3), for being the King of His people now (verses 4-6), and for bringing future judgment (verses 7-9).

## Psalm 140

This lament combines elements of lament and imprecation, along with trust, as the psalmist faces great adversity. The poison of slander and lies seems to be a particular concern of the psalmist (verses 3, 11). Perhaps this is from David's inspired pen during the time Saul was pursuing him? How often did evil men whisper in Saul's ears bad things about David? Verses 1-5 describe these wicked plotters. Verses 6-11 seek help, both personally (verses 6-8) and punitive (verses 9-11). Note the contrast in verses 7 and 9's use of "head." The psalmist says God has covered his head but he prays God will bring the wickedness of the slanderers back on their heads! This is a request for sin to "boomerang" back on the sinner. The psalm ends with a



strong affirmation of faith and trust (verses 12-13).

**Psalm 2**

Psalm 2 is famous because it is Messianic. It is specifically ascribed to David in Acts 4:25, and is based on God's promises to David his house in 2 Samuel 7. In fact, the king may be the speaker throughout the psalm. This marks it as a royal psalm, a psalm pertaining to the king of the nation and his role with the people. The key in royal psalms is to remember the center of the psalm is not the king, but God who establishes that king. The king needs to be established because at the beginning of his reign the subservient nations think this is the time to break away, that now is the time to plan a revolt (verses 1-3). In contrast to what they say (verse 3, "let us") God laughs and speaks (verse 6, "as for Me") announcing God's anointed choice will reign! The Lord's anointed tells of this decree (verses 7-9) and how sure it is. The psalm concludes with an admonition to the nations of the earth: submit to God and His anointed (verses 10-12).

What makes Psalm 2 special is its application to Jesus made in the New Testament. He is the Ultimate Anointed One. It is applied throughout the New Testament to Jesus (see for example Matthew 3:17; Acts 4:25-28). Hebrews 1:5 quotes the psalm to say Jesus is the express image of God, possesses His glory and sits at His right hand. Without in anyway devaluing these scriptural attributions it is vital the reader of Psalm 2 make its application to Jesus: He will reign and rule and none can successfully oppose Him! That was true of David's reign and it is true of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

**Psalm 29**

Psalm 29 is the antidote to little god-ness! This is a psalm about the greatness of Jehovah. It is a psalm of direct praise. Fifteen times we read the name of God here, given as "Lord" but it is Yahweh. The means by which David calls attention to the majesty of God is by comparing God to a violent thunderstorm. The storm sweeps across the land breaking and thundering and destroying and David thinks of God's awesome greatness and power. Some have called it "The Seven Thunder Claps of God." The expression "voice of the Lord" occurs 7 times. It is a beautiful psalm, with very strong parallelism (maybe the strongest in the psalter). It is also a "sandwich" psalm - begins and ends in heaven, middle part takes place on earth. The careful student will remember that Baal was the Canaanite's storm god, often portrayed with a lightning bolt in his hand. This psalm announces who the real God of the storm is! Verse 1 calls the "mighty ones" to worship. These may be heavenly beings. All are to worship "in the splendor of holiness" (verse 2). That can mean in holy garments or may be a call to worship in awareness of God's holiness. Verse 3 depicts the storm coming off the sea. In verse 5 it roars down from the north (Lebanon). "Sirion" in verse 6 is Mount Hermon, a towering mountain. Kadesh (verse 8) is in the south, showing that the storm has swept over all Israel. God is above the storm (verses 10-11), sitting above the "flood" (verse 10, a special word used elsewhere only of Noah's flood). Far above the turmoil God is enthroned. He is the force behind the storm, but the storm doesn't affect Him. He is greater than storms, and yes, greater than the false storm god, Baal

**Psalm 99**

This is the last of the "Righteous Rule" unit (Psalm 96-99). This is a psalm of praise, it celebrates God's reign over the entire earth. This psalm begins with the call for all to love and worship the King who reigns in righteousness (verses 1-5), but then turns to Israel's past (verses 6-8) to ask God for help and forgiveness. The language causes some to wonder if this is a psalm of the Babylonian exile, when the Jews were far from home and feeling the need for forgiveness and deliverance very keenly.

**Psalm 100**

This is a hymn, a call to praise God, with an emphasis on thanksgiving. Notice its edification intent. This psalm doesn't address God - it addresses the worshipers of God. Psalm 100 seems perfectly and purposefully in place here. It comes after the psalms about God as king (Psalms 96-99). Psalm 100 seems to form a fitting conclusion to that idea. There is king language and the praise of God as being a great sovereign (verse 3). Despite the popular use of verse 1 ("joyful noise") by those who cannot sing well and are not musically inclined the idea isn't "make random noise even if it is out of tune" but rather "shout" or "proclaim" or "make a fanfare." God's goodness and hesed love (verse 5) are the basis of this happy psalm calling God's people to worship Him joyfully.

## **Psalm 141**

This is another of David's laments, beseeching God for help from those who attack him (verses 1-2, 8-10). It does feature however, some wisdom elements at its center (verses 3-7). The psalmist is concerned with evil in its many forms - speech (verse 3), the heart (verse 4), and actions (verse 4b). Verses 6-7 are notoriously difficult to translate and understand. Verse 6 may mean when those who torment the psalmist are judged (executed) they will see how right the psalmist was. Verse 7 seems to be a proverbial saying that the wicked are plowing and slaughtering the righteous. The psalmist goes from that to appeal to God for His help and deliverance (verses 8-11). Verse 10 has the "let their sin boomerang back on them" idea that is common in the psalms.

## **Psalm 101**

This is a royal psalm. It is by the king and it is about the king and his rule. The psalm's eight verses are stuffed to the brim with ideas about the person and life of the leader (verses 1-4), and about the quality of those who follow him (verses 5-8). In a real way it is a promise to rule and reign as God would have His king to do. There is nothing here that is hard to understand. The difficulty, as David's own life shows, is living out what is vowed here. Godly leadership begins with the leader himself and then includes him actively leading his people to also serve the Lord.

## **Week 52**

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## **Psalm 102**

There is no question this is a lament, as the writer bitterly calls for God's help (verses 1-2, 24). What is up for debate is why the writer is feeling God's wrath (verses 3-11). Some think this is a penitential psalm, perhaps from an Israelite in exile. Others have offered this is more like Job, with terrible suffering arriving for an unknown reason. Verse 8 certainly sounds like the book of Job, especially in a culture where sickness and sin were tied so closely together. The tone changes in verse 12 where confidence is found in God and what God can do and has done. The appeal here is for God to act so that He may be glorified and worshiped (verses 21-22). The psalm concludes with a wonderful reminder that everything changes but God. Verses 25-28 override the doubts of the hour with faith!

## **Psalm 103**

Psalm 103 begins a group of psalms of praise, psalms 103-107. They are so similar in theme that 103 and 104 may even be companions, designed to go together. 103 begins the series with self-talk. There is exhortation here to self given by self that says "Self, we need to be praising God" (verses 1-2, 22b). Along the way are some of the most famous and beautiful sentiments in all the psalms. Verse 2b provides a wonderful illustration of contrasting parallelism, as the opposite of "praise" is "forget." Verse 8 is an almost an exact quote of God's self-revelation in Exodus 34:6. Tremendous comfort is found in verse 14, where the psalmist says God knows us better than we know ourselves and yet still loves and blesses us. Verse 18 underlines that we must not abuse this love. Trusting obedience and godly fear are the key links to knowing this God's covenant love (verses 11, 13). The psalm ends with ever widening circles of praise (verses 19-22).

## **Psalm 150**

This song of praise does not ask for anything, but simply and elegantly rings out praise to God. As such it stands as the last entry in the psalter, and the summary of all five books in Psalms. The book of Psalms is composed of five separate books that were all put together into one book, and as we have seen in reading through the psalms each of the first four books ends with a doxology (41:13; 72:18-19; 89:52; 106:48). Psalm 150 stands as the doxology, or closing statement of praise, for not only the fifth book but all of Psalms. As Psalm 1 began with instruction on the kind of person who can worship and know God so now the book concludes with a call for everyone every where to praise our great God!

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**New Testament**

## Psalm 141

This is another of David's laments, beseeching God for help from those who attack him (verses 1-2, 8-10). It does feature however, some wisdom elements at its center (verses 3-7). The psalmist is concerned with evil in its many forms - speech (verse 3), the heart (verse 4), and actions (verse 4b). Verses 6-7 are notoriously difficult to translate and understand. Verse 6 may mean when those who torment the psalmist are judged (executed) they will see how right the psalmist was. Verse 7 seems to be a proverbial saying that the wicked are plowing and slaughtering the righteous. The psalmist goes from that to appeal to God for His help and deliverance (verses 8-11). Verse 10 has the "let their sin boomerang back on them" idea that is common in the psalms.

## Psalm 101

This is a royal psalm. It is by the king and it is about the king and his rule. The psalm's eight verses are stuffed to the brim with ideas about the person and life of the leader (verses 1-4), and about the quality of those who follow him (verses 5-8). In a real way it is a promise to rule and reign as God would have His king to do. There is nothing here that is hard to understand. The difficulty, as David's own life shows, is living out what is vowed here. Godly leadership begins with the leader himself and then includes him actively leading his people to also serve the Lord.

## Week 52

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