

NCTM, Monday Night Series, 1992. 'Psalms' G. C. Bingham.

## ***Introductory Study—'Psalms'***

### **WELCOME TO 1992 SERIES ON THE PSALMS**

A welcome to those who have been in this or other classes previously and a special welcome to those who are newcomers. This study on the Psalms should prove very worthwhile and we ask you to bear with the way we teach and conduct the class, until you feel at home, and can begin to grasp the way we go about things. It is possible that a whole new world will open up to us, and it is worth persevering.

### **THE PATTERN FOR THE YEAR**

For the first two terms we will be studying the 'Book of the Psalms', and in particular, selected Psalms from the five divisions of the Book. In the third and fourth terms we will be looking at The Song of Solomon'. Should we complete it before the end of the fourth term we will resume our studies in the Psalms. Introductions to the Book of Psalms can be read in Bible Dictionaries and Encyclopedia. A very good one is in the *New Bible Dictionary (IVP, 2nd. Ed. 1982)* on pages 992-996. Other introductions can be found in one volume or multi-volumes series commentaries. Another good one is the *Word Bible Commentary Psalms 1-50* (Word Books, 1983, Vol. 1) on pages 25-56. This last Introduction is specialised. A good commentary is in the SCM Old Testament Library, by Artur Weisler called *The Psalms* (1962). H.C. Leupold's *Exposition of Psalms* (Baker, 1959) makes very good reading. For the most part students will not need to refer to commentaries. Certainly new members of the class should relax, and simply read the Psalms, especially the ones selected, and if possible before and after they are expounded.

The Psalms and the Song of Solomon have been chosen this year to go with the course on biblical counselling. There is so much human material-living relational material-in these two books as to provide so-called 'models' and 'case-histories' for those interested in counselling.

### **The Shape and Nature of the Book of the Psalms**

Probably this Book—or portions of it—are read more than any other book in the 66 books of the Bible. This is because it is one of the most human documents of human history. Some of us go time and again to the Psalter because the moods, the feelings and the situations we experience have been the same as that of the Psalmists, and we take comfort and courage from the fact that we are not on our own in such situations. We are helped by those who went before us. The matters of life, of worship, praise and adoration of God as Creator, the richness of the creation, the delight in living, the nature of God as both Creator and Redeemer, the fact of human sin and its sorrow, the guilt and fear we bear for our sinfulness, the grace and love of God in His divine mercy are all contained in this great book. The nature and beauty of law is also a great theme, the giving of it to the nation of Israel, the rarity of it, and the benefits that come to those who obey it. With this gift come also the other gifts of God—His election of Israel, His covenant, His liberation of them as a slave people in Egypt, the great saga of that liberation, the years in the wilderness, the giving to them the promised land, and then God's

care of them in it, along with the festivals and fasts, the establishment of the holy city—Jerusalem—and **the temple on Mount Zion**. There are the special songs of ascents, there are laments for the judgements of God—so terribly deserved for idolatry and apostasy. There are cries for mercy and salvation by those burdened with sin, and for protection where the cruelty of ruthless enemies threatens life. There are also songs in exiles, and yearnings for worship, for use of the 'Songs of Ascent' the congregation knew in the older times of worship.

Because of this scholars have a fascinating time, trying to figure out who wrote certain psalms, what were the occasions of their composition and their use, and why there should be the imprecatory psalms—those that call down judgement upon the enemies of the composers.

## **The Formation of the Psalter**

The Book of Psalms consists of a collection of poems not intended to be read so much as sung, and to be used in worship; Literally the Hebrews word for 'psalm' (Greek psalmos) are *zimir*, *zimrah* and *mizmor* and mean 'a song of praise'. Such psalms are found in other societies than Israel, and precede Israel's entrance into Caanan. Of course the human race has ever sung its songs and saga. The Song of Moses (Exod. 15) is one of Israel's oldest hymns. There is his beautiful Song of Praise in Deuteronomy 32, and his Song of Blessing in 33. There is the Song of Deborah in Judges 5, and the Song of Hannah in I Samuel 2. 73 songs are attributed directly to David, some to Asaph (50; 73-83), to the sons of Korah (42-49; 84-85; 87-88) to Solomon (72; 127), to Heman (88), Ethan (89) and Moses (90). The Psalter is composed of five books, the divisions being as follows—Book I Psalms 1-41; 11, 42-72; 111, 73-89; IV, 90-106; V, 107-150. Each Book closes with a doxology.

The Psalter has been called 'the hymn-book of the second temple' which does not mean many of the psalms were not written before then, but that they were collected for the purpose of worship. We can conjecture that such songs were sung continuously, and that they deeply influenced the life, ethics, theology, worship and practice of the nation of Israel. They have passed into the Christian church and are part, also, of its life and liturgy and thinking. Someone once said that David slew more with his harp than his sword. Music with words and words with music continue to be dynamic in all cultures and societies. The Psalter never ceases to have an extraordinary power in the lives of those who use it.

## *A Precis of Psalm One*

(i) **Verse 1(a).** Psalter—and this *psalm*—*begins with a beatitude*, i.e. 'happy, very happy'. For 'beatitude' see Genesis 1:22, 28; 2:3; 9: 1; 9: 1; 12:3, etc. In Psalms 1:1; 2; 2:12; 32:1, 2; 33:12; 34:8; 40:4; 41:1; 65:4 ; 84:4, 5, 12; 89:19; 94:12; 106:3; 112: 1; 119:1, 2; 128: 1; cf. Matthew 5:3-10 and the 7 blessings of the Revelation (1:3; 14:12-13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7; 22:14). (a) God blesses Man and creation, (b) Man blesses God, (c) Man blesses his fellow creatures. Being blessed is the ideal state of being in shalom—peace—having joy, security, serenity. God's blessing the assurance every person needs for true life.

(ii) **Verse 1(b).** *The cause of blessing:* (a) refusal of evil and refusal to be guided by evil; refusal to make one's society one of sinners, and refusal to join with them as scoffers and mockers of God and good, (b) aligning oneself with the law of the Lord, for which see Psalm 19:7-14; Psalm 119:1-176. (c) delighting in the law and meditating upon it. Note 'law' in N.T. does not mean 'condemnation of the law', but the law of love, i.e. the law of Christ. Note the phrases, 'delight in', 'meditate upon'<sup>1</sup>. They indicate no terror of the law, no seeing it as 'heavy' or burdensome (cf I John 5:3. 'Law' was 'torah' i.e. 'instruction').

(iii) **Verse 3(a).** *State of blessing:* (a) the person is like a tree. The tree is a great theme throughout Scripture from Genesis 2:9—Revelation 22:2. Note the uses of a tree-shade, place of nesting, source of fruitfulness, picture of God's Kingdom, has powers of healing. Can be a source of building, furniture, warmth. (b) the source of growth is the functional planting-'by streams of water'. Note the meanings of 'water' throughout Scripture, especially 'life'. See Psa. 46:4; Ezek. 47:1-12; Rev. 22:2.

(iv) **Verse 3(b).** *Source of blessing for others:* note principle of 'fruitfulness' from Genesis 1:28 to Revelation 22:5, especially John 15:1-8; Galatians 5:22-23; Philippians 1: 11; Revelation 22:5. Withered leaves are not the state of the tree. *Note:* Verse 3(c) does not mean a tree, but the state of a man of God who is as a tree.

(v) **Verses 4-5.** *The state of the wicked:* (a) by contrast the life of the wicked is not like the person who refuses evil, espouses good, lives in the law and delights in it. The sinner establishes nothing: note that chaff is fragmentary, establishes no heritage, is lost in the wind (or burned in the fire). See Jer. 17:8; Job 8:16, Eccls. 8:10-13 and all the biblical Wisdom literature—sin is foolishness, (b) 'The wicked will not stand firm when Judgement comes, nor sinners when the virtuous assemble' (JB)—life is always uneasy in the depths of deliberately sinful men: fear of judgement is always present. Contrast 'the assembly of sinners' and 'the assembly of the righteous'.

(vi) **Verse 6.** **NRSV**, "For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked shall perish". The Psalmist is bringing his conclusion by way of a contrast. Whatever the righteous may think under difficulty, opposition, scorn and adversity, the truth of verse 6 still obtains.

**Conclusion.** If we are talking about a sane, fulfilling life, lived in good health of mind and spirit, then Psalm I is as good a prescription as we can find. It is simple, easily understood, the true way to go! Blessing is a state of being that makes for true health, for purpose and direction life.

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<sup>1</sup> See my 'The Christian Meditator (NCPI, 1986). Meditation is a rich Christian discipline and source of great blessing. We must take off time to be meditate. No other faith or religion has as rich a practice as biblical meditation.

## *A Precis of Psalm Two*

(i) **Verses 1-3** are the *first* strophe. Original setting: the coronation of a new king about to take place. The old king has subjugated the nation: the new king is opposed by these nations. In verse 1 there is a combined conspiracy. 'in vain' foreshadows the defeat of the kings and their peoples. For 'counsel' see Psalm 1:1. 'The LORD' means Yahweh. 'his anointed' means the messiah or king. Verse 3 speaks of liberation through revolution.

(ii) **Verses 4-6** are the *second* strophe. Opens with the scornful laughter of God, as He surveys the nations pitifully opposing Him. He is the God of the nation (Pss. 22:28; 47:8; 99:1; 97:9). 'sits in the heavens;' shows God's lofty sovereign Being. Man lives on the earth. The nations have 'rage' (2:1). God has wrath. He has fury. These are both terrifying to the nations (cf. Rom. 1: 18), since God *acts*. He has His plan for history which will, in fact, benefit the nations. The statement of verse 6 makes 'his anointed' into 'my king' and later (v.7) 'my son'. The nations belong to God by creation (Acts 17:26-27), Israel by special covenant. 'Zion my holy hill' is Jerusalem, sanctified by the temple. God Himself announces the facts: the whole world must be silent in the face of them.

(iii) **Verses 7-9** are the *third* strophe. Psalm 2 and 110 have similarities especially with regard to God's sovereignty to the nations and His king who rules them (110; 1, 5-6). The Psalmist the new king-tells of his authentication of coronation, and the charter given him under Yahweh. He is the son of God<sup>1</sup>, in some sense equal with the 'old' king, Yahweh (cf. Eph. 5:5). The Father-King tells him that this day, 'today'-the day of his adoption-is the day when he can ask for his heritage. To be the son of the father is to be the prime claimant to the heritage.<sup>2</sup> Here the very nations which would wrest sovereignty from the Lord (Yahweh) are the heritage of the Son-king. He is permitted to ask boldly (Psa. 89:26f.; 11 Sam. 7:14). He will inherit the earth (cf. Rom. 4:15). 'the ends of the earth'<sup>3</sup> is parallel with 'the nations'-he will have sovereignty over all. It is not merely *possession*, but *sovereignty* over all, defeating the rebellion of the nations. V.9 uses the terms of conquest, pulverizing the enemies. The N.T. references to this (Rev. 2:26; 12:5; 19:15) are testimony and explanation. 'Rod' has two meanings-two elements—(a) a destructive element, (b) the symbol of rulership. A point is that the terrible nations facing God in their rebellion are fragile as earthen pots!

(iv) **Verses 10-12** are the *fourth* strophe. In the light of the new, strong Son-King the nations had better beware, change their minds, cease their rebellion and come to submission. Recognition of the facts constitutes wisdom. 'Fear and trembling' are constantly found in Scripture, being the true beginning of wisdom. To 'kiss the feet' is to submit to the conqueror. Some versions have 'kiss the Son', i.e.. the feet of the new king in submission. That nations may *rage* (v.1; Psa. 46:6) but they face a stronger element in the wrath of the king, who is one with the LORD. He brooks no rebellion. For this reason never be outside the refuge which is Him!

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<sup>1</sup> In the O.T. no individual is addressed as being uniquely and peculiarly the Son of God. Cf. Psalm 89:26-27; II Samuel 7:14.

<sup>2</sup> Inheritance or heritage is a prime theme in the Old and New Testaments. To have no heritage is to have nothing.

## *A Precis of Psalm Sixteen*

**Introduction:** A Miktam has been thought to be 'a golden psalm', 'a golden jewel', 'an inscriptional psalm' and so, but probably the meaning has been lost.

In this Psalm the writer is in a wonderful position in life. He is devoted to God, rejects idolatry, delights in God and is glad of the land he has and the heritage he will pass on. His wisdom comes from God, and he deliberately centres upon God and shall remain stable. His delight is in the Lord, and he is not afraid of the emptiness of death. Rather he already sees and walks the path of life, knowing fullness of joy, now, and the pleasures that God gives him.

The Psalm divides itself into three strophes according to Artur Weiser, i.e. verses 1-4, 5-8 and 9-11.

*Strophe 1. The Psalmist has trust only in God and for His true people.*

**Verse 1.** The Psalmist is faced with many dangers, and invokes God as his 'strong God' (Leupold). A refuge is a wonderful place for security. Moreover, he sees no other and hides himself in God by trust and choice of will. **Verse 2.** He says to Yahweh, 'You are my Adonai,' for he needs one Lord. No man can serve two lords. Later (v.4) he refuses the choice of a god as a lord. Every man needs 'a good' i.e. happiness, security, the thing of certainty, the filler-out of his being. The Psalmist gladly confesses that outside of God he has no good. Inside Him—his refuge—he has all good. **Verse 3.** He lives in a land where there are two kinds of folk, (i) 'the saints, (ii) the idolators. The saints are those who are holy, who dwell in God's salvation, who witness to a world that there is holiness for men and women who are in covenant (Lev. 11:44; Exod. 19:5-6; cf. Dan. 7:13ff.). These have the nobility and as he delights in God who sanctifies them, so he delights in them. It is good to see a good man! **Verse 4.** By contrast there are unholy ones—the idolators. David refuses to participate in false propitiation ('libations of blood') and false use of names—use of false names, supposed to have power since all names have power for life and death. Yahweh—the Name—is the only one on his lips.

*Strophe 2. The richness of a life in full communion with Yahweh.*

**Verse 5.** It is with God Himself that he communes. God is food and drink to him the only ones that he knows—and at the same time his lot is in the hand of God. **Verse 6.** The lines or boundaries of his land enclose good soil and fertile fields, and this he will not be ashamed to pass on to his children., Meanwhile he partakes of it, himself. David does not limit inheritance just to material possession. **Verse 7.** Blessing flows from an overflowing heart—blessing upon God. Man ever lacks wisdom, and God's counsel is the only trustworthy one. Moreover it is immediate, never withheld and is practical. In the night he knows this counsel to be true. His heart (Heb. 'kidneys') agrees with this, assents to it and asserts it as being wise. (Night is the time when doubts come most freely and accusingly, e.g. 'Has this been the right guidance?') **Verse 8.** As in verses 1 and 2 he will exercise his will, he deliberately concentrates upon God to the exclusion of others and other things. This is what will keep him stable

in the face of things might terrify or tempt. God is always at his right hand—the place of honour and power.

*Strophe 3. The joy of hope in the faithful Yahweh.*

**Verse 9.** Undoubtedly two things are in the mind of the Psalmist in this strophe, (i) the future, (ii) the matter of death. Since he has set God always before him and has rejoiced only in God, life will always continue but death will not. 'Soul' would mean his whole inner being—himself. 'Body' is important because it is the indicator of where and how life is. **Verse 10.** He is not afraid of death generally—that which is a universal fear—nor is he afraid of death in particular, i.e. his own impending one. Since his whole being is in God, he has nothing to fear. **Verse 11.** This is one of the most powerful of Old Testament sayings. The Psalmist has already been shown the path of life and has walked in it, i.e. in communion with God, since God *personally* gives him counsel and personally shows him the way to walk and the manner of walking. Yet he knows he is going to go on walking, even after going through the valley of death, and will know the presence of God no less—but more—and the fulness of joy which is God Himself. God is a God of pleasure. Suffering is not difficult to find, but the person who finds joy has triumphed in life. This is the joy of the Lord (cf. I Cor. 2:6-10).

## PSALM SIXTEEN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

We remember the significance of Psalms in the New Testament<sup>1</sup>. In our precis—as in other Psalms—we refrained from working back to Psalm 16 from the New Testament, but the Psalms shine with their richest light when used in the apostolic truth. In Luke 24:25-26, 44-46, Jesus said the Old Testament prophesied the matter of his resurrection (cf. Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33), and Paul said (I Cor. 15:3-4) that Christ was & raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures'.

Peter at Pentecost used Psalm 16:8-11 in Acts 2:25-28 but we need to read Acts 2:22-33 to get the full exposition of Psalm 16:8-11. Seeing, then, that the death of Jesus did not allow him to see corruption, we understand even more than the writer of Psalm 16 could have understood (cf. I Peter 1:10-12; 11 Pet. 1:20-21). Likewise Paul used Psalm 2:7, Isaiah 53:3, and Psalm 16:10. We can conclude then that the New Testament usages of the Psalm indicate that Psalmist had a rich understanding of the resurrection.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Luke 24:27, 44; Acts 2:25-28; 4:25 and constant use of Psalms 2 and 110.

## *A Precis of Psalm Thirty*

**Introduction:** According to various ideas the heading can mean a Song which was used at the dedication of the Temple site (Leupold), a Song used at the Dedication of the Temple in Solomon's time, a Song used prophetically by David for the Dedication of the Temple, or a Song used at Hanukkah—the Feast of Dedication (John 10:22) for the commemoration after the Temple had been desecrated by Antiochus Epiphanes (I Maccabees 4:52ff.). Seen as a Psalm in itself it may have been used constantly at Hanukkah no matter what its origin, in which case may well be a Psalm of David.

**Verses 1-3.** In **verse 1** the Psalmist immediately addresses God for what has happened. In v. 1 he extols God for lifting him up out of death. This resembles Paul's experience of 11 Corinthians 1:3-11. Often a Psalmist simply extols God for His own Being (Psa. 145: 1; 118:28), but here praise has two elements (i) the Psalmist's foes thought they had grounds for rejoicing over him because of a terrible calamity which had hit him, and (ii)—Verses 2-3—the writer was brought out of a drastic illness which had seemed terminal. It was intolerable that the enemies of the godly should triumph. **Verse 2.** Psalmists have cried many times for deliverance (e.g. Psa. 40:1) but this is not just a pit of fearful circumstances, but the pit of near-death. **Verse 3.** God is the Healer (Exod. 15:26, where healing lies in keep God's laws) and has snatched the Psalmist out of death.

**Verses 4-5.** Verse 4 calls for 'the saints'—those not his foes but his friends and the friends of God—to join in his rejoicing. Health after sickness is glorious, for it speaks of renewed fellowship with God—fellowship which had partially been lost. Verse 5 tells us firstly that the Psalmist had warranted the wrath of God by what he had done. He acknowledges this fact and accepts the 'time of weeping'. He contrasts the comparatively short time of suffering because of anger with the never-ending favour (Heb. *ratson*) of God. This does not mean the time of God's wrath is a light one indeed to the contrary—but by comparison is light. We need to see Hosea 11:8f. and Isaiah 54:8-10 in the light of Psalm 38. The principle of judgement which restores brings incredible joy (cf. Psa. 4:7; 43:4; 16:11-12), because the glory of God's grace is so personal and so beautiful.

**Verses 6-8.** **Verse 6** reverts back to the state of the Psalmist before his sin which brought wrath and terrible sickness. He had boasted that his prosperity was immutable, but he thought in terms of a self-piety which ensured a self-success. Verse 7a shows that indeed under God he had been immovable as a mountain for prosperity was taken as the very favour of the Lord, but it was self-gratulation by the Psalmist, not ascribing to God his being 'established as a strong mountain'. Verse 7b shows that God 'hid His face'—a sad and awful happening for one used to the presence which brought joy. So—in his sickness and suffering the Psalmist became dismayed.

**Verses 8-10.** In **verse 8** the Psalmist recalls vividly the prayer he prayed his misery and fear. First—verse 9—there was the point made that having come to know God and the truth of His Being (cf. Exod 34:6-7) and lived in the rich life of His covenant, what advantage would there be in the death of one of God's saints? Second, would it

accomplish anything? (Note: 'Me Psalmist not saying death ends all, but *death ends what is good, here, on the earth, now!*). Now that the Psalmist can praise God, and tell of His faithfulness, what point would be served by God's anger destroying him? In **Verse 10** he prays in dependent simplicity for deliverance, speaking of God being *gracious* to him and being his *Helper*. He has seen his foolishness, his pride in himself and is repentant. He is also aware of the terrible plight into which he has come.

**Verses 11-12. Verse 11.** What might have proved to be a funeral service now comes to be an occasion of sheer delight by the restoration to health by God in answer to his prayer. Yet it is not so much the prayer as the state of heart and mind of the one who has prayed. This has fitted him for the joy that has come. What sheer relief. The garments of penitence have been exchanged for those of merriment. See Psalm 118:27-29; 149:1-4 for this kind of joy and praise but especially see Isaiah 51:11 for the principle of the joy of restoration after the long night of weeping for their sin and God's judgement now completed. Again, Isaiah 54:7-8 shows the steadfast love of the Lord endures for ever. Grace never wanes in the God of love! That is why in verse 12 the worshipper—who has called others to worship with him—can never cease to be grateful, and must forever be vocal in worship.



## *A Precis of Psalm Thirty Two*

**Introduction:** *The Psalm of Forgiveness.* Maskil: the meaning of this word has been lost. Probably a musical classification, although some interpret the word as 'teaching' (didactic). The occasion of the Psalm is not nominated, but it is certainly after the singer has come into the relief of forgiveness and justification. It could easily be a Psalm of David which follows Psalm 51, so that Psalm becomes itself a commentary on 32. Notice that the Psalm was Augustine's favourite and Luther called it one of the Pauline Psalms. Paul quotes it in Romans 4:68.

**Structure of the Psalm.** It divides fairly easily into six sections, i.e. verses 1-2; 3-4; 5; 6-7; 8-9; and 10-11. Some would include verse 10 with verses 8-9.

**Verses 1-2:** In this section there are two beatitudes. The two verses do not say how the blessings have come, but they avow that they have happened. In a way verses 3-4 could have been a build up to 1 and 2, and verse 5 an explanation preceding the first 2 verses, but the Psalmist is bursting with the wonder of what had happened. What had happened? The Psalmist has been (a) *forgiven* his transgressions (cf. Exod. 34:6-7), (b) his sin *is covered* finally, and (c) no sin is now *imputed* to him. In this case it is 'he', i.e. a person. Which person? Any person in the same situation. The first 6 chapters of Leviticus tell us how sins were forgiven in Israel-by sacrifices. Here there is no mention of the how—i.e. the manner. Even so the Psalmist knows what has happened, and he is in the flush of joy, peace and happiness. When verse 2 says, 'in whose spirit is no deceit' means he has faced up to his sin. Sin carries its own deceit (Heb. 3:13: cf. Exod. 34:7). As we see in our next section, David had tried to deceive himself in regard to his sin. Having no deceit is not a way of being forgiven, but it necessary for repentance and forgiveness.

**Verses 3-4.** Here is the picture of a person who refuses to acknowledge his sin and tries to handle his guilt by his own means. If we understand Psalm 31:9-10, Romans 1: 18-32, and Psalm 38:1-8 then we will understand that the guilt of sin is dynamic and troubles the whole of the person. Dr. Paul Tournier the Swiss Christian psychiatrist said that the words of these verses describe any neurotic patient in his clinic. The words in these two verses are set out in Hebraic meaning, i.e. 'My marrow was turned into the drought of summer. The Psalmist refused to confess, and God kept at him personally until he broke (cf. Psa. 51: 17).

**Verse 5.** Now comes the confession, the glad acknowledgment of what he had refused to admit. Paul in Romans 4 sees the forgiveness as gratuitous, i.e. is not earned or merited by some act on the part of the penitent. Some translations have 'the guilt of my sin', and some 'the iniquity of my sin'. Sin has happened: guilt goes on. Now guilt is finished. The man is wholly free.

**Verses 6-7.** After the flood of judgement in the conscience, the calm ocean follows. Prayer is now a joyous thing, seeing there is nothing between God and the worshipper. Times of distress do come, but they cannot inundate the man who has received

blessing. God becomes a refuge—a term often used in the Psalms- and the man is both preserved from harm, and delivered from evil.

**Verses 8-9.** As we said, this could also include verse 10. The Psalmist is addressing others—those who might fall into the errors the Psalmist did. He addresses his audience as a person who has found wisdom, but really it is God who is speaking. Knowing what way to go has to do with covenant, law and the personal sense of God's presence (cf. Jer. 10:23; Psalm 119:105; Prov. 20:24; 16:9). The 'I will counsel you with my eye upon you', must be God (cf. Psa. 16:7). The listeners, for their part, must learn to have a submissive spirit, or they will be land where the Psalmist has been-in sin.

**Verses 10-11.** Here the 10th. verse gives a contrast to what happens to the wicked. Covenantal love always surrounds the righteous, the one who trusts in the Lord. 'Steadfast love' is a covenant quality of the Lord (Exod. 34:6). Submission brings great joy. So in verse 11 the Psalmist bursts into praise—the joy he has expressed in the two beatitudes is impelling him to do this. Being forgiven does not result from a person's being 'righteous' nor from his being 'upright in heart'. Rather it is around the **other way**. One is these things because of knowing the grace of forgiveness of God, and then being in that state further motivates the worshipper to praise God.

## *A Precis of Psalm Thirty Seven*

**Introduction.** An acrostic Psalm, i.e. one which has verses beginning with letters of the Hebrew alphabet: in this case every two verses. This does not seem to limit the power of the Psalm which is a teaching one—in this case for comfort to the reader. This a Psalm for well-being, but not one for justifying God in His actions (theodicy).

**Verses 1-2.** Fret and envy arise against *the evil* of others, but are counterproductive, but both are corrosive (cf. Prov. 14:29-30) and evil dominates the life of the good man. Evil is always doomed to destruction—sooner or later.

**Verses 3-4.** Against fretting trust in the Lord. The Canaanites lost the land because of evil. Obedience ensures continuity in security. To 'take delight in the Lord' is to enjoy Him. This is not a way of getting one's desires fulfilled 'Deepest desires' spring from the nature of God.

**Verses 5-6.** 'Commit' and 'trust' are synonyms (cf. I Pet. 4:19). *Fret* and *envy* spring from anger that justice will not be done. All in obedience will be justified.

Verse 7 is a repetition of verses 1-2. See Psalm 40:1ff. Being 'still' and 'patient' is the sign and way of true trust. See Psalm 46: 10.

**Verses 8-9.** Wrath and fretting 'tend only to evil'. The 'rage of righteous' is dangerous. It is failure to trust God for the outcome: impatience for vengeance. 'wait for the Lord' is often used in the O.T.—the proof of trust is His justice and care. Note: 'possess the land' is a constant theme—vss. 3, 9, 11, 18, 22, 29, 34, 38. Evil's prosperity is always transitory.

**Verses 10-11.** The wicked were not promised the land: they are against the covenant, therefore they all do not prosper. The meek are not just dispositionally humble people, but those who obey the covenant (cf. Matt. 11:29; 5:5; Rom 4:13). 'Delight in the Lord' (v.4) brings 'delight in abundant prosperity'.

**Verses 12-13.** The wicked are not just after their own gain. The righteous constitute a confrontation to them. They must 'gnash their teeth' and plot against them; cf. Cain and Abel (Gen.4; cf. I John 3: 10-11). As in Psalm 2:4f. the Lord 'laughs at them'. He knows their terrible end is approaching.

**Verses 14-15.** The wicked are not content with plotting: they set out to destroy those who confront their consciences as 'the poor and needy' and 'those who walk uprightly'. Retribution comes to them as their purposes are foiled. God is passing on the news that there is no need for fretting or fuming over the prosperous wicked.

**Verses 16-17.** These verses have a touch of Proverbs 15:16-17; 16:8. The wicked are doomed to disaster but not 'the humble poor'. The wicked man always seems to be enjoying prosperity, but doom awaits him.

**Verses 18-19.** The theme of the 'faithful Creator' (I Pet. 4:19) and 'faithful covenant-God' keeps persisting. In the ultimate 'the blameless' will possess their heritage' and this even in times of famine, but there will be no heritage for the wicked.

**Verse 20.** The prosperity of the wicked are as ephemeral as once green grass is under the hot Middle-East pasture.

**Verses 21-22.** It is often the poor who are generous. Certainly the righteous *give* since they are *blessed* by the God who gives bountifully. They possess the land, whilst the wicked lose all. It may not always seem like this *presently*, but it *eventually* the case. Note: the *curse* of God was always a terror to the one cursed.

**Verses 23-24.** See Proverbs 20:24; Jeremiah 10:23. The mention here of a 'good man' (AV) i.e. one 'in whose way he delights' reminds us of the man of Psalm 1. This man who loves the law may have falls, but is not 'cast down' (AV) i.e. his fall is not final. None is perfect, and if there is a fall, then that one will be steadied, established.

**Verses 25-26.** The Psalmist witnesses to God's goodness that the righteous are never forsaken, nor their children forced to beg. The liberality of verse 21 causes a family to grow about him of children who are a blessing.

**Verses 27-28a.** Now the wicked are addressed, or is it the righteous who are tempted to do evil because the wicked *seem* to prosper? Renouncing evil and doing good means the righteous will always stand. The Lord has His eye on those doing justice. 'He will not forsake his saints' has been a great promise down through history. **Verses 28b-29.** Here a repetition of verses 9, 217 and 22 is stated. Those who keep covenant with the covenant-keeping God shall be blessed. (Why do wicked Israelites not learn from the fate of wicked Canaanites?).

**Verses 30-31.** Here wisdom, law and righteousness are linked—a key to the substance of each. This is, perhaps, the heart of the Psalm.

**Verses 32-33.** Malice, evil-speaking and false witness by the wicked will not triumph. This is a recurring theme in the Psalm.

**Verse 34.** Again there is the injunction to 'wait' (v.7. God will exalt the righteous).

**Verses 35-36.** The wicked man seems so triumphant, so successful; and suddenly all collapses; he is no more, he is *non est* as a person. Wickedness seems to triumph and so attracts many, but then it is deflated.

**Verses 37-38.** Those true to His covenant can be 'blameless', 'upright, and 'persons of peace', all of which makes for a godly line, i.e. 'posterity'. The prospects of the goodness of one's children and descendants is important to one's present living.

**Verses 39-40.** The figure so often used by the Psalmists of God being a refuge takes up all the ideas of 'trust', 'wait'. 'fret not' are caught up in this final promise of deliverance from the wicked, and final vindication. Wickedness falls, righteousness stands. It is not just that righteousness 'pays' and wickedness does not but there is only one way of living and he who is righteous lives in God's true way.

## *A Precis of Psalm Thirty Eight*

**Introduction. memorial offering** could mean 'to make remembrance' or 'for making a confession'. Certainly it has to do with the state of a penitent—'the Penitential Hymn of a Sick Man' (Kittel). The structure of the Psalm is (i) The Psalmist's prayer v. 1. (ii) the reason for his prayer—the judgement of God upon him in sickness, vs. 2-11, (iii) the reaction of his friends and enemies, vs. 12-20, (iv) his closing prayer, vs. 21-22. The Psalm is of immense value because it expresses a common human situation which is not always recognised as arising from sin. Whilst the Psalm reaches no other conclusion than that the sinner is wholly dependent upon God for release, Psalm 32 is helpful in seeing deliverance that comes <sup>1</sup>

(i) **Verse 1.** The Psalmist has no doubt that God is chastening him. Later he says it is for his sin (vs. 3-4). This raises the question of God visiting sinful humans with sickness,<sup>2</sup> and Exodus 15:25b--26 should be read. So also Deuteronomy chs. 28-30 and 32:39; 1 Samuel 2:6; Psalm 50:22.

(ii) **Verses 2-11.** In this passage we are reminded of the principle found in Psalms 32:3-4 (cf. Deut. 28:15-46), i.e. sin brings sickness and confusion (cf. Rom. 1: 18, 24, 26, 28). What is seen here—as in Romans 1:18 ff. (cf. Ps 7:11; 10:13; Eccles. 8:11-12) is that God is *personally* wrathful. For v.3. see Psalm 31:10. The Hebrew saw sickness as a visitation from God when His love for Him and his own friends was broken. V.3 makes God's wrath and a person's sin the one. V.4 speak a man drowning in the ocean under burden—mountainous waves—of his sins, and especially of their guilt. Verses 5-7 show the bodily condition—today called 'psycho-somatic' by some --- caused by guilt. From verses 3-8 he has exposed this to God hence the term 'for the memorial offering'. The Psalmist is really very near to God in the wrath that has come upon him. There is dialogue that is Divine-human! This expose of God's wrath is remarkable, and most beneficial for readers of our times. The Hebrew knew everything came from God, even if—as in the Book of Job—it came via Satan the accuser<sup>3</sup>.

(iii) **Verses 9-20.** Verses 9 and 10 are in the form of an appeal to God. The Psalmist is appealing to the mercy and grace of God by his very condition—even the judgement that has come upon him from God, and as an Israelite does this in the light of Exodus 34:6-7. This man is not apostate, has not sinned with a high hand, and is an applicant for Divine mercy. How would we deal with such a case today? Verses 11-20 deal generally with the attitudes of his friends and enemies. V. 11 may indicate an actual loathsome sickness—a plague. In the Book of Job Job's friends make it clear he is suffering because of his sin. Friends, companions, kinsmen—all alike—shun the Psalmist, and some become critical, trying to demean and then destroy him. **Verses 13** onwards seem to show that he accepts this alienation and hatred also as part of God's judgement on him—so he does not fight the situation. Even so, he sees the sin of his enemy: whatever his own faults these opponents are not justified in their attitudes. So in verses 15-16 he calls for God to judge them. Verses

<sup>1</sup> Note: some have tried to place the event in David's life as to its actual situation, but these must be classed as guesses as there is no internal evidence.

<sup>2</sup> This subject has been taken up in a full way in my *The Wounding and the Healing* (NCPI, new ed. 1990).

<sup>3</sup> In Revelation 12:10 (cf. Zech. 3:1-5; Job 1: 6-11; 2:1-6) Satan is the accuser. Whilst God allowed Satan to strike Job with sickness and calamity we should not (a) think that such judgement always comes via Satan, and (ii) that Satan has, of himself, power to inflict sin and judgement. That is God's prerogative.

17-18 reiterate the pain of God's wrath and he is now driven to explicit confession and sorrow for his sin: this is confession. He is now in the clear, so that his claim (v.20), 'I follow after good', is not false. Indeed the whole Psalm shows his agony because of his sin, and his application to God where others would have fled and hidden, or with calloused conscience would have braved it out. He is pleading his rightness before God in the face of the seen-tingly mighty triumph of his enemies over him. Verses 13-14 show that he has remained dumb in the face of the machinations and accusations of these enemies.

(iv) **Verses 22-23.** Abandonment of him by God would be intolerable. He pleads the Divine mercy for his case that he have his union restored with God. His urgency does not mean lack of reverence. His belief in God is that God saves His covenant people, especially when they are repentant, when His wrath has run its course, and when the time for restoration has come. This is the message spoken so many times in Israel, and it is all in the light of Exodus 34:6-7.

## *A Precis of Psalm Forty*

**Introduction.** The Psalm is directed to 'the choir director' or 'director of music', its claim to be Davidic is reasonable—David had a number of experiences which could have fitted the Psalm. The Psalm seems to be in two sections, (i) verses 1-10, prayer for deliverance, deliverance and gratitude for the same, (ii) the further tensions under which a person of faith lives who has known God's salvation. Both sections have their subsections, and so much so that certain scholars have felt the Psalm is a 'cut-and-paste' form of liturgy for use at certain times. However there is no psychological contradiction in the two sections.

**Verses 1-3.** Verse 1 speaks of a difficult situation, though probably not a literal pit or prison (cf. Jer. 38:6). It was however a painful state from which self-rescue was impossible. The prayer was one of trustful faith, based, no doubt, on covenant assurance (Exod. 34:6-7). Verse two speaks of desolation, slime, insecurity (cf. Psa, 69:2, 13). Stability has come to the Psalmist out of his foot-slipping, increasingly bogged state: he can now proceed in true action of living. Verse 3 speaks of the great relief, the liberation of his heart, the creative state, yet all of Yahweh's grace—'the new song', which is a great theme of Scripture (Psa. 33:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; Rev. 5:9; 14:3; cf. 15:3). The effects of this liberation song will be strong, as, say, in Psalm 126:1-3.

**Verses 4-5.** Verse 4. Another psalmic beatitude—one amongst the many of all the psalms. In this case Yahweh blesses. First blessing is for not trusting the proud. Idolatry is placing that trust in false gods which belongs to God alone (cf Deut. 6:4), and this brings cursing and not blessing. Verse 5. So many and so wonderful are the deeds of the LORD that they are innumerable: none can describe their innate quality and beauty. The phrase, 'thy thoughts towards us', i.e. 'thy saving thoughts' (Weiser) shows the care of Yahweh to His covenant persons.

**Verses 6-10.** This passage tells of the true way of thanksgiving, and of worship. *Verse 6.* False trust in the ritual as an *ex opere operato* act is often spoken of in the OT. See I Samuel 15:22; Psalm 51: 16; Isaiah 1: 11. Jeremiah 6:20; 7:22-23. True sacrifices of the heart (Psa. 51:15-17) delight God (Gen. 8:20f). Verses 7 & 8 can be put together with the idea that God's grace does not work by our actions, for they do not motivate God. The Psalmist has come to the temple to do God's will. When a person truly perceives God's nature he is glad (delighted) to do God's will (cf. Heb. 10:5-9). This theme is worked out powerfully in Psalms 1; 19; 119. The law in the heart (Jer. 31:31-34) means innate and involuntary obedience.

**Verses 9-10** say that although God has wrought salvation for the Psalmist that one does not hide the fact or hold it to himself. It is his delight to share with the congregation in praise of God, for 'the redeemed of the Lord say so'! Note the many mentions of faithfulness, steadfast love, and mercy—all of Exodus 34:6-7—ad the power of these covenantal elements of God's nature in his life. They all echo the 'of grace and truth' of John 1: 14. Weiser translates 'steadfast love and faithfulness' rightly as 'thy grace and truth'.

**Verse 11-12.** Now we come to the tensions that lie within the life of faith. Having been delivered and having uttered gratitude to God, and witnessed to 'the great congregation'-all Israel-the pressures mounts, as always. In *verse 11* the continuing steadfast love and faithfulness of God is what he pleads for, knowing himself helpless without them—back in the pit again, so to speak. The conjunction 'for' of *verse 12* explains why he prays for help. We are back in Psalm 32:3-4, in Psalm 38:1-8: the man sees his sins, dreads their effects but trusts 'steadfast love and faithfulness'. God is with him in it all!

**Verses 13-15** are imprecatory-they are fighting the enmity, and this is a great issue in many of the Psalms. In *verse 13* the Psalmist is urgent in his cry for quick delivery. In *verse 14* he trusts God to ring the changes on his cruel enemies. In *verse 15* he prays for the burning shame that will appal his mockers.

**Verses 16-17.** (See Psalms 70:4-5). By contrast the Psalmist looks not only for himself but for 'all who seek thee' that they may 'rejoice and be glad in thee'. In *verse 16* is the memorable saying, 'those who love thy salvation'. These are the true worshippers crying gladly, 'Great is the Lord!' Salvation has come to them. Verse 17 shows the Psalmist does not presume upon God's grace, but continually pleads his personal poverty, his perpetual need. His trust is in God, but the existential anguish is there as always in the midst of personal tribulation, so that he cries the cry of faith, 'O, Lord, do not tarry!'



## ***A Precis of Psalms Forty-Two & Forty-Three***

**Introduction.** This beautiful Psalm does not tell us who is its author. Some commentators ascribe it to David, some to a man presently separated from the life of Jerusalem, possibly in the area where the waters of Jordan gather from its springs and rush down in cataracts from the slopes of Mount Hermon. Yet others think the Psalmist to be a Jew writing in far exile, but the Psalm is pre-exilic since the temple is still standing. When **Psalms 42 and 43** are read together they compose one unit. **Psalm 43** is one of the few Psalms in the Psalter without a heading. The refrain of verses 6 and 11 in Psalm 42 is the same, and it is repeated in Psalm 43:5. Again, Psalm 43 verses 1-4 complete what is lacking in Psalm 42 where the man's enemies seemed to have triumphed over him, and God has not vindicated him.

**The Text of the Psalm.** *The First Strophe is verses 1-5* and they constitute one of the most transparent and moving expressions within human literature and psalmody. **The first stanza-Verses 1-3** is of one who 'hungers and thirsts for true righteousness', i.e. that personal relationship with God without which a person is not fully a human being. The picture is a female deer which the songster likens to his outgentle, quivering, neck outstretched and head towards the dry wadis, (creeks and flood waterways which are generally empty in dry times) hoping for water. Only those who have thirsted under terrible conditions can know how intense is the desire for quenching, and the Psalmist is insisting he is in great anguish for quenching. He really longs for God as the sinful man does not. God is **the living God**, and this term was understood in two ways by Israel, (i) God is the fountain of living waters, and as such gives life to man. God breathed into man the breath of life and he became a living soul. As the singers put it, 'All our springs are in you', because human resources must wait on the gift of God (Psa.87:7). So (ii), "Me living God' is always the God Who acts. So the Psalmist wants Him to act-now! Not having one's thirst quenched is intolerable suffering, and as this person lives more and more in a pagan land and away from the Temple, his desire for God increases. **'When shall I come and behold the face of God of God,'** he asks in anguish, to which question there is no answer. His thirst meets only with salty tears, not the sparkling fresh water of God's own life, satisfying him in the depths. The pagans cry—time and again—'Where is your God?' and their question is a taunt and torment to him.

**Verse 4.** As he is in pain of desire he mind goes back to when he had known rich worship of God, as he has led his people in worship. Who was this man who could lead the throng of worshippers at times of festival? He must have been a godly personage, someone known and recognised as a leader in worship. What sights they have been—those processional festal occasions! Doubtless they would ascend Zion's hillside sing psalms antiphonally or in response to the cantor—glad shouts songs and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival. Families thronging the way, children crying out and parents and grandparents singing their ancient songs—a colourful sight and occasion. There was only one people who could truly talk of 'the house of God', i.e. the temple, hence the words of another beautiful psalm accorded to the same Sons of Korah—Psalm 84:1-4. **Verse 5.** So the psalmist has sweet memory, and memory is precious for what happened in that past cannot be unhappened. What has happened is so, for ever. Yet, in another way, the Psalmist has sought refuge in the past and must now come back to the present reality and face it.

Perhaps he is telling his soul there is no need to be cast down, since his memory of worship is so sweet. Worship is the primary thing of human experience. Perhaps he is encouraging his soul out of being cast down and disquieted—both soul-shaking elements. That he can speak in this way says much for him—self-encouragement is not easy. So he speaks of 'the God of hope'. Hope means the future is in God's hands, therefore he will again come to worship Him Who is my help, and my God. It is the relationship which matters—the unbroken *personal* relationship.

*The Second Strophe*—verses 6-11—shows the poet with his soul still cast down, in spite of what he says to himself, but then it may have been more cast down had he not. Because he is cast down he draws even closer to God. He remembers him in order to be comforted. Perhaps he is looking at the waters rushing down Mount Hermon and hearing the roaring of them, and yet he may be reminded of the ocean and the waves rushing one upon the other. In any case it is the sound of cataracts and it seems that wave after wave of pressure and stress has gone over him and he cannot control them. But the, they are '**thy waves and thy billows**', i.e. not the waves and billows of others, so that he can be sure his distress comes from God. In this the singer was a true Israelite, one who believed that all life and death, trouble and joy came from God Who is Sovereign. So he believes that by day **the Lord commands His steadfast love** for the covenant-God 'abounds in steadfast love and faithfulness'. The same God gives a song in the heart—a new song—which the worshipper can sing (cf. Psa. 40:3), and in singing he further knows his God, and prayer can go up to 'the God of my life'—the God from whom his life flows. Thus he nestles into God and finds his refuge from sorrow. Yet sorrow still comes—verses 9-10, The enemy will not go away. Their words cause him to mourn because they are like blows which break his bones, which wound him deeply. They taunt him incessantly with '**Where is your God?**' If these pagans cannot leave off their tormenting it is because they, themselves, do not know God, and cannot abide that he claim he does. God is his Rock, his unfailing One. Why is he left to his mourning. In the midst of it he has again to encourage himself, so verse 11—he takes up the refrain of **verse 5** (cf. 43:5).

**Psalm 43:1-2.** If the matter were to be left there (42:5, 11), then at least he is insisting he will again praise God (v.11)—and this, presumably, at the temple in the holy city, Jerusalem. He has, however a strong prayer to make—'a prayer to the God of my life' (42:8), the first part of which is against his enemies. This prayer is strong. He is putting God on His own mettle. The covenant-God should defend His people, and he must. Still puzzled that God has seemingly cast him off, he insists that God is his refuge: he sought out no other. Strengthened even though feeling cast off he prays resonantly for what he most desires, for what he thirsts so deeply—Verses 3-4. In humility he acknowledges his helplessness and the need of God to move and send out light and truth, conducting him back to his beloved city and temple, and worship of the living God. He loves the dwelling place of God, but it is God he loves and desires with all his heart. What a beautiful term, 'God my exceeding joy!' i.e. 'the God of my joy!' No wonder he will praise him with the lyre, allowing the music of his soul to flow out to the God of his love. His final apostrophe cannot be bettered, 'O God, my God.' It is another, 'My Lord and my God!'

## *A Precis of Psalm Forty-Six*

**Introduction.** Title 'of Korah'. In a long line of the Levitical family from Kohath a son of Levi, Korah's sons in David's time were-amongst others-'put in charge of the service of song' (I Chron. ch.6). 'Alamoth' can mean 'maidens' or 'sopranos'. Various view exist of when and why the Psalm was sung, but the text gives no direct indication. It is the basis of Luther's battle-hymn, 'A safe stronghold our God is still'.

**The Structure of the Psalm.** Fits into 3 strophes<sup>1</sup> (Weiser), (i) verses 1-3, (ii) Verses 4-7, (iii) verses 8-11.

**Strophe 1.** Spoken within covenant, as indeed is Luther's hymn 'A Mighty Fortress'. See Psalm 16:1. A refuge from the *present* happenings. Some see it as the 'creation and dissolution of the world' (Weiser) but it seems to refer to physical calamities such as are known in earthquakes, volcanoes and consequent violent land-slides and movement that bring tidal waves (cf. Rev.8.; 11:13). It could also be the vanquishing of the Assyrians under Sennacherib (**H Kings 19:35; Isa. 17:14**). God is (a) a refuge fortress, hiding place, protection, and (b) 'a well proved help in troubles' (Leupold). In practice God can be depended upon since He alone is the One Who troubles the earth. **Therefore we will not fear** is the *credo* of the covenant people. Looked at *nationally*, it would seem the city of God is impregnable when the nations come against it, foaming up in violent movements towards Jerusalem. Looked at *personally*, it would seem that no matter what troubles come, God is **a very present help in trouble**. It *is now* He helps, not in the future only, and this is His character and nature. NB. The Jerusalem Bible adds the refrain of vs.. 7 and 11) to the first strophe as appropriate to the thought.

**Strophe 2.** Luther's 'His kingdom is for ever' is the theme here. Even so, it is all in the simplicity of quiet city. The strophe opens (v. 4), 'Lo, a river!' Rivers in the Scriptures provide symbols of various national powers, or conditions of nations and persons, e.g. the river of Gen. 2:10 flowing from Eden which becomes fourfold, and the four rivers have their own special significance, geographically and historically. See Gen. 15:18; Ezekiel 47:1-12; Revelation 9:14; 16:12; 22:1-2. In Isaiah 12:3 (cf. John 7:37-39) water is salvation. Jerusalem has no actual river but the fountain of Siloam flows water that keeps the city in time of beseigement. Luther translates, 'the city of God shall maintain its marvellous cheerfulness its little wells for these are the holy dwelling places of the Most High'. It is as another Eden. So (v.4) the city is satisfied with its gentle supply. More, God makes the city holy by His unending Presence. So the *holy temple*, etc. v.5 equals v.1--God sustains and protects the city (the nation, the person) immediately-'right early', 'at crack of dawn,<sup>2</sup> when the nations rage (cf. v.6 and Psalm 2:1. So in v.6 the very catastrophes which, it seemed, might overwhelm the city of God (vs.1-2) now, in fact, overwhelm the nations. See the power of Yahweh's ('Yahweh of Hosts') word-it breaks up the nations. His word created (Psa. 33:6; 148:5-6), and now (Psa. 18:13) it can destroy enmity against His people (His city).

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<sup>1</sup> A strophe is 'Any separate or extended section in a poem, opposed to the stanza, a group of lines which necessarily repeats a metrical pattern'. Macquarie Dictionary.

<sup>2</sup> Some think it refers to the defeat of Sennacherib in BC 701 11 Kings 19:35; Isa. 17:14).

The reason for their confidence is God Himself. 'The Lord of Hosts is His battle name. All hosts of heaven are His to command and He sets the disposition of the conflict. JB translates 'our citadel, the God of Jacob! 'If God be for us, then who can be against us'.

**Verses 1-7** are in the indicative, and they tell what is so. **Verses 8-11** are in the imperative. Who is called to see and believe (v.8)? Firstly Israel, for it is always to remember what God has done in the past. If this Psalm refers to the defeat of Sennacherib, then they have something to look at, but the audience is now all nations. Wars can only exist by His decision, and by His decision they will cease. All armaments and equipment will be destroyed. The command 'Be still,' (*NEB*, 'Let be then') means all the nations must pause and think—especially those who 'rage'. The heathen must come to see Yahweh as God. There is none other God. His will be the triumph over all nations (see **Psalm 47** here). See Isaiah 2:1-4; Micah 4:1-3; Isaiah 11:6-9.

When the Psalm is applied personally then it is of great benefit in seeing God's sovereignty in each human life, and tension and restlessness are shown to have no basis.

The refrain of **vs.11** rounds off the Psalm of confidence.

## *A Precis of Psalm Fifty*

**Introduction.** Leupold calls this Psalm 'True Worship'. It is not clear whether this is a Psalm of Asaph or to him, but it is one we approach with the same awe that we should approach any theophany, i.e. visual manifestation of God as with Abraham (Acts 7:1-2), Moses (Exodus 3:19), Elijah (I Kings 19), Isaiah (Isaiah. 6) and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1). When one is brought into the celestial dimension of God, then one sees and understands all things from an entirely new angle. The Psalm is about covenant, the right and wrong uses of sacrifice, hypocritical worship and action of life, and the heart of God towards His people, so that they should be delivered from misunderstandings and now the liberating judgement of God.

**Verses 1-2.** Three names of God are given in the first verse—El, 'the Mighty One'; Elohim, God; and Yahweh, the LORD, the Self-existent covenant God. This God is gloriously displayed. The whole earth is summoned before Him (cf. 49:1, a commentary on 50: 1). A judgement is pending and He is Judge (vss. 4, 6, 2 1). From sunrise to its setting this One will hold His judgement. The place of His appearing was Zion, for He dwelt in the temple there. Out of this glorious city 'God shines forth'-so beautiful the theophany.

**Verse 3.** Theophanic fire and action accompany His coming as in Deuteronomy 33:2; Psalm 18:7; 29:1-11; Exodus 34:29-35, and scenes in the Book of the Revelation (cf.4:2-8; 8:5). They are indications of His holiness-the essence of judgement. God does not keep silence, any more. He is about to judge.

**Verses 4-5.** Calling to the heavens and the earth is using them as witnesses in His court case with those who are His covenant people. This is as Moses does in Deuteronomy 32:1. Now the courtroom is set-so to speak. In His command God is calling his 'faithful ones', i.e. those under covenant who sealed the covenant with appropriate sacrifice (Exod.24:4ff.) and so are responsible for their faithfulness or otherwise according to that sacrifice. In this vast arena of judgement we have more than overtones of that which is eschatological since the whole earth is summoned to the judgement, even though those of Israel are to be judged. As for God He has celestial attestation that He is the true Judge (cf. Gen. 18:25). His judgement can be called in question.

**Verse 7.** God is speaking to the godly ones of Israel: they are to hear His judgements. 'I am God, your God,' is not said to all the vast audience of the world. The covenant people are those with special responsibility in worship. Whilst he is God of all people, He has special covenant relationship with Israel, but is Israel worshipping this God appropriately, especially as He is now revealed to them in theophany?

**Verse 8.** God is not reproofing them for the fact of their sacrifices. The fact is self-evident-they are always sacrificing, but-as the following verses show-there is such as thing as 'zeal without knowledge'.

**Verses 9-11.** Now God is telling them, 'I am not in need of what you are doing. I am not dependent upon you. You are dependent upon Me.' It is insolence for Israel to think it is supplying God with His needs, when He owns all things. They are taking the position that they are doing Him good! How could Man have the capacity to minister to the needs of this God Who now confronts them in His majesty and glory? All creation belongs to Him!

**Verses 12-13** underlines what He has just said. Would God ever be hungry that he should need their offerings? Would he eat the flesh of animals and drink their blood?

The answer is self-evident. Israel should remember the principle of Leviticus 17:11—not that it is mentioned here—namely that it is God who gives the principle of sacrifice—the altar.

**Verse 14.** Instead of giving to God the covenant people should offer thanksgiving to the God who gives all. It is to God they make vows as the Creator, the One Who is over all. They acknowledge Him as 'the Most High'. This is the true perspective of God and Man.

Verse 15. They will find Him their help in the day of trouble. He is the God who delivers—trouble being plenty in their lives. For His help and His nature they will give Him glory. They will hold a high view of Him.

**Verse 16-17** commences an address not to the 'faithful ones' (v.5) but the 'wicked ones'. They, too, are covenant people, but whereas the faithful ones were mistaken in their worship, these are evil in their intent. As wicked ones they go through the motions of religious righteousness, making out that they are not wicked (cf. Jer. 8:8; Isa. 29:13). At the same time they will not take discipline, i.e. obey law from the heart. They deliberately 'cast my words behind you', i.e. get them out of sight, recognition and confrontation.

**Verse 18-20.** The various attitudes and actions described are not those of true worshippers and authentic members of the covenant community. They are evil.

**Verse 21.** They have the effrontery to think God is as they are. He has been silent for His own reasons (cf. Eccles. 8:11; Rom. 3:25b; Acts 17:30) and they have thought 'that I was one like yourselves'. This is partly because of the deceit of sin, and hypocrisy by which they claim they are not evil. Well, God is silent no longer. It is His moment of judgement. He has come in theophanic glory to show them He alone is Judge!

**Verse 22.** The judgement has been made. Those in the category of wicked will have judgement executed on them, and there will be no one to help them out.

**Verse 23.** The faithful ones will hear this judgement and change from their foolish ways of worship. They will make true sacrifices of thanksgiving—seeing God aright. God will show His salvation to those whose lives are consistent with His nature of the Covenant God—El, Elohim and Yahweh.

We conclude that the great judgement of God was necessary to show Israel the true nature of worship and practice of life as the covenant community under God.

## *A Precis of Psalm Fifty-One*

**Introduction.** Deep and personal as is the Psalm it is meant for public singing. The Psalm has generally been accredited to David. 11 Samuel 12:1-15 gives the story which causes the king to author this Psalm. See also Psalms 6; 32; 38. Psalm 32 seems to be well after this one. The Psalm is perhaps the most profound in all penitential writing. These appear to be 7 strophes (RSV, *NRSV*), but 1-17 have a natural thematic flow.

**Verses 1-2:** *God's nature in the forgiveness of sins..* Sin brings great distress (Psa. 3 1; 38, etc.). The Spirit brings conviction of sin (John 16:7-11; Ezek. 36:31). How does one get relief? The Psalmist has covenant in mind, especially Exodus 34:67. Remorse (cf. I Sam. 15:1-31) brings grief of bondage (II Cor. 7:10), repentance, freedom. David has confessed his sin (11 Sam. 12:13; cf. I Sam. 15:24, 30), and throws himself upon the revealed, known nature of God-merciful, slow to anger, steadfast love etc. David ties God to this. Notice the things he requests—as modern as today in needs: utter blotting out (Isa. 43:25; 1: 18f.) of sin, absolute cleansing..

**Verses 3-5.** *Forgiveness and confession.* The nature, depth and horror of sin needs to be known before the grace of forgiveness can be understood. Sin's deceit undone (Heb. 3:14) then sin's personal action against God is revealed. When God judges sin and punishes He is truly **just—justified in thy sentence and blameless in thy judgement.** Judgement is for the penitent's benefit as well as God's vindication. I was brought forth in iniquity (etc.) can mean either David is born into a world saturated with sin, or refers to the human race as in Romans 5:12—original sin, i.e. in the following of the fall. Both are true,

Verses 6-9. *Forgiveness and cleansing.* It is striking that in repentance (*metanoia*) God's holiness is revealed, and His demand on **man-truth in the inward being**, and wisdom in my secret heart. Truth and wisdom are two great themes of Scripture, of human living. Two cleansing rites (i) healing of leprosy (Lev. 14:4ff.), (ii) defilement through contact with corpses (Numb. 19:18; cf. Isa. 1:18) use a bunch of hyssop. Vss.8-9 pray for full restoration. Note joy and gladness, cf. v.12 joy of thy salvation.

**Verses 10-12.** *Cleansing and renewal unto joy.* More prayer for full restoration. In covenant it has been known, but sin has taken away the joy and fulness of life. Create in me a clean heart is a prayer for regeneration (cf. 11 Cor. 5:16-17). Purity of heart is the basis for a new and steadfast spirit. Cast me not away-David has seen this in Saul, also the Spirit go from that king. Restoration also requires sustaining. willing spirit can mean David wants to be given a spirit whereby he is able to will to do God's will-this in and from the joy of salvation.

**Verses 13-14.** *Praise and witness from forgiveness.* This is the witness to grace which he has now experienced. Something has happened to him. The dreadful load is lifted. He can speak to sinners and warn them and tell of forgiveness. V.14 is really a repetition (parallel) of vss.12-13. Deliverance from blood-guiltiness = deliverance from death, i.e. capital punishment (cf. Gen 9:6). Rich will be the witness of deliverance in proclamation of grace.

**Verses 15-17.** *The pure worship that issues from forgiveness and cleansing.* We have already seen this worship, but v.15 is famous in history. No one worships without God's inspiration-God initiates. Here it is the restoration of salvation by forgiveness. v.16 is also well-known for Cain offered a sacrifice whilst a murderer in the making. Sacrifices were offered for blessings, but when given with the wrong motives were-at the best-but bribes or empty rituals of self-righteous hypocrites (cf. Amos 5:21ff.; Hos. 6:6; Isa 1:11ff. Mic. 6:6ff.; Jer 7:21). True sacrifices were acceptable. David knows-in repentance and shame-that **a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart** are the only states in which sacrifice is valid. That state *is itself* a sacrifice. Opposite to this is the hardened heart (Heb. 3:13-14) 'a heart of unbelief'. Psalm 32:1-2 show that forgiveness destroys guilt.

**Verses 18-19.** *Israel, God's blessing and true worship.* This seems out of context with the text above. Did David think his words might seem to denigrate the sacrificial system which he himself respected deeply? Did he add this as a corrective against wrong thinking? Did some other editor do so? We do not know. Some see it as a note for Israelites in exile after the destruction of the temple—i.e. it will be rebuilt and sacrifices will again be offered. It seems best to understand it as David seeing a spiritual renewal in Israel after his sin which must have deeply affected the nation. This fits well with v.14. Life will resume its true state of holiness and righteousness in Israel.



## *A Précis of Psalm Fifty-Five*

**Introduction:** The Psalm of Lament for betrayal and conspiracy by a trusted friend. 'Maskil': the meaning of this word has been lost. Probably a musical classification, although some interpret the word as 'teaching' (didactic). The occasion is not a slight one, nor feelings those of an unduly sensitive person. Possibly the occasion refers to 11 Samuel 16:20ff.—the treachery of Ahithophel. In any case it is a serious and dangerous occasion. The Psalm raises the whole matter of friendship and enmity.<sup>1</sup> Note that this Psalm is one of a cluster which discuss enmity. The Psalm seems to have 7 or 8 strophes but we will use them as 3—Verses 1-8; 9-15; 16-23. The pain and anguish of the Psalmist is reflected in the movement of the song.

**Verses 1-6:** Verses 1-3 are a prayer and the remainder of the Psalm the expression of the Psalmist's feelings and yearnings to escape the pressure of enmity. The Psalmist's trust is in God (see v.22), but his heart is also sick to shuddering because of his situation. At such times we wonder whether God will act, though we know He will! Here the spirit of the Psalmist is breaking down under its load. We are reminded of Paul's 'Fightings without and fears within'. The Psalmist does not have himself under control. Verse two says, 'in anger they cherish enmity against me'-showing the cause of enmity. The fears are practical ones—he is threatened with death, and the shock of other humans hating and plotting his death sickens him. Verses 6-8 express what millions have often longed for—an ivory castle to which to fly. The longing is an illusion, many have tried it and have found no answer to what distresses them—the dislike of them by the enemies. Psalm 57: 1—as in other places—shows there is only refuge in God. The yearning for peace we understand; the poetical language is beautiful.

**Verses 9-15.** Verses 9-11. It would seem that the occasion is one when David is king, yet unable to control the 'violence and strife in the city'. Men in high places are always envied, and in jealousy others would unseat them, meanwhile planning the violence which is endemic to the fallen human race (cf. Gen. 6:11; 4:22-23). The human heart longs for stability and peace. God must act or nothing will happen: slyly they plan at nights around the city walls, and in the day they bring commercial corruption and fraud into business. Verses 12-15. Now the inward pain of the Psalmist is shown. It is not **an enemy** who is behind all this but **a friend!** This tells of the ageold anguish. Friendship is made in a covenant—(i) in the covenant of God with Israel: all are fellow-covenanters, (ii) in personal covenant as with David and Jonathan (I Sam. 18:3ff.; 20:8; 23:16-18). David could handle the enmity of an enemy (v. 12), but look at **Vs. 13-14** which speak of the beauty of **friendship**. This enemy was once 'my equal, my companion, my familiar friend'. They used to 'hold sweet converse', and '**within God's** house [we] they walked together'. Holy associations have now turned bitter—but see v. 23 as to whether there was ever true friendship. What caused the enmity? Genesis 4 (cf. I John 3: 10-11) explain the rivalry, self-proving, ambition. The imprecation of verse 15 is not just one of bitterness—the Psalmist sees no other solution, and justice must be done for such treachery. The reference is to Korah in Numbers 16:30ff, when the ground opened up and devoured the rebels.

**Verses 16-23.** Verses 16-19. Now the Psalmist shows where his trust lies. The basis of his prayer for the destruction of his enemy is not personal venom but because

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<sup>1</sup> See my Pastors' Group Essay (4/5/92) Enmity-Divine, Celestial, Terrestrial.

'they keep no law, and **do not fear God**' (cf. Psalms 14; 53). Koheleth wrote in Ecclesiastes 12:13 'The end of the matter, all has been heard. Fear God' and keep his commandments for this is the whole [duty] of man.' In this section David shows his trust is in God, but he must continue in prayer against the enemy: he is speaking with God about what is urgent needwise, and painful personally. David sees his deliverance as needful for the situation in which he lives, works, and for which he has responsibility. (So must it be with us all.)—'God will give ear, and humble them. he who is enthroned from old'. His sovereignty will bring order from confusion, victory from oppression. *Verses 20-21* speaks of the violation of the covenant of friendship.<sup>1</sup> Whilst professing love and friendship treacherous enmity was within the heart. *Verse 22*. One cannot sustain the situation, and find victory in it-from oneself. The apostle Peter quotes this verse (I Pet. 5:7) referring to a time of trouble and evil. In the ultimate the righteous person is unshaken. *Verse 23* speaks of the confidence that the wicked shall not escape judgement (cf. Psa. 7:11; Eccles. 8:11-13). If we think we have advanced beyond the angry call for judgements such as the Psalmists used, then we should ask ourselves whether we really live in the light of Matthew 5:43-48 and Romans 12:18-21. We need to look carefully: God will avenge the evil done (cf. Rev. 6:9-11). The Psalmist is triumphant, when at the end he says, 'But I will trust in thee.' The Lament of this Psalm is a paradigm for us all.

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<sup>1</sup> See my Pastors; Group Essay (6/4/92) The Pastoral Power of Friendship.

## *A Précis of Psalm Sixty-Three*

**Introduction.** It is suggested from the title that the occasion is when David was fleeing from his son Absalom. II Samuel 15:23, 28; 16:2, 14; 17:16), and that he was in the northern parts of Judah (Leupold). Weiser thinks David is in the sanctuary, but does not indicate whether before or after the incident. It is clear that David has had a rich vision of the Lord, whatever the occasion may have been.

**Verse 1.** All psalms and hymns in the vocative are powerful, indicating immediacy of relationships, and personal revelation of them. The Psalmist addresses God as 'my God', and this is the key to the relationship. He has known God in rich ways. David is using a present continuous tense (JB). He is continually seeking God. AV has 'early I will seek you'. As in Psalm 42 the longing is for God for His sake, for the sake of intimacy in relationship—man coming to his true Source. The RSV 'has as in a dry and thirsty land', but there is no comparison. David is in such a place. There is no water. It may be that he is thinking of actual lack of water or of God being distant as 'the fountain of living water'. He needs sustaining as a human being. 'Faints for thee' is extremely beautiful—showing the nature of true love for God.

**Verse 2.** Some translations have 'So have I looked for thee', but it seems '*upon thee*' is the better translation. The Psalmist has *looked upon God!* The beholding of the power and glory of God reminds of Psalm 29, but in a more peaceful and lovely presentation. It is true he needs such power and glory for his present situation, but being the king (v. 11) and authentically leading the covenant people, he can be assured that the power and the glory will assist him, bringing deliverance. 'Looking upon God' is not simply a continuous day by day experience, but one of special revelation—and in a time of need. Probably the Psalmist is looking back to that special event rather than going through it at the moment, but the recall is as strong as the event.

**Verse 3.** 'Because thy steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise thee' is really saying, "There is nothing in life that equals or surpasses you, so you are my only reason for being. I am utterly lost in You. My response of this to my being is to praise You for Yourself. For me to live is You!"

**Verse 4.** This brings the full flow of gratitude into his heart. He is 'lost in wonder, love and praise'. It is not a momentary element of experience. To lift up his hands was the way of worship amongst his people, and the bodily expression not only of surrender but of adoration. To call on the name is to wholly trust the God he adores, and in this case that trust is needed.

**Verse 5-8.** V. 5. The inner man is thoroughly satiated with the very nature of the God on whom he feasts. Here is intimacy unequalled in the worship of idols. 'Marrow and fat' were virtually gourmet luxuries for people of those times. So the overflow of the grateful and fulfilled heart spills over in the 'joyful lips'. V.6 all this happens when he lies awake at night, the fullness of God flowing upon him. His thoughts are now about God—God only. Meditation is a vast subject in the Old Testament. Nights for some people are times of restlessness, insomnia induced by guilt and fear of man, but

not for David. God is his refuge and strength, the source of his thinking, the object of his ruminations. V.7 'for thou hast been my help' means he is not meditating like some devotee of an idol or a mystery deity, but remembers his Covenant-God who has helped him in situations, such as he may now be in. 'the shadow of thy wings' is a picture of vast wings giving cool shade 'in a dry and weary land where no water is'. It is beautifully intimate. As Psalm 16:12 says, 'in thy presence is fullness of joy' so it is here. Man is made for God's presence. It is his natural habitation-first of creation, then of covenant grace. V.8 whilst his soul clings to God in dependent intimacy, God's hand is under him uphold him and holding him close to His breast.

**Verses 9-10.** In these two verses comes the memory and mention of the enmity that the king has known. so many Psalms there are that take up this theme-actually enmity. If it is Absalom and his army it is nonetheless enmity, and in this case most painful. The Psalmist's adoration of God is what strengthens him to believe God will effect justice by judgement. Death will come to the enemy, and the jackals shall feed on diem. This is a justifiable confidence born out on intimacy with God and the knowledge that He is the Covenant One.

**Verse 11.** All who 'swear of Yahweh' (i.e. the Covenant-God) shall glory-shall know the vindication of God. He-the Psalmist-is the king. God will not desert him. He will have joy! Those who have lied against him shall be brought to boot. The principle found in Psalm 37 is here stated in succinct form.

## *A Précis of Psalm Seventy Three*

**Introduction:** Book III of the Psalter opens with a number of Psalms accredited to Asaph one of the temple-singers. It does not matter who the Psalmist was for it is his Psalm which tackles the problem the text displays—the problem that the pure heart seem not to triumph, yet the wicked prosper. This is a trial to faith. Job raises the matter in Job 21 and David in Psalm 37. It is said that Psalm 73 is, 'a powerful testimony to a battle fought in a human soul comparable with that fought in the book of Job' (Weiser). The argument falls into five sections, (i) verse 1-3, the problem posed, (ii) verses 4-14, the prosperity of the wicked, (iii) verses 15-20, the solving of the great problem, (iv) verses 23-26, the wonder of being pure and knowing God, and (v) a summary of the problem posed.

**Verses 1-3.** The key to the Psalm lies in **verse 1**, and should be read again after the reading of the whole Psalm. Truly emphasises the good God does to 'the upright' and to 'the pure in heart', There are two kinds of people in the Psalm—the pure in heart and the wicked. **Verses 2-3** tell how the Psalmist almost disintegrated when faced with the problem of the wicked prospering. 'Almost' and 'well nigh' are key words. When he is 'envious' it is not that he wants what the wicked have, but that his faith seems to receive a blow from their success. In verses 21-22, when looking back, he sees he was 'embittered' 'pricked in heart', stupid and ignorant'. Yet so far he cannot reconcile God's righteousness and judgement with the prosperity of those who deserve that judgement, but do not receive it.

In **Verses 4-9** the Psalmist describes these hated wicked. They are fat, well preserved, avoid all troubles—such as the righteous know—and are violent, scornful, oppressive, malicious, full of folly and despise God—'set their mouths against the heaven'. 'Their tongue struts through the earth' is a powerful metaphor. Such, the poet infers, should be ripe for judgement.

**Verses 10-14.** As always those who are after a buck follow these people of 'success', so that in **verse 10** they praise and commend them. In **verse 11** they are saying, in effect, 'God does not seem to be concerned with what they do. They get their ends, so in the Most High does nothing about them, then human responsibility is virtually of no importance'. We would say, 'Look, how easily they get away with it!' Verse 12 continues the thought much to the disgust of the Psalmist so that he states in **verses 13-14** that it seems all his purity and suffering is for nought. This is his problem of faith. This could be read wrongly, namely that his holiness of life and faithfulness is utilitarian, and that he did it to get advantages, but this thought is not really present. Keeping the heart clean and washing the hands 'in innocence' (Deut 21:6; Psa. 26:6; Job 9:30) means to have nothing to do with evil. In **verse 14** the Psalmist shows he has actually suffered, and—it would seem—in a physical way, but the wicked do not! Is the good man being punished and not the wicked? Verse 15, Even in his perplexity the poet, who has been on the edge of renouncing God, could not do so. The compulsion of God, holiness and covenant would not allow this—he would be untrue to his children and their future.

**Verses 16-20.** These verses are central to the Psalm. In **verse 16** the Psalmist was saying the whole matter was beyond him but then-verse 17—he went into the sanctuary of God. We would take this to be the temple, but it could be anywhere, and even a conscious recognition that he was in God's covenant. Wherever it was he was in the presence of God, and in another dimension of worship, life and revelation. In the Presence he perceived the mind of God in the matter of the wicked. *Verses 18-20* tell of the judgement and end of the wicked in clear terms. Far from their lot being pleasant (see vss. 4-9) it becomes extremely unpleasant. In the final reckoning, there is doom for the wicked. By this the Psalmist is heartened.

**Verses 21-26.** **Verse 21** speaks of the bitterness the human spirit can have through injustice, and the seeming failure of God to do something about the injustice. 'Pricked in heart' speaks of great anguish. So Man suffers almost intolerable pain in these things, but in **verse 22** he reveals how stupid he was (cf. Prov. 30:2-3): he now speaks of the unbroken fellowship he has with God and such fellowship has been despite his bitterness, that he has always *belonged to God*. It is God who holds his right hand. Verse 24 must one of the most beautiful in the Psalms—God guides him with wisdom and His will and following all this He will receive his child into glory. The closest and richest intimation of granted immortality in the Old Testament lies in **verses 24-26**. They are almost paralleled in Psalm 63:5-8. Having seen the end of the wicked, having had the matter of his faith clarified, he now desires nothing more than his beloved God. He is his eternal portion.

**Verses 27-28** is a summary of the whole Psalm. The wicked—i.e. 'those who are false to thee'-shall perish but the Psalmist avows it is good for him to be near God, and for God to be his refuge. On this basis he can witness to the goodness and triumph of God.

## *A Précis of Psalm Seventy Four*

**Introduction:** It is thought that either this Psalm was written some time after the Chaldean invasion in 587 b.c. or that by Antiochus Epiphanes in the days of the Maccabees (166-165 B.C.) It could even be some unrecorded invasion. Named as a psalm of Asaph it must be a later Asaph than the one of David's day, but probably would be one of his descendants-keeping the music in the family! Certainly terrible things have taken place, and some time has elapsed without God avenging His people, so that the desolation has confronted the singer for a long time. It is no crisis prayer he offers up. It has been pointed out that there is no mention of sin, righteous judgement, repentance and the like throughout the Psalm. The Psalmist obviously thinks that 'enough is enough' however deserving Israel may have been of judgement. 'Maskil' as we have seen is a didactic (teaching) poem.

**Verses 1-3.** The Psalm is like Psalm 79 and the Lamentations of Jeremiah, but both these passages recognise the justice of the judgement of God. Of course verse 2 does speak of God's anger 'smoking [i.e. raging] against the sheep of thy pasture'. The Psalmist is firm with God on the basis that Israel is His people (cf. v. 20), His covenant people. The sanctuary, after all, is God's dwelling place' where thou hast dwelt'-and its destruction is a calumny against God. If Israel is God's flock of sheep then He ought to pastor them, remembering the nature of sheep.

**Verses 4-8.** The Psalmist describes the blasphemous attack upon the temple, they have 'desecrated the dwelling of thy name'. The enemy's plan is to utterly obliterate the Israelites and-the word 'subdue' here is not strong enough. The enemy know that if they kill the worship of the people that they will die away. It must have been painful to see the unholy attacks on the structure of the temple, and then its being burned to the ground.

**Verses 9-11.** Now the Psalmist bemoans the utter desolation of the nation, for prophecy is absent, if not ended—'Where there is no prophecy the people perish'. Also, no one is doing anything. They know nothing of what God will do, and the Psalmist asks why God allows Israel's foes to scoff at God and blaspheme Him. Why does God do nothing, preferring to withhold His hand?

**Verses 12-17.** The Psalmist knows that God is the living God-the God who acts. He reminds God of what He has done in the past for Israel, and in the reminding of God the Psalmist is also reminded himself of God's power. God is now King and is now 'working salvation in the midst of the earth'. God has the power to act in this immediate situation. The Psalmist thus gives a short 'salvation history' narrating the former deeds of God—deeds Israel can now expect of God. So the event at the Red Sea when Leviathan—Egypt—had its hydra heads broken in the waters that flowed over the pursuing army. In the wilderness God provided water miraculously for His people. Not only does history witness to God's power but creation itself is a constant proof with its 'fixed' categories (cf. **Psa. 148:5-6; Jer. 31:36-36**) and the rhythm of the seasons-all under His control. Such a God can quickly punish the enemy and rehabilitate Israel, even to the temple.

**Verses 18-19.** These verses might be thought to come from the Psalmist in order to cajole God into action, but it is the thought of God's holiness and His peerless name which motivates him to get God into action. He likewise pleads for Israel as 'the soul of thy dove' who have become 'poor and needy'. The dove of course is a weak gentle creature as against 'the wild beasts'. He is appealing to God's pity whilst acknowledging the state of the people. His appeal is made on the basis of God's covenant with Israel and His revelation of Exodus 34:6-7 where God abounds in steadfast love and faithfulness. The Psalmist would see his people -the poor and needy- praise God in the worship of thanksgiving for deliverance.

**Verses 22-23.** The Psalmist now believes he has re-activated God's operative power, and that God has listened to him in his assurance of the faithfulness of God so that he can even command God! He uses the term 'the impious' again (cf. v. 18) and urges God not to let the scoffing and the clamour of God's enemies to be passed by unnoticed. God must do something!



## *A Précis of Psalm Eighty Eight*

**Introduction:** The Psalm is by Heman the Ezrahite (cf. I Kings 4:3 1; 1 Chron. 6:33; 15: 17, 19; 16:41; II Chron. 5:12). It is possible there were two Hemans, one 'a wise man' and the other 'a prophet', or they may have been the one. Both were men of considerable depth and experience. The Psalm itself is without doubt the saddest in the whole Psalter. Some commentators of the book of Job think that Job suffered from leprosy, whilst Psalm 88 has been called 'The Cry of the Leper.'

Verses 1-2: It seems there are good grounds for speaking of God as the Saviour. Since the Psalmist cries, **I call for help by day; I cry out in the night before thee.** Heman was an Israelite and would have known the Covenant-God was the self-confessed Saviour of His people. If He were not, then the Psalm is an empty appeal to the God Who does not save one of His own who is in difficulty! Verse 1 has echoes of Psalm 22:1-2. Three times in this Psalm Heman makes special prayer—by night and day (**verse 1**), by morning (**verse 13**), and by the beseeching spreading out his hands before God (verse 9), but all without response from God!

**Verses 3-12.** We notice the conjunction 'for' which introduces what we have called 'the substance of his prayer'. We, ourselves, are so far removed from his scene that we might look upon this material as poetic or as Eastern hyperbole, but it is nothing of this to the Psalmist. He is 'full of troubles' (v. 1), although he does not tell us immediately what they are. What confronts him is near death for he is—now!—going down into the shadowy Sheol, i.e. Hades or the grave (vs. 1-2), and this is no neurotic fear which grips him. (v.4) 'I am a man who has no strength,' speaks of terrifying helplessness. **Verses 5-6** speak of a man who is inwardly desolate and terribly alone. Today we might class him as neurotic or psychotic—to use psychological language. But the Psalmist is revealing to us what many of us have known—the utter deadness of our spirits, an almost lethal lethargy without which the pain of terror would overwhelm us. He is shocked to find himself as a stranger to go ignored by Him, The utter loneliness of being 'cut off from thy hand' is too sad to contemplate. To be among 'those who thou dost remember no more' (v. 5) is a fearful thing to sense. It certainly brings to mind the Christ's cry of dereliction—'My God! My God! Why hast thou forsaken me?' That cry out of the depths was in the midst of suffering for others. Here the Psalmist only suffers in himself. It all seems so pointless, so much without reason, and *to no purpose*. **Verses 7-9a** show that the Psalmist is entering the realm of God's *purposeful action*. It is His wrath! The Pit is 'that nethermost hell'. This man is going down into 'regions dark and deep'. They represent God's wrath upon him. There can be no question—God's wrath is a reality for every day in our consciences we feel the anger of God on our sin. Shakespeare said, 'Conscience doth make cowards of us all,' meaning—as did Paul (Rom. 3:19)—that every mouth is stopped before God, and all know they are guilty. The Israelite understood the wrath of God (Pss. 31:10, 32:3-4; 38; 3-4). This Psalmist also knew the wrath of God. He felt it in his bones. He believed it to be upon him for he knew 'the regions dark and deep' (v.6). He knew the heaviness of God's wrath over his spirit for he had experienced days when it had not been like that. He knew the forms it took, and they were horrifying. What would cause his companions to shun him? Some have said it was his terrible sickness. They see in **verse 15** some congenital disease that was repulsive—'Afflicted and close to death from my youth up'-but if that were

the case why only at this at stage of life do they shun him, especially if they have been 'lover and friend' (**Verse 18**)? No; something even more has been visited upon the Psalmist which make his friends recoil from him. It may well have been a sickness indeed it seems to have been, and sickness and the wrath of God are so often linked that the friends may have seen it as the scourge of God.

Here, then, the Psalmist is not rebuking God for His wrath—he knows better than that. It is just that he knows God as the covenant-God, and wonders at the measure of his suffering. Hew has wept so much about it all that his 'eye grows dim with sorrow'. Because of weeping he can scarcely see. In the light of being part of God's people he now appeals to God. **Verses 9a-12:** it is *every day* that he cries to God. God should answer such continual crying—that is the inference. Why does He not? When he says, 'I spread out my hands to thee,' or, 'I stretch out my hands to thee,' or, 'I spread out my hands in supplication to thee,' he is saying that every part of his being is beseeching God. He asks what good will anything be once he is in the grave (v. 10). Does anything of worth come out of that situation? He is urging that God move now, before his death. He asks the burning question that is in his own heart, regarding the grave. Down in that sad and lonely place of death does *steadfast love* declare itself in saving action (v. 11)? He knows the ancient claim of God that He 'abounds in steadfast love and faithfulness'. Wrath is appropriate where there is sin, and perhaps Heman has merited this wrath he now feels, but whether that be true or not Heman is appealing to the steadfast love of God. Such love may have its expression wrath, but not endlessly. Verse 12: notice the words- 'wonders', 'praise', 'steadfast love', 'faithfulness' and 'saving help'. An these are a direct reproach to God, a confrontation of faith that the Psalmist directs towards God. What then, will God do, since He is always pleased to be reminded of His grace and love? When the expressions of God's covenant-nature are are stated against others such as 'the dead', 'the shadows', 'the grave', 'Abaddon' [perdition], 'darkness' and the sad and poignant 'land of forgetfulness [oblivion]' then we moved to feel the loneliness and grief of the man who was called 'wise'.

**Verses 13-18.** Seemingly God does nothing for the Psalmist's calling upon Him *every day*.. Everything is still there—as it was. The Psalmist in the midst of his very real agony draws himself up for one great thrust against God, yet in it there is no inappropriate charge, no bitter invective, but only a long sigh of inexpressible sorrow, and we must hear what he is saying. At some time one of us or another will come to this point, both in experience and in thinking. Is God harsh and unfeeling about this man? To be 'cast off' is not merely a sad thing: it is most terrible. Then for God to hide His face from a man is intolerable especially when that man is in covenant with God. It seems to the writer that flood-waters are about him. He is enclosed by diem. The sound of them is like waves which threaten to inundate him again and again. The whole prospect is lonely. Surely, then, he can have recourse to those who love him—those who are his friends—but no! He has to cry sadly, 'My familiar friends are as darkness. Darkness is my only companion'. The Psalmist cannot understand what God is about. Unlike David in Psalms 32. 38 and 51 he does not confess he is culpable, and thus open his sin to God. The silence of our Psalmist on this matter is a strange one. He neither denies or admits his guilt. Indeed he accepts the fact of God's wrath, but seems seems to infer it is irrelevant, that it is not the central reason for his suffering. It is almost as if he agrees that suffering and wrath will come to a man, but wonders why it should be so persistent, so intense, and why God should be silent about it. The key to the Psalm lies in verse one in the fact that the Psalmist addresses God as his Saviour.

## *A Precis of Psalm Ninety*

**Introduction:** JB tides this Psalm 'The human condition' and Leupold, 'Man's transitoriness'. The Psalter heads it, 'A Prayer of Moses the man of God'. Mosaic authorship is questioned but it certainly fits with the magnificent oratory-and thought- of Deuteronomy chapters 32-33. When read many times at the one sitting the Psalm induces a feeling of the awesomeness of God, and the pitiful pettiness of Man. Not only is Man a creature of the dust and so transitory, but his sin is significant, and so the wrath of God is understood in its rightful dimensions. In a day of trivia, mediocre understanding and 'amusing ourselves to death' this Psalm is a welcome douche of cold water, and awakens us to the reality of the holy God and the sinfulness of Man. It gives us a sober perspective on Man the creature.

**Verses 1-2.** Psalm 91-2 enlarges the thought of God being the refuge and dwelling place of the man of faith. 'In all generations' can be translated 'age after age'. The reader is directed back to creation and beyond it. Weiser adds in 'travail' to 'formed the earth and the world'. 'Me 'from everlasting to everlasting' has a majestic rolling motion about it. How pitifully small is Man measured against all this grandeur. Yet how strong has been the refuge and dwelling place 'in all generations'. The Hebrew Psalmist was never so much interested in quantifying God, as pointing to His innate sublimity. He likened God to nothing seen-not even the ancient mighty mountains. To do such would be to trivialise God.

*Note:* Liturgically this Psalm has been used over many centuries to bring home to Man the solemnity of death, especially in the face of the wrath of God upon sin. It is significant that today it is often omitted in the Burial Service in favour of more gentle passages of Scripture. Instead of exposing those attending funerals to high dimensions of God we would rather 'comfort' those attending, than affront them with God's awesomeness, and the futility of sinful Man. Spurgeon said, 'Many generations of mourners have listened to this Psalm when standing around the open grave, and have been consoled thereby'.

**Verses 3-6.** In Verses 2-3 we have the contrast of Man and God. God pronounces Man for what he is-dust! 'Turn back to dust,' He says, and Man will be but dust. It is axiomatic that God is not linked with time-as is Man. The billions of human simply roll back to the creation and are dust in the hand of the Creator. So much for Man's vaunted greatness, especially in a technocratic age. All the yesterdays<sup>1</sup> of Man-so magnificent in his eyes, are but a single day which has gone. **Verses 5-6** show the utter transitoriness of humanity. Rolling streams sweep away impotent Man, and he is like the grass which is renewed by the night dew but curls and dies with the sun upon it. At evening it is a nothing. The mortality in all things is most pitiful of all when in human flesh.

**Verses 7-12.** In Verses 7-8 we see that as is the grass, so are we-burnt up by the anger of God. Now we are called upon to view Man—ourselves—as those in sin. The Psalmist accepts the reality of God's wrath upon sin. Man may seek to oppose God's

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<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare said, 'And all our yesterdays have lighted fools/ the way to dusty death'. *McBeth* v.9-10.

wrath and to rationalise it away but as Psalm 7:11 has it, God is angry with the sinner every day.' His conscience bears this knowledge. JB has it in verse 8b, 'having summoned up our sins you inspect our secrets by your own light'. In the light of God's pure countenance our sins are horrible. How justified, then, is His wrath! In **Verses 9-10** the Psalmist continues the matter of God's wrath. We thinking of our days passing away—day after day—under the wrath of God. We are reminded of Romans 18-32 in the N.T. 'Our years come to end like a sigh' is pathetic. Why should God be wrathful on Man whom He has made, if not for his original sin and continuing refusal to move in the will of his Maker? Who sees his life as a short 'span of toil and trouble'? It takes no time to reach seventy years: we have begun, as it were, and suddenly it is all finished! And this without our control. **Verses 11-12:** Even with this who has felt the full force of God's wrath? Man seeks to be oblivious to God's wrath. If he were to contemplate it, and feel its full force he would be as the man in Psalm 38. Verse 12 is translated by JB as 'Teach us to count how few days we have and so gain wisdom of heart'. God teaches wisdom in the 'secret heart' (Psa. 51:6). Wrath sobers us to proper thinking. If it sets our minds seeking wisdom then the Psalm and the matter of death will have worked a great thing in us! The Psalm will not just be a thing of depressing solemnity. As Spurgeon said, 'We will be consoled'.

**Verses 13-17:** If the Psalm is an appeal to God by Israel as a nation for God's help when it has gone astray then the following prayer is rich—a desire for the revival of the nation. If it is a personal prayer then the same obtains—the Psalmist has been brought to reality and desires the best of God. In **Verse 13** it is for God to pity His servant's out of His covenant being of love. In **Verse 14** that steadfast love is to be so abundant that the petitioners may be satisfied in their spirits and have joy and gladness 'all our days'—the days in which they now seek wisdom. In **Verse 15** God is asked to give us much joy and happiness in the future as the petitioners have known punishment and sorrow in the past. In **Verse 16** they ache for the old power and Presence to return into their lives, and the works of the living God to be seen and experienced so that their children will share in this godly heritage. In **Verses 17** the word '*favour*' (*RSV, NRSV, NIV*) is 'beauty' in the AV and 'sweetness' in the AV. The petitioner/s desire his touch of the Lord upon them and they wish all they do to be authentic, and so their living before God and Man to be wholly justified, wholly successful. So far we have come from the proper dread and awe of God to this ultimate intimacy and assurance of having lived a useful life.

## *A Precis of Psalm Ninety One*

**Introduction:** Psalms 46 and 91 have been linked, and considered two of the strongest Psalms in the whole Psalter. Psalm 46 can be that of the whole worshipping community making faithaffirmation of God, but Psalm 91 is that of a person rich and strong in faith whose personal experience of God is a firm one. Delitzsch sees three voices speaking; the first voice in verses 1, 3-8, and 10 to 13, the second voice in verses 2, 9, and the third voice (God's) in verses 14-16. Others—e.g. Leupold—see only two voices, putting verse 2 as being said by the one person who is speaking from verses 1-3. 'Me NRSV and JB—as against the RSV—puts verse 1 and so all verses to verse 13 into the second person, which is how we will take it to be. It must be that the person who is speaking is the person of faith, teaching others how it will be with them if they live in faith as he has. At the same time he is delighted and grateful for what obtains to the person who trusts God, and dwells intimately with Him. In this, as in all Psalms we have to remember that all is said in the light of the covenant. The use of the Psalm in the temple must have been rich and encouraging.

**Verses 1-2.** It is not enough to be a covenant member, for these two verses speak of one who has a special relationship with God Himself, who is here described with four names—as Elyon i.e. 'the Most High'; Shaddai (Gen. 17: 1; 'the God of heaven') here translated 'the Almighty'; Yahweh (Exod. 3:14), i.e. 'the Lord', and finally Elohim, 'God' with plural intensification. These four names show the relationship of the Psalmist. To 'dwell in the shelter of the Most High' and to 'abide in the shadow of the Most High (JB, 'make your home in the shadow of Shaddai) is a permanent living situation. **One may know of God, but then does** one dwell in Him? We see this brilliant understanding in the NT in Colossians 3:3; John 17:20f.; I John 4:16 and 11 Peter 1:4. Such a shelterer and dweller sees God as did Luther in his 'A Mighty Fortress is our God'. As in Psalm 116:7—'return, O my soul to your rest'-means our home is God. If we miss the trust of the indweller, and his reposing in trust upon God-'his true home'-then we miss the wonder of having God as one's habitation or home.

**Verses 3-6.** Now come the promises of the many elements of protection and deliverance. In v. 3 the 'snare of the fowler' is a figure for the peril of death (Eccles 9:12), whilst 'deadly pestilence' is that which deals death. **V.4,** In Deuteronomy 32:11 God is as a strong eagle protecting the nest and covering the eaglet being trained to develop. Here, again, God is a refuge and shelter. 'Faithfulness' we know to be one of His great covenant attributes (Exod 34:7) and can be translated, 'truthfulness'. Such a shelter is He that, 'hiding in Him', one is not destroyed by the four things in **verses 5-6,** viz. 'the terrors of the night', 'the arrow in the day' (wars, invasions, murder), 'the plague that comes in the dark', and 'the scourge that wastes in the middle of the day'. These are the fears of night and day that all mankind carries with it. One, of course, must recognise the special intimate relationship with God, live in it and so have utter trust in His protection.

**Verses 7-8.** Others who do not have this special relationship with God will fall in their thousands in the various situations of life, but the 'dweller in God' will know His protection. He will be immune to the four elements of the previous verses. Secondly, the matter of the judgement of the wicked—so often dealt with in many psalms—will

encourage the person in intimate relationship with God. God will vindicate the person opposed by the wicked and will requite justice.

**Verses 9-10.** In some translations the vocative is used, 'Thou Lord, art my refuge!' and it could be that the teaching Psalmist breaks out in the wonder of the relationship, the immense joy of having God as his refuge. In any case the idea of verses 1-2 of the person indwelling God is reiterated. Thus these two verses sum up the substance of verses 1-8.

**Verses 11-13.** The whole concept of angels as guardians of the friends and lovers of God (cf. Gen. 24:7; Dan. 3:28; Matt. 4:6) is raised here in **vs. 11-12**. We are not often aware of the protection of these celestial creatures who serve 'the heirs of salvation' (Heb. 1: 14; Psa. 34:7) but their galaxies are significant in the affairs of Man and his history. Here the protection is intimately personal. The Devil must have been well aware of these verses for he quoted them to Jesus in the Temptation, where he used it as a temptation to power (Matt. 4:5-7). V. 13 shows that the one indwelling God will also do great exploits. It may also carry on the idea of the aid of angels. Twice Jesus was aided by angels-in the Temptation and in Gesthemene. The language here may be metaphorical of an activity that befits being one of God's trusting ones, i.e. he becomes 'more than conqueror through Him who loved him'..

**Verses 14-16.** Now the speaker is God Himself-the Most High, the Almighty, the Lord, the One Who is 'my God'. The teacher in the temple is really one who has been witnessing to another, or others. Now the Most High addresses him-the true worshipper. What is conveyed here is *communion*. 'Because he cleaves to me in love' is the statement of dependent intimacy. 'Because he knows my name' speaks of the highest experience a human being can have. To know God's name (cf. John 17:11, 12, 26; Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:21) is to know God as far as a human being may know God and so to be devoted to Him. So protection, being present with the worshipper in times of trouble, delivering him from danger and death is reiterated as the privileges and security that one knows who 'dwells in the shelter of the Most High'. God's rescuing and honouring speak of the friendship of God, and of His giving true dignity to a trusting person. V. 16 catches up all that a person may most desire-'long life' and the wonder of 'seeing salvation'.

## *A Précis of Psalm One Hundred and Sixteen*

**Introduction.** Some commentators claim this is a psalm uttered in a congregational festival, whilst others see it as a special psalm on one occasion. Doubtless-like other psalms-it was used continually, especially by persons who had had similar experiences. The Psalmist testifies to God's goodness in the trials he has been through. He also has come to peace with God and man. *Note:* Psalm 116:12-13 was the text for the first sermon delivered on Australian soil.

- (i) **Vss, 1-4.** In v.1 the writer expresses his love for God—a rare overt expression in the O.T (cf. 18:1)<sup>1</sup>. Whilst this was a demand in Israel's covenant (Deut. 6:4-9) and in the new covenant (I Cor. 16:22; 1 John 4:19), yet the cause of love is the grace and love of God 'because he has heard my voice and my supplication'.  
In v.2 The answer to his supplication has set him for life-he will go on calling on God, Whom he now trusts-always!  
**Vss. 3-4** are a lament. Like other Psalmists and Paul in 11 Corinthians 1:8-10 this man was close to death ('encompassed', 'entrapped'), and had deep pain and fear, 'I suffered distress and anguish'. He asked for life and was given it. What an immense relief. no wonder he loved!
- (ii) **Vss 5-7.** V.5 is based directly on Exodus 34:6—the covenant nature of God Who can thus be believed upon and appealed to-'grace and mercy'. He is righteous in acting on His nature, promise and word. We learn all this from the Psalmist.  
v.6. the term 'simple' means the helpless.  
v.7. We are apt to worry constantly, even if there is no cause! Now the Psalmist *returns home to God!* Even at this moment he is in the house of the Lord, but always *God is his rest.* The *bountiful* hand of God has been upon him.
- (iii) **Vss. 8-11.** In v.5 death (Sheol) had him trapped. Perhaps that was illness, but here it seems that not only was the situation painful (v.8—tears, death, stumbling) but the Psalmist has met up with the problem of humanity. Deliverance from death is now in the past (v.8), but the effects are now.  
In **Vss. 9-11** the Psalmist shows (a) he walks 'before the Lord in the land of the living' and (b) keeps his faith<sup>2</sup> because even when he was 'greatly afflicted' he did not lose faith in spite of others who treated him badly. 'Men are a vain hope' (RSV, NRSV) is also translated 'All men are liars' (AV, Weiser). The Psalmist is faced with the treachery of all humanity. He may have had bitterness and anguish regarding men but his faith in God was strengthened. We are all in danger of cynicism—one of the greatest of sins-until we realise we are as all others.
- (iv) **Vss. 12-19.** **Vss 12-14** go together. Asking what he shall *give* for all the bounty God has given him (v.12), he answers himself (v.13) 'I *will take* the cup of salvation<sup>3</sup>. This is 'a libation of wine as part of the ritual of the thank-offering' (Allen) To 'call on the

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<sup>1</sup> Generally love for God was shown in obedience and in expressions of love for His law, His word (Psa. 119)—and so on.

<sup>2</sup> Paul quotes this verse 11 in 11 Corinthians 4:13, 'I believed and so I spoke'. Paul's point is that persecution by others does not destroy our faith but rather strengthens it.

<sup>3</sup> Some translations have 'lift up the cup of salvation', but others have 'take'. 'I am taking'. It all amounts to the same.

name of the Lord' is to acknowledge Him and to proclaim Him especially as the God of salvation—for in this case He has saved His servant.

v.14 shows him paying vows which he had undoubtedly made in his days of his distress.

v.15 is an unusual verse (cf. Psa. 72:13-14) and includes a number of things—the Lord *preserving* His people against *untimely* death, *saving* them out of death at a certain moment, and His *giving* of death at the right time, as well as of resurrecting them—so that death has no sting. 'The latter is more a NT understanding.

In **Vss.16-19** the Psalmist is expanding the matter of offering his vows and thanksgiving.

In v.16 he is conscious of being a servant of God and of his godly mother, as well as his new liberation.

**Vss.17-19** show that he is testifying to all the congregation, loves being in the house of the Lord and is aware of the most holy context of all—the temple in Jerusalem. So he finishes on the note, 'Praise the Lord!'



## *A Precis of Psalm One Hundred & Thirty-Nine*

**Introduction.** The Psalm is headed 'To the choirmaster' or 'director'. It is debated for various reasons whether it could have been written by David himself. Certainly it is in the tradition of David who exposes his thoughts for all to hear. JB divides it into twelve stanzas. The RSV has four sections. The first section is in the historical perfect, whilst the remainder is in the present. The Psalmist is telling us what God knows of him. *JB* sees it as a meditation upon a man under God's omniscience comparable with Job 7:17-20. Notice that throughout the Psalm the writer addresses God in intimacy which expresses both fear and exasperation, both wonder and petition.

**Section One. Verses 1-6.** In **verses 1-4** the Psalmist is speaking of God in the term that some call 'omniscient' i.e. 'all-knowing'. If this is taken in a philosophical sense it takes on a hard note, i.e. God just knows all, and we cannot escape that. However biblically God's knowledge of us is consistent with His nature of love and holiness, i.e. His knowledge is personally relational. In this case it equals Psalm 8:4 where God is mindful of Man, visiting him incessantly. There is little if any abstract thinking with the Hebrew, and so this 'omniscience' is the intimate knowledge God has of His covenant-child. It is not that He is of a supernatural order of a celestial CID! The Psalmist is not phased by God's knowledge of him, but rather is wondering at the intimate concern God has for him. God has searched him thoroughly, knowing all things of his being, his actions, his path of walking, sleeping and all his ways. What is not known to Him? This person is not his own person for his life is not private. **Verses 5-6.** Verse 5 shows that the Psalmist cannot escape God. He is, in one sense, hedged in by Him. 'To beset' is 'to fence around' (*JB*), i.e. in the protective sense, and 'layest thy hand upon me' means 'shielding me with your hand' (*JB*), thus **verse 6** shows that this personal action of God is incomprehensible to the Psalmist. 'Such knowledge' does not mean the Psalmist's knowledge but the knowledge of God—the relational intimate knowledge of the Psalmist by God for the Psalmist. The Psalmist is helpless with wonderment at it.

**Second Section: Verses 7-12.** **Verse 7:** in **verse 5** it was shown that God encompasses the Psalmist. So then, how shall the Psalmist endure such personal intimacy? It is overwhelming. Some call this 'omnipresence' as though it were an imposition on Man, but His presence is to Man, not simply in a spatial but a relational way. Jeremiah said (10:23) that the way of a man is not in himself. No, God is present to him always. It is this which is too much for the Psalmist. Perhaps he can escape from the Spirit of God, from the intimate presence of God. Not only covenant-Man but Man generally has always been confronted by the Presence, the Absence of the Presence and—terrifyingly—the presence of the Absence. Verses 8-9: Yet, no! Neither in the heavens nor in Hades can one hide from Him. Not even if that one could flee to the sunrise, arriving at the horizon could he be hidden from the all-present, all-pursuing God. God would be there to lead him in the right way and to hold his right hand. What a beautiful thought! **Verses 11-12.** Perhaps the Psalmist can have refuge in the darkness of the night or can beseech the day to be constantly dark so that he can have respite from the Presence, but no! this intimate God knows no darkness, since all is bright not only to Him but by Him. There is no escaping the Presence!

**Section Three. Verses 13-18.** Beginning at verse 13 the Psalmist speaks of what we might call 'a mystery'. Our life consists in fellowship—or enmity—with fellow-creatures, i.e. those who have been created. Yet all life is primarily to do with the One Who has created us. Some are angry with God and their ultimate protest is suicide. They did not wish to be created: it was an affront to them, foolish as is that reasoning. The Psalmist now addresses God, expressing his wonder at being created, i.e. at not making himself but being made by the beneficence of this persistent, ever-present Creator-God. At verse 14 some translations differ, some saying God is fearful and wonderful and so to be praised, and others that it is the Psalmist who is fearfully and wonderfully made—an astonishing creature—and so God is to be praised. **Verses 15 and 16** speak of God's active presence in creating in 'the limbo of the womb' (M), but all with a view to the plan God had for the life of the Psalmist. Here is true and loving predestination! Nothing of the Psalmist—his life and actions—is left to 'chance'. **Verses 17-18** speak of the overwhelmed gratitude and delight at and for the intimate care and providence and purpose of God. The sum of the matter, then, is this: when he comes to the end of the road God is still with him! He never escapes, nor wishes to do so. That is the marvel of the Presence.

**Section Four: Verses 19-24.** In verses **19-22** the Psalmist protests his loyalty to God, but one thing in life is a bugbear—the enmity he constantly faces from those who would kill him. Let God slay such enemies! The Psalmist has a true and holy hatred for those who hate God, for in truth it is God they rise up against. **Verses 23-24** show that the Psalmist has entrusted himself wholly to God in the light of all that he has said above. Now he submits all his thinking and ways to God, pleading for His testing action to prevent him from 'walking in the way which leads to torment' (Weiser). He pleads to be led in 'the way everlasting'. L.C. Allen (*The Word Commentary*, Psalms 101-160) translates 'see if I have been behaving as an idolater and guide me in the ancient path'. This all-knowing, all-pervading, all-beneficent Being is all the Psalmist wishes to know. In Him alone he wishes to live.