

Hello everyone,

PERCENT OF BIBLE COMPLETED: 31.3%

Weekly Readings will cover: Psalms 67 – 70, 86, 88, 101, 103, 109 – 110, 122, 124, 131, 133, 138 – 141, 143 - 145

Sunday: Psalm 67 - 69

Monday: Psalm 70, 86 & 101

Tuesday: Psalm 103, 109 & 110

Wednesday: Psalm 122, 124 & 131

Thursday: Psalm 133, 138 & 139

Friday: Psalm 140, 141 & 143

Saturday: Psalm 144, 145 & 88

Current # of email addresses in the group: 613

As always, I hope you had a blessed week of study. I know that this many Psalms can be intense. This will be our last full week of Psalms for now. Half of next week will also be Psalms. We will come back and hit other large chunks of Psalms later in our program. Please follow each day's reading as we jump around quite a bit this week.

I also wanted to mention that I've received a number of emails with questions. I'm doing my best to respond to those, but due to other time commitments, I haven't gotten to everything yet. If I forget, please send them again.

Website archive location for audio files & PDFs:

<https://www.ucg.org/congregations/san-francisco-bay-area-ca/posts/audio-links-re-three-year-chronological-deep-dive-reading-program-circa-2022-2025-903711>

3-YEAR CHRONOLOGICAL STUDY: Week 53

Read the following passages & the Daily Deep Dive on the daily reading.

Day 344 - SUNDAY: January 21st

Psalm 67, 68 & 69

Daily Deep Dive:

Psalm 67:

The UCG reading program states: "*Neginoth* in the superscription of Psalm 67 likely means, as the NKJV translates it here and in other places, "stringed instruments."

George Knight's Daily Study Bible Series commentary *Psalms* says: "Obviously this psalm was composed for public worship. Perhaps it belonged particularly to the autumn harvest festival [i.e., the Feast of Tabernacles or Ingathering] (see verse 6)" (comments on verses 1-7). This he takes from the RSV, which renders verse 6 as "The earth has yielded its increase," whereas other translations understand the verb here as future tense—"shall yield." Of course, the annual harvest does portray a future harvest, as was pointed out with respect to Psalm 65, which begins the current grouping of psalms—and that is certainly a major theme here as well.

The song opens with a prayer for God's mercy and blessing and that His face would shine—smile in favor—on His people (Psalm 67:1). As previously pointed out in regard to Psalm 31:16, the language here is taken from the priestly blessing of Numbers 6:25 (see also Psalm 4:6; Psalm 44:3; Psalm 80:3, Psalm 80:7, Psalm 80:19; Psalm 119:135). The *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* says that this song's "content, form and brevity suggest that it served as a liturgical [i.e., worship service] prayer of the people at the conclusion of worship, perhaps just prior to (or immediately after) the priestly benediction" (note on Psalm 67).

"God's blessing on his people (as well as his saving acts in their behalf) will catch the attention of the nations and move them to praise (Psalm 65:2)" (same note). Indeed, this is a rather exciting thought within the psalm. Note the repetition in the refrain of Psalm 67:3 and verse 5. The excitement here is not just for the increased praise for God, but for the fact that all peoples will be able to rejoice when they experience the establishment of His righteous government over all nations. In their happiness over this certain hope, God's people are expressing love for all mankind.

Given all this, the focus of verse 6 is clearly future. The earth yielding its increase speaks not only of God's great agricultural provision in the world to come, but of the great harvest of humanity that will then take place—to the "ends of the earth" (verse 7), as the

nations learn to properly fear and respect Him and His people are vastly blessed as never before.” [END]

Psalm 68:

The UCG reading program states: “In Psalm 68 David calls on God to deal with His enemies and for the righteous to rejoice in His triumph. The first half of the psalm (to verse 18) reviews God's historic acts on behalf of the Israelites, progressing from the wilderness of Sinai to the conquest of the Promised Land. Verse 18 carries the meaning forward to Christ's day, as we will see, and then the second half of the psalm "looks forward with expectations of God's continuing triumphs until the redemption of his people is complete and his kingly rule is universally acknowledged with songs of praise" (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on Psalm 68).

In Psalm 68:4 God's name is given as "Yah" (see also Isaiah 12:2), a shortened form of Yhwh, usually transliterated as *Yahweh*. This longer form, replaced in most Bible versions with the word "Lord," is the third-person form of the name that God gave in the first person in Exodus 3:14. In that verse God gave a long version of this name, "I AM WHO I AM," as well as a short version "I AM." Just the same, the third-person form Yhwh means "He Is Who He Is," while the shorter form Yah means "He Is" or "He Who Is." This short form appears in the names of many people in the Bible, such as Elijah (i.e., Eli-Yah), Isaiah (i.e., Yitza-Yah) and Jeremiah (i.e., Yerem-Yah).

Psalm 68:5-6 expresses God's special concern for the orphan and widow and His care to make those who are lonely part of families. His desire is to help those in need, which brings us to the next clause in verse 6—delivering the oppressed. Actually, the specific wording here—of bringing those who are bound into prosperity but the rebellious to desert exile—probably relates, given the context of the verses that follow, to God's merciful deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage and their subsequent rebellion and wilderness wanderings (see also Psalm 66:10-12).

God still continued to provide for His people. Psalm 68:8-9 appears to paraphrase a few lines from the Song of Deborah in Judges 5:4b-5 about God providing rain to the Israelites in the Sinai desert. The provision of rain also ties the psalm to Psalm 65:9-10. God's "inheritance" (Psalm 68:9) is a reference to Israel (see Deuteronomy 9:29)—synonymous in the next verse with His congregation and the poor for whom He provided (Psalm 68:10).

Verses 11-14 speak of God granting victory to Israel in its battles against the armies of various kingdoms on the way to subduing the Promised Land. Zalmon in verse 14 is a mountain near Shechem in northern Israel (see Judges 9:46-48). Bashan (Psalm 68:15) is a high plateau northeast of the Sea of Galilee. It was part of the territory of King Og when the Israelites came to the land.

"Mountain" in these verses seems to symbolize land and dominion. That is, the mountain of Bashan is the land or kingdom of Bashan. God says it is now a mountain of *His* (verse 15)—that is, it is incorporated into His dominion as part of the Kingdom of Israel. The mountain's peaks (verse 16) would represent its various sub-kingdoms or city-states. These peaks are erupting, like volcanoes, with envy against the takeover by God and His people. God, however, says He desires to dwell in this mountain—the Promised Land—forever.

Yet, depending on when David wrote this psalm, the mountain of God could perhaps be more specifically identified as Mount Zion—of which the whole land of Israel is an extension (just as Zion, the Mountain of the Lord's House, will, after Christ's return, represent both Jerusalem and the whole Kingdom of God). For it is in Jerusalem that God has chosen to dwell: "For the Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His dwelling place: 'This is My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it'" (Psalm 132:13-14).

With this in mind, consider Psalm 68:17. It mentions God's vast chariot army, and then notice how the NRSV translates the second

half of the verse: "The Lord came from Sinai into the holy place." The Hebrew wording here is difficult, but this meaning fits well in context. That is, what has gone before in the account has shown the progress from the wandering in the wilderness to the permanent establishment of God within His sanctuary in Israel—probably on Mount Zion.

The first phrase in the next verse, "You have ascended on high" (verse 18), would fit with the idea of God's entourage moving from lower surrounding lands to the heights of Israel (especially in the sense of ascending to the place that was to represent the spiritual peak among the nations of the earth). The mountain of God, we have seen in other psalms, represents the heavenly Zion as well—just as it does here. Indeed, there is much more to this verse.

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul notes something remarkable about this passage. He quotes from it in Ephesians 4:8. Then, in verse 9, he asks: "Now this, 'He *ascended*,'—what does it mean but that He also first *descended*...?" Paul realizes that this verse refers to *God*, who dwells in the highest heaven. So how can He be portrayed as ascending to a higher place or station? Only if He first descended—and this Paul explains as prophetic of God coming down from heaven as a human being, Jesus Christ, to then later ascend back up to heaven to reassume His divine majesty.

The next phrase in Psalm 68:18, also referred to by Paul, "You have led captivity captive," finds an earlier parallel in the Song of Deborah: "Arise, Barak [the leader of Israel's army], and lead thy captivity captive" (Judges 5:12, KJV). In that passage, the NKJV translates the phrase simply as, "Lead your captives away." Indeed, the idea here seems merely to be: "Take those you have captured and lead them away as captive." Many see in this a sort of victory procession (compare Psalm 68:24-25). The NIV, similar to the NRSV, renders the phrase in Psalm 68:18 as "You led captives in your train." However, it is not clear if the captives here are humiliated and paraded enemies (compare also Colossians 2:15) or

those whom God has converted to His truth—themselves victorious with God in the procession (compare Psalm 69:33; Romans 6:16-22; Ephesians 3:1).

The next clause in Psalm 68:18 says, "You have received gifts among men." Paul in quoting this seems to reverse it, saying that God "gave gifts to men" (Ephesians 4:8)—referring to the apportioning of spiritual gifts to Christ's followers (verses 7, 11-16). *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* states: "Paul does not cite either MT [the Masoretic Text] or LXX [the Septuagint].... Some have claimed that, under the inspiration of the Spirit, Paul felt free to amplify the meaning of the Psalm, since the giving is implicit in the receiving for. But it seems more probable that the apostle was drawing on an ancient oral tradition reflected in the Aramaic Targum on the Psalter and the Syriac Peshitta version, both of which read, 'Thou hast given gifts to men.' Early rabbinical comments applied the verse to Moses when he *received* the Law on Sinai so as to bring it *to the people*" (note on Ephesians 4:8, emphasis added). *Zondervan* notes on this verse: "Paul apparently takes his cue from certain Rabbinic interpretations current in his day that read the Hebrew preposition for 'from' in the sense of 'to' (a meaning it often has) and the verb for 'received' in the sense of 'take and give' (a meaning it sometimes has—but with a different preposition...)." Of course, God receives from people only what He has already given them or produced in them—so Paul's understanding was certainly correct in any case.

Verse 19 of Psalm 68 continues in the theme of God providing for His people: "Blessed be the Lord, who daily loads us with benefits." However, it is possible that the latter clause should be rendered, as in the NRSV, "who daily bears us up" (i.e., carries us), or, as in the NIV, "who daily bears our burdens."

But those who oppose God will not fare so well in the end (verses 21-23). Crushing enemies in blood under foot (verse 23) recalls Psalm

58:10. As there, this is not to relish the destruction of others but to portray a meting out of justice on those who refuse to repent.

In these verses, we are moving beyond ancient Israel's subjugation of the Promised Land to the future subjugation of the earth to God's Kingdom at Christ's coming. As we saw, Psalm 68:18, besides representing the establishment of the ancient sanctuary in Jerusalem, also represented the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ to the heavenly sanctuary. Yet it also represents the ascension of Christ to the throne of the earth in His Kingdom (as in Psalm 47), when the future temple is established at Jerusalem (see Psalm 68:29).

Verse 30 is probably to be interpreted by verses 31-32, so that "beasts of the reeds" (verse 30)—likely descriptive of the crocodile and hippopotamus of the Nile—represents Egypt and Ethiopia (verse 31) and "the herd of bulls with the calves of the peoples" (verse 30) represents the various "kingdoms of the earth" (verse 32), both great and small. Though initially rebuked, most will soon become part of a great chorus of nations praising God (see verses 32-35), as was called for in the previous psalm." [END]

Verse 14 – Zalmon (NKJV) was a mountain near Shechem.

Verse 15 – The JFB commentary states: "Mountains are often symbols of nations (Psa 46:2; Psa 65:6). That of Bashan, northeast of Palestine, denotes a heathen nation, which is described as a "hill of God," or a great hill. Such are represented as envious of the hill (Zion) on which God resides;"

Psalm 69:

The UCG reading program states: "With Psalm 69 we come to the final group of psalms in Book II (Psalms 69-72). The *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* comments on these four psalms: "Book II of the Psalter

closes with a cluster of three prayers and an attached royal psalm-- in perfect balance with its beginning (...Psalms 42-45). These three prayers [69-71] were originally all pleas of a king in Israel [stated to be David in the superscriptions of 69 and 70] for deliverance from enemies (apparently internal) determined to do away with him. They all contain certain key words that are found elsewhere in Book II only in Psalms 42-44 and in the seven psalms (54-60) placed at the center of the Book. Another link between Psalms 69-71 and 42-44 is the placement of a short psalm at the center of each triad. These placements have the appearance of deliberate editorial design. In the former cluster Ps 43 has been artificially separated from 42...while in the latter cluster Psalm 70 repeats (with some revision) Psalm 40:13-17 and was probably intended to serve as an introduction to Psalm 71. The attached prayer for the king [also referred to as the king's son] (Psalm 72) stands in similar relationship to Psalms 69-71 as Psalm 45 stands to Psalm 42-44 and brings Book II to its conclusion. Thus, as with Psalm 45, its placement here hints at a Messianic reading of the psalm already by the editors of the Psalter.... It should be further noted that in Psalms 65-68 all peoples on earth are drawn into the community of those praising God.... Here in Psalm 69 all creation is called to join that chorus (v. 34), and Psalm 72 envisions that all peoples and kings will submit to the son of David (vv. 8-11) and be blessed through his reign (v. 17)" (note on Psalms 69-72).

Yet the resounding praise in Psalm 69 does not come until the end. Most of the psalm constitutes an urgent prayer by David for deliverance while lamenting over life-threatening circumstances and enemy persecution. While he meant himself as the sufferer, this was also prophetic. "The authors of the N[ew] T[estament] viewed this cry of a godly sufferer as foreshadowing the sufferings of Christ; no psalm, except Psalm 22, is quoted more frequently in the N[ew] T[estament]" (note on Psalm 69). As *The Nelson Study Bible* states: "This highly messianic psalm presents a remarkable description of the sufferings of Jesus Christ. Whereas Psalm 22 describes Jesus' physical sufferings, Psalm 69 focuses more on His emotional and

spiritual suffering. Yet like Psalm 22, this psalm was written by David approximately a thousand years before the events it describes. Both psalms begin with the sufferings of David but have their full meaning in the sufferings of Jesus. For these reasons, the apostles in the New Testament acknowledge that David was a prophet of God (Acts 2:30)" (note on Psalm 69).

David likens his anguish to sinking in mud and deep water, being swallowed by the ocean deep or the pit-that is, the grave (verses 1-2, 14-15). This imagery was also used in Psalm 40 (see verse 2), another messianic psalm quoted in the New Testament. Psalm 40 is part of the cluster of psalms closing Book I of the Psalter, just as Psalm 69 is part of the cluster of psalms closing Book II. A further link here can be found in the fact that the very next psalm, Psalm 70, is, as was noted above, a reprise of Psalm 40:13-17--and it seems like a quick summary of Psalm 69.

David has sought God so earnestly, through crying and constant prayer, that he says, "My throat is dry; my eyes fail while I wait for my God" (verse 3). While the latter expression may denote in part his eyes being swollen from crying, it probably also has to do with diminished joy and hope. (For more on the metaphor of eyes failing, see the Beyond Today Bible Commentary on Psalm 38.)

David is wearied by his host of enemies who, he says, "hate me without a cause" (Psalm 69:4). We saw this same description earlier in Psalm 35:19 and will see a similar one in Psalm 109:3-5. As pointed out in the Beyond Today Bible Commentary on Psalm 35, this baseless antagonism was prophetic of Jesus Christ's experience--as He specifically declared it to be (John 15:25).

David does confess sins to God, but his point here is to say that God knows his enemies aren't opposing him for this reason (Psalm 69:5). As in other messianic passages, Jesus does not share the fault of sin--yet He did suffer for sins (the sins of others, including David's).

In verse 6, the implication is that others on David's side are praying for him. David prays that none of these will suffer shame and discouragement as a result of what happens to him. Indeed, Jesus no doubt prayed for His disciples this way in the time before His trial, crucifixion and death. In David's case, he was asking for God to rescue Him and thereby demonstrate that those who were praying for Him were in the right. In Jesus' case, He would have been asking for His disciples to be helped through what was happening until they were completely vindicated when God truly rescued Jesus from death by resurrecting Him. We should learn a lesson from the fact that Christ was not preserved from death but was ultimately saved out of it. If God does not deliver us from some circumstance in the here and now, we should not let that discourage us. Indeed, God is always alongside the believer, whether He rescues him now or not.

David further states: "For Your sake I have borne reproach...and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me" (verses 7, 9). He is speaking here of the life of the righteous in general terms--of which his present circumstance is only an example. The godly suffer when they turn away from the world to obey God. They often go through difficulties not of their own doing: "Yet for your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered" (Psalm 44:22, NIV). As Jesus told His followers: "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:11-12)--David having been one of these prophets. Jesus Himself was, of course, the premier example of being hated for following God.

In describing his devotion to God for which he is persecuted, David says, "Zeal for Your house has eaten me up" (verse 9). David was consumed with wanting to honor God--filled with desire to serve God's tabernacle and God's nation and to build God's temple. Christ's disciples recognized this passage as applying to *Him* after He ran the moneychangers out of the temple of His day--evidently

already having understood Psalm 69 to be a messianic psalm (see John 2:17). God's people today should have this same zeal for His house, which at this time is His Church (see 1 Timothy 3:15).

David was in sore grief, which in itself became something for others to ridicule (verses 10-11). He was scorned by many at all levels of society--from "those who sit in the gate" (city elders) to drunk commoners singing mocking bar songs about him in the taverns (verse 12). Jesus also faced such contempt.

In verses 13-18 David returns to pleading with God to rescue him--"speedily," he asks (verse 17), trusting that he is praying "in the acceptable time" (verse 13)--also translated "in the time of your favor" (NIV). Considering the messianic nature of this psalm, it is interesting that God will later declare that He has heard His Servant (representative of both the Messiah and Israel) "in an acceptable time" (Isaiah 49:8; see also 2 Corinthians 6:2).

David can't find anyone to comfort him (Psalm 69:20). Consider that Jesus' disciples abandoned Him during His trial and suffering so that the only ones to turn to for pity were His adversaries and other onlookers, and they gave him none. David further states that those from whom he sought comfort instead gave him "gall" (denoting a bitter substance) to eat and, for his thirst (compare verse 3), vinegar to drink (verse 21). David was here employing "vivid metaphors for the bitter scorn they made him eat and drink when his whole being craved the nourishment of refreshment and comfort" (*Zondervan*, note on verse 21). Yet this was prophetic of what Christ experienced, both figuratively *and literally* (see Matthew 27:34, Matthew 27:48; Mark 15:23, Mark 15:36; Luke 23:36; John 19:28-29).

For their mistreatment of him, amounting to defiance of God, David calls on God to curse his enemies with punishment (Psalm 69:22-28). Verse 25, combined with Psalm 109:8, is understood in the New Testament as prophetic of Judas Iscariot no longer having a place

among the apostles following his treachery and suicide (see Acts 1:20). Indeed, we should understand David's words here more as a prophecy of judgment on God's enemies than as a model to follow in our own prayers. Jesus gave us the pattern of what to say during persecution when He was being executed: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34). We are to pray for our enemies (Matthew 5:44)--the best thing we can pray for being that they will repent.

Of course, there are circumstances where it is proper to seek God's intervention and justice against those who refuse to repent. This, however, does not mean wishing people out of God's Kingdom forever. David's prayer about blotting his enemies out of the book of life and that they not be written with the righteous (Psalm 69:28) might seem to imply this--leaving them utterly hopeless. Yet we should consider that what David was really saying here is that God would not accept these enemies as they were at that time--giving them eternal life in spite of the evil they had done. And in fact God does not do this. None of the enemies David speaks of here may ever receive eternal life in God's family--until, that is, their repentance, acceptance of Christ's atonement for their sin and their transformation into wholly new people. The people they *were* will never be in the Kingdom of God. (Even David's old self--which, frankly, was his greatest enemy--will not be in God's Kingdom. And so it is with all of us today.) Indeed, knowing David's character as a man after God's own heart, we can be confident that if one of those of whom he spoke here sincerely repented and begged him for mercy, he would have shown it--making it clear that he did not mean that they should never be able to repent.

David's statement in verse 29, "But I am poor and sorrowful," again calls to mind Psalm 40: "But I am poor and needy" (verse 17), which is repeated in Psalm 70:5. As before, "poor" in this context does not mean financially indigent but, rather, broken in spirit (humbled) and in great need of help--as Jesus Christ also was in His fatal circumstances.

Yet David is confident of God's intervention, declaring that he will praise and thank God (Psalm 69:30)--stating that the proper attitude is what God desires more than the ritualism of the sacrificial system (verse 31), as David also stated in Psalm 40 (verse 6) and in other psalms.

The humble seeking God on his behalf will then rejoice (Psalm 69:32-33)-just as Christ's followers would later rejoice after His resurrection (and just as all His followers today will rejoice after His return in power and glory to rule all nations).

Verse 34, as pointed out earlier, calls on all creation to join in praising God. And verses 35-36 speak of the salvation and restoration of Zion and Judah. David may have been referring to present circumstances-perhaps to Jerusalem and outlying towns taken over by enemies during Absalom's or Sheba's rebellion afterward reverting to David and those loyal to him. Yet some contend that David did not write these words--seeing the specific reference to Judah and the need to rebuild its cities (in a literal sense) as an indication that verses 34-36 were added to David's psalm by a later king in Jerusalem, such as Hezekiah at the time of Assyria's invasion. That could be. In any case, the words here likely refer not just to ancient Zion, but prophetically to spiritual Zion today (God's Church) and to Jerusalem at the time Christ returns to establish God's Kingdom." [END]

Day 345 - MONDAY: January 22nd

Psalms 70, 86 & 101

Daily Deep Dive:

Psalm 70:

The UCG reading program states: "Psalm 70, as mentioned earlier, repeats Psalm 40:13-17 with several minor word changes--these changes perhaps suggesting a different tune. It is interesting that Psalm 70, being taken from Psalm 40, follows Psalm 69, which itself carries imagery over from Psalm 40. Thematically, Psalm 70 appears to be a condensed version of the material in Psalm 69--and

it also seems to introduce Psalm 71 (compare Psalm 70:1-2; Psalm 71:12-13).

The superscription of Psalm 70, like that of Psalm 38, in the NIV says, "A petition." But the KJV and NKJV give the literal rendering of the words here as "To bring to remembrance." In the present case, this terminology could reflect this psalm being a reprise of the end of Psalm 40 and a summary of Psalm 69--i.e., a recounting of the need for deliverance.

One point of indirect contact between Psalms 70 and 69 is found in Psalm 70:3. This verse, with enemies saying "Aha, Aha!" (also Psalm 40:15), finds a counterpart in Psalm 35:21. These enemies, it is said two verses earlier in Psalm 35:19, "hate me without a cause"--a phrase that also appears in Psalm 69:4 (all of these being messianic psalms).

David focuses on God throughout his trial--continually praising Him (Psalm 70:4) and seeking His help." [END]

Psalm 86:

The UCG reading program states: "Psalm 86 is a prayerful lament of David, wherein he cries out to God for mercy. This is the only psalm in Book III with David's name in the title. Certain key phrases are found in other psalms of David. "I am poor and needy" (verse 2), referring to his lowly, humbled state and need for God's saving help, is also found in Psalm 40:17 (repeated in Psalm 70:5). "To You, O Lord, I lift up my soul" (Psalm 86:4) is also found in Psalm 25:1 (compare Psalm 143:8). And "Teach me Your way, O Lord" (Psalm 86:11), showing his deep longing to know and follow God's laws, is also found in Psalm 27:11.

David doesn't give the specifics of his affliction but it is dire—as he perceived himself headed toward "the depths of Sheol" (verse 13), that is, the grave. And his predicament involved a proud mob of violent, godless men who sought his life (verse 14). David is troubled

by his situation "all day long" (verse 3), and its remedy requires God's forgiveness (verse 5). A number of other psalms of David follow this familiar pattern.

In the NKJV translation of verse 2, David prays, "Preserve my life, for I am holy." The word translated "holy" here is not the typical Hebrew word meaning holy, *qodesh* or *kadesh*. Rather, the Hebrew word here is *hasid*, translated "godly" in Psalm 4:3: "But know that the Lord has set apart for Himself him who is *godly*." However, the word *hasid* is closely related to the word *hesed*, used in Psalm 86 for God's mercy, lovingkindness or covenant faithfulness. In context of the rest of verse 2, David seems to be stressing his relationship to God—that he is loyal and faithful to God. The NIV translates his words as, "...for I am devoted to you." Thus, David is not saying he is worthy of saving because of some self-inherent goodness. He is instead basing His plea on the relationship He has with God—one of mutual covenant faithfulness.

"Among the gods there is none like You, O Lord," David declares in verse 8, answering the rhetorical question posed in Exodus 15:11. None of the pagan gods of the surrounding nations are even real—though real demonic spirits may pose as them (compare 1 Corinthians 10:20). That David does not believe in pagan gods is clear, for he states, "You alone are God"—appropriately spelled in English with a capital G (verse 10). He foresees the time when the nations worshipping false gods will learn about their true Creator and glorify Him (verse 9)—which we see more about in the next psalm.

Besides expressing his desire to know and follow God's teachings (verse 11), David also asks for an "undivided" heart so that he can properly fear God and sincerely praise Him (verses 11-12). And note that he is confident that he will be able to do so forevermore (verse 12) because, as he is sure, God will have delivered him from his life-threatening situation (verse 13).

The description of God's compassion and mercy in verse 15 appears drawn from God's description of Himself to Moses in Exodus 34:6.

David concludes Psalm 86 with a final plea for mercy, strengthening and deliverance (verse 16), asking for a positive sign on his behalf (verse 17)—not to help him believe, as he already does, but so that his enemies will be put to shame.” [END]

Psalm 101:

The UCG reading program states: “As the *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* points out, Psalms 101-110 appear to form “a collection of ten psalms located between two other groups (...Psalms 90-100; 111-119) and framed by two psalms that pertain to the king (the first, the king's vow to pattern his reign after God's righteous rule; the last, God's commitment to maintain the king—his anointed—and give him victories over all his enemies. This little psalter-within-the-Psalter is concentrically arranged. Inside the frame [of 101 and 110], Psalms 102 and 109 are prayers of individuals in times of intense distress; [within these] Psalms 103 and 108 praise the Lord for his 'great...love' that reaches to the heavens (Psalm 103:11; Psalm 108:4); [within these] Psalms 104 and 107 are complements, with 104 celebrating God's many wise and benevolent acts in creation and 107 celebrating God's 'wonderful deeds' (vv. 8, 15, 21, 24, 31) for people through his lordship over creation; and [finally within these] the remaining two are also complements, with Psalm 105 reciting the history of Israel's redemption and 106 reciting the same history as a history of Israel's rebellion. This little psalter includes most of the forms and themes found in the rest of the psalter. Its outer frame is devoted to royal psalms and its center pair to recitals of Israel's history with God.... As a collection it bears a distinctly redemption-history stamp and evokes recollection of all the salient elements of the O[ld] T[estament] message” (note on Psalms 101-110).

Given this apparent collection, there is the obvious problem of the book division occurring within it at Psalm 107. Recall, however,

from the Beyond Today Bible Commentary's introduction to Psalms that the division between Books IV and V of the Psalter appears to be an artificial late change—seemingly made primarily to create a fivefold division of the Psalms to correspond with the five books of the Law, likely to have the temple songs follow along with the Scripture reading cycle. We will note more about this matter when we come to Psalm 107 in our reading.

Psalm 101 is a royal psalm of David composed in the form a commitment. As is the case with most psalms, it is not clear whether he originally intended this as a solely personal expression or planned from the beginning for it to be used by others. In any event, when included in the Psalter its words of commitment were certainly to be proclaimed by others—these being successor rulers (as only they had the power to administer justice in the fashion proclaimed in the psalm). Thus, the psalm could have become a sort of oath of office.

David is determined to "behave wisely in a perfect way" or, as the New International Version renders this, to "be careful to lead a blameless life" (verse 2). He begins by praising God, because God's mercy (or lovingkindness) and justice motivate David to rule Israel with the same gracious care and upright fairness.

God had made known His expectations for the kings of Israel (Deuteronomy 17:14-20). The king was to write his own copy of the law and study it "all the days of his life" so that he would properly fear God, administer God's laws and treat his subjects with respect. David vows that in his "house"—his royal office and administration—he will be scrupulous in matters of justice, love and mercy (Psalm 101:2b). By leading a "blameless" life, David meant that he would live with integrity and integrate his life with God's purpose. He was not implying that he would never sin (though he would of course strive not to).

The question "Oh, when will you come to me?" (verse 2) may refer to David's need for special help from God, or it may relate to the Ark of the Covenant. As one commentator explains regarding this verse: "Once David was established on the throne in Jerusalem, he had a consuming desire to bring the ark of God back to the sanctuary so that God's throne might be near his throne. His question in verse 2, 'When will you come to me?' reflects this desire. The ark had been in the house of Abinadab for many years (1 Samuel 6:1-7:2) and then in the house of Obed-Edom after David's aborted attempt to relocate it (2 Samuel 6:1-11)" (Wiersbe, *Be Exultant*, introductory note on Psalm 101). There was a great lesson in the latter episode. For God's law, which David as king was to read and write his own copy of, clearly states how the ark was to be transported. God does want to "come to" us—but only on His terms.

David states that his administration will be different from how other kings in the region ruled. He says he will set "nothing wicked" or "no vile thing" (NIV)—literally, no thing of Belial (this word connoting utter worthlessness and later used as a name for Satan)—before his eyes. He may be referring to an idol or an evil practice or person—with setting this thing or person before the eyes meaning looking to it or such a person for guidance or affording it or him a place of honor and privilege in his presence. This would not happen in David's reign.

By "the deeds of faithless men" (verse 3, NIV) or "the work of those who fall away" (NKJV), David may be referring to Saul's administration—that he will have no part with that kind of leadership. David had a consuming desire to clean things up when he took office. "When David became king, first in Hebron and then at Jerusalem, he inherited a divided land and a discouraged people whose spiritual life was at low ebb. Asaph described the situation in Psalm 78:56-72 and named David as God's answer to Israel's problems. Everything rises and falls with leadership, but many of King Saul's officers were fawning flattering 'toadies' who were unable to work with a man like David" (same note).

In support of David's desire for a righteous administration, he states that no one in his employ will lie, practice deceit, slander, or demonstrate a lack of respect for others—rather, going to the heart of good leadership, he will look for the faithful of the land to serve with him (verses 4-7). *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* states: "The king invites only people of integrity to 'dwell' with him and to serve in his presence as appointed courtiers. Only by surrounding himself with the best and most capable men who will advance the interest of God can the king rest assured that the kingdom of God is strengthened" (note on verse 6).

David closes the psalm with a vow that it would be part of his daily routine to rout evil and wickedness from the land, especially in Jerusalem—the standard would be set there in his capital city first (verse 8).

Of course, as a fallible human being, David did not always live up to his intentions. Consider that such a despicable person as his nephew Joab was high in David's administration for the length of its duration. The commitments of this psalm will be perfectly fulfilled during the administration of David's descendant Jesus Christ—which will include David himself, then resurrected and perfect, as well as all Christians who remain faithful to Christ, who will then serve as divine kings under Him." [END]

Day 346 - TUESDAY: January 23rd

Psalms 103, 109 & 110

Daily Deep Dive:

Psalm 103:

The UCG reading program states: "Psalm 103, attributed in the superscription to David, is a psalm of praise for the wonderful goodness of God directed toward His people. David begins by talking with himself, demanding that his whole being "bless" the Lord (verses 1-2). This is in response to all of God's wonderful benefits—the blessings He gives us. We cannot of course bless God in kind. A "blessing" from a human being directed to God is a word

of heartfelt praise or thanksgiving or an expressed wish to see all of God's purposes fulfilled, implying cheerful and committed cooperation with Him—submitting oneself fully to His will. Note that the psalm begins and ends with the same formula (verses 1, 22)—as does the next psalm (Psalm 104:1, Psalm 104:35).

In Psalm 103:3-5, David calls attention to six personal blessings from the Lord: forgiveness, healing, redemption, lovingkindness, satisfaction and renewal. With "you" and "your" in these verses, David was still speaking to himself, but clearly these statements apply to all of God's people. That is, each of us reading or singing along with the psalm could say the same things to ourselves. A seventh blessing—relief from oppression—is listed in verse 6 as applying to "all" (thus expanding the divine blessings out to others).

At the top of his list, David thanks God that He has the power and desire to forgive the perverse crookedness of our human nature that manifests itself in various iniquities (verse 3a). Next we are told that God "heals all your diseases" (verse 3b)—just as God "forgives all your iniquities" in the previous clause. Some, realizing that godly people sometimes must suffer ongoing infirmity despite repeated prayers (as even the apostle Paul had to), think God healing "all" our diseases here does not mean that He heals every single one. Rather, they interpret these words as meaning merely that all diseases we have *that are healed* are healed by God—that is, whenever we are healed, God is the One who heals us. This is problematic, however, as it would indicate the same meaning for the previous parallel clause—that all iniquities we have *that are forgiven* are forgiven by God (thus meaning that God is the One who does whatever forgiving is done and not all of our sins are necessarily forgiven). Yet the statement about forgiveness seems more clearly to mean that God forgives every one of our sins—which indicates that the healing clause means that God heals every one of our diseases. In fact, as an inspired scriptural proclamation about God's nature, this would seem to be a divine promise. How then are we to reconcile this with faithful Christians who are not healed?

First we must recognize that there are conditions that must be met for healing—just as there are for forgiveness. Forgiveness requires repentance and faith—and so does divine healing (especially in cases where the sickness or disease is a result of the afflicted person's sins). But even when these conditions are met, God is not obligated to instantly and immediately remove affliction. Yet Psalm 103:3 would indicate that He *has* obligated Himself to heal the faithful *at some point*. He may choose to instantly intervene and heal—or, for His great and inscrutable purposes, He may decide to delay healing until much later. In fact, He may in some cases choose to delay healing until after a person has died—when, in the ultimate healing, He will return believers to life in the resurrection from the dead. In this, God still proves Himself faithful to the promise of Psalm 103. Indeed, faithful believers brought up in the resurrection will experience perfect wellness and be impervious to illness for eternity to come.

We find a further parallel in the benefit that follows. God "redeems your life from destruction" (verse 4a)—“from the pit” (NIV)—pulling us from dire circumstances and ultimately from the grave. This, of course, does not mean that we won't suffer adversity or death. David suffered both. God's own perfect Son, Jesus Christ, suffered intensely and died in His human life at a young age. So, while the promise of Psalm 103:4 is in part for our lives today—as God keeps us from various calamities throughout our lives and lets us endure others before rescuing us—the ultimate fulfillment of the verse will not come until our future resurrection in God's Kingdom. Even so, in verse 3 God delivers us from physical ailments throughout our lives today, but He will not remove all illness from us for eternity to come until that same resurrection.

The same applies to being crowned with lovingkindness and tender mercies (verse 4b). On one level, David may have been speaking to himself of God having literally crowned him as the king of Israel—along with the advantages and privileges that brought. Yet he may also have been thinking of God more generally and figuratively

heaping blessings and care upon his head (compare Genesis 49:26). The word for "lovingkindness" in Psalm 103:4 is *hesed*, meaning loyal steadfast love or covenant faithfulness, while tender mercies here refers to deep compassion and parental care (compare verse 13). Being the objects of God's grace or favor "crowns" His people above all creation. And ultimately, they will be crowned as literal kings to rule in His Kingdom (Revelation 5:10).

That God "satisfies your mouth with good things" (Psalm 103:5) includes more than providing food. "The word translated 'mouth' is a bit of a puzzle since it is usually translated 'ornaments' or 'jewelry,' words that hardly fit this context" (Wiersbe, *Be Exultant*, note on verses 1-6). The NIV follows the Greek Septuagint translation in rendering the word as "desires" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, footnote on verse 5). "Some students interpret the word to mean 'duration' or 'years' (see NASB [compare NRSV]). No matter how old we become, God can satisfy the needs of our lives and the spiritual desires of our hearts" (Wiersbe, note on verses 1-6). To be *renewed like the eagle* (verse 5) pictures having the strength to soar, to keep on (compare Isaiah 40:31). Both elements of Psalm 103:5 will find ultimate fulfillment in the Kingdom of God—as will God's righteous and just intervention for the oppressed of verse 6.

David uses the past national experience of Israel to illustrate God's blessings on His people—particularly His forgiveness, mercy and love. This was explained to Moses and demonstrated to the Israelites in how God dealt with them (verses 7-8, 17-18; compare Exodus 34:6-7). Though the Israelites, as we all do, deserved death for sin, God nevertheless continues to work with His people. His punishments against Israel's constant rebellion were not without end but were intended to help rehabilitate the people, not to justly destroy them (Psalm 103:9-10). God is here praised for His willingness to temper His righteous anger with His vast mercy and care for His people as His little, weak children (verses 11-14). Whereas God's anger is brief—required only during the fleeting

physical existence of man—his "mercy" or loyal love is forever and will serve to perpetuate those who honor their commitment to follow Him (verses 15-18).

God's benefits extend to all within His dominion. "And His kingdom rules over all" (verse 19)—so that all creation (in both the spiritual and physical realms) should praise God along with David, as the psalm calls for in the threefold address: "Bless...Bless...Bless..." (verses 20-22a), followed by the final repetition of the psalm's opening line. This also serves to introduce the praise of God for His creation in the next psalm." [END]

Psalm 109:

The UCG reading program states: "In Psalm 109, often referred to as an imprecatory (cursing) psalm of lament, David calls on God to judge and punish his wicked enemies who have attacked him with lies and hateful accusations (verses 1-4). Their fabrications are baseless, "without a cause" (verse 3), and they have betrayed David, returning, he says, "evil for good, and hatred for my love" (verse 5).

In its opening and closing, David refers to his enemies in the plural. Yet in verses 6-19, the psalm refers to a singular individual. Some take these verses to be David's quoting of his enemies regarding himself, yet it more likely seems that David is the one speaking here--referring to a primary antagonist, evidently one holding an office of responsibility (see verse 8).

In very strong language, David calls on God to settle accounts (verses 6-20). *The Nelson Study Bible* states: "Here the psalm takes a decidedly negative tone. The description of the wife of the enemy becoming an impoverished widow and the children becoming beggars [verses 9-12] seems particularly harsh. However, the psalmist directs these strong requests to the Lord; he does not actually take the sword into his own hand. He may feel compelled to vent his anger in words, but the psalmist understands that vengeance itself belongs to the Lord" (note on verses 6-8).

Still, we might wonder why David would pray for calamity on innocent family members. Of course, they may not have been innocent at all. We do not know the exact circumstances here. It may be that the children mentioned were older--and that David understood them and the wife to be fully supportive of the wicked man's attacks on him. They may even have been participants in slandering him. The enemy's parents may also have been involved (see verse 14).

Moreover we should consider, as the *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* says, that "the close identity of a man with his children and of children with their parents, resulting from the tightly bonded unity of the three- or four-generation households of that ancient society, is alien to the modern reader, whose sense of self is highly individualistic.... That deep, profoundly human bond accounts [along with passed down behavior and consequences] for the ancient legal principle of 'punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation' (see Exodus 20:5...)" (note on Psalm 109:12). Furthermore, since it was considered that "a man lived on in his children...the focus of judgment [when mentioning the cutting off of descendants] remains on the false accuser (see Psalm 21:10; Psalm 37:28)" (note on 109:13).

It also seems that the curses David calls for are ones his accusers have pronounced against him--that he is merely praying for their curses against him to be turned back on themselves (compare verses 17-20). The psalm thus forms an "appeal for judicial redress--that the Lord will deal with them in accordance with their malicious intent against him, matching punishment with crime" (*Zondervan*, note on verses 6-15).

Indeed, we must also remember that David was Israel's king and judge as well as an inspired prophet of God. His song here, though no doubt personally heartfelt, was more importantly a declaration of God's judgment rather than a model for us on how to pray about enemies. This is what God's law decreed concerning false accusers:

"If the witness is a false witness, who has testified falsely against his brother, *then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother*; so you shall put away the evil from among you. And those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you. Your eye shall not pity: life shall be for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot" (Deuteronomy 19:18-21).

As for how we are to pray about our enemies, Jesus gave us this instruction: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you" (Luke 6:27-28). Of course, this does not preclude asking God to deal with them with "tough love" if they persist in harm--as this would ultimately be for their own good.

Demonstrating Psalm 109's prophetic aspect, the apostle Peter later cited the end of verse 8, "Let another take his office," in regard to selecting a replacement for Judas Iscariot among the 12 apostles after his betrayal of Jesus Christ (Acts 1:20). This does not necessarily mean that all of Psalm 109 is applicable to Judas. For instance, we have no other evidence that he had a wife and children--though it is possible that he did. The important point is that the judgment decreed on a betrayer of God's anointed king would, in an even greater sense, fit Judas. Judas betrayed Jesus, the King of Kings, returning evil for the love that Christ had shown him.

Psalm 109:14-15 should not be understood as a prayer for removing all possibility of repentance and forgiveness for David's enemy and the enemy's family. Rather, David is asking that God not forget what they did to him so as to ensure their punishment. Yet David himself would have accepted an enemy's repentance--just as God accepted David's own repentance. Some, it should be noted, see the verses here as indicating that Judas cannot be forgiven for his sin upon repentance in the second resurrection. These verses indicate no such thing.

Finally, David describes the effect of the enemies' attacks on him (verses 22-25)--foreshadowing what Jesus Himself would experience. And he prays for God to powerfully intervene in a way that would make it clear to the enemies that God was doing so (verses 26-27). David closes with praise, confident in God's coming intervention on his behalf (verse 31)--just as God will intervene for all of His people suffering such assaults and persecution from others." [END]

Psalm 110:

The UCG reading program states: "Psalm 110 is a royal psalm of David that affirms the divinity of the Messiah. Note that the psalm begins in verse 1 with "the LORD"--i.e., *YHWH* (He Is Who He Is, the Eternal God)--giving subordinate regal rule at His right hand to another whom David refers to as "my Lord" (*Adoni*, meaning "Master"). David was the king of Israel. Who, if not God, was over him as his Lord?

Prior to Jesus' day, the Jews viewed this psalm as messianic. They saw David here looking to the future Messiah or Christ, the anointed King who would establish the Kingdom of God over all nations. Yet other passages showed that the Messiah would be a descendant of David, which was seemingly problematic for Psalm 110. Jesus used these points in confounding the Pharisees. Note this exchange from Matthew 22 (which gives evidence of the Jewish messianic interpretation of Psalm 110 and confirms David as the psalm's author):

"While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, 'What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?'

"They said to Him, 'The Son of David.'

"He said to them, 'How then does David call Him 'Lord,' saying [in Psalm 110:1]: 'The LORD said to my Lord, sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool'? If David then calls Him 'Lord,'

how is He his Son?' And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare to question Him anymore" (verses 41-46; compare Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44).

It was unheard of that a forefather would call a descendant "Lord" (i.e., Master). Moreover, how could David, as the founding father of his dynasty, refer to a king to follow in his stead as his Lord? Some have proposed that David was referring to Solomon when he became king in David's place while David was still alive. Yet this seems rather unlikely--for why then would the religious teachers of Christ's day have been confounded? Indeed, David shortly before his death still issued commands to Solomon. So Solomon was not David's Lord.

Following Jesus and the emergence of Christianity, a new Jewish explanation came about--that *le David* ("of David") in the psalm's title meant not *by* David but *regarding* David and that the psalm was written by one of David's subjects. Yet this was obviously not the traditional understanding in Jesus' day, as His exchange with the Pharisees makes clear. They considered David the author, as Jesus affirmed. It is interesting that *le David* in the titles of the preceding psalms (108 and 109) was and still is understood in Jewish interpretation to mean that David wrote these.

The apparent dilemma of having David as the author is resolved if we understand that the messianic descendant of David is also Himself divine. Yet the wording of Psalm 110:1 does not seem to merely say that a future messianic King would one day be David's Lord. David, rather, appears to say that this One was *already* his personal Lord--that is, One he already served. This truly makes sense only if David recognized two divine beings existing at that time--one subordinate to the other. So here we have an Old Testament revelation of the existence of God and the Word--later known as God the Father and God the Son (Jesus Christ). While this was not generally understood by the Israelites, it should not surprise

us to see that God's specially inspired prophets glimpsed this important truth.

The apostle Peter quoted Psalm 110:1 as applying to Jesus as the subordinate "Lord" at the right hand of God (Acts 2:34-36). The verse is also quoted in Hebrews 1:13, which shows that this position was given to Jesus and not to the angels.

Whereas Psalm 110:1 describes both Lords from a third-person perspective, verses 2-3 are written in second person--with David using the words "You" and "Your" in addressing the messianic King directly. Depending on the context, the name *YHWH* (represented here as "LORD") could refer to God the Father or to the One who became the Messiah, Jesus Christ--or to both. In keeping with verse 1, the use of "LORD" in verse 2 still clearly refers to the Father. The "You" and "Your" with the "rod of...strength" or "mighty scepter" (NIV) in verses 2-3 must refer to the Messiah. Note God making "Your [the Messiah's] enemies" a footstool (subservient) in verse 1 and the mention again of "Your [the Messiah's] enemies" in verse 2.

David in verse 3 tells his messianic Lord that His people will be "volunteers" when the Lord comes in power. The wording here is "lit[erally] 'freewill offerings,' i.e., they will offer themselves as dedicated warriors to support [the Messiah] on the battlefield.... Accordingly, Paul speaks of Christ's followers offering their bodies 'as living sacrifices' (Romans 12:1) and of himself as a 'drink offering' (Philippians 2:17)" (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on Psalm 110:3). The latter part of verse 3 apparently depicts the Messiah "as clothed in royal majesty and glory and perpetually preserving the bloom of youth even as the 'womb of the dawn' gives birth each morning to the dew" (same note).

Verse 4 is either another third-person description of a divine conversation or a continuation of the second-person address to the Messiah. God is quoted as telling the divine Messiah, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." Melchizedek

(meaning "King of Righteousness") was in Abraham's day the King of Salem (meaning King of "Peace") and priest of God Most High (see Genesis 14:18-20). He was evidently a preincarnate manifestation of Jesus Christ (see ["A Mystery Solved: The Identity of Melchizedek"](#) in our free booklet [Who Is God?](#)). Unlike the later Aaronic priesthood, His priesthood was not established on the basis of His descent within a priestly tribe. Rather, it was by direct divine appointment. Jesus would continue in this priestly role on the same basis. Discussion over this point, citing Psalm 110:4, can be found in Hebrews 5:5-11 and 6:20-7:28.

The declaration in Psalm 110 of the Messiah as a priest was a source of confusion for many of the Jews of Christ's day, leading some to mistakenly think that besides a Davidic Messiah of the line of Judah, there would also be a Messiah of the line of Aaron, who was from the tribe of Levi (and, outside the scope of this discussion, some also believed in a Messiah of the tribe of Joseph). Yet the *one* Messiah was to be both King and Priest.

Note next the opening words of Psalm 110:5: "The Lord is at Your right hand." The Lord (*Adonai*) at the beginning of the verse is evidently the Messianic King, Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of the Father (see Acts 5:31; Acts 7:55-56; Romans 8:34; Colossians 3:1). For recall from verse 1 the Father's appointment of the Lord (Jesus) to sit at His right hand. Therefore, verses 4-7 must constitute an address to God the Father about the future rule of the messianic Lord--thus reciting back to God, in hope and trust, what God has revealed. Jesus will execute divine judgment throughout the world and achieve victory." [END]

Day 347 - WEDNESDAY: January 24th

Psalms 122, 124 & 131

Daily Deep Dive:

Psalm 122:

The UCG reading program states: "Psalm 122, the third song of ascents in the first set of three, centers on blessing and peace in Zion. "This

poem describes the joy of the pilgrim on arriving at Jerusalem to worship God" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on Psalm 122). It is the first of four psalms of David among the songs of ascents.

David was "glad"--the Hebrew connotes laughter and cheerful delight--when companions encouraged him to accompany them into "the house of the Lord" at Jerusalem (verses 1-2). As David lived prior to his son Solomon's construction of the temple, this would immediately refer to the tabernacle that David erected in Jerusalem for the Ark of the Covenant, a place of public worship (2 Samuel 6:17-18). Yet David may have intended this psalm to be used in later temple worship. In a greater sense, it prefigures people coming into the spiritual temple of God--His Church--and ultimately God's Kingdom.

Because he lived in Jerusalem, David himself did not have to go far to worship in God's house. But he does mention others coming from afar--stating that the tribes of God (all His people) "go up" (ascend in their journey) to Jerusalem to give Him thanks (verse 4). Packed with throngs of pilgrims, the city is "compact together" (verse 3)--with all the tribes pressed together and blended. They come to the "Testimony of Israel" (verse 4). This likely referred to the tablets of the Testimony bearing the Ten Commandments within the Ark of the Covenant (compare Exodus 31:18; Exodus 25:21-22; Exodus 16:34). It also may entail coming to God's festivals to learn His laws generally. Indeed, the entire law was to be read every seventh Feast of Tabernacles (Deuteronomy 31:9-13).

Besides God's law being housed and taught in Jerusalem, it was also administratively applied here in civil judgment--providing the blessing of the rule of law and resultant civil order to God's nation (Psalm 122:5). The leading judges in the land were Israel's kings. When David speaks of "thrones of the house of David" in the plural, he may be referring to the seats of himself and Solomon after he had Solomon crowned king prior to his own death. There may also be a prophetic foreshadowing here of the future thrones of judgment in

God's Kingdom, when Jesus Christ sits on the throne of David and His faithful followers reign with Him (see Luke 1:31-33; Revelation 3:21; 20:4, Matthew 19:28).

David calls on worshippers to pray for the peace of Jerusalem (Psalm 122:6). Actually, the name Jerusalem *means* "Possession of Peace" or "Foundation of Peace." And there is wordplay centered on this fact in the psalm. For a feel of the poetic construction, notice the alliteration (repeated consonant sounds) in the following list of Hebrew words and phrases in the song:

| Verses | Hebrew words | English translation |
|--------|---|---|
| 2-3 | <i>Yerushalem Yerushalem</i> | Jerusalem. Jerusalem |
| 4 | <i>shesham alu shebetim shebeti-Yah...le-shem</i> | where go up tribes, tribes of Yah...to name |
| 5 | <i>shammah...le-mishpat</i> | there...of judgment |
| 6 | <i>sha'alu shalom Yerushalem yeshaleyu</i> | Pray peace Jerusalem; shall prosper |
| 7 | <i>shalom...shaluah</i> | peace...prosperity |
| 8 | <i>shalom</i> | peace |

David's prayer--"May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your walls, prosperity within your palaces" (verse 6)--may have been looking ahead to the divinely promised peaceful and blessed reign of his son Solomon, whose name meant "Peaceful." No doubt it was also David's desire for his ongoing dynasty--that the city would be a place of peace and harmony for God's people always, especially as they came together for worship at the annual feasts.

Sadly, Jerusalem has too often failed to live up to its name as the City of Peace. In the nearly 3,000 years since Solomon's death, it has seen numerous wars and conflicts--and today it sits as a geopolitical powder keg. Thus, the psalm looks forward to the time

of the Kingdom of the Messiah, the Prince of Peace, for its complete fulfillment--a time of which Solomon's peaceful reign was only a small foretaste. The Feast of Tabernacles also provides such a foretaste.

Yet though the peace sought in the psalm was ultimately far off, because the house of the Lord was in Jerusalem, David was committed to praying for peace in his day and seeking to rule righteously for the good of the city (verse 9). As before, besides the application of the words of this psalm to David's immediate situation, we should also understand them as applying to the people of spiritual Zion who constitute the spiritual temple of God today--the Church--the peace and good of which we should all continually pray and strive for even as we look forward to ultimate peace in the Kingdom of God." [END]

Psalm 124:

The UCG reading program states: "Psalm 124, the second song of ascents of the second set of three, expresses trust in God--acknowledging Him as the reason for Israel's survival. This is the second of four songs of ascents attributed to King David.

David encourages national participation in this hymn with the formula "Let Israel now say" (verse 1; compare 118:2; 129:1). The repeated opening statement "If it had not been the Lord who was on our side..." (verses 1-2) takes as a given that God *had* been on their side. Indeed, God is on the side of His people. This was historically true for Israel, just as it is for *spiritual* Israel--God's Church. Being on the side of His people does not mean that God endorses everything that they do, as they stumble and sin. The sense here is of being with them, supporting them. God works with His people to guide them, help them and ultimately save them--often against antagonists who try to thwart them. In a powerful New Testament parallel, the apostle Paul remarks, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

Without God's aid, the enemies of His people, in both the physical and spiritual realm, would have swallowed them up (Psalm 124:2-3)--in the metaphoric senses of a flood running over them (verses 4-5) and of predatory wild animals devouring them (verse 6). David used such flood imagery in other psalms for threats and persecution (Psalm 18:16; Psalm 32:6; Psalm 69:1-2; compare also Job 27:20; Revelation 12:15-16). And he elsewhere compares persecution to being attacked by lions (Psalm 7:1-2; Psalm 10:8-11; Psalm 57:4).

Yet God has given deliverance, seen also in the figure of a bird escaping the fowler's snare--the trap of a bird trapper (compare Psalm 91:3). *The Zondervan Student Bible* comments: "Some trouble is quick--bang and it's over...but with other trouble, trying to escape only gets you more deeply entangled...if you try to undo the damage, you only make it worse. That's exactly the picture of 'the fowler's snare.' The bird that caught its neck in the noose only tightened the snare's choke-hold by struggling. The bird could not get out by its own effort. But this time, says David, the snare has miraculously broken, and the bird has flown to safety. When you escape that way, there's only one person to thank: the Lord" (note on verse 7).

Indeed, the past deliverance on which the song reflects is the basis for continued trust in the help of the Almighty Creator God--the One who made heaven and earth (verse 8; compare Psalm 121:2; Psalm 134:3). This confidence is essential for our journey to God's Kingdom." [END]

Psalm 131

The UCG reading program states: "Psalm 131 is the third of four psalms of David among the songs of ascents. As the third song of ascents in the fourth set of three, we would expect its theme to be blessing and peace in Zion--and this does fit with the mention of David, the king in Jerusalem, having a calmed and quieted soul and of Israel living in the hope of God forever (verses 2-3). The same exhortation for Israel to hope in God in Psalms 130:7 and Psalm

131:3 serves to link these two psalms thematically--as does proximity and the continued mood of humility before God.

In light of his accomplishments, David could have been proud. Yet he presents himself to the Lord as a humble man. At heart he is not arrogant or filled with self-importance, nor does he have aspirations for personal greatness (verse 1). He does not deem himself more capable than he is, recognizing his limitations (same verse).

He is at peace and content in God's presence, like a weaned child who no longer frets and cries for milk from his mother's breast (verse 2). A breastfeeding baby can be satisfied--but only temporarily. Note furthermore that this does not mean David views himself as independent of God and no longer in need of His provision. Indeed, a weaned child must still be taken care of and fed by his or her mother. Certainly God will continue to provide and care for all His people--and they should look to Him in confident hope for the present and for eternity to come (verse 3).

Thus, humility, maturity to a point of settled and ongoing contentment, and faith in God's promises are important focuses to maintain in observing God's festivals and in living godly lives generally in the lifelong march to His Kingdom." [END]

Day 348 - THURSDAY: January 25th

Psalms 133, 138 & 139

Daily Deep Dive:

Psalm 133:

The UCG reading program states: "Psalm 133, the fourth of four psalms of David among the songs of ascent, concerns the joy of brotherly unity among God's people. As the second song of ascents in the fifth set of three, it looks in trust to God to provide His commanded blessing of eternal life. The key word in the psalm, missed in English because it is translated different ways, is the thrice--repeated *yarad*--rendered "running down" twice (verse 2)

and "descending" once (verse 3). The idea is that goodness and blessing comes down from above--from God.

David may have composed the psalm when the tribes, after many years of conflict, agreed to unite under his leadership (2 Samuel 5:1-5). As well, the psalm speaks to the pleasure of traveling together in harmony to keep the feasts in Jerusalem--and participating there in the great throngs of unified worship. Furthermore, the song applies to the blessing of unity within and among the congregations of God's people--even today.

The delightful unity described is between "brethren"--brothers--emphasizing family kinship. This goes far beyond immediate family. For people in Old Testament times this was understood in the sense of national brotherhood. And of course we in God's Church understand it to refer, on an even higher level, to spiritual brotherhood through the Holy Spirit of God. God's children getting along and happily working together is truly a delightful experience--and a blessing that comes down from Him.

The "precious oil" (verse 2) was the anointing oil specially prepared for use in the tabernacle (see Exodus 30:22-33). "When the high priest was anointed, the oil ran down his beard to the front of his body and over his collar. This suggests that the oil 'bathed' the twelve precious stones that he wore on the breastplate over his heart, and this 'bathing' is a picture of spiritual unity" (Wiersbe, *Be Exultant*, note on verse 2).

In verse 3, Mount Hermon, a high, snowy peak on the border between Israel and Lebanon, was a significant source of water for Israel. One avenue for this was evaporation--carrying water from Hermon to settle in the south as dew and rain. Also, snowmelt sank into the Hermon region and emerged in many streams in northern Israel, even forming the headwaters of the Jordan River--the word Jordan also being derived from the word *yarad*. (*Yaraden* apparently meaning "coming down from

Dan"--which was in the Hermon area). As water was carried this way from Hermon down through the land of Israel to the mountains of Zion, so was further evaporation and precipitation. Yet note that precipitation in general is not in mind here, but specifically dew. From around May to October, encompassing Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles, virtually no rain fell on Jerusalem, so that refreshment came only through the blessing of daily morning dew--and, the comparison is made, through the unity of God's people at His pilgrim feasts.

"The two similes (vv. 2-3) are well chosen; God's blessings flowed to Israel through the priestly ministrations at the sanctuary (Exodus 29:44-46; Leviticus 9:22-24; Numbers 6:24-26)--epitomizing God's redemptive mercies--and through heaven's dew that sustained life in the fields--epitomizing God's providential mercies in the creation order" (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on verse 3). Moreover, anointing oil and water precipitation are both representative in Scripture of the Holy Spirit--sent down from God to transform and spiritually sustain His people.

This blessing from above is the source of the unity of God's people--as well as the closing blessing of this joyous life continuing through all eternity." [END]

Psalm 138:

The UCG reading program states: "Just before the final five praise hymns that close the book of Psalms (146-150), those responsible for its final compilation placed a collection of eight psalms attributed in their titles to King David (138-145). This serves to tie the whole Psalter together, as David composed most of its first two books. The final Davidic collection, as the *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* comments, "is framed by songs of praise (Psalms 138; 145). The first of these extols the greatness of the Lord's glory as displayed in his answering the prayer ('call') of the 'lowly' when suffering at the hands of the 'proud.' The last, employing a grand and intricately woven alphabetic acrostic design, extols the 'glorious

majesty' of the Lord as displayed in his benevolent care over all his creatures--especially those who 'call' on him (look to him in every need). Within this frame have been placed six prayers--with certain interlocking themes" (note on Psalms 138-145)--the first (Psalm 139) taking a stand against the wicked and the five others (140-144) seeking deliverance from wicked foes.

In Psalm 138 David wholeheartedly praises God for imbuing him with confidence that God will help him against threatening enemies. Given the prophecy of all kings of the earth coming to praise God (verse 4), the song clearly looks forward to the time of the setting up of God's Kingdom with the future coming of the Messiah for ultimate fulfillment.

David says in verse 1 that He will sing praises to God "before the gods." As in Psalm 135:5 and Psalm 136:2, the identity of the "gods" here could refer to foreign kings falsely claiming divinity or perhaps to human rulers who, as the offspring of the true God commissioned to represent Him in dominion, can bear this title in a sense (compare Psalm 82:1, Psalm 82:6). The reference could also be to demons, the powers behind the thrones of pagan nations who sometimes posed as the false gods these nations worshipped (compare Deuteronomy 32:17). Then again, as this song looks forward to the time of Christ's reign over all nations, the term "gods" here may designate the resurrected saints of God who will reign with Him and share in His divine glory (see "You Are Gods", *The Good News*, July-Aug. 2002, pp. 28-29).

In Psalm 138:2 David says that He will worship toward God's holy temple. He said the same thing in Psalm 5:7. While the Jerusalem temple was not built until after David's death, this does not rule out David as the composer of these psalms. Some point out that the word for temple here was a general one that could refer to the tabernacle structure David built for the ark in Jerusalem. Moreover, it is possible that David was referring to God's temple in heaven. We should also consider that David was looking forward to the time of

God's Kingdom, when a temple will evidently stand in Jerusalem, as seen in the concluding chapters of the book of Ezekiel. Another thought to bear in mind is that David may have composed these songs to be sung in temple worship after his death. Alternatively, it is possible that others edited them to fit later circumstances, though, as we've seen, there is no need to assume this.

David says He will praise God "for Your lovingkindness and Your truth" (Psalm 138:2). The word lovingkindness is translated from the important Hebrew term *hesed*, which can also mean "mercy," "grace," "loyal love" or "devotion." The word rendered "truth," *emet*, besides defining reality as opposed to falsehood, is also understood to refer to the quality of being true to one's word--faithfulness. These words for mercy and truth are often paired together. The NIV translates them as "love" and "faithfulness." We also find this terminology in the New Testament as "grace and truth" (John 1:14).

Continuing from this description of God's character, David further states, "For You have magnified Your word above all Your name" (Psalm 138:2, NKJV). Different versions give an alternate rendering, with translators unable to reconcile how God's word could be above His name--signifying His identity and reputation. Following the Hebrew arrangement, the actual word order is "For You have magnified above all Your name Your word" (J.P. Green, *The Interlinear Bible*). The NIV renders it this way: "For you have exalted above all things your name and your word." However, there is no "and" specified in the Hebrew here, though it could perhaps be interpolated. More importantly, the KJV and NKJV translation does make sense--and conveys a wonderful message. The meaning seems to be that God does not put who He is above what He has said. Rather, what He has said comes first. Consider that the Almighty Sovereign God could go back on every promise He has made and no one could do a thing about it. Yet God of His own will has set His word above all the prerogatives associated with His divine supremacy--that is, He has obligated Himself to abide by everything

He has declared. This is truly awesome to ponder. It should lead us all to join with David in wholehearted worship and praise.

In verse 3, David recounts his own experience of God's faithfulness in having his prayer answered. It is not clear if the day of David crying out refers to a particular instance or if he is describing a regular pattern. Whichever is intended, David is thankful for God intervening and strengthening his resolve and confidence.

As noted above, all kings of the earth coming to praise God and sing of His ways in verses 4-5 is a prophecy of the future messianic era. "David, as a king who believed in God, looked forward to a day when all the kings of the earth would share his experience" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verses 4-6). In the meantime, God, despite His high and lofty station, regards the lowly and humble in spirit--as the mighty of the earth today are typically arrogant and cut off from a relationship with Him (verse 6).

The mighty and proud evidently include David's wrathful enemies, mentioned in verse 7. David here trusts in God to deliver him from them in terms reminiscent of the words he wrote in Psalm 23:3-4.

In verse 8, David says, "The LORD will perfect *that which* concerns me" (the italics here and in the following citations signifying interpolated text not in the original Hebrew). Essentially the same thing is written in Psalm 57:2, where David says that God "performs *all things* for me"--the word translated "performs" being the same Hebrew verb translated "perfect" in Psalms 138:8. It can also mean "complete" or "fulfill," as in the NIV translation: "The LORD will fulfill *his purpose* for me." David had faith that God would save him from his enemies in order to fulfill God's reason for his existence. God would not let anything cut short the work He had begun in him--a tremendous promise that also applies to us (compare Philippians 1:6).

David ends with a declaration similar to the refrain of Psalm 136 and a closing plea, uttered in great confidence as we've seen, that God not abandon the work He was doing in him. As a final observation, it may be that the notation at the beginning of the superscription of Psalm 139, "For the Chief Musician," is actually a postscript for Psalm 138." [END]

Psalm 139:

The UCG reading program states: "In Psalm 139 David acknowledges, in great wonder and awe, God's omniscient care in guiding his life and expresses his solidarity with God against the wicked.

God has searched within David and his life and knows everything there is to know about him. He carefully investigates each facet of David's life to discern all his actions--from when he gets up in the morning to when he goes to bed at night (verses 1-2a). God is thus familiar with all David's patterns, habits, preferences and ways of doing things. Moreover, God looks penetratingly into David's heart to discern his inner motives and secret thoughts (verse 2b). In fact, God knows David so well that He anticipates his words before they are spoken (verse 4). God has an exhaustive knowledge of David--just as He has of us (see Hebrews 4:13).

The beginning of Psalm 139:3 is variously translated: "Thou compassest [i.e., encompass] my path" (KJV); "You comprehend my path" (NKJV); "You discern my going out" (NIV); "You search out my path" (NRSV); "You sift my path" (J.P. Green's Literal Translation). The latter is probably the correct sense (Strong's No. 2219). *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* renders the phrase as "You have winnowed me" (note on verses 1-6). The idea is apparently that God sifts all our actions, "putting them through a sieve, as it were, so as to discover every detail about them, what has motivated them, what effect they have upon me and upon others, in fact, everything conceivable about them" (George Knight, *Psalms*, Vol. 2, The Daily Study Bible Series, comments on verses 1-6).

Yet the purpose of God's intimate knowledge of His servants is not to play "gotcha" and condemn us. Rather, as verse 5 makes plain, God's intention is to protect and guard us--to keep and hold onto us, to steady and guide us, as the objects of His care. God's all-knowing understanding and concern is just too mind-boggling for David to take in (verse 6).

In verses 7-12, David remarks on the fact that there is nowhere he can go to be out from under God's watchful oversight--for God is everywhere (omnipresent) through His infinite Spirit (see verse 7). There is no way to be concealed from Him. He can see and reach everywhere, all the time, day and night, light or dark. For some this might seem a negative thing--that is, there is no escape! But David clearly did not mean it that way, for he says that no matter where he is, God will lead him and uphold him (verse 10). He is greatly *encouraged* by the fact that God is all-seeing and all-knowing. Incidentally, the word "hell" in verse 8 is translated from the Hebrew *sheol*, meaning pit or grave, thus explaining David's statement about making his "bed" there (i.e., his deathbed). So nothing, not even the grave, will separate us from God's caring oversight of our lives--for His intervening hand will lead us even from death (compare Romans 8:35-39).

In verses 13-16 of Psalm 139, David reflects on the fact that God's care in his life was there from its very beginning, acknowledging God's oversight in his conception and prenatal development. Where the NKJV says that God "covered" David in his mother's womb (verse 13), other translations render this "knit me together" (NIV) or "wove me." The Hebrew here literally means *entwined*, implying weaving but perhaps the weaving of a fence or cover of protection (Strong's No. 5526). In any case, David praises the miracle of life and birth of which he is the product (verses 14-15).

In this he remarks that God saw him "made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth" (verse 15). The location here is not meant literally, but is rather a metaphor for a dark,

mysterious, unsearchable and unfathomable place. Such is God's workshop in the cells of the human embryo within the womb! The unformed "substance" in the next verse is a reference to the embryo.

In the latter part of verse 16 David says that all the days prepared for him were written in God's book before these days commenced. What does this mean? Some would use this verse to argue that every day of David's life was completely mapped out in advance--and to argue that the same applies to us. This, however, violates the principle of free will and choice--which we find repeatedly in Scripture (compare Deuteronomy 30:19). Furthermore, "all...the days" does not have to mean each and every day but could mean the days taken as a whole--a lifetime. Based on this, others might argue that the verse means merely that David's lifespan was generally predetermined from his genetics since conception. While possible, it seems likely that more is intended.

Commentaries typically maintain that David used the metaphor of a book to portray God's exquisitely detailed plans for each person--plans He has in mind before a person's birth. Elements of David's life, at least in a general sense (particularly his reign over Israel), seems to have been plotted out by God ahead of time (while still allowing David free will as to whether to serve God or reject Him). And this plan may have been written in an actual spiritual record, rather than this signifying a mere metaphor. David in another psalm remarked that his tears were written in God's book (Psalm 56:8), which seems to be the same as the book of remembrance for those who fear God in Malachi 3:16. This may or may not be synonymous with another book David mentions, the book of the living (Psalm 69:28), apparently equivalent to the Book of Life, God's heavenly registry of the righteous (see Exodus 32:32-33; Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:3; Hebrews 12:23; Revelation 3:5; Revelation 13:8; Revelation 17:8; Revelation 20:12, Revelation 20:15, Revelation 20:17; Revelation 22:19). David's reference in Psalm 139 could also be to the "Scripture of Truth," the Bible of heaven as it were, wherein a lengthy prophecy of the future was already inscribed

before it was given to Daniel to write down in his own book as God's written revelation to us (see Daniel 10:21).

The theme of one's purpose in life is a key topic in the Bible. Note what God announced to the Jewish nation in exile: "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11). Indeed, David remarks in the next verse of Psalm 139 on how precious and countless are God's thoughts toward *him* (verses 17-18).

The end of verse 18 then states, "When I awake, I am still with you." Perhaps the point is that David is amazed to consider that every day he wakes, he is still in God's care--returning to the thought at the beginning of the psalm of God observing His "sitting down and...rising up" (verse 2). Yet some suggest that he is speaking in a future tense of his resurrection--remarking in the context of verse 16 that after the passing of his days, he will awake from death and even still be with God.

Enraptured as he is with God's intimate and all-seeing care in his life--demonstrative of God's care for all His servants--David still can't help but think about the wicked who, despite God's wonderful intentions over which he's been musing, still cause trouble for him and all of God's people (as highlighted in the next five psalms). As he closes Psalm 139, David expresses the wish that God would justly deal with this outstanding problem. God has, in fact, already pronounced a death sentence in His law against the bloodthirsty and the blasphemous. David is here supporting the carrying out of that sentence (verses 19-20).

David then unequivocally declares that he hates those who hate God and rebel against Him, loathing them and hating them with a perfect or complete hatred (verses 21-22). Many today are disturbed at such language in light of Jesus Christ's instruction in the New Testament: "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good

to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you in and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). Indeed, caring for one's enemy was also an Old Testament directive (compare Exodus 23:4-5; Proverbs 25:21).

But we should consider a number of factors here. First, as in other psalms, the hatred David is speaking of in Psalm 139 should be understood primarily in the sense of rejection and strong aversion. Note his words in verse 19 calling on the bloodthirsty to get away from him. That is, David wants nothing to do with them. He won't support them or make common cause with them. He will not befriend them or accept their friendship, for he counts them as his enemies (verse 22). This is a second point to emphasize. David's hatred here does not equate to personally taking vengeance or even mistreatment on a personal level. It equates to counting the wicked as his enemies. He opposes them. If they are *God's* enemies, then they are *his* enemies. That brings us to a third factor to note here. David is not declaring hatred for those who merely bear him personal ill will, but for those who hate and rise up against God. Of course, those who bore David animosity usually did so on the basis of opposition to God and His law--yet it was this rather than personal hurt that was the basis for David's declared hatred against them. In essence, David was declaring his complete solidarity with God against God's enemies.

None of this, by the way, precludes following the New Testament instruction to pray for one's persecutors and to do good to them. Even given the strong words David spoke, he still could and may well have followed what Christ would later explain--as he clearly did in his dealings with Saul. Indeed, we should be careful to not misconstrue Christ's teaching in this regard. Consider that praying for one's persecutors obviously does not mean praying for their success in persecution. It primarily means praying for their long-term well-being, realizing that God intends to eventually lead them to repentance. It may include praying that He will lead them to repent *soon*--at least of their present antagonism and offending

behavior. Barring that outcome, praying for enemies could even mean asking God to exercise judgment on them to stop them from their evil and greater guilt. Doing good to persecutors, loving our enemies, does not mean supporting them in their evil plans or making common cause with them. Recall what Jehu the seer said to King Jehoshaphat of Judah for his joint operations with evil King Ahab of Israel : "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD? Therefore the wrath of the LORD is upon you" (2 Chronicles 19:2). As is stated here, we are not to "love" the haters of God in this sense. Rather, we are to oppose them.

David ends with a prayer that God will search his heart and investigate his anxieties to see "if there is any wicked way in me" (Psalm 139:24). Some commentators relate his request to his declared abhorrence of God's enemies--the idea being that he is asking God to search his heart to see if his expressed thoughts are the product of a righteous stand with God or born out of personal concerns. Other commentators understand the verse as a general request that God examine him for *any* wickedness--that is, having discussed wickedness in others, that God check to see if there is wickedness to be dealt with in *him*. David deeply desires to be led out of wickedness and, as he says in verse 24, into the way that leads to everlasting life.

As a final note, if the first part of the superscription of this psalm, "To the Chief Musician," actually belongs to the previous psalm as a postscript, then the same phrase at the beginning of the superscription of the *next* psalm may actually be the postscript of this psalm." [END]

Day 349 - FRIDAY: January 26th

Psalms 140, 141 & 143

Daily Deep Dive:

Psalm 140:

The UCG reading program states: "We now come within the final collection of Davidic psalms (Psalm 138-145) to its central sequence

of five prayers in which David seeks deliverance from wicked enemies (140-144). The first of these, Psalm 140, is a lamenting plea for preservation from the plotting of evil, violent men and a call for divine retribution. The structure of the psalm is easy to discern. There are four stanzas (verses 1-3, 4-5, 6-8, 9-11), the first three ending with "Selah" and the last followed by a two-verse conclusion (verses 12-13).

The first two stanzas set up the problem David is faced with. It is interesting to note that the same words are used for the second line in both the first and second stanzas: "Preserve me from violent men" (verses 1, 4). The violent here may intend physical brutality, but their method of attack is verbal—through deceit and slander (see verse 3; compare verses 9, 11). David experienced a number of such incidents in his life.

In the third stanza, David says he has appealed to the Lord in complete trust (verse 6-7). He knows that the One who has "covered" or shielded (NIV) his head in actual physical battles will protect him in this current "battle" (verse 7). With this confidence, he asks that God not grant success to the schemes of his enemies (verse 8). As noted in regard to the previous psalm, Jesus' instruction in the New Testament to bless and pray for our enemies (Matthew 5:44) does not mean praying for their success in opposing and harming us.

In the fourth stanza David calls for a curse on the offenders. Whereas God covered or protected David's head in past battles (again, see verse 7), David calls for the head of his enemies to be covered only with the evil of their own lips—that is, for their scheming and slander against him to come back on them. Indeed, this is the decreed penalty in the law for bearing false witness against another (see Deuteronomy 19:16-21). David as God's prophet is pronouncing this judgment. In another psalm, David foretold that burning coals and fire would rain down on the wicked (Psalm 11:6), as Sodom and Gomorrah experienced (Genesis 19:24).

Here that same penalty is called for (Psalm 140:10), though the sense may be figurative of a calamitous divine judgment. As David's enemies tried to trip him up to cause him to fall into traps (verse 5), David calls for *them* to fall into deep pits "that they rise not up again" (verse 10). This too may be figurative—of being sunk into ineffectiveness. If it implies their deaths, then their not rising again would refer to them no longer being alive to cause trouble in the present world—not to them never being in a future resurrection. The next psalm likewise calls for the wicked to fall into their own nets (Psalm 141:9-10).

David ends Psalm 140 in verses 12-13 on a confident note, assured that God will bring justice to the needy and afflicted and that God's people will dwell with Him in perpetual gratitude." [END]

Psalm 141:

The UCG reading program states: "Psalm 141 is the second in the sequence of five psalms of David seeking deliverance from the wicked. David also prays here that he be kept from taking part with them in their evildoings.

He begins with an urgent call for God to hear his plea (verse 1) and declares his intention to present his prayer, with hands raised toward heaven, as incense and as the evening sacrifice, desiring that God accept it as such (verse 2).

Incense was burned on the golden altar within the tabernacle—later the temple—every morning and evening to infuse the sanctuary with a sweet smell (see Exodus 30:1-10). Furthermore, frankincense was included with burnt offerings (see Exodus 30:1-10, 34-38; Leviticus 2:2)—adding fragrance to the savor of the sacrificial meat being cooked. Later in Scripture, the burning of incense is said to represent the prayers of God's people ascending to Him (Revelation 5:8; Revelation 8:3-4).

The evening sacrifice was a regular daily burnt offering "for a sweet aroma" (Numbers 28:3-8), symbolizing, along with the morning sacrifice, regular and ongoing devotion to God. In considering the analogy, realize that "the evening sacrifice took time, it took care, it took preparation, it was extremely costly, every action in it was clearly thought out and performed in logical sequence" (George Knight, *Psalms*, comments on Psalm 141:1-10).

David's specification of the *evening* sacrifice rather than the morning one or both may indicate that he spoke or composed this prayer in the evening—perhaps at the time of the evening sacrifice. It could even be that David routinely gave this or a like prayer as part of his reflection at the end of the day over an extended period of time—that is, it may have become his own personal evening sacrifice. It is worth noting that "both Ezra (Ezra 9) and Daniel (Daniel 9) prayed at the time of the evening offering. After the second temple was built, this psalm was read when the evening sacrifices were offered and the lamps were lit in the holy place" (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Exultant: Psalms 90-150*, note on Psalm 141:1-2).

Before praying for God to deal with the wicked and to rescue him from them, David first turns to the issue of his own human proclivities, asking God to help him avoid any deviation toward wickedness in his own character. This includes safeguarding his speech (verse 3)—for control over one's tongue through God's help is a huge part of godly character (compare James 3). It also means not eating of the wicked's "delicacies" (Psalm 141:4) or "dainties" (KJV). David is likely saying one of two things here. Either he does not want to get drawn into enjoying the "finer things" that come as a product of living the evil lifestyle common among the rich and powerful. Or he does not want to be someone who is welcomed as a guest among such people—dining in their homes and enjoying their hospitality.

If he starts leaning this way at all, David prays that the "righteous"—either a godly person or the righteous *One*, God—will as a kindness "strike" him (knock some sense into him) through rebuke. This will be like fine oil on the head, a gesture of rich hospitality that he *will not* refuse (verse 5)—in contrast to the fineries of the wicked that he *intends to* refuse.

The Hebrew text then becomes somewhat difficult to understand—from the end of verse 5 through verse 7. Translators have rendered this section in various ways over the centuries. The primary controversy centers on to whom these verses are referring.

Many believe the last line of verse 5 refers to the righteous—that David is praying for them "in their calamities" (KJV). However, the plural "their" more likely seems to refer back to the workers of iniquity in verse 4 (since the "righteous...him" in verse 5 is singular). And the KJV "in their calamities" is reinterpreted as "in [the face of] their evils." This is the sense followed in most modern versions.

If that is correct, then verse 6 (which some take to refer to the sufferings of the righteous) would, as seems more likely, also refer to the wicked: "When their judges [the leaders of the wicked] are overthrown in stony places, they [the wicked] shall hear my words; for they [my words] are sweet" (KJV). The word translated "sweet" can also mean "pleasing" or "agreeable." Some take this to mean that the general populace of the wicked will actually be willing to listen to David after their rulers fall. Others believe the meaning is that the wicked are going to be forced by the fall of their leaders to see that David's words were "well spoken" (NIV)—whether that's agreeable to them or not.

Moving on to verse 7, there is again scholarly disagreement. Whose bones are scattered at the mouth of the grave? David mentions "*our* bones," though many prefer to have him say "*their* bones"—that is, those of the wicked. The NIV adds to the beginning of this statement the words "They will say" and interprets

verse 7 as quoting the wicked—the description here seeming to fit the wicked rulers cast down in verse 6. Then again, others see no evidence for any quotation in verse 7 and understand David to be referring figuratively to the devastated state of himself and others of the righteous who are persecuted by the wicked (compare Psalm 143:3, Psalm 143:7)—giving the basis for the stated judgment on the wicked in the previous verse (Psalm 141:6) and the reason for his call for deliverance and justice in the next verses (8-10).

In these concluding verses, David turns his eyes to God, his only refuge from the intrigues of the wicked (verses 8-9). Similar to the previous psalm, he asks that the wicked be caught up in their own plotting (verse 10; compare Psalm 140:5, Psalm 140:9-10)—while he is set free into safety.” [END]

Psalm 143:

The UCG reading program states: “Psalm 143 is the fourth in the sequence of five psalms of David (within the collection of eight) wherein David prays for deliverance from enemies. It is classified as one of the seven penitential psalms (Psalms 6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143). These psalms have in common an acknowledgment of sin (Psalm 32:5; Psalm 8:18; Psalm 51:2-4; Psalm 130:3) and/or a reference to deserved punishment (Psalm 6:1; Psalm 38:1; Psalm 102:10; Psalm 143:2).

In this psalm, David doesn't acknowledge specific sins but is clearly aware of his own failings, asking to be passed over in judgment. He knows that such judgment would find him guilty, as he, like everyone, has sinned (compare Psalm 143:2; Romans 3:10, Romans 3:23). So he pleads for mercy, basing his appeal on God's faithfulness and righteousness (Psalm 143:1) in dealing with one who is His servant (verse 2; compare verses 11-12).

David further implies that he is unable to withstand judgment given his already-overwhelmed state, crushed to the depths of despair by enemy persecution that brought him seemingly near death (verses

3-4, 7). Although David is probably referring to a human enemy (verse 3) and enemies (verse 12) who have persistently hounded him, he may have in mind as well the spiritual Adversary, Satan the devil, and his demons, who are also associated with darkness and the pit (see Ephesians 6:12; Revelation 20:1-2).

David likens his yearning for God to dry ground that needs rain (verse 6). Interestingly, rain in other passages symbolizes God's Word and teachings (Isaiah 55:6-13; Deuteronomy 32:1-3), the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 44:3-4), righteousness (Hosea 10:12) and the coming of God (Hosea 6:1, Hosea 6:3). David needs all of this. In desperation he cries out for God's immediate intervention. He cannot rely on his own overwhelmed and failing spirit (Psalm 143:4, Psalm 143:7), referring to his weakened strength of mind. He requires the help of God's good Spirit (see verse 10). He needs an understanding of how to go forward (verse 8), rescue from his enemies (verse 9), instruction in righteousness (verse 10), and relief and empowerment (verse 11).

As in the opening of the psalm (verses 1-2), David again bases his plea for help (including justice on enemies) on the fact that he is God's servant (verses 11-12)—stressing here God's *hesed*, rendered "mercy" (verse 12, NKJV) but also translatable as "loyal love" or "devotion." The point is that God has made promises of steadfast love and help to those who are His servants—even, as verse 11 implies, staking His name, His reputation, on this." [END]

Day 350 - SATURDAY: January 27th

Psalms 144, 145 & 88

Daily Deep Dive:

Psalm 144:

The UCG reading program states: "Psalm 144 is the last in the sequence here of five psalms of David seeking rescue from foes, in this case referring to treacherous foreign enemies in a time of war or the threat of war. It contains a number of similarities with David's great victory song found in 2 Samuel 22 and Psalm 18. As the victory

song evidently came late in David's life, after all his foes were subdued, and Psalm 144 was written while David still needed deliverance from foreign enemies, it would appear that the victory song borrowed elements from Psalm 144 rather than the other way around. In fact, there is more in the specific wording of both songs to confirm this, as we will see.

Psalm 144 opens with David praising God as his "Rock" (verse 1a), the word here also meaning "strength," which could mean a stronghold or fortress. The same word appears at the beginning of Psalm 18 as "strength" (verse 1), but it is paired in the next verse with another word meaning "rock" (verse 2; compare 2 Samuel 22:2). Note also the references to God as "fortress" and "high tower" (Psalm 144:2; compare Psalm 18:2; 2 Samuel 22:2-3).

In Psalm 144:2 David refers to God as He "who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle" (Psalm 144:1b). Compare the victory song: "He teaches my hands to make war" (Psalm 18:34; 2 Samuel 22:35). Thus David credits God for making him a successful warrior-king. *The Nelson Study Bible* suggests: "It is also possible that this psalm was used in the training of the army (as was Psalm 149). Warfare in ancient Israel was tied closely to the worship of God. Deliverance from the enemy was not just a task for tough soldiers, it was a matter of active piety" (introductory note on Psalm 144). As God's earthly kingdom at that time, Israel and its human ruler battled foreign enemies at God's command. Christians today, who wait for God's future Kingdom, do not have this responsibility and therefore do not participate in physical warfare (compare John 18:36). Of course, God does teach us to fight spiritual battles against our spiritual enemies.

Verse 3 of Psalm 144, asking what is man (the Hebrew here connoting *mortal* man) that God should care for him, is nearly the same as Psalm 8:4. Actually, David evidently took this wording, as found in both psalms, from Job 7:17-18. In fact, the previous clause of that passage, "For my days are but a breath" (verse 16), is echoed

in the next words of Psalm 144: "Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow" (verse 4). "The Hebrew word translated 'breath' [here and in Job 7:16] is *habel*, the name of one of Adam's sons (Abel), and the word translated 'vanity' thirty-eight times in Ecclesiastes. (See also Psalm 39:4-6, Psalm 39:22; Psalm 62:9; Psalm 78:33, Psalm 94:11.) The 'shadow' image is found in Psalm 102:11, Psalm 109:23, Job 8:9 and Psalm 14:2, and Ecclesiastes 6:12 and Ecclesiastes 8:13" (Wiersbe, *Be Exultant*, note on Psalm 144:1-4).

This presentation of the frailty of human existence sets up David's plea for God's powerful intervention. The imagery of the bowing down of the heavens, the flashing forth of lightning bolts as arrows and the rescue from great waters representative of foreign adversaries (verses 5-7) is all found in the victory song as well (compare Psalm 18:9, Psalm 18:14, Psalm 18:16-17; 2 Samuel 22:10, 2 Samuel 22:15, 2 Samuel 22:17-18). However, Psalm 144 asks for these things to happen, while the victory song shows them as already accomplished. Thus, the victory song is essentially praise and thanks for God answering the plea of Psalm 144—further demonstrating the order in which these psalms were composed.

Verse 8 and the recapitulation of the plea for deliverance in verse 11 seem to imply that the foreign enemies are violating some treaty or other agreement they had made with Israel .

David, anticipating deliverance and victory, says he will sing a new song to God (verse 9; compare Psalm 33:2-3; Psalm 40:3). This could refer to singing an old song with renewed joy and zeal. Yet in this case it may well refer to the composition of a completely new song—the best fit seeming to be the victory song of Psalm 18 and 2 Samuel 22. In the context of this new song is the reference to God as "the One who gives salvation to kings, who delivers David His servant from the deadly sword" (Psalm 144:10). Considering that the names of the psalmists are rarely included in the lyrics of the psalms, compare the victory song: "Great deliverance He gives to

His king, and shows mercy to His anointed, to David and his descendants forevermore" (Psalm 18:50; compare 2 Samuel 22:51).

Praying for God's deliverance in faith, David can foresee strong, healthy children, prosperity, peace and contentment for God's nation (Psalm 144:12-15). Such happiness, as verse 15 makes clear, is the reward of the people of God—both in this age and, in an ultimate sense, in the age to come.

It would be beneficial to read Psalm 18 or 2 Samuel 22 following Psalm 144 to see the intervention of God in answering David's prayer." [END]

Psalm 145:

The UCG reading program states: "Psalm 145, the last of the final collection of eight Davidic psalms (Psalms 138-145), is a grand hymn of praise for God the Great King and His majestic reign and gracious acts—including the deliverance of His people. It serves as the closing frame of the five prayers of David seeking rescue from wicked enemies (Psalms 140-144)--perhaps placed here as grateful and worshipful praise in collective response to God's intervention in all these past situations and His faithfulness to continue intervening (compare Psalm 145:18-20). The hymn also serves to transition to the final five untitled psalms of *Hallelujah* ("Praise the LORD") that close the book of Psalms (146-150). This psalm is specifically titled a "praise" or *tehillah* (derived from *hallel*)--the only psalm so titled. From the plural form of this word, *tehillim*, has come the traditional Hebrew name for the book of Psalms--*Sefer Tehillim* or "Book of Praises."

David composed Psalm 145 in the form of an alphabetic acrostic, with each succeeding verse beginning with a succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet--with the exception, according to the Masoretic Text, of the letter *nun*. A number of modern versions, based on other texts, include an additional verse corresponding to this letter after verse 13 (though not numbered as a separate verse). However,

this does not appear to be justified. As *John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible* comments: "This psalm is written alphabetically, as is observed on the title of it; but the letter '*nun*' is here wanting.... Nor is the order always strictly observed in alphabetical psalms; in the thirty-seventh psalm the letter '*ain*' is wanting, and three [letters] in the twenty-fifth psalm. The Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions, supply this defect here, by inserting these words, 'the Lord is faithful in all his words, and holy in all his works,' as if they were begun with the word *Nman*, but they seem to be taken from Psalm 145:17, with a little alteration" (note on verse 13).

David begins his hymn of praise with a powerful declaration that he will *extol* (exalt or lift up), *bless* and *praise* God every day forever and ever (verses 1-2)--demonstrating an understanding that he himself will live forever to render this worship. He then states the theme of his psalm: "Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable" (verse 3; compare Romans 11:33). David can compose praise from uncountable manifestations of God's greatness: His nature, His creation, His plan of salvation, His dealings with mankind.

In verses 4-12 David mentions a number of ways that praise for God will be promulgated. He starts by declaring that praise for God's awesome works will resound from one generation to the next (verse 4). This is accomplished as stories of God's great acts are taught to succeeding generations. The passing on of such knowledge is primarily the responsibility of parents (compare Deuteronomy 4:9; Deuteronomy 6:7).

Another means of transmitting this knowledge is through the recording of God's acts for posterity, as was done in the Scriptures. In fact, observe next in Psalm 145 the back and forth of "I will meditate" (verse 5) and "Men shall speak" (verse 6a), "I will declare" (verse 6b) and "They shall utter" (verse 7). Modern Bible versions often eliminate these shifts, but they are clearly present in the

Hebrew. Perhaps the idea here is that David is declaring God's praises in this and other psalms-which others in later generations will sing and talk about.

David then inserts here God's revelation of Himself through His character, essentially repeating God's description of Himself to Moses as gracious, compassionate, full of mercy or loving devotion, slow to anger, and good (verses 8-9; compare Exodus 34:6-7). Similar wording may also be found in other psalms (e.g., Exodus 86:5, Exodus 86:15; Psalm 111:4; Psalm 112:4).

In the next verse (Psalm 145:10a), David says that all of God's works will praise Him, echoing Psalm 19:1-3, where the evidence of God's creative handiwork in the heavens "declares" God's glory.

And a further method of the transmission of God's praise is through the speaking of His saints--His sanctified people--whose task it is to proclaim His Kingdom and mighty acts to the sons of men, the people of this world (verses 10a-12). This is primarily accomplished today, as the New Testament makes clear, through the Church's proclamation of the gospel of the Kingdom. Yet in an ultimate sense, this may picture the saints, when resurrected and glorified as kings and priests in God's future Kingdom, teaching the gospel to all nations.

Verse 13, it should be noted, stresses the eternal nature of God's Kingdom and dominion. We should realize that Scripture presents God's Kingdom in three ways. In the first two senses it is a present reality. God is particularly the King of His people--both ancient Israel and spiritual Israel, His Church, today. Moreover, God is of course always and ever the King of the universe--Sovereign over all His created realm. Yet for the time being, God permits resistance to His rule. And this brings us to the third, future sense of God's Kingdom. When Jesus Christ returns, He will set up God's Kingdom over all nations, enforcing its laws throughout the world and leading

everyone to accept God's sovereignty or be removed. All these senses of God's reign appear in the remainder of the psalm.

Verses 14-16 illustrate God's compassion and goodness as, through His sovereign rule, He helps the needy and provides sustenance for all living things. Note that the word "gracious" in verse 8 is translated from *hannun*, meaning stooping in kindness to help (Strong's No. 2587, from 2603). In verse 17 the word translated "gracious" is *hasid* (Strong's No. 2623)--an adjective form of *hesed* (No. 2617), meaning loyal love or devotion. Indeed, in verses 17-20 we see God's loyal love to His devoted people. He will answer their prayers and save them.

While the deliverance and preservation of God's people in these verses happens today, the ultimate fulfillment of this passage will come with the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth in the future, when the wicked who refuse to come under God's loving authority will be destroyed (verse 20) and David's praise will be part of a vast chorus of all people praising God for all time (verse 21).”
[END]

Psalm 88:

The UCG reading program states: “There is some question as to the authorship of Psalms 88 and 89. The superscription of Psalm 88 describes it as a song of the sons of Korah (the last of 11 Korahite psalms in the Psalter) as well as a *maskil*—an instructive psalm or "contemplation" (NKJV)—of Heman the Ezrahite. Psalm 89 is labeled as a *maskil* of Ethan the Ezrahite. Many take these names to refer to David's Levitical choir leaders Heman and Ethan (the latter apparently also known as Jeduthun). Indeed, Heman the singer, grandson of Samuel and choir leader of the Levitical clan of Kohath, was a descendant of Korah (see 1 Chronicles 6:33-38). Yet note 1 Kings 4:31, which says that Solomon was wiser than "Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Chalcol, and Darda." These men were evidently descendants not of Levi but of Judah's son Zerah: "The sons of Zerah were Zimri, Ethan, Heman, Calcol, and Dara" (1

Chronicles 2:6). The distinction Ethan the Ezrahite here appears to denote Ethan the Zarhite or Zerahite (recall that Hebrew was originally written with no vowels). How do we make sense of this?

Some think traditions have become confused and that the superscriptions of Psalms 88 and 89 are in error—that the designation "Ezrahite" was wrongly added to the Heman and Ethan in these psalm titles. But that is not necessarily so. First of all, it is entirely possible that the Heman and Ethan here are not David's Levitical music leaders at all but instead the illustrious descendants of Zerah. If so, it could be, in the case of Psalm 88, that the sons of Korah took the Zerahite Heman's written poem and set it to music—turning it into a song (making it "a psalm of the sons of Korah"). On the other hand, the Heman here could well be David's Levitical choir leader, a descendant of Korah. Note that Korah himself was the son of Izhar, one of Kohath's four sons (see 1 Chronicles 6:18, 1 Chronicles 6:37-38,). Perhaps the descendants of Izhar were referred to as the Kohathite sub-clan of the Izrahites or Ezrahites. However, such an explanation would *not* apply to David's music leader Ethan, who was a descendant of Levi's son Merari. Considering all this, perhaps the Heman of Psalm 88 was David's music leader, the Izrahite, while the Ethan of Psalm 89 was the famous Zerahite and not the Merarite choir leader (more on this in the comments on Psalm 89).

Besides attribution, the superscription of Psalm 88 also contains the phrase *le-mahalath le-annoth*. Recall that Psalm 53's superscription contains the phrase *le-mahalath*. As noted before in the Beyond Today Bible Commentary, this phrase has been variously interpreted as "On sickness," "On suffering," "To pipings" (on wind instruments) or "To dances" (or some sort of choreography). The second part here, *le-annoth*, is thought to mean "of humblings or "of afflictions." It is not clear whether both parts are to be understood independently or taken together as a combined phrase (such as "On suffering of afflictions"). Also, one or both parts together could

indicate either the subject matter of the psalm or another tune to which the psalm is set.

Heman, whatever his specific identity, is in Psalm 88 enduring some grave, life-threatening trial. Verse 15 in fact says that he has experienced life-threatening affliction for *years*—since his youth. It is not clear whether he means that he has been enduring the same, continuing trial ever since then or that he has experienced numerous similar dire circumstances over the years. The latter seems more likely, though his recurring problems may stem from the same root causes having never abated.

In his despair, Heman voices a desperate complaint against God: "Why, O Lord, do you reject me and hide your face from me?" (verse 14). He cries out to God day and night (verses 1, 9, 13), pleading for Him to hear (verse 2). He feels death is inevitable and close. He is as good as dead already, "adrift among the dead" (verse 5), cut off from God, no longer remembered by Him (same verse).

Indeed, he perceives his circumstances as coming *from* God: "You have laid me in the lowest pit" (verse 6). "You have afflicted me with all Your waves" (verse 7)—that is, of wrath and terrors (compare verses 16-17). "You have caused my friends to abandon me; you have made me repulsive to them.... I am worn out from the burden of your punishments" (verses 8, 15, Today's English Version). Heman can't escape his misery: "I am shut up, and I cannot get out" (verse 8).

He has called on God every day and worshipped Him with outspread hands (verse 9). Is it to no avail? Is he to die like the wicked? Will God wait to intervene until after he is already dead? (compare verse 10a). Of course, God certainly *can* intervene for those who have already died through resurrecting them—and He *will* ultimately resurrect all His people in the future. But this thought was far from the psalmist. For how would letting him die at this time bring God glory in the present? If dead, without

consciousness, Heman could not declare God's lovingkindness, faithfulness and righteousness to others (see verse 10b-12). In other words, he was no use to God dead. This recalls David's reasoning in Psalm 6:4-5 and Psalm 30:8-9.

The psalm ends gloomily with the situation unresolved: "You have made even my closest friends abandon me, and darkness is my only companion" (Psalm 88:18, TEV). Nevertheless, there is a glimmer of hope in this darkest of laments based on the way it opens, for Heman begins the psalm by addressing the Lord as "the God who saves me" (verse 1, NIV) or "God of my salvation" (NKJV). *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* says: "Though the psalm ends on a lament, faith triumphs, because in everything the psalmist has learned to look to 'the God who saves' (v. 1). The 'darkness' (v. 18; cf. v. 12) of grief is reminiscent of death; but as long as there is life, hope remains focused on the Lord. [One particular commentator] is right when he writes, 'Psalm 88 stands as a mark of realism of biblical faith. It has a pastoral use, because there are situations in which easy, cheap talk of resolution must be avoided'" (note on verses 15-18).

The *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* points out in its note on the closing cluster of Book III (Psalms 84-89): "The final two prayers (Psalms 88; 89) both end unrelieved by the usual expression of confidence that God will hear and act.... However, the editors of Book III have placed them under the near shadow of Psalms 87, the more distant shadow of Psalms 84 and the still more distant shadow of Psalms 82. From these psalms they should not be dissociated." [END]