

Day 348 - THURSDAY: January 25th

Psalms 133:1-3 NKJV

A Song of Ascents. Of David. Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, Running down on the beard, The beard of Aaron, Running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon, Descending upon the mountains of Zion; For there the LORD commanded the blessing—Life forevermore.

Psalms 138:1-8 NKJV

A Psalm Of David. I will praise You with my whole heart; Before the gods I will sing praises to You. I will worship toward Your holy temple, And praise Your name For Your lovingkindness and Your truth; For You have magnified Your word above all Your name. In the day when I cried out, You answered me, And made me bold with strength in my soul. All the kings of the earth shall praise You, O LORD, When they hear the words of Your mouth. Yes, they shall sing of the ways of the LORD, For great is the glory of the LORD. Though the LORD is on high, Yet He regards the lowly; But the proud He knows from afar. Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me; You will stretch out Your hand Against the wrath of my enemies, And Your right hand will save me. The LORD will perfect that which concerns me; Your mercy, O LORD, endures forever; Do not forsake the works of Your hands.

Psalms 139:1-24 NKJV

For the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David. O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, But behold, O LORD, You

know it altogether. You have hedged me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain it. Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me," Even the night shall be light about me; Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day; The darkness and the light are both alike to You. For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them. How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand; When I awake, I am still with You. Oh, that You would slay the wicked, O God! Depart from me, therefore, you bloodthirsty men. For they speak against You wickedly; Your enemies take Your name in vain. Do I not hate them, O LORD, who hate You? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.

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 compasses [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]