

Day 351 - SUNDAY: January 28th

Psalm 89, 50 & 73

Psalms 89:1-52 NKJV

A Contemplation of Ethan the Ezrahite. I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever; With my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations. For I have said, "Mercy shall be built up forever; Your faithfulness You shall establish in the very heavens." "I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to My servant David: 'Your seed I will establish forever, And build up your throne to all generations.' " Selah And the heavens will praise Your wonders, O LORD; Your faithfulness also in the assembly of the saints. For who in the heavens can be compared to the LORD? Who among the sons of the mighty can be likened to the LORD? God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, And to be held in reverence by all those around Him. O LORD God of hosts, Who is mighty like You, O LORD? Your faithfulness also surrounds You. You rule the raging of the sea; When its waves rise, You still them. You have broken Rahab in pieces, as one who is slain; You have scattered Your enemies with Your mighty arm. The heavens are Yours, the earth also is Yours; The world and all its fullness, You have founded them. The north and the south, You have created them; Tabor and Hermon rejoice in Your name. You have a mighty arm; Strong is Your hand, and high is Your right hand. Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; Mercy and truth go before Your face. Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound! They walk, O LORD, in the light of Your countenance. In Your name they rejoice all day long, And in Your righteousness they are exalted. For You are the glory of their strength, And in Your favor our horn is exalted. For our shield belongs to the LORD, And our king to the Holy One of Israel. Then You spoke in a vision to Your

holy one, And said: "I have given help to one who is mighty; I have exalted one chosen from the people. I have found My servant David; With My holy oil I have anointed him, With whom My hand shall be established; Also My arm shall strengthen him. The enemy shall not outwit him, Nor the son of wickedness afflict him. I will beat down his foes before his face, And plague those who hate him. "But My faithfulness and My mercy shall be with him, And in My name his horn shall be exalted. Also I will set his hand over the sea, And his right hand over the rivers. He shall cry to Me, 'You are my Father, My God, and the rock of my salvation.' Also I will make him My firstborn, The highest of the kings of the earth. My mercy I will keep for him forever, And My covenant shall stand firm with him. His seed also I will make to endure forever, And his throne as the days of heaven. "If his sons forsake My law And do not walk in My judgments, If they break My statutes And do not keep My commandments, Then I will punish their transgression with the rod, And their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless My lovingkindness I will not utterly take from him, Nor allow My faithfulness to fail. My covenant I will not break, Nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips. Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David: His seed shall endure forever, And his throne as the sun before Me; It shall be established forever like the moon, Even like the faithful witness in the sky." Selah But You have cast off and abhorred, You have been furious with Your anointed. You have renounced the covenant of Your servant; You have profaned his crown by casting it to the ground. You have broken down all his hedges; You have brought his strongholds to ruin. All who pass by the way plunder him; He is a reproach to his neighbors. You have exalted the right hand of his adversaries; You have made all his enemies rejoice. You have also turned back the edge of his sword, And have not sustained him in the battle. You have made his glory cease, And cast his throne down to the ground. The days of his youth You have shortened; You have covered him with shame. Selah How long, LORD? Will You hide Yourself forever? Will Your wrath burn like

fire? Remember how short my time is; For what futility have You created all the children of men? What man can live and not see death? Can he deliver his life from the power of the grave? Selah Lord, where are Your former lovingkindnesses, Which You swore to David in Your truth? Remember, Lord, the reproach of Your servants How I bear in my bosom the reproach of all the many peoples, With which Your enemies have reproached, O LORD, With which they have reproached the footsteps of Your anointed. Blessed be the LORD forevermore! Amen and Amen.

Psalms 50:1-23 NKJV

A Psalm of Asaph. The Mighty One, God the LORD, Has spoken and called the earth From the rising of the sun to its going down. Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God will shine forth. Our God shall come, and shall not keep silent; A fire shall devour before Him, And it shall be very tempestuous all around Him. He shall call to the heavens from above, And to the earth, that He may judge His people: "Gather My saints together to Me, Those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice." Let the heavens declare His righteousness, For God Himself is Judge. Selah "Hear, O My people, and I will speak, O Israel, and I will testify against you; I am God, your God! I will not rebuke you for your sacrifices Or your burnt offerings, Which are continually before Me. I will not take a bull from your house, Nor goats out of your folds. For every beast of the forest is Mine, And the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the mountains, And the wild beasts of the field are Mine. "If I were hungry, I would not tell you; For the world is Mine, and all its fullness. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, Or drink the blood of goats? Offer to God thanksgiving, And pay your vows to the Most High. Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me." But to the wicked God says: "What right have you to declare My statutes, Or take My covenant in your mouth, Seeing you hate instruction And cast My words behind you? When you saw a thief, you consented with him, And have been a partaker with adulterers. You give your

mouth to evil, And your tongue frames deceit. You sit and speak against your brother; You slander your own mother's son. These things you have done, and I kept silent; You thought that I was altogether like you; But I will rebuke you, And set them in order before your eyes. "Now consider this, you who forget God, Lest I tear you in pieces, And there be none to deliver: Whoever offers praise glorifies Me; And to him who orders his conduct aright I will show the salvation of God."

Psalms 73:1-28 NKJV

A Psalm of Asaph. Truly God is good to Israel, To such as are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; My steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the boastful, When I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pangs in their death, But their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men, Nor are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride serves as their necklace; Violence covers them like a garment. Their eyes bulge with abundance; They have more than heart could wish. They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression; They speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, And their tongue walks through the earth. Therefore his people return here, And waters of a full cup are drained by them. And they say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?" Behold, these are the ungodly, Who are always at ease; They increase in riches. Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, And washed my hands in innocence. For all day long I have been plagued, And chastened every morning. If I had said, "I will speak thus," Behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of Your children. When I thought how to understand this, It was too painful for me— Until I went into the sanctuary of God; Then I understood their end. Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awakes, So, Lord, when You awake, You shall despise

their image. Thus my heart was grieved, And I was vexed in my mind. I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You. Nevertheless I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand. You will guide me with Your counsel, And afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish; You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry. But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, That I may declare all Your works.

Daily Deep Dive:

Psalm 89:

The UCG reading program states: "Psalm 89 begins as a psalm of praise for God's covenant with David, the Lord here seen sharing His dominion over creation with His earthly regent (verses 1-37), but ends as a lament over the apparent downfall of the Davidic dynasty (verses 38-51)—with a doxology (expression of praise) appended at the end to close Book III of the Psalter (verse 52).

This maskil—instructive psalm or "contemplation"—was composed by Ethan the Ezrahite. As mentioned above, his identity is disputed. Some believe this refers to David's Levitical choir leader Ethan (also apparently known as Jeduthun), but it more likely seems to refer to the Ethan the Ezrahite of 1 Kings 4:30-31, a descendant of Judah's son Zerah (compare 1 Chronicles 2:6). It should be observed that the earliest time that could conceivably fit with the latter section of this psalm is that of Pharaoh Shishak's invasion during the reign of Solomon's son

Rehoboam. Perhaps David's choir leader Ethan could have lived until this time, as was postulated in the Beyond Today Bible Commentary on Psalms 73-74 with regard to Asaph and his psalms about national invasion—though it seems unlikely that both choir leaders would have lived into their early 100s. (Of course, whether Asaph lived that long is not known. His psalms could have been exclusively prophecies—as could the conclusion of this psalm.) Ethan the Ezrahite in 1 Kings 4 appears to have lived at the time of or prior to Solomon—though it could be that he lived long afterward and that the comparison here between Solomon and him (and the other noted Zerahites) could have been a much later addition to the account of Solomon in the book of Kings.

One possibility worth considering is that Ethan the Ezrahite wrote only the first part of Psalm 89 (verses 1-37) as a positive psalm during the time of David or Solomon and that another author added the downturn of the final section (verses 38-51) at a much later time—perhaps even as late as the fall of the Kingdom of Judah to Babylon. Most, however, take the psalm as a unified composition—with a long setup to give the background for the lament of the final section. Of course, regardless of how the psalm came together, it is presented to us as a unified whole in the Psalter.

Ethan begins with a celebration of God's mercy (hesed or covenant love) and faithfulness, which he will sing of "forever...to all generations" (verses 1). God's merciful love stands firm forever, having been established "in the very heavens" (verse 2). This evidently is all aimed toward the covenant with David in verses 3-4 of a perpetual dynasty, which the prophet Nathan had revealed to David (see 2 Samuel 7:12-17). Evidently much more

was said to David than is recorded in 2 Samuel 7. The establishment of the promise in the heavens is explained in more detail in verses 29 and 36-37 of Psalm 89, where it is said that David's dynasty will persist as long as heaven, sun and moon. This is related to God's statement through Jeremiah that His covenant with David was as unbreakable as the pattern of day and night and as the ordinances of heaven and earth (see Jeremiah 33:19-21, Jeremiah 33:25-26). God, moreover, explicitly swore to David that His dynasty would rule in all generations (Psalm 89:3-4). This creates a problem for many modern interpreters, as we will later consider.

Verses 5-17, concerning God's might and power, may appear to be a digression in the psalm. Yet this description of the Almighty Sovereign of heaven and earth is central to the psalm for a number of reasons. First of all, it illustrates His capacity to keep His promises—to fulfill the terms of the covenant He has made. Secondly, we are made to understand that God, on His throne of righteousness and justice (verse 14), is the true and ultimate King. He was actually Israel's King to start with (1 Samuel 12:12). The human king of Israel belongs to Him (Psalm 89:18)—serving as His viceroy, governing for Him on His throne. Note 1 Chronicles 29:23: "Then Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord as king instead of David his father." Furthermore, we should bear in mind that the One known to the Israelites as God in the Old Testament was in fact the preincarnate Jesus Christ (see 1 Corinthians 10:4). He would later be born as a human being of David's lineage and, later still, come in glory to take back His throne to Himself as Israel's King forever—in ultimate fulfillment of the promise of the Anointed King, the Messiah.

The Nelson Study Bible notes on Psalm 89:9-10: "Rahab [pictured elsewhere as a river- or sea-monster] is a title for Egypt (87:4 [compare Isaiah 30:7]). The sea and Rahab [here] refer to God's great victories: in the beginning, His control of His creation; in the historic past, His victory over Egypt; and in the future, His complete triumph over Satan, sin, and death (Isaiah 27:1; Isaiah 51:9). The psalmists regularly assert God's complete control of creation (see Psalm 24:1). Nothing can challenge God's majestic rule over the entire universe." Compare also Psalm 93:2-4. (And for more on the term Rahab, see the Beyond Today Bible Commentary on Job 25-26.)

In Psalm 89:12, Mount Hermon is the snow-covered, 10,000-foot peak on Israel's northern border with Lebanon. Mount Tabor here, though only 1,800 feet, nevertheless rises grandly above the flatter land around it in the Galilee region. The majesty of these mountains serves but to praise the great God who made them. His arm and hand, symbolizing His strength and authority, is strong and high (verse 13).

The words "joyful sound" in verse 15 are translated from the Hebrew word *teruah*, the same word translated "blowing of trumpets" with respect to the Feast of Trumpets (see Leviticus 23:24). It refers to a great awakening blast on the shofar or ram's horn—like a shout or alarm. Perhaps the idea in Psalm 89:15 is that, in a figurative sense, all creation blares the majesty and power of God—and that those who perceive this are blessed. Responding to God, these people experience His favor, righteousness, empowerment and exaltation (verses 15-17). The horn in verse 17 is a symbol of strength (see verse 24; 75:10; 92:10-11; 132:17).

Verse 18 of Psalm 89 returns to the subject of the human king, who serves God as the people's defensive "shield" (see Psalm 84:9). This provides a transition back into a discussion of the Davidic covenant.

In Psalm 89:19, the Masoretic Text says God spoke in vision to a plurality of "holy ones" rather than the singular "holy one." This does not necessarily mean that multiple people received the vision, especially as the vision itself is singular. The statement more likely means that the one receiving the vision, presumably Nathan, communicated what he received to all of God's people. With God's mighty arm and hand mentioned earlier, He now establishes and strengthens David as His anointed king (verses 20-21). He and those who follow Him to the throne would prevail against enemies (verses 22-24). As God ruled the sea (verse 9), He would now bestow sovereignty over the seas and rivers to the Davidic dynasty (verse 25). During the reigns of David and Solomon, Israel's borders were extended from the River Euphrates in the north to the River or Brook of Egypt in the south. And in alliance with Hiram of Tyre and later Egypt, Israel came to exercise dominion over maritime commerce in the Mediterranean and Red Seas. In the future, the Davidic dynasty's dominion over the seas would be even greater, as we will see.

The king of Israel would experience a special Father-son relationship with God (verse 26)—being as God's firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth (verse 27). David and Solomon did become the greatest kings of their time. Yet there was still more in store for the Davidic dynasty, which was to go on forever (verse 29).

Verses 30-34 show that God's promise to David was not ultimately contingent on the faithfulness of his descendants. If

they disobeyed God, He would punish them but would not bring David's dynasty to an end. Verses 35-37 make it certain that God's promise is absolute and irrevocable.

All of this serves to introduce the shocking contrast of the final section. Things looked bleak for the royal descendant of David—whoever he was at the time described here. He was evidently guilty of sin for which God was angry (verse 38). And it appeared that God, despite His promises, had renounced His covenant to uphold the dynasty (verse 39). Broken defenses, ruined strongholds, plunder by enemies who are exalted, turning back the edge of the king's sword and not sustaining him in the battle (verses 40-43)—all of this point to a time of national invasion and the suffering of crushing military defeat. As mentioned earlier, the earliest time that would fit such circumstances was the invasion of Pharaoh Shishak during the reign of Solomon's son Rehoboam. Yet this could refer to a later invasion and defeat—perhaps even the final cessation of the Davidic dynasty in Judah at the time of the Babylonian invasion. Note the dreadful scale of the events. The psalm says the Davidic crown and throne have been cast down to the ground (verses 39, 44). The dynasty appeared doomed.

How could this be? Had not God utterly sworn that such a thing could never happen? Yet it looked like God was flouting every promise He had made to David regarding his throne and dynasty. How long will God let this horrible situation continue, the psalmist asks (verse 46). Life is so short—will he live to see the end of this situation? (verses 47-48). Where is the lovingkindness (the *hesed*) sworn to David, as noted at the beginning of the psalm? (verse 49; compare verses 1-3). The psalmist concludes by praying that God will think on the heavy burden of shameful

reproach—the terrible mocking—that all His people, including His anointed king, are now being made to suffer from enemies (verses 50-51).

As hopeless as the end of the psalm may seem, it is not utterly so. For implicit in the question of how long this situation will go on is the thought that God may yet intervene. Indeed, why bother praying if there is no hope that He will act? Moreover, as much as the psalm ends in lament and confusion, we should recall that most of the psalm—the first part—speaks in glowing terms of God and His faithfulness. Looking back at the first verse gives us the real focus of the psalm—God's merciful love and faithfulness is eternal and will be extolled forever. This is the lens through which the difficult circumstances at the end of the psalm are to be viewed.

How, then, do we reconcile this? An important clue is found in verse 4. God said David's throne would be built up to all generations—that is, one of his dynastic descendants would rule in all generations. Yet nowhere is it promised that there would be no breaks in the reigns of David's descendants. In fact, the punishing of the kings for transgression (see verse 32) could evidently include the temporary cessation of the Davidic throne—as long as a generation did not pass without David's throne being reestablished.

Yet what of the Davidic dynasty seemingly terminating with Zedekiah at the time of Babylon's invasion? Most Bible commentators today would be hard pressed to explain this in light of the Davidic covenant. Some think the throne was reestablished with the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. But Jesus was born more than 500 years later—after which many generations had passed, despite God's promise that David's throne would rule in

all generations. Moreover, Jesus did not come to reign on David's throne at His first coming. He will do that when He later returns. So, have more than 2,500 years now gone by without a descendant of David ruling on his throne? Has God voided His covenant with David and broken His promises after all?

The answer is no. The Davidic throne was in fact transferred from Judah to Israel at the time of Babylon's invasion (compare Ezekiel 17). This entailed planting David's lineage in the British Isles—as Israelite tribes were in the process of migrating there (see our free booklet [The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy](#)).

Shocking though it may seem, the royal dynasty of Great Britain today is the continuation of the line of David. Britain's monarchs have been the highest of the earth (see Psalm 89:27)—with historical dominion over the sea (see verse 25). To trace this amazing story, be sure to read our online publication [The Throne of Britain: Its Biblical Origin and Future](#).

Finally, we should realize that, as previously mentioned, David's descendant Jesus Christ is going to come back and reassume His rightful place as King over Israel as well as all nations. Through Him, the ultimate Anointed One (Messiah) and firstborn of God who will rule supreme over all the earth's kings, the sublime promises to David will come to fullest fruition—and His omnipotent reign will last for all eternity to come.

With the compilation of the Psalter, Psalm 89 in its final form concludes with the grateful praise of verse 52, bringing Book III to a positive ending.” [END]

Psalm 50:

The UCG reading program states: “Psalm 50 is the first of 12 psalms in the Psalter attributed to Asaph, one of David's music leaders (see 1 Chronicles 23:2-5)—with only this one occurring in

Book II and the other 11 in Book III. It seems most likely that Asaph composed these. However, as noted in the Beyond Today Bible Commentary on Psalms 42-45, it could also be that David wrote these, or just this first one, for Asaph to perform (or one composed the music and the other the lyrics). Yet this particular psalm "may have been separated from the other psalms of Asaph (73-83) in order to be paired with Psalm 51 in the cluster of Psalm 49-53" (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on Psalm 50 title)—the idea being that Psalm 50 is a divine calling to account followed by a repentant response in Psalm 51 (where the sacrifices God desires are reiterated).

In Psalm 50 God delivers a summons and declares that He is the supreme Judge. Where the NKJV speaks of God *calling* the earth and the heavens in verses 1 and 4, the NIV properly renders this as God *summoning* them—or their inhabitants—into His presence for the purpose of judgment. Note verse 4: "He summons the heavens above and the earth, that he may judge his people" (NIV). In verse 1, the summoning of the earth from the rising to the setting of the sun simply means that His summons reaches around the entire world.

Verses 2-3 speak of God shining forth from Zion, "the perfection of beauty," and the coming of God with fire and storm. This would seem to tie the psalm back to Psalms 46-48, which describe God's coming in great power to put down His enemies and His ascension to the throne in Zion in its lofty beauty to rule over all the earth (compare also Isaiah 29:6). At that time, He will gather His saints (see Psalm 50:5; Isaiah 40:11; Isaiah 56:8) and will institute righteous judgment (Psalm 50:6; Daniel 2:20; Daniel 4:34-35; Psalm 75). He will then instruct Israel in the ways of

righteousness and warn of the consequences of hypocrisy (Psalm 50:7-23).

Yet just as in Psalm 48, there is likely a measure of duality all these verses. For God shining forth out of Zion could relate to the proclamation of His truth and call to repentance through His Church in this age as well as the law and judgment going forth from Zion in the Kingdom. The gathering of saints for judgment (Psalm 50:4-6) may relate to God's judgment beginning with the Church today (see 1 Peter 4:17)—not in the sense of final sentencing but of an evaluation process through their lives. Alternatively, it may refer to the Church being gathered for the work of delivering God's judgments to the world—especially to physical Israel (see Psalm 50:7).

Yet if the mention of God's saints having made a covenant with Him by sacrifice (verse 5) is related to the discussion of sacrifice in verses 7-15, it is possible that the same people are intended. That is, it could be that the saints or holy ones bound to God in covenant refers to the faithful of Israel—in ancient times meaning those who persisted in God's covenant and today referring to the elect remnant of Israel according to grace, God's Church.

Getting into the meat of the psalm's message starting in verse 7, note that God is the one speaking—and He has something to say against His people. It is a rebuke. Not for their sacrifices per se, as God has commanded these and they are certainly to offer them (verse 8). The problem is that the people had lost the perspective of *why* God had set up the sacrificial system in the first place. God didn't need their sacrifices (verses 9-13). They were not doing Him a favor by giving them. All the animals already belong to Him (verses 10-11).

In verse 12, God says, "If I were hungry, I would not tell you." This is figurative, as God does not get hungry. The stress should be on the word "you." He is saying that He does not need to go to *them* to be provided for. What physical things could they possibly give Him since He already owns everything? "For the world is mine," He declares, "and all its fullness."

Indeed, the whole point of the sacrificial system was to show the people how much they needed God—His forgiveness and spiritual help—not the other way around. It also afforded them an opportunity for obedience and character development.

And this God *did* want. The offerings of the heart—these were and are the true offerings that God desires as a prelude to any physical offerings, as was noted earlier in the Bible Reading Program comments on Psalm 40. God wants a relationship with His people, wherein they live before Him in humility and obedience and He blesses and provides for them (Psalm 50:14-15). As God says in Hosea 6:6, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings" (see also Matthew 9:13; Matthew 12:7). We will see this reiterated in the next psalm.

These words are as important to us as they were to the ancient Israelites. We do not offer burnt offerings today, but we do give offerings—of money and service. Yet these things, as important and required as they are, can become a wrong focus in a number of ways. We may start to think that we are upholding the Church or work of God with our tithes and efforts and develop a wrong sort of pride over that. We must never make the mistake of thinking that God needs what we have or is dependent on what we do. The reason He instructs us to give is to benefit us, to help train us for even greater service. Another pitfall is to get so

wrapped up in the ritual aspects of prayer, Bible study, Sabbath services, Holy Day observance, etc., that we neglect to consider our utter dependence on God, to humbly repent of our sins or to serve the well being of others. Indeed, even serving others can fall into this category too if it does not flow from a genuine heart of love but, rather, from a desire to appear spiritual (compare 1 Corinthians 13:3).

This brings us to verse 16 of Psalm 50. Some commit to God's laws with their mouths but then turn around and flagrantly violate them as a matter of course (verses 16-20). This is not talking about the wicked of the world in general—but of those who profess to have a relationship with God.

God in His mercy does not immediately destroy such people. But sadly, they tend to take from this that He must be okay with what they're doing (verse 21). In their drift from God they basically forget what He's all about (verse 22). Yet God says He's going to set them straight on the matter (verse 21)—and warns them of dire consequences if they will not consider His words and, by implication, repent (verse 22). Of course, they must desire to change. What power can release a person from sin who doesn't want to be released? Who can help a person who doesn't understand he needs help? "So are the paths of all who forget God; and the hope of the hypocrite shall perish, whose confidence shall be cut off" (Job 8:13).

Those who remember God and glorify Him will see His salvation (verse 23). The NRSV translates this verse as: "Those who bring thanksgiving as their sacrifice honor me; to those who go the right way I will show the salvation of God." Herein is assurance offered to those who serve God with a proper attitude—and hope offered to those who have drifted from Him. They can repent. God wants

to save them. That's the reason He warns them. And He shows them the way to repent in the next psalm—along with a restatement of the kind of sacrifices He is truly looking for.” [END]

Psalm 73:

The UCG reading program states: “Book III of the Psalter, as the *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* explains, "consists of three groupings of psalms, having an overall symmetrical pattern (six psalms {73-78}, five psalms {79-83}, six psalms {84-89}) and at its center (Psalm 81) an urgent exhortation to fundamental covenant loyalty to the Lord" (note on Psalms 73-78). Of the 17 psalms in this book, the titles of the first 11 (these psalms constituting the first two clusters of the three mentioned above) bear the name of Asaph, one of David's three choir directors--Asaph evidently being the primary director among the three. We earlier read Psalm 50, another psalm of Asaph that may have been detached from a full grouping of 12 to be placed in Book II during a later process of arrangement.

As mentioned earlier, *le-Asaph* could either mean that the psalms were written *by* Asaph or *for* him to perform. The former seems more likely, though there is some difficulty with respect to Asaph's authorship or even performance of the psalms bearing his name. A number of the psalms of Book III deal with a time of national invasion and devastation. Indeed, two of Asaph's psalms (74 and 79) concern an enemy invasion of Jerusalem and the ravaging of the temple. This helps to establish a link, as explained in the *Beyond Today Bible Commentary's* introduction to Psalms, between Book III of the Psalter and the third of the five Festival Scrolls, the book of Lamentations, read annually by the Jews during their fast on the ninth of Ab in commemoration of the

Babylonian and Roman destructions of the temple. Asaph, though, lived centuries before the Babylonian destruction. It is perhaps possible that Asaph did live to see Pharaoh Shishak's invasion during the reign of Solomon's son Rehoboam (1 Kings 14:25-28; 2 Chronicles 12). But Asaph would have been extremely old then if he were still alive. Consider that he was given his appointment when the Ark of the Covenant was brought to Jerusalem shortly after David's establishment there (see 1 Chronicles 15:17-19; 1 Chronicles 16:5). Asaph would then have been over 30, as David's change to allow Levitical service at a younger age did not come until the end of the king's reign (compare Numbers 4:2-3, Numbers 4:22-23, Numbers 4:29-30; 1 Chronicles 23:3, 1 Chronicles 23:25-27). Shishak's invasion came about 78 years after David took over Jerusalem, so Asaph would have been 108 or older. While seemingly unlikely, this is not impossible.

However, other solutions have been put forward. Perhaps the most popular is the general rejection of the superscriptions in the book of Psalms as unreliable. But then we are left with the great mystery of how these scribal attributions arose. If oral tradition, did not the tradition have some basis?

Others would argue that Asaph wrote the psalms in question in a form we no longer have and that later editors rewrote these to fit their later circumstances. This could be, but in such a case it would seem that the particular psalms would have been chosen for revision because they concerned similar circumstances, in this case national invasion, yet no such invasion took place in Asaph's time prior to Shishak's.

Some believe that "references to Asaph in these titles must sometimes include descendants of Asaph who functioned in his

place" (*Zondervan*, note on Psalm 73 title). It is true that Asaph's descendants remained as temple singers in later centuries (see 2 Chronicles 35:15; Ezra 2:41; Nehemiah 7:44; Nehemiah 11:17). But why would the titles not say "*sons of Asaph*," as others say "sons of Korah"?

Another very real possibility is that Asaph was writing prophetically. He is referred to in 2 Chronicles 29:30 as "Asaph the seer." Indeed, many of the psalms are understood to be prophetic, but usually this means that some present circumstance was being written about that reflected future events in a dual sense. Indeed if Asaph did witness, and was writing about, Shishak's invasion, his words were also likely prophetic of future destruction--that is, of the ancient Babylonian and Roman destructions as well as the end-time destruction yet to come. However, it could be that God gave Asaph a vision of the future disconnected from his immediate circumstances. He may have been writing of what he saw with his mind and not with his eyes. We simply don't know for sure. In any event, we will assume Asaph himself as the author of the psalms bearing his name, as this seems most likely despite the apparent difficulty.

We begin, then, with the first cluster of Book II, Psalms 73-78. This "first group is framed by psalms of instruction. Psalm 73 is a word of godly wisdom based on an individual's life experience, while Psalm 78 is a psalm of instruction based on Israel's communal experience in its historical pilgrimage with God. Within this frame, Psalm 74 (a communal prayer) is linked with Psalm 77 (a prayer of an individual) by the common experience of seeming to be rejected by God (see Psalm 74:1; Psalm 77:7) and by an extended evocation of God's saving act in Israel's exodus from Egypt (see Psalm 74:13-15; Psalm 77:16-19). At the center, two

psalms (75; 76) express joyful assurance that Israel's God (His 'Name is near,' Psalm 75:1; 'his name is great in Israel,' Psalm 76:1) calls the arrogant wicked to account and rescues their victims; he cuts off 'the horns of the wicked' (Psalm 75:10) and breaks 'the spirit of rulers' (Psalm 76:12 [NIV])" (note on Psalms 73-78).

Psalm 73 explores the dilemma of the wicked seeming to prosper while the godly suffer so much. It is thematically tied in this respect to Psalm 49. Like that song, Psalm 73 gives the clarity of vision that comes from realizing people's future destiny. "Placed at the beginning of Book III, this psalm voices the faith (confessed {v. 1}, tested {vv. 2-26} and reaffirmed {vv. 27-28}) that undergirds the following collection. It serves in Book III as Ps 1-2 serve in Book I" (note on Psalm 73).

Asaph knows that God is good to those in Israel who are pure in heart (verse 1), but he had struggled to understand why the wicked prosper--being nearly tripped up by this as he started to envy their strength, abundance and carefree lives (verses 2-5, 7, 12). It seemed they could do and say whatever they want (verses 8-9). How is it that they could defy God and everything still go so well for them? (verses 11-12). Was it pointless to obey God? (verses 13-14). Besides the personal quandary of Asaph detailed here, this song probably found meaning to the nation at large in later years when wicked enemy nations seemed to freely defy God and prosper while God's own nation suffered greatly at their hand.

In verse 15 Asaph says to God, "If I had really spoken this way, I would have been a traitor to your people" (New Living Translation). Thus he was so far only entertaining these thoughts.

He had not yet succumbed to actually believing them. But the confusion was very uncomfortable (verse 16).

Until one day, that is, while he was in God's sanctuary (the tabernacle or temple)--perhaps performing his duties leading prayerful and worshipful music--that it hit him. He realized the *end* of the wicked (verse 17)--they will perish (verse 27). "He rediscovered something that he probably already knew but had not really considered: The prosperity of the wicked will not last. Their wealth will have no value in the next life" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verses 15-18). Indeed, more than in just this ultimate sense, he realized that without God's overseeing care their demise could come at any moment (verses 18-19; compare Luke 13:1-5). The middle statement of Psalm 73:19, "They are utterly consumed with terrors," means either that terrible events would destroy them (see NIV) or that, deep down, the wicked are really filled with fear of what might happen to them because they do not have the assurance of faith the godly have. Verse 20 says that when God finally does decide to deal with the wicked, they will disappear like a bad dream--the phrase "despise their image" here in context meaning to disregard the sight of them as unreal (compare Isaiah 29:5-8).

Asaph was then rather upset with himself (Psalm 73:21) for being so stupid--like an ignorant beast (verse 22; compare Job 18:3)--in thinking the way he had. Nevertheless, God didn't desert him in his foolishness but enlightened his perspective to keep him on the road to glory (Psalm 73:23-24). Nothing in the universe can compare to a relationship with God (verse 25). Physical life ends, but with Him is eternal life and reward (verse 26). Those who forsake God for unfaithfulness are on the road to death (verse 27).

Contrary to his earlier consideration of serving God being futile (verse 13), Asaph concludes just the opposite: "It is *good* for me to draw near to God" (verse 28). He trusts God and will proclaim to others-as this song does--that what God does for us makes our devotion to Him more than worth it." [END]