

I WILL EXALT YOU

A Guide for the Interpretation of Selected Psalms, Book One (1-41)

By William H. Lawson

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The title, I Will Exalt You, comes from the first line of Psalm 30. Though the Book of Psalms is diverse, exalting God is a major emphasis. The cover features a portrait of one of my students and depicts a Heart of Worship.

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Dedicated to my students and colleagues in Asia. May the Lord bless you as you seek to hear him speak through his word.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF PSALMS](#)

[CHAPTER TWO: BLESSED IS THE MAN \(Psalm 1\)](#)

[CHAPTER THREE: THE ONE SITTING IN HEAVEN LAUGHS \(Psalm 2\)](#)

[CHAPTER FOUR: YOU ARE A SHIELD AROUND ME \(Psalm 3\)](#)

[CHAPTER FIVE: HOW MAJESTIC IS YOUR NAME! \(Psalm 8\)](#)

[CHAPTER SIX: IN THE LORD I TAKE REFUGE \(Psalm 11\)](#)

[CHAPTER SEVEN: KEEP ME SAFE, GOD \(Psalm 16\)](#)

[CHAPTER EIGHT: THE HEAVENS ARE DECLARING THE GLORY OF GOD \(Psalm 19\)](#)

[CHAPTER NINE: WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME? \(Psalm 22\)](#)

[CHAPTER TEN: THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD \(Psalm 23\)](#)

[CHAPTER ELEVEN: VINDICATE ME, LORD \(Psalm 26\)](#)

[CHAPTER TWELVE: THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION \(Psalm 27\)](#)

[CHAPTER THIRTEEN: ASCRIBE TO THE LORD GLORY AND STRENGTH \(Psalm 29\)](#)

[CHAPTER FOURTEEN: I WILL EXALT YOU, LORD \(Psalm 30\)](#)

[CHAPTER FIFTEEN: THEN I ACKNOWLEDGED MY SIN \(Psalm 32\)](#)

[SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY](#)

[ABOUT THE AUTHOR](#)

PREFACE

Christians and even Christian ministers often struggle to hear God speak through the Bible. The problem in part is that sound principles and methods for interpreting the Bible are not known or practiced. Instead, everyone does what is right in his or her own eyes.

In Ears to Hear: A Guide for the Interpretation of the Bible I provide principles, methods, and procedures for Christians and Christian ministers as they seek to hear God speak through the Bible and communicate the message of the Bible to those who need a word from God. This guide supplements Ears to Hear by illustrating the principles, methods, and procedures introduced in that guide through practicing them on the Book of Psalms. This guide is not intended to be a detailed commentary on the Book of Psalms. Instead, it contains the results of my personal struggle to hear God speak through the Book of Psalms and determine the best way to communicate its message using the principles, methods, and procedures introduced in Ears to Hear. Therefore, its value is primarily as an example for you as you undertake a similar struggle. Other volumes are available that illustrate these principles, methods, and procedures on other biblical books such as: Obedient unto Death: A Guide for the Interpretation of Paul's Epistle to the Philippians and The Lion Roars: A Guide for the Interpretation of the Book of Amos.

The first chapter contains my introductory study of the Book of Psalms and illustrates the methods and procedures introduced in unit 2 of Ears to Hear. Chapters 2 through 15 contain my interpretations of selected psalms from Psalms, Book I (1-41) and illustrate the method and procedures introduced in units 3-6 of Ears to Hear.

It is my earnest desire that you will not only benefit from my study of the Book of Psalms but that you will also use the methodologies illustrated within this book in your interpretation of the Bible.

William H. Lawson

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF PSALMS

The Book of Psalms gets its name from the nature of the material found within the book. In the Hebrew Old Testament, Psalms is called *Tehillim* or "Hymns of Praise." The English title comes from the title employed in the Greek Old Testament, *Psalmoi*. This word is characteristically used to translate the Hebrew word *mizmor* and probably had the sense of "Religious Songs." Since the Book of Psalms contains a variety of religious songs in addition to hymns of praise, Psalms is a very appropriate title.

Background and Purpose

Authorship

The Book of Psalms cannot be attributed to a single author. Many psalms have superscriptions that identify the author and these superscriptions may reflect accurate traditions about authorship. Some have questioned the reliability of these superscriptions or that they designate authorship. Nonetheless, these superscriptions provide the only available information about authorship. Many authors wrote the psalms according to these superscriptions, including David, Asaph, the sons of Korah, Heman (88), Ethan (89), Moses (90), and Solomon (72 and 127). Other psalms are completely anonymous.

Place and Date of Writing

A few psalms contain information that makes it possible to date their composition and place them at a particular locale with relative certainty. However, most of the psalms are extremely vague about place and date of writing. Some psalms have superscriptions that may provide information about place and date of writing. Some have questioned the reliability of these superscriptions. Nonetheless, these superscriptions sometimes provide the only available information about the place and date of writing. Based on the content of the psalms themselves as well as their superscriptions it can be concluded that the psalms were written in many locales over a long period of time within Israel's history, probably from the earliest days through the post-exilic period. These psalms were certainly cherished by the worshipping communities within Israel and probably preserved in smaller collections until they were compiled into the present volume sometime in the post-exilic period.

Situation and Purpose

The general situation reflected in the psalms is the worship of Israel. In fact, some of the psalms can be related to specific worship contexts. In addition, most of the psalms reveal something of the situation of the psalmist. Furthermore, some psalms have superscriptions that may provide information about the situation of the psalmist (See Psalms 3, 7, 18, 34, 51, 52, 54, 56, 59, 60, and 63). Some have questioned the reliability of these superscriptions. Nonetheless, these superscriptions may provide helpful information about the situation of the psalmist. The situation of the psalmist usually provides the entry point for later worshipers who are encouraged to learn from the psalmist's experience and follow his example within the context of worship (See Genre and Function). Many diverse situations can be determined based on the content of

the psalms themselves as well as their superscriptions. Below is a list of the most common general situation contexts addressed by the psalms. In addition, some of the psalms were written with specific situations and worship contexts in view.

1. The worshipers had experienced various trials and were questioning God's faithfulness.
2. The worshipers had been exposed to various temptations and were considering turning away from God.
3. Though they had come to God's sanctuary to worship him, the worshipers were living in a way that was displeasing to God.
4. The worshipers had an authentic relationship with God and desired to know God more intimately as well as how they could live for him.
5. The worshipers had experienced God's power and deliverance and desired to praise him and declare his glory.

The general purpose of the psalms was to lead God's people in an authentic encounter with God in worship. The psalms also served more specific purposes relative to the general situation contexts described above. Below is a list of the most common purposes served by the psalms. In addition, some of the psalms have specific purposes related to their specific situations and worship contexts.

1. The psalms were intended to assure the worshipers of God's faithfulness and encourage them to continue to trust and cry out to him in prayer when they were enduring trials.
2. The psalms were intended to provide the worshipers with the opportunity to express their complaints to God and work through their anxieties.
3. The psalms were intended to lead the worshipers to examine themselves and repent of any conduct that was unworthy of their relationship with God.
4. The psalms were intended to reveal God and what he expected of the worshipers and encouraged them to commit themselves to him.
5. The psalms were intended to inspire the worshipers to praise God and declare his glory.

Biblical Context and Role

The Book of Psalms is located in the third division of the English canon of the Old Testament. This division is normally called the Poetic Books. However, the title is really a misnomer. The divisions of the English canon are based generally on the nature of the material found in each division (Law, History, Poetry, and Prophecy). However, the third division of the English canon really contains a miscellaneous collection of literary genres. Though poetry predominates, this division is not exclusively poetry and other divisions of the canon contain a significant amount of poetry as well. A better name for this division is the Wisdom and Worship Books.

Like all the Wisdom and Worship Books, the Book of Psalms comes from the final division of the Hebrew canon, the Writings. The Writings served within the Hebrew canon to supplement God's previous revelation in a variety of ways. As the books of the Writings were incorporated into the Septuagint, the basis for the English canonical arrangement, they were placed into existing divisions (History and Prophecy). However, some of the books in the Writings did not readily fit these categories and were placed in a new division (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs). This new division could not be placed last because the Prophetic Books required that position due to their forward outlook. Thus they were placed

before the Prophetic Books. These books serve within the canon to provide practical guidance for dealing with the real issues of everyday life and living in authentic relationship with God.

The Book of Psalms stands after Job and before Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs in the Wisdom and Worship Books. The Wisdom and Worship Books seem to be arranged in chronological order. Job comes first because the main character lived before the existence of the nation of Israel. The Book of Psalms comes next because it was associated with David. Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs are last because they were associated with David's son Solomon. The Book of Psalms provides practical guidance for dealing with the real issues of everyday life and living in authentic relationship with God along with the rest of the Wisdom and Worship Books. The specific role of the Book of Psalms within the Wisdom and Worship Books is to inspire God's people to approach him in worship and provide models for an authentic encounter with God.

The Book of Psalms was very influential within Judaism and early Christianity. The psalms are frequently alluded to and even quoted in other Old Testament books. Psalm 18 is also in 2 Samuel 22. Psalm 96:1-13 is also in 1 Chronicles 16:23-33. Psalm 105:1-15 is also in 1 Chronicles 16:8-22. Psalm 106:1 and 47-48 are also in 1 Chronicles 16:34-36. Psalm 132:8-10 is also in 2 Chronicles 6:41-42. The psalms also are employed prominently within the New Testament. In addition, the psalms in the Book of Psalms are related in form to other psalms in the Bible (See for example Exodus 15:1-18, Numbers 10:35-46, Deuteronomy 32-33, 1 Samuel 2:1-10, Isaiah 38:10-20, Jonah 2:2-9, and Habakkuk 3:2-19). Furthermore, some of the psalms are characterized by wise instruction (See Genre and Function) that is closely related in form to the teaching in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

Genre and Function

The psalms can be generally defined as religious songs that lead the worshipers to an authentic encounter with God and ministry to other worshipers within the context of worship. These religious songs are extremely diverse in form and function. However, I have attempted below to describe the essential elements of their character and the dynamic way that they function.

Parallelism and Meter

The psalms may be generally classified as poetry. Poetry is distinct in character from prose and must be approached differently. Hebrew poetry is different from English poetry. The most characteristic aspects of Hebrew poetry are the use of parallelism and meter.

Parallelism. Distinct to Hebrew poetry is the employment of various kinds of parallel structure. Parallelism was probably used for beauty of expression, impact on the reader, and as an aid to memory. In Hebrew poetry, the lines of poetic verse are related to one another in various ways. The most common forms of Hebrew parallelism are listed below. The interpreter should be sensitive to the use of parallelism because successive lines of poetry supplement and explain one another.

1. In synonymous parallelism the second line repeats the first line in a different way.
2. In synthetic parallelism the second line expands or completes the thought introduced in the first line.
3. In antithetic parallelism the second line repeats the first line but in a contrasting way.

4. In climactic parallelism the second line repeats part of the first line and then adds to it.

Meter. Hebrew poetry is also characterized by its own distinctive style of meter or cadence. However, little of certainty is known about the principles employed in Hebrew poetic meter. Therefore, interpreters should probably not try to impose a system of meter on the poetry of the psalms or use that understanding of meter as the basis for exegetical decisions.

Heart Appeal

Like most poetry, the psalms appeal to the heart more than the head. Some psalms do have a strong cognitive element. Psalms of wise instruction appeal almost exclusively to the mind and most psalms do have an element of cognitive teaching. However, the psalms are not primarily concerned with imparting knowledge. Instead, the psalms are more affective in nature. They generate a dynamic experience that results in transformation. The affective nature of the psalms is a significant challenge for modern interpreters who prefer to take an objective stance, examine texts, and analyze meaning. Instead, the interpreter of the psalms must participate in the dynamic experience generated by the psalm, encounter God through the psalm, and be transformed by that dynamic encounter.

Figurative Language

Like most poetry, the psalms employ an extensive amount of figurative language. Though the Bible is replete with figurative language, the poetic sections are especially saturated and the Book of Psalms is no exception. Significant archetypes and images are employed to convey the message and inspire a response through the psalms. The employment of figurative language in the Book of Psalms requires that interpreters move beyond a literal understanding of the words and be sensitive to the underlying intent of the figurative language employed. Ross has helpful introductions to the nature of poetic language (Ross, 81-85) and the figures of speech commonly employed in the psalms (Ross, 90-109). My much simpler introduction to figures of speech in Ears to Hear should also be helpful (Ears to Hear, Unit 4, Lesson 6).

Shocking Honesty

The psalms are characterized by shocking honesty in relating to God. This shocking honesty is found most strikingly in the laments and imprecatory petitions. The psalmists unabashedly grumble and whine about the difficulty of their situation and God's failure to intervene on their behalf. Grumbling and complaining is discouraged in other parts of Scripture as inappropriate to God's people and displeasing to God. The psalmists also boldly pray for the judgment and destruction of their enemies, at times employing the grossest of language. Of course, Jesus teaches in the New Testament that Christians should love and pray for their enemies not against them. These complaints and imprecations often shock modern readers because they do not regard them as appropriate. However, these complaints and imprecations probably serve an important function within the psalms. Worship can often be superficial, especially when worshipers put on a pious façade. The complaints and imprecations encourage the worshipers to openly express their true feelings to God whether they are appropriate or not, rather than concealing these feelings and only expressing what they think God wants to hear.

Unusual Perspective

The psalms are written from a perspective distinct in biblical literature. The psalms predominantly contain the words of the psalmist to God and to other worshipers. One of the difficult questions associated with understanding the psalms is, "How can God speak through words spoken to him?" On the one hand, the worshipers are intended to overhear the words spoken to God by the psalmist and other members of the worshipping community and discover more about God and how God's people should relate to him. On the other hand, the worshipers are intended to join the psalmist and other members of the worshipping community in expressing themselves to God in various ways through the words of the psalm. Less difficult are the words directed by the psalmist to other worshipers. On the one hand, the worshipers are intended to hear what God is saying through the psalmist and other members of the worshipping community. On the other hand, the worshipers are intended to join the psalmist and other members of the worshipping community in speaking God's word to other worshipers. However, the interpreter must be prepared for the unexpected. Sometimes the words of others in addition to the psalmist are recorded in the psalms. God occasionally speaks and the words of others, including wicked and ungodly people, are recorded in the psalms for various purposes. Furthermore, sometimes the psalmist addresses others through the words of the psalm in addition to God and the members of the worshipping community, including again wicked ungodly people.

Characteristic Forms

The psalms have been the subject of form analysis for nearly a century. Scholars have found it helpful to group the psalms into distinct formal categories based on their characteristics, perspectives, and probable contexts in the worship of Israel. The psalms are generally categorized as either psalms of lament, psalms of praise, royal psalms, or wisdom psalms.

Psalms of lament. Psalms of lament are characterized by complaint, but often move on to include a petition for help, a commitment to praise God (as well as other significant commitments), and actual expressions of praise. These psalms of lament lead the worshipers to express their feelings of anguish to God, encourage them to call out to God for help, build up their faith and inspire them to praise God and declare his goodness, and induce them to make significant commitments to God.

Psalms of praise. Psalms of praise are characterized by declaration of praise to God, but often include exhortations to praise God and expressions of commitment. These psalms of praise strengthen the faith of the worshipers, inspire the worshipers to praise God, provide the worshipers with words to praise God, and lead them to make significant commitments to God.

Royal psalms. Royal psalms are very diverse in character. The only characteristic that distinguishes these psalms is that they are related to the king. This characteristic is not really a formal characteristic, but a topic that is related more closely to the situation of the psalm. Nonetheless, this topic does often dramatically affect the form and how it functions.

Wisdom psalms. Wisdom psalms are characterized by teaching regarding the way of life that pleases God and leads to his blessing and the way of life that displeases God and leads to his judgment. I prefer to use the designation "psalms of wise instruction" because it is more descriptive of the form. Sometimes the psalmist exhorts other worshipers with commands and prohibitions. However, in many cases the psalmist does not use direct commands and prohibitions but instead commends righteousness by describing its benefits and warns against unrighteousness by describing its disastrous consequences.

Unique Liturgies with Diverse Elements

Though the categorizing of psalms into characteristic forms remains helpful for understanding and experiencing the psalms, the psalms have too much variety to be effectively categorized. Psalms of lament often evolve into psalms of praise. Psalms of praise contain diverse elements that make each one unique. Wise instruction is often incorporated into psalms of lament and praise. Royal psalms do not have a characteristic form and incorporate elements of lament, praise, and wise instruction. I have personally found it more helpful to understand each psalm as a unique liturgy comprised of diverse elements. In this approach, I examine each psalm for its characteristic elements. These elements normally serve a characteristic function within the psalm. Based on this elemental analysis I then draw conclusions about how the psalm works as a liturgical whole to communicate a message and lead the worshipers to a dynamic and authentic encounter with God. Below I have described some of the most common or important of these elements and explain their normal liturgical functions. However, this list of elements is not comprehensive. In addition, these elements are still general categories that encompass a variety of material. Therefore, the interpreter should be alert for other elements and significant variations within the elements. Furthermore, these elements overlap considerably and should not be applied rigidly.

Lament. A lament is an expression of the psalmist's distress to God. In most cases the lament is simply a frank sharing of the psalmist's struggle (See for example 3:1-2; 4:6a; 6:3, 6-7; 9:13a; 13:1-2; 17:10-12; 22:6-8; 31:9b-13; 38:17-20; 39:1-6; and 41:5-9). However, at times there is a clear indication that the psalmist has some resentment toward God because he feels that he is being treated unjustly or that God has been slow to intervene on his behalf (See for example 10:1-11; 22:1-2; 12-18; and 35:11-16). These laments enable the worshipers to enter into the experience of the psalmist by identifying with his struggle and even his resentment toward God. In addition, these laments encourage the worshipers to share their struggles with God and even give vent to their resentment along with the psalmist. In a few cases psalms are almost exclusively lament. However, in most cases these laments move on to affirmation of faith, petition, confession, etc. In these cases the psalm leads to worshipers to move beyond complaint to affirm their faith in God, acknowledge their responsibility for their own plight, ask God to be merciful and intervene on their behalf, etc.

Declaration of praise and affirmation of faith. A declaration of praise is an articulation of the psalmist's adoration of God or thanksgiving to him while an affirmation of faith is an avowal of trust in God (See for example 2:1-9; 3:3-6, 8a; 4:2, 7-8; 6:8-10; 7:10-16; 8:1-9; 9:3-12, 15-18; 10:13-14, 16-18; 11:1-7; 12:5-7; 13:5; 16:5-6, 9-11; 17:14b-15; 18:1-19, 25-45, 46-48, 50; 20:6-8; 21:1-13a; 22:3-4, 9-10, 21b, 26-31; 23:1-6; 24:1-2; 25:1-2a, 3, 15; 26:12a; 27:1-3, 5-6, 10, 13; 28:5, 6-7a, 8; 29:3-11; 30:1b-3, 6-12a; 31:8, 14, 19-22; 32:3-5, 7; 33:4-7, 10-16, 20-21; 34:4-7; 36:5-9; 38:15-16; 39:7; 40:1-5; and 41:11-13). Declarations of praise and affirmations of faith can either be addressed directly to God or to other worshipers. In fact, in many cases the psalmist moves freely between addressing God and addressing other worshipers. In either case declarations of praise serve within the context of worship to inspire praise in the worshipers while affirmations of faith encourage the worshipers to affirm their own faith in God along with the psalmist. These declarations of praise and affirmations of faith normally provide good reasons for worshipers to praise God and affirm their faith in him based on who he is and what he has done, is doing, or will do.

Petition. A petition is the voicing of the psalmist's requests to God to help him in his situation (See for example 3:7; 5:10; 9:19-20; 10:15; 12:3-4; 17:13-14a; 28:4; 31:17-18; 35:4-8, 26). These petitions serve to encourage worshipers to voice their own requests to God along with the psalmist. These petitions are often accompanied by lament to emphasize the urgency of the petition. Also, these petitions are often accompanied by affirmations of faith to assure the worshipers that God will hear and answer their requests.

Commitment. A commitment is an expression of the psalmist's determination to act in a particular way in response to God and what he has done or in anticipation of what he will do (See for example 5:7; 7:17; 9:1-2; 13:6; 16:2-4, 7-8; 18:49; 20:5a; 21:13b; 22:22, 25; 25:1; 26:12b; 27:8; 28:7b; 30:1a, 12b; 31:6-8, 14; 34:1-2a; 35:9-10, 18, 28; and 40:6-10). These commitments serve to inspire other worshipers to make these same commitments to God along with the psalmist. These commitments are often accompanied by an explanation for the psalmist's commitment that provides reasons for the worshipers to join him in committing themselves to God.

Confession. A confession is an acknowledgment of the psalmist's sin and expression of his sorrow for sin (See for example 38:18; 41:4). These confessions serve the important function of leading the worshipers to acknowledge and express their sorrow for their own sin along with the psalmist. These confessions are usually accompanied by petitions for God's forgiveness and mercy (38:1, 21-22; 41:10).

Defense. A defense is an assertion of the psalmist's righteous character and conduct (See for example 7:3-5; 17:3-5; 18:20-24; and 26:2-8). These defenses seem to be rather presumptuous and proud. In fact, the discomfort that worshipers experience may be part of their dynamic. These defenses probably serve to challenge the worshipers with the psalmist's righteous life and lead them to reaffirm their commitment to righteous character and conduct along with the psalmist.

Commendation. In commendation, the psalmist describes the righteous character and conduct that pleases God and results in his blessings (See for example 1:1-3, 6a; 2:12b; 11:5a, 7; 14:5b-6; 15; 16:2-4, 7-8; 19:7-11; 24:8-10, 12-14; 25:5-7; 31:19-20; 32:1-2, 10b; 33:12-19; 34:8b-10, 15, 17-20, 22; 37:11, 16-19, 21-26, 28b-33, 37, 39-40; and 41:1-3). These commendations serve to encourage righteous conduct in the worshipers so that they can please God and receive his blessings.

Warning. In warning, the psalmist describes the unrighteous character and conduct that displeases God and results in his wrath (See for example 1:4-6b; 5:4-6; 11:5b-6; 14:4-5a; 25:5-7; 32:10a; 34:16, 21; and 37:10, 12-17, 20-22, 35-36, 38). These warnings serve to discourage unrighteous character and conduct in the worshipers so that they can avoid God's displeasure and wrath.

Exhortation. In exhortation the psalmist specifically commands righteous character and conduct and prohibits unrighteous character and conduct (See for example 2:11-12a; 4:4-5; 9:11-12; 14:7b; 22:23-24; 24:7-10; 27:14; 29:1-2; 30:4-5; 31:23a-24; 32:6, 8-9, 11; 33:1-5, 8-9; 34:2b-3, 8-14; and 37:1-9, 27-28a, 34). Assurances of the benefits of righteous character and conduct and warnings of the consequences of unrighteous character and conduct usually accompany these commands and prohibitions to encourage obedience.

Dynamic Quality

Most psalms have a dynamic that leads to an authentic encounter with God and real transformation of the worshipers. Longman affirms that "God is present in every corner of his creation." However, he also affirms that God "chooses to dwell in a special way in certain places." He then asserts:

These special places of God's presence are places of intimate and at times fearful encounter with the God of the universe. They are places which demand human response; they demand worshipful prayer. The Psalms are such a divine-human encounter, and they find their actual setting within the formal worship of Israel (Longman, 11).

I suggest a simple three step procedure for entering in to the dynamic worship opportunity provided by the psalms, encountering God, and being transformed. First, the worshiper should identify with the psalmist in his situation as part of the worshipping community. Second, the worshiper should observe very carefully what the psalmist does and listen very carefully to what the psalmist says because he is the leader of worship. Third, the worshiper should respond to the dynamic worship opportunity by doing what the psalmist does because of what he says.

Strategy and Structure

The arrangement of the psalms in the Book of Psalms appears to be arbitrary, with little discernible strategy in the order of the psalms. Craigie suggests that the psalms were "brought together into a single volume by an author or editorial team" in much the same way that hymnals are produced today (Craigie, 27). However, as Davidson says, "It is doubtful whether any modern hymnbook editorial committee would be satisfied with the order--or disorder--which lies before us in the present book" (Davidson, 7). Though many have sought to determine how the present collection of psalms came into being, Dahood is probably right when he concludes, "The timeless nature of many of the psalms makes it impossible for us now to trace the history of these collections or the process by which they were combined" (Dahood, xxxii). Nonetheless, Ross general reconstruction of this process seems logical (Ross, 52-55).

The psalms are divided into five books, but these books do not have distinctive characters. However, Ross has discerned more of a connection between the psalms in each of these books and his observations are worth considering (Ross, 55-63). Many speculate that these divisions are intended to parallel the five books of the Pentateuch. In the outline below, these divisions are the fundamental levels of organization for the Book of Psalms. Though the arrangement of the psalms appears to be arbitrary, some of the psalms are related to one another. Some psalms are associated with prominent persons in the superscriptions: The Psalms of David (73 psalms are associated with David; see also Psalm 72:20); the Psalms of Asaph (Psalms 50, and 73-83); and the Psalms of the Sons of Korah (Psalms 42-49, 84-85). Some psalms are related to one another by their distinctive vocabulary. The Elohim Psalms use the divine name Elohim predominantly as opposed to the other psalms which employ Yahweh for the most part (Psalms 42-72 or Book II). The *Hallel* Psalms are characterized by the exclamation *Hallelu Yah* "Praise the LORD" (Psalms 106, 111-113, 135, and 146-150). Psalms 120-134 are related to pilgrimages in the superscriptions, though the only psalm in this collection that gives explicit evidence of association with a pilgrimage is Psalm 122. In the outline below, these relationships are identified in parenthesis. In addition, some psalms overlap with other psalms in content. Psalm 14 is repeated in Psalm 53. Psalm 31:1-4 is repeated in Psalm 71:1-3. Psalm 40:13-17 is repeated in Psalm 70:1-5. Psalm 108 combines Psalm 57:7-11 and Psalm 60:5-12. Psalm 115:4-11 is repeated in Psalm 135:15-20.

The psalms are numbered differently in the Greek and Hebrew texts of the Book of Psalms. The difference in numbering is caused by the different ways that the psalms have been divided. In the Greek text, Psalms 9 and 10 as well as Psalms 114 and 115 from the Hebrew text have been combined into one psalm. However, in the Greek text Psalms 116 and 147 from the Hebrew text have each been divided into separate psalms. The result in both cases is a collection of 150 psalms. In addition, in some cases psalms which are identified as one psalm by both the Hebrew and Greek texts either seem to contain two distinct psalms or are complicated enough to divide further into smaller units. In the outline below, the numbering reflects the numbering of the Hebrew Masoretic text (and most modern translations); however, I have divided and combined the psalms in ways that seemed appropriate based on their content.

I. Book One--Psalms 1-41

- A. Psalm 1--Blessed Is the Man
- B. Psalm 2--The One Sitting in Heaven Laughs
- C. Psalm 3--But You Are A Shield Around Me (A Psalm of David)
- D. Psalm 4--Answer Me When I Call, My Righteous God
- E. Psalm 5--Give Ear to My Words, LORD
- F. Psalm 6--LORD, Do Not Rebuke Me in Your Anger (A Psalm of David)
- G. Psalm 7--LORD, My God, I Take Refuge in You (A Psalm of David)
- H. Psalm 8--How Majestic Is Your Name (A Psalm of David)
- I. Psalm 9--I Will Praise You, LORD (A Psalm of David)
- J. Psalm 10--Why, LORD, Do You Stand Far Off
- K. Psalm 11--In the LORD I Take Refuge (A Psalm of David)
- L. Psalm 12--Help, LORD, for the Godly Are No More (A Psalm of David)
- M. Psalm 13--How Long, LORD? Will you Forget Me Forever? (A Psalm of David)
- N. Psalm 14--The Fool Says in His Heart, "There Is No God" (A Psalm of David; see also Psalm 53)
- O. Psalm 15--LORD, Who May Dwell in Your Sanctuary? (A Psalm of David)
- P. Psalm 16--Keep Me Safe, God (A Psalm of David)
- Q. Psalm 17--Hear, LORD, My Righteous Plea (A Psalm of David)
- R. Psalm 18--I Love You, LORD, My Strength (A Psalm of David)
- S. Psalm 19--The Heavens Are Declaring the Glory of God (A Psalm of David)
- T. Psalm 20--May the LORD Answer You When You Are in Distress (A Psalm of David)
- U. Psalm 21--The King Rejoices in Your Strength (A Psalm of David)
- V. Psalm 22--My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me? (A Psalm of David)
- W. Psalm 23--The LORD Is My Shepherd (A Psalm of David)
- X. Psalm 24--The Earth Is the LORD's and Everything in It
- Y. Psalm 25--To You, LORD, I Lift Up My Soul (A Psalm of David)
- Z. Psalm 26--Vindicate Me, LORD (A Psalm of David)
- AA. Psalm 27--The LORD Is My Light and My Salvation (A Psalm of David)
- BB. Psalm 28--To You I Call, LORD My Rock (A Psalm of David)
- CC. Psalm 29--Ascribe to the LORD Glory and Strength (A Psalm of David)
- DD. Psalm 30--I Will Exalt You, LORD (A Psalm of David)
- EE. Psalm 31--In You, LORD, I Have Taken Refuge (A Psalm of David; see also Psalm 71:1-4)
- FF. Psalm 32--I Will Throw My Transgressions Up to the LORD (A Psalm of David)
- GG. Psalm 33--Sing Joyfully to the LORD, You Righteous (A Psalm of David)

- HH. Psalm 34--I Will Extol the LORD at All Times (A Psalm of David)
- II. Psalm 35--Contend, LORD, with Those Who Contend with Me (A Psalm of David)
- JJ. Psalm 36--An Oracle Is Written in My Heart concerning the Sinfulness of the Wicked (A Psalm of David)
- KK. Psalm 37--Do Not Fret because of Evil Men (A Psalm of David)
- LL. Psalm 38--LORD, Do Not Rebuke Me in Your Anger (A Psalm of David)
- MM. Psalm 39--I Will Watch My Ways and Keep My Tongue from Sin (A Psalm of David)
- NN. Psalm 40--I Waited Patiently for the LORD (A Psalm of David; see also Psalm 70:1-5)
- OO. Psalm 41--Blessed Is He Who Has Regard for the Weak (A Psalm of David)

II. Book Two--Psalms 42-72

- A. Psalms 42-43--As the Deer Pants for Streams of Water (A Psalm of the Sons of Korah/An Elohim Psalm)
- B. Psalms 44--We Have Heard with Our Ears, God (A Psalm of the Sons of Korah/An Elohim Psalm)
- C. Psalm 45--My Heart Is Stirred by a Noble Theme (A Psalm of the Sons of Korah/An Elohim Psalm)
- D. Psalm 46--God Is Our Refuge and Strength (A Psalm of the Sons of Korah/An Elohim Psalm)
- E. Psalm 47--Clap Your Hands, All You Nations (A Psalm of the Sons of Korah/An Elohim Psalm)
- F. Psalm 48--Great Is the LORD and Most Worth of Praise (A Psalm of the Sons of Korah/An Elohim Psalm)
- G. Psalm 49--Hear This, All You Peoples (A Psalm of the Sons of Korah/An Elohim Psalm)
- H. Psalm 50--The Mighty One, God the LORD (A Psalm of Asaph/An Elohim Psalm)
- I. Psalm 51--Have Mercy on Me, God (A Psalm of David/An Elohim Psalm)
- J. Psalm 52--Why Do You Boast of Evil, You Mighty Man? (A Psalm of David/An Elohim Psalm)
- K. Psalm 53--The Fool Says in His Heat, "There Is No God" (A Psalm of David/An Elohim Psalm; see also Psalm 14)
- L. Psalm 54--Save Me, God, by Your Name (A Psalm of David/An Elohim Psalm)
- M. Psalm 55--Listen to My Prayer, God (A Psalm of David/An Elohim Psalm)
- N. Psalm 56--Be Merciful to Me, God (A Psalm of David/An Elohim Psalm)
- O. Psalm 57--Have Mercy on Me, God (A Psalm of David/An Elohim Psalm; see also Psalm 108)
- P. Psalm 58--Do You Rulers Indeed Speak Justly? (A Psalm of David/An Elohim Psalm)
- Q. Psalm 59--Deliver Me from My Enemies, God (A Psalm of David/An Elohim Psalm)
- R. Psalm 60--You Have Rejected Us, God (A Psalm of David/An Elohim Psalm; see also Psalm 108)
- S. Psalm 61--Hear My Cry, God (A Psalm of David/An Elohim Psalm)
- T. Psalm 62--My Soul Finds Rest in God Alone (A Psalm of David/An Elohim Psalm)
- U. Psalm 63--God, You Are My God (A Psalm of David/An Elohim Psalm)
- V. Psalm 64--Hear Me, God, As I Voice My Complaint (A Psalm of David/An Elohim Psalm)
- W. Psalm 65--Praise Awaits You, God, in Zion (A Psalm of David/An Elohim Psalm)
- X. Psalm 66--Shout with Joy to God, All the Earth (An Elohim Psalm)
- Y. Psalm 67--My God Be Gracious to Us and Bless Us (An Elohim Psalm)

- Z. Psalm 68--My God Arise, His Enemies Be Shattered (A Psalm of David/An Elohim Psalm)
- AA. Psalm 69--Save Me, God, for the Waters Have Come up to My Neck (A Psalm of David/An Elohim Psalm)
- BB. Psalm 70--Hasten, God, to Save Me (A Psalm of David/An Elohim Psalm; see also Psalm 40:13-17)
- CC. Psalm 71--In You, LORD, I Have Taken Refuge (An Elohim Psalm; see also Psalm 31:1-3)
- DD. Psalm 72--Endow the King with Your Justice, God (A Psalm of Solomon/An Elohim Psalm)

III. Book Three--Psalms 73-89

- A. Psalm 73--Surely God Is Good to Israel (A Psalm of Asaph)
- B. Psalm 74--Why Have You Rejected Us Forever, God? (A Psalm of Asaph)
- C. Psalm 75--We Give Thanks to You, God (A Psalm of Asaph)
- D. Psalm 76--In Judah God Is Known; His Name Is Great in Israel (A Psalm of Asaph)
- E. Psalm 77--I Cried Out to God for Help (A Psalm of Asaph)
- F. Psalm 78--My People, Hear My Teaching (A Psalm of Asaph)
- G. Psalm 79--God, the Nations Have Invaded Your Inheritance (A Psalm of Asaph)
- H. Psalm 80--Hear Us, Shepherd of Israel (A Psalm of Asaph)
- I. Psalm 81--Sing for Joy to God Our Strength (A Psalm of Asaph)
- J. Psalm 82--God Presides in the Great Assembly (A Psalm of Asaph)
- K. Psalm 83--God, Do Not Keep Silent (A Psalm of Asaph)
- L. Psalm 84--How Lovely Is Your Dwelling Place, LORD Almighty (A Psalm of the Sons of Korah)
- M. Psalm 85--You Showed Favor to Your Land, LORD (A Psalm of the Sons of Korah)
- N. Psalm 86--Hear, LORD, and Answer Me (A Psalm of David)
- O. Psalm 87--He Has Set His Foundation on the Holy Mountain (A Psalm of the Sons of Korah)
- P. Psalm 88--LORD, the God Who Saves Me (A Psalm of the Sons of Korah)
- Q. Psalm 89--I Will Sing of the LORD's Great Love Forever

IV. Book Four--Psalms 90-106

- A. Psalm 90--Lord, You Have Been Our Dwelling Place
- B. Psalm 91--He Who Dwells in the Shelter of the Most High
- C. Psalm 92--It Is Good to Praise the LORD
- D. Psalm 93--The LORD Reigns, He Is Robed in Majesty
- E. Psalm 94--LORD, the God Who Avenges
- F. Psalm 95--Come, Let Us Sing for Joy to the LORD
- G. Psalm 96--Sing to the LORD a New Song, Sing to the LORD All the Earth
- H. Psalm 97--The LORD Reigns, Let the Earth Be Glad
- I. Psalm 98--Sing to the LORD a New Song, for He Has Done Marvelous Things
- J. Psalm 99--The LORD Reigns, Let the Nations Tremble
- K. Psalm 100--Shout for Joy to the LORD, All the Earth
- L. Psalm 101--I Will Sing of Your Love and Justice (A Psalm of David)
- M. Psalm 102--Hear My Prayer, LORD
- N. Psalm 103--All My Inmost Being, Praise His Holy Name (A Psalm of David)
- O. Psalm 104--LORD My God, You Are Very Great

- P. Psalm 105--Give Thanks to the LORD, for He Is Good
- Q. Psalm 106--Who Can Proclaim the Mighty Acts of the LORD (A Hallel Psalm)

V. Book Five--Psalms 107-150

- A. Psalm 107--Who Can Proclaim the Might Acts of the LORD (A Hallel Psalm)
- B. Psalm 108--My Heart Is Steadfast, God (A Psalm of David; see also Psalm 57:7-11 and 60:5-12)
- C. Psalm 109--God, Whom I Praise, Do Not Remain Silent (A Psalm of David)
- D. Psalm 110--The LORD Says to My Lord (A Psalm of David)
- E. Psalm 111--I Will Extol the LORD with All My Heart (A Hallel Psalm)
- F. Psalm 112--Blessed Is the Man Who Feels the LORD (A Hallel Psalm)
- G. Psalm 113--Praise the Name of the LORD, Servants of the LORD (A Hallel Psalm)
- H. Psalm 114--When Israel Came Out of Egypt
- I. Psalm 115--Not to Us, LORD, But to Your Name Be the Glory (See also Psalm 135:15-20)
- J. Psalm 116--I Love the LORD, for He Heard My Voice
- K. Psalm 117--Praise the LORD, All You Nations
- L. Psalm 118--Let Israel Say, His Love Endures Forever"
- M. Psalm 119

1. *Aleph* (1-8)--Bless Are Those Who Walk According to the Law of the LORD
2. *Beth* (9-16)--How Can a Young Man Keep His Way Pure?
3. *Gimel* (17-24)--Open My Eyes That I May See Wonderful Things in Your Law
4. *Daleth* (25-32)--Preserve My Life According to Your Word
5. *He* (33-40)--Teach Me, LORD, to Follow Your Decrees
6. *Waw* (41-48)--May Your Unfailing Love Come to Me, LORD
7. *Zayin* (49-56)--Remember Your Word to Your Servant
8. *Heth* (57-64)--You Are My Portion, LORD; I Have Promised to Obey Your Words
9. *Teth* (65-72)--Do Good to Your Servant according to Your Word, LORD
10. *Yodh* (73-80)--Give Me Understanding to Learn Your Commands
11. *Kaph* (81-88)--I Have Put My Hope in Your Word
12. *Lamedh* (89-97)--Your Word, LORD, Is Eternal
13. *Mem* (98-104)--Oh How I Love Your Law
14. *Nun* (105-112)--Your Word Is a Lamp to My Feet and a Light to My Path
15. *Samekh* (113-120)--I Hate Double-Minded Men, But I Love Your Law
16. *Ayin* (121-128)--I Have Done What Is Righteous and Just
17. *Pe* (129-136)--Your Statutes Are Wonderful; Therefore I Obey Them
18. *Tsadhe* (137-144)--Righteous Are You, LORD, And Your Laws Are Right
19. *Qoph* (145-152)--Answer Me, LORD, And I Will Obey Your Decrees
20. *Resh* (153-160)--Deliver Me, for I have Not Forgotten Your Law
21. *Sin* and *Shin* (161-168)--My Heart Trembles at Your Word
22. *Taw* (169-176)--Give Me Understanding according to Your Word

N. Psalm 120--I Call on the LORD in My Distress and He Answers Me (A Pilgrimage Psalm)

O. Psalm 121--I Lift My Eyes to the Hills (A Pilgrimage Psalm)

P. Psalm 122--I Rejoice with Those Who Said to Me, "Let Us Go to the House of the LORD" (A Pilgrimage Psalm/A Psalm of David)

Q. Psalm 123--I Lift My Eyes to You Whose Throne Is in Heaven (A Pilgrimage Psalm)
 R. Psalm 124--If the LORD Had Not Been on Our Side (A Pilgrimage Psalm/A Psalm of David)
 S. Psalm 125--Those Who Trust in the LORD Are Like Mount Zion (A Pilgrimage Psalm)
 T. Psalm 126--When the LORD Brought Back the Captives to Zion (A Pilgrimage Psalm)
 U. Psalm 127--Unless the LORD Builds the House, Its Builders Labor in Vain (A Pilgrimage Psalm/A Psalm of Solomon)
 V. Psalm 128--Blessed Are Those Who Fear the LORD, Who Walk in His Ways (A Pilgrimage Psalm)
 W. Psalm 129--They Have Greatly Oppressed Me, But They Have Not Gained the Victory (A Pilgrimage Psalm)
 X. Psalm 130--Out of the Depths I cry to You, LORD (A Pilgrimage Psalm)
 Y. Psalm 131--My Heart Is Not Proud, LORD (A Pilgrimage Psalm/A Psalm of David)
 Z. Psalm 132--LORD, Remember David (A Pilgrimage Psalm)
 AA. Psalm 133--How Good and Pleasant It Is When Brothers Live Together in Unity (A Pilgrimage Psalm/A Psalm of David)
 BB. Psalm 134--Praise the LORD, All You Servants of the LORD (A Pilgrimage Psalm)
 CC. Psalm 135--Praise the Name of the LORD (A Hallel Psalm; see also Psalm 115:4-11)
 DD. Psalm 136--His Love Endures Forever
 EE. Psalm 137--By the Rivers of Babylon We Sat and Wept
 FF. Psalm 138--I Will Praise You, LORD, with All My Heart (A Psalm of David)
 GG. Psalm 139--LORD, You Have Searched Me and Know Me (A Psalm of David)
 HH. Psalm 140--Rescue Me LORD, from Evil Men (A Psalm of David)
 II. Psalm 141--LORD, I Call to You; Come Quickly to Me (A Psalm of David)
 JJ. Psalm 142--I Cry Aloud to the LORD (A Psalm of David)
 KK. Psalm 143--LORD, Hear My Prayer, Listen to My Cry for Mercy (A Psalm of David)
 LL. Psalm 144--Praise Be to the LORD My Rock (A Psalm of David)
 MM. Psalm 145--I Will Exalt You, My God the King (A Psalm of David)
 NN. Psalm 146--I Will Praise the LORD All My Life (A Hallel Psalm)
 OO. Psalm 147--How Good It Is to Sing Praises to Our God (A Hallel Psalm)
 PP. Psalm 148--Praise the LORD from the Heavens (A Hallel Psalm)
 QQ. Psalm 149--Sing to the LORD A New Song, His Praise in the Assembly of the Saints (A Hallel Psalm)
 RR. Psalm 150--Praise God in His Sanctuary (A Hallel Psalm)

Message

Though the psalms speak to the heart more than the head and seek to inspire transformation more than convey truths, they do have an objective message that provides the cognitive basis for affective change. The message of the psalms is quite extensive and only the most prominent and general truths are listed below.

1. God's people should personally encounter him in worship because he is present with his people.
2. God's people should trust God because he loves them and is personally concerned about their situation.
3. God's people should call out to him for help in times of need because God hears their prayers and responds to their need.

4. God's people should feel free to express their innermost feelings to God.
5. God's people should rely on God because he can be depended upon to deliver, provide for, strengthen, protect, and bless his people.
6. God's people should continue to trust in him even in times of difficulty because God is faithful to his promises and they will ultimately be fulfilled.
7. God's people should continue to trust in him even when they are oppressed by wicked people because God is just and will judge the wicked who oppress them.
8. God's people should live righteously and faithfully for him because God requires that his people be holy.
9. God's people should rely on God's word because his revelation is trustworthy and a sound basis for life in relationship with him.
10. God's people should praise God and give him thanks because he is great and deserves and desires the praise of his people.

CHAPTER TWO

BLESSED IS THE MAN

Psalm 1

Study of the Passage

Text and Translation

1 Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,
or stand in the way of sinners,
or sit in the seat of mockers;
2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD
and on his law he meditates day and night.
3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water,
that yields its fruit in season;
Whose leaf does not wither
and whatever he does prospers.
4 Not so the wicked!
They are like the chaff that the wind blows away.
5 Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
6 For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
But the way of the wicked will perish.

Situation and Purpose

Psalm 1 is set within the general context of worship like all the psalms. However, this psalm is too general to specify the context of worship. The psalm seems especially concerned for worshipers who might be corrupted by wicked people rather than base their lives on God's law. Therefore, the psalmist describes the blessed man as one who "does not walk in the council of the wicked, or stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of mockers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night." The purpose of the psalm was to encourage and warn the worshipers to live by God's law rather than allowing themselves to be influenced by the wicked.

Literary Context and Role

Psalm 1 stands at the beginning of the Book of Psalms. However, the Book of Psalms has no discernible strategy. Nonetheless, this psalm certainly provides an appropriate introduction to the collection with its instruction on living righteously by God's law. Weiser describes this psalm as a signpost that stands at the entrance of the Psalter and speculates that "the compiler of the Psalter deliberately assigned first place to this psalm in order to call the readers to obedience to God's will and to trust in his providential care" (Weiser, 102; see also Craigie, 59 and Durham, 171). Davidson draws attention to other psalms that seem to be dialoguing with this psalm and specifically its promise of prosperity, and suggests that these other psalms are important for understanding just what the psalmist means by God's blessing (Davidson, 13). In addition, this psalm is related formally to other psalms of wise instruction.

Form and Function

Psalm 1 can be generally classified as a psalm of wise instruction. Psalms of wise instruction are characterized by teaching regarding the way of life that pleases God and leads to his blessing and the way of life that displeases God and leads to his judgment. Sometimes the psalmist exhorts the worshipers directly, using commands and prohibitions to define specifically the demands and restrictions of God on his people with rationale for obedience supplied, usually assurances of the blessings of obedience and warnings of the dangers of disobedience. However, in many cases the specific response is only implied. Either the implied response is commended by assurances of the blessings of a life characterized by the conduct or character commended or discouraged by warnings of the disastrous consequences of a life characterized by the conduct or character discouraged. This psalm does not contain any commands and prohibitions. Instead, it contrasts the righteous and wicked life, assuring the righteous of God's blessing and warning the wicked of God's judgment. Underlying these assurances and warnings is an implied prohibition--"Do not walk in the council of the wicked, stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of mockers"--and an implied command--"Delight in the law of the LORD and meditate on it day and night."

Strategy and Structure

Psalm 1 has a clear strategy. First, the psalmist describes the blessed life of those who delight in and meditate on God's law rather than being influenced by wicked sinners in verses 1-3. Second, the psalmist reinforces his assertion by contrasting the blessings that result from living by God's law in verse 3 with the disastrous consequences of living wickedly in verses 4-5. Finally, the psalmist further reinforces his assertion by contrasting God's attention to the way of the righteous with the disaster that awaits those who follow the way of the wicked in verse 6. As the worshipers are faced with these contrasting choices and their consequences they are led to avoid the influence of wicked people and base their lives on God's law.

- I. The Blessed Life Based on the Law of the LORD (1-3)
 - A. The Character of the Blessed Life (1-2)
 1. Avoiding the influence of the wicked (1)
 2. Delighting in the law of the LORD (2)
 - B. The Blessings of Avoiding the Influence of the Wicked and Delighting in the Law of the LORD (3)
 1. Provided for
 2. Fruitful
 3. Sustained
 4. Prosperous
- II. The Disaster that Results from Living Wickedly (4-5)
 - A. The Disaster that Results During Life (4)
 - B. The Disaster that Results at the Judgment (5)
- III. The Way of the Righteous and the Way of the Wicked (6)
 - A. The LORD's Attention to the Way of the Righteous (6a)
 - B. The Vanishing Way of the Wicked (6b)

Message or Messages

God's people should avoid the influence of wicked sinners and delight in and meditate on the law of the LORD continually because he will bless them by providing for them, making them fruitful, sustaining them during difficulty, and enabling them to prosper. God's people should avoid the influence of wicked sinners and delight in and meditate on the law of the LORD continually because those who don't will be denied God's blessings, live worthless and unstable lives, and be condemned and rejected at the judgment. God's people should avoid the influence of wicked sinners and delight in and meditate on the law of the LORD because he is attentive to the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked vanishes.

Analysis of the Details

The Blessed Life Based on the Law of the LORD

The psalmist describes the character of the blessed life in verses 1-2. He then illustrates and explains the blessings of that life in verse 3. Through this description he sought to discourage the worshipers from being corrupted by wicked sinners and encourage them to be influenced by God's law so that they can experience God's blessing.

The character of the blessed life. The psalmist describes the character of the blessed life in verses 1-2. The psalmist describes the blessed life negatively in terms of what they should not do in verse 1, "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, or stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of mockers." "Walk" is a common verb used to express the way one lives life. The "wicked" are those who have rebelled against God's authority over their lives. Therefore, "walk in the counsel of the wicked" means to follow a course of life advised by those who have rebelled against God's authority. "Stand" is a common verb used to express the making of a firm decision. "Sinners" are those who are living their lives contrary to God's revealed will. "Way" is a common noun used to describe direction in life. Therefore, "stand in the way of sinners" means to make a decision to live like those who are living their lives contrary to God's revealed will. "Sit" is used to indicate joining with someone in an activity. "Mockers" are those who sit around criticizing God and his appointed rulers. Therefore, to "sit in the seat of mockers" means to join them in their criticism of God and his appointed rulers. It is at least possible that these verbs describe the process of someone being drawn gradually into corruption (walk>stand>sit). Nonetheless, the repetition does probably serve to reinforce by reiteration. As Durham asserts, "he proceeds to multiply the impact of this truth by stating it twice more, to form a triple parallelism" (Durham, 107). This repeated description of potentially dangerous influences served as an emphatic warning to the worshipers of what could rob them of their experience of the blessed life. They should not be influenced by the wicked, sinners, and mockers so that they can experience God's blessing.

The psalmist describes the blessed life positively in terms of what should be done in verse 2, "But his delight is in the law of the LORD and on his law he meditates day and night." The word "law" was used to refer to the commandments, the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures, and God's revelation generally. Here it is probably used in a general sense to refer to God's revelation. As Durham maintains, "Law is used here not in the restricted, legalistic sense . . . It here means, as it most frequently does in the Bible, the instruction, teaching, guidance, even the revelation of Yahweh" (Durham, 172). Enjoyment of God's revelation is a characteristic of those with whom God is pleased and gives his blessing. The extent of the joy and the priority that the blessed person gives God's revelation is emphasized by the next line, "and in his law he

meditates day and night." Meditation probably refers to the practice of saying the words repeatedly, considering their implications, and seeking to hear God's voice through them. As Broyles observes, "The Hebrew verb means literally 'to mutter.' It is somewhat analogous to 'reading', but it also connotes the notion of 'mulling' something over and over. It thus comes to have the derived mental notion of 'pondering'" (Broyles, 42). The blessed person's meditation is described as continual, "day and night." However, these words should not be taken literally, but as an expression of the priority that he places on God's word. The use of the imperfect probably also indicates that this is his habitual practice (Ross, 189). This description of the basis of the life of the blessed person serves to set what should be the priorities of the worshipers. They should delight in God's word and meditate on it continually so that they can experience God's blessing.

The blessings of avoiding wickedness and delighting in the law of the LORD. The psalmist describes the blessings of righteous who live by God's law in verse 3 using the analogy of a fruit tree. First, the blessedness of the righteous who live by God's law is indicated by the position of the tree, "planted by streams of water." This tree has an ideal location where it is watered and nourished by more than one stream. The imagery conveys the idea that God will provide for those who make his word a priority. Second, the blessedness of the righteous who live by God's law is indicated by the fruitfulness of the tree, "which yields its fruit in season." The analogy of fruitfulness often refers to a rich and meaningful life. Those who put a priority on God and his word will be blessed with a rich and meaningful life. The use of the imperfect probably indicates the consistency of this fruitfulness (Ross, 190). Third, the blessedness of the righteous who live by God's law is indicated by the health of the tree during dry season, "and whose leaf does not wither." The implication here is that even during the difficult times God will continue to sustain those who live righteously by his word. The final line, "Whatever he does prospers," abandons the analogy and supplies a straightforward application. However, this application should not be taken categorically, but as a general rule in the light of the entire biblical revelation. In fact, as Davidson points out, many other psalms in the collection make a materialistic understanding of prosperity untenable and require "redefining prosperity as an inner quality of life" (Davidson, 13). Through this description of the blessings of the righteous who live by God's word the psalmist sought to encourage the worshipers to live righteously by God's law. They should live by God's law so that God will provide for them, make them fruitful, sustain them, and enable them to prosper.

The Disaster that Results from Living Wickedly

The psalmist describes the consequences of the wicked life in verses 4-5, contrasting the disaster that results from wickedness in both this life and at the judgment with the blessings that result from a righteous life based on God's law. Through this warning the psalmist sought to discourage worshipers from living like the wicked.

The disaster that results during life. The psalmist describes the disaster that results during life for those who live wickedly in verse 4. He begins with an emphatic exclamation that stresses that the wicked will not share the blessings of the righteous in the first part of verse 4, "Not so the wicked!" God will not provide for the wicked, make them fruitful, sustain them, or enable them to prosper as he does for the righteous who live by his instruction. Instead, the wicked are described in the second part of verse 4 as "chaff that the wind blows away." As the psalmist used an agricultural analogy to describe the blessings of the righteous who live by God's law, he

uses another agricultural analogy to describe the disaster of the wicked who ignore God's law. These analogies stand in contrast to one another to emphasize the superiority of the righteous life lived by God's law to the wicked life. Rather than being like a fruit tree, the wicked are like chaff. Chaff is the husk of the kernel of grain. Chaff is separated from the grain by treading on or beating the kernel of grain. Then the grain/chaff mixture is thrown into the air. The chaff blows away with the wind because it is lighter while the heavier grain falls to the ground. Chaff became a symbol of worthlessness. Thus the wicked life is described as worthless and amounting to nothing in contrast to the rich and meaningful life of the righteous who live by God's instruction. As Weiser puts it, "In the opinion of the poet the life of the wicked, a life lived apart from God, is just as empty, just as meaningless and worthless as the chaff (Weiser, 106). Similarly, Craigie states, "The wicked are thus depicted as lightweights, persons without real substance or worth (Craigie, 61). In addition, the picture of the chaff blowing away may imply the instability of that life.

The disaster that results at the judgment. The disaster of wickedness is further described in verse 5 where the eschatological consequences are clearly revealed, "Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous." The "judgment" to which the psalmist refers is probably God's eschatological or end time judgment. Similarly, "the assembly of the righteous" probably refers to the gathering of God's people on the Day of the LORD to receive his eschatological blessings. The key word understood in both lines is "stand." The wicked "will not stand in the judgment"--they will not be able to endure the trial of God's judgment. Nor will sinners be able to stand "in the assembly of the righteous"--they will be excluded from God's people and the eschatological blessings that are theirs. Through this description of the disaster of the wicked who ignore God's word the psalmist sought to discourage the worshipers from living like the wicked. They should not ignore God's law and live wickedly because if they do so God will not provide for them, make them fruitful, sustain them, and enable them to prosper, but their lives will be worthless, unstable, and they will be judged by him and denied his eschatological blessings as well.

The Way of the Righteous and the Way of The Wicked

The psalmist explains the consequences of following the way of the righteous as opposed to the way of the wicked in verse 6, further contrasting the blessings of righteousness in the first part of the verse with the disaster of wickedness in the second part of the verse. Through this description he sought to encourage the worshipers to live by the righteous way of God's law rather than the way of the wicked so that they can experience the blessings of the righteous rather than the disaster of the wicked.

The LORD's attention to the way of the righteous. The psalmist explains God's attitude toward the way of the righteous in the first part of verse 6, "the LORD watches over the way of the righteous." The words imply more than just passive observance. God protects the righteous and leads them safely through life. Through this explanation the psalmist sought to give the worshipers incentive for living righteously by God's law. They should live righteously by God's law so that God will watch over them.

The vanishing way of the wicked. The psalmist explains the end result of following the way of the wicked in the second part of the verse, "the way of the wicked will perish." The picture here is of a road that seems to be going somewhere, then vanishes. Though the wicked believe they have chosen a course of life that leads to happiness, in reality it leads nowhere. Through

this explanation the psalmist sought to warn the worshipers of the disastrous results of following the way of the wicked rather than the way of the righteous. They should live righteously by God's law rather than wickedly or they will discover that the way they have chosen leads nowhere but to disaster.

Application of the Message

Establishing Correspondence

Christians today often allow themselves to be influenced by the wicked rather than delighting in and meditating on God's word. As a result they do not live the righteous life that God teaches, but are corrupted by the wicked and live like them. These correspondences between the original and modern situations provide a strong basis for applying the message of Psalm 1 to the modern situation.

Distinguishing the Contextualized

This passage contains very little of a contextualized nature that requires that the message be limited or adjusted when applied to the modern situation. However, it does contain a few elements that could be considered contextualized. First, in verse 2 the psalmist pronounces God's blessing on the one whose "delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night." "Law" could have been used in a restrictive sense to refer to the commandments. However, it could also have been used to refer more broadly to the first five books of the Old Testament or even God's revelation in general. At any rate, in application "law" should be generalized to include all of God's biblical revelation. Second, in verse 3 the psalmist describes God's blessing, "Whatever he does prospers." This absolute promise could be misunderstood if taken apart from God's greater revelation in the rest of Scripture, especially the New Testament. Christians are not promised material prosperity and in fact are often called upon to renounce material prosperity for the sake of the gospel. Nonetheless, the Old Testament and even many of the psalms deal with this issue and it is clear that material prosperity is not a given for Christians. I have chosen to keep this promise in my statement of the adjusted message, hopefully in the same sense that it was originally used, as a general assurance of God's blessing. Other psalms will be allowed to address the exceptions. Therefore, the statements of the applied message has only been modified slightly.

Adjusting the Message

Christians should avoid the influence of wicked and arrogant sinners and delight in and meditate on God's word continually because he will bless them by providing for them, making them fruitful, sustaining them during difficulty, and enabling them to prosper. Christians should avoid the influence of wicked and arrogant sinners and delight in and meditate on God's word continually because those who don't will be denied God's blessings, live worthless and unstable lives, and be condemned and rejected at the judgment. Christians should avoid the influence of wicked and arrogant sinners and delight in and meditate on God's word continually because he is attentive to the way of the righteous but the way of the wicked vanishes.

Proclamation of the Message

Title: Blessed Is the Man

Objective: The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians to avoid the influence of wicked and arrogant sinners and delight in and meditate on God's word.

Proposition: Christians should avoid the influence of wicked and arrogant sinners and base their lives on God's word continually because God blesses those who base their lives on his word, the wicked will live worthless lives and be condemned at the judgement, and God is attentive to the way of the righteous but the way of the wicked vanishes.

Introduction

Living the Christian life is something like trying to drive in a large city like Kuala Lumpur when you are unfamiliar with the road system. It is easy to make a wrong turn and become hopelessly lost. The reason for these faulty turns in life is that we seek the wrong source for direction. Instead of looking to God's word for guidance, we allow ourselves to be influenced by the wicked of the world. As a result we do not live the righteous life that God demands, but are corrupted by the wicked and live like them. The psalmist has some good guidance for navigating life in Psalm 1. *Read Psalm 1.*

I. Christians should avoid the influence of wicked and arrogant sinners and delight in and meditate on God's word continually because he will bless them by providing for them, making them fruitful, sustaining them during difficulty, and enabling them to prosper.

- A. The psalmist describes the influences that do not direct God's people to the road that leads to his blessing in verse 1, "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, or stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of mockers."
- B. The psalmist describes the influence that does direct God's people to the road that leads to his blessing in verse 2, "But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night."
- C. The psalmist describes the blessings of those who avoid the influence of wicked and arrogant sinners and delight in and meditate on God's word continually in verse 3, "He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in season; whose leaf does not wither, and whatever he does prospers."
- D. Illustration of a Life Lived Based on God's Word
- E. Application

II. Christians should avoid the influence of wicked and arrogant sinners and delight in and meditate on God's word continually because those who don't will be denied God's blessings, live worthless and unstable lives, and be condemned and rejected at the judgment.

- A. The psalmist describes the disaster that results in this life from choosing the road of wickedness in verse 4.
 - 1. He emphatically asserts that the wicked will not share in the blessings of the righteous in the first line of verse 4, "Not so the wicked!"
 - 2. He compares them to chaff in the second line of verse 4, "They are like the chaff that the wind blows away."
- B. The psalmist describes the disaster that waits at the end of this life for the wicked in verse 5, "Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous."
- C. Illustration of a Life Lived Based on Worldly Council
- D. Application

III. Christians should avoid the influence of wicked and arrogant sinners and delight in and meditate on God's word continually because God is attentive to the way of the righteous but the way of the wicked vanishes.

- A. The psalmist describes God's watchfulness over those who choose the road of the righteous in the first line of verse 6, "For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous."
- B. The psalmist describes how the way of those who choose the road of the wicked leads nowhere in the second line of verse 6, "but the way of the wicked will perish."
- C. Illustration of the Path in Cameron Highlands that Vanished
- D. Application

Conclusion

Living the Christian life is something like trying to drive in a large city like Kuala Lumpur when you are unfamiliar with the road system. It is easy to make a wrong turn and become hopelessly lost. The reason for these faulty turns in life is that we seek the wrong source for direction. Instead of looking to God's word for guidance, we allow ourselves to be influenced by the wicked of the world. You should avoid the influence of wicked and arrogant sinners and delight in and meditate on God's word continually because he will bless you by providing for you, making you fruitful, sustaining you during difficulty, and enabling you to prosper. You should avoid the influence of wicked and arrogant sinners and delight in and meditate on God's word continually because those who don't will be denied God's blessings, live worthless and unstable lives, and be condemned and rejected at the judgment. You should avoid the influence of wicked and arrogant sinners and delight in and meditate on God's word continually because he is attentive to the way of the righteous but the way of the wicked vanishes.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ONE SITTING IN HEAVEN LAUGHS

Psalm 2

Study of the Passage

Text and Translation

- 1 Why are the nations in tumult
and do the peoples plot vanity?
- 2 The kings of the earth take their stand
and the rulers gather together
against the LORD and against his anointed one.
- 3 They say, "Let us completely tear off their bonds
and cast their fetters far from us."
- 4 The one sitting in heaven laughs.
The Lord scoffs at them.
- 5 Then he speaks to them in his wrath
And terrifies them in his fury,
- 6 "I myself have installed my king on Zion,
my holy hill."
- 7 **I will proclaim*** the decree of the LORD.
He said to me, "You are my son.
Today I myself have given birth to you.
- 8 Ask of me, and **I will make*** the nations your inheritance,
the ends of the earth your possession.
- 9 You will break them with an iron rod;
You will smash them to pieces like a potter's vessel."
- 10 Therefore, you kings, be wise;
be warned you rulers of the earth.
- 11 Serve the LORD with fear
and rejoice with trembling.
- 12 Kiss the son, lest he be angry
and you be destroyed on the way,
for his wrath can flare up in a moment.
Blessed are those who take refuge in him.

*The Hebrew text contains an emphasis that is otherwise difficult to translate into English (See Analysis of the Details).

Situation and Purpose

Psalm 2 is set within the general context of worship like all the psalms. This psalm could possibly have been used at the coronation of a new king since the decree of the LORD in verse 7 states, "You are my son, today I have given birth to you." Davidson suggests, this psalm was "probably originally part of the liturgy celebrating the accession to the throne of the king in pre-

exilic Jerusalem, and of an annual ceremony reenacting the coronation and confirming the vital place of the king in the life of the community" (Davidson, 14). In addition, this psalm presupposes a situation in the history of Israel in which nations that have been subject to Israel are now rising up in rebellion. As verses 2-3 report, "The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his anointed one. They say, 'Let us completely tear off their bonds and cast their fetters far from us.'" As Ross observes, this psalm was also used "in times of national crises when people needed to be reminded that God had installed their king and the threats from the nations would fail" (Ross, 199). Therefore, the psalm would have been most meaningful to worshipers who were frightened because of the threat of war. The purpose of this psalm in response to this situation was to encourage the worshipers to trust in the LORD rather than be frightened by their enemies.

Literary Context and Role

The Book of Psalms has no discernible strategy. Therefore, placing Psalm 2 in its literary context and determining its role within that context is not very productive. Nonetheless, this psalm could have been placed at the beginning of the Book of Psalms along with Psalm 1 to provide an introduction to the collection. Both psalms contain blessings. Psalm 1 blesses those who avoid the influence of the wicked and live righteously by God's instruction. Psalm 2 blesses those who take refuge in God. Thus the Book of Psalms begins by blessing those who trust and obey. In addition, this psalm is closely related to other psalms that have the king as their subject matter, sometimes referred to as royal psalms. These royal psalms are often interpreted messianically in the New Testament. Indeed, Psalm 2 is frequently interpreted messianically and is even quoted in Acts 4:25-26 (2), Acts 13:33 and Hebrews 1:5 and 5:5 (7), and Revelation 2:27 (9). Furthermore, this psalm is also related by form to other psalms where affirmations of faith dominate.

Form and Function

Psalm 2 is frequently regarded as a royal psalm. However, royal psalms are quite diverse in character. The only characteristic that distinguishes these psalms is that they are related to the king. This characteristic is not really a formal characteristic, but a topic that is related more closely to the situation of the psalm. Nonetheless, this topic does often dramatically affect the form and how it functions. This royal psalm is dominated by affirmations of faith. An affirmation of faith is an avowal of trust in God. Affirmations of faith can either be addressed directly to God or to other worshipers. In either case affirmations of faith encourage the worshipers to affirm their own faith in God along with the psalmist. These affirmations of faith normally provide good reasons for worshipers to affirm their faith in him based on who he is and what he has done, is doing, or will do. However, the affirmations of faith in this psalm are somewhat unique. First, this psalm contains a rhetorical question that assures that the threat is empty. Second, this psalm contains a description of the threat and God's response to it to affirm that the threat is empty. Third, this psalm contains a divine decree giving assurances to the king that provide a basis for faith among the worshipers. Fourth, this psalm contains a warning to the kings and rulers of the earth that assures worshipers that those whom they perceive as the threat are really the ones who are in jeopardy. Finally, this psalm contains a blessing on those who take refuge in the LORD to commend worshipers to trust God. All of these serve as assurances to the worshipers of God's sovereignty and faithfulness to the king and the nation. An implied

command/prohibition underly these assurances--Trust in the LORD rather than be frightened by the kings and rulers of the earth.

Strategy and Structure

This psalm has a very clear strategy. First, the psalmist exposes the futility and absurdity of the threat to demonstrate that there is nothing to fear in verses 1-6. Second, he includes an assuring decree of the LORD to the king that builds on the divine assurance in verse 6 to further show that there is nothing to fear in verses 7-9. Third, he reverses the threat with a warning to the kings of the earth to further verify that there is nothing to fear in verses 10-12. Finally, he concludes with a blessing of those who take refuge in the LORD to commend trust in the LORD in the final line of verse 12.

- I. The Futility and Absurdity of the Threat (1-6)
 - A. The Futility of Their Upheaval and Plotting (1)
 - B. The Ones against Whom the Kings and Rulers of the Earth Are Rebelling (2)
 - C. The Response of the Lord Enthroned in Heaven to the Rebellion of the Kings and Rulers of the Earth (3-6)
 1. The rebellion of the kings and rulers of the earth (3)
 2. The laughter and ridicule of the Lord enthroned in heaven (4)
 3. The stern speech of the Lord enthroned in heaven that terrorizes them (5)
 4. The assurance of the Lord enthroned in heaven to the king (6)
- II. The LORD's Assuring Decree to the King (7-9)
 - A. Introduced as a Decree of the LORD (7a)
 - B. Assurance of Adoption (7b)
 - C. Assurance of Inheritance (8)
 - D. Assurance of Victory (9)
- III. Warning to the Kings of the Earth (10-12a)
 - A. Command to Be Wise and Heed Warning (10)
 - B. Command to Serve and Rejoice with Fear and Trembling (11)
 - C. Command to Kiss the Son and Warning of His Anger (12a)
- IV. The Blessedness of Those Who Take Refuge in the LORD (12b)

Message or Messages

God's people should trust the LORD rather than fear the kings and rulers of the earth because their upheaval and plots will amount to nothing since they are rebelling against the LORD and his anointed one and the Lord enthroned in heaven laughs at and ridicules them, he will terrify them with his angry reply, and he has firmly established his king on Zion. God's people should trust the LORD rather than fear the kings and rulers of the earth because he regards the king as his son, has given his son the nations and even the ends of the earth as an inheritance, and promised his son decisive victory over his foes. God's people should trust the LORD rather than fear the kings and rulers of the earth because the kings and rulers are the ones who are in danger of being destroyed if they are not wise and heed his warning, serve the LORD with fear and trembling, and submit to his son. God's people should trust the LORD rather than fear the kings and rulers of the earth because those who take refuge in him are blessed.

Analysis of the Details

The Futility and Absurdity of the Threat

The psalmist describes the futility and absurdity of the threat of the kings and rulers of the earth in verses 1-6. He asserts the futility of their upheaval and plotting based on the ones against whom they were rebelling and the response of the one sitting in heaven to their threat. Through exposing the threat to be futile and absurd the psalmist was seeking to encourage the worshipers to trust in the LORD rather than fear the kings and rulers of the earth.

The futility of their upheaval and plotting. He asserts the futility of their upheaval and plotting in verse 1 using a rhetorical question, "Why are the nations in tumult and do the peoples plot vanity?" The "nations" and "peoples" are the countries surrounding Israel. The "tumult" of these nations seems to refer to their preparations for war against Israel. The "plot" of the people seems to refer to the plans of the kings and rulers to overthrow Israel's dominion (See verses 2-3). The key word in this question is "vanity." This word means "emptiness" and implies that the tumult and plotting of the nations and peoples is futile. Rhetorical questions are frequently employed to make emphatic exclamations. Rhetorical questions that ask "Why?" normally imply that there is no good reason. Thus this rhetorical question is the equivalent of the emphatic exclamation, "The nations are in tumult and the peoples are plotting for nothing!" As Oesterley observes, this question "is, on the one hand, an expression of surprised contempt, but, on the other, an implicit expression of faith" (Oesterley, 124).

The ones against whom the kings and rulers of the earth are rebelling. The psalmist exposes the futility and absurdity of the threat by revealing who the kings and rulers of the earth were rebelling against in verse 2, "The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his anointed one." The kings and rulers are the monarchs of the nations and peoples surrounding Israel. The standing and gathering together of these kings and rulers indicates that they have determined to conspire together to overthrow the dominion of Israel. However, they are described as kings and rulers "of the earth," indicating their subordinate position to the LORD, who is described in verse 4 as "The one sitting in heaven." Consequently, their rebellion against the LORD is absurd. The absurdity of their rebellion is stressed further by referring to the king as "his anointed one." Anointing was the ritual act of pouring sacred oil on someone to signify their divine selection and empowering. The rebellion of the kings and rulers of the earth was absurd because the LORD had especially selected and empowered the king to rule (See the assuring proclamation in verses 7-9).

The response of the one sitting in heaven to the rebellion of the kings and rulers of the earth. The psalmist exposes the emptiness and absurdity of the threat by describing the response of the one sitting in heaven to the rebellion of the kings and rulers of the earth in verses 3-6. The determination of the kings and rulers of the earth to free themselves from the rule of the LORD and his king is described in verse 3, "They say, 'Let us completely tear off their bonds and cast their fetters far from us.'" Despite their determination, the LORD responds in such a way as to emphasize the absurdity of their revolt. The LORD responds with laughter and ridicule in verse 4, "The one sitting in heaven laughs, the Lord scoffs at them." The LORD is described as "The one sitting in heaven" to emphasize his superior position above "the kings of the earth" (2). The picture is probably that of the LORD observing the conduct of the kings of the earth from his heavenly throne from which he rules the earth. From his perspective on his heavenly throne their rebellion is comical. There is no way these insignificant kings and rulers can overthrow his

sovereign rule. As Weiser puts it, "The helpless kings of the earth are contrasted with the superior might of God who is the King of heaven. A race of pygmies is face to face with a giant!" The LORD is called "the Lord." As Ross observes, "The use of this title indicates that he is the sovereign master, and everyone else is a servant" (Ross, 205).

The LORD responds by terrifying them with his angry reply in verse 5, "Then he speaks to them in his wrath and terrifies them in his fury." The kings and rulers were terrifying the people of Israel. However, the psalmist gives the assurance that the LORD terrifies those who terrify them. As Ross observes:

Both words "wrath" and "anger" have to do with heat, i.e., a burning anger and a heated rage. Here again the writer uses anthropomorphic language (idioms) to describe God's wrath in terms of flaring nostrils and burning rage. The point is that the declaration from Go, will be angry condemnation, and they will be terrified" (Ross (206).

The LORD responds by assuring them of the stability of the king in verse 6, "I myself have installed my king on Zion, my holy hill." This assurance is stressed by the repetition of the subject pronoun (literally "I, I have installed my king" and indicated in translation with the reflexive pronoun "I myself have installed"). The verb translated "installed" means to firmly set in place, stressing the secure position of the king and consequently the nation of Israel. This assurance is reinforced further by the description of Zion as "my holy hill." The implication is that God has set aside this place and would protect it from harm. Therefore, the worshipers should trust the LORD rather than fear the kings and rulers of the earth because their upheaval and plotting will amount to nothing since they are rebelling against the LORD and his anointed and the Lord enthroned in heaven laughs at and ridicules them, will terrify them with his angry reply, and has firmly established his king on Zion.

The LORD's Assuring Decree to the King

Next, the psalmist relates a decree of the LORD to the king, assuring the king of his adoption, inheritance, and victory over his enemies in verses 7-9. Through this decree the psalmist was seeking to assure the worshipers that they could trust in the LORD and need not fear the kings and rulers of the earth because of his promises to the king.

Identified as a decree of the LORD. The psalmist begins by identifying what he is about to announce as a decree of the LORD in the first line of verse 7, "**I will proclaim** the decree of the LORD." The psalmist's assertion is made emphatic in the Hebrew text with the use of the cohortative mood (indicated in translation with bold print). Decrees were authoritative pronouncements made by earthly kings. However, this decree is by no earthly ruler. This decree is an authoritative pronouncement of the King of kings. Therefore, the assurances contained in this decree could be relied on absolutely.

Assurance of adoption. The LORD's first assurance in the decree is his promise to adopt the king as his son in the second line of verse 7, "He said to me, 'You are my son, today I myself have given birth to you.'" The background for this assurance is 2 Samuel 7:4-17, which records the words of the LORD to David through Nathan the prophet. Among the assurances of this prophecy was that God would give David a son and establish his kingdom. Within this assurance God specifically promises, "I will be his father, and he will be my son" (14a). This promise probably meant that God would regard David's son as his own child and love and care for him as a son. Craigie traces this concept to God's adoption of the nation Israel as his son in

Deuteronomy 26:17 and 30:19 (Craigie, 67). In fact, the assurance goes on to state that even though God would discipline David's son, "my love will never be taken away from him" (15a). The commitment of God to this promise is emphasized in the Hebrew text by repeating the subject pronoun (literally "I, I have given birth to you" and indicated in translation with the reflexive pronoun "I myself").

Assurance of inheritance. The LORD's second assurance in the decree is his promise to give his son the king an inheritance in verse 8, "Ask of me and **I will make** the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession." The very nations that are threatening the security of Israel are promised to the king as his inheritance. The commitment of God to this promise is emphasized in the Hebrew text with the cohortative mood, which is used to stress strong determination (indicated in translation with bold print). The extent of the king's authority over the nations as God's heir is emphasized in the second line. Even the "ends of the earth" are his for the asking.

Assurance of victory. The LORD's third assurance in the decree is his promise to give his son the king victory over his enemies in verse 9, "You will break them with an iron rod; you will smash them to pieces like a potter's vessel." The first line focuses on the power of the king to defeat his enemies. This power is described as "an iron rod" as opposed to the kings who are described as pottery in the subsequent line. The easy and total defeat of the king's enemies is the focus of the second line. The kings of the earth are easily smashed. Davidson even suggests that "the rod of iron . . . may refer to a royal scepter, symbol of the king's power" (Davidson, 17). Therefore, the worshipers should trust in the LORD rather than fear the kings and rulers of the earth because he regards the king as his son, has given his son the nations and even the ends of the earth as an inheritance, and promised his son decisive victory over his foes.

Warning to the Kings of the Earth

Next, the psalmist warns the kings of the earth that the wise course of action would be to serve the LORD with fear and trembling and submit to his son the king in verses 10-12. However, his intent was not really to warn these kings. Instead, he was seeking to assure the worshipers. Israel was not in danger! Those who rebelled against Israel and its king were the ones in danger! First, the psalmist commands the kings and rulers of the earth to be wise and heed his warning in verse 10, "Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned you rulers of the earth." Second, the psalmist commands the kings and rulers of the earth to serve and rejoice with fear and trembling in verse 11, "Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling." The command to rejoice seems to be out of place here. However, it could be that the psalmist was stressing the need to fear the LORD and his anointed at all times, even during times of celebration. Third, the psalmist commands the kings and rulers to kiss the son and warns them of their peril in the first line of verse 12, "Kiss the son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment." "Kiss the son" refers to an ancient practice in which subjects expressed devotion and submission to a superior by kissing him. The extent of the danger of these kings is emphasized by comparing the son's anger to a flash fire that could rage and devour them. Therefore, the worshipers should trust the LORD rather than fear the kings and rulers of the earth because they are the ones who are in danger of being destroyed if they are not wise and heed the warning, serve the LORD with fear and trembling, and submit to his son.

The Blessedness of Those Who Take Refuge in the LORD

The psalmist concludes by pronouncing a blessing on those who take refuge in the LORD in the final line of verse 12, "Blessed are those who take refuge in him." Through this blessing the psalmist was seeking to encourage the worshipers to trust in the LORD rather than fear the kings and rulers of the earth. This blessing stands out as significant in the Hebrew text as the climactic line of the psalm. Therefore, the worshipers should not fear the kings and rulers of the earth but trust in the LORD because those who take refuge in him are blessed.

Application of the Message

Establishing Correspondence

The New Testament establishes the correspondence between the king and Jesus Christ, who is depicted as the Messiah who would establish and rule over the eternal kingdom of God. In fact, the promises of this psalm to the king are specifically related to Jesus Christ in Acts 4:25-26 (2), Acts 13:33 and Hebrews 1:5 and 5:5 (7), and Revelation 2:27 (9). In addition, Christians today often experience opposition as they seek to follow Jesus Christ as their king. This opposition sometimes causes them to doubt God and fear their enemies. These correspondences between the original and modern situations provide a strong basis for applying the message of Psalm 1 to the modern situation.

Distinguishing the Contextualized

This psalm has a few points of tension between the original and modern situations as the assurances found within it are related to Jesus Christ. God is no longer working through a nation like Israel that had a king ruling from Zion and made war against neighboring countries. However, Jesus will rule from Zion, the New Jerusalem, when he comes to judge the world and establish God's kingdom at the end of time. Therefore, these promises should be understood primarily in relation to the eschaton. Moreover, there is a sense in which the promises in this psalm seem more directly relevant to Jesus Christ than to the earthly rulers of Israel. Not even David threatened to capture "the ends of the earth" and whereas God may have regarded David's descendants as his sons, Jesus Christ was literally the Son of God. In the statement of the applied message that follows I have adjusted the original message statement so that the promises more directly relate to Jesus Christ. Though I do not specifically use the name of Jesus, I make the relationship clear by capitalizing Anointed One, Son, and King.

Adjusting the Message

Christians should trust the LORD rather than fear those with worldly power because their upheaval and plots will amount to nothing since they are no match for the LORD and his Anointed One Jesus. Christians should trust the LORD rather than fear those with worldly power because his Son is King, he has given his Son the ends of the earth as an inheritance, and promised his Son decisive victory over his foes. Christians should trust the LORD rather than fear those with worldly power because they are the ones who are in danger of being destroyed if they are not wise, serve the LORD with fear and trembling, and submit to his Son. Christians should trust the LORD rather than fear those with worldly power because those who take refuge in him are blessed.

Communication of the Message

Title: The One Sitting in Heaven Laughs

Objective: The objective of this message is to encourage Christians to trust in the LORD rather than fear those with worldly power.

Proposition: Christians should trust the LORD and his Son Jesus rather than fear those with worldly power because their plots will amount to nothing since they are no match against the LORD and his Anointed One Jesus; the LORD has given his Son Jesus authority and victory; those who rebel against the LORD and his Son Jesus are the ones in danger; and those who take refuge in the LORD are blessed.

Introduction

We often experience opposition as we seek to follow Jesus Christ as our King. As Ian Buntain, one of my missionary colleagues, once said, "When you are doing something spiritually significant you are going to get the Evil One's attention." At times we may even feel that everyone is against us and there is no way of escape. This opposition sometimes causes us to doubt God and fear our enemies. The psalmist describes a situation in which the kings and rulers and nations and peoples were in tumult and plotting to overthrow his rule as Israel's king. However, he remains unafraid and confident. We need to have his faith today. *Read Psalm 2.*

I. Christians should trust the LORD rather than fear those with worldly power because their upheaval and plots will amount to nothing since they are no match for the LORD and his Anointed One Jesus.

A. The psalmist begins with a rhetorical question that indicates that the threat raised by these renegade nations and peoples was empty in verse 1, "Why are the nations in tumult and do the peoples plot vanity?"

B. The psalmist exposes the absurdity of the threat caused by the kings and rulers of the earth by revealing who the kings and rulers of the earth were rebelling against in verse 2, "The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his anointed one."

C. The psalmist exposes the absurdity of the threat by describing the response of the LORD to the kings and rulers of the earth in verses 4-6.

1. First, the LORD responds with laughter and ridicule in verse 4, "The one sitting in heaven laughs, the Lord scoffs at them."

2. Second, the LORD responds by terrifying them with his angry reply in verse 5, "Then he speaks to them in his wrath and terrifies them in his fury."

3. Third, the LORD responds by reinforcing his assurance of the stability of the king in verse 6, "I have installed my king on Zion, my holy hill."

D. Illustration of the Boy, the Bullies, and the Big Brother

E. Application

II. Christians should trust the LORD and his Son Jesus rather than fear those with worldly power because his Son Jesus is King and he has given his Son the ends of the earth and promised his Son decisive victory.

A. The psalmist introduces a decree of the LORD in the first line of verse 7, "I will proclaim the decree of the LORD."

B. The LORD's assures the king that he has been adopted as God's son in the second line of verse 7, "He said to me, 'You are my son, today I have given birth to you.'"

C. The LORD assures the king that the nations and even the ends of the earth will be his inheritance in verse 8, "Ask of me and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession."

D. The LORD assures the king that he will be victorious over his enemies in verse 9, "You will break them with an iron rod; you will smash them to pieces like a potter's vessel."

E. Illustration of the Authority and Victory of Jesus

F. Application

III. Christians should trust the LORD and his Son Jesus rather than fear those with worldly power because they are the ones who are in danger if they do not serve the LORD and submit to his Son.

A. The psalmist issues a warning to the kings and rulers of the earth in verse 10 through the first half of verse 12.

B. First, the psalmist advises the kings and rulers of the earth to be wise and heed his warning in verse 10, "Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned you rulers of the earth."

C. Second, the psalmist commands the kings and rulers of the earth to serve the LORD with fear and trembling in verse 11, "Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling."

D. Third, the psalmist commands the kings and rulers of the earth to kiss the son and warns them of their peril in the first line of verse 12, "Kiss the son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment."

E. Illustration of the Danger of Those Who Do Not Submit to the LORD

F. Application

IV. Christians should trust the LORD rather than fear those with worldly power because those who take refuge in him are blessed.

A. The psalmist concludes by pronouncing a blessing on all those who take refuge in the LORD in the second half of verse 12, "Blessed are those who take refuge in him."

B. Illustration of the Security of Those Who Trust in the LORD

C. Application

Conclusion

You may be experiencing opposition as you seek to follow Jesus Christ as your King. At times you may even feel that everyone is against you and there is no way of escape. This opposition may even be causing you to doubt God and fear those who oppose you. The psalmist describes a situation in which the kings and rulers and nations and peoples are in tumult and plotting to overthrow his rule as Israel's king. However, he remains unafraid and confident. You need to have his faith. In fact, as a Christian you have even more reason for confidence because Jesus is God's Son and Anointed King. You should trust the LORD rather than fear those with worldly power because their upheaval and plots will amount to nothing since they are no match for the LORD and his Anointed One Jesus. You should trust the LORD and his Son Jesus rather than fear those with worldly power because his Son is King and he has given his Son the ends of the earth and promised his Son decisive victory. You should trust the LORD and his Son Jesus rather than fear those with worldly power because they are the ones who are in danger if they do not serve the LORD and submit to his Son. You should trust the LORD rather than fear those with worldly power because those who take refuge in him are blessed.

CHAPTER FOUR

BUT YOU ARE A SHIELD AROUND ME

Psalm 3

Study of the Passage

Text and Translation

A psalm of David when he fled from his son Absalom

1LORD, how many are my foes!

How many rise up against me!

2How many are saying of me,

"There is no deliverance for him in God!" *Selah*²

3But you, LORD, are a shield around me,
my glory, and the one who lifts my head.

4With my voice I cry aloud to the LORD
and he answers me from his holy hill. *Selah*²

5As for me, I lie down and sleep and wake up again,
because the LORD sustains me.

6I will not fear the tens of thousands
drawn up against me on every side.

7Arise, LORD!

Deliver me, my God!

For you strike all my enemies on the jaw
and break the teeth of the wicked.

8Deliverance comes from the LORD.

Your blessing [is] on your people. *Selah*²

¹The Septuagint has the second person pronoun rather than the third, making the words a direct taunt, "There is no deliverance for you in God!"

²The word *Selah* is generally regarded as an instruction for worship, but its meaning is uncertain. Durham summarizes the speculation, "Most frequently, *Selah* has been held to refer to a pause, either for a musical interlude or silence, a 'lifting up' of voice (s) in praise, a signal for the congregation to prostrate themselves, a loud clash of the cymbals, and a word meaning 'forever' to be shouted by the congregation" (Durham, 175).

Situation and Purpose

Psalm 3 reflects a situation in which enemies surrounded the psalmist. In his lament in verse 1 he expresses dismay at the multitude of his enemies, "LORD, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me!" In his declaration of faith in verse 6 he approximates the number of his enemies, "I will not fear the tens of thousands drawn up against me on every side." In addition, many doubted that God would deliver him. As he relates in his lament in verse 2, "How many are saying of me, 'There is no deliverance for him in God!'" The superscription identifies the psalmist as David and relates the situation to the conspiracy of his son Absalom as

described in 2 Samuel 15-17. The conspiracy of Absalom is consistent with the situation reflected in the psalm and may provide the historical context for its interpretation. Though the psalmist retains his faith in God to deliver him, he wrote for those who did not share his strong faith and perhaps were saying, "There is no deliverance for me in God!" The purpose of the psalm was to assure the worshipers of God's faithfulness and encourage them to keep trusting him and calling to him for help.

Literary Context and Role

The Book of Psalms has no discernible strategy. Therefore, placing this psalm in its literary context and determining its role within that context is not very productive. Nonetheless, this psalm is loosely related by the superscription to other psalms attributed to David. In addition, this psalm is related by the superscription to the historical accounts of Absalom's rebellion against David (2 Samuel 15-19). Furthermore, Craigie suggests that Psalms 3 and 4 are related liturgically, "Thus the location of these two psalms next to each other in the psalter would not be accidental; the compiler of the Book of Psalms (or of a collection within it) has set alongside each other two standard psalms for use in morning and evening worship respectively" (Craigie, 72). However, the connection of this psalm with morning worship is based solely on the reference to waking up in verse 5.

Form and Function

This psalm is usually classified as a lament (Davidson, 19). However, lament plays only a minor role in the psalm. Craigie classifies the psalm as a royal psalm and more specifically as a "royal protective psalm" (Craigie, 71-72). However, the classification of royal psalms is more relevant for situation and purpose than form and function. This psalm combines the liturgical elements of lament, affirmation of faith, and petition. These elements work together dynamically to enable the worshipers to have an authentic encounter with God and be transformed as they identify with the psalmist, observe what he does, listen to what he says, and do what he does based on what he says. A lament is an expression of the psalmist's distress and grievances to God and serves to aid the worshipers to enter into the experience of the psalmist through identifying with his struggle as well as encouraging them to express their innermost feelings to God. The psalmist laments his plight in verses 1-2. An affirmation of faith is an expression of the psalmist's trust in the LORD and is usually accompanied by the rationale for this trust. Affirmations of faith serve to build up the faith of the worshipers as well as inspire them to affirm their faith in the LORD along with the psalmist. The psalmist affirms his faith in verses 3-6. A petition is an expression of the psalmist's needs and desires to God and serves to encourage the worshipers to express their needs and desires to God along with the psalmist. The psalmist petitions the LORD in verses 7-8.

Strategy and Structure

The psalmist employs a progressive strategy that moves from lament, to affirmation of faith, to petition. First, the psalmist establishes the basis for the worshipers to identify with him and enter into the worship experience through lament in verses 1-2. Second, the psalmist affirms his own faith in God and thereby encourages the worshipers to affirm their faith based on his affirmation of faith in verses 3-6. This affirmation of faith is in two stanzas. In the first, the psalmist affirms his faith in God as his shield, glory, encouragement, and the one who answers his prayers (3-4). In the second, the psalmist affirms his faith in God as the one who sustains and

delivers him (5-6). Finally, the psalmist leads the worshipers to petition God for deliverance through his own confident petition in verses 7-8. Within this petition the psalmist also provides additional reason for committing their needs and desires to God.

- I. The Psalmist's Lament (1-2)
 - A. The Psalmist's Lament because of His Many Enemies (1)
 - B. The Psalmist's Lament because of the Pessimism of Others (2)
- II. The Psalmist's Faith in the LORD to Protect, Encourage, and Answer Prayer (3-4)
 - A. The Psalmist Affirmation of Faith in the LORD
 - 1. His shield
 - 2. His glory
 - 3. His encouragement
 - B. The Psalmist's Affirmation of Faith in the LORD to Answer Prayer (4)
- III. The Psalmist's Faith in the LORD to Sustain and Deliver (5-6)
 - A. The Psalmist's Affirmation of Faith in the LORD to Sustain (5)
 - B. The Psalmist's Affirmation of Faith in the LORD to Deliver (6)
- IV. The Psalmist's Confident Petition (7-8)
 - A. The Psalmist's Petition for the LORD to Arise and Deliver Him (7a)
 - B. The Psalmist's Bases for Faith in the LORD to Answer His Petition (7b-8)
 - 1. His experience of the LORD's help
 - 2. His conviction that salvation comes from the LORD
 - 3. The LORD's blessing on his people

Message or Messages

God's people should candidly express their anguish to the LORD along with the psalmist because of their many enemies and the pessimism of others. However, God's people should also affirm their faith in the LORD along with the psalmist rather than fearing their enemies and becoming discouraged because he is their protector, glory, encouragement, and the one who answers their prayers. In addition, God's people should affirm their faith in the LORD along with the psalmist rather than fearing their enemies and becoming discouraged because he will sustain them and deliver them. Furthermore, God's people should call out to the LORD to deliver them along with the psalmist rather than fearing their enemies and becoming discouraged because he will smite their enemies, deliverance comes from the LORD, and his blessing is on his people.

Analysis of the Details

The Psalmist's Lament

The psalmist begins by lamenting to the LORD about his many enemies and the pessimism of others in verses 1-2. This lament provides a point of identification between the psalmist and worshipers that enables them to benefit from his experience. In addition, the lament provides the worshipers with an opportunity to express their own distress and discouragement to the LORD.

The psalmist's lament because of his many enemies. The psalmist laments to the LORD about his many enemies in verse 1, "LORD, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me!" The extent of the psalmist's predicament and his resulting distress is emphasized in the

Hebrew text with the exclamatory use of the interrogative pronoun and a noun stressing the number of his foes and those who rise up against him ("how many . . . How many"). In verse 6 the psalmist gives a number to his "many" foes, "the tens of thousands drawn up against me on every side." Based on the historical context provided by the superscription, these enemies were Absalom and his allies. The worshipers would be able to identify with the psalmist to the extent that they too were experiencing opposition.

The psalmist's lament because of the pessimism of others. The psalmist laments to the LORD about the pessimism of others in verse 2, "How many are saying of me, 'There is no deliverance for him in God!'" The extent of the psalmist's predicament and his resulting distress is again emphasized in the Hebrew text with the continuing impact of the exclamatory use of the interrogative pronoun and the noun stressing the number of those who are pessimistic about his deliverance ("How many"). Actually, the identity of these pessimists is ambiguous. Many regard this quote as coming from the psalmist's enemies (Craigie, 73 and Durham, 174-175). Their words would then be a taunt intended to further accentuate his distress. The Septuagint translates their words in such a way as to encourage this understanding by using the second person pronoun rather than the third, "There is no deliverance for you in God!" However, it is also possible that these pessimists were the psalmist's friends who had become discouraged by his seemingly hopeless situation (Weiser, 117). Whether the pessimists are the psalmist's taunting enemies or discouraged friends, the point of the psalm is to lead the worshipers to reject this proposition and conclude as the psalmist does in verse 8, "Deliverance comes from the LORD!" Nonetheless, at this point the psalmist is seeking to enable the worshipers to identify with him in his distress and discouragement. He possibly inserts the word *Selah* to give them this opportunity. The worshipers would be able to do so to the extent that they shared his experience of opposition and discouragement. Therefore, the worshipers should candidly express their anguish to the LORD along with the psalmist because of their many enemies and the pessimism of others.

The Psalmist's Faith in the LORD to Protect, Encourage, and Answer Prayer

The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD as his protection, glory, encouragement, and the one who answers his prayers in verses 3-4. This affirmation of faith served to assure the worshipers of God's faithfulness and encourage them to affirm their faith in the LORD along with the psalmist.

The psalmist's affirmation of faith in the LORD--His protection, glory, and encouragement. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD as his protection, glory, and encouragement in verse 3, "But you, LORD, are a shield around me, my glory, and the one who lifts my head." First, the psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD as his source of protection. He identifies the LORD as his shield, indicating that God is faithful to protect him from his enemies. However, the LORD is a unique shield. The normal shield in use was small and only provided limited protection on one side. The LORD is a shield that completely surrounds the psalmist and provides comprehensive protection against "the tens of thousands drawn up against me on every side" (6). Second, the psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD as his glory. The word "glory" literally means "weight" and came to mean "importance." When applied to God it identifies him as the one who is preeminent in all things. As Davidson puts it, "God is the one who is central to all that is important and significant in the psalmist's life, or the one who can be depended upon to

defend the psalmist's honor and dignity" (Davidson, 20). Third, the psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD as his source of encouragement. When people are distraught and discouraged they often hang their heads in despair or shame. The picture of the LORD as the one who lifts the psalmist's head portrays him as the one who provides encouragement and vindication in times of distress and humiliation. The psalmist's affirmation provides the rationale and inspiration for the worshipers to join him in affirming their faith in God.

The psalmist's affirmation of faith in the LORD to answer his prayers. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD to answer his prayers in verse 4, "With my voice I cry aloud to the LORD, and he answers me from his holy hill." This declaration is based on the psalmist's experience of prayer. The Hebrew imperfect verbs indicate that he has repeatedly called out to God in the past and God has characteristically answered his prayers (Durham, 175-176 and Weiser, 117). The "holy hill" is Zion the focal point of God's presence among his people. Based on what the superscription reveals about the historical context for the psalm, the LORD was again faithful to answer David's prayer. Through the psalmist's experience of answered prayer the worshipers were encouraged to cry out to God based on the expectation that the LORD would listen to them as well. The psalmist inserts the word *Selah* again at this point, possibly to give them the opportunity to reflect on the LORD's protection, glory, encouragement, and faithfulness to answer prayer. Therefore, the worshipers should affirm their faith in the LORD along with the psalmist rather than fearing their enemies and becoming discouraged because he is their protector, glory, encouragement, and the one who answers their prayers.

The Psalmist's Faith in the LORD to Sustain and Deliver

The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD as his sustainer and deliverer in verses 5-6. This affirmation of faith also served to assure the worshipers of God's faithfulness and encourage them to affirm their faith in the LORD along with the psalmist.

The psalmist's affirmation of faith in the LORD to sustain. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD to sustain him in verse 5, "As for me, I lie down and sleep and wake up again, because the LORD sustains me." The psalmist's affirmation of his faith is stressed in the Hebrew text by the doubling of the subject pronoun (translated "As for me" and literally "I, I lie down and sleep and wake up again"). The verb translated "sustain" suggests the image of the LORD laying his hand upon the psalmist to steady and support him. People are extremely vulnerable when they are asleep. An enemy could easily sneak up on them and kill them without resistance. However, the psalmist's testimony is that the LORD was faithful to sustain him from harm when he was powerless to guard himself. In addition, the psalm demonstrates the faith of the psalmist, who seems to have slept soundly through the night because he trusted in the LORD. Based on what the superscription says about the historical context for the psalm, the LORD was again faithful to sustain David. Through the psalmist's experience of the LORD's sustenance the worshipers were encouraged to trust in the LORD like the psalmist based on the expectation that the LORD would sustain them as well.

The psalmist's affirmation of faith in the LORD to deliver. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD in spite of his many enemies in verse 6, "I will not fear the tens of thousands drawn up against me on every side." The hopelessness of the psalmist's situation is emphasized, but only to dramatize his faith in the LORD through the use of irony. Irony portrays a circumstance or result that is contrary to expectations. From a human perspective the psalmist should have

been terrified. Nonetheless, he trusted in the LORD because of his experience of the LORD's answered prayer and sustenance. The psalmist serves as an example of faith in seemingly hopeless circumstances. Therefore, the worshipers should affirm their faith in the LORD along with the psalmist rather than fearing their enemies and becoming discouraged because he will sustain them and deliver them.

The Psalmist's Confident Prayer for Deliverance

Finally, the psalmist concludes with a petition to the LORD for deliverance in verses 7-8. Through this petition the psalmist sought to lead the worshipers to commit their troubles to the LORD in prayer along with him. Set within the petitions are additional explanations of the bases for his faith in the LORD to answer his petition that inspire confidence and encourage the worshipers to petition the LORD for his help.

The psalmist's petition for the LORD to arise and deliver him. The psalmist petitions the LORD for deliverance in the first line of verse 7, "Arise, LORD! Deliver me, my God!" The petition, "Please arise, LORD!" is the ancient battle cry of Israel (See Numbers 10:35). Broyles notes that "The petition is appropriate to the threat: arise against the many who 'rise up against me' (v. 1)" (Broyles, 50). Based on what the superscription reveals about the historical context of this psalm, the LORD did intervene and deliver David from Absalom and his allies. Through this prayer the worshipers were encouraged to join the psalmist and pray for God to intervene on their behalf and deliver them.

The psalmist's bases for faith in the LORD to answer his prayer. The psalmist establishes the bases his faith in the LORD to answer his petition in verses 7-8. The psalmist bases his faith in the LORD to answer his prayers on his experience of the LORD's help in combating his enemies in the second line of verse 7, "For you strike all my enemies on the jaw and break the teeth of the wicked." The verbs are in the perfect state, indicating the psalmist's past experience and present expectation. The LORD has fought for him against his enemies in the past and he anticipates that the LORD will fight for him again in his present peril. Some suggest that more is implied than confidence in the LORD to strike a victorious blow against his enemies. Davidson translates "strike all my enemies on the jaw" with "strike all my enemies on the cheek" and asserts that this is "an act of contemptuous dismissal" (Davidson, 21). In addition, he explains "break the teeth of the wicked" in relation to the taming of wild animals and maintains that it implies rendering his enemies powerless (Davidson, 21). However, Craigie understands "break the teeth" as silencing (Craigie, 75).

The psalmist bases his faith in the LORD to answer his prayer on his conviction that the LORD is the source of deliverance in the first line of verse 8, "Deliverance comes from the LORD." The psalmist began by describing his seemingly hopeless situation and the pessimistic conclusion of many, "There is no deliverance for him in God." After establishing the basis for his faith, the psalmist concludes by declaring, "Deliverance comes from the LORD." The psalmist bases his faith in the LORD to answer his prayer on his conviction that the LORD's blessing is on his people in the second line of verse 8, "Your blessing [is] on your people." These bases for the psalmist's confident prayer serve to encourage the worshipers to join the psalmist and pray for God to intervene on their behalf and deliver them. The psalmist concludes by inserting the word *Selah*, probably to give them an opportunity to reflect on the LORD's faithfulness to deliver and bless them when they call out to him. Therefore, the worshipers should call out to the LORD to deliver them along with the psalmist rather than fearing their

enemies and becoming discouraged because deliverance comes from the LORD and his blessing is upon his people..

Application of the Message

Establishing Correspondence

Christians today often experience opposition as they seek to follow Jesus Christ as their king. They also come into contact with other Christians who have become discouraged by this opposition. This opposition as well as the pessimism of other Christians sometimes causes them to doubt God and fear their enemies. These correspondences between the original and modern situations provide a strong basis for applying the message of Psalm 3 to the modern situation.

Distinguishing the Contextualized

This passage contains very little of a contextualized nature that requires that the message be limited or adjusted when applied to the modern situation. Nonetheless, this passage does at least seem to have a few points of tension between the original and modern situations. First, the psalm reflects a situation in which the psalmist was surrounded by enemies who were seeking to kill him. Most Christians are not in danger of death because of their commitment to Jesus Christ. However, some Christians are threatened by death and the rest often experience more subtle forms of opposition. Second, this psalm gives expression to complaint while the New Testament seems to indicate that there is no place for complaint in the Christian life. In Philippians 4:4 for example, Paul states, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" Nonetheless, the psalm is merely encouraging honesty before God rather than putting on a false face. Moreover, the psalm moves quickly from complaint to affirmation of faith and petition. Third, the psalmist seems to express some joy that the LORD has struck his enemies on the jaw and broken their teeth, whereas the New Testament encourages love and prayer for enemies. Nonetheless, God does intervene on behalf of his people and strike their enemies. Therefore, the statement of the applied message has only been modified slightly.

Adjusting the Message

Christians should candidly express their anguish to the LORD along with the psalmist because of their many enemies and the pessimism of others. However, Christians should also affirm their faith in the LORD along with the psalmist rather than fear their enemies and becoming discouraged because he is their protector, glory, encouragement, and the one who answers their prayers. In addition, Christians should affirm their faith in the LORD along with the psalmist rather than fear their enemies and becoming discouraged because he will sustain them and deliver them. Furthermore, Christians should call out to the LORD to deliver them and bless his people along with the psalmist rather than fear their enemies and becoming discouraged because deliverance comes from the LORD and his blessing is on his people.

Communication of the Message

Title: But You Are a Shield around Me

Objective: The objective of this message is to encourage Christians to trust the LORD and call out to him for deliverance and blessing rather than fearing their enemies and being discouraged.

Proposition: Christians should affirm their faith in the LORD and call out to him for deliverance because he is their protector, glory, and encouragement; he will answer their prayers and sustain them; and deliverance comes from the LORD and his blessing is on his people.

Introduction

Christians today often experience opposition as they seek to follow Jesus Christ as their king and become discouraged. They may also come into contact with other Christians who have also become discouraged and further discourage them with their pessimism. In some parts of the world Christians are being arrested and imprisoned because of their faith. However, even in America Christians are experiencing growing opposition because of their stand for the truth. The psalmist also experienced opposition and discouragement. He complains, "LORD, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me!" He also came into contact with others who further discouraged him by their pessimism. He complains further, "How many are saying of me, 'There is no deliverance for him in God!'" The psalmist complains openly to God and we should express our feelings honestly to God as well. However, the psalmist moves beyond his complaints to affirm his faith in God and ask the LORD to deliver him. We should allow the psalmist to lead us beyond complaint to faith and prayer. *Read Psalm 3.*

I. Christians should affirm their faith in the LORD because he is their protector, glory, and encouragement.

- A. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD as his protection, glory, and encouragement in verse 3, "But you, LORD, are a shield around me, my glory, and the one who lifts my head."
- B. Illustration of the Faithfulness of the LORD to Protect and Encourage
- C. Application

II. Christians should affirm their faith in the LORD because he will answer their prayers and sustain them.

- A. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD to answer his prayers in verse 4, "To the LORD I cry aloud, and he answers me from his holy hill."
- B. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD to sustain him in verse 5, "As for me, I lie down and sleep and wake up again, because the LORD sustains me."
- C. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD to deliver him in verse 6, "I will not fear the tens of thousands drawn up against me on every side."
- D. Illustration of the Faithfulness of the LORD to Answer Prayer and Sustain
- E. Application

III. Christians should call out to the LORD to deliver them because deliverance comes from the LORD and his blessing is on his people.

- A. The psalmist asks the LORD to deliver him in the first half of verse 7, "Please arise, LORD! Deliver me, my God!"
- B. The psalmist explains the basis for his confidence that the LORD will answer his prayer for deliverance in verses 7-8.
 - 1. First, the psalmist explains that he has faith that the LORD will answer his prayers because of his experience of the LORD's help in combating his enemies in the second line of verse 7, "For you strike all my enemies on the jaw and break the teeth of the wicked."

2. Second, the psalmist explains that he has faith that the LORD will answer his prayers because the LORD is the source of deliverance in the first line of verse 8, "Deliverance comes from the LORD."

3. Third, the psalmist explains that he has faith that the LORD will answer his prayers because the LORD's blessing is on his people, "Your blessing is on your people."

D. Illustration of the LORD's Faithfulness to Answer Prayer and Deliver

E. Application

Conclusion

You may experience opposition as you seek to follow Jesus Christ as your king and become discouraged as a result. You may also come into contact with other Christians who have become discouraged and they may further discourage you with their pessimism. The psalmist also experienced opposition and others who further discouraged him by their pessimism. The psalmist complains openly to God and we should express our feelings honestly to God as well. However, the psalmist moves beyond his complaints to affirm his faith in God and ask the LORD to deliver him and bless his people. We should allow the psalmist to lead us beyond complaint to faith and prayer. We should affirm our faith in the LORD because he is our protector, glory, and encouragement. We should affirm our faith in the LORD because he will answer our prayers and sustain us. Furthermore, we should call out to the LORD to deliver us because deliverance comes from the LORD and his blessing is on his people.

CHAPTER FIVE

HOW MAJESTIC IS YOUR NAME

Psalm 8

Study of the Passage

Text and Translation

*For the worship leader. Upon the gittith. A psalm of David*¹

1LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Which sets your praise above the heavens!²

2By the mouth of children and infants you have established strength
because of your enemies, to put a stop to the foe and the avenger.

3When I observe your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,

4What is man that you remember him,
the son of man that you pay attention to him?

5But you made him lack only a little from God³
and crowned him with glory and honor.

6You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
You put everything under his feet:

7All sheep and cattle
and also the beasts of the open country,

8The birds of the air
and the fish that travel the paths of the seas.

9LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

¹The meaning of *gittith* is unknown. The Septuagint relates the term to the word for winepress (Anderson 101; Durham, 185; Weiser, 140). Speculation includes: a festival or celebration (perhaps associated with the vintage festival of the Feast of Tabernacles), a musical melody (perhaps a vintage tune), and a kind of musical instrument (perhaps a type of lyre).

²The Hebrew text of this line is confusing. The Hebrew text has a relative pronoun with a *qal* imperative, second person, masculine, singular verb, "Set your praise above the heavens." However, this translation makes little sense in this context. Two alternate approaches to understanding the text seem most probable. The first approach retains the relative pronoun and verb, but the verb is identified as a *qal* perfect, third person, feminine, singular, "Which sets your praise above the heavens" (See also Durham, 185). The second approach incorporates the relative pronoun into the verb form, tracing the verb to a root meaning "serve" or "minister", and identifying it as *piel* imperfect, first person, singular, "I am ministering (exalting) your praise above the heavens" (Dahood, 48-50; see also Anderson, 101; and Craigie, 107).

³The Hebrew word translated "God" is both a general name for God and the term for pagan deities, "gods". Both of these translations are fraught with difficulty. Translating the word "gods" implies an acceptance of the reality of these pagan deities. Translating the word "God" seems to diminish the biblical teaching of the transcendence of God and elevate humanity to a

position that seems to contradict verse 4. An alternative used by many translations is to render the word with "heavenly beings" or "angels" (Anderson, 103). This translation is possible, though unusual. Even with the difficulties, I have translated the word "God" because this translation is consistent with the psalmist's emphasis on the extreme graciousness of God in exalting humanity (See also Craigie, 108; and Weiser, 140).

Situation and Purpose

The psalm provides no clues for establishing a specific situation beyond the general context of worship. The superscription identifies the psalmist as David. Certainly David's life would be an excellent setting for understanding the psalm because of his deep interest in worship. The superscription relates the psalm to the *gittith*, which some have understood as a vintage festival of the Feast of Tabernacles. However, the linking of the *gittith* to a vintage festival is extremely speculative. It is probably best to understand the situation addressed in the psalm as a general context of worship. Nonetheless, the psalm would have been most meaningful to worshipers who have become discouraged because of their foes (2) and feel that God is too far removed from their struggle to remember or pay attention to them (4). The purpose of the psalm was to encourage the worshipers and inspire them to praise the LORD their God.

Literary Context and Role

The Book of Psalms has no discernible strategy. Therefore, placing this psalm in its literary context and determining its role within that context is not very productive. Nonetheless, this psalm is loosely related to other psalms attributed to David. In addition, the psalm is generally related in form to other psalms of praise. Furthermore, Jesus quotes verse 2 in Matthew 21:16 and verses 4-6 are interpreted messianically by Paul and the author of Hebrews (1 Corinthians 15:27; Ephesians 1:22; and Hebrews 2:6-8).

Form and Function

This psalm is dominated by declarations of praise. Declarations of praise serve within the context of worship to inspire praise in the worshipers through the praise of the psalmist. These declarations of praise normally provide good reasons for worshipers to praise God through the psalmist's declarations of who God is and what he has done, is doing, or will do. Psalms of praise are often characterized by an exhortation to praise God, expressions of praise, and concluding commitments or exhortations. However, this psalm of praise is rather simple. It contains no call to worship or expression of commitment or exhortation. Instead, it consists solely of expressions of praise. These expressions of praise serve to strengthen the faith of the worshipers as they hear the words of the psalmist, inspire them to praise the LORD, and give them the words to express their praise to the LORD. Thus the expressions of praise in this psalm imply the command, "Praise the LORD!"

Strategy and Structure

The strategy of the psalm is clearly intentional. The psalmist begins and ends with the same line, "LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" The framing of the psalm with this line serves to emphasize this expression of praise as the theme of the psalm. Within this frame the psalmist piles expressions of praise on top of one another to inspire faith and praise. However, an inner strategy is also apparent in the psalm. The psalmist exalts the LORD

above the heavens in verse 1 and the heavens above man in verses 3-4 so much so that he considers it incredible that the LORD should consider humanity at all. Nonetheless, he praises the LORD for his grace in exalting and giving authority to humanity in verses 5-8. In this way the psalmist emphasizes the LORD's grace to humanity.

- I. The Psalmist Praises the LORD for His Authority and Majesty (1)
- II. The Psalmist Praises the LORD for His Support of the Helpless (2)
- III. The Psalmist Praises the LORD for the Wonder of the Heavens Which He Created (3-4)
 - A. The Psalmist's Observation of the Heavens and Consideration of the LORD's Work of Creation (3)
 - B. The Psalmist's Wonder at the Heavens Which the LORD Created (4)
- IV. The Psalmist Praises the LORD for Exalting and Giving Authority to Humanity (5-8)
 - A. The Psalmist Praises the LORD for Exalting Humanity (5)
 1. Making humanity lack only a little from God
 2. Crowning humanity with glory and honor
 - B. The Psalmist Praises the LORD for Giving Authority to Humanity (6-8)
 1. Making humanity ruler over his creation
 2. Giving humanity dominion over everything
- V. The Psalmist Praises the LORD for His Authority and Majesty (9)

Message or Messages

God's people should praise the LORD because he is their Lord, his name is majestic in all the earth, and his praise is above the heavens. God's people should praise the LORD because he has established strength through the helpless to put a stop to the foe and avenger. God's people should praise the LORD because he has formed the heavens with his fingers, set the moon and stars in place, and they are so awesome that it is amazing that he remembers and pays attention to humanity at all. God's people should praise the LORD because he has exalted humanity, crowned them with glory and honor, and put all of his creation under their authority.

Analysis of the Details

The Psalmist Leads Praise to the LORD for His Authority and Majesty

The psalmist begins by leading the worshipers to praise the LORD for his authority and majesty in verse 1, "LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! Which places your praise above the heavens!" The psalmist leads the worshipers to acknowledge the authority of the LORD over them by addressing him as "our Lord." The Hebrew word used here emphasizes the absolute authority of the LORD as sovereign Lord over his subjects. The LORD's authority over them as Lord supplies one motivation for praising him. The psalmist then leads the worshipers to praise the LORD for his majesty, "how majestic is your name in all the earth!" The Hebrew text employs an interrogative pronoun to introduce an exclamation, emphasizing the great majesty of the name of the LORD ("how majestic"). LORD in all capital letters is used for the divine name, which was considered too holy to say aloud. The name of the LORD represents who he is. The word translated "majestic" literally means "wide" or "vast." The extent of the majesty of the name of the LORD is stressed by the adjective "all." The

probable implication is that the name of the LORD is so great that it completely overshadows the whole earth and everything in it. This exclamation is repeated and thereby reinforced in the final line of the psalm. As was noted earlier (Text and Translation, note 2), the next line could be translated "Set your praise above the heavens!" "I am exalting your praise above the heavens!" or "Which sets your praise above the heavens!" Whatever the correct reading, the certain implication is that the LORD's praise is "above the heavens!" The exaltation of the LORD in this verse seems to advance progressively. The LORD is exalted above the worshipers, the earth, and the heavens. The remainder of the psalm continues to exalt the LORD above the heavens, the earth, and humanity. Therefore, the worshipers should praise the LORD because he is their Lord, his name is majestic in all the earth, and his praise is above the heavens.

The Psalmist Praises the LORD for His Support of the Helpless

The psalmist praises the LORD for his support of the helpless in verse 2, "From the mouth of children and infants you have established strength because of your enemies, to put a stop to the foe and the avenger." As Ross summarizes, "some individuals appear weak and vulnerable, but they have access to divine power--this is the way that God has ordered creation" (Ross, 293). Through his own praise, the psalmist sought to inspire the worshipers to praise the LORD for his support of the helpless as well. The "children and infants" stand over against the LORD's "enemies" and are threatened by "the foe and the avenger." The "children and infants" are seemingly helpless to overcome the LORD's "enemies" and protect themselves from "the foe and avenger." Nonetheless, "From the mouth of these same "children and infants" the LORD "established strength . . . to put a stop to the foe and avenger." The implication is that the LORD is the source of strength to enable the helpless to overcome their enemies. As Craigie states, "God may utilize the weak of this world, even the child, both to establish his strength reflected in his nature and in creation, and at the same time to put at rest (or quiet) the opposition of his enemies" (Craigie, 107). Therefore, the worshipers should praise the LORD along with the psalmist because he has established strength through the helpless to put a stop to the foe and avenger.

The Psalmist Praises the LORD for the Wonder Of the Heavens which He Created

The psalmist praises the LORD for the wonder of his creation of the heavens in verses 3-4. Through his own praise, the psalmist sought to inspire the worshipers to praise the LORD for the wonder of his creation of the heavens as well.

The psalmist's observation of the heavens and description of the LORD's work of creation. The psalmist relates his observation of the heavens and considers God's work of creation in verse 3, "When I observe the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place." The psalmist summarizes his observations of the heavens with, "When I observe the heavens . . . the moon and stars." He supplements this summary with words that describe the LORD's work in creating the heavens, "the work of your fingers . . . which you set in place." This description serves to accentuate the majesty and sovereignty of the LORD with respect to his creation. Even though the heavens are vast from the human perspective and beyond their reach, the LORD formed the heavenly bodies with his fingers and

set them in their places with his hands. This description reinforces verse 1 where the LORD was exalted over the heavens.

The psalmist's wonder at the heavens which the LORD created. The psalmist expresses his wonder at the heavens that God created in verse 4, "What is man that you remember him, the son of man that you pay attention to him?" As Craigie puts it, "In contrast to God, the heavens are tiny, pushed and prodded into shape by the divine digits; but in contrast to the heavens, which seem so vast in the human perception, it is mankind that is tiny" (Craigie, 108). This rhetorical question serves two purposes within the context of the psalm. First, the question accentuates the psalmist's wonder at the LORD's creation of the heavens as described in the preceding verse. Second, the question accentuates the grace of the LORD in exalting and giving authority to humanity as described in verses 5-8. This rhetorical question is of the type that implies an emphatic negative response. Thus it is equivalent to the exclamation, "The heavens that the LORD created are so awesome that mankind is not worth remembering or paying attention to!" Therefore, the worshipers should praise the LORD along with the psalmist because he has formed the heavens with his fingers, set the moon and stars in place, and they are so awesome that it is amazing that he remembers and pays attention to humanity at all.

The Psalmist's Praise to the LORD for Exalting and Giving Authority to Humanity

The psalmist praises the LORD for exalting and giving authority to humanity in verses 5-8. Through his own praise the psalmist sought to inspire the worshipers to praise the LORD for exalting and giving authority to humanity along with him.

The psalmist praises the LORD for exalting humanity. The psalmist praises the LORD for exalting humanity in verse 5, "But you made him lack only a little from God and crowned him with glory and honor." As was noted earlier (Text and Translation, note 3), "God" in the first line could also be translated "gods" or conceivable "heavenly beings." However, "God" seems to suit the psalmist's intent of emphasizing the grace of the LORD in exalting humanity. The psalmist contrasts the humble position of humanity in the preceding verse--They are not worth remembering or paying attention to--with the position they occupy by his grace--they lack only a little from God himself. The second line adds additional emphasis to God's grace in exalting humanity. "Glory and honor" are described as a crown that God has placed on the head of humanity. This line may also anticipate verses 6-8 because a crown is also the symbol of authority.

The psalmist praises the LORD for giving authority to humanity. The psalmist praises the LORD for giving authority to humanity in verses 6-8, "You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: All sheep and cattle and also the beasts of the open country, the birds of the air, and the fish that travel the paths of the seas." The extent of the authority that God has given humanity is emphasized both by the adjective "everything" and the comprehensive list of animals that follows. This list includes domesticated as well as wild animals and animals from every major habitat--land, sea, and air. Thus the preeminence of humanity in the world is not based on anything inherent in man but on the graciousness of God. Therefore, the worshipers should praise the LORD because he has exalted humanity, crowned them with glory and honor, and put all of his creation under their authority.

The Psalmist Leads Praise to the LORD for

His Authority and Majesty

The psalmist concludes by leading the worshipers once again to praise the LORD for his authority and majesty in verse 9, "LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" This exclamation of praise repeats and reinforces the identical exclamation in the first line of verse 1. However, subsequent to that first exclamation the psalmist has established the majesty of the LORD because of his support of the helpless (2), his awesome work in creating the heavens (3-4), and his grace in exalting and giving authority to humanity (5-8).

Application of the Message

Establishing Correspondence

Christians today also come under attack because they seek to live for God. They may also feel that God is too far removed to care about their struggles. As a result they may not feel much like praising God. These correspondences between the original and modern situations provide a strong basis for applying the message of Psalm 8 to the modern situation. In addition, the New Testament interprets this psalm, especially verses 4-8, messianically. Jesus explains the acclaim of the children, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" to the chief priests and teachers of the law by quoting from verse 2 (Matthew 21:16). Both Paul (1 Corinthians 15:27 and Ephesians 1:22) and the author of Hebrews (Hebrews 2:6-8) identify Jesus as "the son of man" of verse 4 and define his authority in terms of verses 5-8. These interpretations are legitimate because Jesus is the realization of all that God intended for humanity. However, these interpretations do not affect the message of the passage in its original context. Nonetheless, Jesus is the supreme illustration of the final statement of the applied message.

Distinguishing the Contextualized

This passage contains very little of a contextualized nature that requires that the message be limited or adjusted when applied to the modern situation. Therefore, the statement of the applied message has only been modified slightly.

Adjusting the Message

Christians should praise the LORD because he is their Lord, his name is majestic in all the earth, and his praise is above the heavens. Christians should praise the LORD because he has established strength through the helpless to put a stop to the foe and avenger. Christians should praise the LORD because he has formed the heavens with his fingers, set the moon and stars in place, and they are so awesome that it is amazing that he remembers and pays attention to humanity at all. Christians should praise the LORD because he has exalted humanity, crowned them with glory and honor, and put all of his creation under their authority.

Communication of the Message

Title: How Majestic Is Your Name!

Objective: The objective of this message is to encourage Christians who are under attack and feeling that God is far removed from their struggle and inspire them to praise the LORD their God.

Proposition: Christians should praise the LORD because he is their Lord and he is exalted over everything; he has given strength to the powerless to overcome his enemies; he has formed the heavens and set the moon and stars in place; and he has exalted humanity and put all of his creation under their authority.

Introduction

We have gathered together today to praise the LORD our God. However, some of you may not feel very much like praising the LORD. You may be under attack because you are trying to live faithfully for God. You may even feel that God is too far removed to care about your struggles. In Psalm 8 the psalmist praises the LORD, affirming among other things that he does strengthen the weak and helpless who are attacked and he is concerned about people. Let us allow the psalmist to lead us to affirm our faith in the LORD and exalt him in praise. *Read Psalm 8.*

I. Christians should praise the LORD because he is their Lord and he is exalted over everything.

- A. The psalmist begins by leading the worshipers to praise the LORD for his authority and majesty in verse 1, "LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! Which places your praise above the heavens!"
- B. The psalmist concludes by leading the worshipers to praise the LORD for his authority and majesty in verse 9, "LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"
- C. Illustration of the LORD's Majesty
- D. Application

II. Christians should praise the LORD because he gives strength to the powerless to overcome his enemies.

- A. The psalmist praises the LORD for his support of the helpless in verse 2, "From the mouth of children and infants you have established strength because of your enemies, to put a stop to the foe and avenger."
- B. Illustration of the LORD's Strengthening of the Powerless
- C. Application

III. Christians should praise the LORD because he has formed the heavens and set the moon and stars in place.

- A. The psalmist praises the LORD by observing the heavens and considering God's work of creation in verse 3, "When I observe the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you set in place."
- B. The psalmist praises the LORD by expressing his wonder at the wonder of the heavens that he created in verse 4, "What is man that you remember him, the son of man that you pay attention to him?"
- C. Illustration of the LORD's Power in Creation
- D. Application

IV. Christians should praise the LORD because he has exalted humanity and put all of his creation under their authority.

- A. The psalmist praises the LORD because he has exalted humanity in verse 5, "But you made him lack only a little from God and crowned him with glory and honor."

B. The psalmist praises the LORD because he has given authority to humanity in verse 6, "You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: All sheep and cattle and also the beasts of the open country, the birds of the air, and the fish that travel the paths of the sea."

C. Illustration of the LORD's Graciousness to Humanity

D. Application

Conclusion

We have gathered together today to praise the LORD our God. However, some of you may not feel very much like praising the LORD. You may be under attack because you are trying to live faithfully for God. You may even feel that God is too far removed to care about your struggles or hear your praise. In Psalm 8 the psalmist praises the LORD, affirming among other things that he does strengthen the weak and helpless who are attacked and he is concerned about people. Let us allow the psalmist to lead us to affirm our faith in the LORD and exalt him in praise. You should praise the LORD because he is your Lord and his name is exalted over everything. You should praise the LORD because he gives strength to the powerless to overcome his enemies. You should praise the LORD because he has formed the heavens with his fingers and set the moon and stars in place. You should praise the LORD because he has exalted humanity and put all of his creation under their authority.

CHAPTER SIX

IN THE LORD I TAKE REFUGE

Psalm 11

Study of the Passage

Text and Translation

For the worship leader. Of David

1In the LORD I take refuge.

How can you say to my soul:

"Flee you bird to your mountain,

2For look, the wicked bend their bows;

They set their arrows to the string

to shoot in the dark at those who are upright in heart?

3When the foundations are being destroyed,

what can the righteous do?"

4The LORD is in the temple of his holiness;

The LORD is in heaven on his throne.

His eyes see; his eyes scrutinize the sons of man.

5The LORD scrutinizes the righteous

and the wicked and those who love violence his soul hates.

6May he rain traps¹ on the wicked, fire and burning sulfur;

a scorching wind will be the portion of their cup.

7Because the LORD is righteous he loves righteous deeds;

The upright will see his face.

¹Most modern versions emend the Hebrew text "traps" to read "coals of fire," but there is no manuscript evidence for this emendation and the text makes sense as it is due to the nature of poetic language (See also Ross, 336 note 8).

Situation and Purpose

The psalm reflects a situation in which the psalmist was being attacked by the wicked and the foundations of society were crumbling (2-3). In addition, his enemies were taunting him to flee because of the attacks of the wicked and his helplessness. These attacks as well as the taunts of his enemies could easily have discouraged the psalmist and resulted in him losing his faith in God. Furthermore, the psalmist's affirmations of faith suggest other crises of faith with regard to God's presence and holiness (4), transcendence and sovereignty (4), and scrutiny and justice (4-7). However, the primary crisis seems to be regarding the justice of the LORD since the psalmist affirms God's justice in verses 4-7. The superscription identifies the psalmist as David. Many instances in the life of David are consistent with the situation reflected in the psalm and provide an appropriate historical context for its interpretation. The psalm would be most meaningful for worshipers who were experiencing similar difficulties and discouragement and were questioning the justice of God. The purpose of the psalm was to encourage worshipers to continue to trust in

the LORD rather than be discouraged by the attacks of the wicked and the taunts of their enemies.

Literary Context and Role

The Book of Psalms has no discernible strategy. Therefore, placing this psalm in its literary context and determining its role within that context is not very productive. Nonetheless, this psalm is loosely related to other psalms attributed to David. In addition, the psalm is generally related in form to other psalms dominated by affirmations of faith.

Form and Function

The psalm is often classified as a psalm of praise. However, more specifically this psalm consists of affirmations of faith (Anderson, 119 and Craigie, 132 classify it as a psalm of confidence or trust). Affirmations of faith are declarations of the psalmist's confidence in God for who he is and what he has done, is doing, and will do. These affirmations of faith serve to encourage the worshipers and inspire them to affirm their own faith in God along with the psalmist. In this psalm the psalmist leads the worshipers by example to take refuge in the LORD in verse 1, "In the LORD I take refuge." He also encourages the worshipers to take refuge in the LORD by affirming his faith in the LORD's protection (1-3), presence and holiness (4a), transcendence and sovereignty (4b), and scrutiny and justice (4c-7). A unique feature of the psalm is a rebuking rhetorical question in verses 1-3. Through this question the psalmist rebukes those who are taunting him to flee because of the attacks of his enemies and his helplessness. The implication of his question is that the basis for their taunt is absurd. In the context of worship the other worshipers were intended to overhear the rebuke, which serves to discourage fear and encourage faith. Thus the psalm implies the command "Trust in the LORD" or more specifically "Take refuge in the LORD" based on verse 1.

Strategy and Structure

Psalm 11 has a clear strategy. The psalmist begins leading the worshipers by example to take refuge in the LORD and affirming his faith in the LORD's protection in spite of the taunts of his enemies in verses 1-3. The psalmist then provides the reasons for his faith in the LORD and optimism in verses 4-7: The LORD's presence and holiness (4a), transcendence and sovereignty (4b), and scrutiny and justice (4c-7).

- I. The Psalmist's Faith in the LORD's Protection (1-3)
 - A. The Psalmist's Affirmation of Faith in the LORD as His Refuge (1a)
 - B. The Psalmist's Rebuke of Those Who Would Discourage Him (1b-3)
 1. Rebuking introduction (1b)
 2. Taunt to flee (1c)
 3. The attacks of the wicked (2)
 4. The helplessness of the righteous (3)
- II. The Psalmist's Faith in the LORD (4-7)
 - A. The Psalmist's Affirmation of the LORD's Presence and Holiness and Transcendence and Sovereignty (4a-b)
 - B. The Psalmist's Affirmation of the LORD's Scrutiny and Justice (4c-7)
 1. The LORD's scrutiny of all mankind (4c)
 2. The LORD's scrutiny of the righteous and hatred of the wicked (5)

3. The LORD's judgment of the wicked (6)
4. The LORD's righteousness, love of righteous deeds, and acceptance of the upright (7)

Message or Messages

God's people should take refuge in the LORD and not be discouraged by those who question God's justice and maintain that the upright are at the mercy of the wicked because their perspective is unjustified and absurd. God's people should take refuge in the LORD and not be discouraged by those who question God's justice and maintain that the upright are at the mercy of the wicked because the LORD is present and holy and transcendent and sovereign. God's people should take refuge in the LORD and not be discouraged by those who question God's justice and maintain that the upright are at the mercy of the wicked because the LORD scrutinizes all humanity; the LORD scrutinizes the righteous and hates and punishes the wicked; and the LORD is righteous, loves righteous deeds, and accepts the upright into his presence.

Analysis of the Details

The Psalmist's Faith in the LORD's Protection

The psalmist begins by affirming his faith in the LORD's protection in verses 1-3. He does this by affirming his faith in the LORD as his refuge and rebuking those who would discourage him with their taunts to flee. Through this affirmation the psalmist sought to encourage other worshipers and lead them to affirm their own faith in the LORD.

The psalmist's affirmation of faith in the LORD as his refuge. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD as his refuge in the first line of verse 1, "In the LORD I take refuge." This line stands alone without an echoing parallel line as is customary in Hebrew poetry to emphasize its distinctiveness. Ross explains that the tense of the perfect state verb "stresses that the psalmist's trust has continued throughout life" (Ross, 338). The remainder of the psalm provides the justification for this affirmation of the psalmist's faith. A refuge is a place of sanctuary and safety from harm. Through his affirmation of faith the psalmist models for other worshipers the appropriate response to trials--taking refuge in the LORD. Anderson postulates that the psalmist sought refuge in the temple based on verse 4 and the practice of fleeing to the altar or sanctuary (Anderson, 120). However, verse 4 only asserts that the LORD is in his holy temple and it is more probable that the psalmist was simply affirming his faith in the LORD as his refuge in a general sense.

The psalmist's rebuke of those who would discourage him. The psalmist rebukes those who would discourage him with their taunts to flee in verses 1-3. The rest of the psalm provides his rationale for disregarding these taunts. These verses contain a long elaborate rhetorical question. This rhetorical question is introduced in the second line of verse 1, "How can you say to my soul" and followed in the third line of verse 1 and verses 2-3 by a quotation of the taunt of those who sought to discourage the psalmist. These people are often identified as the psalmist's friends, but the language they employ is clearly antagonistic (See below). It seems more likely that these are his enemies. However, Craigie suggests, "It is equally likely that the words in quotation marks (vv 1-2) are the psalmist's own words, the internal voice of fear, speaking silently and temptingly in his thoughts" (Craigie, 132-133). The introduction of this question implies the basis for the taunts of those who would discourage him are unjustified and absurd.

Durham maintains that this question implies the psalmist's incredulity at the attitude and advice of his counselors (Durham, 191). As Ross exclaims, "David's reply is in the form of a rhetorical question (erotesis) to express his amazement and rejection of their proposal--how can they suggest that he flee when he has taken refuge in the LORD?" (Ross, 339) They taunt him to "Flee like a bird to your mountain." This imperative verb translated "Flee" is actually a feminine form and could be translated "Flee, you woman!" They also liken him to a bird, implying that he was small and helpless. Anderson suggests that "a flight to the mountains was a proverbial expression for a measure of desperation" (Anderson, 121). The bases for their taunt to flee are explained in verses 2-3.

First, they argued that flight was necessary because of the attacks of the wicked in verse 2, "For look, the wicked bend their bows; they set their arrows to the string to shoot in the dark at those who are upright in heart." Perhaps those taunting him were continuing the imagery of the bird with the upright in heart as the prey and the wicked as hunters. The description of the hunters stringing their bows probably indicates that they are preparing to shoot and stresses the imminent danger of attack. The description of the hunters shooting "in the dark" probably indicates that they were shooting from a concealed position and portrays their cunning as well as the psalmist's vulnerability to unexpected danger. They were taunting him to flee because they believed the upright in heart were at the mercy of the wicked. However, the psalmist's introduction indicates that he believed that their argument was unjustified and absurd because the LORD was his refuge.

Second, they argued that flight was necessary because the very bases of life were being destroyed and he was hopeless to do anything about it in verse 3, "When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?" The first line of verse 3 emphasizes the cataclysm that they were facing. As Durham states, "The foundations are the structure and basis of the life the psalmist and his friends enjoy" (Durham, 191). Weiser specifically identifies "the foundations" as the foundations "of life, of security, of the community, of justice, and of religion" (Weiser, 156). The second line of verse 3 casts the entire verse in the form of a rhetorical question. The implication of the rhetorical question is that the righteous can do nothing to help themselves and God is doing nothing to help them. Another possible translation of this question is, "What have the righteous done?" This translation more directly indicts God for injustice because he has not intervened on behalf of the righteous. However the question is translated, the foundations of society are being destroyed and the righteous are without hope since God seems to be oblivious to their plight. Through this rebuke the psalmist sought to discredit this pessimistic perspective. Therefore, the worshipers should take refuge in the LORD and not be discouraged by those who question God's justice and maintain that the upright are at the mercy of the wicked because this perspective is unjustified and absurd.

The Psalmist's Faith in the LORD

The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD's presence and holiness, transcendence and sovereignty, and scrutiny and justice in verses 4-7. Through these affirmations the psalmist further demonstrated that the perspective of those who sought to discourage him was unjustified and absurd and sought to encourage worshipers to trust and seek refuge in the LORD.

The psalmist's affirmation of the LORD's presence and holiness and transcendence and sovereignty. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD's presence and holiness and transcendence and sovereignty in verse 4. He affirms the LORD's presence and holiness in the

first line of verse 4, "The LORD is in the temple of his holiness." The Old Testament depicts the temple as God's dwelling place among his people. Thus it was a symbol of God's presence among his people. In addition, the psalmist qualifies the temple with the words, "of his holiness." The Old Testament law restricts access to the temple, especially the holy place and the most holy place. In this way the temple was a symbol of God's holiness. God's holiness is his distinctiveness and superiority. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD's transcendence and sovereignty in the second line of verse 4, "The LORD is in heaven on his throne." Though the psalmist affirms that the LORD is present in the temple, he also maintains that God is enthroned in heaven. God is not a creature of the earth, but is otherworldly and dwells in heaven far above all earthly powers. The heavenly throne depicts the LORD's sovereignty over the powers and affairs of the world. Through these affirmations of the LORD's presence and holiness and transcendence and sovereignty the psalmist was seeking to assure other worshipers of God's presence and authority to help them and encourage them to trust him. Therefore, the worshipers should take refuge in the LORD and not be discouraged by those who question God's justice and maintain that the upright are at the mercy of the wicked because the LORD is present and holy and transcendent and sovereign.

The psalmist's affirmation of the LORD's scrutiny and justice. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD's scrutiny and justice in verses 4-7. He affirms the LORD's scrutiny of all mankind in the final line of verse 4, "His eyes see; his eyes scrutinize the sons of man." The extent of the LORD's scrutiny is stressed in several ways. First, the scrutiny of the LORD is stressed through repetition. Not only does this verse affirm twice that God sees and scrutinizes, but the first line of the subsequent verse affirms the same thing, "The LORD scrutinizes the righteous." Second, the verb translated "scrutinizes" stresses God's close examination. Third, Anderson notes that the second word translated "eyes" in verse 4 literally means eyelids and suggests that "The picture is probably derived from the contraction of the eyelids during close scrutiny of some object" (Anderson, 122). Fourth, Ross notes that the two verbs (see, scrutinize) "should be classified as habitual imperfects" indicating that they describe God's characteristic practice. Finally, the psalmist emphasizes the LORD's scrutiny by defining who he watches with the words "the sons of man" or literally "the sons of Adam." All people are sons of Adam and therefore come under his scrutiny. Through this affirmation of the LORD's scrutiny the psalmist was seeking to assure other worshipers that God was not indifferent, but fully aware of their plight as well as wickedness of sinners.

The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD's scrutiny of the righteous and abhorrence of the wicked and violent in verse 5, "The LORD scrutinizes the righteous and the wicked and those who love violence his soul hates." Through this affirmation of the LORD's scrutiny of the righteous, he is probably counteracting the pessimistic words of those who are questioning God's justice and maintaining that the righteous are at the mercy of the wicked. God is fully aware of their upright conduct. There may also be an implicit warning in these words as well. They need to be careful to truly live a righteous life or they may come under his judgment. The LORD's abhorrence of the wicked and violent is described in very strong terms. By expressing his hatred with the words "his soul hates" rather than the simpler "he hates" the psalmist was probably emphasizing that God's abhorrence of the wicked and violent reaches to the very depths of his being. Ross classifies the verb as a gnomic perfect that is used to express a universal truth (Ross, 343).

The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD's judgment of the wicked in verse 6, "May he rain traps on the wicked, fire and burning sulfur; a scorching wind [will be] the portion of their cup." The jussive is probably used to express the certainty of judgment in the form of a wish or prayer (Ross, 344). Indeed, most translations translate it as a direct affirmation of faith ("He will rain"). The first line of his description of God's judgment of the wicked is reminiscent of his judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah and stresses the severity and completeness of his judgment of the wicked. In the second line of his description of the judgment of the wicked and violent the psalmist seems to employ irony. Rather than receiving God's blessing, their portion would be a "scorching wind." Through this affirmation of the LORD's scrutiny, hatred, and judgment of the wicked the psalmist was seeking to assure other worshipers of the God's justice to the wicked.

The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD's righteousness, love of righteous deeds, and acceptance of the upright in verse 7, "Because the LORD is righteous he loves righteous deeds; the upright will see his face." As Craigie notes "he loves righteous deeds" can mean "either that he loves to do righteous deeds, or those who do righteous deeds" and he prefers the latter in this context (Craigie, 134). Weiser asserts that "the upright will see his face" "is derived from the cultus and refers to the theophany at the climax of the rites performed in the cult when the worshipper experiences the presence of his God with joy and trembling" (Weiser, 157). The Old Testament sometimes denies that human beings can look upon the face of God as in Exodus 33:20 where God says to Moses, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live" (NIV). Nonetheless, other passages indicate that some human beings will look upon the face of God as in this passage. Underlying this imagery is the implication that even though God is holy, he accepts the upright and admits them into his presence. Through this affirmation of the LORD's righteousness, love for righteous deeds, and acceptance of the righteous into his presence the psalmist was seeking to assure other worshipers of God's justice. Therefore, the worshipers should take refuge in the LORD and not be discouraged by those who question God's justice and maintain that the upright are at the mercy of the wicked because the LORD scrutinizes all humanity; he scrutinizes the righteous and hates and punishes the wicked; and he is righteous, loves righteous deeds, and accepts the upright into his presence.

Application of the Message

Establishing Correspondence

Christians today also come under attack like the psalmist and feel like the foundation of their life is crumbling underneath them. In addition, Christians may be further discouraged by the taunts of those around them who question the justice of God and maintain that the upright are at the mercy of the wicked. These correspondences with the original situation provide a strong basis for applying the message of Psalm 11 to the contemporary situation.

Distinguishing the Contextualized

There is very little of a contextualized nature in the passage that would require that the message of this passage be limited or adjusted. However, the assurance that God is present at the temple has little meaning for Christians. Nonetheless, the message underlying this imagery-- God's presence among his people--remains valid. In addition, the assertion that God hates the wicked and those who love violence is inconsistent with New Testament teaching on the love of God for all people. Nonetheless, this language is intended to emphasize the righteousness and justice of God. God may not hate them but he does hate what they do and they will be held

accountable. Therefore, the statement of the applied message that follows has only been modified slightly.

Adjusting the Message

Christians should take refuge in the LORD and not be discouraged by those who question God's justice and maintain that the upright are at the mercy of the wicked because their perspective is unjustified and absurd. Christians should take refuge in the LORD and not be discouraged by those who question God's justice and maintain that the upright are at the mercy of the wicked because the LORD is present and holy and the LORD is transcendent and sovereign. Christians should take refuge in the LORD and not be discouraged by those who question God's justice and maintain that the upright are at the mercy of the wicked because the LORD scrutinizes all humanity; the LORD scrutinizes the righteous and hates wickedness and punishes the wicked; and the LORD is righteous, loves righteous deeds, and accepts the upright into his presence.

Communication of the Message

Title: In the LORD I Take Refuge

Objective: The objective of this message is to encourage Christians to trust and take refuge in the LORD rather than become discouraged when they are attacked and others question God's justice and maintain that the upright are at the mercy of the wicked.

Proposition: Christians should take refuge in the LORD and not be discouraged by those who question God's justice because their perspective is unjustified and absurd; the LORD is present and holy and transcendent and sovereign; the LORD is righteous, hates wickedness and punishes the wicked, and loves righteousness and accepts the upright.

Introduction

Christians often come under attack and may feel at times that the foundation of their life is crumbling underneath them. As a result they may become discouraged. This danger is intensified when others question the justice of God, maintain that the upright are at the mercy of the wicked, and ridicule them for their faith in God. The psalmist was in a similar predicament. He was under attack and others were taunting him to flee because his enemies were attacking him, the foundations of his life were being destroyed, and God didn't seem to be doing anything about it. Nonetheless, the psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD. We need the psalmist's faith. *Read Psalm 11.*

I. Christians should take refuge in the LORD and not be discouraged by those who question God's justice because their perspective is unjustified and absurd.

- A. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD as his refuge in the first line of verse 1, "In the LORD I take refuge."
- B. The psalmist's rebukes those were taunting him to flee in the remainder of verse 1 and verses 2-3, "How can you say to my soul: 'Flee like a bird to your mountain, for surely the wicked bend their bows; they set their arrows to the string to shoot in the dark at those who are upright in heart. When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?'"
- C. Illustration of Christians Being Ridiculed for Their Faith
- D. Application

II. Christians should take refuge in the LORD and not be discouraged by those who question God's justice because the LORD is present and holy and transcendent and sovereign.

- A. The psalmist affirms his faith in the presence and holiness of the LORD in the first line of verse 4, "The LORD is in the temple of his holiness."
- B. The psalmist affirms his faith in the transcendence and sovereignty of the LORD in the second line of verse 4, "The LORD is in heaven on his throne."
- C. Illustration of How the LORD Is Present and Holy and Transcendent and Sovereign
- D. Application

III. Christians should take refuge in the LORD and not be discouraged by those who question God's justice because the LORD is righteous, hates wickedness and punishes the wicked, and loves righteousness and accepts the upright.

- A. The psalmist affirms his faith in the scrutiny of the LORD in the second half of verse 4, "His eyes see; his eyes scrutinize the sons of man."
- B. The psalmist affirms his faith in the righteous LORD's scrutiny, hatred of wickedness, and judgment of the wicked in verses 5-6.
 - 1. First, he affirms the righteous LORD's scrutiny of the righteous in the first line of verse 5, "The LORD scrutinizes the righteous."
 - 2. Second, the psalmist affirms the LORD's abhorrence of the wicked and violent in the second line of verse 5, "and the wicked and those who love violence his soul hates."
 - 3. Third, the psalmist affirms the LORD's judgment of the wicked in verse 6, "On the wicked he will rain traps, fire and burning sulfur; a scorching wind will be the portion of their cup."
- C. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD's righteousness, love for righteous deeds, and acceptance of the upright in verse 7, "Because the LORD is righteous he loves righteous deeds; the upright will see his face."
- D. Illustration of the Justice of God
- E. Application

Conclusion

Christians often become discouraged when they come under attack and may feel at times that the foundation of their life is crumbling underneath them. This danger is intensified when others question the righteousness of God, maintain that the righteous are at the mercy of the wicked, and ridicule their faith in God. The psalmist was in a similar predicament. Nonetheless, the psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD. We need the psalmist's faith. You should take refuge in the LORD and not be discouraged by those who question God's justice because their perspective is unjustified and absurd. You should take refuge in the LORD and not be discouraged by those who question God's justice because the LORD is present and holy and transcendent and sovereign. You should take refuge in the LORD and not be discouraged by those who question God's justice because the LORD is righteous, hates wickedness and punishes the wicked, and loves righteousness and accepts the upright.

CHAPTER SEVEN

KEEP ME SAFE, GOD Psalm 16

Study of the Passage

Text and Translation

*A miktam of David*¹

- 1 Keep me safe, God,
for I take refuge in you.
- 2 You said² to the LORD: "You are my Lord, my good;
There is nothing above you."
- 3 As for the holy ones who are in the land,
them and the glorious ones,
all my delight is in them.
- 4 They multiply their pains.
They hurry to another³.
- I will not pour out their libations of blood
and I will not take up their names on my lips.
- 5 The LORD is my choice portion and my cup.
You are holding my share.
- 6 The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places.
Indeed, the inheritance is delightful for me.
- 7 I thank the LORD who counsels me;
Indeed, in the night my heart instructs me.
- 8 I keep the LORD before me always.
Because [he is] at my right hand I will not be shaken.
- 9 Therefore, my heart is glad and my glory rejoices;
Indeed, my body also abides securely
- 10 Because you will not abandon me to *Sheol*;
You will not let your beloved see the Pit.
- 11 You make known to me the path of life,
full satisfaction of joy in your presence,
pleasure at your right hand forever.

¹The designation *miktam* is given to several psalms (16, 56-60). However, the meaning of this term is uncertain.

²Most modern translations read "I said"; however, the Hebrew text actually reads "You said". "I said" is possible since that is what the Septuagint and other ancient versions read. Nonetheless, the Hebrew text is more probable since it is the more difficult reading and would explain why the alternate readings arose. If the Hebrew text is correct, it should be understood as the psalmist speaking to himself (Ross, 397 adds the words "O my soul" to make this clearer).

³The Hebrew word employed here is uncertain. It could come from a root meaning "hasten" in which case it would condemn the lack of commitment of these idolaters. It could also come from a more obscure root meaning "obtain in exchange" in which case it would warn the worshipers of the bad bargain that these idolaters have made by their unfaithfulness.

Situation and Purpose

This psalm reflects a general context of worship. However, underlying this general context is a more specific context--the danger of abandoning the LORD and worshipping idols. This danger is reflected most clearly in verse 4 where the psalmist refers to those who have committed adultery. In addition, this danger is reflected in the psalmist's reaction to the threat. The psalmist's affirmation of the LORD as his Lord, good, and that there is nothing above him imply that this position could be taken by idols. His determination not to pour out their libations of blood or take up their names imply that these were possibilities for some. The psalmist's commitment to bless the LORD and keep the LORD before him at all times implies the danger that some might give other gods credit for God's blessings and abandon him. The psalm would have been most meaningful to worshipers who were facing the common temptation to forsake the LORD and worship idols. The purpose of this psalm was to lead the worshipers to reject idolatry, trust in the LORD for their needs, commit themselves completely to him, thank him for all he has done for them, and keep close to him at all times.

Literary Context and Role

The Book of Psalms has no discernible strategy. Therefore, placing this psalm in its literary context and determining its role within that context is not very productive. Nonetheless, Psalm 16 is related by the superscription to other psalms of David. In addition, the psalm is related by the superscription to other psalms designated *miktam* (Psalms 56-60). However, the meaning of *miktam* is uncertain.

Form and Function

This psalm is difficult to classify by the general categories normally used to describe the psalms. Instead, the psalm is a liturgy that combines petition, commitment, and affirmation of faith. A petition can be defined generally as an expression of the psalmist's needs and desire to God. These petitions are usually accompanied by explanations for the psalmist's confidence in God to answer his petitions. The petition serves as a model to encourage other worshipers to petition God with the explanation providing the encouragement for them to do so. Verse 1 of this psalm contains a petition that follows this pattern. Underlying this petition is the implied command, "Ask the LORD to keep you safe!" A commitment is an indication of the psalmist's determination to respond to God in a particular way. These commitments are usually accompanied by explanations of the reasons for the commitment. The commitment of the psalmist serves as a model to lead other worshipers to make commitments to God, with the explanations providing reasons for doing so. This psalm contains commitments to the LORD as Lord (2), to delight in God's people (3), to avoid idolatry (4), to thank the LORD (7), and to remain close to the LORD (8-11) that follow this pattern. Underlying these commitments are the implied commands: "Be committed to the LORD!" "Delight in the LORD's holy and glorious ones!" "Reject idolatry!" "Thank the LORD!" and "Keep the LORD before you always!" Affirmations of faith are indications of the psalmist's confidence in God because of who he is or what he has done, is doing, or will do. These affirmations of faith serve to encourage the

worshippers and inspire them to affirm their own faith in God. This psalm contains affirmations of faith in verses 5-6. Underlying these affirmations of faith is the implied command, "Trust in the LORD!"

Strategy and Structure

The psalm contains a series of petitions, commitments, and affirmations of faith that lead the worshipers to petition the LORD (1), commit themselves to him in various ways (2-4 and 7-11), and affirm their faith in him (5-6). Each of these contains explanations that encourage the worshipers to follow the psalmist.

- I. The Psalmist's Petition to the LORD (1)
- II. The Psalmist Reminds Himself of His Commitment to the LORD (2)
- III. The Psalmist's Commitment to Delight in the People of the LORD (3)
- IV. The Psalmist's Commitment to Avoid Idolatry (4)
 - A. The Shameful and Foolish Idolatry of Some
 1. Their multiplication of pains
 2. Their hastening to another
 - B. The Psalmist's Refusal to Commit Idolatry
 1. To pour out their libations of blood
 2. To take up their names on his lips
- V. The Psalmist's Faith in the LORD (5-6)
 - A. The Psalmist's Faith in the LORD (5)
 1. His choice portion and cup
 2. The one holding his share
 - B. The Psalmist's Confirming Experience (6)
 1. Pleasantly placed boundary lines
 2. Delightful inheritance
- VI. The Psalmist's Commitment to Thank the LORD (7)
 - A. The Psalmist's Commitment
 - B. The Reason for His Commitment
- VII. The Psalmist's Commitment to an Intimate and Abiding Relationship with the LORD (8-11)
 - A. The Psalmist's Commitment (8a)
 - B. The Reasons for the Psalmist's Commitment (8b-11)
 1. The resulting stability (8b)
 2. The resulting joy and a sense of well-being (9)
 3. The reasons for joy and sense of well-being (10-11)
 - a. No fear of *Sheol* and the Pit (10)
 - b. Revelation of the path of life, full satisfaction of joy, and pleasure (11)

Message or Messages

God's people should ask the LORD to keep them safe along with the psalmist because he is their refuge. God's people should submit to the LORD along with the psalmist because he is their Lord, he is their good, and everything is under his authority. God's people should delight in

the LORD's faithful people along with the psalmist because they are his holy and glorious ones. God's people should avoid idolatry along with the psalmist because those who worship other gods are shameful and foolish. God's people should trust in the LORD along with the psalmist because he is their source of blessing and hope for the future. God's people should thank the LORD along with the psalmist because he counsels and instructs them. God's people should commit themselves to an intimate and abiding relationship with the LORD along with the psalmist because if he is beside them they will not be shaken; they will have joy and a sense of well-being; and he will not abandon them to *Sheol* and the Pit, but will show them the path of life, full satisfaction of joy in his presence, and pleasure at his right hand forever.

Analysis of the Details

The Psalmist's Petition to the LORD

The psalmist asks the LORD for protection in verse 1, "Keep me safe, God, for I take refuge in you." Through this petition the psalmist sought to lead other worshipers to ask the LORD to keep them safe. The psalmist's petition, "Keep me safe, God," is an appeal for God to preserve him from danger. Though the psalmist's explanation, "for I take refuge in you," is addressed to God, the worshipers are intended to overhear and remember that God is their refuge. A refuge is a place of sanctuary and safety. Therefore, the worshipers should ask the LORD to keep them safe along with the psalmist because he is their refuge.

The Psalmist's Reminds Himself of His Commitment to the LORD

The psalmist reminds himself of his commitment to the LORD in verse 2, "You said to the LORD: 'You are my Lord, my good; there is nothing above you.'" Through this commitment the psalmist sought to lead other worshipers to commit themselves to the LORD. The psalmist identifies the LORD as his Lord. The first title, LORD, is actually the divine name, and is distinguished from the second title Lord by the use of all upper-case letters. The second title, Lord, is the Hebrew word *Adonai*. Human lords had absolute authority over those under their control. The psalmist recognized the LORD as the Lord of lords and submitted himself to the absolute authority of the Lord over his life. The psalmist also identifies the LORD as his good. He may be going beyond simply saying that the LORD is the source of all that is good in his life to say that it is the presence of the LORD in his life that makes his life good. This identification of the LORD as his good, though addressed to the LORD, serves to explain to other worshipers why he submits to the LORD as his Lord and to encourage them to do the same. In addition, the psalmist declares, "There is nothing above you." This declaration, though also addressed to the LORD, serves to explain further to other worshipers why he submits to the LORD as his Lord and to encourage them to do the same. The LORD is above all and everyone and everything is under him and should submit to his authority. Therefore, the worshipers should submit to the LORD along with the psalmist because he is their Lord, he is their good, and everything is under his authority.

The Psalmist's Delight in the People of the LORD

The psalmist commits himself to delight in God's faithful people in verse 3, "As for the holy ones who are in the land, them and the glorious ones, all my delight is in them." Through his expression of delight in the holy and glorious ones the psalmist sought to lead other worshipers

to delight in God's faithful people. Though the identity of the holy and glorious ones is not specifically stated, the most likely candidates are those who worship the LORD and seek to live holy lives that glorify the name of the LORD. The Hebrew word translated "holy ones" means "those who are set apart." The Hebrew word translated "glorious ones" probably indicates that these people reflect the glory of God and thereby bring glory to him. These alternate designations for God's faithful people provide an explanation of the psalmist's delight in them and encourage other worshipers to delight in those who are faithfully worshipping and living their lives for the LORD as well. Therefore, God's people should delight in God's faithful people along with the psalmist because they are his holy and glorious ones.

The Psalmist's Commitment to Avoid Idolatry

The psalmist commits himself to avoid idolatry in verse 4. Through his expression of commitment he sought to lead other worshipers to commit themselves to avoid idolatry as well. The psalmist begins by describing the idolatry of some in such a way as to indicate to other worshipers that it is shameful and foolish. He then expresses his adamant refusal to join them as a model for other worshipers.

The shameful and foolish idolatry of some. The psalmist depicts the shameful unfaithfulness of those who turn to idolatry in the first half of the verse, "They multiply their pains. They hurry to another." The Hebrew word for "pains" shares the same root as the word for "idols." The psalmist may have intended a play on words in this context, implying that by multiplying their idols these idolaters were also multiplying their pains. The Hebrew verbs translated "They multiply" and "They hurry" stress the zeal of these idolaters. Idolatry was condemned by the very first of the Ten Commandments and regarded by all true worshipers as a shameful betrayal of the LORD. Yet these idolaters not only worship idols, but "multiply" their idols. They not only turn to other gods, but "hurry to another." In addition, this depiction of the idolatry of some may indicate its foolishness as well. The Hebrew verb translated "They hurry" could be taken back to a similar but rarer root meaning "give in exchange." In that case the psalmist would be emphasizing the foolish bargain that these idolaters made by exchanging the living God for worthless idols that only bring them pain.

The psalmist's refusal to commit idolatry. The psalmist expresses his adamant refusal to commit idolatry in the second half of the verse, "I will not pour out their libations of blood and I will not take up their names on my lips." Pouring out a libation of blood was an act of worship whereby the blood of the sacrifice was poured upon the altar as an expression of the worshiper's devotion to the god. Taking up the name of a god on the lips refers to any use of the god's name in the context of personal or corporate worship to express commitment, affirm faith, declare praise, or make a petition. As Ross says, "By not uttering their names, David did not recognize the divinity or power of any 'god' other than *Yahweh*" (Ross, 404). The psalmist models through his refusal to worship other gods how other worshipers should respond to the temptation to idolatry. Therefore, the worshipers should avoid idolatry along with the psalmist because those who worship other gods are shameful and foolish.

The Psalmist's Faith in the LORD.

The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD in verses 5-6. Through his affirmation of faith he sought to encourage other worshipers and lead them to affirm their faith in the LORD as well.

The psalmist begins by affirming his faith in the LORD and then substantiates his confidence in the LORD from his own experience.

The psalmist's faith in the LORD. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD in verse 5, "The LORD is my choice portion and my cup. You are holding my share." The "choice portion" and "cup" are emblematic of food and drink. By identifying the LORD as his choice portion and cup the psalmist was probably affirming his faith in the LORD as the one who provides him with food and drink, basic necessities that are essential for life. However, the directness of his identification of the LORD as his choice portion and cup could indicate that he considers the LORD himself to be what is essential for his life. Weiser regards the cup as a symbol and pledge of divine saving grace (Weiser, 175). A share is an allotted portion. That God is the one holding that share suggests that God is the source of whatever blessings are coming to him, keeps them secure, and dispenses them at the appropriate time. The nature of these blessings is not defined and could include both temporal and eternal benefits since both kinds of blessings are mentioned elsewhere in the psalm. As Ross puts it, "When people put their trust in the LORD, he gives them himself and therefore all the provisions in life they could need" (Ross, 405). Though directed in part to the LORD, the psalmist intended this affirmation of faith to encourage other worshipers and lead them to trust in the LORD as well.

The psalmist's confirming experience. The psalmist verifies the faithfulness of the LORD from his own experience in verse 6, "The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places. Indeed, the inheritance is delightful for me." In the first line the psalmist describes his experience in terms of property lines. However, this description is probably intended more generally to describe all the blessings that the God has given him rather than just property. As Durham says, "It is not land, however, which the psalmist has in mind; he has rather taken the ancient terminology of land heritage and applied it to the far richer heritage of communion with God" (Durham, 198). The second line repeats the same affirmation in different terms for emphasis. The Hebrew conjunction translated "Indeed" is used to stress the extent of the psalmist's delight in all that the LORD has bequeathed him. The psalmist intended for this confirming testimony from his experience to encourage other worshipers and lead them to trust in the LORD as well. Therefore, the worshipers should trust in the LORD along with the psalmist because he is their source of blessing and hope for the future.

The Psalmist's Commitment to Thank the LORD

The psalmist commits himself to thank the LORD in verse 7, "I thank the LORD who counsels me. Indeed, in the night my heart instructs me." Through this commitment the psalmist sought to lead other worshipers to thank the LORD. Actually, the Hebrew word translated "I thank" literally means "bless." However, this word is commonly used to express thanks to God for all his blessings. As Davidson explains, "To bless God means to respond in gratitude to all the blessings that God has bestowed upon his people; it is to acknowledge all that God has done to enrich the life of the community or individual" (Davidson, 60). The specific reasons for the psalmist's thankfulness are God's counsel and instruction. The second line of this explanation seems to stress the extent of the LORD's counsel (the conjunction translated "Indeed"). However, what is specifically pictured is uncertain. Perhaps the extent of the LORD's counsel is stressed by its unusual timing or means (at night through dreams) or perhaps through its timeliness (as he is lying in bed fretting over his predicament and unable to sleep). Therefore,

the worshipers should thank the LORD along with the psalmist because he counsels and instructs them.

The Psalmist's Commitment to an Intimate and Abiding Relationship with the LORD

The psalmist commits himself to an intimate and abiding relationship with the LORD in verses 8-11. Through this commitment the psalmist sought to lead other worshipers also to commit themselves to an abiding relationship with the LORD. The psalmist expresses his commitment to the LORD and then explains the reasons for his commitment.

The psalmist's commitment. The psalmist expresses his commitment to an intimate and abiding relationship with the LORD in the first line of verse 8, "I keep the LORD before me always." The Hebrew word translated "before me" indicates that his commitment is to an intimate relationship to the LORD. The Hebrew word translated "always" indicates that his commitment was to an abiding relationship with the LORD. Ross explains, "This refers to his constant contemplation on God--he is ever mindful of the LORD, giving priority to him in all his thoughts and actions" (Ross, 408). As the worshipers witnessed the psalmist's commitment they would be led to commit themselves to an intimate and abiding relationship with the LORD along with him.

The reasons for the psalmist's commitment. The psalmist explains the reasons for his commitment to an intimate and abiding relationship with the LORD in the second line of verse 8 through verse 11. As the worshipers listened to the psalmist's explanation they would be encouraged to commit themselves to an intimate and abiding relationship with the LORD along with him. The psalmist explains that he is committed to an intimate and abiding relationship with the LORD because of the stability that relationship gives to his life in the second line of verse 8, "Because [he is] at my right hand I will not be shaken." He has come to realize that when the LORD is close at hand ("at my right hand") he has stability ("I will not be shaken"). The right hand is also a position of honor and expresses not only the psalmist's commitment to an intimate relationship with God but to give God the honored place in his life. Therefore, the worshipers should commit themselves to an intimate and abiding relationship with the LORD along with the psalmist because if he is beside them they will not be shaken.

The psalmist explains that he is committed to an intimate and abiding relationship with the LORD because of the joy and sense of well-being that results from that relationship in verse 9, "Therefore, my heart is glad and my glory rejoices. Indeed, my body also abides securely." The Hebrew conjunction translated "Therefore" links the psalmist's joy and sense of well-being to his commitment to an intimate and abiding relationship with the LORD. His joy and sense of well-being are manifest both inwardly and outwardly. The Hebrew word translated "heart" relates to the inner being of a person. Though the choice of word is unusual, the Hebrew word translated "glory" probably also refers to the psalmist's inner being. The psalmist's inner being is characterized by "joy" and "rejoicing" because of the stability that he has in the LORD. The psalmist introduces his affirmation in the second line of verse 9 with a conjunction that stresses that even his body is relaxed and unaffected by the ravages that often accompany anxiety (translated "Indeed"). Therefore, the worshipers should commit themselves to an intimate and abiding relationship with the LORD along with the psalmist so that they can have joy and a sense of well-being.

The reasons for the psalmist's joy and sense of well-being. The psalmist explains the reasons for his joy and sense of well-being in verses 10-11. As the psalmist explains the reasons for his joy and sense of well-being the worshipers would be encouraged even more to commit themselves to an intimate and abiding relationship with the LORD along with him. In verse 10 he explains that he is able to rejoice and feel secure because the LORD will protect him from death, "Because you will not abandon me to *Sheol*; you will not let your beloved see the Pit." "*Sheol*" was the term used by Hebrews for the abode of the dead and "Pit" was often employed as a synonym. Both words are used to express the Hebrew fear of death and the afterlife. However, the psalmist is convinced that because he is beloved of the LORD he will be saved from death. These affirmations are stated in the strongest way possible in the Hebrew text (lo with the imperfect).

In verse 11 he explains that he is able to rejoice and feel secure because the LORD has revealed to him the way of life, joy, and pleasure, "You make known to me the path of life, full satisfaction of joy in your presence, pleasure at your right hand forever." The path that the LORD has revealed to the psalmist is a course of life lived in relationship with God. The importance of a relationship with the LORD has been indirectly affirmed throughout the psalm, but is affirmed directly in verse 8 where the psalmist commits himself to an intimate and abiding relationship with the LORD. The importance of this relationship is stressed again in verse 11. The psalmist affirms that full satisfaction of joy and eternal pleasure are found in the presence of the LORD and at his right hand. Though some try to limit this affirmation to earthly existence (See Anderson, 145-146; and Davidson, 60), the joyous and pleasurable life that is described in this verse seems to encompass eternity as well. As Weiser concludes,

In view of the context in which the saying stands, the phrase "path of life" can hardly be understood in any other sense than as a life lived in communion with God which will be carried on even after death; in other words, as the consummation of salvation, the future of which is at present still hidden from the poet (Weiser, 178).

The psalmist has kept the LORD at his right hand throughout his life and expects that the LORD will keep him at his right hand for eternity. Therefore, the worshipers should commit themselves to an intimate and abiding relationship with the LORD along with the psalmist because he will not abandon them to death, but will show them the path of life, full satisfaction of joy in his presence, and pleasure at his right hand forever.

Application of the Message

Establishing Correspondence

Christians today also experience difficulties that may discourage them and lead them to turn away from the LORD and rely on other things for security. These correspondences between the original and modern situations provide a strong basis for apply the message of psalm 16 to the modern situation.

Distinguishing the Contextualized

There is very little of a contextualized nature that would require that the message of the passage be adjusted when applied to the modern situation. However, Christians today seldom turn from the worship of the LORD to idolatry and even fewer have opportunity to "pour out their libations of blood." Nonetheless, they may still compromise their commitment to the

LORD by their allegiances to other things. Therefore, I have generalized the statement more so that its application would have more general relevance. I have also replaced *Sheol* and the Pit with death since those terms are not commonly used in the modern context. The assurances with regard to deliverance from death in this psalm actually are more comprehensible in the modern context since Jesus has won the victory over death.

Adjusting the Message

Christians should ask the LORD to keep them safe because he is their refuge. Christians should submit to the LORD because he is their Lord, he is their good, and everything is under his authority. Christians should delight in God's faithful people because they are his holy and glorious ones. Christians should not replace the LORD with other devotions because those who worship other gods are shameful and foolish. Christians should trust in the LORD because he is their source of blessing and hope for the future. Christians should thank the LORD because he counsels and instructs them. Christians should commit themselves to an intimate and abiding relationship with the LORD because if he is beside them they will not be shaken; they will have joy and a sense of well-being; and he will not abandon them to death, but will show them the path of life, full satisfaction of joy in his presence, and pleasure at his right hand forever.

Communication of the Message

Title: Keep Me Safe, God

Objective: The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians to take refuge in the LORD, submit to him, keep him before them always, delight in his faithful ones, and avoid compromising their commitment to him with other allegiances.

Proposition: Christians should ask the LORD to keep them safe; submit to the LORD as their Lord; delight in the LORD's faithful people; not compromise their relationship with the LORD; trust in the LORD; thank the LORD; commit themselves to an intimate and abiding relationship with the LORD.

Introduction

Christians often experience difficulties that may discourage them and lead them to turn away from the LORD and rely on other things for security. The psalmist who wrote Psalm 16 seems to have lived in a similar time. He refers to those who have forsaken the LORD and turned to other gods. Nonetheless, the psalmist continues to trust in the LORD and cries out to him for protection and remains committed to the LORD and an intimate and abiding relationship with him. We need the psalmist's faith and commitment. *Read Psalm 16.*

I. Christians should ask the LORD to keep them safe because he is their refuge.

- A. The psalmist asks the LORD for protection in verse 1, "Keep me safe, God, for I take refuge in you."
- B. Illustration of God's Protection
- C. Application

II. Christians should submit to the LORD because he is their Lord, he is their good, and everything is under his authority.

- A. The Psalmist submits himself to the LORD in verse 2, "I said to the LORD: 'You are my Lord, my good; there is nothing above you.'"

- B. Illustration of God's Goodness
- C. Application

III. Christians should delight in God's faithful people because they are his holy and glorious ones.

- A. The psalmist commits himself to delight in God's faithful people in verse 3, "As for the holy ones who are in the land, them and the glorious ones, all my delight is in them."
- B. Illustration of the Joy of Christian Fellowship
- C. Application

IV. Christians should not compromise their commitment to the LORD with other devotions because those who do are shameful and foolish.

- A. The psalmist depicts the shamefulness and foolishness of those who turn to idolatry in the first half of verse 4, "They multiply their pains. They hurry to another."
- B. The psalmist expresses his adamant refusal to join these idolaters in the second half of the verse, "I will not pour out their libations of blood and I will not take up their names on my lips."
- C. Illustration of Shameful Abandonment of God
- D. Application

V. Christians should trust in the LORD because he is their source of blessing and hope for the future.

- A. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD in verse 5, "The LORD is my choice portion and my cup. You are holding my share."
- B. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD from his experience in verse 6, "The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places. Indeed, the inheritance is delightful for me."
- C. Illustration of God's Faithfulness and Blessing
- D. Application

VI. Christians should thank the LORD because he counsels and instructs them.

- A. The psalmist commits himself to thank the LORD in verse 7, "I thank the LORD who counsels me. Indeed, in the night my heart instructs me."
- B. Illustration of God's Counsel
- C. Application

VII. Christians should commit themselves to an intimate and abiding relationship with the LORD because they will not be shaken, they will have joy and a sense of well-being, he will not abandon them to death, but will show them the path of life, full satisfaction of joy, and eternal pleasure.

- A. The psalmist commits himself to an intimate and abiding relationship with the LORD in the first line of verse 8, "I keep the LORD before me always."
- B. The psalmist explains the reasons for his commitment to an intimate and abiding relationship with the LORD in the second line of verse 8 and in verse 9.
 - 1. He explains that he is committed to an intimate and abiding relationship with the LORD because of the stability that relationship gives to his life in the second line of verse 8, "Because (he is) at my right hand I will not be shaken."
 - 2. He explains that he is committed to an intimate and abiding relationship with the LORD because of the joy and sense of well-being that results from that relationship in

verse 9, "Therefore, my heart is glad and my glory rejoices. Also, my body abides securely."

C. The psalmist explains the reasons for his joy and sense of well-being in verses 10-11.

1. He explains that he is able to rejoice and feel secure because the LORD will protect him from death in verse 10, "Because you will not abandon me to *Sheol*; you will not let your beloved see the Pit."

2. He explains that he is able to rejoice and feel secure because the LORD has revealed to him the path of life, full satisfaction of joy, and eternal pleasure in verse 11, "You make known to me the path of life, full satisfaction of joy in your presence, pleasure at your right hand forever."

D. Illustration of the Joy of Living in God's Presence

E. Application

Conclusion

Christians often become discouraged and turn away from the LORD and rely on other things for security. The psalmist seems to have lived in a similar time. Nonetheless, the psalmist continues to trust in the LORD and cries out to him for protection and remains committed to the LORD and an intimate and abiding relationship with him. We need the psalmist's faith and commitment. You should ask the LORD to keep you safe because he is your refuge. You should submit to the LORD because he is your Lord, he is your good, and everything is under his authority. You should delight in God's faithful people because they are his holy and glorious ones. You should not compromise your commitment to the LORD with other devotions because those who do are shameful and foolish. You should trust in the LORD because he is your source of blessing and hope for the future. You should thank the LORD because he counsels and instructs you. You should commit yourselves to an intimate and abiding relationship with the LORD because if he is beside you, you will not be shaken, you can rejoice and feel secure, and he will not abandon you to death, but will show you the path of life, full satisfaction, and eternal pleasure.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE HEAVENS ARE DECLARING THE GLORY OF GOD Psalm 19

Study of the Passage

Many scholars maintain that verses 1-6 were originally another composition that has been incorporated into the psalm (Anderson, 167; Durham, 206; Weiser, 197). Even if this is the case, they are now an integral part of Psalm 19.

Text and Translation

For the worship leader. A psalm of David

- 1The heavens are declaring the glory of God
and the expanse of the sky is revealing the work of his hands.
- 2Day to day they pour out speech
and night to night they declare knowledge.
- 3There is no speech or words;
Their voice is not heard.
- 4Yet their voice¹ has gone out,
their words to the end of the world.
He has pitched a tent for the sun in them²
5and it is like a bridegroom leaving his pavilion;
It exults like a champion to run his race.
- 6Its rising is from one end of the heavens
and its circuit to the end of them
and there is nothing hidden from its heat.
- 7The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul.
The testimony of the LORD is sure,
making the simple wise.
- 8The precepts of the LORD are right,
giving joy to the heart.
The command of the LORD is lustrous,
giving light to the eyes.
- 9The fear³ of the LORD is pure,
standing forever.
The ordinances of the LORD are true;
They are altogether righteous;
- 10Being more desirable than gold,
even much refined gold;
And sweeter than honey,
even honey from the comb.
- 11Also your servant is instructed by them;

In keeping them is great reward.

12 Who can discern errors?

Empty me of hidden ones.

13 Also keep your servant from insolent ones;

May they not rule over me.

Then I will be perfect,

innocent of much transgression.

14 May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart

be pleasing before you, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

¹The Hebrew text actually reads "their line"; however the Septuagint reads "their voice" and this is followed by most modern translations since the Hebrew text is difficult to understand and the parallel structure favors "voice" (Anderson, 169; Craigie, 178). I have also followed the Septuagint because the difference between the two readings is only one letter in the Hebrew text that the scribe could easily have omitted when copying. Nonetheless, Ross, translates "their line" and plausibly explains it as a line of text (Ross, 465).

²Some scholars have proposed that the Hebrew text originally read "in the sea" rather than "in them" (antecedent "the heavens") since the Hebrew words are similar and "in the sea" corresponds to Hebrew cosmology. However, the text of the Hebrew can be understood as it stands.

³Some scholars have proposed that the Hebrew text should have a synonym for "law" rather than "fear" because "fear" breaks the pattern of synonyms (See for example Durham, 206). However, "fear of the LORD" is a key concept in wisdom teaching and certainly appropriate in this context.

Situation and Purpose

In addition to the general context of worship, the psalm reflects a situation in which the psalmist was seeking to live his life in such a way as to please God. He expresses this desire in verse 14, "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing before you." Nevertheless, the psalmist is beset by the universal problem of sin. He recognizes that he is blind to some of his sins. As he asks in verse 12, "Who can discern errors?" In addition, he is very aware of other sins that he commits and the danger that they might control him. Therefore, he pleads in verse 13, "Also keep your servant from insolent ones; May they not rule over me." The superscription identifies the psalmist as David. Certainly David's life would be an excellent setting for understanding the psalm because he earnestly sought to please God, but at times was overcome by sin. The psalm would have been most meaningful to worshipers who were seeking to please the LORD, but were struggling with sin. The purpose of this psalm was to encourage the worshipers to praise God, fear the LORD and live by his instructions, ask God for forgiveness and help in overcoming sin, and seek to please God.

Literary Context and Role

The Book of Psalms has no discernible strategy. Therefore, placing this psalm in its literary context and determining its role within that context is not very productive. Nonetheless, this psalm is loosely related to other psalms attributed to David. In addition, verses 1-6 are generally

related in form to other psalms of praise and verses 7-11 are generally related in form to other psalms of wise instruction.

Form and Function

This psalm is difficult to classify using the normal categories for describing the psalms. Instead, it is a liturgy that combines elements of praise, commendation, and petition. These elements work together dynamically to enable the worshipers to have an authentic encounter with God and be transformed as they identify with the psalmist, observe what he does, listen to what he says, and do what he does because of what he says. Declaration of praise is an expression of the psalmist's adoration of God to other worshipers for who he is and what he has done or is doing. These expressions of adoration serve to encourage and inspire the worshipers to declare the praises of the LORD along with the psalmist. In commendation, the psalmist describes the righteous character and conduct that pleases God and results in his blessings. These commendations serve to encourage righteous conduct in the worshipers so that they can please God and receive his blessings. In this psalm fearing the LORD (9a) and living by his instructions (7-8 and 9b-11) are commended by the positive attributes and benefits of these attitudes and actions. Through this commendation the worshipers are encouraged to fear the LORD and live by his instructions. Petition is an expression of the psalmist's needs and desires to God and serves to encourage the worshipers to express their needs and desires to God as well. Petitions are often accompanied by explanations that provide encouragement for the worshipers to join the psalmist in expressing their needs and desires to God. In this psalm the worshipers are led by the psalmist's petition to ask God for forgiveness, help to overcome sin, and to express their desire to please him in verses 12-14.

Strategy and Structure

The psalmist's strategy in this psalm is progressive and clearly intentional. He begins by declaring the glory of God through his creation in verses 1-6. This declaration establishes the basis for the psalmist's commendation of fearing the LORD and living by his instruction in verses 7-11 as well as his petition for forgiveness, help in overcoming sin, and expression of desire to please the LORD in verses 12-14. The commendations in verses 7-11 provide concrete direction for the worshipers, who are encouraged to fear the LORD and live by his instruction. The petition concludes in verses 12-14 by leading the worshipers to ask the LORD for help to overcome sin and express their desire to please the LORD.

- I. The Heavens' Declaration of the Glory of God (1-6)
 - A. The Heavens' Continuous, Mysterious, and Universal Declaration of the Glory of God (1-4)
 1. The heavens' declaration of the glory of God (1)
 2. The heavens' continuous declaration of the glory of God (2)
 3. The mystery of the heavens' declaration of the glory of God (3)
 4. The heavens' universal declaration of the glory of God (4a-b)
 - B. The Sun's Declaration of the Glory of God (4c-6)
 1. The sun's position in the heavens (4c)
 2. The sun's radiant emergence at dawn (5a)
 3. The sun's exultation as it runs its course (5b)
 4. The extent of the sun's circuit (6a-b)

5. The sun's universal heat (6c)
- II. The Psalmist's Commendation of Fearing the LORD and Living by His Instruction (7-11)
 - A. The Perfection and Reviving Power of His Law (7a)
 - B. The Sureness and Instructional Value of His Statutes (7b)
 - C. The Rightness of His Precepts and the Joy They Give (8a)
 - D. The Luster of His Commands and the Light They Supply (8b)
 - E. The Purity and Eternity of the Fear of the LORD (9a)
 - F. The Truth and Absolute Righteousness of His Ordinances (9b)
 - G. The Desirability and Sweetness of His Ordinances (10)
 - H. The Instruction and Reward of Keeping His Ordinances (11)
 - III. The Psalmist's Petition and Desire (12-14)
 - A. The Psalmist's Petition for Help to Overcome Sin
 1. Petition for help to overcome hidden sin (12)
 2. Petition for help to overcome insolent sin (13a)
 3. The results of overcoming--perfection and innocence (13b)
 - B. The Psalmist's Desire to Please the LORD (14)

Message or Messages

God's people should praise the LORD along with the psalmist because the heavens are declaring the glory of God at all times and in every place even though they can't speak, like the sun that God has placed in the heavens, bursts forth radiantly at dawn, exultantly traverses the heavens from one end to the other, and touches everything everywhere with its heat. God's people should fear the LORD and live by his instructions because the law of the LORD is perfect and revives the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure and makes the simple wise; the precepts of the LORD are right and give joy to the heart; the commands of the LORD are lustrous and give light to the eyes; the fear of the LORD is pure and stands forever; the ordinances of the LORD are true and absolutely righteous, more desirable than gold and sweeter than honey, and provide instruction and result in reward for those who keep them. God's people should ask him to help them with hidden faults because no one can discern their errors and willful sins so that their sins will not rule over them and they can be perfect and innocent and desire to please the LORD because he is their Rock and Redeemer.

Analysis of the Details

The Heavens' Declaration of the Glory of God

The psalmist describes how the heavens declare the glory of God in verses 1-6. Through his description the psalmist sought to inspire the worshipers to declare the glory of the LORD as well. In addition, he was laying the foundation for his commendation of fearing the LORD and living by the LORD's instruction (7-11), petition for forgiveness and help to overcome sin, and expression of desire to please the LORD (12-14).

The heavens' continuous, mysterious, and universal declaration of the glory of God. The psalmist encourages the worshipers to praise the LORD by describing the heavens' continuous, mysterious, and universal declaration of the glory of God in verses 1-4. First, the psalmist describes the heavens' declaration of the glory of God in verse 1, "The heavens are declaring the glory of God and the expanse of the sky is revealing the work of his hands." Both verbs, "are

declaring" and "is revealing," are participles in the Hebrew text. Participles are frequently used in Hebrew to emphasize continuous action. In this context the participles emphasize the heavens' continuous declaration and revelation of God's glory. The word "glory" literally means "weight" and came to mean "importance." When applied to God it identifies him as the one who is preeminent in all things. The description of the heavens and expanse of the sky as "the work of his hands" is an allusion to the creation account and exalts God as the Creator. Second, the psalmist describes the heavens' continuous declaration of the glory of God in verse 2, "Day to day they pour out speech and night to night they declare knowledge." The heavens pour out and declare God's glory continuously, both day (as seen in the sun, see verses 5-6 where the sun is used as an example) and night (as seen in the moon and stars). The heavens also declare God's glory "day to day" and "night to night." The verb translated "pour out" probably employs the picture of a continuous spring bubbling up from the ground. Third, the psalmist describes the mystery of the heavens' declaration of the glory of God in verse 3, "There is no speech or words. Their voice is not heard." The NIV translates this verse, "There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard." This translation emphasizes the heavens' universal declaration of the glory of God. The editors of the NIV have probably translated the text in this way because the more literal translation seems inconsistent with the context where the heavens' continuous and universal declaration of the glory of God is emphasized. In fact, verse 4 states, "Their voice has gone out, their words to the end of the world." However, this dissonance is probably intentional. The psalmist was stressing that, mysteriously, the heavens declare the glory of God even though they do not have a human language to do so. As Ross puts it, "Natural revelation may not communicate with specific words, but its message is clear nonetheless" (Ross, 475). Fourth, the psalmist describes the heavens' universal declaration of the glory of God in verse 4, "Yet their voice has gone out, their words to the end of the world." The extent of the heavens' declaration of the glory of God is emphasized by its outer most limit, "the end of the world."

The sun's declaration of the glory of God. The psalmist uses the sun as an example of how the heavens declare the glory of God in verses 5-6. First, the psalmist relates that God has established a home for the sun in the heavens in the first line of verse 5, "He has pitched a tent for the sun in them." This tent should probably be understood as a dwelling. This imagery places the sun among heavens that "declare the glory of God." Second, the psalmist describes the sun's emergence from that tent at dawn in the second line of verse 5, "And it is like a bridegroom leaving his pavilion." This pavilion should probably be understood as the tent where the bridegroom has consummated his union with his bride. The imagery probably focuses on the bridegroom's glowing joy. As the imagery is related to the sun it is probably intended to convey the dazzling brilliance of the sun as it rises at dawn. Third, the psalmist describes the sun's path across the sky in the final line of verse 5, "It exults like a champion to run his race." The imagery probably focuses on the triumphant joy of a champion runner as he runs. As the imagery is related to the sun it probably is intended to convey the brilliance of sun as it moves across the sky. Fourth, the psalmist describes the extent of the sun's circuit across the heavens in the first line of verse 6, "Its rising is from one end of the heavens and its circuit to the end of them." The extent of the sun's circuit is emphasized by marking the extreme limits of its course. Fifth, the psalmist describes the impact of the sun upon everything everywhere on the earth in the second line of verse 6, "and there is nothing hidden from its heat." Therefore, the worshipers should praise the LORD along with the psalmist because the heavens are declaring the glory of God at all times and in every place even though they can't speak, like the sun that God has placed

in the heavens, bursts forth radiantly at dawn, exultantly traverses the heavens from one end to the other, and touches everything everywhere with its heat.

The Psalmist's Commendation of Fearing the LORD and Living by His Instructions

The psalmist commends the fear of the LORD and living by his instructions by describing positively their character and benefits in verses 7-11. Through this commendation the psalmist was seeking to encourage the worshipers to fear the LORD and live by his instructions. Many words are used synonymously to refer to the LORD's instructions ("law, testimony, precepts, commands," and "ordinances"). These words could be used for the legal material of the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures or more generally of the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures, but should probably be understood even more generally to refer to all of God's revelation. As Leupold concludes with regard to "law", "the term is here almost the equivalent of what we commonly call the Word of the Lord" (Leupold, 181).

The perfection and reviving power of his law. The psalmist encourages the worshipers to live by the instructions of the LORD by commending the perfection and reviving power of his law in the first line of verse 7, "The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul." The word translated "perfect" accentuates the completeness of the instruction provided by God's law. The "soul" is the essence of who people are and could also be translated "life." In this context it probably refers to the quality of their life as well as their eternal destiny. The word "reviving" literally means "returning." The reviving power of God's instruction is revealed in its ability to return those who have ruined their lives and are condemned because of their disregard of God's instruction to the fullness of life and acceptance by God enjoyed by those who live in God's will.

The sureness and instructional value of his testimony. The psalmist encourages the worshipers to live by the instructions of the LORD by commending the sureness and instructional value of his testimony in the second line of verse 7, "The testimony of the LORD is sure, making the simple wise." The word translated "sure" comes from a verb that means "confirm" or "support" and focuses on the dependability of God's instructions. The instructional value of God's testimony is emphasized by its power to transform a simple person into a wise person.

The rightness of his precepts and the joy they give. The psalmist encourages the worshipers to live by the instructions of the LORD by commending the rightness of his precepts and the joy they give in the first line of verse 8, "The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart." The word translated "right" is somewhat ambiguous. The psalmist could be commending the precepts of the LORD because they are right in the sense that obedience to them leads to the desired result, the full and meaningful life. However, he could also be encouraging obedience to the precepts of the LORD because doing so is the morally right thing to do. The second line of the commendation, "giving joy to the heart," seems to support the first possibility. However, joy results from obedience to God's instructions in part because one has done what is morally right.

The luster of his commands and the light they supply. The psalmist encourages the worshipers to live by the instructions of the LORD by commending the radiance of his commands and the enlightenment they supply in the second line of verse 8, "The command of the LORD is lustrous, giving light to the eyes." The word translated "luster" comes from a verb

that means "purify; select; cleanse, polish;" and "test, prove." I have chosen to translate it "luster" because of its relationship with the second line, "giving light to the eyes." God's instructions are so clean and pure that they radiate God's truth and provide enlightenment for living.

The purity and eternity of the fear of the LORD. The psalmist encourages the worshipers to fear the LORD by commending the purity and eternity of the fear of the LORD in the first line of verse 9, "The fear of the LORD is pure, standing forever." The fear of the LORD is "pure" in the sense that it is the uncontaminated basis for an uncontaminated life. The fear of the LORD is "standing forever" in the sense that it is the everlasting basis of everlasting life. Craigie describes the fear of the LORD as "a permanent foundation for human life" (Craigie, 182). Leupold explains:

"Fear" is strictly not a synonym for law but rather emphasizes a reaction that it calls forth, namely, a wholesome reverence for the will of the Lawgiver, emphasizing that no one who deals with the law dare regard it merely as an abstraction or in a spirit of absolute objectivity but should rather feel the need of his submitting to it (Leupold, 181).

The truth and absolute righteousness of his ordinances. The psalmist encourages the worshipers to live by the instructions of the LORD by commending the truth and total righteousness of his ordinances in the second line of verse 9, "The ordinances of the LORD are true; they are altogether righteous." Both the words "true" and "righteous" emphasize the integrity of God's instructions. The absolute integrity is intensified with the absolute adverb translated "altogether."

The desirability and sweetness of his ordinances. The psalmist encourages the worshipers to live by the instructions of the LORD by commending his ordinances for their desirability and sweetness in verse 10, "Being more desirable than gold, even much refined gold; and sweeter than honey, even honey from the comb." Gold is a very precious metal and extremely valuable. Therefore, it is highly prized. But the psalmist maintains that God's instructions are even more desirable than gold. He further stresses this point by asserting that God's instructions are even more valuable than "much refined gold." No matter the quantity or quality of the gold, God's instructions are still more valuable and desirable. Honey is very sweet and desired because of its enjoyable taste. But the psalmist maintains that God's instructions are even sweeter and more desirable than honey. He further stresses this point by asserting that God's instructions are even sweeter and more desirable than "honey from the comb." This honey was considered the finest, but God's instructions are still sweeter and more desirable.

The instruction and reward of keeping his ordinances. The psalmist encourages the worshipers to live by the instructions of the LORD by describing the benefits of being instructed and keeping his ordinances in verse 11, "For your servant is instructed by them; in keeping them is great reward." This verse defines the two necessary responses to God's instructions. God's people need to be instructed by his instructions. However, instruction is incomplete without obedience. The reward is quantified with the adjective "great" (lit. "much") to emphasize the benefit of obedience. Therefore, the worshipers should fear the LORD and live by his instructions because the law of the LORD is perfect and revives the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure and makes the simple wise; the precepts of the LORD are right and give joy to the heart; the commands of the LORD are lustrous and give light to the eyes; the fear of the LORD is pure and stands forever; the ordinances of the LORD are true and altogether righteous, more

desirable than gold and sweeter than honey, and provide instruction and result in reward for those who keep them.

The Psalmist's Petition and Desire

The psalmist petitions the LORD for help to overcome sin as well as expresses his desire to please the LORD in verses 12-14. As he relates his own petitions and desires he sought to encourage the worshipers to join him in appealing to the LORD for help in overcoming sin as well as expressing their desire to please the LORD.

The psalmist's petition for help to overcome sin. The psalmist relates his petition for help to overcome sin in verses 12-13. Through his personal petition he was also seeking to lead the worshipers to petition the LORD for help to overcome sin along with him. First, he appeals for help to overcome hidden sins in verse 12, "Who can discern errors? Empty me of hidden ones." His appeal for help to overcome hidden sins is introduced by a rhetorical question. This rhetorical question is equivalent to the emphatic declaration, "No one can discern errors!" The inability of people to discern their sins makes praying for help to overcome them imperative. How can someone overcome their errors if they are unaware of them? Many modern versions translate his appeal like the NIV, "Forgive my hidden faults." However, the verb employed here suggests more than just forgiveness. The verb means "pour out so as to empty" and conveys not just an appeal for forgiveness, but removal as well. Second, he appeals for help to overcome willful sins in the first part of verse 13, "Also keep your servant from insolent ones; May they not rule over me." Many scholars argue that "insolent ones" means "insolent people." Though my translation could be understood either way, the context indicates that both "hidden ones" and "insolent ones" refer back to "errors." These are willful sins that are the result of an arrogant disregard for the will of God. The second line of the appeal is ironically true. Though willful sins are committed by people who arrogantly assert their will in opposition to God, the result is that they are robbed of their will by the very sins they choose to commit. Third, the psalmist describes the results of overcoming sin in the second part of verse 13, "Then I will be perfect, innocent of much transgression." The word "perfect" is very strong and many might object that it is an unrealistic expectation. Nonetheless, "perfect" is what the Hebrew word means and the high expectation remains.

The psalmist's desire to please the LORD. The psalmist expresses his desire to please the LORD in verse 14, "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing before you, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer." Through his personal expression of desire he was also seeking to lead the worshipers to express their desire to please the LORD along with him. This appeal completes the appeal for help to overcome sin. The appeal for help to overcome sin was focused on actions, whereas this appeal focuses on words and thoughts. The psalmist's appeal, therefore, covers every possible arena of life--the surface level of actions and words as well as the subsurface level of hidden sins and secret thoughts. The rationale for seeking to please the LORD is provided by the words used to describe him, "my Rock and my Redeemer." The psalmist addresses the LORD as his Rock--the firm and secure basis for his life. The psalmist addresses the LORD as his Redeemer--the one who has bought him back from slavery. Therefore, the worshipers should ask the LORD for help to overcome hidden faults because no one can discern their errors and willful sins so that they will not be ruled by them and can be perfect and innocent and desire to please the LORD in word and thought because he is their Rock and Redeemer.

Application of the Message

Establishing Correspondence

Like the psalmist, Christians today often desire to please the LORD, but they often struggle with sin that hampers them from doing so. These correspondences between the original and modern situations provide a strong basis for applying the message of Psalm 19 to the modern situation.

Distinguishing the Contextualized

This passage contains very little of a contextualized nature that requires that the message be limited or adjusted when applied to the modern situation. However, the commendation of the LORD's instructions seems to stand in tension with justification by faith as taught in the New Testament. In fact, the psalmist promises those who keep his ordinances "great reward" in verse 11. This promise of reward seems to teach a "works righteousness." However, if these words for the instructions of the LORD are understood more broadly, even the gospel could be categorized within them. Therefore, the statement of the applied message has only been modified slightly.

Adjusting the Message

Christians should declare the glory of the LORD because the heavens are declaring the glory of God at all times and in every place even though they can't speak, like the sun that God has placed in the heavens, bursts forth radiantly at dawn, exultantly traverses the heavens from one end to the other, and touches everything everywhere with its heat. Christians should fear the LORD and live by his instructions because the law of the LORD is perfect and revives the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure and makes the simple wise; the precepts of the LORD are right and give joy to the heart; the commands of the LORD are lustrous and give light to the eyes; the fear of the LORD is pure and stands forever; the ordinances of the LORD are true and absolutely righteous, more desirable than gold and sweeter than honey, and provide instruction and result in reward for those who keep them. Christians should ask the LORD to help them with hidden faults because no one can discern their errors and willful sins so that their sins will not rule over them and they can be perfect and innocent and desire to please the LORD because he is their Rock and Redeemer.

Communication of the Message

Title: The Heavens Are Declaring the Glory of God

Objective: The objective of this message is to lead Christians to declare the glory of God; fear him and live by his instructions; and ask him for help to overcome sin and express their desire to please him.

Proposition: Christians should proclaim the glory of the LORD because the heavens are declaring his glory; fear the LORD and live by his instructions so they can experience his transforming power; and desire to please the LORD and ask him to help them with sin because he is their Rock and Redeemer.

Introduction

Christians have a responsibility to declare the glory of God. However, even though they may declare the glory of God with their mouths, they are often living in a way that is contrary to God's revealed will and does not glorify him. At the heart of the problem is a struggle with sin that is beyond their ability to win and reaches down to the very core of their being. The psalmist who wrote Psalm 19 evidently had a similar struggle and recognized the struggle in others. Therefore, he leads the worshipers to praise the LORD, fear the LORD and live by his instructions, and pray for help to overcome sin and please the LORD. Let's let him lead us in worship as well. *Read Psalm 19.*

I. Christians should proclaim the glory of the LORD because the heavens are declaring his glory.

A. The psalmist encourages the worshipers to praise the LORD by describing the heavens' continuous and perpetual, mysterious, and universal declaration of the glory of God in verses 1-4.

1. First, the psalmist describes the heavens' declaration of the glory of God in verse 1, "The heavens are declaring the glory of God and the expanse of the sky is revealing the work of his hands."
2. Second, the psalmist describes the heavens' continuous and perpetual declaration of the glory of God in verse 2, "Day to day they pour out speech and night to night they declare knowledge."
3. Third, the psalmist describes the mystery of the heavens' declaration of the glory of God in verse 3, "There is no speech or words. Their voice is not heard."
4. Fourth, the psalmist describes the heavens' universal declaration of the glory of God in verse 4, "Yet their voice has gone out, their words to the end of the world."

B. The psalmist uses the sun as an example of how the heavens declare the glory of God in verses 5-6.

1. First, he relates that God has established a home for the sun in the heavens in the first line of verse 5, "He has pitched a tent for the sun in them."
2. Second, he describes the sun's emergence from that tent at dawn in the second line of verse 5, "And it is like a bridegroom leaving his pavilion."
3. Third, the psalmist describes the sun's path across the sky in the final line of verse 5, "It exults like a champion to run his race."
4. Fourth, the psalmist describes the extent of the sun's circuit across the heavens in the first line of verse 6, "Its rising is from one end of the heavens and its circuit to the end of them."
5. Fifth, the psalmist describes the impact of the sun upon everything everywhere on the earth in the second line of verse 6, "and there is nothing hidden from its heat."

C. Illustration of the Glory of God Revealed in His Creation

D. Application

II. Christians should fear the LORD and live by his instructions so they can experience his transforming power.

A. The psalmist encourages the worshipers to live by the instructions of the LORD by commending the perfection and reviving power of his law in the first line of verse 7, "The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul."

B. The psalmist encourages the worshipers to live by the instructions of the LORD by commending the sureness and instructional value of his testimony in the second line of verse 7, "The testimony of the LORD is sure, making the simple wise."

- C. The psalmist encourages the worshipers to live by the instructions of the LORD by commending the rightness of his precepts and the joy they give in the first line of verse 8, "The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart."
- D. The psalmist encourages the worshipers to live by the instructions of the LORD by commending the radiance of his commands and the enlightenment they supply in the second line of verse 8, "The command of the LORD is lustrous, giving light to the eyes."
- E. The psalmist encourages the worshipers to fear the LORD by commending the purity and eternity of the fear of the LORD in the first line of verse 9, "The fear of the LORD is pure, standing forever."
- F. The psalmist encourages the worshipers to live by the instructions of the LORD by commending the truth and total righteousness of his ordinances in the second line of verse 9, "The ordinances of the LORD are true; they are altogether righteous."
- G. The psalmist encourages the worshipers to live by the instructions of the LORD by commending his ordinances for their desirability and sweetness in verse 10, "Being more desirable than gold., even much refined gold; and sweeter than honey, even honey from the comb."
- H. The psalmist encourages the worshipers to live by the instructions of the LORD by describing the benefits of heeding and keeping his ordinances in verse 11, "For your servant is instructed by them; in keeping them is great reward."
- I. Illustration of the Benefits of Fearing God and Living by His Instructions
- J. Application

III. Christians should desire to please the LORD and ask him to help them with sin because he is their Rock and Redeemer.

- A. The psalmist asks for help to overcome hidden sins in verse 12, "Who can discern errors? Empty me of hidden ones."
- B. The psalmist asks for help to overcome willful sins in the first line of verse 13, "Also keep your servant from insolent ones; may they not rule over me."
- C. The psalmist describes the benefits of overcoming sin in the second line of verse 13, "Then I will be perfect, innocent of much transgression."
- D. The psalmist expresses his desire to please the LORD in verse 14, "May the words of mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing before you, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer."
- E. Illustration of the Power of God to Help Overcome Sin
- F. Application

Conclusion

Christians have a responsibility to declare the glory of God. However, even though they may declare the glory of God with their mouths, they are often living in a way that is contrary to God's revealed will and does not glorify him. At the heart of the problem is a struggle with sin that is beyond their ability to win and reaches down to the very core of their being. The psalmist evidently had a similar struggle and recognized the struggle in others. In Psalm 19 he leads the worshipers to praise the LORD, fear the LORD and live by his instructions, and pray for help to overcome sin and please the LORD. Let's let him lead us in worship as well. You should proclaim the glory of the LORD because the heavens are declaring his glory. You should fear the LORD and live by his instructions so you can experience his transforming power. You

should desire to please the LORD and ask him to help you with sin because he is your Rock and Redeemer.

CHAPTER NINE

WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?

Psalm 22

Study of the Passage

Some have postulated that this psalm is a compilation of two psalms because of what is perceived as an incongruity between verses 1-21, which are dominated by lament, and verses 22-31, which are dominated by affirmation of faith and declaration of praise. However, the tension between the two halves of the psalm is eased when the psalm is understood as a liturgy that is intended to lead the worshipers through lament to affirmation of faith and declaration of praise (See Form and Function). In addition, verses 1-21 do contain a significant amount of affirmation of faith and declaration of praise (3-5 and 9-10). Furthermore, Psalm 22 is certainly a unified psalm as it stands within the Book of Psalms whether or not two formerly separate psalms have been joined together.

Text and Translation

To the worship leader. According to "The Doe of the Dawn." A psalm of David¹

- 1 My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?
So far from saving me are the words of my roaring.
- 2 My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer
and by night and there is no silence for me.
- 3 Yet you are the Holy One,
the one abiding in the praises of Israel.
- 4 Our fathers put their trust in you;
They trusted and you delivered them.
- 5 They cried to you and were saved;
In you they trusted and were not made ashamed.
- 6 But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by man and disdained by people.
- 7 All who see me mock me;
They sneer and shake their heads [saying]:
- 8 "Turn to the LORD! Let him deliver him.
Let him rescue him since he delights in him."
- 9 Yet you brought me out of the womb;
You made me secure upon my mother's breast.
- 10 I was cast upon you from birth;
You have been my God from my mother's womb.
- 11 Do not be far from me, for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.
- 12 Many bulls surround me,
mighty ones of Bashan encircle me.
- 13 They open wide their mouths at me,
like a lion tearing and roaring.

14I am poured out like water
and all my bones are out of joint;
My heart is like wax that has melted within me.

15My strength is dried up like an earthenware pot;
My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth
and you lay me in the dust of death.

16Indeed, dogs have surrounded me
and a band of evil men has encircled me;
They have pierced my hands and my feet.²

17I can count all my bones;
They themselves look and stare at me.

18They divide my garments among them
and cast lots for my clothing.

19But you, LORD, do not be far off;
My help, hasten to my aid!

20Deliver my life from the sword,
my only one from the power of the dog!

21Rescue me from the mouth of the lion,
from the horns of the wild ox.
You have answered me!³

22I will certainly declare your name to my brothers;
I will praise you in the midst of the congregation.

23You who fear the LORD, praise him!
Every descendant of Jacob, glorify him!
Fear him, every descendant of Israel!

24For he does not despise or detest the affliction of the afflicted
and does not hide his face from him,
but when he cries to him, he answers.

25From you comes my praise in the great assembly.
I will fulfill my vows before those who fear him.

26The poor will eat and be satisfied;
They who seek the LORD will praise him--
May your hearts live forever!

27All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD
and all the families of the nations will bow down before you.

28For dominion belongs to the LORD
and he rules over the nations.

29All the fat of the earth will eat and bow down before him
and all who go down to the dust will bow down
and he who cannot keep himself alive.⁴

30Posterity will serve him.
It will be told about my LORD to a [future] generation.

31They will come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet to be born
That he has done it.

¹The Septuagint and some other early versions have "Help" instead of "Doe." This reading is consistent with the content of the psalm, which depicts the LORD as the basis of hope during the

dark night of trial. However, this reading is not supported by the Hebrew text and could be an attempt by the translators of the Septuagint to solve the mystery of "The Doe of the Dawn."

²The Masoretic Text literally reads "My hands and my feet are like a lion." However, the words "like a lion" are impossible to understand in context. Many conjectural reconstructions of the original wording of the Hebrew text have been made including: "picked clean," "shriveled," "are bound" (Anderson, 190), "hurt" (Weiser, 217-218), "lopped off" (Durham, 214), and "exhausted" (Craigie, 195-196). I have chosen to follow the Septuagint reading, "pierced," based primarily on the New Testament allusions to this verse.

³This affirmation of faith is present in the Masoretic Text even though the Hebrew words are understood differently in the Septuagint and Syriac Versions. Many modern translations omit this affirmation of faith as well, but it probably should be included because it provides the pivotal point of transition in the psalm between the laments and petitions in verses 1-21 and the commitment to praise the LORD, exhortation to praise the LORD, and declarations of praise to the LORD in verses 22-31.

⁴Many suspect that verse 29 has become corrupt in transmission. Speculation abounds with regard to the correct reading. Two points of contention are found in the first line, "All the fat of the earth will eat and bow down." First, some have struggled with the word translated "will eat." They have conjectured that the Hebrew word should be divided into two words. The resultant reading would be, "*Indeed, to him* will all the fat of the earth bow down" (The words in italics are those that have been derived from dividing the Hebrew word for "will eat" into two words). Second, others have struggled with the translation of "the fat," feeling that the subject of this line is out of concord with the rest of the verse where the psalmist speaks of the dead. They have attempted to trace the Hebrew word instead to a word meaning "sleep." The resultant reading would be, "*Indeed, to him will all who sleep* bow down" (The words in italics are those that have been changed by tracing the word for "fat" to the word for "sleep"). The first of these conjectures may be justified. However, I have retained the reading of the Masoretic text because it is understandable in its present form. The second of these conjectures should probably be rejected. The subsequent lines of this verse may be adding something new to the description of the fat (See Analysis of the Details). In addition, some have also conjectured that the final line is a later addition. This conjecture seems especially prevalent among those who have reconciled the first and second lines of the verse. As a result the third line becomes redundant. However, Hebrew poetry does sometimes employ three lines and this characteristic is especially common in this psalm. Furthermore, "all the fat will eat and bow down" provides a natural counterpart to "The poor will eat and be satisfied" in verse 26.

Situation and Purpose

The psalm seems to reflect a situation in which the psalmist was experiencing great difficulty. One aspect of his great difficulty was the attacks of wicked men. These wicked men attacked him on two fronts. First, they threatened his physical well-being. He describes them as many mighty bulls (12), roaring and tearing lions (13), and scavenging dogs (16). Second, they threatened his emotional well-being with their humiliating taunts (6-8 and 17a). Another aspect of his great difficulty was his deteriorating physical and emotional condition. He describes himself as a worm rather than a man (6a) and maintains that he is poured out like water (4a), all his bones are out of joint (14b), his heart has melted like wax (14c), his strength has dried up (15a), his tongue sticks to the roof of his mouth (15b), he is close to death (15c), and his bones

are clearly visible (17a). Finally, he felt that God had forsaken him and did not listen to his prayers (1-2). The superscription identifies the psalm as a psalm of David. Certainly David's life provides an appropriate setting for understanding this psalm. This psalm would have been most meaningful to other worshipers who, like the psalmist, were undergoing a severe trial and questioning God's faithfulness. The purpose of the psalm was to encourage worshipers to move beyond lament to trust in the LORD, ask him to be with them and deliver them, and praise him in anticipation of his deliverance and ultimate triumph.

Literary Context and Role

The Book of Psalms has no discernible strategy. Therefore, placing this psalm in its literary context and determining its role within that context is not very productive. Nonetheless, this psalm is loosely related to other psalms attributed to David. This psalm is quoted and alluded to in the Passion narratives of the gospels. These quotations and allusions suggest that the writers of the gospels regarded this psalm as a prophecy of the coming of the Messiah. However, this psalm does not appear to be a prophecy. Nonetheless, Jesus does fulfill what is affirmed in this psalm. The identification of Jesus with the suffering righteous one of this psalm verifies the truth that the psalmist affirms. Jesus' resurrection from the dead proves that God is present with those who are suffering, does hear their prayers, and will deliver them.

Form and Function

Most scholars classify this psalm as a psalm of lament. However, this psalm contains a variety of elements and should be regarded as a much more complex liturgy that combines lament, affirmation of faith, petition, commitment, exhortation, and praise. The laments provide a basis for the identification of the worshipers with the psalmist and encourage them to join the psalmist in expressing their innermost feelings to God. This psalm contains laments that serve this function in verses 1-2, 6-8, and 12-18. The affirmations of faith serve to encourage the worshipers and lead them to affirm their own faith along with the psalmist. This psalm contains affirmations of faith that serve this function in verses 3-5, 9-10, and 21b. The petitions guide the worshipers to ask the LORD to be present and deliver them along with the psalmist. This psalm contains petitions that serve this function in verses 11 and 19-21a. Commitments are expressions of the psalmist's determination to respond to God in a particular way and lead the worshipers to renew their own commitment to the LORD along with the psalmist. This psalm contains commitments that serve this function in verses 22 and 25. Exhortations directly command the worshipers to respond in a clearly defined way and are normally accompanied by rationale for doing so. This psalm contains an exhortation that serves this function in verses 23-24. Declarations of praise are expressions of the psalmist's adoration of God and serve to inspire and direct the worshipers to praise God. This psalm contains declarations of praise that serve this function in verses 26-31.

Strategy and Structure

Most scholars divide this psalm into two halves, leading from lament (1-21) to praise (22-31). Though this division is legitimate, the strategy of the psalm, especially the first half of the psalm, seems to be more sophisticated. The first half of the psalm seems to contain three cycles, each beginning with lament and progressively incorporating affirmations of faith in God's past faithfulness (3-5 and 9-10), petitions for God's presence and deliverance (11 and 19-21a), and affirmations of faith in God (21b). Through this strategy the psalmist gradually weaned the

worshippers from lament and led them to trust in the LORD, ask him to be with them and deliver them, and affirm their faith that he will answer their prayers. Then they are prepared to join him as he leads and exhorts them to declare the praises of the LORD (22-31).

- I. The Psalmist's Lament and Affirmation of Faith (1-5)
 - A. The Psalmist's Lament of His Abandonment and Unanswered Prayers (1-2)
 1. The psalmist's despair because of his abandonment (1a)
 2. The psalmist's despair because of his unanswered prayers (1b-2)
 - B. The Psalmist's Affirmation of God's Faithfulness to Israel (3-5)
 1. The psalmist's faith in the Holy One who abides in the praises of Israel (3)
 2. The psalmist's faith in the LORD to answer the prayers and deliver the people of Israel in the past (4-5)
- II. The Psalmist's Lament, Affirmation of Faith, and Petition (6-11)
 - A. The Psalmist's Lament of His Humiliation (6-8)
 1. The psalmist's self-loathing
 2. The scorn and ridicule of others
 - B. The Psalmist's Affirmation of God's Faithfulness to Him (9-10)
 1. The psalmist's affirmation of the LORD's faithfulness during his birth and infancy (9)
 2. The psalmist's affirmation of the LORD's faithfulness throughout his life (10)
 - C. The Psalmist's Petition for God's Presence (11)
 1. The psalmist's appeal for God's presence
 2. The psalmist's explanation of the urgency of his appeal
- III. The Psalmist's Lament, Petition, and Affirmation of Faith (12-21)
 - A. The Psalmist's Lament of His Affliction and Dissolution (12-18)
 1. The psalmist's lament of his affliction by his enemies (12-13)
 2. The psalmist's lament of his emotional and physical dissolution (14-15)
 3. The psalmist's lament of his affliction and dissolution (16-18)
 - B. The Psalmist's Petition for Deliverance (19-21a)
 1. The psalmist's appeal for the LORD's presence (19a)
 2. The psalmist's appeal for the LORD to help and deliver (20-21a)
 - C. The Psalmist's Affirmation of God's Faithfulness to Answer (21b)
- IV. The Psalmist's Commitment, Exhortation, and Praise (22-31)
 - A. The Psalmist's Commitment to Praise the LORD (22)
 - B. The Psalmist's Exhortation for Others to Praise, Glorify, and Fear the LORD (23-24)
 1. The psalmist's command for others to praise, glorify, and fear the LORD (23)
 2. The psalmist's rationale for praising, glorifying, and fearing the LORD (24)
 - C. The Psalmist's Reaffirmation of His Commitment to Praise the LORD (25)
 1. The psalmist's rationale for praising the LORD
 2. The psalmist's commitment to fulfill his vows
 - D. The Psalmist's Declaration of Praise to the LORD (26-31)
 1. The psalmist's praise to the LORD for satisfying the poor who seek him (26)
 2. The psalmist's praise to the LORD for his dominion over the people of the earth (27-29)
 3. The psalmist's praise to the LORD because his righteousness will be proclaimed in future generations (30-31)

Message or Messages

God's people should affirm their faith in God when their prayers go unanswered and they feel abandoned along with the psalmist because he is the Holy One, he abides in the praises of Israel, and he delivered their fathers when they trusted and cried out to him. God's people should affirm their faith in God and ask him to be near when they are ridiculed and feel humiliated along with the psalmist because he brought them out of the womb, made them secure as an infant, and has been their God ever since. God's people should ask the LORD to be near and hasten to deliver them when they are attacked and feel like their lives are falling apart along with the psalmist because he will answer them. God's people should praise the LORD along with the psalmist because he does not ignore the cries of the afflicted, but answers when they pray; the poor who seek him will be satisfied and have reason to praise him; all the people of the world will turn to the LORD and submit to him; and the righteousness of the LORD will be proclaimed to future generations.

Analysis of the Details

The Psalmist's Lament and Affirmation of Faith

The psalmist laments his seeming abandonment by God, but then affirms his faith in God in verses 1-5. In this cycle of lament and affirmation the psalmist sought to lead other worshipers to move beyond lament to affirm their faith in God along with him.

The psalmist's lament of his abandonment and unanswered prayers. The psalmist laments his seeming abandonment by God and unanswered prayers in verses 1-2. He begins by expressing his despair because of his abandonment in the first line of verse 1, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He expresses his cry of despair in a rhetorical question that stresses his perplexity and anxiety. His perplexity is accentuated by the tension between the way he addresses God and his questioning of God's faithfulness. He addresses God as "My God, my God," affirming his covenant relationship with God, but concluding that inexplicably God has abandoned him. Ross says, "The repetition of the words with the same sense (epizeuxis) projects a depth of feeling and pathos that few other expressions could provide" (Ross, 531). His subsequent cries in the second line of verse 1 and in verse 2 clarify that he feels abandoned by God because his prayers are unanswered, "So far from saving me are the words of my roaring. My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, and by night, and there is no silence for me." The psalmist emphasizes the futility of his prayers by stressing the intensity and persistence of his cries along with their ineffectuality. He roars like a lion and cries out by day and by night so that he is never silent. Nonetheless, his prayers are far from saving him and God does not answer. Through this lament the psalmist enabled the worshipers to identify with his experience and express their own feelings of being abandoned and ignored by God.

The psalmist's affirmation of God's faithfulness to Israel. Nonetheless, the psalmist affirms his faith in God in verses 3-5. He affirms his faith in God as the Holy One whom the people of Israel praise in verse 3, "Yet you are the Holy One, the one abiding in the praises of Israel." By affirming that God is the "Holy One" the psalmist was asserting God's uniqueness. In the context of the psalm and especially verses 4-5, the psalmist was probably affirming that God, unlike any other, is faithful to answer the prayers of his people and deliver them. The psalmist's affirmation that God is "the one abiding in the praises of Israel" presumes that Israel has reason to praise God continually. In the context of the psalm and especially verses 4-5, the

psalmist was probably affirming again that God is worthy of praise because of his faithfulness to answer the prayers of his people for deliverance. As Ross says, "God is so faithful in answering prayers that his people are constantly praising him in the sanctuary" (Ross, 533). He affirms God's faithfulness to answer prayer and deliver the people of Israel in the past in verses 4-5, "Our fathers put their trust in you; they trusted and you delivered them. They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not made ashamed." Both the faith of the people of Israel and God's faithfulness to them are emphasized by repetition. They "put their trust in you," "trusted," "cried out to you," and "in you they trusted" and "you delivered them," they "were saved," and "were not made ashamed." As Weiser asserts, "When the poet comes to think of the beginnings of the Heilsgeschichte of Israel, this recollection appears to him as an island of comfort in the midst of the ocean of his suffering" (Weiser, 221). Through this affirmation of God's faithfulness the psalmist sought to lead other worshipers to move beyond lament to affirm their faith in God to answer the prayers of his people. Therefore, the worshipers should affirm their faith in God when their prayers go unanswered and they feel abandoned along with the psalmist because he is the Holy One, he abides in the praises of Israel, and he delivered their fathers when they trusted and cried out to him.

The Psalmist's Lament, Affirmation of Faith, And Petition

The psalmist laments his humiliation, but then affirms his faith in God and asks for God to be with him in verses 6-11. In this cycle of lament, affirmation, and petition the psalmist sought to lead other worshipers to move beyond lament to affirm their faith in God and ask him to be with them along with him.

The psalmist's lament of his humiliation. The psalmist laments his humiliation in verses 6-8. He expresses his self-loathing in the first line of verse 6, "But I am a worm and not a man." Humanity is at the top of the natural order, while worms are at the bottom. By identifying himself as a worm the psalmist was emphasizing his low estimation of himself. Davidson notes that the word "worm" is also used in Job 25:6 by one of Job's so-called friends to mock him and in Isaiah 41:4 to describe Israel trampled underfoot by enemies. He concludes, "The psalmist feels crushed and helpless, surrounded by mockery and derision which seek to undermine his faith by insidiously suggesting that the claims he once made about God were groundless" (Davidson, 80). His subsequent cries of despair in the second line of verse 6 through verse 8 clarify that the cause of his self-loathing is the scorn and ridicule that others have heaped upon him, "scorned by man and disdained by people. All who see me mock me; they sneer and shake their heads [saying]: 'Turn to the LORD! Let him deliver him. Let him rescue him since he delights in him.'" He not only states that others hold him in reproach and ridicule him, but describes their mocking behavior and quotes their sarcastic words. Their sneer and the shake of their heads are physical expressions of their scorn and disdain. Sarcasm is stating the opposite of what is really meant with a humorous or derisive intent. Through their sarcastic statements the psalmist's enemies were really saying, "You can't rely on the LORD! He won't deliver you! He won't rescue you since he doesn't delight in you!" Through this lament the psalmist enabled the worshipers to identify with his experience and express their own complaints to God when they feel humiliated.

The psalmist's affirmation of God's faithfulness to him. Nonetheless, the psalmist affirms God's faithfulness to him in the past in verses 9-10. He affirms God's faithfulness to him during his birth and infancy in verse 9, "Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me secure

upon my mother's breast." He affirms God's faithfulness to him throughout his life in verse 10, "I was cast upon you from birth; you have been my God from my mother's womb." He stresses God's faithfulness by tracing it back to its very beginnings. Through this affirmation of faith the psalmist was encouraging the worshipers to affirm their own faith in God along with him because of God's faithfulness to them in the past.

The psalmist's petition for God's presence. Furthermore, the psalmist appeals to God to be present with him in verse 11. In the first line of the verse the psalmist appeals for God's presence, "Do not be far from me." In the remainder of the verse the psalmist explains why God's intervention is so urgent, "for trouble is near, and there is no one to help." God's intervention is essential because of the proximity of the danger and because there is no one other than God who can help. Through this petition the psalmist was leading the worshipers to ask God to be with them in times of trouble along with him. Therefore, the worshipers should affirm their faith in God and ask him to be near when they are ridiculed and feel humiliated along with the psalmist because he brought them out of the womb, made them secure as an infant, and has been their God ever since.

The Psalmist's Lament, Petition, and Affirmation of Faith

The psalmist laments his affliction and dissolution, but then petitions the LORD for deliverance and affirms God's faithfulness to answer in verses 12-21. In this cycle of lament, petition, and affirmation the psalmist sought to lead other worshipers to move beyond lament to ask the LORD to deliver them and affirm their faith in God to answer them along with him.

The psalmist's lament of his affliction and dissolution. The psalmist laments his affliction and dissolution in verses 12-18. He laments his affliction by his enemies in verses 12-13, "Many bulls surround me; mighty ones of Bashan encircle me. They open wide their mouths at me, like a lion tearing and roaring." He stresses the seriousness of his situation by emphasizing the strength and ferocity of his enemies. He describes them as mighty bulls. The bulls of Bashan were well-known for their great size and strength. He describes them as fierce lions opening their mouths, roaring, and tearing him to pieces. He laments his emotional and physical dissolution in verses 14-15, "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax that has melted within me. My strength is dried up like an earthenware pot; My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth, and you lay me in the dust of death." As Weiser maintains, "We can interpret all these phenomena as manifestations of the physical reaction which takes effect in his body at the moment of extreme distress, making him shake with fear" (Weiser, 223). The psalmist laments further his affliction and dissolution in verses 16-18, "Indeed, dogs have surrounded me, and a band of evil men has encircled me; they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones; they stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them, and cast lots for my clothing." He describes his attackers as dogs. Dogs were considered unclean animals and this figure may simply be a way to identify his enemies as evil men as the subsequent line echoes. However, wild dogs are also scavengers and that is certainly how he describes his enemies literally in verses 16-18. They surround him, wound him so that all his bones are exposed, gawk and exult in his defeat, and divide up his possessions. Through this lament the psalmist enabled the worshipers to identify with his experience and express their own complaints to God when they felt attacked and feel like they are falling apart.

The psalmist's petition for deliverance. Nonetheless, the psalmist asks the LORD to be with him and deliver him in verse 19 through the first two lines of verse 21. He asks the LORD

to be present with him in the first line of verse 19, "But you, LORD, do not be far off." He asks the LORD to help and deliver him in the second line of verse 19 through the first line of verse 21, "My help, hasten to my aid! Deliver my life from the sword, my only one from the power of the dog! Rescue me from the mouth of the lion, from the horns of the wild ox!" The urgency of the petition is stressed by his multiplication of imperative verbs ("hasten . . . Deliver . . . Rescue"). He also stresses the urgency of his request with the words "my only one" which probably refers to "my life" in the preceding line emphasizing the risk to his life. Furthermore, the urgency of the appeal is emphasized through the description of his predicament. He is already in the mouth of the lion and on the horns of the wild ox. Through this petition the psalmist was leading the worshipers to ask God to be with them and deliver them in times of trouble along with him.

The psalmist's affirmation of God's faithfulness to answer. The psalmist affirms his faith in God's faithfulness to answer his prayer for deliverance in the climactic line of verse 21, "You have answered me!" This affirmation is not found in many modern translations, but is essential to the meaning of the psalm. This affirmation is in the perfect state and should probably be translated as an accomplished fact, "You have answered me!" However, the psalmist could use the perfect state of the verb to emphasize the certainty of this affirmation even though it has not yet happened ("You will answer me!"). Through this affirmation of faith the psalmist was encouraging the worshipers to affirm their own faith in God along with him because of God's faithfulness to answer their prayers for his presence and deliverance. Therefore, the worshipers should ask the LORD to be near and hasten to deliver them when they are attacked and feel like their lives are falling apart along with the psalmist because he will answer them.

The Psalmist's Commitment, Exhortation, and Praise

The psalmist commits himself to praise the LORD, exhorts others to praise the LORD, and praises the LORD in verses 22-31. By so doing the psalmist sought to both lead and command other worshipers to praise the LORD along with him.

The psalmist's commitment to praise the LORD. The psalmist commits himself to declare the praise of the LORD in verse 22, "I will certainly declare your name to my brothers; I will praise you in the midst of the congregation." He stresses the sincerity of his commitment in Hebrew text through the use of the cohortative voluntative mood, which often is employed in Hebrew to emphasize strong determination. The psalmist reaffirms his commitment to declare the praise of the LORD in verse 25. He explains why he has committed himself to declare the praise of the LORD in the first line, "From you comes my praise in the great assembly." His praise is based on who God is and what he has done, specifically in this context he praises God because God has answered his prayers. He reaffirms his commitment to declare the praise of the LORD in the second line, "I will fulfill my vows before those who fear him." The vows he refers to are probably the promises he has made to declare God's name to his brothers and praise God in the midst of the congregation in verse 22. Through these commitments the psalmist sought to lead other worshipers to commit themselves to praise the LORD along with him.

The psalmist's exhortation for others to praise and fear the LORD. The psalmist exhorts others to praise and fear the LORD in verses 23-24. First, he commands them to praise and fear the LORD in verse 23, "You who fear the LORD, praise him! Every descendant of Jacob, glorify him! Fear him, every descendant of Israel!" None are exempted from these commands. Though the first command is addressed to those "who fear the LORD," all are commanded to

fear and glorify the LORD. The Hebrew word translated "fear" may perhaps better be translated "reverence" in this context. Second, he explains why they should praise and fear the LORD in verse 24, "For he does not despise or detest the affliction of the afflicted, and does not hide his face from him, but when he cries to him, he answers." He emphasizes the truth of these affirmations of God's faithfulness in Hebrew through the use of the perfect state, which is frequently used to stress certainty ("he does not despise or detest," "does not hide his face," and "he answers"). Through this exhortation the psalmist sought to compel other worshipers to praise and fear the LORD.

The psalmist's reaffirmation of his commitment to praise the LORD. The psalmist reaffirms his commitment to praise the LORD in verse 25, "From you comes my praise in the great assembly. I will fulfill my vows before those who fear him." He says that his praise comes from God because the LORD is the one who has intervened in his life and answered his prayers. His vows are certainly his commitment to praise the LORD for all he has done.

The psalmist's declaration of praise to the LORD. The psalmist declares the praise of the LORD in verses 26-31. He praises the LORD because he satisfies the poor who seek him in verse 26, "The poor will eat and be satisfied; they who seek the LORD will praise him--May your hearts live forever!" All three lines of this verse relate to the same group in the parallel structure, the poor who seek the LORD. They will be satisfied and have reason to praise him. The final line probably expresses the psalmist's own good wishes for the poor who seek the LORD. However, Ross calls this a point of instruction and explains:

In the lament section (v. 14), David reported that his heart, his will to live, his determination to keep on praying, was melting like wax within him--he had almost given up. He did not, and now he could tell people not to do that either, to be encouraged, to keep on praying, because God does not despise the affliction of the afflicted (Ross, 545-546)

The psalmist praises the LORD for his dominion over the peoples of the earth in verses 27-29. First, he asserts that all people will turn to the LORD and bow down to him in verse 27, "All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before you." The universality of God's sovereignty is emphasized by the absolute adjective "all." Second, he explains why all people must turn to the LORD and bow down to him in verse 28, "For dominion belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations." Third, he illustrates that all people will bow down to the LORD in verse 29, "All the fat of the earth will eat and bow down before him, all who go down to the dust will bow down, and he who cannot keep himself alive." The word translated "fat" is often translated "rich" (NIV). Indeed, "fat" is probably a metonym for "rich" and the counterpart to the hungry poor of verse 26. As in verse 26, all three lines of this verse relate to the same group in the parallel structure. The parallel structure can be understood to explain why the fat or rich will submit to the LORD--All who die will bow down to him and no one can keep himself alive. The arrogance and ridicule of the rich was a great travail to those who were suffering. Their ultimate submission to the LORD would certainly be reason to praise God. The universality of God's sovereignty is again stressed with the absolute adjective "all."

He praises the LORD because his righteousness will be proclaimed to future generations in verses 30-31, "Posterity will serve him. It will be told about my LORD to a [future] generation. They will come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet to be born that he has done it." Through this declaration of praise the psalmist sought to lead other worshipers to praise the

LORD. Therefore, the worshipers should praise the LORD along with the psalmist because he does not ignore the cries of the afflicted, but answers when they pray; the poor who seek him will be satisfied and have reason for praise; all the people of the world will turn to the LORD and submit to him; and the righteousness of the LORD will be proclaimed to future generations.

Application of the Message

Establishing Correspondence

Christians today are also attacked and ridiculed by their enemies. As a result they often suffer physically and emotionally. If the trial persists they may doubt God's presence and faithfulness to answer their prayers for help. These correspondences between the original and modern situations provide a strong basis for applying the message of Psalm 22 to the modern situation. Jesus is identified with the suffering righteous one of this psalm in the Passion narratives of the gospels. These quotations and allusions suggest that the writers of the gospels regarded this psalm as a prophecy of the coming of the Messiah. However, this psalm does not appear to be a prophecy. Nonetheless, the affirmations of the psalmist are fulfilled in Jesus. The identification of Jesus with the suffering righteous one of this psalm does verify the truth that the psalmist affirms.

Distinguishing the Contextualized

This passage contains very little of a contextualized nature that requires that the message be limited or adjusted when applied to the modern situation. Nonetheless, this passage does have two points of tension between the original and modern situations. First, this psalm is based in part on the psalmist's experience as part of the people of Israel whereas God is now working through the church. Nonetheless, the church is identified in the New Testament as the New Israel. However, because the church is composed of those who have received rebirth through faith in Christ, this new beginning of their Christian life may be a better point of reference for God's faithfulness. Second, this psalm gives expression to complaint while the New Testament seems to indicate that there is no place for complaint in the Christian life. In Philippians 4:4 for example, Paul states, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" Nonetheless, the psalm is merely encouraging honesty before God rather than putting on a false face. Moreover, the psalm moves quickly from complaint to affirmation of faith, petition, and declaration of praise. Therefore, the statement of the applied message has only been modified slightly. In fact, this psalm may be even more meaningful for the modern situation since Christians have the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. The identification of Jesus with the suffering righteous one of this psalm serves to verify the truth of this message.

Adjusting the Message

Christians should affirm their faith in God when their prayers go unanswered and they feel abandoned because he is the Holy One, he abides in the praises of his people, and he delivered his people when they trusted and cried out to him. Christians should affirm their faith in God and ask him to be near when they are ridiculed and feel humiliated because he has given them new life in Christ and has been their faithful God ever since. Christians should ask in faith for the LORD to be near and hasten to deliver them when they are attacked and feel like their lives are falling apart because he will answer them. Christians should praise the LORD because he does not ignore the cries of the afflicted, but answers when they pray; the poor who seek him

will be satisfied and have reason to praise God; all the people of the world will turn to the LORD and submit to him; and the righteousness of the LORD will be proclaimed to future generations.

Communication of the Message

Title: Why Have You Forsaken Me?

Objective: The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians to move beyond their complaints to affirm their faith in God and ask him to be with them and help them during times of trouble.

Proposition: Christians should affirm their faith in God and ask him to be with them and help them during times of trouble because he is the Holy One and he has demonstrated his faithfulness to his people; he has given them life and he has demonstrated his faithfulness to them; and he does not ignore the cries of the afflicted, but answers when they cry out to him.

Introduction

Christians today are often attacked and ridiculed by their enemies. As a result they often suffer physically and emotionally. If the trial persists they may doubt God's presence and faithfulness to answer their prayers for help. Psalm 22 indicates that the psalmist also was attacked and ridiculed by his enemies, suffered physically and emotionally, and doubted God's presence and faithfulness to answer his prayers for help. Nonetheless, he affirmed his faith in God and asked God for his presence and help. The psalmist is a good example for us when we experience difficulty and doubt God. *Read Psalm 22.*

I. Christians should affirm their faith in God when their prayers go unanswered and they feel abandoned because he is the Holy One and he has demonstrated his faithfulness to his people.

- A. The psalmist laments his seeming abandonment by God in verses 1-2, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" So far from saving me are the words of my roaring. My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, and by night, and there is no silence for me."
- B. Nonetheless, the psalmist affirms his faith in God to Israel in verses 3-5.
 1. He affirms his faith in God as the Holy One whom the people of Israel praise in verse 3, "Yet you are the Holy One, the one abiding in the praises of Israel."
 2. He affirms God's faithfulness to answer prayer and deliver the people of Israel in the past in verses 4-5, "Our fathers put their trust in you; they trusted and you delivered them. They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not made ashamed."
- C. Illustration of God's Faithfulness to Deliver His People
- D. Application

II. Christians should affirm their faith in God and ask him to be near and help when they are ridiculed and feel humiliated because he has given them life in Christ and demonstrated his faithfulness to them.

- A. The psalmist laments his humiliation in verses 6-8, "But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by man and disdained by people. All who see me mock me; they sneer and shake their heads (saying): 'Turn to the LORD! Let him deliver him. Let him rescue him since he delights in him.'"
- B. Nonetheless, the psalmist affirms God's faithfulness to him in the past in verses 9-10.

1. He affirms God's faithfulness to him during his birth and infancy in verse 9, "Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me secure upon my mother's breast."
 2. He affirms God's faithfulness to him throughout his life in verse 10, "I was cast upon you from birth; you have been my God from my mother's womb."
- C. Furthermore, the psalmist appeals to God to be present with him in verse 11.
1. In the first line of the verse he asks God to be near, "Do not be far from me"
 2. In the remainder of the verse the psalmist explains why God's intervention is so urgent, "for trouble is near, and there is no one to help."
- D. Personal Testimony of God's Faithfulness
- E. Application

III. Christians should ask in faith for the LORD to be near and help them when they are attacked and feel like their lives are falling apart because he will not ignore the cries of the afflicted, but will answer them when they cry out to him.

- A. The psalmist laments his affliction and dissolution in verses 12-18, "Many bulls surround me; mighty ones of Bashan encircle me. They open wide their mouths at me, like a lion tearing and roaring. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax that has melted with me. My strength is dried up like an earthenware pot; my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth, and you lay me in the dust of death. Indeed, dogs have surrounded me, and a band of evil men has encircled me; they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones; they stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them, and cast lots for my clothing."
- B. Nonetheless, the psalmist asks the LORD to be with him and deliver him in verses 19 through the first two lines of verse 21.
1. He asks the LORD to be present with him in the first line of verse 19, "But you, LORD, do not be far off!"
 2. He asks the LORD to help and deliver him in the second line of verse 19 through the first line of verse 21, "O my help, hasten to my aid! Deliver my life from the sword, my only one from the power of the dog! Rescue me from the mouth of the lion, from the horns of the wild ox!"
- C. The psalmist affirms God's faithfulness to answer his prayer for deliverance in the final line of verse 21, "You have answered me!"
- D. The psalmist further affirms God's faithfulness to answer prayer in verse 24, "For he does not despise or detest the affliction of the afflicted, and does not hide his face from him, but when he cries earnestly to him, he answers."
- E. Moreover, the psalmist affirms that those who seek the LORD will be satisfied and have reason to praise him in verse 26, "The poor will eat and be satisfied; they who seek the LORD will praise him--May your hearts live forever!"
- F. Illustration of God's Faithfulness to Be Near and Answer Prayer
- G. Application

Conclusion

Christians today are often attacked and ridiculed by their enemies. As a result they often suffer physically and emotionally. If the trial persists they may doubt God's presence and faithfulness to answer their prayers for help. Psalm 22 indicates that the psalmist also was attacked and ridiculed by his enemies, suffered physically and emotionally, and doubted God's presence and faithfulness to answer his prayers for help. Nonetheless, he affirmed his faith in

God and asked God for his presence and help. The psalmist is a good example for us when we experience difficulty and doubt God. In fact, we have a stronger basis for faith in God than he did. The gospels allude to this psalm in their depiction of the Passion and Jesus himself cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!" But of course God did not forsake Jesus. He was raised from the dead and ascended to be with his heavenly Father. Neither will God forsake you! You should affirm your faith in God when your prayers go unanswered and feel abandoned because he is the Holy One and has demonstrated his faithfulness to his people. You should affirm your faith in God and ask him to be near and help when you are ridiculed and feel humiliated because he has given you life and demonstrated his faithfulness to you. You should affirm your faith in God and ask him to be near and deliver you because he will not ignore the cries of the afflicted, but will answer when you cry out to him.

CHAPTER TEN

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

Psalm 23

Study of the Passage

Text and Translation

A psalm of David

1The LORD is my shepherd;

I shall not be lacking.

2He enables me to lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside quiet waters.

3He saves my life;

He leads me in paths of righteousness for the sake of his name.

4Even if I walk in death's shadow, I will fear no evil,

for you are with me; your rod and your staff, **they*** comfort me.

5You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows.

6Surely goodness and steadfast love will follow me all the days of my life

and I will be welcomed in the house of the LORD length of days.

*The bold print indicates an emphasis in the Hebrew text that is otherwise difficult to convey in English (See Analysis of the Details).

Situation and Purpose

The psalm reflects a general context of worship. However, underlying the psalm is a concern for specific threats to the faith of worshipers. These concerns are reflected indirectly in the psalmist's affirmations of faith. The psalmist's affirmation of the LORD's care and provision in verses 1-2 makes these verses most meaningful for worshipers who have doubted God's care and provision. The psalmist's affirmation of the LORD's deliverance and direction in verse 3 makes this verse most meaningful for worshipers who have been in danger or confused. The psalmist's affirmation of the LORD's protection and comfort in verse 4 makes this verse most meaningful for worshipers who have been afraid and discouraged. The psalmist's affirmation of the LORD's vindication and honor in verse 5 makes this verse most meaningful for worshipers who have enemies who have ridiculed them. The psalmist's affirmation of the LORD's goodness, steadfast love, and welcome in verse 6 makes this verse most meaningful for worshipers who have doubted God's love and acceptance. As Broyles observes:

We may walk through the valley of the shadow of death and we must affirm, I will fear no evil, because we are tempted to fear. We confess, I shall not be in want, because we fear we shall be. The confession, he leads me beside quiet waters, has meaning because many dangers--including my enemies--threaten to sap us of life. He restores my soul, indicates that there are times when it becomes weary (Broyles, 123).

The superscription identifies the psalm as a psalm of David. Certainly David's life provides an appropriate setting for understanding this psalm. The purpose of the psalm was to encourage these worshipers to continue to trust in the LORD and remain faithful to him.

Literary Context and Role

The Book of Psalms has no discernible strategy. Therefore, placing this psalm in its literary context and determining its role within that context is not very productive. Nonetheless, this psalm is loosely related to other psalms attributed to David. In addition, this psalm is related by form to other psalms of praise or psalms dominated by affirmations of faith. Furthermore, this psalm is also related to other passages in the Bible that develop the imagery of the LORD as the Shepherd.

Form and Function

This psalm can be classified generally as a psalm of praise. However, this psalm of praise is characterized by affirmations of faith. Affirmations of faith are declarations of the psalmist's confidence in God based on who he is and what he has done, is doing, and will do. These affirmations of faith serve to encourage the worshipers and inspire them to affirm their own faith in God along with the psalmist. In this psalm the psalmist employs two images to characterize the LORD and affirm his faith--the LORD his Shepherd and the LORD his Gracious Host. Through these images the psalmist affirms his confidence in the LORD to care for him and meet his needs, provide for him and make him secure, save and guide him, protect and support him, vindicate and honor him, treat him with goodness and steadfast love, and always welcome him. Underlying these affirmations is the implied command, "Trust in the LORD!"

Strategy and Structure

The strategy of the psalm is based on the two images that the psalmist employs. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD using the image of the Shepherd in verses 1-4. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD using the image of the Gracious Host in verses 5-6. These affirmations of faith reinforce the psalmist's affirmation of the faithfulness of the LORD from different perspectives, encouraging other worshipers to trust in him as well.

- I. The Psalmist's Affirmation of Faith in the LORD as His Shepherd (1-4)
 - A. The Psalmist's Faith in the LORD to Care for Him and Meet His Needs (1)
 - B. The Psalmist's Faith in the LORD to Provide for Him and Make Him Secure (2)
 - C. The Psalmist's Faith in the LORD to Save and Guide Him (3)
 - D. The Psalmist's Faith in the LORD to Protect and Support Him (4)
- II. The Psalmist's Affirmation of Faith in the LORD as His Gracious Host (5-6)
 - A. The Psalmist's Faith in the LORD to Vindicate and Honor Him (5)
 1. Preparation of a table before him in the presence of his enemies
 2. Anointing of his head with oil and filling of his cup to overflowing
 - B. The Psalmist's Faith in the LORD's Perpetual Goodness, Steadfast Love, and Welcome (6)
 1. The perpetual pursuit of the psalmist by goodness and steadfast love
 2. The perpetual welcome of the psalmist into the LORD's house

Message or Messages

God's people should trust in the LORD along with the psalmist because he will care for them like a faithful shepherd and they will not lack anything. God's people should trust in the LORD along with the psalmist because he will provide for their needs and make them secure like a faithful shepherd. God's people should trust in the LORD along with the psalmist because he will rescue them and lead them in the right way like a faithful shepherd. God's people should trust in the LORD along with the psalmist because he will protect and support them like a faithful shepherd. God's people should trust in the LORD along with the psalmist because he will vindicate and honor them in the presence of their enemies like a gracious host. God's people should trust in the LORD along with the psalmist because his goodness and steadfast love will follow them all the days of their lives and they will always be welcome in his presence.

Analysis of the Details

The Psalmist's Affirmation of Faith in the LORD As His Shepherd

The first image that the psalmist employs to affirm his faith in the LORD is that of the LORD as Shepherd. He uses this image to affirm his faith in the LORD to care for him and meet his needs, provide for him and make him secure, save and guide him, and protect and support him. Through these affirmations of faith the psalmist was seeking to encourage other worshipers and lead them to affirm their own faith in the LORD along with him.

The psalmist's faith in the LORD to care for him and meet his needs. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD to care for him and meet his needs in verse 1, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not be lacking." The shepherd was responsible for taking care of the sheep. Verses 2-4 develop specific responsibilities of the shepherd. He is responsible for feeding and watering them (2), saving them from predators and guiding them along the right path (3), and walking with them through danger and protecting them from any threat (4). The psalmist affirms that in every area of responsibility, the LORD is faithful to care for him and as a result he is not lacking in anything. The affirmation "I shall not be lacking" is in the strongest grammatical construction in Hebrew for making a denial to emphasize the psalmist's confidence. As Ross says, "Here David affirms that there is no lack or deficiency in the LORD's provision" (Ross, 560). Through this affirmation the psalmist was seeking to encourage other worshipers and lead them to affirm their own faith in the LORD to care for them and meet their needs and commitment to follow him. Therefore, the worshipers should trust in the LORD along with the psalmist because he will care for them like a faithful shepherd and they will not lack anything.

The psalmist's faith in the LORD to provide for him and make him secure. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD to provide for him and make him secure in verse 2, "He enables me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters." Every creature needs food and water to survive. The shepherd was responsible for providing the sheep with food and water. The psalmist affirms that the LORD is like a faithful shepherd and provides for his basic needs. Ross observes that the word used "indicates the rich, abundant grass of springtime" and concludes, "Not only is the quantity of God's provision without lack, but the quality is the best" (Ross, 561). More is probably implied than simply the LORD's faithfulness to provide for these basic needs. The LORD not only provides him with food, but enables him to "lie down" in those green pastures. The LORD not only provides him with water, but he is able to drink from "quiet waters." These details in the description seem to also affirm that the LORD is faithful to make

him secure. However, Ross believes that the calm waters represent spiritual cleansing" and "The point is that the LORD cleanses people from sin and provides spiritual refreshment and renewal from the chaos of life" (Ross, 562). Through this affirmation the psalmist was seeking to encourage other worshipers and lead them to affirm their own faith in the LORD to provide for them and make them secure. Therefore, the worshipers should trust in the LORD along with the psalmist because he will provide for their needs like a faithful shepherd and make them secure.

The psalmist's faith in the LORD to save and guide him. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD to save and guide him in verse 3. He affirms his faith in the LORD to save him in the first half of the verse, "He saves my life." The word translated "life" is often translated "soul," but in this context it is probably used to refer to physical existence. The verb translated "saves" literally means "returns." The word suggests that the psalmist has come close to death, but the LORD has returned him to life. The shepherd was responsible for the lives of the sheep in his care and he sometimes had to rescue them from dangerous situations in which their lives were threatened. The psalmist affirms that the LORD is like a faithful shepherd and saves him. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD to guide him in the second half of the verse, "He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." The shepherd was responsible for guiding sheep on the correct path so that they did not get lost. The psalmist employs "paths of righteousness" to describe a way of life characterized by a right relationship with God and upright conduct toward others. The psalmist affirms that the LORD is like a faithful shepherd and leads him on the right paths. The LORD is certain to lead them on the right path because his reputation is at stake ("for his name's sake"). As Leupold states:

Since "name" is the equivalent of "character" or "reputation," this beautiful little phrase means: He does all this because He has a reputation among His saints for faithful dealings with them, a reputation which must be cautiously upheld (Leupold, 212).

Through this affirmation the psalmist was seeking to encourage other worshipers and lead them to affirm their own faith in the LORD to save and guide them. Therefore, the worshipers should trust in the LORD along with the psalmist because he will rescue them and lead them in the right way like a faithful shepherd.

The psalmist's faith in the LORD to protect and support him. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD to protect and support him in verse 4. He affirms his faith in the LORD in the first half of the verse, "Even though I walk in death's shadow, I will fear no evil." The psalmist's fearlessness is accentuated by the extremity of the situation he describes. "Death's shadow" is a very literal translation of the Hebrew text and probably portrays the imminence of death. Death is so close that he is standing in its shadow. The shadow may also be intended to convey the despair that the proximity of death often causes. Nonetheless, the psalmist asserts confidently, "I will fear no evil." The affirmation "I will fear no evil" is in the strongest grammatical construction in Hebrew for making a denial to emphasize the psalmist's confidence. "Evil" in this context refers to something potentially harmful and life-threatening. The psalmist explains the reason for his confidence in the second half of the verse, "for you are with me; your rod and your staff, **they** comfort me." The faithful shepherd protects the sheep from predators. His rod is the weapon he uses to ward off any danger. Though he could use his staff as a weapon as well, it was more often used for support and is probably used as an indication of the LORD's support during difficult times. The pronoun "they" is emphatic in the Hebrew text and is used to stress the basis of the psalmist's confidence (indicated by bold print). If the analogy is reversed, the psalmist's comfort in the LORD's protection and support may be likened to sheep that

complacently trust in the shepherd without fear of any danger. The psalmist affirms that the LORD is like a faithful shepherd and protects and supports his people. Through this affirmation of faith the psalmist sought to encourage other worshipers and lead them to affirm their own faith in the LORD to protect and support them and commitment to follow him. Therefore, the worshipers should trust in the LORD and remain faithful to him along with the psalmist because he will protect and support them like a faithful shepherd.

The Psalmist's Affirmation of Faith in the LORD As His Gracious Host

The other image that the psalmist employs to affirm his faith in the LORD is that of a Gracious Host. He uses this image to affirm his faith in the LORD to vindicate and honor him and to persistently treat him with goodness and steadfast love and always welcome him into his house. Through these affirmations of faith the psalmist was seeking to encourage other worshipers and lead them to affirm their own faith in the LORD along with him.

The psalmist's faith in the LORD to vindicate and honor him. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD to vindicate and honor him in verse 5, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows." Meals were an important social institution in Israel as they are in most societies today. Meals sealed relationships between those who ate together. By stating that the LORD prepared a table before him, the psalmist was affirming his faith in the LORD to confirm their relationship. That this confirmation would occur in the presence of his enemies expresses his confidence that the LORD would vindicate him by confirming their relationship to his enemies, who were either denying the LORD or that he had a relationship with the LORD. The gracious host welcomes honored guests by anointing their heads with oil. He continues to show them special regard throughout the meal by making sure that their cup is always full. The psalmist affirms that the LORD is like a gracious host and welcomes and honors him. Through this affirmation the psalmist sought to encourage other worshipers and lead them to affirm their own faith in the LORD to vindicate and honor them. Therefore, the worshipers should trust in the LORD along with the psalmist because he will vindicate and honor them like a gracious host.

The psalmist's faith in the LORD's persistent goodness, steadfast love, and welcome. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD to treat him persistently with goodness and steadfast love and always welcome him in verse 6. He affirms his faith in the LORD to treat him persistently with goodness and steadfast love in the first half of the verse, "Surely goodness and steadfast love will follow me all the days of my life." Though not specifically stated, the psalmist is certainly referring to the LORD's goodness and steadfast love. The Hebrew adverb translated "Surely" is used to emphasize the psalmist's confidence in the LORD's goodness and steadfast love. The LORD's goodness and steadfast love are described as pursuing him, a picture that is intended to convey the persistence of the LORD to treat him with goodness and steadfast love. Perhaps the picture is of a gracious host persistently following his honored guests to make sure that their plates and cups are always full. This emphasis on the persistence of God's goodness and steadfast love is further stressed by "all the days of my life." Anderson stresses the dramatic reversal in the psalmist's situation, "The Psalmist is no longer hunted down by his enemies, but he is literally pursued by the goodness of God" (Anderson, 199). Goodness is a general term that refers broadly to all of God's blessings, but steadfast love is an important theological term. This word is used to express God's compassion for his people because of their

covenant relationship. As the gracious host conscientiously attended to his honored guest, making sure that his plate and cup were always full, the psalmist affirms that the LORD attends to his people, making sure that their lives are filled with goodness and steadfast love.

The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD to always welcome him in the second half of verse 6, "and I will be welcome in the house of the LORD length of days." The word translated "be welcome" is frequently translated "dwell," following the ancient versions. However, the word in the Hebrew text literally means "return." This word should probably be understood in the context of the psalmist's use of the image of the gracious host to affirm his confidence that he will be able to return and is therefore welcome. Though "house of the LORD" is frequently used for the temple, it should probably be understood more generally to affirm the psalmist's faith that he will be accepted by God into his presence (See also Durham, 218). The final phrase, "length of days," is often translated "forever." As attractive as this translation may be, only on one occasion does this phrase mean "forever" and on that occasion it is accompanied by a qualifying phrase, "forever and ever" (Psalm 21:4). Nonetheless, in many cases it is used to indicate the full length of an object and in every case it is used in relation to time it emphasizes duration. Ross is probably on the right track by translating "for the remaining days of my life" (Ross, 554). Through this affirmation of his faith the psalmist was seeking to encourage other worshipers and lead them to trust in the LORD to treat them persistently with goodness and steadfast love and always welcome them. Therefore, the worshipers should trust in the LORD because he will treat them persistently with goodness and steadfast love and they will always be welcome in his presence.

Application of the Message

Establishing Correspondence

Christians today also suffer deprivation and attack and as a result may be confused, discouraged, and doubt God's care and provision. These correspondences with the original situation provide a strong basis for applying the message of Psalm 23 to the contemporary situation.

Distinguishing the Contextualized

There is very little of a contextualized nature in the passage that would require that the message of this passage be limited or adjusted. Therefore, the statements of the applied message that follow have only been modified slightly.

Adjusting the Message

Christians should trust in the LORD along with the psalmist because he will care for them like a faithful shepherd and they will not lack anything. Christians should trust in the LORD along with the psalmist because he will provide for their needs and make them secure. Christians should trust in the LORD along with the psalmist because he will rescue them and lead them in the right way. Christians should trust in the LORD along with the psalmist because he will protect and support them. Christians should trust in the LORD along with the psalmist because he will vindicate and honor them in the presence of their enemies. Christians should trust in the LORD along with the psalmist because his goodness and steadfast love will follow them all the days of their lives and they will always be welcome in his presence.

Communication of the Message

Title: The LORD Is My Shepherd

Objective: The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians to trust in the LORD.

Proposition: Christians should trust in the LORD because he will care for them like a faithful shepherd and they will not lack anything; he will provide for their needs and make them secure; he will rescue them and lead them in the right way; he will protect and support them; he will vindicate and honor them; his goodness and steadfast love will always follow them; and they will always be welcome in his presence.

Introduction

Psalm 23 is one of the most beloved of the psalms. It is frequently read at funeral because of the comfort that it gives for those who "walk in death's shadow." However, it provides a great deal of encouragement for Christians facing a variety of difficulties common to life including the struggle to provide for basic needs and security, the threat of calamity and need for direction, and the menace of enemies. As the psalmist contemplated these difficulties and dangers he still confidently affirmed his faith in the LORD. We need his faith. *Read Psalm 23.*

I. Christians should trust in the LORD because he will care for them and they will not lack anything.

- A. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD to care for him and meet his needs in verse 1, "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be lacking."
- B. Illustration of the LORD's Provision
- C. Application

II. Christians should trust in the LORD because he will provide for their needs and make them secure.

- A. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD to provide for him and make him secure in verse 2, "He enables me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters."
- B. Illustration of the LORD's Security
- C. Application

III. Christians should trust in the LORD because he will rescue them and lead them in the right way.

- A. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD to save him in the first half of verse 3, "He saves my life." The verb "saves" literally means "returns."
- B. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD to guide him in the second half of verse 3, "He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his names sake."
- C. Illustration of the LORD's Leadership
- D. Application

IV. Christians should trust in the LORD because he will protect and support them.

- A. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD to protect and support him in the first half of verse 4, "Even though I walk in death's shadow, I will fear no evil."
- B. The psalmist explains the reason for his confidence in the second half of the verse, "for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."
- C. Illustration of the LORD's Protection

D. Application

V. Christians should trust in the LORD because he will vindicate and honor them in the presence of their enemies.

A. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD to vindicate and honor him in verse 5, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows."

B. Illustration of the LORD's Vindication

C. Application

VI. Christians should trust in the LORD because his goodness and steadfast love will follow them all the days of their lives.

A. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD to treat him persistently with goodness and steadfast love in the first half of verse 6, "Surely goodness and steadfast love will follow me all the days of my life."

B. Illustration of the LORD's Persistent Goodness and Love

C. Application

VII. Christians should trust in the LORD because they will always be welcome in his presence.

A. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD to always welcome him in the second half of verse 6, "and I will be welcome in the house of the LORD length of days."

B. Illustration of the LORD's Perpetual Welcome

C. Application

Conclusion

Psalm 23 is one of the most beloved of the psalms. It is frequently read at funeral because of the comfort that it gives for those who "walk in death's shadow." However, it provides a great deal of encouragement for Christians facing a variety of difficulties common to life including the struggle to provide for basic needs and security, the threat of calamity and need for direction, and the menace of enemies. As the psalmist contemplated these difficulties and dangers he still confidently affirmed his faith in the LORD. We need his faith. You should trust in the LORD because he will care for you and you will not lack anything. You should trust in the LORD because he will provide for your needs and make you secure. You should trust in the LORD because he will rescue you and lead you in the right way. You should trust in the LORD because he will protect and support you. You should trust in the LORD because he will vindicate and honor you in the presence of your enemies. You should trust in the LORD because his goodness and steadfast love will follow you all the days of your lives. You should trust in the LORD because you will always be welcome in his presence.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

VINDICATE ME, LORD Psalm 26

Study of the Passage

Text and Translation

Of David

1 Vindicate me, LORD,
for I myself walk in my integrity
and trust in the LORD,
I do not slip.

2 Test me, LORD, and try me;
Appraise my heart and my mind;

3 For your steadfast love is before my eyes
and I walk about in your truth.

4 I do not sit with deceitful men
or consort with those who conceal.

5 I abhor the assembly of evildoers
and do not sit with the wicked.

6 I wash my hands with cleanliness
and go all about your altar, LORD,

7 In order to proclaim your praise
and recount all your wonders.

8 I love the habitation of your house, LORD,
and the place where your glory dwells.

9 May you not take away my soul along with sinners,
nor my life with bloodthirsty men,

10 Those in whose hands is a scheme
and whose right hand is full of a bribe.

11 Instead, I myself walk in my integrity;
Redeem me and be gracious to me.

12 My foot stands on level ground;
I will bless the LORD in the assemblies.

Situation and Purpose

This psalm reflects a general context of worship. However, the psalm also reflects a more specific situation in the life of the psalmist. The psalmist appears to have been a genuinely righteous man. However, he appears to have been living among wicked people and was anticipating God's judgment of his people. This threat is most clearly reflected in his appeal to God in verses 9-10, "May you not take away my soul along with sinners nor my life with bloodthirsty men, those in whose hands is a scheme and whose right hand is full of a bribe." Some scholars who relate this psalm closely to Psalm 7 (See Literary Context and Role) use that

psalm to augment the situation (Anderson, 213-214; Durham, 222-223; and Weiser, 242). Psalm 7 reflects a situation in which the psalmist has been falsely accused by his enemies. However, no implication of false accusation can be found in Psalm 26. The superscription identifies the psalmist as David. The life of David does provide an appropriate context for understanding the psalm. The psalm would have been most meaningful for worshipers who also lived among wicked people and feared God's judgment. The purpose of the psalm was to lead the worshipers to uphold their commitment to God; ask him to redeem them, be gracious to them, and vindicate them; and affirm their faith in him.

Literary Context and Role

The Book of Psalms has no discernible strategy. Therefore, placing this psalm in its literary context and determining its role within that context is not very productive. Nonetheless, this psalm is loosely related to other psalms attributed to David. In addition, this psalm is also related loosely by form to other psalms in which the psalmist defends his integrity. In fact, Durham relates this psalm specifically to Psalms 7 and 17, which are both psalms of David and contain elements of defense (Durham, 222; see Anderson, 213 and Weiser, 242 who also link this psalm with Psalm 7). In addition, Ross suggests:

Psalms 25-28 seem to have been written during one period of time. The common motifs include the psalmist's undeserved accusation and opposition by unidentified enemies, consistent loyalty to the LORD, prayer for vindication and deliverance, and confidence that God will answer the prayer.

Form and Function

Though commonly classified as a psalm of lament, this psalm is difficult to classify according to the usual general categories. Indeed, the psalm contains no lament at all. Instead, the psalm is a liturgy comprised of several elements that work together to generate a dynamic encounter with God in worship. The psalm is comprised of petition, defense, and affirmation of faith (Craigie, 224 similarly uses the designations prayer, declarations of integrity and innocence, and the certainty of divine hearing). Petitions are the voicing of the psalmist's requests to God, usually to help him in his situation. Petitions serve to encourage worshipers to voice their own requests to God along with the psalmist. The psalmist petitions God for vindication in verses 1a and 2, justice in verses 9-10, and redemption and grace in verse 11b. Along with his petitions the psalmist includes his defense. A defense is the psalmist's assertion of his righteous character and conduct. This defense serves as the justification of the psalmist's confidence that God will answer his petitions. Through this defense the worshipers are challenged by the psalmist's righteous character and conduct to affirm their own commitment to righteousness so that they can be confident that God will answer their petitions as well. The psalmist defends his righteous character and conduct in verses 1b, 3-8 and 11a. Affirmations of faith are expressions of the psalmist's confidence in God because of what he has done, is doing, or will do. Affirmations of faith serve to encourage the worshipers and inspire them to affirm their faith in God along with the psalmist. The psalmist affirms his faith in the stability of his life and that he will again bless the LORD in verse 12.

Strategy and Structure

The psalm has a deliberate strategy that leads the worshipers to evaluate the level of their faith and integrity so that they will have a basis for asking God for vindication and being confident that they are secure. First, the psalmist appeals to God for vindication and defends his faith and integrity as the basis of his confidence that God will vindicate him (1). Second, the psalmist again appeals to God for vindication and defends his faith and integrity as the basis of his confidence that God will vindicate him (3-8). However, this appeal is expanded, especially in the defense so that the nature of a life of faith and integrity is clarified and emphasized. Third, the psalmist appeals again for vindication and defends his faith and integrity as a basis for confidence that God will vindicate him (9-11). However, this appeal is expanded especially in the appeal so that the nature of what vindication entails is clarified and emphasized. In conclusion, the psalmist affirms his faith in the stability of his life and that he will again bless the LORD (12). This affirmation of faith is based on what has preceded, implying the necessity of faith and integrity as well as the faithfulness of God to bless those who live with faith and integrity.

- I. The Psalmist's First Appeal for Vindication (1)
 - A. The Psalmist's Petition
 - B. The Psalmist's Defense
 - 1. His integrity
 - 2. His faith
 - 3. His carefulness
- II. The Psalmist's Second Appeal for Vindication (2-8)
 - A. The Psalmist's Petition (2)
 - B. The Psalmist's Defense (3-8)
 - 1. His reliance on God's steadfast love and truth (3)
 - 2. His avoidance of the influence of deceitful and wicked men (4-5)
 - 3. His innocence and dedication to the proclamation of God's praise (6-7)
 - 4. His passion for God's house and glorious presence (8)
- III. The Psalmist's Third Appeal for Vindication (9-11)
 - A. The Psalmist's Petition for Justice (9-10)
 - B. The Psalmist's Defense (11a)
 - C. The Psalmist's Petition for Redemption and Grace (11b)
- IV. The Psalmist's Affirmation of Faith (12)
 - A. The Psalmist's Faith in the Stability of His Life
 - B. The Psalmist's Faith that He Will Again Bless the LORD

Message or Messages

God's people should live with integrity and trust in the LORD without slipping like the psalmist so that they can confidently ask God to vindicate them like the psalmist. God's people should conduct themselves based on God's steadfast love and truth, avoid the influence of deceitful and wicked people, worship God with innocence and dedication to the proclamation of God's praise and wonders, and have passion for God's house and glorious presence like the psalmist so that they can confidently ask God to vindicate them like the psalmist. God's people should live with integrity like the psalmist so that they can confidently ask God for justice, redemption, and grace like the psalmist. God's people should trust in the LORD and carefully

maintain their integrity without slipping like the psalmist so that they can have confidence that their lives are stable and they will have reason to praise the LORD for his blessings like the psalmist.

Analysis of the Details

The Psalmist's First Appeal for Vindication

The psalmist appeals for vindication in verse 1. In this appeal the psalmist voices his petition to the LORD and defends his right to vindication. Through this appeal the psalmist was seeking to challenge other worshipers to carefully live with faith and integrity so that they can confidently petition the LORD for vindication along with him.

The psalmist's petition. The psalmist petitions the LORD for vindication in the first line of verse 1, "Vindicate me, LORD." The imperative verb literally means "Judge me." Few would seek God's judgment. Nonetheless, the psalmist petitions God to judge him. The context indicates that he is asking the LORD to examine his life and vindicate or declare him innocent of wrongdoing. This petition indicates the psalmist's confidence both in God's justice and that the character of his life would be approved by God. As other worshipers heard his petition they would be challenged to petition God to vindicate them as well. In this way the psalmist's petition forced them to consider whether they were as confident as him that God will approve the character of their lives.

The psalmist's defense. The psalmist defends his right to vindication in the remainder of verse 1, "For I myself walk in my integrity and trust in the LORD; I do not slip." The Hebrew text emphasizes his commitment to walk with integrity and trust the LORD by doubling the subject pronoun (Literally "I, I walk in my integrity and trust in the LORD" and indicated in translation with the reflexive pronoun, "I myself"). First, he asserts that he lives his life with integrity. The verb "walk" is used to refer to the way that he has lived his life and is in the perfect state, probably to indicate that this is his characteristic way of living. The noun translated "integrity" conveys the idea of "completeness." Through this word the psalmist was probably asserting that he conducted his life in complete accord with God's way of righteousness. Second, the psalmist asserts that he trusts in the LORD. This verb is also in the perfect state, probably to indicate that this is his characteristic way of living. The concluding line of the verse seems to be related to both of the psalmist's assertions that he lives with integrity and trusts in God. The Hebrew verbal construction emphasizes his faithfulness to maintain his integrity and faith (the negative *lo* with the imperfect). As other worshipers listened to the bases of the psalmist's confident petition and defense they were forced to examine themselves to determine whether they had the integrity and faith that would enable them to be confident like the psalmist. Therefore, the worshipers should live with integrity and trust in the LORD without slipping like the psalmist so that they can confidently ask God to vindicate them like the psalmist.

The Psalmist's Second Appeal for Vindication

The psalmist again appeals for vindication in verses 2-8. In this appeal he expands the defense of his right to vindication. Through this appeal the psalmist was seeking to challenge other worshipers to carefully live with faith and integrity so that they can confidently petition the LORD for vindication along with him.

The psalmist's petition. The psalmist petitions the LORD for vindication in verse 2, "Test me, LORD, and try me; appraise my heart and my mind." Few would ask God to test, try, and appraise them. This bold petition indicates again the psalmist's confidence both in God's justice and that the character of his life would be approved by God. In fact, his level of confidence is emphasized in two ways. First, he piles up verbs that ask repeatedly for God to examine him ("Test me . . . try me . . . appraise my heart and mind"). The verb translated "appraise" literally means "refine" but is also frequently used for evaluating the purity of precious metals. Ross explains, "the LORD refines his people by putting them in situations or trials that will test their faith, and in the process anything that is worthless or deleterious will be removed and only what is pure, i.e., the life of faith, remains" (Ross, 613). Second, he asks God to appraise both his heart and mind. The noun translated "heart" literally means "kidneys" which the Hebrews regarded as the center of emotions. The noun translated "mind" literally means "heart" which the Hebrews regarded as the inner being and especially the mind and will. As other worshipers heard his petition they would be challenged to petition God to examine their lives as well. In this way the psalmist's petition forced them to consider whether they were as confident as the psalmist that God would approve the character of their lives.

The psalmist's defense. The psalmist defends his right to vindication in verses 3-8. First, the psalmist defends his right to vindication based on his reliance on God's steadfast love and truth in verse 3, "For your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk about in your truth." The psalmist uses the expressions "before my eyes" and "I walk about" to indicate his reliance on God's steadfast love and truth. The expression "before my eyes" indicates that he is always mindful of God's steadfast love as he lives his life. The noun translated "steadfast love" emphasizes God's unwavering commitment to act with love toward his covenant people. The expression "I walk about in your truth" indicates that he lives his life by God's truth. Probably the truth that he is referring to is what God has revealed in his word.

Second, the psalmist defends his right to vindication based on his avoidance of wicked influences in verses 4-5, "I do not sit with deceitful men or consort with those who conceal. I abhor the assembly of evildoers and do not sit with the wicked." His refusal to sit and consort with deceitful and wicked men is emphasized in the Hebrew text (the negative *lo* with the imperfect). Each line stresses through repetition the psalmist's refusal to be influenced by wicked people. His refusal to sit and consort with deceitful and wicked men portrays his determination not to associate with them and perhaps be corrupted by their deceit and wickedness. His abhorrence for the assembly of evildoers indicates that he is repulsed by the thought of joining their assembly and perhaps being corrupted by their evil.

Third, the psalmist defends his right to vindication based on his innocence and dedication to the proclamation of God's praise and wonders in verses 6-7, "I wash my hands in innocence and go all about your altar, LORD in order to proclaim your praise and to recount all your wonders." Actually, the language employed in this assertion could indicate that the psalmist is a priest rather than a king. However, the reference to washing hands is probably used figuratively and the reference to the altar is probably another way of referring to worship. The reference to the washing of hands probably refers to a ceremonial washing of hands before service at the altar. The qualifying phrase "in innocence" perhaps indicates that there is a sense in which the ceremonial washing was unnecessary because he was already innocent. The psalmist stresses his dedication to worship by the verb stem (*po'el*) and mood (cohortative). The purpose of his dedication to worship was to proclaim God's praise and wonders.

Finally, the psalmist defends his right to vindication based on his passion for God's house and glorious presence in verse 8, "I love the habitation of your house, LORD and the place where your glory dwells." Though somewhat ambiguous, the first line of this verse probably means that the psalmist loves dwelling in God's house. However, this assertion should probably not be taken literally. He did not literally dwell in God's house, but he did enjoy the time he spent there. The reason that the psalmist loves dwelling in God's house is because it is God's house and the place where his glory dwells. As other worshipers listened to the psalmist's bases of confidence that he would be approved by God, they were forced to examine themselves to determine whether they were conducting themselves based on God's steadfast love and truth, avoiding the influence of the wicked, serving God with innocence and diligently proclaiming God's praise and wonders, and loving to be in God's house so they could be confident like the psalmist. Therefore, the worshipers should conduct themselves based on God's steadfast love and truth, avoid the influence of deceitful and wicked people, serve God with innocence and diligently proclaim God's praise and wonders, and have passion for God's house and glorious presence like the psalmist so that they can confidently ask God to vindicate them like the psalmist.

The Psalmist's Third Appeal for Vindication

The psalmist again appeals for vindication in verses 9-11. In this appeal he expands on his petition for vindication. Through this appeal the psalmist was seeking to challenge other worshipers to carefully live with faith and integrity so that they can confidently petition the LORD for justice, redemption, and grace along with him.

The psalmist's petition for justice, redemption, and grace. The psalmist petitions God for justice, redemption, and grace in verses 9-10, "May you not take away my soul along with sinners, nor my life with bloodthirsty men, those in whose hands is a scheme and whose right hand is full of a bribe." He stresses the urgency of his appeal by using the jussive mood. The psalmist petitions God for redemption and grace in the second line of verse 11, "Redeem me and be gracious to me." The nature of these petitions is much different from those that have preceded ("Judge me" in verse 1; and "Test me . . . and try me; appraise . . ." in verse 2). At this point the psalmist expands his petition for vindication and specifies what vindication entails. Justice is the righteous judgment of God that leads to the condemnation of sinners and the acquittal of the righteous. Redemption is the buying back of a friend or relation who has been sold into slavery and suggests in this case deliverance from a disastrous and dishonorable fate. Grace is the favorable regard and benevolent treatment of God. As other worshipers heard the psalmist's petition they would be encouraged by the hope of justice, redemption, and grace to petition God along with him.

The psalmist's defense. The psalmist defends his right to justice, redemption, and grace in the first line of verse 11, "Instead, I myself walk in my integrity." As in verse 1, the psalmist is probably asserting that he conducted his life in complete accord with the way of righteousness. He emphasizes his commitment to living with integrity by doubling the subject pronoun (Literally "I, I walk in my integrity" and indicated in translation with the reflexive pronoun). Whereas he asserted his commitment to living with integrity in verse 1 using the perfect state, he now asserts his present and ongoing commitment to living with integrity using the imperfect state. As other worshipers listened to the psalmist's basis of confidence that God would not condemn him along with the wicked, but redeem and be gracious to him they would be forced to

examine themselves to determine whether they were living with integrity so they could be confident like the psalmist. Therefore, the worshipers should live with integrity and faith like the psalmist so that they can confidently ask God for justice, redemption, and grace like the psalmist.

The Psalmist's Affirmation of Faith

The psalmist affirms his faith in the stability of his life and that he will have reason to praise the LORD for his blessings in verse 12. Through this affirmation of faith the psalmist was seeking to challenge other worshipers to carefully live with faith and integrity so that they can be confident that their lives are stable and they will have reason to praise the LORD along with him.

The psalmist's faith in the stability of his life. The psalmist affirms his faith in the stability of his life in the first line of verse 12, "My foot stands on level ground." When people stand on the side of a hill where the ground is uneven their footing can be precarious and they can easily fall. Conversely, when people stand on a flat surface where the ground is level their footing is firm and they are in little danger of falling. Of course the psalmist is not referring literally to his footing, but to the basis of his life. The psalmist's confident assertion of the stability of his life raises the question, "What were the grounds for his confidence?" Based on the rest of the psalm, the psalmist's grounds for confidence were his faith in the LORD and the integrity of his life. As other worshipers listened to the psalmist's confident assertion of the stability of his life they were forced to examine themselves to determine whether they were living with faith and integrity like the psalmist so they can be confident like him.

The psalmist's faith that he will again bless the LORD. The psalmist affirms his faith that he will again bless the LORD in the second line of verse 12, "I will bless the LORD in the assemblies." The verb translated "I will bless" is frequently used to describe God blessing of his people. When the subject and recipient are reversed as here the implication is that God is being praised because of his blessings. Most translations interpret "the assemblies" as a plural of extension and translate it "the great assembly." In either case, the expression refers to the assembly of God's people for worship. The psalmist's confident assertion that he would again bless the LORD raises the question again, "What were the grounds for his confidence?" Based on the rest of the psalm, the psalmist's grounds for confidence were his faith in the LORD and the integrity of his life. As other worshipers listened to the psalmist's confident assertion that he would again bless the LORD they were forced to examine themselves to determine whether they were living with integrity like the psalmist so they can be confident like him. Therefore, the worshipers should trust in the LORD and carefully maintain their integrity without slipping like the psalmist so that they can have confidence that their lives are stable and they will have reason to bless the LORD like the psalmist.

Application of the Message

Establishing Correspondence

Christians today also live in a wicked world and they often seem caught in the middle between the wicked world and God. On the one hand, wicked people attack them because of their dedication to God. On the other hand, God's judgment of the wicked in the world often impacts their lives as well. As a result, they may either question God's justice or compromise their commitment to righteousness because the righteous suffer along with the wicked. These

correspondences with the original situation provide a strong basis for applying the message of Psalm 26 to the contemporary situation.

Distinguishing the Contextualized

There is very little of a contextualized nature in the passage that would require that the message of this passage be limited or adjusted. However, Christians today do not worship in the temple around the altar or wash their hands ritually before worship. Nonetheless, these contextualized elements can be related to equivalents in the modern context. Therefore, the statement of the applied message that follows has only been modified slightly.

Adjusting the Message

Christians should live with integrity and trust in the LORD without slipping so that they can confidently ask God to vindicate them. Christians should conduct themselves based on God's steadfast love and truth, avoid the influence of deceitful and wicked people, worship God with innocence and dedication to the proclamation of God's praise and wonders, and have passion for God's house and glorious presence so that they can confidently ask God to vindicate them. Christians should live with integrity like the psalmist so that they can confidently ask God for justice, redemption, and grace. Christians should trust in the LORD and carefully maintain their integrity without slipping so that they can have confidence that their lives are stable and they will have reason to praise the LORD for his blessings.

Communication of the Message

Title: Vindicate Me, LORD

Objective: The objective of this message is to encourage Christians to carefully maintain their integrity and trust God without slipping.

Proposition: Christians should carefully live with integrity and faith by conducting themselves based on God's steadfast love and truth, avoiding wicked influences, being dedicated to proclaiming his praise, and being passionate for God's presence so that they can confidently ask God for vindication and have confidence that their lives are stable and they will have reason to praise him.

Introduction

Christians today live in a wicked world and they often seem caught in the middle between the wicked world and God. On the one hand, wicked people attack them because of their dedication to God. On the other hand, God's judgment of the wicked in the world often impacts their lives as well. As a result, they may lack confidence in God's justice or compromise their commitment to righteousness because they suffer along with the wicked. The psalmist also struggled with this dilemma, but he remained confident in God's justice and his own integrity and faith. In fact, he was so confident that he asked God to judge, test, try, and appraise him. I wonder if you have that kind of confidence in your faith and integrity. *Read Psalm 26.*

I. Christians should live with integrity and faith so that they can have confidence to pray for vindication.

- A. The psalmist petitions the LORD for vindication in the first line of verse 1, "Judge me, LORD" and again in verse 2, "Vindicate me, LORD, and try me; appraise my heart and my mind." I wonder if any of us would have the confidence to pray such a prayer.
- B. The psalmist defends his right to vindication in the remainder of verse 1 and reveals to us how we can have his confidence, "For I myself walk in my integrity and trust in the LORD; I do not slip." I wonder if any of us would have the confidence to make this claim.
- C. Illustration of a Life of Integrity and Faith
- D. Application

II. Christians should conduct themselves based on God's steadfast love and truth, avoid wicked influences, be dedicated to proclaiming God's praise, and be passionate for God's presence so that they can have confidence to pray for vindication.

- A. The psalmist again prays for vindication in verse 2, "Test me, LORD, and try me; Appraise my heart and my mind." I wonder if any of us would have the confidence to pray such a prayer.
- B. The psalmist defends his right to vindication in verses 3-8.
 1. First, he conducts himself based on God's steadfast love and truth in verse 3, "For your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk about in your truth."
 2. Second, he avoids wicked influences in verses 4-5, "I do not sit with deceitful men or consort with those who conceal. I abhor the assembly of evildoers and do not sit with the wicked."
 3. Third, his worship is characterized by innocence and dedication to the proclamation of God's praise and wonders in verses 6-7, "I wash my hands in innocence and go all about your altar, LORD in order to proclaim your praise and to recount all your wonders."
 4. Fourth, he is passionate for God's house and glorious presence in verse 8, "I love the habitation of your house, LORD and the place where your glory dwells." I wonder if any of us would have the confidence to make these claims.
- E. Illustration of a Life of Integrity and Faith
- F. Application

III. Christians should live with integrity and faith so that they can confidently ask God for justice, redemption, and grace like the psalmist.

- A. The psalmist petitions God for justice in verses 9-10, "May you not take away my soul along with sinners, nor my life with bloodthirsty men, those in whose hands is a scheme and whose right hand is full of a bribe."
- B. The psalmist petitions God for redemption and grace in the second line of verse 11, "Redeem me and be gracious to me."
- C. The psalmist defends his right to justice, redemption, and grace in the first line of verse 11, "Instead, I myself walk in my integrity." I wonder if any of us would have the confidence to make such a claim.
- D. Illustration of a Life of Integrity and Faith
- E. Application

IV. Christians should live with integrity and faith so that they can have confidence that their lives are stable and they will have reason to praise God.

- A. The psalmist affirms his faith in the stability of his life in the first line of verse 12, "My foot stands on level ground."

- B. The psalmist expresses his faith that he will again bless the LORD in the second line of verse 12, "I will bless the LORD in the assemblies."
- C. Illustration of God's Faithfulness to Those Who Live with Integrity and Faith
- D. Application

Conclusion

Christians today live in a wicked world and they often seem caught in the middle between the wicked world and God. On the one hand, wicked people attack them because of their dedication to God. On the other hand, God's judgment of the wicked often impacts their lives as well. As a result, they may either question God's justice. The psalmist also struggled with this dilemma, but he remained confident in God's justice and his own faith and integrity. In fact, he was so confident that he asked God to judge, test, try, and appraise him. I wonder if you have that kind of confidence in your faith and integrity. You should live with integrity and faith so that you can have confidence to pray for vindication. You should conduct yourselves based on God's steadfast love and truth, avoid the influence of deceitful and wicked people, worship God with innocence and dedication to the proclamation of God's praise, and have passion for God's house and glorious presence so that you can have confidence to pray for vindication. You should live with integrity and faith so that you can confidently ask God for justice, redemption, and grace. You should live with integrity and faith so that you can have confidence that your lives are stable and you will have reason to praise God for his blessings.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION

Psalm 27

Study of the Passage

Many scholars regard Psalm 27 as a compilation of two separate psalms in verses 1-6 and 7-14 (See Anderson, 219, Durham, 224, Oesterley, 194, and Weiser, 245, though Anderson at least allows for the possibility that Psalm 27 is a literary unity). Three reasons are usually given for this division. First, they observe that verses 1-6 express confidence while verses 7-14 are filled with anxiety and petition. Second, verses 1-6 and 7-14 are self-contained and make sense on their own. Third, the movement of the verses from faith in verses 1-6 to fear in verses 7-14 is unusual. Nonetheless, I have chosen to interpret Psalm 27 as a unit for several reasons (See also Broyles, 141-142, Craigie, 230-231, Leupold, 234-235, and Ross, 623-624). First, Psalm 27 is a single psalm in every Hebrew manuscript and in the versions. Second, the psalm has a unifying theme. Throughout, the psalm is concerned with the presence of the LORD. The second half of the psalm only expresses anxiety when the removal of the LORD's presence is contemplated. Third, the diverse parts of the psalm are integrated into a clear strategy (See Strategy and Structure).

Text and Translation

Of David

1The LORD is my light and my salvation.

Who shall I fear?

The LORD is the stronghold of my life.

Who shall I dread?

2When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh,
my adversaries and my foes against me,
they themselves will stumble and fall.

3Though an army encamp against me,
my heart will not fear.

Though war rise against me,
in this I will continue to trust.

4One thing I ask of the LORD;
this is what I seek:

That I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,

to gaze on the beauty of the LORD
and to seek him in his temple.

5For he will hide me in his hidden lair on the day of trouble;
He will cover me with the cover of his tent
and set me high upon a rock.

6Then my head will be exalted above my enemies who surround me;
At his tabernacle I will certainly sacrifice with shouts of joy;
I will certainly sing and make music to the LORD.

7Hear my voice, LORD, I am calling;
 Be gracious to me and answer me.
8My heart says of you, "Seek his face!"¹
 I am seeking your face, LORD.
9Do not hide your face from me;
 Do not turn your servant away in anger;
You have been my helper.
 Do not abandon or forsake me, God my Savior.
10Though my father and mother forsake me,
 the LORD will welcome me.
11Teach me your way, LORD;
 Lead me on a level path because of my watchers.
12Do not put me in a life of constraints,
 for false witnesses rise up against me
 and a breath of violence.
13I am certain to see the goodness of the LORD
 in the land of the living."²
14Wait for the LORD;
 Be strong and let your heart be firm
 and wait for the LORD.

¹A literal translation of the Hebrew text would be "My heart says to you, "Seek my face!" However, most scholars emend the text. Many translations reflect a radical emendation of the Hebrew text. I have followed the conservative emendation of the text reflected in the New International Version. The NIV emends the text to read, "My heart says of you, 'Seek his face!'" The preposition "of" is simply an alternate translation of a Hebrew preposition that is normally translated "to." However, the changing of the pronoun "my" to "his" assumes that the Hebrew text is corrupt and emends it in a way that corresponds with the second line of the verse. There are three primary arguments for this emendation. First, the Septuagint and other versions vary considerably from the Hebrew text and one another, suggesting that the text was corrupt at an early date. Second, the reading of the Hebrew text does not correspond very well with the subsequent line in the parallel structure. Third, the emendation involves only a minor change in the Hebrew text. Nonetheless, an argument could be made for retaining the wording of the Hebrew text because it is the only reading of the Hebrew manuscripts, can be understood in the context (See Analysis of the Details), and explains the confusion of the Septuagint and other versions.

²A literal translation of the Hebrew text would be "If I had not been certain to look on the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living." However, I have followed most scholars who emend the text by omitting a compound word at the beginning that is normally translated "if not" or "unless." There are three primary arguments for omitting this compound word. First, this word normally introduces the prosthesis (the "if" statement) of a conditional statement, but there is no apodosis (the "then" statement). Second, this word is absent in five Hebrew manuscripts and the Septuagint and other versions. Third, the word has special marks even in the Hebrew manuscripts in which it is found, probably indicating that the Masoretes were unsure about it. Nonetheless, an argument could be made for retaining the reading of the Hebrew text. First, the great majority of Hebrew manuscripts include the compound word. Second, the resulting line

can be understood as aposiopesis, a figure of speech in which the ending is omitted for rhetorical effect. Third, the inclusion of this compound word results in a more difficult reading that scribes might be tempted to clarify or correct.

Situation and Purpose

Psalms 27 reflects a situation in which the psalmist has experienced difficulties and especially the accusations and attacks of his enemies. Verses 2-3 at least envision the possibility that evil men could advance against him, a great army could encamp against him, and war could rise against him. More specifically, verses 11-12 indicate that people were watching him with evil intent, false witnesses were rising up against him, and some were breathing threats of violence. In addition, the psalmist expresses some anxiety that God might forsake him and abandon him to his enemies in verse 9 and the first line of verse 12. The superscription identifies the psalm as a psalm of David. Certainly, David's life provides an appropriate background for understanding this psalm. The psalm would have been most meaningful to worshipers who had been accused and attacked by their enemies and were concerned that God had deserted them. The purpose of the psalm was to encourage these worshipers to trust in God, desire God and petition him to be with them, and commit themselves to patiently wait on God and remain determined.

Literary Context and Role

The Book of Psalms has no discernible strategy. Therefore, placing this psalm in its literary context and determining its role within that context is not very productive. Nonetheless, this psalm is loosely related to other psalms attributed to David. In addition, Ross suggests:

Psalms 25-28 seem to have been written during one period of time. The common motifs include the psalmist's undeserved accusation and opposition by unidentified enemies, consistent loyalty to the LORD, prayer for vindication and deliverance, and confidence that God will answer the prayer.

Form and Function

Psalms 27 is difficult to categorize using the general categories for psalms. In fact, the diverse character of the psalm is one of the reasons why most scholars have regarded it as a compilation of two psalms. Instead, this psalm contains a variety of elements and should be regarded as a much more complex liturgy that combines affirmation of faith, commitment, petition, and exhortation. An affirmation of faith is an expression of the psalmist's confidence in God because of what he has done, is doing, or will do. Affirmations of faith encourage the worshipers and lead them to affirm their own faith along with the psalmist. This psalm contains affirmations of faith that serve this function in verses 1-3. Affirmations of faith are also found within the petitions, commitments, and exhortations (5-6, 10, and 13). A commitment is an expression of the psalmist's determination to respond to God in a particular way, usually with an explanation of the reasons for the commitment. Commitments lead the worshipers to make commitments along with the psalmist for the reasons supplied. This psalm contains commitments that are intertwined with petitions in verses 4-6 and 8. A petition is the voicing of the psalmist's needs to God, usually with an explanation of why he is confident in seeking God's help. Petitions lead the worshipers to ask God for their needs along with the psalmist for the reasons supplied. This psalm contains petitions that are intertwined within commitments in verses 4-6 and 7-12. An exhortation contains commands or prohibitions, usually with explanations of why the commands

and prohibitions should be obeyed. The commands and prohibitions define the required response and the explanations provide the rationale for obedience. This psalm contains an exhortation that serves this function in verse 14.

Strategy and Structure

Psalms 27 has a sophisticated strategy that leads the worshipers to affirm their faith in God; commit themselves to seeking him; ask him for his presence, guidance, and protection; and wait on the LORD with patience and determination. The psalmist begins by affirming his faith, especially when attacked, based on the presence of the LORD in his life (1-3). The psalmist then commits himself to seek the LORD and asks for an intimate and abiding relationship with him (4-6). The psalmist then commits himself to seek the LORD again and pleads for God's acceptance, guidance, and protection (7-12). Through these stages the psalmist establishes the necessity of God's presence and leads the worshipers to plead for God's presence along with him. The psalmist concludes by directly exhorting the worshipers to wait on the LORD with patience and determination (13-14).

- I. The Psalmist's Faith and Fearlessness in the LORD (1-3)
 - A. The Psalmist's Fearlessness because of the LORD (1)
 1. The psalmist's fearlessness because the LORD is his light and salvation
 2. The psalmist's fearlessness because the LORD is the stronghold of his life
 - B. The Psalmist's Faith and Fearlessness even when Attacked (2-3)
 1. The psalmist's faith when his enemies advance against him (2)
 2. The psalmist's fearlessness though an army encamps against him (3a)
 3. The psalmist's faith though war rises against him (3b)
- II. The Psalmist's Commitment to and Petition for an Abiding Relationship with the LORD (4-6)
 - A. The Psalmist's Commitment and Petition (4)
 1. The priority of his commitment and petition
 2. The nature of his desire
 - B. Reasons for His Commitment and Petition (5-6)
 1. Protection from his enemies (5)
 2. Exaltation over his enemies leading to joyous worship (6)
- III. The Psalmist's Commitment to Seek the LORD and Petition for Acceptance, Guidance, and Protection (7-12)
 - A. The Psalmist's Petition that the LORD Graciously Hear and Answer (7)
 - B. The Psalmist's Commitment to Seek the LORD (8)
 - C. The Psalmist's Petition that the LORD Not Reject Him (9)
 1. The psalmist's petition that the LORD not hide his face or turn away in anger (9a)
 2. The psalmist's petition that the LORD not abandon or forsake him (9b)
 - D. The Psalmist's Faith that the LORD Will Not Reject Him (10)
 - E. The Psalmist's Petition that the LORD Teach and Lead Him (11)
 - F. The Psalmist's Petition that the LORD Not Put Him under the Control of His Enemies (12)
- IV. The Psalmist's Concluding Exhortation to Patience and Determination (13-14)
 - A. The Psalmist's Certainty of Seeing the Goodness of the LORD (13)

B. The Psalmist's Command for Patience and Determination (14)

Message or Messages

God's people should not fear but trust in the LORD like the psalmist even if evil men advance against them, a great army encamps against them, and war rises against them because the LORD is their light and salvation and the stronghold of their lives. God's people should above all else seek and ask for an abiding relationship with the LORD, an experience of his beauty, and access to him in the temple like the psalmist because he will protect them and exalt them over their enemies so that they will have reason to joyously sacrifice and sing praises to him. God's people should seek the LORD from their hearts and ask him to accept them, teach and lead them, and protect them like the psalmist because he is their helper and Savior, he will welcome them, and they need his help because of their enemies. God's people should trust the LORD, patiently wait on him to intervene, and remain determined because they will see the goodness of the LORD.

Analysis of the Details

The Psalmist's Faith and Fearlessness in the LORD

The psalmist affirms his faith and fearlessness in the LORD in verses 1-3. In this affirmation the psalmist declares his fearlessness because of the LORD and emphasizes the extent of his faith and fearlessness even when attacked. Through this affirmation of faith the psalmist was seeking to encourage other worshipers to affirm their faith in the LORD along with him.

The psalmist's fearlessness because of the LORD. The psalmist affirms his fearlessness because of the LORD in verse 1, "The LORD is my light and my salvation. Who shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life. Who shall I dread?" In the first line of each couplet the psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD in terms of God's gracious treatment of him. He affirms that the LORD is his light, probably meaning that he relies on the LORD for guidance and hope in a world that is dark with evil. Ross says, "The metaphor of 'light' signifies the joy of life, the perfection of holiness, and the illumination of the way of truth" (Ross, 626). He affirms that the LORD is his salvation, probably meaning that he relies on the LORD to deliver him from danger. He affirms that the LORD is his stronghold, meaning that he relies on the LORD for security. The second line in each couplet contains almost identical rhetorical questions that emphasize the extent of the psalmist's faith and fearlessness when threatened by enemies. These are the type of rhetorical questions that are the equivalent of an exclamation and have an implied response. In this case the questions imply the emphatic replies, "I have no one to fear!" and "I have no one to dread!" The repetition of these rhetorical questions emphasizes the confidence of the psalmist's affirmation of faith.

The psalmist's faith and fearlessness even when attacked. The psalmist emphasizes the extent of his faith and fearlessness even when attacked in verses 2-3. These verses contain three assertions that emphasize his affirmation of faith by repetition. In addition, the threat seems to increase the level of threat progressively, thereby intensifying his affirmation of faith (evil men>an army>war). First, the psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD when evil men advance against him in verse 2, "When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, my adversaries and my foes against me, they themselves will stumble and fall." The psalmist is using pictorial language and is not necessarily referring to physical assault. Instead, he is affirming God's faithfulness to protect him from attack from people with evil intent. The psalmist emphasizes the

severity of the threat by multiplying the words describing those who are attacking him ("evil men," "my adversaries," and "my foes"). He also emphasizes the severity of the threat by describing their evil intent, "to devour my flesh." He was not suggesting that cannibals were attacking him. Instead, he is simply indicating that they intend to do him harm in a dramatic way. The faith of the psalmist is affirmed in his assertion of what will happen to these evil men. Though they advance against him to do him harm, they will stumble and fall before they ever reach him. Again the psalmist is using pictorial language and does not necessarily mean that they will literally fall, but that their evil plans will be thwarted. This dramatic reversal of fortunes is emphasized in the Hebrew text by doubling the subject pronoun (Literally "they, they will stumble and fall" and indicated in translation with the reflexive pronoun) They will be the ones who come to harm rather than the psalmist. The psalmist also intensifies his affirmation of faith by using the perfect state of the verb, a state that is often used to stress certainty (See also Anderson, 222).

Second, the psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD even if an army encamps against him in the first half of verse 3, "Though an army encamps against me, my heart will not fear." The threat has now increased from "evil men" to "an army." In the Hebrew text the psalmist's lack of fear is emphasized (*lo* with the imperfect). By affirming that his heart will not fear rather than stating more directly that he will not fear the psalmist was probably stressing that peace would penetrate to the inner core of his being. Third, the psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD even if war rises against him in the second half of verse 3, "Though war rise against me, in this I will continue to trust." The threat has now increased from "an army" to "war." The psalmist emphasizes the persistence of his faith even with an increasing threat by the using a participle rather than a verb (translated "I will continue to trust"). As other worshipers listened to the psalmist's affirmations of faith they would be encouraged to affirm their own faith along with him. Therefore, the worshipers should not fear but trust in the LORD like the psalmist even if evil men advance against them, a great army encamps against them, and war rises against them because the LORD is their light and salvation and the stronghold of their lives.

The Psalmist's Commitment to and Petition for an Abiding Relationship with the LORD

The psalmist commits himself to seek and petitions for an abiding relationship with the LORD in verses 4-6. In this commitment and petition the psalmist describes his desire for the LORD and relates reasons for desiring the LORD. Through his commitment and petition the psalmist sought to inspire other worshipers to seek and petition for an abiding relationship with the LORD along with him.

The psalmist's commitment and petition. The psalmist commits himself to and asks for an abiding relationship with the LORD in verse 4. The psalmist introduces his desire for the LORD as the preeminent desire of his life in the first half of the verse, "One thing I ask of the LORD; this is what I seek." The psalmist desires the LORD so much that it is the only thing that he requests and seeks. The psalmist describes his desire for the LORD in the second half of the verse, "That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple." The psalmist's desire to dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of his life probably does not indicate that he wanted to take up residence in the temple for the remainder of his life. Instead, it expresses his desire for an intimate relationship with God that will last as long as he lives (See also Craigie, 232). The psalmist's

desire to gaze on the beauty of the LORD is ambiguous. He certainly does not mean it literally since God is spirit. However, he could be speaking of his desire for a mystical experience of God's beauty in worship. Craigie suggests that he is speaking of a symbolic experience of God through the beauty and glory of the temple (Craigie, 232). Oesterley paraphrases this line "to experience the sense of happiness and peace at being in Yahweh's presence" (Oesterley, 196). The psalmist's desire to seek the LORD in his temple probably indicates his longing for access to God, perhaps specifically through prayer. However, as Durham concludes, "They are a multiplication of expressions for the one thing which is in fact the basis of the poet's unwavering trust--the real presence of Yahweh" (Durham, 225).

Reasons for seeking and asking for an abiding relationship with the LORD. The psalmist relates reasons for seeking and asking for an abiding relationship with the LORD in verses 5-6. The psalmist explains that he desires the LORD because the LORD will protect him from his enemies in verse 5, "For he will hide me in his hidden lair on the day of trouble; he will cover me with the cover of his tent and set me high upon a rock." The psalmist emphasizes God's protection using three different illustrations to depict the protection of the LORD. First, the psalmist describes the LORD's protection as the LORD hiding him in a hidden lair. The psalmist doesn't mean that the LORD will stick him in a cave, but that the LORD will conceal him from danger as lions conceal their cubs in a hidden den. Second, the psalmist illustrates the LORD's protection by describing the LORD covering him with the cover of his tent. The psalmist doesn't literally mean that the LORD will conceal him under the flap of a tent, but that the LORD will conceal him from danger. As Weiser puts it, "Just as the stranger finds protection from menacing dangers in the hospitable hut or tent of a friendly host, so the faithful man knows that God will hide him in his shelter in the day of trouble" (Weiser, 249). However, the psalmist could also have the tabernacle in mind since it was considered a place of refuge. Third, the psalmist illustrates the LORD's protection by describing the LORD setting him high upon a rock. The psalmist doesn't literally mean that the LORD will put him on a rock, but that the LORD will make it impossible for the threat to reach him.

The psalmist explains that he desires the LORD because the LORD will exalt him over his enemies and he will have reason for joyous worship in verse 6, "Then my head will be exalted above my enemies who surround me; at his tabernacle I will certainly sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will certainly sing and make music to the LORD." The psalmist's affirmation that his relationship with the LORD would result in his head being exalted above his enemies expresses his confidence that God will give him victory and authority over them. He will be vindicated for his faith in God. The psalmist's exaltation over his enemies in turn will result in joyous worship. The certainty of the psalmist's expectation that he will joyously worship the LORD is emphasized by his use of cohortative voluntative mood (translated "I will certainly sacrifice . . . I will certainly sing and make music") and repetition. His shouts of joy stress the exuberance of his praise. As the worshipers listened to the psalmist's commitment and petition for an abiding relationship with the LORD and his description of the additional benefits of a relationship with him they would be inspired to seek and ask for an abiding relationship with the LORD along with him. Therefore, the worshipers should above all else seek and ask for an abiding relationship with the LORD, an experience of his beauty, and access to him in his temple because he will protect them and exalt them over their enemies so that they will have reason to joyously sacrifice and sing praises to him.

The Psalmist's Commitment to Seek the LORD and Petition

for Acceptance, Guidance, and Protection

The psalmist commits himself to seek the LORD and petitions him for acceptance, guidance, and protection in verses 7-12. Through his commitment and petition the psalmist sought to lead other worshipers to seek the LORD and ask him to accept, guide, and protect them along with him.

The psalmist's petition that the LORD graciously hear and answer. The psalmist asks the LORD to graciously hear and answer his petitions in verse 7, "Hear my voice, LORD, I am calling; be gracious to me and answer me." This introductory petition gives the impression of desperate pleading and underscores the psalmist's urgent desire that his petitions for God's acceptance, guidance, and protection be answered. As other worshipers listened to the psalmist's desperate plea for the LORD to hear and answer him they would sense his urgency and the importance of the petitions he is about to make.

The psalmist's commitment to seek the LORD. The psalmist commits himself to seek the LORD in verse 8, "My heart says of you, 'Seek his face!' I am seeking your face, LORD." Seeking the face of the LORD means to strive for an experience of God. Ross says, "Seeking the face of the LORD means praying for his grace" (Ross, 631). The psalmist emphasizes that his commitment to seek the LORD came from the very core of his being by relating his heart's appeal for him to seek the face of the LORD in the first line of the verse. His expression of commitment in the second line of the verse stresses that he was acting on this inner desire to experience the LORD. This expression of the psalmist's commitment to seek the LORD recalls his earlier commitments to seek the LORD in verses 4-6. As the worshipers listened to the psalmist's commitment to seek the LORD they would be led to commit themselves to seek the LORD along with him.

The psalmist's petition that the LORD not reject him. The psalmist pleads with the LORD not to reject him in verses 9. First, the psalmist pleads with the LORD not to hide his face or turn away in his anger in the first part of verse 9, "Do not hide your face from me; do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper." Hiding one's face is a way of avoiding someone. Turning away is an indication of rejection. Therefore, the psalmist was pleading with God not to avoid or reject him. In the final line of the verse the psalmist intensifies his plea by declaring that the LORD has been his helper. If God should avoid and reject him, he will have no help. Second, the psalmist pleads with the LORD not to abandon or forsake him in the second part of verse 9, "Do not abandon or forsake me, God my Savior." The verbs "abandon" and "forsake" both convey the idea of being left alone to fend for oneself. The psalmist intensifies his plea by addressing the LORD as his Savior. If God should abandon or forsake him, he will have no one to save him. As other worshipers listened to the psalmist's desperate pleas for the LORD not to reject him they would be filled with the fear of being rejected by the LORD as well and plead with the LORD to accept them along with him.

The psalmist's faith that the LORD will welcome him. The psalmist affirms his faith that the LORD will welcome him in verse 10, "Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will welcome me." Parents normally love their children and would never reject them. Even when everyone else rejects them, their parents would normally accept them. However, the psalmist maintains that the love and acceptance of God surpasses the love and acceptance of parents. Leupold commends a half-proverbial meaning for this verse: "When all earthly props give way, the Lord can still be depended upon, and on Him I rest" (Leupold, 238). As other

worshippers listened to the psalmist's affirmation of faith that the LORD would welcome him they would be encouraged to petition the LORD to accept them as well.

The psalmist's petition that the LORD teach and lead him. The psalmist petitions the LORD to teach and lead him in verse 11, "Teach me your way, LORD; lead me on a level path because of my watchers." Though the two petitions of this verse are closely related, each has a distinct emphasis. The way of the LORD that the psalmist asks God to teach him is the manner of life that he has revealed in his law. The level path that the psalmist asks God to lead him on is the manner of life that will result in stability. The Old Testament affirms repeatedly that living in a manner that is in conformity with God's revelation in the law will result in a stable life. The psalmist emphasizes the necessity of God's instruction and leadership by drawing attention to those who were watching him. The context suggests that these watchers have a malignant purpose. They are watching him so that they can find an opportunity to accuse or attack him (See verse 12). As other worshippers listened to the psalmist's petition they would be led to ask God to teach and lead them along with him.

The psalmist's petition that the LORD not put him under the control of his enemies. The psalmist asks the LORD not to turn him over to his enemies in verse 12, "Do not put me in a life of constraints, for false witnesses rise up against me and a breath of violence." A "life of constraints" suggests that the psalmist is asking God not to put him under the control of his enemies. This understanding seems to be reflected in the translation of the NIV, "Do not turn me over to the desires of my enemies." The psalmist emphasizes the urgency of God not putting him under the control of his enemies by describing the malevolent intent of his enemies. They were looking for an opportunity to falsely accuse or attack him violently. Ross says, "These people were watching for any occasion to accuse and any weakness to exploit" (Ross, 633). As the worshippers listened to the psalmist's petition they would be led to ask God to protect them along with him. Therefore, the worshippers should seek the LORD from their hearts and ask him to accept them, teach and lead them, and protect them along with the psalmist because he is their helper and Savior, he will welcome them, and they need his help because of their enemies.

The Psalmist's Concluding Exhortation to Patience And Determination

The psalmist concludes by exhorting other worshippers to faith, patience, and determination in verses 13-14. He affirms faith in the LORD as the basis for his commands for them to patiently wait on the LORD and remain determined. Through this exhortation the psalmist urged the worshippers to patiently wait in faith for the LORD and remain resolute in their commitment to the LORD based on the certainty that they would see the goodness of the LORD.

The psalmist's certainty of seeing the goodness of the LORD. The psalmist affirms his faith that he will certainly see the goodness of the LORD in verse 13, "I am certain to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living." The certitude of the psalmist's affirmation of faith is stressed by the meaning of the verb he employs. The verb translated "I am certain" means "to stand firm." However, it is frequently used in a similar sense to the verb meaning "to trust or believe." Nonetheless, it retains an emphasis on firmness and certainty. The reference to "the goodness of the LORD" probably refers to the blessings of God. The qualifying phrase "in the land of the living" indicates that his expectation is for this life rather than life after death. As the worshippers heard the psalmist's affirmation of faith they would be encouraged to trust in the LORD and affirm their faith in the LORD along with the psalmist.

The psalmist's command for patience and determination. The psalmist commands the worshipers to patiently wait on the LORD and remain resolute in their commitment to the LORD in verse 14, "Wait for the LORD; be strong and let your heart be firm and wait for the LORD." The command to wait for the LORD is emphasized by repetition. Waiting on the LORD requires faith and implies patience. Though the commands to "be strong and let your heart be firm" are different in wording they also emphasize by repetition the need for determination. The psalmist is obviously not appealing for physical strength, but strength of resolve. Similarly, the heart is the inner core of a person's being, including the will. A firm heart implies resolve of the will. These commands explicitly identify the appropriate response of the worshipers. Some scholars conclude that the words of verse 14 are no longer the words of the psalmist. A common approach is to conclude that this exhortation comes from a priest who concludes the liturgy with an exhortation to those who have asked the LORD for his presence and help through the psalm (Anderson, 226; and Craigie, 234). However, the verse contains no indication of a change of speaker and it appears from verse 13 that the psalmist's faith has already been revived. A more likely possibility is that verse 14 contains a self-exhortation in which the psalmist exhorts himself to patience and determination (Leupold, 239 and Weiser, 254). However, again the psalm contains no indication that the psalmist is directing this exhortation inward. The most likely conclusion is that the psalmist has concluded his psalm by directly exhorting other worshipers to be patient and determined (Durham, 226 concludes that he is speaking "half to himself and half to any who will listen"). Therefore, the worshipers should trust the LORD, patiently wait on him to intervene, and remain determined because they will see the goodness of the LORD.

Application of the Message

Establishing Correspondence

Christians today also experience difficulties including false accusations and attacks by their enemies. During these times it is common for Christians to become anxious because they fear that God has rejected and abandoned them. These correspondences between the original and modern situations provide a strong basis for applying the message of Psalm 27 to the modern situation.

Distinguishing the Contextualized

This passage contains very little of a contextualized nature that requires that the message be limited or adjusted when applied to the modern situation. Nonetheless, this passage does have a few points of tension between the original and modern situations. Christians no longer worship in the temple (4) or offer sacrifices at the tabernacle (6). Nonetheless, these contextualized elements can be generalized or related to equivalents in the modern context. Therefore, the statement of the applied message that follows has only been modified slightly.

Adjusting the Message

Christians should not fear but trust in the LORD like the psalmist no matter what the threat against them because the LORD is their light and salvation and the stronghold of their lives. Christians should above all else seek and ask for an abiding relationship with him, an experience of his beauty, and access to him because he will protect them and exalt them over their enemies so that they will have reason to joyously worship and sing praises to him. Christians should seek

the LORD and ask him to accept them, teach and lead them, and protect them because he is their helper and Savior, he will welcome them, and they need him because of their enemies. Christians should trust the LORD, patiently wait on him to intervene, and remain determined because they will see the goodness of the LORD.

Communication of the Message

Title: The LORD Is My Light and My Salvation

Objective: The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians to trust in the LORD, seek and ask for an abiding relationship with him; and wait for him with patience and determination.

Proposition: Christians should not fear but patiently trust in the LORD and sincerely seek for an abiding relationship with him because he is their light and salvation and the stronghold of their lives, he will protect and exalt them over their enemies, he is their helper and Savior and they need him, and they will experience his goodness.

Introduction

Christians today often experience difficulties, including false accusations and attacks by their enemies. During these times it is common for Christians to become anxious because they fear that God has rejected and abandoned them. The author of Psalm 27 clearly experienced similar difficulties and anxiety. In response, he affirmed his faith in the LORD, committed himself to and asked for an abiding relationship with the LORD, and exhorted other worshipers to patience and determination. Let's let him lead us to overcome our anxiety, reaffirm our faith and commitment to seek the LORD, and renew our patience and determination. *Read Psalm 27.*

I. Christians should not fear but trust in the LORD no matter what the threat because he is their light and salvation and the stronghold of their lives.

A. The psalmist affirms his fearlessness because of the LORD in verse 1, "The LORD is my light and my salvation. Who shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life. Who shall I dread?"

B. The psalmist emphasizes the extent of his faith and fearlessness no matter the extent of the threat in verses 2-3.

1. First, the psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD when evil men advance against him in verse 2, "When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, my adversaries and my foes against me, they themselves will stumble and fall."

2. Second, the psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD even if an army encamps against him in the first half of verse 3, "Though an army encamp against me, my heart will not fear."

3. Third, the psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD even if war rises against him in the second half of verse 3, "Though war rise against me, in this I will continue to trust."

C. Illustration of Faith and Fearlessness

D. Application

II. Christians should above all else seek and ask for an abiding relationship with the LORD because he will protect them and exalt them over their enemies.

A. The psalmist commits himself to and asks for an abiding relationship with the LORD in verse 4.

1. He introduces his commitment and petition for an abiding relationship with the LORD as the preeminent desire of his life in the first two lines of the verse, "One thing I ask of the LORD; this is what I seek."

2. The psalmist describes his desire for the LORD in the remainder of the verse, "That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple."

B. The psalmist explains that he seeks and asks for an abiding relationship with the LORD because the LORD will protect him from his enemies in verse 5, "For he will hide me in his hidden lair on the day of trouble; he will cover me with the cover of his tent and set me high upon a rock."

C. The psalmist explains that he seeks and asks for an abiding relationship with the LORD because the LORD will exalt him over his enemies and he will have reason for joyous worship in verse 6, "Then my head will be exalted above my enemies who surround me; at his tabernacle I will certainly sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will certainly sing and make music to the LORD."

D. Illustration of the Peace that Comes from Living in a Relationship with God

E. Application

III. Christians should sincerely seek the LORD's acceptance, guidance, and protection because he is their helper and Savior and they need him.

A. The psalmist asks the LORD to graciously hear and answer his petitions in verse 7, "Hear my voice, LORD, I am calling; be gracious to me and answer me."

B. The psalmist commits himself to seek the LORD from his heart in verse 8, "My heart says of you, 'Seek his face!' I am seeking your face, LORD."

C. The psalmist pleads with the LORD not to reject him in verse 9.

1. First, the psalmist pleads with the LORD not to hide his face or turn away in his anger in the first three lines of verse 9, "Do not hide your face from me; do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper."

2. Second, the psalmist pleads with the LORD not to abandon or forsake him in the final line of verse 9, "Do not abandon or forsake me, LORD my Savior."

D. The psalmist affirms his faith that the LORD will welcome him in verse 10, "Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will welcome me."

E. The psalmist petitions the LORD to teach and lead him in verse 11, "Teach me your way, LORD; lead me on a level path because of my watchers."

F. The psalmist asks the LORD not to turn him over to his enemies in verse 12, "Do not put me in a life of constraints, for false witnesses rise up against me and a breath of violence."

G. Illustration of the Fearfulness of Facing Trials without God

H. Application

IV. Christians should patiently wait on the LORD and remain resolute in their commitment to him because they will see his goodness.

A. The psalmist affirms his faith that he will certainly see the goodness of the LORD in verse 13, "I am certain to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living."

B. The psalmist commands the worshipers to patiently wait on the LORD and remain resolute in their commitment to the LORD in verse 14, "Wait for the LORD; be strong and let your heart be firm and wait for the LORD."

C. Illustration of Patiently Waiting on God and Remaining Resolute

D. Application

Conclusion

Christians today often experience difficulties and trials. During these times it is common for Christians to become anxious. The psalmist responds to difficulty and anxiety in Psalm 27 by affirming his faith in the LORD, committing himself to seek the LORD, asking the LORD for an intimate relationship, guidance, and protection, and exhorting other worshipers to patience and determination. Let's let him lead us to overcome our anxiety. You should not fear but trust in the LORD no matter what the threat because he is your light and salvation and the stronghold of your lives. You should above all else seek for an abiding relationship with the LORD because he will protect you and exalt you over your enemies. You should seek sincerely the LORD's acceptance, guidance, and protection because he is your helper and Savior and you need him. You should patiently wait on the LORD and remain resolute in your commitment to him because you will see his goodness.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

ASCRIBE TO THE LORD GLORY AND STRENGTH

Psalm 29

Study of the Passage

Text and Translation

A Psalm of David

- 1 Ascribe to the LORD, sons of God,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
- 2 Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name;
Prostrate yourselves to the LORD in the adornment of holiness.¹
- 3 The voice of the LORD is over the waters;
The God of glory thunders,
the LORD over the many waters.
- 4 The voice of the LORD is powerful;
The voice of the LORD is in splendor.
- 5 The voice of the LORD is breaking the cedars;
The LORD shatters the cedars of Lebanon.
- 6 He makes Lebanon jump like a calf,
Sirion like a young wild ox.
- 7 The voice of the LORD splits into flames of fire.
- 8 The voice of the LORD makes the desert quake;
The LORD makes the Desert of Kadesh quake.
- 9 The voice of the LORD makes the oaks writhe²
and strips the forests;
And in his temple all of his are crying, "Glory!"
- 10 The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;
The LORD sits enthroned as King forever.
- 11 The LORD gives strength to his people;
The LORD blesses his people with peace.

¹Weiser translates "in the adornment of holiness" with "when he appears in his sanctuary." However, this seems to be a forced attempt to fit the translation into his understanding of the historical background of the psalm.

²Some emend the text to read, "The voice of the LORD makes the oaks whirl." This emendation certainly corresponds to the following line. However, the Hebrew text can be understood in its original form (See Analysis of the Details).

Situation and Purpose

Psalm 29 reflects a general context of worship. However, the psalm may also reflect a more specific context of worship. Most commentators identify the psalm as a "theophany hymn" and set it in the context of a festival celebrating the appearance of God (Anderson, 232; Durham,

228; and Weiser, 261). In addition, the psalm may reflect generally on the situation of the psalmist and other worshipers. The psalmist's affirmation that "The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD is enthroned as King forever" seems to reflect a concern that God's people have lost their confidence in God's sovereignty because of the difficulty of their lives. The "flood" is almost certainly an allusion to the flood account. However, it is also probably a representation of these difficulties. This crisis of faith would certainly explain the psalmist's emphasis on God's glory and strength in the call to worship in verses 1-2, his own praise and report of the praise of all those in the temple in verses 3-9, and his affirmation of faith in verses 11-12. The superscription identifies Psalm 29 as a psalm of David. Certainly the life of David would be an appropriate historical context for understanding the psalm. His life contains many times when his faith and the faith of the people of Israel were tested. The purpose of the psalm was to strengthen the faith of God's people and encourage them to trust and praise the LORD.

Literary Context and Role

The Book of Psalms has no discernible strategy. Therefore, placing this psalm in its literary context and determining its role within that context is not very productive. Nonetheless, this psalm is loosely related to other psalms attributed to David. In addition, this psalm is also related by form to other psalms of praise. Moreover, other psalms also depict the voice of the LORD as thunder (Psalms 18, 46, 68, and 77).

Form and Function

Psalm 29 can be generally classified as a psalm of praise. However, each psalm of praise is a distinct liturgy and a clearer understanding of the form would result from an evaluation of each of the different elements in the liturgy of praise. This psalm consists of exhortation, declaration of praise, and affirmation of faith. In exhortation the psalmist normally commands righteous character and conduct and prohibits wicked character and conduct. Explanations of the benefits of righteous character and conduct and the disastrous consequences of wicked character and conduct usually accompany these commands and prohibitions to encourage compliance. However, commands to praise God are distinct. They can be more specifically designated as calls to worship and are usually based on the character and actions of God. Psalm 29 contains specific commands in verses 1-2, "Ascribe to the LORD" (3 times) and "Prostrate yourselves to the LORD." These commands are reinforced by the identification of God found within the call to praise. An unusual feature of this call to worship is that it is not directed to the worshipers but to "the sons of God" or "the heavenly beings." Nonetheless, the praise of these heavenly beings implies the need for the worshipers to praise God since they are also God's children (See Analysis of the Details). Praise is the psalmist's declaration of God's greatness because of who he is and what he has done. Praise serves within the context of worship to inspire other worshipers to praise God along with the psalmist for the very reasons he identifies within his praise. Psalm 29 contains declarations of praise in verses 3-9. A unique feature of this praise is that the psalmist also asserts that "in his temple all of his are crying, "Glory!" This assertion further intensifies the need for the worshipers to join the psalmist and all who belong to the LORD in praising God. An affirmation of faith is an expression of the psalmist's confidence in God because of who he is and what he has done, is doing, or will do. Affirmations of faith serve within the context of worship to encourage the worshipers to affirm their trust in God along with the psalmist for the very reasons he identifies within his affirmation. Psalm 29 contains affirmations of faith in verses 10-11.

Strategy and Structure

The psalmist begins with a celestial call to worship (1-2a). Next, the psalmist praises the authority, power, and splendor of the LORD and his voice and asserts that all who are his glorify him. Finally, he affirms the LORD's sovereignty and strengthening and blessing of his people. As the psalm develops the worshipers are led to praise the LORD following the heavenly beings (1-2) and the psalmist and all who belong to the LORD (3-9) because of his sovereignty and strengthening and blessing of his people (10-11).

- I. The Psalmist's Call to Celestial Worship (1-2)
 - A. Command for the Sons of God to Ascribe Glory and Strength to the LORD (1-2a)
 - B. Command for the Sons of God to Prostrate Themselves before the LORD (2b)
- II. The Praise of the Psalmist and All Who Belong to the LORD (3-9)
 - A. The Psalmist's Praise to the LORD and His Voice (3-9b)
 1. The authority of the LORD's voice over the waters (3)
 2. The power and splendor of the LORD's voice (4)
 3. The power of the LORD's voice to shatter the cedars of Lebanon (5)
 4. The power of the LORD to make the mountains jump (6)
 5. The power of the LORD's voice to split into flames of fire (7)
 6. The power of the LORD's voice to make the deserts writhe (8)
 7. The power of the LORD's voice to make the does writhe and strip the forests (9a-b)
 - B. The Praise of All Who Belong to the LORD (9c)
- III. The Psalmist's Affirmation of Faith in the LORD (10-11)
 - A. The Psalmist's Faith in the Sovereignty of the LORD (10)
 1. The psalmist's faith in the sovereignty of the LORD over the flood
 2. The psalmist's faith in the eternal reign of the LORD as king
 - B. The Psalmist's Faith in the LORD to Strengthen and Bless (11)
 1. The psalmist's faith in the LORD to strengthen his people
 2. The psalmist's faith in the LORD to bless his people with peace

Message or Messages

God's people should praise the LORD with humility and holiness because that is what the heavenly sons of God are commanded to do, they also are God's children, and the LORD is glorious and mighty. God's people should glorify the LORD because the voice of the God of glory called the world into being, the voice of the LORD is powerful and majestic and has authority over all his creation, and the psalmist and all those who belong to the LORD are glorifying him in the temple. God's people should trust the LORD because he is sovereign over the flood, he will exercise his sovereign rule forever, and he gives strength to his people and blesses them with peace.

Analysis of the Details

The Psalmist's Call to Celestial Worship

The psalmist calls for celestial worship of the LORD in verses 1-2. Through this celestial call to worship the psalmist sought to lead the worshipers to recognize their need to praise the LORD so that they join the heavenly beings in worshipping him.

Command for the sons of God to ascribe glory and strength to the LORD. The psalmist commands the sons of God to ascribe glory and strength to the LORD in verse 1 and the first line of verse 2, "Ascribe to the LORD, sons of God, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name." The phrase literally translated "sons of God" is normally used to refer to heavenly beings (Genesis 6:2, 4; Job 1:6, 2:1, 38:7; and Psalms 82:6, 89:7). Indeed, scholars almost universally agree that the psalmist is speaking of heavenly beings (Anderson, 234; Craigie, 246; Durham, 228; and Weiser, 262). I have chosen to follow this overwhelming preponderance of scholarly opinion. However, Israel is frequently referred to as God's son and the people of Israel are frequently referred to as his sons (Exodus 4:22-23; Deuteronomy. 14:1, 32:5, 20; Psalms 80:16; Isaiah 1:2, 4, 30:1, 9; Jeremiah 3:14, 22, 4:22, 31:20; and Hoshea 2:1, 11:1). Therefore, it would be natural for them to recognize the implications of this command to the heavenly sons of God for their own worship since they also were God's children. The act of worship prescribed in this verse is indicated by the verb "ascribe." The word translated "ascribe" is a very general term that frequently means "give." In this context the verb probably encompasses acknowledgment and praise of the LORD for his glory and strength. The verb occurs three times, emphasizing by repetition the need for the sons of God to acknowledge and praise the LORD for his glory and strength. The noun translated "glory" comes from a verbal root meaning "be heavy" and is used to stress the importance or significance of something, especially God. To ascribe glory to God or his name means to give him the honor he deserves as the LORD. Similarly to ascribe strength to God means to acknowledge and praise the LORD for his might. In fact, the power and authority of the LORD become the dominant theme of verses 3-9. As the worshipers listened to the psalmist command the heavenly sons of God to worship they would recognize that they also were God's children and they needed to acknowledge and praise the LORD for his glory and might along with the celestial worshipers.

Command for the sons of God to prostrate themselves before the LORD. The psalmist commands the sons of God to prostrate themselves before the LORD in the second line of verse 2, "Prostrate yourselves to the LORD in the adornment of holiness." The imperative verb translated "Prostrate yourselves" is frequently translated "worship." Prostration is certainly an act of worship, but one with very specific implications. People prostrated themselves before those whom they recognized as being their superiors. Therefore, the heavenly sons of God are commanded to humble themselves before the LORD in worship in recognition of his authority over them. The garments they are commanded to wear also reveal something about the nature of their worship. Holiness is described as the garment they are to wear. Holiness refers to a consecrated life, one that was set apart for God's service. Therefore, the heavenly sons of God are commanded to consecrate themselves to the LORD in preparation for worship. As the worshipers listened to the psalmist command the heavenly sons of God to worship they would recognize that they also were God's children and they needed to worship the LORD with humility and holiness along with the celestial worshipers. Therefore, the worshipers should praise the LORD with humility and holiness because that is what the heavenly sons of God are commanded to do, they also are God's children, and the LORD is glorious and mighty.

The Praise of the Psalmist and All Who Belong to the LORD

The psalmist praises the LORD and his voice and asserts that all who belong to the LORD are praising him in his temple in verses 3-9. Through his own praise and the praise of all those who belong to the LORD the psalmist sought to inspire the worshipers to join him and the rest of God's people praising him in the temple.

The psalmist's praise to the LORD and his voice. The psalmist praises the LORD and the authority, power, and splendor of his voice in verse 3 through the second line of verse 9. Most scholars agree that the psalmist is depicting the authority, power, and splendor of the voice of the LORD through thunder. First, the psalmist praises the authority of the LORD's voice over the waters in verse 3, "The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD over the many waters." In this verse the psalmist may be alluding to the creation account in Genesis 1 in which the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters and God spoke the world into existence. If that is the case, then he is praising the glorious authority of God's voice to create the world. Second, the psalmist praises the power and splendor of the LORD's voice in verse 4, "The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is in splendor." The word translated "in splendor" means "ornament" or "adornment" and suggests the image of being dressed up, hence "in splendor." The power of the LORD's voice is illustrated in the verses that follow. Third, the psalmist praises the power of the LORD's voice to shatter the cedars of Lebanon in verse 5, "The voice of the LORD is breaking the cedars; the LORD shatters the cedars of Lebanon." Cedars and especially the cedars of Lebanon were tall majestic trees noted for the strength of their wood, which was prized as a building material. Yet the LORD's voice is so powerful that it is able to turn these trees into a pile of splinters. The psalmist uses the intensive stem of the verb translated "shatters" to emphasize God's power to disintegrate the cedars. Fourth, the psalmist praises the power of the LORD's voice to make the mountains jump in verse 6, "He makes Lebanon jump like a calf, Sirion like a young wild ox." Lebanon is a mountain in northern Israel while Sirion is the Sidonian name for Mount Hermon, which is east of Mount Lebanon. Mountains are immovable. Yet the voice of the LORD is so powerful that it is able to make them leap like a skittish calf or young wild ox. Fifth, the psalmist praises the power and splendor of the LORD's voice by comparing it to the lightning that accompanies the thunder in verse 7, "The voice of the LORD splits into flames of fire." Sixth, the psalmist praises the power of the LORD's voice to make the deserts quake in verse 8, "The voice of the LORD makes the desert quake; the LORD makes the Desert of Kadesh quake." Seventh, the psalmist praises the power of the LORD's voice to make the does writhe and to strip the forest in verse 9, "The voice of the LORD makes the does writhe and strips the forests." The verb translated "writhe" probably implies that the voice of the LORD is able to frighten the does so that they go into premature labor. The cumulative effect of the psalmist's praise is to declare the LORD's awesome power and authority over all of Palestine. The LORD has awesome power and authority over the mountains and the cedars that grow there (5-6), the sky (7) the desert (8), and the forests and the animals that live there (9). As the worshipers listened to the psalmist praising the authority, power, and splendor of the LORD and his voice they would be inspired to praise him as well.

The praise of all who belong to the LORD. The psalmist asserts that all who belong to the LORD are glorifying him in the final line of verse 9, "And in his temple all of his are crying, 'Glory!'" The cry of the worshipers in the temple again expresses the weight or honor with which they regarded God. As Ross says, "Since the word basically means 'to be heavy,' the developed sense of 'glory' refers to importance or worth, and 'glorify' to acknowledge through praise the importance of God" (Ross, 661). The ones glorifying God in the temple are identified

as "all of his," everyone who belonged to the LORD. The worshipers also belonged to the LORD. As the worshippers heard from the psalmist that all who belonged to the LORD were glorifying him in the temple they would be inspired to join them in praising God. Therefore, the worshipers should glorify the LORD because the voice of the God of glory called the world into being, the voice of the LORD is powerful and majestic and has authority over all his creation, and the psalmist and all those who belong to the LORD in the temple are glorifying him.

The Psalmist's Affirmation of Faith in the LORD

The psalmist affirms his faith in the sovereignty of the LORD as well as his faithfulness to strengthen and bless his people in verses 10-11. Through this affirmation of faith the psalmist sought to encourage the worshipers to affirm their faith in the LORD along with him.

The psalmist's faith in the sovereignty of the LORD. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD's sovereignty in verse 10, "The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD sits enthroned as King forever." Actually, the verb translated "sits enthroned" simply means "sit, remain" or "dwell." However, the addition of "enthroned" is justified in translation because of the qualifying phrase "as King" in line two. The image of the LORD enthroned as King depicts his sovereign control. The first line of the verse is almost certainly an allusion to the Genesis account of the flood and affirms the LORD's sovereign control over the flood. The flood was a catastrophe. Nonetheless, the Genesis account of the flood depicts it as totally in accordance with the will of God and under his sovereign control. As the worshipers listened to the psalmist's affirmation of his faith in the LORD's sovereign control over the flood, they would be encouraged to affirm their faith in the LORD's sovereign control over the catastrophes in their own lives. As Ross says, "God is made available as the resource for the people of God to overcome the world" (Ross, 662). In the second line the psalmist affirms that the LORD's sovereign control is eternal. He concludes his affirmation of the LORD's sovereign rule with the word "forever," declaring his firm faith that the LORD's sovereign rule would never end. In fact, the verb translated "sits" is often translated "remains," implying constancy. As the worshipers listened to the psalmist's affirmation of his faith in the LORD's constant sovereign control, they would be encouraged to affirm their faith that he was in control of their lives as well and would be forever.

The psalmist's faith in the LORD to strengthen and bless his people. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD to strengthen and bless his people in verse 11, "The LORD gives strength to his people; the LORD blesses his people with peace." The strength that the LORD gives is probably strength of resolve and determination. The peace with which the LORD blesses his people probably includes well-being and serenity. As the worshipers listened to the psalmist affirm his faith they would be encouraged to affirm their faith as well. Therefore, the worshipers should trust the LORD because the he is sovereign over the flood, he will exercise his sovereign rule forever, and he gives strength to his people and blesses them with peace.

Application of the Message

Establishing Correspondence

Christians today also experience difficulties that may cause them to doubt God's authority and power or faithfulness to strengthen them and bless them. These correspondences between the

original and modern situations provide a strong basis for applying the message of Psalm 29 to the modern situation.

Distinguishing the Contextualized

This passage contains very little of a contextualized nature that requires that the message be limited or adjusted when applied to the modern situation. Nonetheless, this passage does have one point of tension between the modern and original situations. Even though Christians today do glorify God, they do not worship at the temple. Therefore, the reference to the worship at the temple in the statement of the message should be removed. With that one exception the statement of the applied message that follows has only been modified slightly.

Adjusting the Message

Christians should praise the LORD with humility and holiness because the heavenly sons of God are commanded to do, they also are God's children, and the LORD is glorious and mighty. Christians should glorify the LORD because the voice of the God of glory called the world into being, the voice of the LORD is powerful and majestic and has authority over all his creation, and the psalmist and all those who belong to the LORD are glorifying him. Christians should trust the LORD because he is sovereign over the flood, he will exercise his sovereign rule forever, and he gives strength to his people and blesses them with peace.

Communication of the Message

Title: Ascribe to the LORD Glory and Strength

Objective: The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians to praise the LORD with humility and holiness and trust him to strengthen and bless them.

Proposition: Christians should trust and praise the LORD with humility and holiness because they are his children and he is glorious and mighty, they are his and he called the world into being and exercises authority over all his creation, and he rules as king over the flood forever and strengthens and blesses his people with peace.

Introduction

As the psalmist wrote Psalm 29 he was celebrating God's sovereignty and power as well as his faithfulness to strengthen and bless his people. However, sometimes the people of Israel were overwhelmed by a flood of difficulties that made it difficult for them to praise God and trust him to strengthen and bless them. These are the times that this psalm was most meaningful to the people of Israel. Christians today also are overwhelmed by a flood of difficulties that may cause them to doubt God's sovereignty and power as well as his faithfulness to strengthen them and bless them. This psalm can help Christians continue to praise and trust God even when they feel overwhelmed by a flood of trouble. *Read Psalm 29.*

I. Christians should praise the LORD with humility and holiness because they are his children and he is glorious and mighty.

A. The psalmist commands the sons of God to praise the LORD for his glory and might in verse 1 and the first line of verse 2, "Ascribe to the LORD, sons of God, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name."

B. The psalmist commands the sons of God to humbly consecrate themselves to the LORD in the second line of verse 2, "Prostrate yourselves to the LORD in the adornment of holiness."

C. Illustration of the Glory and Might of the LORD

D. Application

II. Christians should glorify the LORD because they are his and he called the world into being and has authority over all his creation.

A. The psalmist praises the LORD and the authority, power, and splendor of his voice in verse 3 through the second line of verse 9.

1. First, the psalmist praises the authority of the LORD's voice over the waters in verse 3, "The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD over the many waters."

2. Second, the psalmist praises the power and splendor of the LORD's voice in verse 4, "The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is in splendor."

3. Third, the psalmist praises the power of the LORD's voice to shatter the cedars of Lebanon in verse 5, "The voice of the LORD is breaking the cedars; the LORD shatters the cedars of Lebanon."

4. Fourth, the psalmist praises the power of the LORD's voice to make the mountains jump in verse 6, "He makes Lebanon jump like a calf, Sirion like a young wild ox."

5. Fifth, the psalmist praises the power of the LORD's voice by comparing it to lightning that accompanies the thunder in verse 7, "The voice of the LORD splits into flames of fire."

6. Sixth, the psalmist praises the power of the LORD's voice to make the deserts quake in verse 8, "The voice of the LORD makes the desert quake; the LORD makes the Desert of Kadesh quake."

7. Seventh, the psalmist praises the power of the LORD's voice to make the does writhe and to strip the forest in verse 9, "The voice of the LORD makes the does writhe and strips the forests."

B. The psalmist asserts that all who are his are glorifying him in the final line of verse 9, "And in his temple all of his are crying, 'Glory!'"

C. Illustration of the Power and Authority of the LORD's Voice

D. Application

III. Christians should trust the LORD because he is sovereign over the flood forever and strengthens and blesses his people with peace.

A. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD's sovereignty in verse 10, "The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD sits enthroned as King forever."

B. The psalmist affirms his faith in the LORD to strengthen and bless his people in verse 11, "The LORD gives strength to his people; the LORD blesses his people with peace."

C. Illustration of the LORD's Sovereignty over Trials and Difficulties

D. Application

Conclusion

As the psalmist wrote this song of praise and faith he was celebrating God's sovereignty and power as well as his faithfulness to strengthen and bless his people. However, sometimes the

people of Israel were overwhelmed by a flood of difficulties that made it difficult for them to praise God and trust him to strengthen and bless them. These are the times that this psalm was most meaningful to the people of Israel. You may also be overwhelmed by a flood of difficulties that has caused you to doubt God's sovereignty and power as well as his faithfulness to strengthen and bless his people. Nonetheless, Psalm 29 provides encouragement for you to continue to praise and trust the LORD. You should praise the LORD with humility and holiness because you are God's children and he is glorious and mighty. You should glorify the LORD because the voice of the God of glory called the world into being and is powerful, majestic, and has authority over all his creation. You should trust the LORD because he is sovereign over the flood forever and he strengthens and blesses his people with peace.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

I WILL EXALT YOU, LORD

Psalm 30

Study of the Passage

Text and Translation

A psalm. A song for the dedication of the temple. Of David

- 1 I will exalt you, LORD,
for you lifted me up
and did not let my enemies gloat over me.
- 2 LORD my God, I called to you for help
and you healed me.
- 3 LORD, you brought me up from *Sheol*;
You restored me to life from those going down into the grave.
- 4 Sing praise to the LORD, his faithful ones;
Give thanks at the memory of his holiness.
- 5 For his anger [lasts] only a moment,
but his favor [lasts] a lifetime;
Weeping may come to lodge for the night,
but rejoicing [comes] in the morning.
- 6 I myself said during my serenity,
"I will not ever be shaken."
- 7 LORD, when you favored,
you established strength for my mountain;
But when you hid your face,
I was constantly disturbed.
- 8 To you, LORD, I called;
To the Lord I sought grace:
- 9 "What gain is there in [shedding] my blood,
in my going down to the Pit?
Will the dust thank you?
Will it proclaim your faithfulness?"
- 10 Hear, LORD, and be gracious to me;
LORD, be a constant help for me."
- 11 You have turned my wailing into dancing for me;
You have completely removed my sackcloth
and fully clothed me with joy,
- 12 That [my] glory may sing praise to you and not cease.
LORD my God, I will give you thanks forever.

Situation and Purpose

Psalm 30 seems to reflect a situation in which the psalmist at one time had been experiencing a difficult trial. He possibly could have had a physical ailment that even threatened his life. The physical ailment seems to be implied in verse 2 where he affirms that when he called to God for help, God healed him. The threat of death seems to be implied in verse 3 where he affirms that God delivered him from *Sheol* and the grave and in verse 9 where he pleads with God not to shed his blood or send him down to the Pit. In addition, the psalmist seems to have had enemies that would have loved the opportunity to gloat over him since he mentions them in verse 1. Furthermore, the psalmist seems to have come to the conclusion that God had forsaken him, presumably because of his sin. Verse 7 states that God has hidden his face from him and verse 9 suggests that he had been condemned by God and was under a death sentence. As a result the psalmist had been sorrowful and distressed. He mentions weeping in verse 5, relates how disturbed he was in verse 7, and refers to his wailing and mourning in verse 11. However, when the psalmist wrote this psalm the LORD had already delivered him and he responds with praise and thanksgiving. The superscription identifies the psalm as a psalm of David. The life of David would certainly be an appropriate context for understanding the psalm. The superscription also relates the psalm to the dedication of the temple. Again, the dedication of the temple would be an appropriate context for understanding the psalm because it was dedicated in part as a place where the people of Israel could go both to pray for God's help and praise him for his deliverance. The psalm would probably have been most meaningful for those who were still experiencing difficulty. The purpose of this psalm is to lead, compel, and inspire worshipers to praise and thank the LORD even when going through trials.

Literary Context and Role

The Book of Psalms has no discernible strategy. Therefore, placing this psalm in its literary context and determining its role within that context is not very productive. Nonetheless, this psalm is loosely related to other psalms attributed to David. In addition, this psalm is related by form to other psalms of praise.

Form and Function

Psalm 30 can be generally classified as a psalm of praise. However, each psalm of praise is a distinct liturgy and a clearer understanding of the form results from an evaluation of each of the different elements in the liturgy of praise. These elements work together to generate a dynamic encounter with God in worship. This psalm consists of a commitment to praise, an exhortation or call to praise, and expression of praise. A commitment is an expression of the psalmist's determination to act in a particular way in response to God. These commitments serve to inspire other worshipers to make these same commitments along with the psalmist. These commitments are normally accompanied by some indication of the reason for the psalmist's commitment that provides the rationale for the worshipers to make the same commitment. The psalmist commits himself to praise the LORD in verses 1-3. Exhortation is when the psalmist specifically commands righteous character and conduct or prohibits wicked character and conduct. These exhortations are normally accompanied by some rationale for obedience, frequently assurances of the blessings of obedience and warnings of the consequences of disobedience. Psalm 30 contains a specific type of exhortation commonly known as a call to worship in verses 4-5. Calls to worship are normally based on God's character and actions rather than assurances and warnings. Psalm 30 also contains the psalmist's own praise and commitment to thank the LORD

in verses 6-12. The worshipers are led to commit themselves to praise the LORD along with the psalmist based on his praise for God's work of grace in his life.

Strategy and Structure

Psalms 30 contains a very deliberate strategy that is structured to lead, compel, and inspire the worshipers to praise and thank the LORD along with the psalmist. First, the psalmist commits himself to exalt the LORD in verses 1-3, leading the worshipers to exalt the LORD along with him. Second, the psalmist directly exhorts the worshipers to praise and thank the LORD in verses 4-5. Finally, the psalmist praises the LORD for his work of grace in his life and commits himself to praise and thank the LORD forever in verses 6-12, inspiring the worshipers to praise and thank the LORD along with him.

- I. The Psalmist's Commitment to Exalt the LORD (1-3)
 - A. The Psalmist's Commitment (1a)
 - B. The Psalmist's Exaltation of the LORD (1b-3)
 1. For lifting him up and not letting his enemies gloat over him (1b)
 2. For healing him when he called for help (2)
 3. For delivering him from death (3)
- II. The Psalmist's Exhortation to Praise and Thank the LORD (4-5)
 - A. Commands Calling for Praise and Thanksgiving (4)
 1. Command for the LORD's faithful ones to sing praise
 2. Command to give thanks at the memory of his holiness
 - B. Rationale for Singing Praise and Giving Thanks (5)
 1. The brevity of his anger and the endurance of his favor
 2. The transience of weeping and the inevitability of rejoicing
- III. The Psalmist's Praise to the LORD and Commitment to Give Thanks Forever (6-12)
 - A. The Psalmist's Praise to the LORD for His Favor and Strength (6-7a)
 1. The psalmist's serenity and sense of stability (6)
 2. The basis of the psalmist's serenity and sense of stability (7a)
 - B. The Psalmist's Praise to the LORD for His Grace and Help (7b-12a)
 1. The psalmist's despair when the LORD ignored him (7b)
 2. The psalmist's petition for the LORD's grace and help (8-10)
 - a. The psalmist's introduction to his petition for grace and help (8)
 - b. The psalmist's justification of his petition for grace (9)
 - c. The psalmist's petition to the LORD for grace and help (10)
 3. The psalmist's praise to the LORD for turning his mourning into joyous celebration (11)
 4. The implication of the psalmist's experience of grace and help (12a)
 - C. The Psalmist's Commitment to Give Thanks to the LORD Forever (12b)

Message or Messages

God's people should exalt the LORD along with the psalmist because he lifts them up and does not let their enemies gloat over them, heals them when they call to him for help, and restores them to life from death. God's people should sing praise and give thanks to the LORD because they are his faithful ones, he is holy, his anger is brief while his favor is enduring, and their weeping is fleeting and they will inevitably rejoice. God's people should give thanks to the

LORD forever along with the psalmist because his favor is the basis of their strength, stability, and serenity; he answers their petitions for grace and help; and he changes their mourning into celebration so that they sing praise to him without ceasing.

Analysis of the Details

The Psalmist's Commitment to Exalt the LORD

The psalmist commits himself to exalt the LORD in verses 1-3. Through this expression of commitment he sought to lead other worshipers to commit themselves to exalt the LORD along with him.

The psalmist's commitment. The psalmist states his commitment to exalt the LORD in the first line of verse 1, "I will exalt you, LORD." The verb translated "exalt" in the *poel* cohortative form of a verb that means "to lift high" or "exalt" and stresses his determination to exalt the LORD (Ross, 668). When used to describe praise it conveys the sense of acknowledging and declaring the exalted status of the LORD over all creation. The psalmist's use of this term to describe his praise of the LORD is certainly appropriate because in the next line of the verse he explains that the LORD has lifted him up. As Broyles says, the opening line "directs the worshiper to repay Yahweh 'in kind.' As Yahweh has raised him up, so the speaker wishes to do toward Yahweh" (Broyles, 154).

The psalmist's exaltation of the LORD. The psalmist exalts the LORD in the remainder of verse 1 and in verses 2-3. First, he exalts the LORD for lifting him up and not letting his enemies gloat over him in the remainder of verse 1, "For you lifted me up and did not let my enemies gloat over me." The verb translated "lifted" is used to describe the drawing up of a bucket from a cistern or crevice. Weiser describes the significance of this picture well, "Just as a bucket is pulled up from a cistern or as a prisoner is lifted out of a dungeon (cf. Jer. 38.10), so God has snatched him away from the peril of death" (Weiser, 268). Evidently the psalmist had enemies who were anticipating his demise and preparing a celebration. But the LORD healed him of his sickness and rescued him from death so that their celebration had to be cancelled. Second, he exalts the LORD for healing him when he called for help in verse 2, "LORD my God, I called to you for help and you healed me." Third, he exalts the LORD for delivering him from death in verse 3, "LORD, you brought me up from *Sheol*; you restored me to life from those going down into the grave." *Sheol* was the word the Hebrews used to refer to the abode of the dead and along with the word translated "grave" conveyed all the fears associated with death. The psalmist probably does not literally mean that he was dead and God raised him back to life, but that he was as good as dead and God revived him. As the worshipers listened to the psalmist commit himself to exalt the LORD they would be inspired to exalt the LORD along with him. Therefore, the worshipers should exalt the LORD along with the psalmist because he lifts them up and does not let their enemies gloat over them, heals them when they call to him for help, and restores them to life from death.

The Psalmist's Exhortation to Praise and Thank the LORD

The psalmist exhorts other worshipers to praise and thank the LORD in verses 4-5. Through this exhortation the psalmist sought to compel other worshipers to praise and thank the LORD.

Commands calling for praise and thanksgiving. The psalmist commands other worshipers to sing praise and give thanks to the LORD in verse 4, "Sing praise to the LORD, his faithful

ones; give thanks at the memory of his holiness." Within these commands the psalmist includes two elements that provide good reason for the worshipers to sing praise and give thanks to the LORD. First, he addresses them as "his faithful ones." By addressing them as "his faithful ones" the psalmist was probably appealing to them based on their loyalty to God and their covenant relationship with him. Second, he commands them to give thanks "at the memory of his holiness." By reminding them of God's holiness the psalmist was appealing to them based on his distinctiveness and superiority to all that they have experienced.

Rationale for singing praise and giving thanks. The psalmist provides the rationale for other worshipers to praise and thank the LORD in verse 5, "For his anger [lasts] only a moment, but his favor [lasts] a lifetime; weeping may come to lodge for the night, but rejoicing [comes] in the morning." In the first half of the verse, the brevity of God's anger ("a moment") is contrasted with the endurance of his favor ("a lifetime") to stress the grace of God to restrain his anger and exercise his favor. In the second half of the verse, the transience of weeping ("lodge for the night") gives way to the inevitability of rejoicing ("comes in the morning") to stress the grace of God to quickly intervene in the lives of his people and deliver them from the difficulties that are causing them distress. As the worshipers listened to the psalmist's exhortation they would be compelled to sing praise and give thanks to the LORD. Therefore, the worshipers should sing praise and give thanks to the LORD because they are his faithful ones, he is holy, his anger is brief while his favor is enduring, and their weeping is fleeting and they will inevitably rejoice.

The Psalmist's Praise to the LORD and Commitment to Give Thanks Forever

The psalmist praises God for his experience of God's favor and grace and commits himself to give thanks to the LORD forever in verses 6-12. Through his praise and expression of commitment to give thanks to the LORD the psalmist was seeking to lead other worshipers to commit themselves to praise and thank the LORD along with him.

The psalmist's praise to the LORD for his favor and strength. The psalmist praises the LORD for his favor and strength in verses 6-7. He begins by describing his serenity and sense of stability because of the LORD in verse 6, "I myself said during my serenity, 'I will not ever be shaken.'" Scholars almost universally understand these words as an expression of the psalmist's arrogant self-confidence (Anderson, 243; Craigie, 254; Durham, 230; and Weiser, 270; however, see also Broyles, 155). However, this conclusion is based on the assumption that the psalmist's attitude as described in verse 6 is the cause for the LORD hiding his face as related in the second line of verse 7. In fact, the first line of verse 7 clearly indicates that the psalmist regarded the LORD as the source of his strength and stability and by implication his serenity. The word translated "serenity" comes from a verbal root that means to "be quiet" or "at ease." Though it is sometimes used in the sense of complacency, its prominent use is to describe peace and prosperity. The extent of the psalmist's serenity is stressed in the Hebrew text by doubling the pronoun (indicated by the reflexive pronoun "myself" in the translation). The psalmist's affirmation that he "will not be shaken" expresses his sense of stability. The extent of his confidence in his stability is stressed by "ever" a word that is frequently translated "forever." The picture behind the word is that of someone whose footing is firm so that he cannot be shaken. This picture is frequently used to describe the stability of those who have chosen to trust in the LORD and live for him. The psalmist explains the basis of his serenity and sense of stability in the first half of verse 7, "LORD, when you favored, you established strength for my

mountain." The word translated "favor" is probably used here to describe God's pleasure with and acceptance of the psalmist. The final line of the verse is difficult, but it certainly affirms the LORD as the source of the psalmist's strength and stability. Mountains, as immovable objects, are often used as a symbol of stability. As the worshipers listened to the psalmist praise the LORD for his favor, strength, stability, and his resulting serenity they would be inspired to praise the LORD along with him.

The psalmist's praise to the LORD for his grace and help. The psalmist praises LORD for his experience of God's grace and help in verses 7-12. First, the psalmist describes his distress when the LORD ignored him in second half of verse 7, "But when you hid your face, I was constantly disturbed." The picture of God hiding his face depicts God ignoring the psalmist. Presumably God ignored the psalmist because he had sinned. But it would be wrong to assume that the sin was complacency based on verses 6-7. Instead, this reference to a time when God ignored him introduces his testimony of praise for God's graciousness to answer his prayer and forgive him in verses 8-11. In addition, this reference also accentuates the psalmist's praise to God for his favor and strengthening and his resulting serenity and sense of stability by contrasting it with his distress when God ignored him. In fact, the verb translated "disturbed" is nearly a direct antonym of "serenity." Whereas "serenity" came from a verbal root meaning "be quiet," "disturbed" could be translated "disquieted." The extent of the psalmist's distress is emphasized in the Hebrew text by the combination of a perfect form of the verb of being and a participle (translated "constantly disturbed").

Second, the psalmist petitions the LORD for his grace and help in verses 8-10. The psalmist introduces his petition to the LORD for grace and help in verse 8, "To you, LORD, I called; to the Lord I sought grace." The psalmist's petition for grace and help is found in verses 9-10. He appeals for grace and help in verse 10, "Hear, LORD, and be gracious to me; LORD, be a constant help for me." Both the introduction and the petition itself use a form of the word "grace." The word translated "grace" and "gracious" refers to God's unmerited favor. Therefore, the psalmist appeals to God to favor him once again even though he does not deserve God's favor. The psalmist's appeal for help seems to emphasize his desire for God's constant intervention on his behalf by combining an imperative with a participle (translated "be a constant help"). The psalmist also justifies his petition for grace in verse 9, "What gain is there in [shedding] my blood, in my going down to the Pit? Will the dust thank you? Will it proclaim your faithfulness?" The psalmist's justification of his petition contains a series of rhetorical questions. These are the type of rhetorical question that have an emphatic implied response. The implied response to each of these questions was: "There is no gain in shedding my blood or me going down to the Pit! The dust will not thank you or proclaim your faithfulness!" The word translated "Pit" is the equivalent of *Sheol* (See comments on verse 4). The word "dust" probably refers to the decay of the human body after death. The body decays until it turns into dust. Both of these words refer to death. The implication of the psalmist's appeal is that death will not praise or thank God if he dies, but he will praise and thank God if he is delivered. Ross explains, "The psalmist is not engaging in crass bargaining here with God, but he is saying that if God delivers him from dying then he would have every reason to go to the sanctuary and tell everyone of God's faithfulness" (Ross, 676-677). Therefore, the psalmist's justification of his petition for grace is based on his understanding of his obligation to praise and thank the LORD when he is delivered. This appeal anticipates his assertion in verse 12 that his experience of God's grace obligates him to sing praise to the LORD without ceasing.

Third, the psalmist praises the LORD for his experience of grace in verse 11, "You have turned my wailing into dancing for me; you have completely removed my sackcloth and fully clothed me with joy." Wailing is an expression of mourning while dancing is an expression of joy. Similarly, sackcloth is the coarse and ugly cloth worn by mourners as an expression of their sorrow. However, the psalmist praises God for removing his mourning garment and instead clothing him with joy. The Hebrew text emphasizes the complete removal of the sackcloth and being fully clothed with joy by the use of the intensive stem of the verbs (translated "completely removed" and "fully clothed").

Finally, the psalmist states the implication of his experience of grace in the first line of verse 12, "That [my] glory may sing praise to you and not cease." In fact, the psalmist seems to be asserting that the very reason that God has turned his mourning into celebration is so that he will sing praise to God. The subject of the verb is unusual. Most scholars regard "glory" as a circumlocution for "I" following the second line in the parallel structure of verse 12 (See also Psalm 7:5). I have also understood it as a circumlocution for "I" but translated it more literally "[my] glory" to preserve the unusual expression as much as possible. The psalmist probably used this unusual self-designation with a purpose. Unfortunately, his purpose is not clear. If "glory" is used as a synonym for "soul" he could be stressing his need to sing praise to the LORD from the very core of his being. Ross says, "this word emphasizes his value, his true nature (s.v. Ps. 19:1)" (Ross, 678). The extent of the psalmist's obligation is emphasized with the words "and not cease." As the worshipers listened to the psalmist praise the LORD for his experience of grace they would be inspired to praise the LORD along with him.

The psalmist's commitment to give thanks to the LORD forever. The psalmist commits himself to give thanks to the LORD forever in the second line of verse 12, "LORD my God, I will give you thanks forever." The psalmist emphasizes the extent of his commitment with "forever." The verb could also be taken to be a cohortative, emphasizing his determination (Ross, 678). As the worshipers heard the psalmist's praise and witnessed his commitment they would be led to commit themselves to give thanks to the LORD forever along with the psalmist. Therefore, the worshipers should praise and give thanks forever along with the psalmist because God's favor is the basis of their strength, stability, and serenity; he answers their petitions for grace and help; and he turns their mourning into celebration so that they will sing praise to him without ceasing.

Application of the Message

Establishing Correspondence

Christians today also experience difficult trials. They may also become seriously sick to the extent that their lives are threatened like the psalmist. In addition, they may also have enemies that are ready to celebrate when something bad happens to them like the psalmist. Nonetheless, they have also experienced God's favor, grace, and help like the psalmist. These correspondences between the original and modern situations provide a strong basis for applying the message of Psalm 30 to the modern situation.

Distinguishing the Contextualized

This passage contains very little of a contextualized nature that requires that the message be limited or adjusted when applied to the modern situation. Therefore, the statement of the applied message that follows has only been modified slightly.

Adjusting the Message

Christians should exalt the LORD because he lifts them up and does not let their enemies gloat over them, heals them when they call to him for help, and restores them to life from death. Christians should sing praise and give thanks to the LORD because they are his faithful ones, he is holy, his anger is brief while his favor is enduring, and their weeping is fleeting and they will inevitably rejoice. Christians should praise and give thanks forever because God's favor is the basis of their strength, stability, and serenity; he answers their petitions for grace and help; and he changes their mourning into celebration so that they will sing praise to him without ceasing.

Communication of the Message

Title: I Will Exalt You, LORD

Objective: The objective of this message is to exhort and inspire Christians to exalt, praise, and give thanks to the LORD.

Proposition: Christians should exalt and give thanks to the LORD because he exalts and vindicates them, heals them when they call for help, and restores them to life from death; his anger is brief while his favor is enduring and their weeping is fleeting and they will inevitably rejoice; and his favor is the basis of their strength, stability, and serenity and he changes their mourning into celebration.

Introduction

Christians today often experience difficult trials. They may become seriously sick to the extent that their lives are threatened. In addition, they may have enemies that are ready to celebrate when something bad happens to them. Furthermore, they may conclude that God has deserted them. As a result, they may become despondent and depressed. Evidently the psalmist who wrote Psalm 30 experienced similar difficulties. However, God delivered him and he responds by praising the LORD, exhorting other worshipers to praise the LORD, and committing himself to praise the LORD forever. Let's allow him to lead us to praise the LORD our God.
Read Psalm 30.

I. Christians should exalt the LORD because he exalts and vindicates them, heals them when they call to him for help, and restores them to life from death.

- A. David commits himself to exalt the LORD in the first line of verse 1, "I will exalt you, LORD."
- B. David exalts the LORD for exalting and vindicating him in the remainder of verse 1, "For you lifted me up and did not let my enemies gloat over me."
- C. David exalts the LORD for healing him when he called for help in verse 2, "LORD my God, I called to you for help and you healed me."
- D. David exalts the LORD for delivering him from death in verse 3, "LORD, you brought me up from *Sheol*; you restored me to life from those going down into the grave"
- E. Illustration of the Grace and Healing of God
- F. Application

II. Christians should praise and thank the LORD because his anger is brief while his favor is enduring and their weeping is fleeting and they will inevitably rejoice.

- A. David commands other worshipers to sing praise and give thanks to the LORD in verse 4, "Sing praise to the LORD, his faithful ones; give thanks at the memory of his holiness."
- B. The psalmist provides the rationale for other worshipers to praise and thank the LORD in verse 5, "For his anger [lasts] only a moment, but his favor [lasts] a lifetime; weeping may come to lodge for the night, but rejoicing [comes] in the morning."
- C. Illustration of the Grace and Mercy of God
- D. Application

III. Christians should praise and give thanks to the LORD because he is the basis of their strength, stability, and serenity and he changes their mourning into celebration.

- A. David praises the LORD for his favor and strength in verses 6-7.
 - 1. He begins by describing his serenity and sense of stability because the LORD in verse 6, "I said during my serenity, 'I will not ever be shaken.'"
 - 2. He explains the basis of his serenity and sense of stability in the first half of verse 7, "LORD, when you favored, you established strength for my mountain."
- B. David praises LORD for his experience of God's grace and help in verses 7-12.
 - 1. First, he describes his distress when the LORD ignored him in the second half of verse 7, "But when you hid your face, I was constantly disturbed."
 - 2. Second, he relates his petition to the LORD for his grace and help in verses 8-10, "To you, LORD, I called; to the Lord I sought grace . . . Hear, LORD, and be gracious to me; LORD, be a constant help for me."
 - 3. Third, he praises the LORD for his experience of grace in verse 11, "You have turned my wailing into dancing for me; you have completely removed my sackcloth and fully clothed me with joy."
- C. The psalmist commits himself to give thanks to the LORD forever in the second line of verse 12, "LORD my God, I will give you thanks forever."
- D. Illustration of the Grace and Help of God
- E. Application

Conclusion

Christians today often experience difficult trials. They may become seriously sick to the extent that their lives are threatened. They may have enemies that are ready to celebrate when something bad happens to them. They may have concluded that God has deserted them. As a result, they may become despondent and depressed. Evidently the psalmist who wrote Psalm 30 experienced similar difficulties. However, God delivered him and he responds by praising the LORD, exhorting other worshipers to praise the LORD, and committing himself to praise the LORD forever. Let's allow him to lead us to praise the LORD our God. You should exalt the LORD because he exalts and vindicates you, heals you when you call to him for help, and restores you to life from death. You should sing praise and give thanks to the LORD because his anger is brief while his favor is enduring and your weeping is fleeting and you will inevitably rejoice. You should praise and give thanks to the LORD forever because his favor is the basis of your strength, stability, and serenity and he changes your mourning into celebration.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THEN I ACKNOWLEDGED MY SIN Psalm 32

Study of the Passage

Text and Translation

*Of David. A maskil*¹

- 1 Blessed is he whose transgression is carried away,
whose sin is covered.
- 2 Blessed is the man whose iniquity the LORD does not reckon against him
and there is no deceit in his spirit.
- 3 When I was silent my bones wore out
through my roaring all day long.
- 4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
My sap² was vanquished by the drought of summer. *Selah*³
- 5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you
and did not cover up my iniquity.
- I said, "I will throw my transgressions up to the LORD"
and **you*** carried away the guilt of my sin. *Selah*³
- 6 Therefore let everyone who is pious pray to you
in time to find [you]⁴;
- Surely during the flood of many waters,
they will not reach them.
- 7 You are a hiding place for me;
you protect me from distress
and surround me with ringing cries of deliverance. *Selah*³
- 8 "I will teach you prudence and direct you in the way you should walk;
I will counsel* with my eye upon you.
- 9 Do not be like a horse or a mule,
which have no understanding,
but [must have] bit and rein as his rigging for control
or they will not come to you."
- 10 Many are the pains of the wicked,
but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD.
- 11 Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous;
Shout a ringing cry all you who are upright in heart!

*The Hebrew text contains an emphasis that is otherwise difficult to translate into English
(See Analysis of the Details).

¹The meaning of *maskil* is uncertain. The word seems to come from the same root as the word translated "teach" in verse 8. Therefore, this designation could identify Psalm 32 as a

teaching psalm. Psalm 32 certainly does teach. However, other psalms given this designation are not clearly teaching psalms (See Psalms 42, 44-45, 52-55, 74, 78, 88-89, and 142).

²Craigie, 263-264 emends the Hebrew text to read "my tongue was turned as in summer droughts" based on the similarity of the Hebrew words for "tongue" and "sap" and because "sap" makes little sense (See also Weiser, 280-281). However, I have chosen to retain the reading of the Hebrew text because it avoids the conjecture of an emendation and does make sense (See Analysis of the Details).

³The word *Selah* is generally regarded as an instruction for worship, but its meaning is uncertain. Durham summarizes the speculation, "Most frequently, *Selah* has been held to refer to a pause, either for a musical interlude or silence, a 'lifting up' of voice(s) in praise, a signal for the congregation to prostrate themselves, a loud clash of the cymbals, and a word meaning 'forever' to be shouted by the congregation" (Durham, 175).

⁴Craigie, 264 emends the text to read "at a time of stress" based on the similarity of the Hebrew words for "find" and "stress." However, I have retained the reading of the Hebrew text because it avoids the conjecture of an emendation and it is clear without the need for emendation (See Analysis of the Details).

Situation and Purpose

The psalm reflects a situation in which the psalmist had sinned against God, but prayed for God's mercy and was fully confident of forgiveness and security in God. The psalmist's situation is reflected most clearly in his personal testimony of his experience when he was silent then confessed his sin and sought God's mercy in verses 3-5. Nonetheless, the psalm also reflects the concern of the psalmist for others who have sinned against the God, have not yet prayed for God's mercy, and have no confidence of forgiveness and security in God. This concern is reflected in his commendation of seeking God's mercy by blessing the one whose transgression is forgiven in verses 1-2; his testimony of the consequences of remaining silent and the benefit of confessing and seeking God's mercy in verses 3-5; his exhortation to pray, presumably confessing sin and seeking God's mercy in verses 6-7; his commendation of heeding God's instruction and exhortation to avoid stubborn self-will in verses 8-9; and his commendations of avoiding wickedness, trusting God, and striving for righteousness in verses 10-11. The superscription identifies Psalm 32 as a psalm of David. Certainly the life of David would be an appropriate historical context for understanding the psalm. The purpose of this psalm was to exhort and encourage worshipers to repent and confess their sin, ask God for mercy, trust him, avoid wickedness, and strive for righteousness.

Literary Context and Role

The Book of Psalms has no discernable strategy. Therefore, placing this psalm in its literary context and determining its role within that context is not very productive. Nonetheless, this psalm is loosely related by the superscription to other psalms attributed to David. In addition, this psalm is linked by the superscription to other psalms designated by the term *maskil* (See Psalms 42, 44-45, 52-55, 74, 78, 88-89, and 142). However, the nature of the relationship is as mysterious as the term *maskil*. This psalm is related by form to other psalms of wise instruction. It is also related to other penitential psalms such as 6, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143 (Ross, 705).

Form and Function

Psalm 32 can be generally classified as a psalm of wise instruction. Nonetheless, it is still necessary to examine the different kinds of instruction within the psalm and determine how they function. The dominant forms of wise instruction in this psalm are commendation and warning. In commendations, the psalmist describes the righteous character that pleases God and results in his blessings. These commendations encourage the worshipers to live righteously so that they can please God and receive his blessings. In warnings, the psalmist describes the unrighteous character and conduct that displeases God and results in his wrath. These warnings discourage the worshipers from living wickedly so that they can avoid God's displeasure and wrath. The psalmist blesses the one who has been forgiven and whose spirit is pure in verses 1-2. Blessings are a type of commendation. In verses 1-2 the psalmist commends the one who seeks God's forgiveness and a pure spirit. The psalmist gives his personal testimony in verses 3-5. The first half of his testimony is a type of warning. In verses 3-4 the psalmist warns against refusing to acknowledge sin and seek forgiveness by testifying about the disastrous consequences he suffered when he was silent. The second half of his testimony is a type of commendation. In verse 5 the psalmist commends the acknowledgment of sin and seeking forgiveness by testifying that God forgave him. The psalm also contains a commendation encouraging the worshipers to heed God's instruction in verse 8 and a warning discouraging wickedness and a commendation encouraging faith in verse 10. Verse 11 should probably be understood as a commendation of righteousness even though the encouragement is put in the form of a command. In addition, the psalm does contain exhortation. In exhortations, the psalmist specifically commands righteous character and conduct and prohibits wicked character and conduct. These exhortations usually include assurances of the benefits of obedience to encourage obedience and warnings of the dangers of disobedience to discourage disobedience. The psalmist exhorts the godly to pray in verses 6-7, encouraging obedience with the warning of limited time and the assurance of protection. Verse 9 contains an exhortation to avoid stubborn self-will that is reinforced by an unpleasant comparison of those with stubborn self-will to a horse or a mule.

Strategy and Structure

The psalmist begins by blessing the one who is forgiven and pure, thereby encouraging the worshipers to confess their sin and seek God's mercy sincerely (1-2). Next, the psalmist gives his testimony of the disastrous consequences of remaining silent and the benefit of confessing and seeking mercy, further encouraging the worshipers to confess and seek God's mercy based on his own experience (3-5). Next, the psalmist exhorts the godly to pray, further urging the worshipers to confess and seek of God's mercy by warning them of the limited time and assuring them of protection and deliverance (6-7). The psalmist concludes with instruction encouraging the worshipers to heed God's instruction, avoid stubborn self-will and wickedness, and live by faith and righteousness (8-11).

- I. The Psalmist's Blessing on The One Who Is Forgiven and Sincere (1-2)
 - A. Blessing on the One Whose Sin Is Forgiven (1-2a)
 1. Blessing on the one whose transgression is carried away (1a)
 2. Blessing on the one whose sin is covered (1b)
 3. Blessing on the one whose iniquity is not reckoned against him (2a)
 - B. Blessing on the One with No Deceit in His Spirit (2b)
- II. The Psalmist's Testimony of the Necessity of Seeking Mercy (3-5)
 - A. The Disastrous Consequences When He Remained Silent (3-4)

- B. The Benefit When He Acknowledged His Sin and Sought Mercy (5)
- III. The Psalmist's Exhortation to Pray and Affirmation of Faith in the LORD (6-7)
 - A. Command to Pray and Warning of Limited Time (6a)
 - B. Assurance that the Flood Waters Will Not Reach Those Who Pray (6b)
 - C. Affirmation of Faith in God to Protect and Deliver (7)
- IV. Instruction regarding Stubbornness, Wickedness, Faith, and Righteousness (8-11)
 - A. Commendation of Heeding God's Teaching (8)
 - B. Exhortation to Avoid Stubborn Self-will (9)
 - C. Warning against Wickedness and Commendation of Faith (10)
 - D. Commendation of Righteousness and Uprightness (11)

Message or Messages

God's people should sincerely confess their sin and seek God's mercy because those whose transgressions are carried away, sins are covered, iniquities are not reckoned against them, and spirits have no deceit are blessed. God's people should confess their sin and seek God's mercy because if they remain silent they will be worn out by their cries of agony, God's hand will be heavy on them, and their strength will evaporate, but if they throw their transgressions up to God, he will carry their guilt away. God's people should confess their sin and ask for God's mercy in prayer because that is the pious thing to do, time may be running out, and he will protect and deliver them. God's people should heed God's teaching because it is prudent, the right way, and results in his watchful care, and avoid stubborn self-will because it reveals that they have the understanding of a horse or mule. God's people should avoid wickedness because the wicked have many pains; trust the LORD because steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD; and strive for righteousness because the righteous and upright can rejoice, be glad, and shout a ringing cry of celebration.

Analysis of the Details

The Psalmist's Blessing on The One Who Is Forgiven and Sincere

The psalmist begins by blessing the one who is forgiven and sincere in verses 1-2. Through this blessing the psalmist was encouraging the worshipers to sincerely seek God's forgiveness and mercy.

Blessing on the one whose sin is forgiven. The psalmist blesses the one whose sin is forgiven in verses 1-2. He employs three words for sin, probably to stress sin's pervasive power over humanity. However, he seems to stress sin's power only to emphasize the even greater power of God's grace for he then employs three words for God's mercy and forgiveness. First, the psalmist blesses the one whose transgression is carried away in the first line of verse 1, "Blessed is he whose transgression is carried away." The word "transgression" describes those sins that are acts of self-will and rebellion against God's authority. Nonetheless, the psalmist asserts that God is able to carry these transgressions away so that his people are no longer condemned because of them. Second, the psalmist extends the blessing to include the one whose sin is covered in the second line of verse 1, "Whose sin is covered." The word "sin" describes those sins that are acts of human weakness, missing the mark of God's law. Nonetheless, the psalmist asserts that God is able to cover these sins so that the worshipers no longer are

condemned because of them. Third, the psalmist blesses the one whose iniquity is not reckoned against him in the first line of verse 2, "Blessed is the man whose iniquity the LORD does not reckon against him." The word "iniquity" describes those sins that are a perversion of what God has intended for humanity and it is used in some context with the sense of "guilt." Nonetheless, the psalmist asserts that God is able to ignore these sins so that his people are no longer condemned because of them. So the power of sin over humanity is pervasive, but God's power to forgive is even greater. How can these sins be covered? The context indicates God's people can receive this blessing of forgiveness when they confess their sin and seek his mercy.

Blessing on the one with no deceit in his spirit. The psalmist extends the blessing to include the one with no deceit in his spirit in the second line of verse 2, "And there is no deceit in his spirit." The word "spirit" when applied to humanity refers to the essence of being and is often associated with emotions and desires. The word "deceit" is used to describe malevolent dishonesty and could be translated "treachery." In the context of the psalmist's appeal for the worshipers to confess their sins and seek God's mercy, the implication is that they should do so with a sincerity that comes from the very core of their being. As the worshipers listened to the psalmist blessing those whose sins were forgiven and whose spirits were without deceit they would be encouraged to confess their sin and seek God's mercy sincerely so that they could be blessed. Therefore, the worshipers should sincerely confess their sin and seek God's mercy because those whose transgressions are carried away, sins are covered, iniquities are not reckoned against them, and spirits have no deceit are blessed.

The Psalmist's Testimony of the Necessity of Seeking Mercy

The psalmist testifies from his own experience to the necessity of confessing sin and seeking God's mercy in verses 3-5. Through his testimony the psalmist was seeking to encourage the worshipers to confess their sin and seek God's mercy.

The disastrous consequences when he remained silent. The psalmist testifies to the disastrous consequences that resulted when he did not confess his sin and seek God's mercy in verses 3-4, "When I was silent my bones wore out through all my roaring all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my sap was vanquished by the drought of summer." The silence of the psalmist should be understood in relationship to verse 5; he stubbornly refused to confess his sin and seek God's mercy as he later does in that same verse. The psalmist employs three pictures to describe the disastrous consequences of his stubborn refusal to confess his sins and seek God's mercy. His multiplication of pictures is probably intended to stress the extent of the disastrous consequences that result from failing to confess sin and seek God's mercy. The persistence of these disastrous consequences is also stressed by "all day long" with the first picture and "day and night" with the second. The first picture describes a consequence so disastrous that it results in intense cries of agony that wear out his bones. The second picture describes God's hand pressing down on him so hard that he can no longer stand. The third picture describes him as a tree that has had its sap or lifeblood dried up by the drought of summer. The word "vanquished" is used to describe a devastating defeat in battle as in the overthrow of Nineveh in Jonah 3.

The benefit when he acknowledged his sin and sought mercy. The psalmist testifies to the benefit that resulted when he did confess his sin and seek God's mercy in verse 5, "Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will throw my

transgression up to the LORD' and **you** carried away the guilt of my sin." The psalmist describes his confession both positively and negatively. He acknowledged his sin rather than covering it up. The NIV translates "I will throw" as "I will confess" implying the meaning of the verb from the first half of the verse. However, I prefer the more literal translation because the picture employed implies the psalmist's recognition of his inferior status in relation to God. This picture also implies more than just that he confessed his sin. It also suggests that he has offered his sins to God in hope that God will be merciful to him. The benefit he received from confessing his sin and seeking God's mercy is described in the final line of the verse, "and **you** carried away the guilt of my sin." God removed his culpability. The psalmist doubles the subject pronoun to emphasize that God is the source of mercy (indicated in translation with bold print). As the worshipers listened to the psalmist share his experience of the consequences of remaining silent and the benefit of confessing sin and seeking God's mercy they would be encouraged to confess their own sin and seek God's mercy. Therefore, the worshipers should confess their sin and seek God's mercy because if they remain silent they will be worn out by their cries of agony, God's hand will be heavy on them, and their strength will evaporate, but if they throw their transgressions up to God, he will carry their guilt away.

The Psalmist's Exhortation for the Pious to Pray

The psalmist exhorts the pious to pray in verses 6-7. The psalmist commands the pious to pray and reinforces his command with an assurance and affirmation of faith. Through this exhortation the psalmist sought to entreat the worshipers to confess their sins and seek God's mercy in prayer.

Command for the pious to pray and warning of limited time. The psalmist commands the pious to pray and warns them of limited time in the first line of verse 6, "Therefore let everyone who is pious pray to you in time to find [you]." The psalmist addresses this command to the pious. In this way he was appealing to the self-perception of the worshipers. If they believed they were pious, then they should pray. The word "pious" often stresses the covenant faithfulness of God when applied to him and may have similar implications when applied to his people in this context. The command is simply to "pray," but in this context the psalmist was probably appealing for the worshipers to confess their sins and seek God's mercy in prayer. The time limit that the psalmist sets underscores the urgency of obedience by implying that there may be a time when they will be unable to find God.

Assurance that the flood waters will not reach those who pray. The psalmist reinforces the command to pray by assuring the pious who pray that the flood waters will not reach them in the second line of verse 6, "Surely during the flood of many waters, they will not reach them." The Hebrew people feared the water and floods were frequently used as here as a metaphor for difficult trials. The psalmist emphasizes the extent of the difficult trial he is contemplating by stressing its depth with "of many waters." However, the psalmist simply emphasizes the difficulty of the trial to accentuate his assurance. No matter how difficult the trial, it will not be able to overwhelm them like a flood.

Affirmation of faith in God to protect and deliver. The psalmist reinforces the command to pray with an affirmation of faith in God to protect and deliver him in verse 7, "You are a hiding place for me; you protect me from distress and surround me with ringing cries of deliverance." The psalmist employs multiple affirmations of faith in God to emphasize the extent of God's faithfulness as well as his trust in God. God himself is the psalmist's place to

hide. God will protect him from distress. The word "distress" comes from a verbal root meaning "bind, tie up, be restricted." The word "protect" means "watch, guard, keep" and affirms God's watchfulness on his behalf. God will guard him and not let him be constrained by difficulties. God will grant him victory so that all his friends and relatives will cry out in celebration at his deliverance. As the worshipers listened to the psalmist exhort the pious to pray they would be compelled to confess their sins and seek God's mercy in prayer. Therefore, the worshipers should confess their sin and ask God for mercy in prayer because that is the pious thing to do, time may be running out, and he will protect and deliver them.

Instruction regarding Stubbornness, Wickedness, Faith, and Righteousness

Verses 8-11 contain instruction regarding stubbornness, wickedness, faith, and righteousness. However, it is uncertain who the teacher is in this case. The qualifying phrase "with my eye upon you" in the second half of verse 8 would be more appropriate if God is the teacher. However, verses 10-11 speak of the LORD in the third person and the psalmist seems to be the teacher. Nonetheless, in psalms of wise instruction the psalmist is God's spokesperson and the words of God and the words of the psalmist are sometimes mingled without concern for distinguishing between them. I have resolved this difficulty by putting verses 8-9 in quotation marks, distinguishing them as the words of the LORD. Through this instruction the psalmist sought to encourage and exhort the worshipers to heed God's instructions rather than remaining stubbornly self-willed and to avoid wickedness and live righteously by faith.

Commendation of heeding God's teaching. Verse 8 contains a commendation of heeding God's teaching, "I will teach you prudence and direct you in the way you should walk; **I will counsel** with my eye upon you." God's teaching is commended because it results in "prudence," wisdom for living life. God's direction is commended because it leads to the right way ("the way you should walk"). God's counsel is commended because it results in God's watchful care ("with my eye upon you"). This final commendation is emphasized in the Hebrew text by the use of the cohortative voluntative mood (indicated in translation with bold print). This grammatical construction emphasizes God's determination. The commendations are multiplied to emphasize the importance of heeding God's instruction.

Exhortation to avoid stubborn self-will. Verse 9 contains an exhortation to avoid stubborn self-will, "Do not be like a horse or a mule, which have no understanding, but [must have] bit and rein as his rigging for control or they will not come to you." The worshipers are prohibited from being "like a horse or a mule." The specific implication of this analogy is clarified in the description of their conduct. Without equipment to control them they remain stubbornly self-willed. The judgment of this conduct is provided with "which have no understanding." They are dumb animals. As Leupold states, "Refusal to let oneself be guided by the Lord's kindly direction puts one in the class of the brute beasts that must at times be controlled by forcible and harsh means when they refuse gentle guidance" (Leupold, 268). As the worshipers listened to these verses they would be encouraged to heed God's instructions and compelled to avoid stubborn self-will. Therefore, the worshipers should heed God's instructions because his teachings are prudent, the right way, and result in his watchful care, and avoid stubborn self-will because it reveals that they have the understanding of a horse or mule.

Warning against wickedness and commendation of faith. Verse 10 contains a warning against wickedness and commendation of faith, "Many are the pains of the wicked, but steadfast

love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD." Wickedness is discouraged because it results in pain. This warning against wickedness is accentuated by emphasizing the extent of the pain with "Many are the pains." Trust is commended because it results in an experience of God's steadfast love. The word translated "steadfast love" is a word that emphasizes God's care for and faithfulness to his covenant people. This commendation of faith is accentuated by emphasizing the extent of God's steadfast love with the verb "surrounds." God's steadfast love will completely engulf those who trust in him. As Ross says, "Believers have a great prospect; God's loyal love will surround them. There may be difficulties to overcome, but God's faithful covenant love will always be there" (Ross, 718).

Commendation of righteousness and uprightness. Verse 11 contains a commendation of righteousness and uprightness, "Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; shout with a ringing cry all you who are upright in heart!" Though verse 11 contains commands, these commands are directed to the "righteous" and "upright in heart" and encourage the worshipers to be righteous and upright so that they can rejoice. The "righteous" are those who do what is right based on God's law. The word "upright" means "straight" and implies conformity to God's law without deviance. The word "heart" was frequently used to refer to the inner being of a person and often was associated with the mind and will. Therefore, the qualifying phrase "in heart" implies a dedication to live by God's revealed will that comes from a person's inner being. The multiplication of terms for the jubilant response emphasizes the joy that the worshipers can experience if they are dedicated to a life of righteousness. As the worshipers listened to the psalmist's warning against wickedness and commendations of faith and righteousness they would be encouraged to avoid wickedness and live righteously by faith. Therefore, the worshipers should avoid wickedness because the wicked have many pains; trust the LORD because steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD; and strive for righteousness because the righteous and upright can rejoice, be glad, and shout a ringing cry of celebration.

Application of the Message

Establishing Correspondence

Even though they have experienced God's grace and mercy, Christians are still plagued by the problem of sin. They are often lured into sin and then become hardened so that they have difficulty acknowledging their sin and seeking God's mercy. As a result they are overwhelmed with guilt; have no confidence that God will forgive them, help them, and save them; and are deprived of the joy of the Christian life. These correspondences between the original and modern situations provide a strong basis for applying the message of Psalm 32 to the modern situation.

Distinguishing the Contextualized

This passage contains very little of a contextualized nature that requires that the message be limited or adjusted when applied to the modern situation. However, the New Testament does stress the need for faith in Jesus Christ as the means of obtaining God's mercy. Nonetheless, this profound revelation of God's grace through Jesus Christ does not substantially affect the message of this passage. Therefore, the statement of the applied message has only been modified slightly.

Adjusting the Message

Christians should sincerely confess their sin and seek God's mercy because those whose transgressions are carried away, sins are covered, iniquities are not reckoned against them, and spirits have no deceit are blessed. Christians should confess their sin and seek God's mercy because if they remain silent they will be worn out by their cries of agony, God's hand will be heavy on them, and their strength will evaporate, but if they throw their transgressions up to God, he will carry their guilt away. Christians should confess their sin and ask for God's mercy because that is the pious thing to do, time may be running out, and he will protect and deliver them. Christians should heed God's teaching because it is prudent, the right way, and results in his watchful care, and avoid stubborn self-will because that reveals it they have the understanding of a horse or mule. Christians should avoid wickedness because the wicked have many pains; trust the LORD because steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD; and strive for righteousness because the righteous and upright can rejoice, be glad, and shout a ringing cry of celebration.

Communication of the Message

Title: Then I Acknowledged My Sin

Objective: The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians to confess their sins and seek God's mercy, heed God's teaching and avoid stubborn self-will, and avoid wickedness and live righteously by faith.

Proposition: Christians should confess their sin and seek God's mercy because they will be blessed, God will carry their guilt away and they will be free from the burden of sin, time may be running out and God will protect and deliver them; heed God's teaching rather than being stubbornly self-willed because it is prudent and results in God's watchful care; and trust God and strive for righteousness so they can elude the pains of the wicked, be surrounded by God's steadfast love, and experience joy.

Introduction

Even though they have experienced God's grace and mercy, Christians are still plagued by the problem of sin. They are often lured into sin and then become hardened so that they have difficulty acknowledging their sin and seeking God's mercy. As a result they are overwhelmed with guilt; have no confidence that God will forgive them, help them, and save them; and are deprived of the joy of the Christian life. The psalmist who wrote Psalm 32 had also sinned against God, but he confessed his sin, prayed for God's mercy, and rededicated himself to live righteously by God's teaching. As a result he was fully confident that God had forgiven him and was at work in his life. Therefore, he was filled with joy. Nonetheless, he was still concerned about others who had sinned, but had not confessed and asked God for mercy, and who were living in fear. We need to allow him to lead us to confess our sin, ask God for mercy, and rededicate ourselves to live righteously by God's teaching. *Read Psalm 32.*

I. Christians should sincerely confess their sin and seek God's mercy because those whose sins are forgiven are blessed.

A. The psalmist blesses the one whose transgression is carried away in the first line of verse 1, "Blessed is he whose sin is carried away."

B. The psalmist extends the blessing to include the one whose sin is covered in the second line of verse 1, "Whose sin is covered."

- C. The psalmist blesses the one whose iniquity is not reckoned against him in the first line of verse 2, "Blessed is the man whose iniquity the LORD does not reckon against him."
- D. The psalmist extends the blessing to include the one with no deceit in his spirit in the second line of verse 2, "And there is no deceit in his spirit."
- E. Illustration of the Blessing of God's Forgiveness
- F. Application

II. Christians should confess their sin and seek God's mercy because he will carry their guilt away and they will be free from the burden of sin.

- A. The psalmist testifies to the disastrous consequences that resulted when he did not confess his sin and seek God's mercy in verses 3-4, "When I was silent my bones wore out through all my roaring all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my sap was vanquished by the drought of summer."
- B. The psalmist testifies to the benefit that resulted when he did confess his sin and seek God's mercy in verse 5, "Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will throw my transgression up to the LORD' and you yourself carried away the guilt of my sin."
- C. Illustration of the Burden of Sin and Guilt
- D. Application

III. Christians should confess their sin and ask for God's mercy because time may be running out and God will protect and deliver them.

- A. The psalmist commands the pious to pray and warns them of limited time in the first line of verse 6, "Therefore let everyone who is pious pray to you in time to find [you]."
- B. The psalmist reinforces the command to pray by assuring the pious who pray that the flood waters will not reach them in the second line of verse 6, "Surely during the flood of many waters, they will not reach him."
- C. The psalmist reinforces the command to pray with an affirmation of faith in God to protect and deliver him in verse 7, "You are a hiding place for me; you will protect me from distress and surround me with ringing cries of deliverance."
- D. Illustration of God's Faithfulness to Deliver
- E. Application

IV. Christians should heed God's teaching rather than being stubbornly self-willed because it is prudent and results in God's watchful care.

- A. God commends the heeding of his teaching in verse 8, "I will teach you prudence and direct you in the way you should walk; **I will counsel** with my eye upon you."
- B. God prohibits stubborn self-will in verse 9, "Do not be like a horse or a mule, which have no understanding, but [must have] bit and rein as his rigging for control or they will not come to you."
- C. Illustration of the Disastrous Consequences of Stubborn Self-Will
- D. Application

V. Christians should trust God and strive for righteousness so they can avoid the pains of the wicked, be surrounded by God's steadfast love, and experience joy.

- A. The psalmist warns against wickedness in the first line of verse 10, "Many are the pains of the wicked."
- B. The psalmist commends faith in the second line of verse 10, "But steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD."

C. The psalmist commends righteousness and uprightness in verse 11, "Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; shout with a ringing cry all you who are upright in heart!"

D. Illustration of the Joy that Comes from Living a Righteous Life of Faith

E. Application

Conclusion

Even though they have experienced God's grace and mercy, Christians are still plagued by the problem of sin. They are often lured into sin and then become hardened so that they have difficulty acknowledging their sin and seeking God's mercy. As a result they are overwhelmed with guilt; have no confidence that God will forgive them, help them, and save them; and are deprived of the joy of the Christian life. David also sinned against God, but he confessed his sin, prayed for God's mercy, and rededicated himself to live righteously by God's teaching. We need to allow him to lead us to confess our sin, ask God for mercy, and rededicate ourselves to live righteously by God's teaching. You should sincerely confess your sins and seek God's mercy because those whose transgressions are forgiven are blessed. You should confess your sin and seek God's mercy because he will carry your guilt away and you will not be burdened by sin. You should confess your sin and ask for God's mercy because time may be running out and he will protect and deliver you. You should heed God's teaching rather than being stubbornly self-willed because it is prudent and results in his watchful care. You should trust God and strive for righteousness so that you can avoid the pains of the wicked, be surrounded by God's steadfast love, and experience joy.

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