

June 15 : Scriptures Psalm 71-73

SUMMARY

Psalm 71. Feeling a little bit old today? I can tell you that as I get older, some of the scriptures come to life a bit more. This psalm is one of them because the Psalmist is quite clear about his reason for writing it, "Don't discard me in my old age. As my strength fails, do not abandon me" (71:9). That's his plea. From the start, he proclaims his utter dependence on God and stalwart trust in his sustaining power as his "rock of refuge" and "fortress" (71:3). Yehovah delivers him from the wicked (71:4), and the Lord has been his constant source of hope and confidence from his youth, even from birth (71:5-6). What a lifelong testimony! But now, as the Psalmist has reached old age, he's become aware of his vulnerabilities and how "enemies" would exploit them (71:9-11). Regardless, he will hold fast to his God (71:14-16).

One of the fun things about growing old(er) is how experience builds perspective. Our Psalmist has walked with Yehovah for a long time and now passes his experiential knowledge of God to the younger generation (71:17-18). One of the most vital lessons he shares is his knowledge of God's greatness and power and how the Lord preserved him through difficulties. When we're young, and trouble comes to us, we often panic or worry about how we'll ever survive. After going through several such difficulties and experiencing how God helps His beloved people, troubles aren't all that daunting. "He did it before, He'll do it again" is the song on our lips (71:20). Therefore, the Psalmist can pick up his instrument and raise his voice in a song of praise to his great Sustainer of the Aged!

Psalm 72. The heading for Psalm 72 says, "Of Solomon." I think my HCSB commentary makes a good point. It could mean "authored by," "written for," or "in the style of." So, I would look closely to see if any clues point to one or the other of the above meanings. The themes of righteousness and justice weave throughout this psalm, and specific references seem to point to Solomon, such as "He will judge your people with righteousness and your afflicted ones with justice" (72:2), and the fact that under Solomon, Israel's influence had its greatest reach, even to the Euphrates to the north (72:8), ships reaching Tarshish (72:10; 1 Kings 10), and tribute from Sheba (72:15; 1 Kings 10). Overall, I think this is a psalm of blessing upon Solomon for the Lord to prosper him, extending God's blessing to His people. And while there are many blessings and benefits from that blessing, the Lord gets all the credit as He should (72:18-19).

There's an interesting final verse, "The prayers of David son of Jesse are concluded" (72:20). But are they? Evidently not, because there are seventeen more psalms after this

one credited to David. It's probably a notation at the end of Psalms Book II to set it apart from the following psalms (73-83) attributed to Asaph's authorship (or inspiration).

Psalm 73. Psalms, Book II, begins here (chapters 73-89). This psalm sets the tone at the start, "God is indeed good to Israel, to the pure in heart" (73:1). "But," the Psalmist writes, "my feet almost slipped; my steps nearly went astray. For I envied the arrogant; I saw the prosperity of the wicked" (73:2-3). The Psalmist's dilemma was knowing God was good to the godly, but the assumption is He's not good to the wicked. It only makes sense. And yet, the wicked prosper (73:4-12). "Then why should the godly person work at being good?" the Psalmist asks (73:13). And if the Lord is good to the godly, why do godly people suffer (73:14)? It sounds like we're back to the book of Job, right? So, let's see how the Psalmist answers this quandary.

It's a matter of perspective – temporal vs. eternal, the "now" vs. the "later." The apparent contradiction confused the Psalmist because he focused on the present time and the situation surrounding him (73:16). That all changed when he went into the Lord's presence and saw things from Yehovah's perspective (73:17). Sure, the wicked person prospers, but they could slip up at any time and crash, losing everything. The Psalmist realizes that such thoughts toward the Lord (assuming His unfairness) are animalistic, purely instinctive, and without any sense of spiritual understanding (73:22). What makes all the difference to him is knowing the Lord has him by the hand. In other words, the Lord has a firm grip on his life and will sustain him now and afterward when he dies (73:24). Being with the Lord matters even when life doesn't go as we think it should. So, it's useless to envy the wicked and all they accumulate in life or that they're enjoying "their best life now." It will all pass, and only those who stay tight with the Lord will find their life now and into eternity.

INSIGHT

As I get older, I'm faced with the things of "old age" more clearly. I pray to stay active, vibrant, clear-headed, rational, and spiritually vital until I die. In particular, 71:18 stands out to me, "Even while I am old and gray, God, do not abandon me, while I proclaim your power to another generation, your strength to all who are to come." That's my purpose in writing this simple *Cruisin' Through The Bible* schedule and commentary. I want to help you understand God's word in light of my experience. I want to "proclaim the Lord's power to another generation" as something that will help others after I'm gone. Now don't get me wrong, I'm in no hurry. But old(er) age gives us a different perspective and a desire to make some impact on those to follow, just like the Psalmist writes about.

June 16 : Scriptures Psalm 74-76

SUMMARY

Psalm 74. This psalm is a lament and describes how an enemy has invaded Israel and wreaked havoc on the nation, the people, the city, and the sanctuary. This situation raises an interesting question. Asaph was a Levite in David's day. And yet, no enemy is recorded as doing such widespread damage to Israel. Therefore, it seems that this psalm was written in Asaph's name or with his style to mourn a devastating national event, likely many generations later when the Assyrians, the Babylonians, or even the northern kingdom of Israel attacked Judah and Jerusalem.

The description of the devastation is vivid (74:3-8), and the Psalmist's despair is palpable (74:9-11). He writes as one looking at the utter ruin and begging God to intervene. Can God do so? Yes! He recounts God's mighty deeds – saving His people, defeating supernatural forces, and ordering the cosmos (74:12-17). In the last part, the Psalmist pleads with Yehovah to come to the aid of His beloved people and pay back Israel's oppressors for their violence. The key is the Psalmist says it's a matter of God's honor at stake (74:22) and to act now as His enemies are still at work (74:23).

Psalm 75. Wow! Talk about a shift in tone! This is a psalm of thanks for who God is and what He does – judge the wicked. He will judge in His time and according to all fairness. God doesn't favor anyone. As the Sovereign God, He alone raises one person and takes another one down. That's quite the reassurance for those who think (or see) the wicked always get their way in this life. Eventually, the Judge of the Earth will balance the scales of justice. The wicked will fall, and the righteous will rise in His presence. God will make it all work out.

Psalm 76. This magnificent psalm exalts God again as the Heavenly Judge (76:8). God is known in Judah. Why? Judah is the kingly tribe of whom David is the premier king, the "man after God's heart" (1 Samuel 13:14). God's name (His reputation, character, and personal traits) is great in Israel, i.e., all the 12 tribes who have experienced God and His exploits over the centuries. Israel's God dwells in Salem (Jerusalem) upon Mount Zion. From there, He rules over His people and fights their battles (76:3). The Psalmist declares God's majesty as He recalls how God moved against His enemies. "At your rebuke, God of Jacob, both chariot and horse lay still" (76:6) refers to the Egyptian army's wipe-out at the Red Sea. Honestly, who can stand against Israel's Mighty God? When the Judge stands to announce justice, the earth has nothing to say (76:8). Even humanity's wrath against God glorifies Him. Therefore, His servants who fear Him should bring the sacrifices that they've vowed to Him, the one who rules the rulers of the earth!

INSIGHT

I get ticked off sometimes when I watch the political show in Washington D.C. and even on the state and local levels. There are a lot of shenanigans going on. There are some very good and honest people in power and a lot of terribly dishonest and despicable scoundrels holding the levers of power. It gets terrible at election time when the latter group puts on a mask to convince you how fantastic they are and then pulls it off once they're assured of another term in office. That's when I take refuge in this verse, "Exaltation does not come from the east, the west, or the desert, for God is the Judge: He brings down one and exalts another" (75:6-7). I often pray for the Lord to put the right people in office who will stand for Him and do good for the people. If the Lord happens to let some less-than-desirable tool with questionable morals in office, I continue to pray for them. "Lord, turn their hearts or turn them out of office." Then I have to trust the Lord because, as the Psalmist says, the Lord is the Judge under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He exalts one, but He can just as easily take one down." May the Lord give us righteous men and women to lead us according to this word!

June 17 : Scriptures Psalm 77-79

SUMMARY

Psalm 77. Psalm 77 is a psalm of confidence according to the heading in my Bible, "Confidence in a Time of Crisis." The Psalmist (Asaph, according to Jeduthun's style?) is in a tough place. This moment of crisis is significant enough to drive him to seek God continually for help. Even during the night, God's lack of response makes him lose sleep as he prays and spends time with the Lord (77:1-4). How does he soothe himself? By remembering what Yehovah has done in the past (77:5-6). And yet, without God acting now, his recollections cause the Psalmist to cry out, "Has God forgotten me?" Such a thought that God's strength (His right hand) will not move on his behalf distresses "Asaph." So, the Psalmist presses in harder, recalling and celebrating the Lord's past mighty works to encourage him in the present and to hope for future deliverance. As is usual for Asaph's psalms, he looks back to the Exodus as his prime example of God's saving nature and power. 77:15 refers to Yehovah redeeming (restoring to Himself) His people from their slavery in Egypt. Verses 77:16-20 is his poetic recounting of the Red Sea Crossing with the picture of Moses and Aaron leading God's people as shepherds lead their flock. So metaphorically, Asaph encourages himself that as surely as God led His people through their crisis, He can do so in the Psalmist's situation. That's quite an encouragement upon which to meditate!

Psalm 78. This chapter is another of Asaph's psalms, during which he recalls the Lord's work on Israel's behalf. Right away, in the beginning, the Psalmist explains why he's writing this psalm. He's recounting God's past deeds so they can be recorded and handed down to future generations. "We will not hide them from their children but will tell a future generation the praiseworthy acts of the Lord, his might, and the wondrous works he has performed" (78:4). If you recall from 1 and 2 Kings/Chronicles, many Israelites went astray because they forgot God and what He did for them. Forgetting begets ingratitude, and ignorance makes people ripe for apostasy and idolatry. The Psalmist wrote this psalm to remind the people of God and what He's done. The first and most important thing was God establishing His covenant and Torah with His people (78:5-8). The older Israelites were commanded to tell their children of God's Torah from generation to generation to prevent spiritual straying, unlike some previous generations who committed this sin (78:8). The men of Ephraim were one such group (78:9, likening to wayward Israelites of Moses' day to the rebellious northern ten tribes after Solomon's reign). Why did they stumble? Because they "did not keep God's covenant and refused to live by his law. They forgot what he had done, the wondrous works he had shown them" (78:10-11). Again, this is precisely why the Psalmist is composing this psalm so

that the people worshiping the Lord in the Temple get a great reminder and not forget God.

The Psalmist recalls God's judgments on Egypt (78:12), the splitting of the Red Sea (78:13-14), and how the Lord provided water for His people *from rocks* (78:15-6)! And yet the people rebelled in the face of Yehovah's miraculous provision. "Oh sure, the Lord can provide water, but can He provide food?" The Psalmist points out what a stupid thing that was to say because the Lord sent fire in response to His people's ingratitude and scorn (78:21). But the Lord did send food (the manna and quail incident, Numbers 11:30-34), and after the people gorged themselves on God's provision, He struck some of Israel's best men down (78:23-31).

Did His people learn their lesson (the same lesson Asaph is trying to teach his listeners)? No. After disciplining some of the Israelites via death, many returned to God, repenting and seeking Him. And yet, their bent hearts kept turning them away from Yehovah (78:36-37). Despite that, the Lord was patient and merciful, remembering "that they were only flesh, a wind that passes and does not return" (78:39). Again, Asaph reminds his hearers of what did to Egypt and Canaan on behalf of His people. He judged Egypt, brought the sons of Jacob out and led them through the wilderness, and then drove out the Canaanite nations ahead of Israel (78:43-55). *And still, the Israelites rebelled, tested Him, and broke God's laws!* Asaph recounts how when the Israelites lapsed into idolatry, God rejected His people. He let the Philistines destroy the Tabernacle at Shiloh, capture the Ark, and run roughshod over His people. But God was still gracious. When it came time, Yehovah Himself took matters into His own hands and utterly defeated His enemy! He didn't do it with the tribe of Ephraim (the "firstborn son" of Jacob's "firstborn," Joseph). Instead, God selected the last son of Jesse of the tribe of Judah, David. And with that faithful man, God established His reign among His people. And let not any Israelite forget it!

Psalm 79. Although attributed to Asaph, this psalm describes an event about 410 years after the real Asaph lived. Asaph was a prophetic songster who led the Levitical worship teams under King David's reign (c. 1000 B.C.). The horrendous event described in the psalm is likely the Babylonian invasion (c. 586 B.C.). It's a safe assumption because it was under the Babylonian attack that Israel's First Temple was desecrated and ultimately destroyed along with the entire city of Jerusalem (79:1). The aftermath was devastating. The narrative of unburied bodies lying about the decimated city and being eaten by wildlife is a typical picture of God's reproach. God created the human body, and even the executed criminal's body was to be treated with respect. For a body to be left on display, unburied, was a way to humiliate one's enemies (Saul and Jonathan's bodies

hung on Beth She'an's walls) and heap abuse on them by desecrating their remains. Therefore, after surveying the scene, the Psalmist cries out to God to cease His anger against His people (79:5, because of their idolatry and sin) and turn His anger against Israel's enemies for their extreme destruction (79:6-7) and humiliation of God's people.

The Psalmist implies that for God not to help His people it's a stain on His reputation as He's the only one who could help and defend Israel. A conquering nation would credit their god as stronger than the conquered nation's god. Therefore, with Israel defeated and smashed, the nations mock the Living God, "Why should the nations ask, 'Where is their God?'" The Psalmist appeals to God for forgiveness and mercy and for Yehovah to execute vengeance on the nations that did this to His people. If He would do that, then all would know Israel is still His people, the sheep of His pasture.

As a side note, God did indeed strike down Babylon for how they went after what remained of Israel (the southern kingdom of Judah). God called Babylon to act as His instrument of judgment against His people for their idolatrous sin. But Babylon went way too far. Their wave of desolation broke over the land of Judah, and if God's hand had not been on His people, they would have been smashed for good. However, when we reach the major prophets who spoke God's word to His people during this time of upheaval and crisis, God promised to preserve His people and strike down Babylon. On one night, Babylon fell to the Medo-Persians. But for that, you'll have to wait until we reach the book of Daniel.

INSIGHT

Confidence in a time of crisis (Psalm 77)? How? By recounting how the Lord took you through times of trouble, difficulties, shortfalls, and needs. The Psalmist is right when he tells God's mighty deeds to buoy him up in a tough time. There are many times when I face a situation that's like one that the Lord took me through. Again, even if the problem doesn't change, at least I can find comfort and hope by thinking about how magnificent God is and how He caused things to change to bring me out of my sad place.

June 18 : Scriptures Psalm 80-84

SUMMARY

Psalm 80. I can't help it. I read the headings of the psalms to get an idea of their topic. It helps. In my Bible, this one says, "A Prayer for Restoration." To restore means "To bring back into existence or use; reestablish: restore law and order. 2. To bring back to an original or normal condition." So, something has happened, and the Psalmist has written a piece to be sung to ask for God to restore something. He goes to Yehovah directly (80:1). The parallel is interesting, "Shepherd of Israel, who leads Joseph like a flock," and "shine on Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh." Joseph was his father's favorite wife's son, and so was Benjamin. Ephraim and Manasseh were Joseph's sons that his father adopted into the family. The Psalmist is calling upon God's covenant with the family of the firstborn (Joseph) and his brother (Benjamin). Why?

Because covenant partners come to each other's aid when they're in trouble, the Psalmist uses the term Shepherd (80:1) to remind God that the people of Israel are His helpless sheep. If He doesn't help them, they're exposed and vulnerable. Next, the Psalmist calls the Lord "Yehovah God of Armies" (80:4). So Yehovah is Israel's protector and defender against attacking enemies, which is what 80:6 suggests. A neighboring army has attacked the nation, and it's not going well for Israel. Thus, they need God's help to restore them to their original condition, free from their enemies. God can do it because He's done it before. The Psalmist uses vineyard language to recall how God took Israel and planted them in Canaan, where they took root (80:8-11). And like every vineyard, there is a wall around it to protect it from those who would steal its fruit. But it seems Israel has turned away from their Shepherd, Army Commander, and Vinedresser. Therefore, God has removed Israel's protection and allowed enemies to invade. The Psalmist sings for God's help to strengthen the king (80:17, son of man – human, in this case, the man at your right hand – God's designated king) and turn back Israel's attackers. When that happens, the people will be restored (80:19)!

Psalm 81. Psalm 81 is a reminder to God's people to obey Him. Gee, maybe we should start every day with this, right? Anyway, it's set in the context of the Passover, followed by another recounting of God saving Israel from Egypt (81:3, 5-6). The Lord delivered His people and brought them to the Waters of Marah, where He transformed the poisonous water into drinkable water for a purpose – to teach them that He is more than able to take care of His people if they would simply obey Him and not look to other gods (things, etc.) to replace Him (81:10). But did they learn? Nope. The Psalmist uses the example of the rebellious people of the past and their punishment to admonish and encourage those in the present to stay obedient (81:15-16).

Psalm 82. Okay, this is an unusual psalm. A very unusual psalm. On the surface, it's a piece asking God for righteous judgment. The language indicates a Judge taking His seat and preparing to make a ruling (82:1). Some interpreters see this as God rebuking human judges for unjust rulings against the vulnerable. *However*, according to some who take the Bible for what it plainly says as their starting point (like Dr. Michael Heiser, *Unseen Realm*), God is rebuking the "gods," i.e., spiritual beings assigned to oversee humanity who have abused their trust. And since they've failed, God will judge these supernatural beings. Even though they have a spiritual nature, they'll suffer the same fate sinful human beings suffer – separation from God (death) and loss of their place of authority. Here's what Dr. Michael Heiser believes. God created a council of supernatural beings to serve as His overseers of the supernatural realm. God chose to create human beings to oversee His earthly creation. When humanity rebelled, God separated Himself from humanity. He then instituted these supernatural beings to watch over the subdivisions of the human race that were formed at the Tower of Babel – the nations formed according to their languages. In other words, God put a divine/supernatural being over each nation and tasked that being to help guide the nation per His ways. However, these beings liked being worshiped by people and usurped God's place in the people's hearts and minds, hence the beginning of idolatry. Therefore, God will judge those corrupted supernatural overseers, bring them down, and once again take His rightful place "over all the earth" (83:18). I highly recommend Heiser's book for insights into the Bible!

Psalm 83. This is another wild psalm that speaks of a united attack against Israel by the nations surrounding them. What's fascinating is when you compare the people groups and where they were located with today's nations that surround the nation of Israel. Suddenly, it looks like a prophecy of a combined Arab assault against the Jews. The rest of the psalm is a prophetic prayer for Israel's protection.

Psalm 84. Psalm 84 is a wondrously beautiful tribute to God's house. Ever wake up on a Sunday morning, and the first thought in your head is, "I get to go to worship this morning!" How many of us are genuinely excited to jam with the Lamb in worship? To be honest, there are times when I don't feel this way, and I need to stir myself up to get excited to sing and hear some excellent teaching. But there have been remarkable moments in my life where God's presence seems to settle on a church service/building/congregation for a time, and the sense of His presence is palpable! Spiritual gifts start flowing, worshipers sing at the top of their lungs, and the preaching or teaching is like fire erupting from the bones of whoever is sharing. This psalm comes to life during those times of God's nearness, and the revival fires are burning bright.

Like the Psalmist, I can't wait to "go to church," and I don't care if it's morning, noon, or night (84:1-2). I can see the Psalmist standing in the Temple courts, just looking around at all the sacrifices and singing, and in a small corner, he spots a bird that's built its home close to the Lord's presence in His courts. He envies the bird that can stay in the Lord's house while he has to return home (84:3-4). Even if people feel down or weak, just taking the trip to see the Lord is enough to encourage and strengthen them! He cries out for the Living God, "the Lord God of heavenly forces, Jacob's God," to hear his prayers. Some people envy those that serve on the church platform or altar area in today's church congregations. I've served for years as an acolyte (lighting candles, serving Communion), a worship leader, and a pastor-teacher. I understand the Psalmist's desire. When we understand the Lord's goodness and how amazing it is to stand in His presence, nothing the world has to offer can compare, especially when what the world offers is going to go away anyway. I can testify to the writer's declaration, "The Lord is a sun and shield; God is favor and glory. The Lord gives—doesn't withhold!—good things to those who walk with integrity. Lord of heavenly forces, those who trust in you are truly happy!" (84:11-12).

INSIGHT

Psalm 80:17 "Let your hand be with the man at your right hand, with the son of man you have made strong for yourself." On the surface, the idioms of this verse mean, "Oh Lord, let your power and strength and enabling go from You to the king, the man You chose to exercise Your power and authority on Your behalf." Pretty straightforward, isn't it.

And yet, there's a related verse we haven't read yet in the book of Daniel. In Daniel 7, we're introduced to "one like a *son of man* was coming with the clouds of heaven. *He approached the Ancient of Days* and was escorted before him. *He was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, so that those of every people, nation, and language should serve him.* His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will not be destroyed" (Daniel 7:13-14). We'll dig into that section when we get to it, but this struck me.

"Son of man" in Psalm 80 refers to a human being who sits at God's right hand, i.e., God's power works through him to work on His behalf. "Son of man" in Daniel refers to a unique human being, a person who, strangely, can exist in heaven with the Ancient of Days. This "son of man" is given the power to exercise God's rule of all the people of the earth. This is God's messiah, His anointed man, who will rule God's people and the world's nations. Psalm 80 says it in a limited, purely human sense. Daniel 7 reveals God's massive plan that He intends to fulfill through a special "son of man," Israel's Messiah. If you're familiar with the Gospels, does it now make sense that Jesus called himself the

"son of man" who now stands at His Father's "right hand" as His Right Hand Man (holding all of His Father's power), not only interceding for believers but waiting to receive the "go ahead" to exercise His Father's power to bring God's kingdom to earth? You may not understand this now, but wait until you read through Daniel and the Gospels. It'll make more sense then.

June 19 : Scriptures Psalm 85-87

SUMMARY

Psalm 85. This psalm was “of the sons of Korah.” This credit is the one given for Psalm 42. In 1 Chronicles 9, it says that the Korahites were responsible for keeping the gates, guarding the treasures, bringing the worship tools out of storage and returning them, baking the Sabbath bread, overseeing temple furnishings and supplies, blending the ointment for the spices, and leading the gathered worshipers in song (1 Chronicles 9:19, 26, 28-33). That’s a pretty hefty job description. This psalm is a plea for God to restore His favor to His people. He had already acted on their behalf (85:1-3), but something was missing – the full sense of God’s pleasure (85:4-8). The sense I get is the Psalmist is praying for something more – more spiritual zeal and more appreciation for the salvation the Lord has given His people. It’s true. Sometimes we take the Lord for granted. The Lord lets us get into trouble to remind us of how far we’ve drifted. That causes us to cry out to Him, and He helps us. But we can simply return to our laid-back, “take God for granted” attitude. What we need is more “fire in our bellies!” We need more of the Lord’s glory in our lives. We must be awash in covenant faithfulness and truth combined with righteousness and peace. That is where we need to seek to be with the Lord (85:10-13).

Psalm 86. This psalm is credited to David and is one of lamentation and pleading to God for personal spiritual growth and help against his enemies. His plea is, “Listen, Lord, protect me, save me, be gracious to me, bring joy to me.” Why? Because “I’m poor and needy, I’m faithful, I trust You, I call to You, and I turn to You.” It would be an excellent exercise to mull over these self-descriptions to see how we line up with them. Are we poor and needy or self-sufficient? Are we faithful to Jesus? Do we trust Him, call out to Him, and keep our attention on Him? Just something to think about. The Psalmist says this because he knows God’s kind and forgiving character (86:5), so he calls out to Yehovah. There’s no God like Him, and no spiritual being can do what He does. Even the mighty nations of the world will bend their knees to the Lord (86:9). David commits himself to Yehovah, whom he knows loves him and will save him from death. Not so the wicked who are attacking David. The Lord doesn’t guide them, but David is, and it’s when the Lord acts on David’s behalf that he’ll find comfort, and his enemies will be overcome. *Selah!*

Psalm 87. This short little psalm, also by the gatekeepers of the Lord (the Korahites), is an ode to Zion/Jerusalem, God’s city. The holiness of God’s city makes the mountains upon which it rests holy. The Psalmist sings in praise of Zion’s gates because that’s where the elders sat to render God’s judgments for court cases (87:2). The city commands more devotion than the rest of Israel’s dwellings because it’s God’s city. The names listed are

of nations that were traditional enemies of Israel. Still, in the future, during the end times, they will come alongside and support Jerusalem – Egypt, Babylon, the Philistines, Tyre (Lebanon), and Cush (Ethiopia). Though strangers to the land and born in other countries, these Gentiles will be regarded as naturalized citizens with their support of Israel. And despite the influx of welcomed Gentiles, the Lord will note His treasured people especially (87:6). Jerusalem truly is an international city. Many people worldwide love Jerusalem and look forward to the day when Jerusalem is no longer fought over, but it is the praise of the entire earth!

INSIGHT

Jerusalem! Jerusalem! As the author Joel Rosenberg puts it, Jerusalem is the epicenter of God's work on earth. The Bible focuses on all the land of Israel and some places beyond it. Still, Jerusalem is ground zero for God's most significant works – starting the salvation process through Jesus' death and resurrection during His first time on earth and completing that work when Jesus returns to take up His throne in Jerusalem to rule Israel and the entire world. Jesus is not returning to New York City. He's not returning to Rome. He's returning to Jerusalem because He has unfinished prophetic business to attend to. May that day come quickly and while we're alive to see it!

June 20 : Scriptures Psalm 88-89

SUMMARY

Psalm 88. Psalm 88 sounds like a person wrote it at the end of their rope. They see no hope for their situation and are as good as dead. If the Lord doesn't do something, they're done. In the Hebrew scriptures, it was believed that the person who died descended into Sheol (88:3-5), the underground holding place of the dead. It only makes sense because if the body goes down into the earth, so would what remains of the person – their spirit. The Hebrews imagined Sheol to be a dark place of shades with iron bars over the top so that no one could return to the land of the living, and yes, that's depressing. The writer credits his situation to God, who has put His wrath on him (88:7). I've had some bad times like that when all I could do was sigh and cry.

I could relate to the Psalmist because I knew only God could change the things I was going through. I love how the Psalmist appeals to the Lord. The person uses four rhetorical questions that are all answered, "No," and the questions appeal to God to save the person while they're still alive because dead people don't praise God or make His deeds known. Therefore, the suffering writer cries for help. The psalm ends with no resolution. This may seem a bit of a downer, but not every challenging issue in life is solved quickly. It's okay to voice our pain to the Lord and hang in there while we wait for His deliverance.

Psalm 89. This long psalm is about the Lord's covenant with King David. It's attributed to Ethan the Ezrahite, a Levitical musician. His use of the term, "I will sing of the Lord's *faithful love* forever," is our clue to the psalm's meaning. Faithful love is *chesed* or covenant love. It's the kind of faithfulness a person shows to their covenant partner. Emotions don't enter the "love" aspect. It's about being absolutely dedicated and loyal to the partner. The Lord has made a covenant with His Chosen One, i.e., David (89:3), and it follows the event in 2 Samuel 7, and 1 Chronicles 17, where the Lord swears a covenant to King David and promises that his family line will always hold Israel's throne (89:4). Verses 5-18 describe the greatness of Israel's covenant King. Nothing in heaven or on earth compares with Yehovah. Those who follow the Lord are happy, and the King of heaven and earth backs the "horn of Israel," Israel's strength, the king. Verses 19-37 are the essence of God's covenant promises to David.

However, in verse 38, the psalm takes a twist. Something has happened that causes the Psalmist to cry out to God based on Yehovah's covenant with David. Evidently, enemies have attacked the land and David's city. The negative things that happened (89:40-45) are punishments of a covenant-type, usually due to human unfaithfulness. When the

Psalmist invokes David's name, it's not that these things are occurring in David's day. If you think back to Kings and Chronicles, it could be this psalm was written about 400-500 years after David's reign when Judah was sinking into idolatry. As you may remember, God often judged His people to snap them out of their rebellion and cause them to seek Him again so He could restore them. This is where the Psalmist is: "How long, Yehovah?" Will You hide Yourself forever? Will You anger keep burning like fire?" In other words, "You have our attention, Lord! How long will You allow this to go on? Now that we're crying out to You, why aren't You acting on our behalf? Remember the taunts of the enemy and act!" May the Lord defend His people now and forever. And so ends Book III of the Psalms.

INSIGHT

God has such a "long lens" on His prophetic camera. He knows He will bring forth Israel's Messiah from the tribe of Judah, and this Messiah will also work to salvation for Israel and all nations. We know the Messiah to be Jesus, David's descendent from Judah's tribe. We may think God struck a covenant with David because of David's faithfulness, but God's complete plan was to finalize that covenant in His Son, Yeshua, Jesus. The Davidic covenant was made around 1,000 B.C., and Jesus arrived 1,000 years later. But the covenant prophecies won't be fulfilled until Jesus returns to rule from David's throne in Jerusalem, Israel. If some End Time Bible scholars are correct, and this will happen soon, God's promise to David will have stretched over 3,000 years to its fulfillment. Amazing!

June 21 : Scriptures Psalm 90-93

SUMMARY

Psalm 90. This is a unique psalm because it's credited to Moses. To be fair, Moses could have authored it, or someone else did with Moses and his words in mind. It certainly does have a Moses perspective because Moses wrote of the eternality of God and creation, two things that stick out at the beginning of the psalm (90:2). Plus, under Moses' leadership, God was most certainly the one who protected His people from many troubles during Moses' years of ministry. In contrast to God's eternal nature, people live but for a moment in time, mere grass that flourishes in the morning but wilts and dies in the evening (90:5). A person can never hope to live a thousand years, but to God, those same thousand years are like a day that passes by. Not only is God eternal, but He's all-knowing. None of us sinners can hope to hide our sin from the Lord (90:8) as we speed through our final day. For the Psalmist, the best people can do is live 70-80 years, years that are often filled with "struggle and sorrow." Why? I believe it's because the writer knows very well the condition humanity got itself into in Genesis 3 when our First Parents rejected God's ways for their own, and after that, life changed. We would live "by the sweat of our brow," an idiom for living in fear. Therefore, in the light of God's anger and wrath that causes us to revere Him, we should ask the Lord to "Teach us to number our days carefully so that we may develop wisdom in our hearts" (90:12). We need to consider our days and ways to live our short lives with wisdom in reverence for God. In the face of life's difficulties, the Psalmist asks God to turn toward His people so we can know His compassion, faithful love and be glad. The Psalmist wants God's faithful works to be seen by His people and their kids and for the work of their hands to last as a testimony to Him (90:16-17). Yes, the Psalmist asks for as many good days as the difficult ones so that he can rejoice in God's goodness.

Psalm 91. This well-known psalm is another that every Bible-loving Christian should memorize. It's filled with conditional promises with very simple conditions. So let me rearrange and condense what I'm reading. The requirements are: live under Yehovah's protection, trust Him, make the Lord your dwelling place (i.e., live in daily awareness and communion with Him), and set your heart on the Lord. What are the things God says He will do for those who live like this? He will be your refuge and fortress, places of protection. He will protect you. How? From sudden unseen troubles and sickness. As you hunker in under His wings (the picture of baby chicks hiding under the mother hen's wings in a storm), you will have nothing to fear, night or day, plagues or pestilences (which was considerable concern in the ancient world with primitive medicine). Even though tens of thousands may fall, you'll be preserved. The wicked will fall, but you won't. In fact, God will assign angels to guard you and actively protect you. The Psalmist

is not joking because Hebrews 1:14 says, “Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve those who are going to inherit salvation?” If we stay tight with God, God Himself says He will deliver us, protect us, answer us, rescue us, honor us, satisfy us with long life, and save us.

And I can hear it now. But what about the believer who goes through difficult times and they don’t seem to get the promises listed above. Does that mean they weren’t staying close to God? Not at all. Sometimes in God’s sovereignty, He allows bad things to come our way. But as I read this, I think of all the trouble I avoided by staying tight to God and living His way. By not sleeping around, I didn’t contract a plague or disease. By living God’s way, I could sleep at night even though the bills were piling up and the money wasn’t. Why? Because I knew the Lord is my provider and would meet all our needs, *which He did!* My wife and I have been blessed in ways (physically, spiritually, emotionally, and mentally) far beyond what I could ask because we *have* tried to stay close to the Lord. As we’ve remained “under His wings,” we’ve been guided past unseen traps (“opportunities”) that would have been extremely harmful to our family and us had we taken the bait. The upshot of the psalm is that it’s an encouragement to draw close to the Lord and stay close to Him, listen to Him, follow His lead, and trust Him. We may encounter difficulties, but He’s there to get us through them and avoid many others.

Psalm 92. The heading says this is a Psalm for the Sabbath day. If so, it should be about God since we must remember (Exodus 20:8) and observe (Deuteronomy 5:12) the Sabbath in His honor. And it is! The whole psalm is rejoicing in God for who He is (92:1-3) and all He has done (92:4-5). Though enemies should arise, they’ll perish, but the Lord will continue forever. Therefore, the Psalmist has nothing to fear, for he’s faithful to the Lord. As a righteous person who walks with God, the Psalmist knows he will prosper and remain vibrant into old age.

Psalm 93. This psalm is short and oh, so sweet! It’s all about the Yehovah’s majesty and how He sits enthroned about His creation. Because He sits as King over the world, the world is firmly established and “cannot be shaken.” Tell that to the climate alarmists. Though the waves roar and make a mighty tumult, God’s majesty is far greater. And because the Lord’s throne and creation are firmly established, His testimonies (decrees, commands) are reliable, reflecting the beauty of God’s holiness.

INSIGHT

I caught a quick “Aha!” moment when I read Psalm 91. It happened when I read, “He will cover you with his feathers; you will take refuge under his wings” (91:4) as part of “The one who lives under the protection of the Most High dwells in the shadow of the

Almighty" (91:1). Being under God's wings metaphorically means trusting in Him and the protection of His presence and His word when we obey it. At the end of Jesus' ministry, after three years of reaching out to His fellow Jews and the Jewish leadership with the Good News of how God's kingdom would come to them in a new way, Jesus came to the point where He knew the inevitable. Since the Jewish leadership had rejected Him (no surprise since it was already prophesied in Isaiah 53), the Father would now sideline and punish His people for rejecting Him. Yes, this was foreseen and part of His plan to bring the Gospel to the rest of the world, but it didn't absolve the people of Jesus' day of their rejection, rebellion, and eventual hand in Jesus' crucifixion. On the day before Passover, when Jesus would be arrested and condemned, Jesus stood on the Mount of Olives and said, *"How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!* See, your house is abandoned to you. I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'!" (Luke 13:34-35, italics author). Now think about this. The Psalmist says those who take cover under God's wings will know His protection and the Lord as their protective shield. That means those who *don't* do that are exposed to the troubles listed in the psalm, exposed to danger. And that's what Jesus was saying. Because he used the hen/chicks reference, I wonder if He was referring to Psalm 91 and what would happen to the people of His day because they refused God's protection by choosing to deal with Jesus their way and not the way their Heavenly Father wanted them to. A mere 40 years later, the Roman army surrounded Jerusalem during the 1st Jewish Rebellion, and within a few months, the city and the Temple were destroyed. When we read Josephus' account of the siege and Jerusalem's fall, it reads like the terrible things in Psalm 91 – fear day and night, plagues and pestilences, flying arrows, and thousands falling (dying) as God's judgment of the wicked. I don't know about you, but if the positive side of this verse doesn't encourage you to get close to God, the negative side, borne out by Israel's fall in A.D. 70, will do the trick!