

June 22 : Scriptures Psalm 94-97

SUMMARY

Psalm 94. Here comes the Judge! Here comes the Judge! This psalm appeals to the Divine Judge to get on with judging the wicked who are celebrating away (94:1-3). The psalmist brings his charges against the evil people and why the Almighty Judge should haul them into His court. Not only do they harm God's people, but they also go after the innocent and vulnerable (94:4-7). But does the One who made the eye and ear not see or hear? Of course, He does! And the Judge is the same God who gave the nations the way to live, so surely, He'll discipline those who break His laws. "Hey evil people, don't think you can get away with your wicked stuff" (94:8-11). In the meantime, the Judge works on behalf of His people, disciplining them and helping them escape from trouble while He prepares the lawbreakers' downfall. Yup, the Judge will support His people (94:12-15). The psalmist knows that without the Lord's help, he would have fallen, but the Judge stands up for him and supports him with His covenant love (94:16-19)! Therefore, though the wicked conspire against God's people, the Judge will rule and act on the psalmist's behalf while executing judgment against the rotten scoundrels (94:20-23).

Psalm 95. This psalm speaks of great worship for a great God! He's the One who knows the depths of the earth and other incomprehensible things like the mountaintops, the depths of the seas, and how the dry land was made (95:3-5). And yet, such a great King is also a Good Shepherd who cares for His sheep and deserves their worship (95:7). However, the psalmist includes a warning to heed God's voice. Those who sing this song are the descendants of those who dropped in the desert and other places because even though they knew God as King and Shepherd, they refused to listen to Him. This admonition is a fair warning for all of God's people.

Psalm 96. Psalm 96 is a call for *all* nations to worship the Lord. Why? Because He is not just Israel's God. He's the One True God of the entire earth, and all the gods of the nations are nothing (96:5). Yehovah alone made the heavens in which these so-called gods reside. Since God is the Majestic One, then may all the people of the world (families of the peoples) come before the Lord with their sacrifices and praise Him, for He is the One who controls the whole earth and holds it firmly. He is the Judge of the entire world and is coming to render judgment upon all the nations (96:12-13).

Psalm 97. Again, we have a beautiful psalm of worship and praise to the Mighty, Majestic King! The psalmist describes God's majesty in stunning atmospheric terms – clouds, darkness, fire, lightning, and the fullness of God's presence, causing mountains to shudder and shake (97:2-5). Heaven also responds in kind when God's presence

manifests. The One True God's presence puts the lie to the idols, revealing how worthless they are (97:7). All so-called gods, lesser spiritual beings, *must* bend the knee to Yehovah! Judah and Jerusalem rejoice in God's judgments, for He is over all things on earth and beings in heaven. What should the righteous do in the light of God's awesome majesty and justice? Hate evil, for this mighty God protects His people and shines the light of His favor on them!

INSIGHT

While the psalmist writes in highly picturesque terms, don't think this is all just a flight of fancy. The Bible records moments in human history when the God of Heaven dropped into our physical world for a little chat – or a lot of fighting. Take a close look at the Exodus. Don't think that God's presence in a mighty cloud or pillar of fire was a small thing. I like to watch tornado videos, and some of the largest ones on the open western prairies are stunning, to say the least. I can't imagine what it was like for the Egyptian army to gaze at the pillar of fire that could so easily have consumed them! And then there's the Lord's great appearance at Mount Sinai, where it says His presence made the mountain shake. The rabbis say the mountain hopped and skipped as the fire, as a blast furnace, roared on the very top.

There's another Mount Sinai incident where the prophet Elijah fled after taking out Queen Jezebel's prophets of Baal, and she threatened his life. As Elijah cowered in a cave, God's presence shook the mountain with a mighty earthquake, tossed rocks around with a strong wind, and then crisped the surface with a roaring fire, similar to Yehovah's appearance when Israel first encamped at Sinai's base. As a prelude to what God told Elijah, I think the Lord reminded His frightened prophet Who was in charge – the God of Sinai. And finally, in Isaiah 6, the namesake prophet (Isaiah) saw a vision of God's throne room in the Temple that was so real it felt to him as if the entire building was about to shake apart. He was so frightened and convicted by his sin that Isaiah told God he was about to disintegrate. So, is the psalmist just being hyperbolic in describing God's presence, or is he reminding God's people of the Mighty One who has their backs? Having that picture in your mind, how does that make you feel knowing God is with you?

June 23 : Scriptures Psalm 98-101

SUMMARY

Psalm 98. This psalm is a song of praise for the victory God gave Israel, which He displayed for all the nations of the earth. Which victory? Unknown. But any of Israel's victories under God's hand is the sign of Yehovah's covenant faithfulness to His people. And who should join in the psalm of praise besides God's people, Israel? The earth, seas, rivers, and mountains. Why? Because the Lord is coming to judge the earth, He will decide fairly and justly for everyone. After seeing all the injustice in the world today, I'm looking forward to the Lord doing that!

Psalm 99. And we have another psalm of praise for God's presence and justice. He sits enthroned between the cherubim – literally and supernaturally. It's a mind-blowing truth that the eternal, ever-living God rested His presence between the golden cherubim above the Ark of the Covenant in the Temple at the psalm's writing. Let that sink in! God's physical presence rested above the Ark of the Covenant in the Tabernacle and the Temple. The psalmist reminds us that the present God is also the just God. He *loves* justice. Furthermore, He "established fairness; you have administered justice and righteousness in Jacob." Fairness, justice, and righteousness are an excellent combination for any society. Fairness – "Having or exhibiting a disposition that is free of favoritism or bias; impartial." Justice – "The attainment of what is just, especially that which is fair, moral, right, merited, or in accordance with law." Righteousness – "Morally upright; without guilt or sin." (American Heritage Dictionary. It's hard to say, but a quick consideration of these three words tells me we don't live in a fair, just, or right society. Not when fairness is skewed to favor a culturally approved person over another. Not when it's hard for some people to get justice because it doesn't line up with politically correct ideology. And righteousness? Our nation threw God out of the courtroom a long time ago. Guilt and sin are determined by ideology, not law. Okay, rant aside, what does the psalmist say is our best response to proper fairness, justice, and righteousness? Bow and worship. The psalmist lists three influential and significant priests who served God, Moses, Aaron, and Samuel, who humbled themselves before the Lord, who communed with them and forgave their sins while maintaining proper justice for their actions when they crossed God's moral line. Even they didn't get a pass. If not they, then neither will we, so we should learn and humble ourselves before the Lord.

Psalm 100. How about a really short psalm of thankfulness? Here you go. But for what should we be thankful, O psalmist? Because Yehovah is God and He made us (100:3). That alone should be enough. But He also cares for us as a Shepherd does His sheep.

Therefore, it's good to gather in His Temple with songs of praise for His covenant faithfulness and goodness, which lasts throughout the generations.

Psalm 101. A Davidic psalm. All arguments aside, I'm going to assume King David wrote this. The King commits himself to focus on God and His ways in integrity. He will so focus on God that he'll resist the tendency (the temptation) to sin against which all people struggle. Integrity means "Steadfast adherence to a strict moral or ethical code" (American Heritage Dictionary. The Hebrew word translated integrity is *tamim*, "complete, sound. Also, blameless, entire, intact, one who is perfect, upright, without blemish or defect." Such biblical integrity speaks of purity of thought and behavior. Integrity means not compromising with evil which leads to transgression, which means "to swerve or fall away from God." King David is so zealous for integrity and moral purity that he lists those things that will cause him to destroy those people who embrace the following sins in his kingdom; slandering a neighbor, having haughty eyes, or an arrogant heart. Imagine if that were the case today! I kind of chuckle thinking about how many people would be tossed out of our society if they didn't mend their ways. Oh yeah, that includes me as well.

David refuses to hang around with sinners and prefers drawing righteous people to himself. Obviously, King David knows the idea that "Bad company corrupts good morals." He desires to have people of integrity around him and, as king, refuses to tolerate anyone in his palace who is two-faced or lies, and King David commits to the same thing over Israel and Jerusalem.

INSIGHT

David's dislike of the wicked makes me wonder what it would be like to live in a nation as intolerant of sin and ungodly behavior as King David. At least we can be that little island of godliness if we choose to follow God.

June 24 : Scriptures Psalm 102-104

SUMMARY

Psalm 102. Psalm 102 has a beautiful heading in my Bible, "Affliction in light of Eternity A prayer of a suffering person who is weak and pours out his lament before the Lord." As we go through the verses, I'm pretty sure many people can identify with the writer's lament. How often have we found ourselves where all we can do is bawl to the Lord, begging Him to answer us and send help? This must have been a time in the writer's life when his whole world seems to be caving in, greatly affecting his whole being. His days fly by, his bones hurt, and his heart and he's lost his appetite. And that's just 102:3-4! He speaks of groaning, aloneness, isolation, and inability to sleep. Rather than find compassion, he gets taunts from his enemies (102:8). He believes God has had a big hand in his situation, treating the suffering psalmist with "indignation and wrath" (102:10). And yet, the psalmist knows God is exalted in His heaven and is famous not only throughout the earth but across generations. He prays for God to come to his nation's aid and for His servants who love even the stones of Jerusalem. The new part that begins at 102:12 talks about God rising in judgment to help Jerusalem even after some kind of devastation. When God judges on behalf of His people, the rest of the nations will see and fear the Lord. This has undoubtedly been the case since Israel's War of Independence in May 1948 and subsequent wars. Despite crazy odds against her, Israel has successfully defended herself even to the point of winning new land in warfare (the Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip, and the Sinai Peninsula), which shocked the attacking nations and the rest of the world. But the battles came at great personal expense to the Israelis with loss of life and destruction. The psalmist knows what he is writing is for "future generations" who will once again be restored to Jerusalem to serve the Lord (102:22). In the meantime, while the writer suffers in this present life, he looks to the Lord and His everlastingness that will far outlast what His hands have made. So, what can we learn from Psalm 102? One of the ways to help with our suffering is to keep our focus on the Lord and rest assured that even if all things pass away (including us), the Lord will always be present. We will never be without help or comfort.

Psalm 103. According to the heading, this is a Davidic psalm that seems to have been inspired by the good things the writer knows Yehovah does for His people. The critical opening phrase is, "do not forget all his benefits" (103:2), and then the psalmist lists them in verses 3-14. One of my favorite verses is "He revealed his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel" (102:7). Why the difference? Moses stayed close to the Lord, close enough to learn God's ways. But those who aren't so close to Him see only His works (think of the fantastic events of the Exodus). But Moses desired to know God Himself (Exodus 33:9-11, 18-19; 34:5-8), not just His deeds. Another benefit I love is the Lord's

loving-kindness (covenant faithfulness) we experience when He forgives and cleanses us from our sin (103:9-12). He loves us as the perfect father would, and He knows how frail we are (103:13-16). But in the face of our extreme frailty and short lives, we have a loving and faithful God who lives forever (103:17-19), and that's a great reason to bless Him every day (103:20-22).

Psalm 104. Do you want a solid scripture that you can use to kick off a time of worship? *This is it!* Simply put, Psalm 104 is a hymn about God and His creation and how remembering His creating and sustaining work causes us to praise the Lord. I'm just going to let the psalm speak for itself. I want to suggest one thing, though. As you read it, change the third person to the first person as you read through the whole psalm. For example, change "He established the earth on its foundations; it will never be shaken" to "*You* established the earth on its foundations; it will never be shaken" (104:5). And there's this one, "May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in his works" turns into "May *Your* glory endure forever; may *You* rejoice in *Your* works" (104:31). This will make it more intimate and help you speak directly to God. Give it a try. I did, and I can't believe how much it rocked me again. Just keep heaping praise on Him!

INSIGHT

We certainly are frail creatures. The psalmist is right. Our lives pass like smoke (102:3). At age 62, I'm seeing obituaries of those in my High School graduating class. That tends to bring mortality home to me. And then I see obituaries of much younger people dying in their 30s and 20s. I've lived a good life and feel like I've accomplished some good things for the Lord, something I can leave for future generations (102:18). But what about the lives that were a small puff of smoke – young men and women, even children? If I were to speak to a young person, I would advise a few things. 1) Get to know Jesus early in your life. Ask Him to save you from eternal separation from Him and His Father when you die. 2) Ask the Lord to help you live for Him so that you have something that you've left behind that affects other peoples' lives for God. Then, even if you die young, you've left a legacy and can look forward to God's "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25, the parable of the talents). IT's not how long you live; it's how well you live. And you can only live well through God and with His help.

June 25 : Scriptures Psalm 105-107

SUMMARY

Psalm 105. Although Psalm 105 is a little longer, it's pretty simple. As I read it, it's a psalm of praise to God for His faithfulness to His people as seen through the events stretching from Abraham and the rest of the patriarchs through the Egyptian captivity and the Exodus to the point where Israel's God gave His people their land. That covers about 760 years! That's quite the track record of continual faithfulness. No wonder the psalmist is singing God's praises. There's a nice twist in the last verse at the psalm's end. It answers the question, to what end did God faithfully preserve, protect, and establish His people? The answer is, "All this happened so that they might keep his statutes and obey his instructions. Hallelujah!" (105:45)

Psalm 106. While Psalm 105 is a psalm declaring God's faithfulness, Psalm 106 is about the unfaithfulness of God's people. It's quite a contrast. Here's a simple breakdown: God is faithful beyond anything we can say. People are happy when they live His way (106:1-3). The psalmist asks the Lord to once again show His favor to His people by bringing them salvation (106:4), in the sense of saving the exiled Israelites from the nations to which they were exiled for their stubborn disobedience (106:47). In between these two verses is a cold-eyed look at how disobedient Israel had been throughout their life with God – The Exodus (106:6-12), the Waters of Marah, the quail and manna incidents (106:13-15), Korah's rebellion (106: 16-18), the Golden Calf debacle and near-extermination by God (106:19-23), the rebellion of the Ten Spies (106:24-27, year 2 in the wilderness), Israel's idolatry that nearly got them wiped out *again* (106:28-31), the 2nd water from the rock episode that so angered Moses that he was disqualified from the Promised Land (106:32-33), and Israel's failure to drive out the Canaanites despite God's command and their subsequent fall into idolatry (106:34-39). How did Yehovah deal with their disobedience and unfaithfulness? By allowing foreign nations to enter the land and oppress the Israelites. However, when they repented, God forgave them and freed them from their oppressors (106:44-46). Despite their unfaithfulness, God still cared for them and acted on their behalf. So, since the Lord forgave previous national sins, the psalmist once again asks the Lord to forgive His faithless people. And we come to the end of Book IV of the Psalms.

Psalm 107. Book V opens with a psalm of thanksgiving to God as a Deliverer. The 2nd and 3rd verses invoke the redemption theme, redemption meaning restoring people to a previous state, usually to their family, after a bad event caused them to be separated from their loved ones. The key theme, though, of this psalm is "God's faithful love." This phrase is *chesed* in Hebrew and is an unfailing covenant love committed to the well-being

of one's covenant partner. Faithful love (*chesed*) is mentioned six times in this chapter and is intimately linked to why the Lord saves His people from their troubles. 1) God took those who found themselves lost in a desert wasteland, hungry and thirsty, and led them to cities for protection and provision. Likely the psalmist is thinking about Israel's wilderness wandering. 2) God found those isolated from society because they broke God's law. And yet, the Judge and Jailer had mercy on them, forgiving and releasing them from their bondage. 3) God sought out those suffering because of their "rebellious ways and sins." Many people today physically suffer illness and deterioration because they chose to live their way and not God's. 4) God found those who were adrift at sea, battered by the waves, brought about by the Lord himself. It reminds me of Paul's storm-tossed journey in Acts 27 and the storm that came over the ship Jonah had boarded to flee from God's assignment against Nineveh. Yet, when the sailors cried to the Lord, He answered and calmed the sea, bringing them to safe harbor. What should all these beneficiaries of God's gracious deliverance do? Thank God because He is the Way-Maker who can bring water to the desert and abundance from the ground (107:33-38). He can even overturn oppression so that the oppressed are free and the oppressors become oppressed. What's the psalmist's conclusion? Think about these things as examples of God's unfailing covenant love. What a terrific way to encourage oneself!

INSIGHT

Why did God save us through Jesus? When I attend some churches, it seems they just focus on "me, the miserable sinner" who is saved by God's grace (which is true), but they stop there. That's the theme Sunday after Sunday. It's like they're stuck on the first verse of *Amazing Grace*, "Amazing Grace how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found; Was blind, but now I see." They don't move to the rest of the verse about living for the Lord by His grace, "Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come; 'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, And grace will lead me home."

As I've often told my wife, "It's as if they're stuck at the cross and haven't walked over to see the empty tomb." Jesus told His disciples that He had to go away so that he could send them the Holy Spirit. That "going away" means dying and rising and ascending to heaven so that He could send His Spirit to be with us *so that we could live obediently and carry on His ministry as Jesus' body to the end of giving glory to God*. Yes, we were saved for the same reason that the writer of Psalm 105 notes, "All this happened so that they might keep his statutes and obey his instructions. Hallelujah!" (105:45). As we keep Jesus statutes and obey His instructions, we look more and more like Him to a spiritually lost world. We were saved for a purpose. Do it.

June 26 : Scriptures Psalm 108-112

SUMMARY

Psalm 108. Ever wake up with a worship song in your head? I guess you could call it a worship song earworm. When that happens, I wonder if I've been worshipping all night long or why it got stuck in my head in the first place. I can often trace it back to the recent worship team rehearsal time (I play keys in my congregation's worship team). Why do I bring this up? Because this psalm by David (a Davidic psalm) opens with the writer praising and worshipping God in the morning, "My heart is confident, God; I will sing; I will sing praises with the whole of my being. Wake up, harp and lyre! I will wake up the dawn" (108:1-2). But as we read through it, it's clear that it's a pre-battle psalm that exalts God and proclaims Him as King over the nations and protector of Israel. The finale is the psalmist's plea for the Lord to grant Israel victory, "Give us aid against the foe, for human help is worthless. With God we will perform valiantly; he will trample our foes" (108:12-13).

Psalm 109. Judging by what we read about King David's life, this psalm is certainly in line with his ongoing struggles against those who opposed him. This chapter is an imprecatory psalm, a prayer that asks God to "curse" the psalmist's enemies. No, this is not based on personal hatred but on God's covenantal promise to act on behalf of His partner when that partner is attacked. It's like a lesser king petitioning the greater king with whom he has a covenant for help against an adversary. The greater king comes to the aid of a lesser king. David's complaint is while he has extended love to others, they've returned hate. Judging by the list of imprecations, the hateful words and deeds must have been harsh. The list of imprecations (109:6-15) follows, and the psalmist lays out the reasons for more curses (109:16-20). Those reasons are based on Torah commands to protect the innocent and the vulnerable, people who are very close to Yehovah's shepherd-heart. But what of the Psalmist? He falls back on Yehovah's covenant promises to protect His own, especially when they are needy and vulnerable and on the receiving end of the wicked person's attacks. Again, here are the words that tell us this is a covenant issue. "Help me, Lord my God; save me according to your faithful love (*chesed*, covenant commitment, and faithfulness, not an emotion although such a commitment would stir up emotions) (109:26)." And here's another fun idiom, "For he stands *at the right hand* of the needy to save him from those who would condemn him" (109:31). The right hand is the "hand" or "side" of strength because most people are right-handed, weapons are used with the right hand, and tasks are performed with the right hand. Therefore, this can be read, "For he is the strength of the needy, those who have no strength, to overpower those who bring useless accusations against him." Nice, huh?

Psalm 110. This chapter is another psalm of David, and when it's referred to in later scriptures, especially by Jesus, you absolutely know King David wrote it. Psalm 110 is considered a messianic psalm, a psalm that looks forward to God sending Israel's Messiah. Jesus used this psalm to reveal the Jewish leadership's misunderstanding about their messiah (Matthew 22:44; Mark 12:36, Luke 20:42). Later inspired writers clearly identify who Psalm 110 and Jesus were referring to – Jesus Himself (Acts 2:34; Hebrews 1:13)! So let's take a look at this heavily prophetic psalm. Imagine David writing, "This is the declaration of the Lord to my Lord" (110:1). That means David has a Lord, Yehovah. Between Yehovah and David, there is another lord, i.e., a higher authority "king" under the authority of the highest authority king, Yehovah. From the start, David implies that a king who will come down his family line will be of greater authority than he. What does Yehovah say to this greater king (we'll say messiah, God's anointed king)? "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool" (110:1). There's that right-hand thing again! Paraphrased, Yehovah's future king will hold all Yehovah's power and authority and remain with God Himself (What? A human king in heaven with God? Who would have ever thought such a thing?) until the time when God's enemies are to be defeated. Then this Anointed One (as Israel's King, David's descendant) will receive Yehovah's kingly sanction to rule over all his enemies from Jerusalem (110:2) with his people following him (110:3). This Anointed One, Israel's Messiah-King, will hold the two functions as King and Priest. But wait! Doesn't the Torah say that the Kingship and Priesthood should never be invested in the same person after God split it to the Levites (priesthood) and Judah, specifically David's family (kingship)? Yes, it does. However, since God separated those functions in the first place, He has the right to recombine them when He wants. Perhaps it was God's plan all along to separate the two roles *until* a specific person comes who could execute both functions perfectly – Jesus! Jesus is a kingly priest as Melchizedek was also a king who served as God's High Priest in Genesis 24. Yes, this psalm is all about Jesus. He is King David's king-priest descendant who will rule the nations from Jerusalem. 109:5-7 describes His reign. I'm looking forward to the day, and I hope I'm alive to see it when Jesus returns to stop the world's and Israel's enemies in their tracks, executes justice upon those enemies, and sets this world right again.

Psalm 111. This psalm centers on God's works. It may say that in the Psalm's heading in your Bible. Why will the psalmist praise God "with all his heart?" Because of God's mighty works. Notice verses 2-4, "The Lord's works are great, All he does is splendid and magnificent, He has caused His wondrous works to be remembered." Yup, it's about what the Lord has done and what that reveals about Him. He is gracious, compassionate, provides food, is faithful to His covenant, and has given Israel their land. His works are just and true (as opposed to the wicked, whose works are often unjust and false – my comment). Because of that, the Lord's works endure forever. As it says at the top and the

end of the psalm, God's works are to be studied, and His ways are to be observed. Those who follow them gain wisdom and insight. It sounds like a good deal to me.

Psalm 112. Psalm 112 feels like a continuation of Psalm 111. To me, the connection is "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his instructions have good insight" (111:10). Then Psalm 112 continues with the characteristics of the righteous person who fears the Lord and follows his instructions. That person walks in peace, joy, and confidence and acts just like God, "gracious, compassionate, and righteous" (112:4). In other words, the psalmist is telling us we will become like what we focus on, what we worship. Because they know God and He is with them, the righteous person lives fearlessly, able to give freely to the poor, staring into the future with undimmed and confident eyes. It's funny to me at the end as the psalmist says the wicked "will see it and be angry; he will gnash his teeth in despair" (112:10). Why? "The desire of the wicked leads to ruin." But the desire of the righteous, God and His word, leads to life!

INSIGHT

Life can be a battle at times. When we wake up, it's not hard for our minds to race ahead to the day's challenges. Some of them can be pretty daunting, even terrifying. Psalm 108 is a good reminder to have the proper perspective when our eyes open. Yes, with God, we will perform valiantly! No matter what the day brings, we need God's help, "for human help is worthless." The great thing is that our Lord has promised to give us His strength and to help us!

June 27 : Scriptures Psalm 113-118

SUMMARY

We have reached a series of psalms called The Hallel, or Praise Psalms. Myjewishlearning.com says, "Hallel is a prayer of thanksgiving added to the morning service on festive Jewish holidays. The prayer, whose Hebrew name literally means "praise," is comprised of six psalms (113-118) that amount to an extended expression of praise and thanks to God for the many kindnesses bestowed upon Israel."

Reciting the Hallel is not a modern phenomenon. They're quoted throughout the New Covenant scriptures, especially in the Gospels. There's a deep link between some of them and Jesus. Jesus is the fulfillment, the ultimate expression, of the Feasts of the Lord. For example, the Spring Feasts are the Week of Unleavened Bread, Passover, First Fruits, and Shavuot (Pentecost as we Christians know it). Jesus was the sinless "Lamb of God" who died on Passover, rose on the Feast of First Fruits, and Sent His Spirit on the day of Shavuot. Since there's a strong connection between Jesus and the Feasts, a psalm about a Feast likely references Jesus. That's what we'll explore in these psalms and get familiar with them.

Psalm 113. Psalm 113 praises a merciful God who "humbles himself" to lift up His people. The psalmist declares that God's name is to be praised. "God's name" refers to God Himself and His perfect, holy character. Because of who He is, God is exalted above all nations (unlike those puny regional or local "gods/idols"). And yet, the Almighty, exalted God stoops down to look upon the earth and humanity (113:6) and raise people up (113:7). The word for "stoops down" means "to abase oneself." Abase means "lower, demean, humiliate, degrade, denigrate." Imagine! The Almighty God abases Himself to come to His people and raise them to sit with the "higher class" of their society. This teaches us that God regards all people as equals. An even greater understanding is that Jesus abased Himself (Philippians 2:5-11) to be born in human flesh and suffer and die for the poor and needy so He could lift them up and seat them with Him as co-partners, brothers, and sisters in His realm after He was resurrected (Ephesians 2:4-7). The last verse about giving a barren woman a child has a beautiful idea behind it. A barren woman felt shame because she couldn't produce children to carry on the family line. A man could divorce his wife if she were unable to have children. This verse uses the example to say God takes shame away from His people. The poor and needy feel shame because of their abased condition. And yet, God abases Himself to raise His people and remove their shame as He takes His place alongside them. Now *that* is a great God!

Psalm 114. This psalm is about the God who delivers Israel, and it fits Passover as it relates to the “deliverance” theme. When God delivered His people from Egypt, He took up residence among them. Because He was with His people, the Red Sea Split on the Israelites’ way out of Egypt, the beginning of the Exodus, and the Jordan River split as Israel entered Canaan, the official end of the Exodus. In between, Israel met with God, who shook Mount Sinai and caused water to flow miraculously from a rock to satisfy His people’s thirst at the mountain’s base. The allusion to hills “skipping like lambs” strikes me as hilarious because, in my head, I have the picture of little lambs and goats bouncing around the farmyard. Where is Jesus in this psalm? He is the One who delivers His people; it wasn’t just an exodus from Egypt into the Promised Land. It was an exodus from the kingdom of darkness into the promise of entering His presence when we die. When Jesus died, there was a mighty earthquake in Jerusalem (Matthew 27:54), and the thing that “split” was the Temple curtain (Mark 15:38), showing that the path back to God was now open and He was inviting all to come, first His people and then later, the Gentiles.

Psalm 115. This psalm is a call to give glory to God. Why give glory to God? Because He’s alive, keeps His covenant, is truthful, and rules from heaven as He wants to. So there! He isn’t like those puny, inanimate “gods” that can’t speak, hear, or do anything. They’re useless, and the psalmist says those who worship those metal statues are the same – useless. But that’s not our God! He speaks, hears, and does whatever He wants. That’s quite a contrast to the dumb idols, right? His people can trust Him because Yehovah is their “help and shield” (written three times so that you get the writer’s point) and the One who blesses them. The implication is that the idols can’t protect their owners and can’t bless them. The final stanza is a blessing everyone sings to everyone else as they make their way up to Jerusalem. It encourages everyone to sing out because the dead can’t praise God, so the living should let loose with God’s praise! Where is Jesus in this psalm? Easy. The psalmist compares the Living God with the inanimate idols. But people embrace idols because they’re tangible (able to be touched). Idols were a physical representation of a spiritual being. God one-ups the ridiculous idols. Jesus is God in the flesh. Not a static statue *representing* a spiritual being but a *living, dynamic person* that allows us to experience God in a way that we can relate to and understand. Jesus is the living image of God in human flesh. So take that, stupid idols!

Psalm 116. As the Feast of the Lord pilgrims worship in Jerusalem, they sing Psalm 116, a great song thanking God for His deliverance. Deliverance for what? Likely many things. However, there’s an overriding theme of deliverance from death. Death is inescapable when it comes to us. Therefore, death is the ultimate situation from which people cry for deliverance. If God can save me from death, He can save me from anything! The psalmist

cries out in gratitude for the Lord's salvation (saving him) from a situation that seemed like it was the end. He puts his plight in poetic terms, "The ropes of death were wrapped around me, and the torments of Sheol overcame me; I encountered trouble and sorrow. Then I called on the name of the Lord: 'Lord, save me!'" (116:3-4). The psalmist rejoices because the Lord did just that. Yehovah pulled him back from the edge and saved him from his circumstances, for which he's extremely grateful (116:5-9). The writer refused to believe himself when faced with whatever was oppressing him and called those people liars who said he was done for (116:10-11). But God came through! So, the psalmist will lift the cup of salvation and thank God. Now, this is important. During the Passover celebration, four cups of wine are drunk, two during the ceremony before dinner and two during the ceremony after dinner. Cup #1 is the Cup of Setting Apart. Cup #2 is the Cup of Plagues commemorating God's power through the Ten Plagues on Egypt. Cup #3 is the first after-dinner cup. It's called the Cup of Salvation or the Cup of the Lamb, commemorating God's deliverance through the blood of the Passover Lamb protecting the Hebrew household in Egypt. Cup #4 is called the Cup of Taking or the Cup of the Kingdom, commemorating Israel becoming God's people and looking forward to the future messianic kingdom.

In Psalm 116:13, the psalmist says, "I will take the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord." The Cup of Salvation represents the Lord's deliverance from death, the kingdom of death. As my Bible commentary (HCSB) puts it, "Those in service to the Lord who are threatened with death are valuable to God, and are thus saved (Psalm 72:14; Isaiah 43:3). Though they may not escape physical death, they will experience eternal life (Matthew 10:29-31; Luke 21:16-18; John 10:28-29)." And since the psalmist is the Lord's servant, He delivered him from death. In response to this excellent deliverance from a deadly situation, the psalmist says he will fulfill his vow, i.e., make a sacrifice called the Thank offering or Peace/Fellowship offering (Leviticus 3, 7:11-21). This type of sacrifice was to thank God for helping a person. It was split between God (burned on the altar), the priests for their meals, and the worshipper who would invite family and friends to celebrate with Him in God's presence. It's a grand thanksgiving celebration whenever a person feels grateful for what Yehovah has done for them. The thank-offering was performed in the courts of the Lord's Temple in Jerusalem (116:19).

Psalm 117. And now we come to the shortest chapter in the Bible, just two verses long. It's simply a call for all nations to worship God for what He has done for His people by keeping His covenant with them.

Psalm 118. This psalm is a tremendous song proclaiming God's covenant faithfulness and thanksgiving to Him for victory! The first four lines set the tone – we thank God because

He holds up his end of the covenant bargain. It's addressed those who sing the psalm, all of Israel, the priesthood, and all who fear God. Yehovah promised to help His people who remain faithful to Him. The psalmist's situation implies "confinement" (distress, 118:5). That's why "the Lord... put me in a spacious place" makes sense. I can identify because some situations feel like the walls closing in, and when the Lord steps in to help, it feels like they draw back to give me some "breathing room." With the Lord on our side, who can possibly do anything to me? And if something happens, I know it must first come through God's hands.

Because of His ability to deliver His people, it's better to trust in the Lord's help than anyone else's (118:7-9). This even applies when many people (or situations, for that matter) head toward us. From his position of trust in the Lord, the psalmist took his stand and destroyed his enemies like one would swat bees (118:12) and quench a fire. When the enemy pushed again, the psalmist pushed back, and with the Lord, the writer was saved by His side (i.e., with the Lord's help). Therefore, the Lord has shown Himself as the psalmist's salvation (Heb. *yeshu'ah*). And so, a grand celebration breaks loose among the victors. Even though the whole situation was part of the Lord's disciplinary dealings with the writer, the close call with death, the Lord didn't abandon him.

And so the writer speaks to the Temple gates to be opened and let him come through to give thanks to the Lord who saved him (118:19-21). Now, what about the cryptic verse 22? A cornerstone helps level a building and bears the weight of the structure. A rejected stone would be the king who was rejected for some reason, yet the Lord restored him from his deadly situation to his prominent place (per my Bible commentary). The psalmist credits the Lord for this and says it's a remarkable thing that Yehovah has done.

The remaining psalm section is a group of pleas and praises based on what the Lord has done. As the people were singing this psalm in the Temple, they would ask the Lord to save them now and give them success in the future. They bless the king, the person who comes in God's name (his authority and power). Verse 27 mentions binding "the festival sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar." My Bible says no such sacrifice was bound in such a way, i.e., tied to the altar. *Au contraire, Pierre!* The special lamb sacrifice offered on the day of Passover was tied to the altar at 9 am (like tying a horse to a hitching post) to be kept on display until it was time to sacrifice it at 3 pm. This verse is a reference to Passover, and during Passover, the Jews celebrate God delivering them from death and saving them from their enemies as they took refuge in the Lord. After Yehovah killed the Egyptian army in the Red Sea, Miriam led the Israelites in "shouts of joy and victory in the tents of the righteous: 'The Lord's right hand performs valiantly!'" (118:15). Psalm

118 is the climax to the Hallel Psalms and rightly so. God's deliverance from Egypt is looked upon as a pivotal moment in Israel's life with Him!

INSIGHT

The cup of salvation from Psalm 116:13 has an exciting nexus point. The cup of salvation is the cup of the Passover Lamb. The Hebrew says the cup of salvation/Lamb is the cup of *yeshu'ah*. Yeshua is Jesus' Hebrew name. Therefore, the third cup of Passover that represents God's salvation through the Lamb that causes death to pass over those who trust Him relates to Jesus, our salvation, and Passover Lamb, who saves us from death. Though we die physically, the Lamb that was slain will cause eternal death to "pass over" us so we may live forever.

June 28 : Scriptures Psalm 119

SUMMARY

Psalm 119. Psalm 117 is the shortest chapter in the Bible, only two verses long. Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible, with 176 verses. Psalm 119 is unique because it's broken into 22 sections of eight verses. The 22 sections have an amazing structure according to the Hebrew alphabet. All eight verses of the first section start with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet – *aleph*. All eight verses of the second section begin with the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet – *bet*. It continues like that until the end of the psalm. All eight verses of the last section start with the last letter – *tav*. Cool, huh? The reason for the acrostic format is that the psalm is a series of individual verses praising the wonder and goodness of God's word, specifically His Torah with all of its commands, laws, judgments, etc. Psalm 119 is a song of praise for God's word.

I'm only going to offer a few thoughts about this as this psalm is way too extensive on which to comment. You can find all sorts of information about it online. The main point is this – do you rejoice in the Bible? Do you find joy in God's word? Do God's commands, rules, guidelines, wisdom, and directions thrill you? Are you excited about putting them into practice continually? If this applies to you, you'll understand how the psalmist regards God's Torah.

The author is unknown, although many scholars focus on David because of his love of God's word, or Ezra, the scribe who, after the Babylonian exile, compiled scriptures to help rebuild the nation, or possibly Daniel, to help the exiles survive with God's word intact. All three of these guys went through tough times with people attacking them, so it helps to explain why the psalmist laments evil people throughout the psalm. According to gotquestions.org/Psalm-119.html, the psalm's central theme is God's word and "the profound truth that the Word of God is all-sufficient." Almost every verse mentions some aspect of God's Word. I recommend you go to the link above (or do your own search for a Psalm 119 synopsis) to get an overview.

But let me go back to where I started. How thrilled are you about God's word? The Holy Spirit helped me understand the Bible when I was first saved. He unlocked my understanding so that even as a Junior in High School, I could get something from the Bible every morning when I read the Bible and I ate my breakfast. I loved Psalms, Proverbs, and the Gospels. My appreciation grew as I read through the Bible because I could see how God progressively unfolded His revelation from Creation to the End. Where are you with God's word? I encourage you to continue *Cruisin' Through The Bible*

to grasp the totality of God's word and how it's all one work flowing from Genesis to Revelation.

INSIGHT

There are two specific scriptures that I learned early on from Psalm 119, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping your word," (vs. 9) and "Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path" (vs. 105). They go hand in hand. God's word shows us how to live right and stay out of trouble. This has been the issue from the start. God told Adam and Eve only to do things His way (the Tree Prohibition). In other words, live the way I tell you. But they didn't keep (guard their lives) with His word. They followed their own directives, sinned, and now all humanity lives without purity (and even wallows in impurity). However, the promise of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31ff, Ezekiel 11, 36) is to restore us to spiritual life, implant God's word in us and gives us Holy Spirit-led motivation to live God's way.

God's word lights our path – He shows us how to walk His way. God's word is our guardrails to keep us on His road. Without that "light," we're just stumbling through life or driving blind.