



Psalms:
Selection A

Info for group leaders on the book of

PSALMS

Background to the Psalms

The background information on the general handout for all group members is probably adequate for you, too. Because the Psalms are a *collection* of separate songs it is difficult to generalise on topics like subject matter, author and style.

The best thing you can do by way of preparation is to read each psalm through several times in advance of the session, both in the NIV and in other versions. The psalms to be studied in the ten sessions are:

1.	Psalm 2	God, his Anointed One and getting our attitudes right
2.	Psalm 19	God speaks to us—through his creation and through his word
3.	Psalm 44	Trying to understand the mysterious ways of the Lord
4.	Psalm 51	Repentance and confession of sin is the way forward when we fall
5.	Psalm 73	The dangers of envying the prosperity of those who despise God
6.	Psalm 88	Calling to God from the depths of rejection and despair
7.	Psalm 91	Trusting the Lord and his sovereign protection of his people
8.	Psalm 94	God is righteous, faithful and the judge of all the earth
9.	Psalm 107	When we call to the Lord for help, he is always there
10.	Psalm 122	Love for the city of God

If you have a commentary on the book of Psalms, by all means use it. The most famous is perhaps *The Treasury of David* by the 19th century Baptist preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Its main drawback, like Matthew Henry's commentary, is that it is based on the KJV.

General guidelines

To your Diggers sessions in general

- While the *NIV* is the Bible version used as the basis for the study, encourage your group also to read the book in other versions they might own. This will give different insights. For your help, the text of the *NRSV* is given at the end of this document.
- Some people might want to comment on 'what this passage is saying to *me*'—a *subjective* approach. While there can be value in this, it is far more important to concentrate on what a particular passage means *objectively*.
- *Don't dominate* the discussion by talking too much yourself. By all means contribute, but your main role is to steer the discussion forward in a helpful and purposeful way.
- *Draw out the quieter members* of the group. If necessary mention them by name: 'John, I wonder if you have any thoughts on this verse?'

- *Tactfully restrain the over-talkative members:* ‘You’ve had quite a bit to say up to now, Sally, so for a while let’s hear what some of the others have to contribute.’
 - Occasionally someone might become *argumentative and contentious*. Point out that these sessions are not about winning arguments or scoring points, but about learning together what God’s Word has to teach us.
 - *Don’t pretend to have all the answers* when you haven’t. If somebody raises a question that you can’t answer, say, ‘I don’t know the answer to that one, but I’ll try to find out for next time.’ Then refer to a Bible commentary, or pass on the question to one of the elders.
- Keep it *practical*. Ideas, theories and doctrines are all fine *as long as they affect the way we live*. Keep steering things back to *life-application*. Always finish on a practical note.
- End each session with *prayer*, asking the Lord to help you all put the session’s lessons into practice.

To the Psalms in particular

- Because of the nature of the Psalms you really need to do a fair bit of *preparation* if you are to be able to help the group get the most from these sessions. *Read* the psalm through several times in advance of then session, then work through the *commentary* given below.
- Begin each session by *reading out loud* the psalm to be studied. If you have a particularly good reader in the group, ask him/her to do it.
- Give the group the *general background* to the psalm, after which a second reading may be helpful.
- Remember (and keep reminding the group) that the Psalms are *poetry*. That means there is a lot of imagery—graphic, colourful language that doesn’t lend itself easily to too literal an interpretation.
- Give attention to any *verses quoted in the New Testament*. Since the New Testament writers are the inspired interpreters of the Old Testament we must give priority to their insights in trying to understand the psalm’s message.
- Note the convention that when the word ‘Lord’ appears in capital letters in the Old Testament (‘LORD’) it represents the Hebrew name *Yahweh*, that is, *Jehovah* (literally ‘the one who is’). This was God’s covenant name by which he made himself known to his people, Israel. When small letters are used (‘Lord’ or ‘God’) it refers to one or another of the more general words for God.

Notes on the text

The notes gratefully quoted below are from the electronic (Logos Library System) edition of *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, edited by J.F. Walvoord & R.B. Zuck, published by Victor Books, 1983-85. Bold text indicates words that appear in the NIV text. The hardback volume is available at around \$80 or £50 from the Amazon Bookstore.

Session 1: PSALM 2

This psalm is familiar to students of the New Testament by virtue of its relevance for Christ. However, the passage was a royal psalm in the Old Testament and therefore was used by the Davidic kings. Its contents describe a celebration at the coronation despite opposition by rebellious people in surrounding territories. In a word, the psalmist exhorted the pagan nations to abandon their rebellious plans against the Lord and His anointed king and to submit to the authority of the Son whom God has ordained to rule the nations with a rod of iron. (As indicated in Acts 4:25, Ps. 2 was written by David.)

A. *The rebellion of the nations (2:1-3)*

2:1-3. The first three verses express the psalmist’s amazement at the plans of **the nations** to overthrow the Lord and **His Anointed One** (מָשִׁיחַ) “Messiah,” which in Gr. is *christos*, the Christ). Every king anointed by a prophet was a “messiah,” an anointed one. If he obeyed God his rule had the authenticity of God’s election and the support of God’s power. This often made the plans of other nations futile.

Verse 1 expresses the psalmist’s amazement in the form of a rhetorical question. He cannot believe “the nations” would **plot** something destined to fail. These earthly **kings** actually were taking a **stand . . . against the LORD** (v. 2) when they stood against His Anointed One.

Verse 3 records the nations’ resolution: they wished to be free of the political control of this king. Their expression describes their bondage to this king as if they were tied down. This they could not tolerate.

B. *The resolution of the Lord (2:4-6)*

2:4. The psalmist turned from his description of the nations (vv. 1-3) to portray the Lord's response to their plan. In a bold description he envisioned God laughing at it. **The LORD sits enthroned** (cf. 9:11; 22:3; 29:10; 55:19; 102:12; 113:5; Isa. 6:1) **high in heaven** and discerns how foolish is their plan to oppose Him. The description is anthropomorphic; God's reaction is stated in human terms.

2:5-6. Based on His contempt for their evil plan God will speak in **His burning wrath** against them. Probably verse 6 summarizes what He says, for His resolution to install His **king** in Jerusalem will be the end of their rebellion. **Zion**, referred to 40 times in the Book of Psalms, was originally a Canaanite city conquered by David (2 Sam. 5:7). Later Zion referred to the temple area and then to the entire city of Jerusalem (cf. comments on Lam. 1:4; Zech. 8:3). **Holy hill** is a synonym for the temple mount (cf. Pss. 3:4; 15:1; 24:3; 78:54; Dan. 9:16, 20; Obad. 16; Zeph. 3:11).

When God establishes His king, He also subjugates those who oppose His king. It was true with David; it will also be true at the end of the age with David's greater Descendant, Jesus Christ.

C. *The declaration of the king (2:7-9)*

2:7. The psalmist now spoke of God's affirmation of the king to show by what right the king rules. **The decree** refers to the Davidic Covenant in which God declared that He would be **Father** to the king, and the king would be His son. So when David became king, God described their affiliation as a Father-son relationship. So the expression "son" took on the meaning of a messianic title.

You are My son (cf. NIV marg.), quoted from the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7:14), is appropriated here by the king to show his legitimate right to rule. **Today** then refers to the coronation day, and the expression "I have begotten you" (NIV marg.) refers not to physical birth but is an extended metaphor describing his becoming God's "son."

2:8. The significance of this adoption of the king as God's anointed son is seen in his **inheritance**. As a son inherits from his father, so the king inherits the kingdom from his "Father." The verse continues the quotation from the Lord's decree, extending an invitation to the king to **ask** for his inheritance, which someday will encompass **the ends of the earth**. People living in these **nations**, including the rebellious nations (v. 1), will be subjugated by the Lord's anointed.

2:9. This subjugation is expressed in harsh terms: he will smash (**dash . . . to pieces**) all rebellious people as he establishes his reign. The imagery is probably drawn from Egyptian execration customs in which the Pharaoh used his **scepter** to smash votive jars (**pottery**) that represented rebellious cities or nations. The Hebrew verbs in the verse—*raḥaḥ* ("break," NIV marg.) and *naḥaṣ* ("dash to pieces, shatter")—describe a crushing blow for the rebels. The NIV's and LXX's **rule** is similar to "break," but "rule" does not do justice to "shatter" or to the context. The verse describes the beginning of the rule, putting down rebellion.

D. *The exhortation of the psalmist (2:10-12)*

2:10-11. In view of all that the Lord had determined for His "son," the psalmist exhorted the foolish nations to submit to the king before his wrath was kindled. Many times in the Psalms God is referred to as **King** (v. 6; 10:16; 24:7-8, 10; 29:10; 44:4; 47:2, 6-7; 48:2; 68:24; 84:3; 95:3; 98:6; 99:4; 145:1; 149:2). The psalmist instructed the earthly **kings** to use wisdom and abandon their foolish rebellion (cf. 2:1). They would **be wise to serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling**. "Serve," "rejoice," "fear," and "trembling" describe the religious responses of the righteous in worship. They are to lead lives of submission, not rebellion; lives characterized by fear and trembling, not arrogance; lives filled with exultation, not the gloom of oppression.

2:12. The image here is that of submission to a sovereign: **Kiss the son!** The psalmist is telling the earth's kings to submit to the Lord and to His anointed son, Israel's king.

The urgency of their submission is expressed by the suddenness of **his wrath**. It is not immediately clear whether this wrath is the Lord's or the king's. The nearest antecedent is the king (the son) who will smash opposition (Ps. 2:9). However, in the psalm the two persons are inseparable; a person serves the *Lord* (v. 11) by submitting to his *son* (v. 12). If the nations' kings do not submit, the king will destroy them, because the Lord in **angry** opposition to their plans has decreed that His son will have the throne.

The final note of the psalm expresses blessing for those **who take refuge in Him**. (The thought of taking refuge in God occurs many times in the Pss.) Again, to submit to the son is to take refuge in the Lord's anointed, and therefore in the Lord as well. Only in the son is there safety from the wrath of God.

The psalm is rich in New Testament application. Reflecting on how the leaders of Israel crucified Jesus, the Messiah, Peter was quick to identify those Jewish leaders with the pagan kings of Psalm 2 (Acts 4:25-26).

The typological significance of the "son" is seen fulfilled in Hebrews 1:5. This coronation psalm is quoted here in referring to the exaltation of Christ at His resurrection (cf. Acts 13:33) and Ascension. By this He is "declared . . . to be the Son of God" (Rom. 1:4), a messianic title. When the Father instructs His Son to ask for His inheritance, then He will bring His Son again into the world (Heb. 1:6). The Second Coming will mean wrath to all who rebel against God and His anointed King, but great joy and refuge for all who by faith submit to God's plan to rule the world through David's greater Son, Jesus Christ. So the title of "son" from the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7:14) ultimately becomes the designation of Jesus Christ as King.

Session 2: PSALM 19

David was moved by observing that the heavens, under the dominating influence of the sun, declare the splendor of God's handiwork. By comparison, he then described the dominating influence of the Law of the Lord which enlightened him. Then he prayed for complete cleansing so that his life would be acceptable to God. The psalm, therefore, surveys both God's natural revelation and His specific revelation, which prompts a response of self-examination.

The Old Testament frequently joins the description of the Lord as Law-Giver and Creator. Accordingly in the first part of this psalm, *elohim* ("God") is used (v. 1) to denote His power as the Creator, and in the second part, *Yahweh* ("the LORD") is used (vv. 7-9, 14), the personal name by which He made Himself known as Israel's covenant God.

The psalm may also be polemical against pagan belief. In polytheistic centers, the sun god was the god of justice. In this psalm, the Lord God is the Creator of the heavens, including the sun that pagans worship, and He is the Law-Giver, establishing justice in the earth.

A. *Natural revelation of God's glory (19:1-6)*

19:1-4b. David announced that **the heavens declare the glory** (splendor) of God's handiwork. Verse 1 is a summary statement: the majestic Creation is evidence of the even more majestic Creator-**God**.

The heavens continually (**day after day . . . night after night**) **display** the fact that there is a Creator (v. 2). Even though Creation does not speak audibly in words (cf. NIV marg.) its message (**voice**) **goes out** to the ends of **the earth**. The message from nature about the glory of God reaches all nations, and is equally intelligible to them all (cf. Rom. 1:18-20).

19:4c-6. Dominant in the heavens is the sun. Like a bridegroom who excitedly leaves his house on his wedding day, the sun **rises**; and like a champion runner racing on his course, the sun **makes its circuit**. These verses do more than speak of nature as a witness to God's glory; they also undermine pagan beliefs, for the same imagery was used of the sun god in ancient Near Eastern literature.

B. *Specific revelation from God's Law (19:7-11)*

19:7. In verses 7-9 David described the efficacious nature of the Law of the Lord. Just as the sun is the dominant feature of God's natural revelation (vv. 4c-6), so **the Law** was the dominant element in God's specific revelation in the Old Testament.

The **perfect** Law of God (cf. "flawless" in 12:6; 18:30; Prov. 30:5) can change people. It revives **the soul** and the Law's **statutes** can be trusted to make one **wise**.

19:8. The Law's **precepts** give **joy to the heart** and its **commands** enlighten one's **eyes**, that is, brighten his life and guide him. The statutes (v. 7), precepts, commands (v. 8), and ordinances (v. 9) are all specific instructions within the Law. Joy and guidance fill the soul of one who meditates on and follows God's commands.

19:9. **Fear** is here a synonym for the Law, for its purpose was to put fear into human hearts (Deut. 4:10, KJV). The Law is **pure**. . . . **sure**, and **righteous**. It was designed to cause believers to obey God and lead **righteous** lives.

19:10-11. David next disclosed his personal reaction to God's perfect Law. He found the statutes desirable and enjoyable. In extolling their value to him, he compared them to gold and honey—**they are more precious than gold**, the most valuable commodity in the ancient Near East, and **sweeter than honey**, the sweetest substance known in the ancient Near East. The Law was not a burden to believers who were trying to please God with their lives. For David, **keeping** God's statutes, which **warned** him of the dangers of folly and sin, brought **reward**.

C. *Prayer for cleansing (19:12-14)*

19:12-14. Contemplation of the holy Law led David to pray for complete cleansing so that he could live an upright (**blameless**) and acceptable life before God, his **Rock** (cf. 18:2, 31, 46) and **Redeemer**. (On the psalmist's request that his **meditation** be **pleasing** to God; cf. 104:34.) He prayed that he would be forgiven for **hidden faults** and preserved from sinning willfully. For sins committed in ignorance, the Law provided atonement; but for **willful sins**, sins committed with a high hand, there was no ceremonial prescription, though forgiveness was still available if the person repented and confessed (cf. Ps. 51). Therefore he needed the perfect Law and God's enabling to restrain him from such sins.

Session 3: PSALM 44

Psalm 44 is a lament of the nation in a time of unequalled disaster. Because of God's deliverance of the nation's ancestors, and because of the people's present faith, they prayed earnestly that God would give them victory. Their prayer was prompted by the fact that they were experiencing defeats which they did not understand. The psalm is unique as an assertion of national fidelity (contrast Lam. 3).

A. *The historic faith of the nation (44:1-8)*

The people asserted their confidence in the Lord, based on His past dealings with the nation and her present faith.

44:1-3. After stating that Israel knew of God's marvellous works in the past (v. 1), they recalled specifically that the Lord gave them the land under Joshua (v. 2). This was recognized as a miraculous work of God, by His **hand . . . arm**, favour (**face** shining; cf. comments on 4:6), and love, not by their own strength.

44:4-8. As a result of hearing what **God** had done, the nation trusted in Him as her **King**. Sometimes the psalmist wrote as if one person were involved (e.g., "my King"), but usually he wrote as if the entire nation were speaking (e.g., **our enemies**), indicating that the singular pronouns may be collective. The people experienced similar great **victories**. . . **through** God in their lifetime, and were confident (**in God** each made his **boast**) regarding the future.

B. The humiliating defeat of the nation (44:9-16)

44:9-12. In spite of past victories (cf. vv. 3-4, 7) the nation had been subjected to a humiliating defeat. First the defeat is described literally, attributing it to the fact that the Lord **no longer** fought for them (vv. 9-10). Then the defeat was vividly described in figurative language (vv. 11-12): they were **scattered** like **sheep** (cf. v. 22) and were **sold** as slaves for trifling amounts which suggested their small worth.

44:13-16. As a result, the nation had been **made . . . a reproach**. Israel's enemies mockingly derided them, causing them inward feelings of ignominy (**disgrace**) and **shame**.

C. The protestation of innocence (44:17-22)

44:17-22. Because this defeat was undeserved, the nation was perplexed. After affirming her integrity (v. 17), the nation affirmed her **covenant** loyalty to God. She had **not** gone astray after other gods and therefore did not deserve this crushing defeat (vv. 18-19). In fact **God** had not accused the nation of idolatry (vv. 20-21). Had they been involved in it, He in His omniscience certainly would have known it. **Yet for His sake** they faced **death** continually (**all day long**). That is, because they fought a holy war for Him, they were experiencing this disaster and were treated like **sheep to be slaughtered** (cf. v. 11).

D. The prayer for victory (44:23-26)

44:23-26. The nation asked God for help (**rouse Yourself!**) for she saw no reason why He should ignore her **misery**. Moreover, the nation felt that God must rescue her (**rise up and help us**) because she was at her lowest (**brought down to the dust**; i.e., about to die). Though the nation was seemingly rejected by God and had apparently lost a battle (even though she had been faithful), she wholeheartedly trusted in the **LORD to redeem** (cf. comments on 26:11) her. This is the proper age-old response of the genuine believer to suffering (cf. Job 13:15, "Though He slay me, yet will I hope in Him").

Session 5: PSALM 51

Few psalms have found as much use as this one among the saints of all ages, a fact which bears witness to the spiritual needs of God's people. Psalm 51 stands as a paradigm of prayers for forgiveness of sins. Its superscription ascribes the occasion to David's sin of adultery with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11), an incident in which David broke several of the Ten Commandments. Believers have been comforted by the fact that since David's sins were forgiven theirs can be too.

Poetry often develops the intensity of a moment. Such a moment with David came when he, having been confronted with his sin, confessed it (2 Sam. 12:13a). Because this psalm deals only with confession and has no word of the forgiveness (which did follow immediately in the historical narrative, 2 Sam. 12:13b), this psalm must be understood as a full meditation on the importance of confession. After a believer sins, he must obtain forgiveness if he is to enjoy full participation in the service of the Lord.

The message of this psalm is that the vilest offender among God's people can appeal to God for forgiveness, for moral restoration, and for the resumption of a joyful life of fellowship and service, if he comes with a broken spirit and bases his appeal on God's compassion and grace.

A. Introductory prayer (51:1-2)

David appealed to God's love and compassion as he petitioned the Lord to forgive him by grace and cleanse him from sin.

51:1a. God's attributes of **unfailing love** (ἔλεος) for His servant and His **compassion** for the helpless, were the basis for David's appeal for mercy. Even the verb **have mercy** was a prayer for **God** to act in accord with His nature. It is also a recognition that David did not deserve forgiveness. God's forgiveness is by His grace alone.

51:1b-2. The three verbs David employed here are figurative. **Blot out** implies a comparison with human records that can be erased; **wash away** (καθάρω) compares forgiveness with washing clothing (often viewed as an extension of a person), **and cleanse** is drawn from the liturgical ceremonial law in which one might be purified for temple participation. These requests (cf. vv. 7, 9) stressed David's desire for God's total forgiveness of his **transgressions . . . iniquity**, and **sin**.

B. Confession (51:3-6)

David confessed that he had sinned against the Lord (vv. 3-4), and then lamented his moral impotence (vv. 5-6).

51:3-4. When he said that his **sin** was constantly **before** him, it must be remembered that his confession came about a year after he had sinned (the young child died a week after the confession; cf. 2 Sam. 12:13-18). Perhaps David had so rationalized his actions that he did not sense his guilt until Nathan approached him. At any rate, he confessed that he had **sinned** against the Lord. And he submitted to the Lord's will, acknowledging that anything God decided about him would be just.

51:5-6. David then acknowledged that he was morally impotent. He was born **a sinner**, that is, at no time in his life was he without sin. This ran contrary to God's moral demands on his life. From his early days he faced **inner** tension, knowing that God desires **truth** and **wisdom**, that is, reliable and productive living.

C. *Petition (51:7-12)*

In connection with his confession, David petitioned God first for forgiveness (vv. 7-9), then for inner renewal (vv. 10-12).

51:7-9. In his prayer for forgiveness the psalmist made the same requests as before (cf. vv. 1b-2) but in reverse order: **cleanse . . . wash**, and **blot out**. When David spoke of God's cleansing him **with hyssop**, he was alluding to the use of hyssop at the religious ceremonies to sprinkle sacrificial blood on the altar. This represented the removal of sin through the shedding of blood (cf. Heb. 9:22). David then asked God to let him once again **rejoice** in the knowledge of being right with God. (On the association of **bones** with emotional anguish, see comments on Ps. 6:2.) The king asked God to remove his **sins** judicially.

51:10-12. As a corrective for his sinful nature, David petitioned **God** for inward renewal of his **heart** attitude (v. 10), preservation in service (v. 11), and restoration of **joy** (v. 12). He was aware that he had become indifferent in his attitudes so he needed renovation. He was also aware that Saul was removed from the kingship for his sin (signified in the OT by the departure of the **Holy Spirit**), so David asked that God not **take** away His Spirit and depose him too. In the New Testament the Spirit does not leave believers; at the moment of salvation He indwells them (cf. John 14:16; Rom. 8:9). But a Christian may be cast aside from service because of sin (cf. 1 Cor. 9:27). David was also aware that in order to experience the joy he once had in his **salvation**, he needed God's inner spiritual renewal.

D. *Vow of praise (51:13-17)*

David promised God that if He forgave him he would participate fully in His service. The requests in these verses are for things that result from forgiveness, and so they form indirect requests for forgiveness.

51:13. First, David said that if God forgave him, he would **teach . . . sinners God's ways** (i.e., how He deals with penitent sinners). Naturally, to be able to teach this he himself must first experience forgiveness.

51:14-15. Second, David said if God forgave him, he would **sing** and **praise** God. Only when delivered from his bloodguiltiness could he join in praising **God**.

51:16-17. Third, David promised that if **God** forgave his sins he would sacrifice to God. He knew that God did not desire simply an animal **sacrifice** from him (cf. 40:6). He needed to find forgiveness before he could sacrifice a peace offering to God. The sacrifice he had to bring was **a broken and contrite** (crushed) **heart**—a humbled **spirit** fully penitent for sin. That is what God desires and will receive.

In the Old Testament, anyone who sinned as David did had to receive a word from a priest or prophet indicating he was forgiven. Only then could the penitent person again take part in worship and make a peace offering. In the New Testament the word of forgiveness is forever written in God's Word—the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from sin (1 John 1:7). Yet even in the New Testament a believer must have a spirit broken of all self-assertion; he must acknowledge his need before God to find spiritual renewal and cleansing (1 John 1:9).

E. *Prayer for prosperity (51:18-19)*

51:18-19. These verses have often been considered a later addition to the psalm because they do not readily relate to the psalm's theme. However, the anticipation of right **sacrifices** (v. 19) is closely related to verses 16-17. The prayer for the building **up of the walls of Jerusalem** could be a prayer for general prosperity of the city's defenses; but it could also be figurative, requesting the strengthening of the moral defenses of the nation (i.e., edifying the king). **Righteous** worship is compatible with moral prosperity.

Session 5: PSALM 73

This psalm strikes the same theme as Psalm 49, and thus may be classified as a wisdom psalm or at least may be studied for its wisdom motifs. In it "Asaph" told of the doubts which nearly overwhelmed him when he compared the life of a worldly man with his own. But then he confessed the sinfulness of his thoughts and explained that the contrast in their destinies enabled him to keep a proper perspective.

A. *Prosperity of the wicked (73:1-14)*

73:1-3. Asaph began this psalm by affirming that though **God is good** to those in **Israel** who trust Him and **are pure in heart** (cf. v. 13), he himself nearly **slipped** (cf. 94:18) in his confidence in the Lord. The psalmist emphasized his own situation by beginning four verses with the Hebrew expression translated **But as for me** (73:2, 22-23, 28). His offense

was that he was envious of **the prosperity of the wicked**. Why should the people who *oppose* God be better off than those who trust Him? This problem was so overwhelming he **almost** lost faith in God's goodness.

73:4-12. Asaph explained the prosperity that troubled him. He observed that the wicked do not seem to suffer trouble as other people do (vv. 4-5). They cover **themselves** with **pride** and **violence** (v. 6). Their **evil** devices are unbounded (v. 7). Their speech is scornful, malicious, and arrogant, as if they owned **the earth** (vv. 8-9). Many **people** are carried away by their evil (they **turn to them**, v. 10) and presumptuous self-confidence, thinking **God** does not **know** of their sin (v. 11; cf. 94:7). With no cares in the world (cf. 73:4-5, 12) **wicked**, arrogant people continue to prosper.

73:13-14. Asaph said he was confused over the value of his salvation. He felt that he had cleansed himself **in vain** (cf. **pure** in v. 1) because since trusting the Lord he had been **plagued** and chastened. Like many saints before and after him, Asaph was puzzled that God seemed to prosper the wicked and punish the righteous.

B. Destiny of the wicked and the righteous (73:15-28)

73:15-20. Asaph overcame his doubts by considering the **destiny** of the wicked. First, he acknowledged the impiety of his former conclusion in view of this consideration. His words are like a confession, for he knew the treachery his words could have been to the congregation (v. 15). The entire conflict was painful (**oppressive**) to him, **till in the sanctuary** he **understood** what will happen to the wicked. God will set **them** in dangerous (**slippery**; cf. "slipped" in v. 2) places where they will stumble and fall, be **cast . . . down in ruin**, and **suddenly** be **destroyed**.

When God finally sets things right, the wicked will be like **fantasies (a dream)**, counterfeits of reality. This was the negative aspect of the solution to Asaph's problem.

73:21-26. The positive aspect of the solution was Asaph's conviction of his own glorious destiny. He confessed that his perspective had been dulled by brutish ignorance. If he had not been so **ignorant**, he admitted, his **heart** would not have been so bitter (vv. 21-22). (**Grieved** is lit., "grew sour"; **embittered** is lit., "felt stinging pains.") His true position was in stark contrast with the wicked, for he knew God was **always with him** (v. 23) and would **guide** him wisely (**with His counsel**) and receive him **into glory** (v. 24). "Into glory" could also be translated "with glory," meaning that God would guide him through his troubles so that he would enjoy honor (and not shame; cf. 4:2) in this life. Since "glory" for individuals in the Old Testament seldom meant heavenly glory the psalmist was probably looking for deliverance in his lifetime. This would demonstrate that he was in God's favour. Of course believers today know from the New Testament that God's punishment of the wicked and blessing of the righteous extend beyond death.

In addition, Asaph affirmed that God was his only possession **in heaven or on the earth**. Though Asaph was overwhelmed, **God** was his **Strength** (cf. 18:1) and His **Portion** (cf. 16:5; 119:57; 142:5). Some wicked people prosper materially but only the spiritual "possessions" of the righteous will last.

73:27-28. Asaph concluded that **those who are far from** God and **are unfaithful** will be destroyed, but that those who are **near God** find joy and safety. Though he had nearly slipped in his confidence in God (cf. v. 2) he now was reassured that God was keeping him secure. God was his **Refuge** (mahsheh, "shelter from danger"; cf. 14:6; 46:1; 61:3; 62:7-8; 71:7; 91:2, 9). Nearness to God always helps believers maintain a balanced perspective on material things and on the wicked.

Session 6: PSALM 88

Psalm 88, written by Heman (cf. 1 Chron. 15:19; 16:41-42; 25:1, 6) the Ezrahite (a wise person, 1 Kings 4:31), has been called one of the saddest psalms in the Psalter. It voices the diligent prayer of one who suffered constantly. The psalmist lamented the terrible and fierce affliction that had brought him to the point of death. Yet he steadfastly prayed to the Lord night and day, basing his appeal on the fact that he would be useless to the Lord in the grave.

A. His terrible affliction (88:1-9a)

88:1-2. The introduction is given in these verses: the psalmist prayed (cf. v. 13) constantly (**day and night**) to **God** for deliverance.

88:3-9a. In describing his affliction, Heman first compared himself to those who are forgotten in **the grave**. His troubled **life** was near death (v. 3), he was considered dead (v. 4, **pit** is a synonym for grave; cf. v. 6; 28:1; 30:3, 9; 69:15; 143:7). He was like **the dead**, without God's **care** (88:5).

Then in direct address Heman declared that God had brought this trouble on him. God laid him **in the lowest pit** (cf. v. 4), God's **wrath . . . overwhelmed** him like **waves**, and God had separated him **from his friends** by his **grief**.

B. His earnest prayer (88:9b-12)

88:9b-12. The psalmist stated that he continued to pray earnestly to the **LORD**. He reasoned that a **dead** person cannot **praise** God's works and attributes **in the grave**. (He wrote this from a human, physical perspective, but it does not contradict other verses that speak of conscious existence after death.) He said the Lord should deliver him so that he could declare His glory. True believers want to praise the Lord, and to Heman death seemed to be the end of that opportunity.

C. His steadfast faith (88:13-18)

88:13-18. For the third time the psalmist affirmed his faith by his **cry to God for help** (v. 13; cf. vv. 1-2). Then, questioning why the **LORD** had apparently rejected him (v. 14), he again stated that his affliction was terrible (vv. 15-18). Like Job in some ways, this psalmist **suffered** under what appeared to be God's **wrath**, separated from his friends **and loved ones**, and was almost in despair (**darkness**). Yet, knowing that God was his only Source of hope, he continued to pray.

Session 7: PSALM 91

Because the psalmist was convinced that there is security in trusting in the Most High God, he encouraged himself that he would be delivered from the various frightening attacks of the wicked. He knew that the Lord had appointed His angels over him to protect him.

This psalm is a beautiful testimony about security in life. Several terms link Psalms 90-92, thus suggesting they are a unit. "Dwelling" occurs in 90:1 and 91:9; "grass" in 90:5 and 92:7; "spring(s) up" in 90:6 and 92:7; "make . . . glad" in 90:15 and 92:4; "Your deeds" in 90:16 and 92:4; "Most High" in 91:1, 9 and 92:1. Also the judgment of the wicked is mentioned in 91:8 and 92:11.

A. Security in God (91:1-2)

91:1-2. The psalmist expressed his great confidence in the fact that whoever trusts in the Most High finds security and protection. The titles of God in verse 1 (**Most High** and **the Almighty**) are significant, for they stress His power as the sovereign Ruler of the world. (On the meaning of "Almighty," *šadday*, see comments on Gen. 17:1.)

The images of **the shelter** and **the shadow** vividly portray divine protection. "Shelter" (*šēṭer*) is a hiding place (also used in Pss. 27:5; 32:7; 119:114, "refuge"). The shadow, perhaps the shadow of a bird's wing (cf. 91:4), also pictures shelter and protection as well as comfort. **God** is also the believer's **Refuge** (*maḥseh*, "shelter from danger"; cf. v. 9 and comments on 14:6) **and . . . Fortress** (*m^osuḏāh*, "strong protection"; used in 18:3; 31:3; 71:3; 144:2). Psalm 91:1-2 admirably expresses the fact that safety is in **the LORD**.

B. Deliverance by angels (91:3-13)

The psalmist, encouraging himself, expanded on the theme of the Lord's protection from danger.

91:3-8. He enumerated how God delivers a believer from various frightening attacks: (1) God delivers **from the fowler's snare** (v. 3a; cf. 124:7), a figure for insidious attempts against his life. (2) God delivers **from . . . deadly pestilence** (91:3b). (3) God covers him with **His wings** (v. 4a), a figure of safety and comfort (cf. 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7). (4) God protects with **His faithfulness** (91:4b), explained here by the metaphor of a **shield and rampart**.

As a result of God's help in these ways one who trusts in the Lord **will not fear . . . terror at night, attack by day . . . pestilence or plague** (vv. 5-6). Destruction that might lay thousands in defeat will not affect a trusting believer; rather, he will **see . . . the wicked** destroyed (vv. 7-8).

91:9-13. The psalmist explained that **no harm** or **disaster** can **befall** those who have made **the LORD** their **refuge** (*maḥseh*, "shelter from danger"; cf. v. 2 and comments on 14:6) because He has commissioned **angels** to care for them. Angels protect from physical harm and give believers strength to overcome difficulties, pictured here as wild lions and dangerous snakes. Satan, in tempting Christ, quoted 91:11-12 (Matt. 4:6), which shows that even God's most marvelous promises can be foolishly applied.

C. God's promise of protection (91:14-16)

91:14-16. The psalmist wrote as if God Himself spoke to confirm the psalmist's faith. In return for the psalmist's love, **the LORD** promised to **rescue him** from danger, **protect him** from harm, **be with him in trouble . . . honour him**, and **satisfy him**. All the kinds of danger mentioned in this song are ineffective against one who rests in the shadow of the Almighty.

Session 8: PSALM 94

This psalm recognizes the fact that vengeance belongs to the Lord. The psalmist called on the Lord to wreak vengeance on proud people who insolently oppress the righteous. The writer was confident that the Lord will not forsake His people but will deliver them, for the wicked have no place in the Lord's reign.

A. Prayer for vengeance (94:1-7)

94:1-3. Verses 1-7 record a prayer that **God** would avenge the **jubilant** wicked. In verses 1-3 the psalmist affirmed that vengeance belongs to the **LORD**. Because God is the **Judge of the earth**, it is He who must repay **the wicked**. Here again a psalmist asked **How long?** (cf. comments on 6:3) The continuing joy of the **wicked** seems out of place since they oppose **God** (cf. 73:3-12).

94:4-7. To justify his request, the psalmist lamented the oppression that the proud insolently inflict on the righteous. The speech of the wicked is **arrogant**. They oppress God's **people**, His **inheritance** (cf. v. 14 and comments on 28:9; Deut. 4:20). The wicked destroy the needy and oppressed (the very ones righteous leaders must help; cf. Ps. 72:4, 12-14). The wicked do all this because they are convinced that **the LORD . . . pays no attention to them** (cf. 73:11).

B. *Warning about judgment (94:8-15)*

94:8-11. The psalmist called on the wicked to consider their ways. He was amazed that the wicked had not **become wise**—God knows their **futile** plans and efforts to oppress the righteous. The logic here is simple but forceful: **He who** created the human **ear** surely can **hear**; **He who formed the eye** surely can **see**; etc.

94:12-15. Here the psalmist expressed his confidence in the **LORD**. A person God may **discipline** is **blessed** because he is taught **from the Law**. Even though a believer is oppressed by wicked people, he can take comfort that God can use such oppression to **teach** him and that God will give him rest from adversity when **the wicked** are destroyed. The psalmist was sure that God **will not** forsake **His people . . . His inheritance** (cf. v. 5 and comments on 28:9; Deut. 4:20), but will reestablish justice.

C. *Consolation from the Lord (94:16-23)*

94:16-19. The psalmist's only consolation was in the **LORD**. After asking **who** would **stand** on behalf of his cause **against** sinners, the writer acknowledged that his security was from **the LORD**. When he was almost defeated by despair (**when his foot was slipping**; cf. 73:2), God's **consolation** quieted his anxious heart and gave him **joy**.

94:20-23. Then the psalmist anticipated God's retribution on the wicked. The **corrupt throne** (lit., "throne of wickedness") refers to villainous rulers whose legislation would seek to destroy **the righteous**. These have no part with God. So the psalmist trusted in **the LORD**, his **Fortress** (mis~~g~~job; cf. comments on 9:9; 46:7), **Rock**, and **Refuge** (cf. comments on 18:1), knowing that the Lord **will repay them for their sins** by destroying **them**.

Session 9: PSALM 107

This psalm is a call to praise addressed to the redeemed of the Lord. The psalmist motivated them to praise Him by portraying how He delivered His people out of the wilderness, broke the bonds of prisoners, restored the sick, showed His power to mariners in the sea, and providentially governs nature and human affairs.

A. *Call for the redeemed to praise (107:1-3)*

107:1-3. God should be thanked for His enduring loyal **love** (cf. v. 43), especially by **the redeemed** who benefit from it. The psalm may have been written during the Babylonian Exile because of the words in verses 2b-3.

B. *Cause for praise: Deliverance (107:4-32)*

In these verses the psalmist cited four examples of the Lord's deliverances of His people. In each case the people pleaded for the Lord to help them out of their distress and He did so (vv. 6, 13, 19, 28). Also in each case the psalmist urged the people to thank God for His unfailing love and wonderful deeds (vv. 8, 15, 21, 31).

107:4-9. First, He delivered **some** from wandering in the wilderness. Unable to find their way, **hungry . . . thirsty**, and dying, they **cried . . . to the LORD** and **He led them** to safety. So people should praise **the LORD** because He satisfied **with good things** (v. 9; cf. 104:28) those who were **thirsty** and **hungry** in the wilderness.

107:10-16. Second, the Lord released **prisoners** from bondage. Those who were chained in dark prisons because **they had rebelled against . . . God. . . . cried** out and were freed from the **darkness** and **chains**. The Jewish Targum suggests this refers to King Zedekiah and the nobles of Judah in exile in Babylon. So people should praise **the LORD** because He delivers from bondage.

107:17-22. Third, **the LORD** delivered the sick from death. When rebellious sinners were afflicted and **near the gates of death** (cf. Job 38:17; Ps. 9:13; Isa. 38:10), **they cried** out to Him and **He restored them**, healing them by **His word**. So people should praise **the LORD** and **sacrifice thank offerings** (i.e., praise offerings) because of their restored health.

107:23-32. Fourth, God delivers sailors in trouble at **sea**. Mariners see His **works** as He calls up a storm (**tempest**). **Their courage** melts, and being **at their wits' end** (lit., "all their wisdom was swallowed up"), they call on Him. He calms **the storm** and delivers them from their danger, guiding them safely to their destination. So people should praise **the LORD. . . . in the assembly**.

C. *Cause for praise: Dominion (107:33-43)*

The psalmist spoke of the Lord's providential governing of the world as a second major reason for praise (cf. vv. 4-32).

107:33-38. The Lord has great power over nature. (The past-tense verbs in the NIV in these verses may be rendered in the pres. tense.) He can turn **a desert** into a watered area (v. 33) or conversely He can make a **fruitful land** become a wasteland (cf. Deut. 29:23). He does this **because of the wickedness of** the people in the land (cf. Deut. 29:24-28).

On the other hand God made the barren land become habitable (**a city where they could settle**; cf. Ps. 107:4, 7) and **fruitful** (vv. 35-38). This He did for the benefit of the poor and needy, so that **their numbers greatly** flourished.

107:39-43. The Lord also has power over people's experiences. He humbles and brings down the proud, but He lifts up the poor and **needy**. So the redeemed praise **the LORD (the upright see and rejoice) but . . . the wicked** are silenced.

A **wise** person will **consider** these meditations carefully, noting the Lord's **great love** (hesed; cf. vv. 1, 8, 15, 21, 31).

Session 10: PSALM 122

The pilgrim-psalmist, designated in the superscription as David, recalled his delight in going up to Jerusalem, which was the nation's spiritual and civic center. He then called for everyone to pray for the peace and security of Jerusalem for the sake of the godly and for the sake of God Himself.

A. *Delight at the pilgrimage (122:1-2)*

122:1-2. The psalmist recalled how he delighted at the prospect of the pilgrimage to **Jerusalem**. Then he relished the experience of actually **standing** within the city's **gates**.

B. *Acclaim of the city (122:3-5)*

122:3-5. The psalmist acclaimed the **city** of **Jerusalem** for its physical splendor, with its full population **closely compacted together**. He then lauded it as the spiritual center to which the nation's **tribes** went on their annual pilgrimages. He also cited it as the seat of justice (cf. Jer. 21:11-12).

C. *Prayer for peace (122:6-9)*

122:6-9. The psalmist asked the people to **pray for the peace** and **security** of the city and its inhabitants (vv. 6-7; cf. 125:5; 128:6). He himself then prayed for **peace**. . . . **for the sake of his brothers**, the righteous pilgrims (122:8), and for **prosperity** for **the sake of the** sanctuary, God's dwelling place (v. 9).
