

TUESDAY BIBLE CLASS

Schedule for Teaching the Psalms

March 8, 1994 -- Introduction to the Psalms, and Psalm 1
March 15, 1994 -- Conclude Psalm 1
March 22, 1994 -- Psalm 2
March 29, 1994 -- Psalm 16
April 5, 1994 -- Psalm 23
April 12, 1994 -- Psalm 34
April 19, 1994 -- Psalm 40
April 26, 1994 -- Psalm 46
May 3, 1994 -- Psalm 51
May 10, 1994 -- Psalm 84
May 17, 1994 -- Psalm 121

THE BOOK OF PSALMS

Introduction

March 7, 1994

"Martin Luther called the Psalter 'a Bible in miniature'" (Unger's Bible Dictionary, p. 273). That is probably the best title we could give it. By its very size, the book of Psalms has to be one of the most important books of the Bible. It is by far the longest book in the Bible. It contains 150 Psalms. But not only is it the longest book, but it contains the longest chapter in the Bible: Psalm 119. Its importance is recognized by the writers of the NT because of the many times quotations are given from the Psalms. And often, even when the Psalms are not quoted directly, the expressions used by the NT writers are traceable to the book of Psalms.

There is no question but that the Psalms were important to the people of God in Israel. The Psalms forever establish a close relationship between the Word of God and singing. And this carried over into the New Testament church. Paul spoke of one of the first evidences of a Spirit-filled life as "speaking to yourselves in Psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19). The Psalms indicate that the Lord wanted His people to be a happy people. That is brought out by the first verse of the first Psalm which we will be considering.

A reading of the Psalms shows, however, that it is not to be a book which stands by itself and above all others. It encourages the reading, meditation, and obedience of God's people to all of the Word of God.

The Psalms historically have been divided into five books:

- 1) Psa. 1-41.
- 2) Psa. 42-72.
- 3) Psa. 73-89.
- 4) Psa. 90-106.
- 5) Psa. 107-150.

One factor that entered into this division was that the last chapter of each book gives a doxology. These would be at the end of chapters 41, 72, 89, 106. Psa. 150 is all doxology.

As far as the writers are concerned, we know who wrote most of them although some are anonymous. Those we know about are:

- 1) David -- seventy-three Psalms.
- 2) Solomon -- Psalms 73 and 127.
- 3) The sons of Korah, a Levitical family -- Psalms 42-49, 84, 85, 87, 88, for a total of twelve.
- 4) Asaph -- twelve Psalms: 50, 73-83.
- 5) Heman, the Ezrahite -- Psalm 88.
- 6) Ethan, the Ezrahite -- Psalm 89.
- 7) Moses -- Psalm 90.

Since King David wrote almost half of them, the Psalms are often called, the Psalms of David.

Probably no book of the Bible has exercised a greater influence on the Lord's people than the Psalms. It is good to read at least one Psalm every day. Graham Scroggie, in his commentary on the Psalms, has laid out a simple plan for reading through the Psalms in a month (based upon 30 days). Read 1, 31, 61, 91, 121 the first day. Then follow through with the second Psalm in each series until the end of the month. To avoid reading Psalm 119 in one day along with the other four Psalms, one part of

Psalm 119 can be read each day for twenty-two days, beginning with the ninth of the month. Cf. Scroggie, W. Graham, The Psalms, pp. 42, 43.

The Importance of the Psalms

It would be impossible to overstate the importance of this book of the Bible, and probably no one has yet made a complete list showing the value of the Psalms. Below are some of the most important ones.

The Psalms are important as a revelation of God. Frequent reference is made throughout the Psalms to the attributes of God, to His work in creation, to His providential influence in the affairs of men and nations, and to His constant presence and influence in the lives of His people. The majesty, the glory, of God is a major theme in the Psalms.

The Psalms tell us about Christ. We speak of the Messianic Psalms. Andrew Bonar has written a commentary on the Psalms called Christ and His Church in the Book of Psalms. In his book he shows how the Psalms continually point us to Christ as well as dealing with conditions which are found in the Church today, both good and bad (with respect to the Church). Although Christ is seen throughout the OT, yet no book portrays Christ more than does the book of the Psalms.

We could not have Christ in the Psalms without also have the Gospel in the Psalms -- and we do! Salvation is a frequent theme. Sometimes that word is used of a deliverance of some kind which the Psalmist needs, but the Gospel is in the Psalms as well.

In the Psalms we learn to pray. We learn what it is to worship the Lord God. We learn how to praise Him. We learn how to present our petitions and needs to Him. We learn how to seek His help and protection in times of need. In the Psalms we are exhorted in many places to wait for the Lord and to wait upon the Lord. I would remind you of the saying among Chinese Christians in the past who said,

If you want to learn how to talk to men, read the Proverbs;
if you want to learn how to talk to God, read the Psalms.

The Psalms encourage continual obedience to the Lord through commandments and through promises of blessing. At the same time they warn us against sin, and set before us the terrible prospect of judgment against sin both now and hereafter. This is to say that the Psalms is a book encouraging holiness of life, and giving instruction as to what it means to be holy.

And so we can say that in the Psalms we see ourselves as well, our corruption, our rebellion, our unfaithfulness, and our need to be holy. In Romans 3 when Paul was quoting from the OT to show the depravity of man, most of his quotes were from the Psalms. The Psalms expose sin in all of its ugliness as an abomination to God. But they also show us the remedy.

As I have said before, the Psalms remind us that the Lord wants us to be a happy and a holy people. If we are holy, we will be happy. But we cannot be happy, truly happy, and constantly happy without being holy. There are many beatitudes in the Psalms which you need to be looking for as you read them. The first Psalm is a beatitude. And let the Psalms remind us that our joy in the Lord is to be expressed in singing to the Lord, which we do in church, but which we can do alone as well as in our families.

In the Psalms we find prophecy, prophecies which since have been ful-

filled, but prophecies also which are yet to be fulfilled. And the prophecies which have been fulfilled provide encouragement for us that the rest of the prophecies will be fulfilled, too, especially when the Lord returns.

Although more could be said, let me mention one more thing: the comfort we receive from the Psalms. What passage in all of Scripture has given more comfort to more of the Lord's people than Psalm 23? Regardless of what our trials might be, or how numerous, there is always encouragement and hope to be found in the Psalms.

In the coming days, at least for the rest of this school year, I am going to be taking up individual Psalms. I am not going to teach every Psalm, but seek to get a variety of Psalms which will help us to see more about the many different themes that are taken up in the book. With the exception of today (because I have spent time introducing the Psalms) I plan to teach a whole Psalm at each class period. I may slip into a second class hour in some Psalms, but as a general rule I want to try to deal with an entire Psalm each hour. And I will try to let you know each week what we will be taking up the following week.

This week we will start with Psalm 1, and finish it next week if we don't get through today.

I hope that our studies will encourage you to be reading a Psalm a day. I have been doing that, and I can assure you that it is a blessing. I may try Dr. Scroggie's plan for a month, five a day. That would be good for all of us without interrupting the daily reading that we are doing now. We can't get too much of the Word.

PSALM 1
March 7, 1994

Intro: This Psalm may have been written as an introduction to all of the other Psalms. It probably was written by David. The Psalms originated with David, but continued to be written until the return of Israel from captivity. So they actually covered a long period of time.

In many ways it sets the tone for all of the Psalms. It shows that man's desire for happiness (which we all have) can never be satisfied except through the Word, through a life of godliness and fellowship with the Lord. The negative note on which it begins would certainly attract the attention of the reader because man in his natural state seeks to find his happiness doing what he wants to do, which is always sinful, rather than seeking his happiness by way of pleasing God.

The Psalm has two parts:

- 1) In verses 1-3 we have God's description of the happy man.
- 2) In verses 4-6 we have God's description of the ungodly man.

And so the Psalm deals with the godly man and the ungodly man, and with the way of the godly man and the way of the ungodly man, plus his doom. And so we could give this Psalm the title, TWO MEN AND TWO WAYS OF LIFE.

1:1 "Blessed" -- This really is an exclamation of joy, and could be translated, "Oh, the blessednesses of the man..." That is, his joy, his happiness is not something that is meager and intermittent, but a joy that is unspeakably wonderful, constant, with blessing too many to count, or as David expressed it in Psalm 23, like a cup that is running over. This is joy that is deep and real, not dependent upon outward circumstances, but a God-given joy that abides in the heart.

However, instead of telling what to do to be happy he told what not to do if the man were to be happy. Happiness is not just a matter of not doing things. There is a positive side also which we will see in verse 2. But we have to learn that sin and happiness do not go together.

We need the negative side. Remember that eight out of the ten commandments are negative. When Paul began the practical part of the book of Romans he said first, "And be not conformed to this world," and then he added, "But be ye transformed..." -- the negative and then the positive.

Notice another thing about this verse.

The Psalmist was speaking about "the man" -- singular, one man. But when he spoke of the people in the latter part of the verse, the word "sinners" (plural) would suggest that "the ungodly" and "the scornful" are to be taken in the plural sense too. The idea seems to be that whenever you find one man, or one woman, or one boy, or one girl, is who interested in pleasing the Lord, interested in a godly life, you will find many others who would rather be ungodly, sinning, and scornful. If we go with the crowd, we are going to go the wrong way, and the way will not be a happy way. This is why we need the Word of God. This is why we need the Psalms. If we follow our hearts, we will go the wrong way. But if we listen to the Word of God, we will have no regrets.

We must assume that the Psalmist was speaking here about a man of God. No unregenerate person is going to be capable of delighting himself in the Word of God. But it shows that even Christians face this struggle, and often take the wrong path. And if you go God's way, you must be prepared at times to walk alone with the Lord.

What did the Psalmist mean by "the counsel of the ungodly," "the way of sinners," and "the seat of the scornful"?

"Counsel," as you might guess, is advice. And "the ungodly" are those who are restless and who do not want anyone telling them what to do, especially God! And one of the characteristics of people like this is that they are not satisfied to live the wrong way themselves, but it seems that they are not satisfied until they corrupt others also. And so we have "the counsel," the advice, "of the ungodly."

Second, "the way of sinners." Remember what Solomon said:

There is a way that seemeth right unto a man,
but the end thereof are the ways of death (Prov. 16:25).

This is a way of life of people who have no regard for God or that which is pleasing to Him. They don't ask if a thing is pleasing to God; they don't care. They simply want to do what they want to do however immoral or coarse it might be.

Third, "the seat of the scornful." A "scornful" person has gotten to the place where he ridicules a person who wants to please God. And he ridicules the Word of God. Ungodly, sinners, and scornful are three terms which all describe the same people, not three different classes of people. And notice that there is progressive involvement -- first walking, then standing, then sitting. The ungodly becomes a sinner, and the sinner becomes scornful. The more we sin, the deeper we will go into it. One sin always leads to another, and those that follow get progressively worse.

Such a path may have its moments of pleasure, but it can never produce true happiness. How do we know? Because the Word of God says so.

So much for what the happy man will not do; what will he do?

1:2 I believe we need to take the title, "the law of the Lord," as not just referring to the Mosaic Law, but to all of the Word of God. The truly happy man not only reads the Word, he not only listens to it as it is being taught, but he delights in it! What did the Psalmist mean by this?

It means that he loves the Word. He looks upon it as his most valuable possession. It is the Word which gives him his greatest pleasure. To delight in something is to put it ahead of everything else. Job was saying that he delighted in the Word of God when he said, "I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:12).

And to show how much the Word meant to him, he meditated on it "day and night," i.e., constantly!

There are four times in the Word where meditation is spoken of as being very profitable:

- 1) Joshua 1:8.
 - 2) Here -- in Psalms 1:2.
 - 3) 1 Timothy 4:15.
- See also Psalms 119:97-99.

What is meditation?

It means to think about the Word, seeking to understand it better, and

wanting to know the practical effect that the Word should have in his life. Perowne said in his commentary that this word "meditate" suggests the idea of being inclined to meditate. He doesn't have to be told to do it; it is in his heart to do so.

Now if we are going to do this, we will need to read it. And we will have to re-read it. It will help us to memorize it. We can't always have our Bibles open before us, but if we have memorized it, we can call it up whenever we have time to do it.

March 8, 1994

The life of the godly man will be, as Unger has said in his Bible Handbook, "Bible-centered" (p. 274). And if it is truly Bible-centered, it will be God-centered and Christ-centered.

1:3 What will be the consequences of such delighting in the Word of God?

"And he shall be" could be translated, And so shall he be.

"Like a tree planted." This is not a wild tree, but what we would call today, a volunteer. This is a tree which has been planted by God. Spurgeon saw in this a reference to a man who is "chosen, considered as property, cultivated and secured from the last terrible uprooting, for 'every plant, which my Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up:' Matthew xv. 13" (Vol. I, p. 2).

There is the picture here also of stability -- "planted," secure. It cannot be moved out of its place. It will not be tossed "to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:14).

But it is also a well-nourished tree. It is not by a single river, but "beside the water-courses" (Delitzsch, I, p. 85). Perowne says the words here speak of "'lesser streams or brooks'" (p. 110), a river which has divided itself into branches, not something which has been done by man. And so here, too, we see evidence of the hand of God. This is unique in a world like ours, a world such as David described it to be in Psa. 63, "a dry and thirsty land, where no water is" (v. 1). This world is a desert. But for the godly man there are never-failing streams of grace. They can never be exhausted. Day by day and even moment by moment the godly man draws nourishment and strength from the Word of God and from the God of the Word.

"That bringeth forth his fruit in his season." Spurgeon defined this as meaning, "patience in the time of suffering, faith in the day of trial, and holy joy in the hour of prosperity" (I, 2). "In his season" suggests that it takes time to produce fruit, but fruit there will be! Kidner says that it will "produce in due course something new and delightful, proper to its kind and to its time" (p. 48). The Lord has chosen us that we should "go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (John 15:16). And in that verse the Lord linked fruitfulness with answered prayer.

"His leaf also shall not wither." This is not only a sign of a healthy tree, but of a beautiful tree. And it would indicate that the outward profession and testimony of the godly man will not be disappointing. How tragic it is to be the people of God fail and fall. God "is able to keep us from falling" (Jude 24), but He will not do it if the Word of God is

being neglected. And this means not only reading it, but understanding it, and living it!

"And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." Up to this point the Psalmist has been speaking about what the godly is; here he speaks of what he does. And, in a sense, draws away from the tree. Prosperity for a child of God is blessing in seeing the purpose of God accomplished in his life, and always done for the glory of God. Cf. Joshua 1:7, 8.

Jeremiah used this same figure in Jer. 17:5-8. (Read.)

What a picture these first three verses give to us, designed by the Holy Spirit to make us hate and avoid sin, but to give ourselves continually and without any reservation to the Word of God.

Now let us look at that crowd described in verse 1 as ungodly, sinners, and scornful.

1:4 "The ungodly are not so." There can be no greater contrast than that which can be seen in comparing the godly man with the ungodly crowd. This is an emphatic statement and is rendered that way in the Vulgate, the LXX, and the Syriac: "Not so the ungodly, not so." God puts a double negative, as Spurgeon said (I, 3), upon the life and character of the ungodly man. All he has is what he is by nature. And one way he can be described is as worthless, unstable chaff, which is not planted, but which the wind can blow first this way, and then that, and then away. And it blows it away -- an expression very similar to what we often hear people saying today.

John the Baptist described the Lord as One:

Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor,
and gather his wheat into the garner;
but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire (Matt. 3:12).

March 14, 1994

Let us remember that the expression, "the ungodly," was not meant to describe just the most wicked, the criminal, the vile person. "The ungodly" are people who have no place for God in their lives. He can be a leader in society, a person of high standards, a man or a woman recognized for outstanding achievements in science, education, medicine, or many other fields. But he has no place for God in his life. He does not know God, and he has no interest in knowing God. So all that he is and all that he does is "like the chaff which the wind driveth away." He lives for this life as though this were all that there is.

So there is a wide range of people who are classified as "the ungodly." And whatever positive things may be said about them, the fact that they leave God out of their lives cancels out any positive things.

As an illustration, please turn to 2 Kings 5:1 where we have a description of Naaman the Syrian. There are five splendid things said about Naaman, things which could not be said about any other man in Syria in his day. (Read them.) But the last statement nullified it all because "he was a leper," and he was going to die!

This is the way the achievements of every person should be written up. List all of the honors, but after them all it has to be said in many

cases, "But he is a sinner." And no one can change that but GOD! He did it in Naaman's case as He had done it in David's case, as well as in yours and mine. Therefore, what really counts is not who we are, nor what we have done, as commendable as they may be in the eyes of men, but what really counts is what God has done in our lives.

God describes the ungodly as "chaff."

"Chaff" is the hull, or husk, which encloses the grain until the grain is threshed. So there is a close connection between the grain and the chaff as they grow together until the harvest.

A man by the name of Sir Richard Baker made a very interesting observation on this verse, and he was quoted by Spurgeon in his Treasury of David, Vol. 1, p. 8. I have no idea who the man was, but his comment is worth reading to you. He said, speaking of God's expression for the ungodly, that they are "like the chaff":

Here by the way, we may let the wicked know they have a thanks to give they little think of; that they may thank the godly for all the good days they live upon the earth, seeing it is for their sakes and not for their own that they enjoy them. For as the chaff while it is united and keeps close to the wheat, enjoys some privileges for the wheat's sake, and is laid up carefully in the barn; but as soon as it is divided, and parted from the wheat, it is cast out and scattered by the wind; so the wicked, whilst the godly are in company and live amongst them, partake for their sake of some blessedness promised to the godly; but if the godly forsake them or be taken from them, then either a deluge of water comes suddenly upon them, as it did upon the old world when Noah left it; or a deluge of fire, as it did upon Sodom, when Lot left it, and went out of the city.

Here we can be reminded of Abraham's prayer for Sodom in Genesis 18. God promised to spare the city if there were only ten righteous people in the city. So the chaff would have benefitted from the presence of wheat among them. But when the wheat was removed, the fire fell on the city.

The wind driving the chaff away is probably intended to be a picture of death. "Wind" can actually be translated as a whirlwind, speaking of the violence of death for an unbeliever who is taken from this life to suffer the torment of hell forever, which was described in Scripture by John the Baptist as "unquenchable fire." John was speaking of our Lord when he said this:

Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor,
and gather his wheat into the garner;

but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire (Matt. 3:12).

As Spurgeon said, they are "intrinsically worthless, dead, unserviceable, without substance, and easily carried away" (Vol. I, p. 3). They are "'Not so' in character; 'not so' in destiny" (De Burgh, quoted by Fausset, Vol. III, p. 106).

Such is the character and the end of the ungodly. But verse 5 takes us to a thought which is even far more serious.

1:5 The ungodly do not think about what may lie ahead after death, or, if they do think about it, they quickly put it out of their minds. They may have the approval of their fellow-sinners, but there is a judgment coming when men will stand before God, not to be judged in groups, but

individually! And they should know now that they will be condemned.
 "Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment." Psalm 5:5 says,
 The foolish shall not stand in thy sight:
 thou hatest all workers of iniquity.

And we are told that the day of judgment for the ungodly will be a day of weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. Cf. Matt. 13:50; 22:13.

The verb that is translated "stand" can also be translated, rise up. And from the second expression in this verse, "nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous," indicates that "the ungodly...the sinners" will not have a part in the first resurrection. Theirs is the second resurrection. They will not be raised with the righteous. They will not be judged as the righteous. And they will not have the same eternal destiny as the righteous.

The Apostle John distinguished between the first resurrection and the second resurrection. Cf. Rev. 20:5, 6. "The first resurrection" is the resurrection to life; the second resurrection is the resurrection to death. Daniel spoke of the two resurrections in Dan. 12:2 where he wrote,
 And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake,
 some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

All great achievements, all charitable acts, all generous contributions, will mean nothing in those days. They are abominable in God's sight because they are like Adam and Eve's fig leaves, they attempt to hide sin, not remove it. The ungodly will be raised, but not with the righteous. They will have no part with "the congregation of the righteous."

Here we always have a mixture. Even in the professing church there are those who are godly and those who are ungodly, and it is usually very difficult, and often impossible to tell the one from the other. Even our Lord had his Judas Iscariot as one of the twelve. Israel had her "mixed multitude."

But heaven is not going to be like that. There will not be even one person in heaven without Christ, not one who is not born again. And while the ungodly will certainly not be comfortable in hell, neither would they want to be in heaven. If unregenerate people do not like to go to church now where the Word of God is preached and where they will be with people who love the Lord, think of how intolerable it would be for them to be in heaven. But not one will be there! How wonderful this will be for the true people of God. Fellowship with God will take on a character in heaven which we have never enjoyed here on earth. Not only will we all be saved, but we will be perfect. No ungodly person will be there. No sin will be there. What glorious things the writer of the book of Hebrews had in mind when he wrote, speaking of us as the people of God,

But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God,
 the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,
 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn,
 which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all,
 and to the spirits of just men made perfect,
 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant,
 and to the blood of sprinkling,
 that speaketh better things than that of Abel (Heb. 12:22-24).

"Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous." If the first part of this verse speaks of the future for the ungodly, then we can assume that the last part of the verse speaks of the future for the godly. And so Spurgeon had this to say about it:

Well may the saints long for heaven, for no evil men shall dwell there, "nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous." All our congregations upon earth are mixed. Every Church has one devil in it. The tares grow in the same furrows as the wheat. There is no floor which is as yet thoroughly purged from chaff. Sinners mix with saints, as dross mingles with gold. God's precious diamonds still lie in the same field with pebbles. Righteous Lots are this side of heaven continually vexed by the men of Sodom. Let us rejoice then, that in "the general assembly and church of the firstborn" above, there shall by no means be admitted a single unrenewed soul. Sinners cannot live in heaven. They would be out of their element. Sooner could a fish live upon a tree than the wicked in Paradise. Heaven would be intolerable to an impenitent man, even if he could be allowed to enter; but shall a privilege shall never be granted to the man who perseveres in his iniquities. May God grant that we have a name and a place in his courts above (I, 3).

Every day we are influenced by the corruption of the world. We are like Lot who was "vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked" (2 Pet. 2:7). God delivered him out of Sodom, but our deliverance is going to be so much better. We are going to be in heaven where

"There shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, nor maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev. 21:27).

It is true that the wicked will not survive the judgment of God, but equally true that they will not be "in the congregation of the righteous." It is impossible for us now to realize how wonderful heaven will be. But how tirelessly we should work to take as many with us as we can -- work by godly living, work by prayer, and work by bearing testimony to the Gospel of the grace of God.

The next, which is the last verse, brings us back to earth again. What comfort it holds for the righteous, but what a warning for the wicked.

1:6 "The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous."

In the first place this means that the Lord knows all that we are going through. He knows what trials we have, what burdens we carry, the enemies who oppose us. As David said in Psa. 31:7, "Thou has known my soul in adversities." And also we read about God and what Job said about Him,

But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me,
I shall come forth as gold (Job 23:10).

But this expression also means that the Lord orders our ways. Cf. Psa. 37:18-24, and link verse 18 with verses 23 and 24. The Lord has ordained the path by which we go on to heaven, but, in addition, He leads us, He cares for us, He keeps us, He protects us, He meets our needs, all along the way. What comfort is contained in those words, "The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous"!

David was revelling again in this truth in Psalm 23 when he wrote,
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil: for thou art with me..." (Psa. 23:4).

He knows us by name. He orders our steps. He is always with us, and so He knows where we are. And He knows the purpose He has for every trial we experience, and assures us that He will not only take us to heaven, but

will take us there transformed to His likeness. What a lot of comfort there is in those words, "The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous." We can't even say this about ourselves, but it is enough that the Lord knows our way. Our way is good as long as it is His way for us.

On the other hand, "the way of the ungodly shall perish."

Again let me remind you of Prov. 14:12, repeated in 16:25: "There is a way which seemeth right..." Men try to make their lives so that they can escape the troubles of this world, only to find themselves in greater trouble, trouble of the worst kind, trouble that will never end: eternal suffering and death!

Here men seek positions. They seek power. They seek money. They seek pleasure of all kinds. But they don't seek God. They will hope to win the lottery, but not give one moment's thought as to how their souls can be won and saved from eternal death. The Lord's words are appropriate here:

For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world,
and lose his own soul? (Mark 8:36).

"The way of the ungodly shall perish."

There are two ways here, and there are only two ways that any person can take. There is the broad way that leads to destruction; there is the narrow way that leads to life. Cf. Matt. 7:13, 14. Many take the broad way; few take the narrow way. The two ways are entirely different, but their greatest difference is in their respective destinations. One leads to eternal life; the other, to eternal death.

Sometimes we look with envy at the ungodly because they seem to be having such a good time. Asaph was bothered with that, and he wrote Psalm 73 to tell us about his struggle. But his confusion came to an end when, as he said, "I went into the sanctuary of God; the understood I their end" (Psa. 73:17).

Whenever you are traveling by car, you want to be sure that the road you are taking will bring you to the place you want to go. In life we are all travelers, heading toward eternity. But there are two possibilities: heaven is one; the other is hell. The people of the world are inclined to forget about the destination. They just want to have a good time along the way. That is what is most important to them. But every person needs to hear these words: "But the way of the ungodly shall perish."

There is something wrong in our hearts if we as the people of God do not find our hearts greatly moved by these words. Every day people are passing into eternity to perish, not to cease existing, but to experience eternal death. How can people escape from such a tragic end? Our Lord said, "For God so loved the world...that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). No sinner deserves to be saved, but God in His love and grace and mercy has provided for the salvation of all who believe through the sacrificial death of His Son. Let us pray that the Lord will give us the boldness we need to speak the truth of the Gospel that we turn many to righteousness. Daniel was speaking of this when he wrote Dan. 12:3:

And they that be wise
shall shine as the brightness of the firmament;
and they that turn many to righteousness
as the stars for ever and ever.

We need to shine first, and then we will be able to make others turn.

May this Psalm be an encouragement to all of us who know the Lord. May it cause us to read the Word more than we have, to seek by God's grace to do what it says, that we may become what the Lord wants us to be, and to be prosperous in what He wants us to do.

But may it make us remember that the majority of people in the world today do not read the Word. And if they read it, they don't believe it. And so let us be faithful in warning them that "the way of the ungodly shall perish."

Before we leave this Psalm, let me point out one more thing, and this is very, very important.

Of whom does this Psalm make you think?

I am sure that you are like I am in one respect: there are certain passages of Scripture which remind us of certain people. We read a verse, and we are reminded of someone. Does this Psalm remind you of anyone? Who is the most blessed person to ever have lived upon the earth?

There would be many candidates for that position, both people in the Bible and many throughout history who have made the Word of God the central part of their lives. I won't take the time to mention many names as suggestions, but I will give you the name of the One Who is the winner -- without any question whatever. He is our Lord Jesus Christ.

Think of Him in connection with verses 1-3. (Read.) He never sinned. He always did the Father's will. He quoted freely from the Scriptures. And He could certainly be described as "a tree." He was supremely fruitful. His leaf did not wither. He prospered as no one ever did before Him, nor after Him. The Lord Jesus Christ is that Blessed Man.

But let us go from that point and remind ourselves that we are to be like Him -- like Him in His love for the Word, like Him in His obedience to the Father, like Him in His holy life, like Him in His faithful service to God, the Father. Psalm 1 may remind you of other people, but let it always remind you of the Lord. And then let it be a reminder of what you should be. May it remind me of what I should be. May it teach us to hate sin and to love righteousness so that we might be more like our Lord.

The Apostle Peter taught that our Lord in His sufferings left us an example that we "should follow his steps: Who did no sin..." (1 Pet. 2:21, 22). The only way we can stay away from sin is by giving our constant attention and obedience to the Word of God. That is the path of happiness here, and greater happiness in the glory to come.

PSALM 2
March 21, 1994

Intro: Although we have no superscription to this Psalm, the New Testament tells us who the writer was. After Peter and John had been threatened in the early days of the Church, they were released, and they went back to "their own company." They told the church what had happened, and then led the believers in prayer. Their prayer started like this:

Lord, thou art God, which has made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that is them is:

Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said,
Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?
The kings of the earth stood up,
and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord,
and against his Christ (Acts 4:24-26).

You should readily recognize these words beginning with, "Why did the heath rage," as being the first two verses of Psalm 2. Therefore, there is no doubt but that David wrote this Psalm.

In Acts 13:33 Paul identified this as "the second Psalm" by quoting verse 7.

We also have evidence in these NT passages that this Psalm speaks of Christ! Therefore, we can call it a Messianic Psalm. In some ways it does reflect the opposition which David experienced concerning his own ascent to the throne of Israel, and may have been written about that time. But its words go far beyond what David experienced. The kings of the earth were not against him; his opposition arose from within the nation Israel. However, we can look upon David's experience as prophetic, and a type of what the Lord Jesus Christ will experience against His ascension as King over all the earth.

So we can also say that this is a prophetic Psalm. It has not yet been fulfilled. The nations of the earth certainly have no place for Christ, and never have. The Roman Empire took sides with Israel against our Lord at His first coming, but the greatest opposition is yet to come. Before the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ the nations will do their utmost to destroy anything that has to do with God, or with Christ, or with His people. But the Psalm tells us what the outcome will be.

From the last three verses of the Psalm we can see that it is an evangelistic Psalm, that is, it has to do with the preaching of the Gospel.

The Psalm seems to fall into four parts, with three verses in each part. And we can divide it this way:

- I. The nations speak (vv. 1-3).
- II. God speaks from heaven (vv. 4-6).
- III. The Messiah speaks (vv. 7-9).
- IV. David speaks (vv. 10-12).

This is certainly a Psalm of great encouragement for us today when we see such ungodliness throughout the world. The nations, including our own, are not concerned about God, nor His Word, nor His will for the earth. The very actions of the nations speak of total rebellion against God. God is not in all their thoughts except perhaps to call upon when things really get bad. But even then we have to ask what God they are praying to. This Psalm sets before us how things are, and how, in the providence of God they some day will be, and what the nations need to do to get ready for it.

Let us look, then, at the first three verses of the Psalm.

I. THE NATIONS SPEAK (Psa. 2:1-3).

Perhaps it would be better to use the word which David used: "rage" and "imagine." "Rage" pictures a mob scene, masses of people angry and ready to take matters into their own hands. It describes the kind of a scene that we see often on television where mobs of people in the Middle East are shouting, throwing rocks, shooting, running back and forth, totally out of control.

"Imagine" speaks of plotting and planning the best way to accomplish what they want to do. So the action that is described here is not just a sudden outbreak of violence, but a plan which has been carefully prepared and which the nations are so determined to accomplish that they will do everything and anything to keep it from failing.

Why did David call it "a vain thing"?

It was because they were trying to do something that they would never be able to accomplish. They might have times when it would seem that they would succeed, but it was all doomed to failure before they ever started because they were fighting against God! And so David was saying, "Why do they make so much noise and have so many plans and get so excited about something that can never be?" But we will see more about this in a moment.

In verse 2 we see what they were trying to do.

There aren't many things that the nations can get united about, but this is one thing that brings them all together.

Both "kings" and "rulers" are mentioned here. The "kings" would be those with the highest authority, and the "rulers" are those in lesser positions, and yet powerful, who are throwing all of their support behind the kings. So not only are the nations united with each other, but each nation is united within itself. There probably never will be such a concentrated effort as that which will take place in the time David was describing here.

They "set themselves." This means that they are determined. No one could talk them out of what they intend to do. It means more to them than life itself. This can be illustrated by the kamikaze pilots in the Japanese air force during World War II who were trained to make suicidal attacks against our naval ships. You see this idea also among the Moslems who will lay down their lives to drive a truck loaded with explosives against some enemy installation.

But they also "take counsel." They sit down together. They make plans, and discuss their strategy. And then they finally have their plans completed, and are determined that they are going to carry out their plans. The verb used here sometimes is translated, ordain.

But we still have not been told what their objective is, who their target is, what they hope to accomplish. Look at the latter part of verse 2. It is "against the Lord, and against his anointed." They are out to do away with God, the Father, and His Anointed One, the Messiah, Who is identified in verses 7 and 12 as "my Son," or "the Son."

Could we possibly have a greater picture of human depravity than we have here? The creatures in rebellion against the Creator. Finite, weak, foolish, depraved and corrupt men daring to stand against Almighty God and His equally Almighty Son. They are going to try to overcome the ever-living God, the One Who is without beginning and without ending, Who cannot die, and they have the same plans for His anointed, which means the Messiah.

And what are the nations saying in their rage? "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us." This is amazing, isn't it, truly amazing!

Do you remember the parable that the Lord told about the nobleman who went into a distant country to receive for himself a kingdom? He called his ten servants, gave each a pound, and told them to take care of things until he returned. But they hated him, and said, "We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14). This is how the Jews felt about our Lord when He was here on earth. And this is how the nations of the earth feel now, and will feel more strongly than ever when the Lord returns. They want to be free! They don't want God telling them what to do. They hate Him, His Son, and His Word. It was as though the Lord was keeping them from enjoying life, when the restraints that He puts upon us are for our good. He would keep us from sinning, but we are determined to do what we want to do.

So this is what the God, the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ have always faced, but which will reach its highest peak when the Lord comes again to reign upon the earth.

Now a situation like this could hardly keep us from panic. It looks like the work of God on the earth was finished, and that man would finally be able to do what he has always wanted to do. But what about God? What is His reaction? We have His response in verses 4 through 6.

II. GOD SPEAKS FROM HEAVEN (Psa. 2:4-6).

But before He speaks, He does something else. Is He worried? Is He caught off guard, and finds that while the nations have a plan, He doesn't have one? Is God afraid of what the nations will do? Not God! He laughs!

In Psa. 37:12, 13 we read,
 The wicked plotteth against the just,
 and gnasheth upon him with his teeth.
 The Lord shall laugh at him:
 for he seeth that his day is coming.

Spurgeon said about God laughing,
 Mark the quiet dignity of the Omnipotent One, and the contempt which he pours upon the princes and their raging people. He has not taken the trouble to rise up and do battle with the--he despises them, he know how absurd, how irrational, how futile are their attempts against him--he therefore laughs at them (I, 11).

The actions of the nations don't even make God stand up! From His throne He laughs, but He also speaks.

Notice how David described God. He was angry, very angry. He was very

displeased even though He laughed. David said that God "shall have them in derision," and that He would "vex" the nations "in his sore displeasure."

To have them in derision means that He would mock them, scorn them, ridicule them--like Elijah did to the prophets of Baal when they were praying and jumping all over their sacrifice trying to get God to answer them.

What does it mean to "vex" someone? It means that He would alarm them. He would make them afraid. He would do to them what He did to Pharaoh and his army when they tried to cross the Red Sea and the Lord took the wheels off of their chariots. The nations wanted to vex God, but He vexed them. The idea is that this would happen suddenly, too. Men can't take God by surprise, but He can take men by surprise--and He doesn't need a long time to prepare for it, either. And God would do all of this in great "displeasure." This word means burning anger. It is impossible for us to understand how angry this will make God. The people who only speak of God as a God of love, have some hard lessons to learn.

But then what did God say? "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion."

This is very interesting. Notice that God speaks of installing, or anointing His Son as King in Jerusalem as though it were already an accomplished fact. But God can do this because He is God. His decrees are so certain, His purposes are so unchangeable, His power is so sovereign, that whatever He has decreed for the future is so certain that it can be spoken of as having already taken place.

That is why Paul could speak of us as already "glorified" in Rom. 8:30.

And so, regardless of how many nations may rise up against God, or how many may be in each nation, God scorns their attempts to defy Him, and declares that what He has purposed shall stand and shall without a doubt be fully accomplished.

What a great God we have! And how this ought to encourage us! There are times when it seems that the wicked will triumph and the work of the Lord will fail. But that is when we need to remember that God is seated upon His throne in the heavens, and that His victory in all things and over all men is absolutely certain.

In the first three verses we see the depravity and foolishness of man; in verses 4 through 6 we see the sovereignty of God--and that emphasis continues in verse 7 through 9.

Now, as we come to verse 7, we have another speaker, and this is indicated by the second part of the verse, "the Lord hath said unto me." God declared Himself in verse 6. It was a message for the nations to hear. But He also had something to say to His Son. And the Son repeats the message as a warning to the nations and for the encouragement of the people of God.

III. THE MESSIAH SPEAKS (Psa. 2:7-9).

The Lord Jesus Christ is speaking, declaring the decree of God, and telling more of what would be involved in installing Him, the Son, upon

the throne in Zion, the mountain on which Jerusalem is established. He is telling what God has told Him.

God has plainly declared that the One Who will sit upon the throne in Zion, in Jerusalem, is His Son. That ought to be enough for us to establish the Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ. When the Lord was on earth, the Jews knew that our Lord's claim that God was His Father, meant that He was claiming divine Sonship, and, therefore, equality with God. See John 5:18.

"This day have I begotten thee." Paul used this verse in Acts 13:33, as I have mentioned, and he did it to show that the resurrection of Christ from the dead proved beyond any question that our Lord was indeed the Son of God. Paul wrote about our Lord in Rom. 1:4 that our Lord was "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."

The word "begotten" does not mean that there was a time when the Lord Jesus was born as the Son of God. That would be a denial of His Deity. But it seems to indicate (and I am not being dogmatic in this) that the resurrection of our Lord was like a birth. And that His resurrection was of such a unique character that it was a "newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). The resurrection is the crowning evidence of the Deity of Christ, that He was truly the Son of God.

Verse 8 is a prayer request that the Father gave to the Son. And it is a wonderful lesson in prayer for us. We are to pray for what the Father has promised. And our prayers are a vital part of what God has promised to do. This is praying in faith. We claim the promise of God, and turn the promise into prayer. This is what the Father was telling the Son to do. He was saying in so many words, "I have promised to make you king; now You ask me to do what I have promised to do."

This verse is sometimes used as a missionary verse. But this is not for us; this is for the Lord Jesus. And this obviously is a prayer that our Lord prays as He is now seated at the right hand of the Father.

In Psalm 110:1 David wrote,

The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand,
until I make thine enemies thy footstool.

And so we can be sure that as our Lord prays for us (Heb. 7:25), He continues to ask the Father to give Him the heathen as His inheritance. And so this means that there will be those who hate the Lord now who will be among His redeemed ones when our Lord is established as the King of kings in Jerusalem. The day will come when "every knee will bow...and...every tongue" will "confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10, 11).

Just thing! The earth which was torn away from God at the fall of Adam, will be fully restored, and the earth will ring with the praises of God. It will all be "to the glory of God the Father."

Verse 9 indicates that the second coming of Christ will be very different from His first coming. He came in humility when He was born of the virgin Mary; when He comes again He will come in power and great glory, and all of the holy angels will be with Him. Cf. Matt. 25:31.

Verse 9 speaks of what the Lord will do to His enemies. He will use a rod

of iron, and He will break them like a potter's vessel. This gives quite a different picture from that which we have in verses 1-3. With all of their raging and uproar, they will be no match for the mighty Son of the living God.

In the last three verses we see that:

IV. DAVID SPEAKS (Psa. 2:10-12).

This teaches us that prophecy is not just a means of satisfying our curiosity about the future, but it is to be preparation for preaching the Gospel. God, of course, gives the message, but it seems that the speaker is David.

And so now we are ready for the sermon. And will you notice that these last three verse have GRACE written all over them. The kings and judges deserve judgment; here the hand of God is extended to them through Christ in mercy.

He called upon them to "be wise." There is no more foolish picture that can be found in the Bible, or anywhere else, than that which we have in the first three verses of this Psalm--the nations taking on God! A man or a nation would have to be totally foolish to do something like that. Sin has made fools out of the human race. No one is as dumb as the person who tries to fight against God. And the nation who fights God is doomed before the fight begins. Oh, how we need to tell people, "Be wise." A person can be just as foolish by ignoring God as he would be if he were fighting against God. So David said, "Be wise." They needed to learn something which they did not know, and he was going to tell them how to be wise.

"Be instructed, ye judges of the earth." This term is used for "the rulers" of verse 2. Judges are supposed to be very wise. They are supposed to be able to judge between right and wrong, to encourage the right and to punish the wrong. But these judges were being foolish themselves. They needed to learn about God. They were being blind leaders of the blind. People are in double trouble when they are blind and have blind leaders as well. Oh, if people could only see what there is that they need to learn. And what a call this is to every servant of the Lord to be faithful in teaching. People ought to learn when they go to church. They ought to learn when they even talk to a Christian. We need to be spreading the light of the Word of God.

How can the nations be wise? What do they need to learn? Verses 11 and 12 give us the answers.

First, instead of fighting the Lord, they need to "serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling" (v. 11).

This means to make the Lord your Master, and you delight in the possibility of being His servant. Instead of wanting to break his bands and casting away his cords, be thankful that He has restrained you. Be thankful that He is seeking you. Be thankful that He has kept you from going deeper into sin than you have. Being the Lord's servant is not something to be afraid of, but it leads to the greatest happiness a person can ever experience in this life, as well as bringing us eternal joy throughout all eternity. "The Lord" here in context probably refers to God, the Father. The next verse speaks of the Son.

"Kiss the Son." Nor like Judas did, but like the sinful woman did who washed the Lord's feet with her tears, then kissed them, and then anointed them with the ointment that she had brought in the alabaster box. Cf. Luke 7:37-39. The Pharisees didn't understand this. They said that the Lord couldn't be a prophet or he would have known that that woman was a sinner. But He did know it, and that is why she was there and doing what she was doing.

You see, actions can speak more loudly than words. This sinful woman was showing her love for the Lord, taking a humble place before Him, seeking His blessing. Kings and judges need to learn to do that. Instead of submitting themselves to the Son, and kissing Him, they wanted to do away with Him, the Friend of sinners, and the Savior of all who come to Him. To kiss the Son is to believe in Him. It is to submit ourselves to Him. It is to turn to Him to do for us what no one else can do, and what we could never do for ourselves. This is why He came and died--to save sinners from their sins and from the consequences of their sins.

But notice the rest of the verse. "Lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little." The last part of this verse can be translated, "for quickly may his anger blaze" (the margin in my Oxford Bible). If we do not come to the Lord to kiss Him, He will come to us as our Judge. And so quickly can we find ourselves facing Him in judgment. Life is uncertain. We cannot boast about what we are going to do tomorrow. We only have today, but we can be thankful that today is the day of salvation. However, we need to know that we can be lost just as quickly by neglecting the Lord as we can by rejecting Him. All it takes to be lost eternally is just to go on neglecting what the Gospel tells us we need to do, and do now: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31).

The Psalm ends with a wonderful beatitude. We can translate it, "How happy are all they that put their trust in him!" Not just some, but all! Man will fight against God and against Christ thinking that he will be happy if he can only get Them out of his life. That is how our hearts deceive us, and that is exactly what the Devil wants us to believe. But true happiness, eternal happiness, is reserved for only those who "put their trust in him."

To kiss the Son is to put your trust in Him. To put your trust in Him is to have your sins forgiven and to have your heart changed. Instead of hating God and Christ, as people usually do, you will love Him, and want to serve Him, and find your joy in having fellowship with Him.

Concl: Robert Robinson may have had Psalm 2 in mind when he wrote the last verse of his hymn, "Come thou Fount of every blessing." The verse I am referring to goes like this:

O to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be;
Let that grace now, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to Thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, O take and seal it, seal it for thy courts above.

How thankful we should be if the Lord has made us "wise unto salvation" (2 Tim. 3:15) as He did Timothy through the Scriptures! But let us, in gratitude to our Lord, tell others to "be wise," and to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, the greatest Friend a sinner can have.

PSALM 16
March 28, 1994

Intro: In the book of Acts we are told two things about Psalm 16:

- 1) That this Psalm was written by David. The Apostles Peter and Paul declare this. And so they confirm the superscription which we find at the beginning of the Psalm: "A Michtam of David," or, as it is spelled in the NASB, "Mikhtam of David."
- 2) That it speaks prophetically of Christ. Therefore, this is a Messianic Psalm.

The first of the two passages to which I refer are Acts 2:25-28, where the Apostle Peter quoted Psa. 16:8-11 in his message on the Day of Pentecost. The second is Acts 13:35, but it is necessary to read the context in vv. 32-37. This is a part of the message which the Apostle Paul preached in Antioch of Pisidia when he and Barnabas were on their first missionary journey.

However, in seeking to understand this Psalm we have to remember that it was written by David about his own experiences and about his own faith and his own hope in the Lord. In this way Psalm 16 is different from Psalm 2. In Psalm 2 the only part which really relates to David is "the sermon" in the last three verses of Psalm 2. And yet we can agree with Matthew Henry who said, "This Psalm has something of David in it, but much more of Christ" (Vol. III, p. 287).

Michtam has been translated in various ways. The prevailing idea seems to be that it means, The Golden Psalm. It also, according to Spurgeon, has been called a jewel, David's jewel, or precious jewel. Derek Kidner, in his commentary on the Psalms in the Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (p. 83) has this to say, which bring out the rare value of Psalm 16:

The theme of having one's affections centred on God gives this Psalm its unity and ardour.

And then he goes on to divide the Psalm into two parts. The first, he said, in verses 1-6, speaks of David's devotion to the Lord. Second, in verses 7-11 we see the blessings which he had experienced, and would experience, as a result.

This word can also mean a secret. So putting this with the idea of a jewel, we can see why some entitle this Psalm, David's Precious Secret. A. R. Fausset in the JFB commentary said that we have "a song conducting into the depths of the divine life, that 'secret of the Lord which is with them that fear him'" (Vol. III, p. 132).

I am going to suggest a threefold division of the Psalm:

- I. David's Prayer (v. 1). In this verse David is doing what prayer is, speaking to the Lord. There certainly is a sense in which the whole Psalm is a prayer. However, I am distinguishing between what David said to the Lord, and what he went on to say about the Lord, and his devotion to the Lord. We can see here the secret (if we may speak of it that way) of David's peace in the midst of his troubles.
- II. David's Testimony (vv. 2-9). Here you can see that he was talking about the Lord.
- III. David's Faith and Hope (vv. 10, 11). Here David spoke to the Lord again, but there is no request here such as we have in verse 1 -- which is the only request! This shows that prayer does not have to involve a request, but can be, like it is here, David reveling in the promises of God concerning the future and eternity.

Now let us turn to the Psalm to see what David wrote.

I. DAVID'S PRAYER (Psa. 16:1).

16:1 Some of the shortest prayers are the most powerful. Much can be expressed in a few words, especially when we are in trouble. And David was in trouble! He was calling upon God to make a hedge about him to protect him from his enemies. He was addressing God as El, the mighty God. In fact, the Almighty One.

It makes no difference who the enemy was, with God on our side it makes no difference who is on the other side. And so David did not even take the time to name his enemy.

What reason did David give God as to why God should build a hedge around him? "For in thee do I put my trust." Without faith it is impossible to please God, but the reverse is true also. With faith we delight the heart of God. Fausset said that this is the strongest reason as to why God should help us -- we are trusting Him!

And so the verse not only speaks of trouble, but of David's helplessness combined with his trust in the Lord.

II. DAVID'S TESTIMONY (Psa. 16:2-9).

16:2 I think we are safe in assuming that David had said what he repeated here long before he got into the trouble about which he was praying here.

The translations of this verse vary from the way it is stated here in the KJV to a simple, "I have said to the Lord." Either way the meaning is the same, but probably the latter is more accurate. David knew the Lord. He belonged to the Lord. And he was living as a man lives when he has submitted himself to the Lord.

But will you notice that the letters in the spelling of Lord are different? The first is all in capitals; the second has a capital "L" followed by the small letters, o-r-d. That is because David used two words for Lord. The first is Jehovah; the second is Adonai. And David was emphasizing that Adonai was his Adonai.

Jehovah is God's main Name. He is the ever-living, unchanging God -- without beginning and without ending. He never was born, and He will never die. My Adonai means he was claiming Jehovah as his Master, even his Owner. But he was not doing it in a way that would indicate he was unhappy about it. In fact, it was just the opposite. However, David's meaning is not really clear as it is expressed in the KJV. The last part of verse 2 would be better translated, I have no good beyond thee. David's Lord was responsible for all of the goodness he had experienced in his life, and so David needed no good thing in addition to what he had in the Lord. What a testimony this is! David had found that everything that made him happy was within the limits of what God was -- not above Him, nor beyond Him, but in Him! Oh, how marvelous is the sufficiency of God, and yet how few of us really learn what David was talking about here.

And so to say that the Lord was his Adonai, was the greatest joy that David had.

When Lucille's mother was living, and she would be at our house for dinner, we would often hear her say when we offered her a second helping, "No, thank you, I've had the greatest plenty." This is what David meant here. The Lord was his "greatest plenty." He was perfectly satisfied with the Lord, and supremely happy in Him. His Lord was the Source of every good thing in his life.

Asaph expressed this same satisfaction with the Lord in Psa. 73:25, 26 where he wrote,

Whom have I in heaven but thee?
and thee is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.
My flesh and my heart faileth:
but God is the strength of my heart,
and my portion for ever.

But that was not all that was characteristic of David. Look at verse 3.

16:3 We need a little help here also in the translation. Let me read it to you as it appears in the NASB:

As for the saints who are in the earth,
they are the majestic ones in whom is all my delight.

Among the people who were on the earth, those whom David loved the most, and whom he considered to be the elite of the earth, were the people of God. Paul loved the Lord's people. He delighted himself in them. They were the best -- even with all of their shortcomings. The word "excellent" here means princely. They were members of heavenly royalty. And David found his heart drawn to them. They were the people who gave him pleasure, and he knew that their value to him could not be calculated.

What did the Apostle John write in 1 John 3:14? (Quote, "We know that we have passed...")

Be sure to notice that verses 2 and 3 are verses which our Lord Jesus Christ could have spoken. He delighted Himself in God while He was here on earth, and He delights Himself in the people whom He has redeemed.

Verses 2 and 3 state what ought to be true of every child of God, fully satisfied with God, and delighting in the Lord's people.

Verse 4 gives us a different picture.

16:4 Here David was speaking of the other kind of people that you find in the earth. They do not know God, and so they do not experience that joy that a child of God has. Instead, in turning to other gods, they not only find sorrow, but multiplied sorrows! And David was determined to have no part in their idolatry.

Remember that you don't have to fall down before an idol of some kind to be an idolater. Paul told the Colossians in his epistle to them that covetousness is idolatry. Cf. Col. 3:5. The desire for things and the desire for pleasures have become the gods of Americans -- and it is money which makes these things possible. Paul told Timothy that "the love of money is the root of all (kinds of) evil" (1 Tim. 6:10).

"Sorrows" speak of that which causes pain and wounds and grief. David had found complete satisfaction and overflowing joy in the Lord; idolaters find just exactly the opposite. And he would not offer their sacrifices,

nor did he even want to talk about their gods. It would seem in the light of what David said at the end of this Psalm that he was not only referring to the sorrows that God-less people experience in this life, but the even greater sorrows that they will experience throughout eternity. It is the mistake of all mistakes for anyone to set his heart on things below and to forget that eternity is to come.

Matthew Henry, in commenting upon the statement that God-less men "hasten after other gods," that we creep like snails toward our God when the heathen out-run us and out-distance. And he said that their zeal toward their false gods ought to be a rebuke to those of us who know the true God.

David drops this subject as quickly as he had picked it up, but it is always true that, when a person has found true joy in the Lord, he cannot help but feel sympathy and distress for those who are headed in the other direction.

But with verse 5 we find David rejoicing in the Lord again.

16:5 In our Bible reading we have been going through the book of Joshua, and so we have been learning a great deal about the inheritance which each tribe in Israel had. David was from the tribe of Judah, and Judah was given a large portion of the promised land. The Levites were given cities throughout Israel, but they did not have a special section of land which they could call their own. Instead, the Lord made it clear that He was their inheritance!

In Joshua 13:33 we read about what Moses did east of the Jordan River, and the same applied to the territory west of the Jordan.

But unto the tribe of Levi Moses gave not any inheritance:
the Lord God of Israel was their inheritance,
as he said unto them.

David seems to have picked up on this idea. Although he was the King of Israel, yet he felt that the Levites were the privileged tribe. But he had become a Levite at heart. As a child of God he knew that the Lord was "the portion of" his "inheritance," too. When the various tribes went through the territories which were given to them, they could say, "This is ours! This is mine!" But David knew that it was far greater to be able to say, "The Lord is the portion of my inheritance." An inheritance is what you have coming to you because of your relationship to some person, a father or mother, or some other family member -- or actually anyone who wants to include you as an heir.

But David was saying here, "More than any of the Lord's blessings, I want the Lord!" Do we feel that way about the Lord? Do we pray only when we want the Lord to give us something, or to do something for us? Or do we pray just because we love to be in His presence, we love to be with Him? Fellowship with the Lord was the greatest blessing David enjoyed. It was his "cup." With the Lord as our inheritance, our portion, our cup, what can we possibly lack?

But the crowning joy of our inheritance is found in David's last words in verse 5: "Thou maintainest my lot."

What a tragedy it would be if we could ever lose what we have in God and in Christ! But that is not possible because the Lord "maintainest" our

lot. That is, He supports and sustains it. Nothing can ever happen to it. We cannot lose it. No one can take it away from us. It is ours, or better, HE is ours forever! He keeps us from falling. And He will present us faultless before God in that day when we finally stand before Him. We often here today about people feeling insecure. If a Christian really knows what his salvation is, he will never feel insecure. God saves and He keeps.

16:6. "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places." "Lines" are a surveyors line, measuring out a portion of land, an inheritance. So the same idea continues here.

"Are fallen unto me" means that David did not choose his inheritance; another chose it for him. And that "another" was God! And David indicated here that he was totally satisfied, and that he could not have chosen better for himself if that had been his to do. He was delighted with the Lord, and would not make a single change in Him if he could.

"Yea, I have a goodly heritage." "Goodly" means totally acceptable. David was more delighted with the Lord than he could have been with any other inheritance.

It is well worth noting that the word "pleasant" has the same root as the word "pleasures" in verse 11. We are going to see when we get there that verse 11 has to do with heaven, but verse 6 has to do with the present here on earth. So we can see that the joys that we have in the Lord here on earth, will not only continue in heaven, but they will be better than ever then, and will never come to an end. What a Savior, and what a salvation He has provided for us.

What should be David's reaction to all that he has been saying?

16:7. "I will bless the Lord..." When we think of all that we have in God and in Christ, there is only One Whom we can thank for what we have. It is God! He counseled us, giving us advice, turning our hearts toward Himself. We did not seek Him; He sought us. We did not have the wisdom to choose Christ, but the constraining work of the Spirit caused us to come to Christ and to believe on Him. And even in the night seasons we continue to be instructed.

"Reins" lit. means kidneys. But it speaks of the inner man, the mind and the heart. The instruction that the Lord gave us to bring us to Himself did not stop when we were saved, but it continues on, night after night. Spurgeon wrote, "Wise men see more with their eyes shut by night than fools can see by day with their eyes open" (I, 196). And then he added, "He who learns from God and so gets the seed, will soon find wisdom within himself growing in the garden of his soul... The night season which the sinner chooses for his sins is the hallowed hour of quiet when believers hear the soft still voices of heaven, and of the heavenly life within themselves" (Ibid.).

We learn from the Gospels that it seems to have been the Lord's habit while He was here on earth, to spend whole nights in prayer, communing with His Father.

16:8 David's testimony continues.

After saying what the Lord has done, then he speaks of what he has done

for himself. God works, and then we work on the basis of what He has done. He works in us, and then we work out what He has been doing in our hearts. "We are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works."

"I have set the Lord always before me."

Notice the things that David said in this Psalm that he had done:

- 1) Verse 1 -- He was trusting the Lord.
- 2) Verse 2 -- He had made Jehovah his Adonai.
- 3) Verse 7 -- He praises the Lord for what He has done.
- 4) Verse 8 -- He sets the Lord always before him. And so he can boldly declare that he will not be moved.

He kept remember the Lord. He kept remembering that the Lord was with him, at his right hand. He kept remembering the love of God, and the wisdom of God, and the power of God, and the grace of God. The presence of the Lord was such a great reality to David that he could hardly have been more conscious of the Lord's presence if the Lord had been physically present with Him.

What a difference it would make in all of our lives if we deliberately, at the beginning of every day, would consciously recognize that God is present with us for fellowship with us, to guide us, to restrain us, to bless and help us, to teach us more about Himself. There is probably nothing more helpful that we can do for ourselves (by God's grace) every day than this.

We need to think about Him. We need to talk to Him. We need to endeavor in all things to please Him. In our Bible reading our purpose should be to learn of Him, to see Him as He is revealed in the Word. There is probably nothing that is more vital to our fellowship with the Lord than to be able to say, and for it to be true, "I have set the Lord always before me." This is not fantasy, to consider the Lord as always present with us. This is a great spiritual reality which every child of God should experience as David did.

This is what gives stability to us as Christians: "I shall not be moved."

By way of contrast, cf. Psa. 54:3; 86:14. This is a picture of most people in the twentieth century. They never think of God nor do they consider Him in what they do, nor in what they are.

John 16:8 is one of the greatest verses in the Bible to show us how we are to live. And it is our responsibility before God to see that we do.

16:9 Not only does setting the Lord before us give stability and strength to our lives (as the following words indicate, even in the face of death), but, according to this verse, it also gives us joy ("Therefore my heart is glad").

Also, "My glory rejoiceth." Peter translated this in Acts 2:26, "And my tongue was glad" (LXX). David was indicating that he was happy inside and out, in his heart and by his tongue, his speech. Some people are happy inside, but don't express it outwardly. Others act happy outwardly, but they have no joy inwardly. The Lord's presence gives both. It does not mean that there will be no trials, and we can see that from the last statement of this verse. It speaks of death: "And my flesh shall rest in hope." In hope of what? Verses 10 and 11 tell us. But the words here

show that David believed in the resurrection of the body. And it was this that helped him to face death in peace.

David's testimony ends with verse 9. In verse 9 we see him talking again to the Lord.

III. DAVID'S FAITH AND HOPE (Psa. 16:10, 11).

These verses are very obviously addressed to God.

16:10. God had done much for David, as we have seen in the Psalm. But the work of the Lord in his behalf would not end in death. God would not leave him in Sheol, nor would He allow his body to disappear in corruption. David's existence would not end in the grave; there were more and better things yet to come. HE WOULD BE RAISED FROM THE DEAD!

16:11. There is much in Psalm 73, especially the latter part which is similar to Psalm 16. Listen to what Asaph wrote about the Lord:

Nevertheless I am continually with thee:
thou hast holden me by my right hand.
Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel,
and afterward receive me to glory.

David and Asaph were two OT saints who believed in resurrection and life after death -- and there were more who believed it, too.

Will you notice in verse 10 and 11 that David was resting in what the Lord would yet do for him? We are growing in a true understanding of the Word when we see that our salvation does not depend upon what we do for God, nor upon what we do for ourselves, but upon what God does for us. (Read verses 10 and 11 with this in mind.)

David, who was in great peril in verse 1, has found his peace in the presence of the Lord here, and, according to verse 11, has only greater and unending joys in glory when he finds himself enjoying God and Christ and the Holy Spirit in the "fulness of joy," lit., joys. God satisfies us here with all of the troubles that we have; He is going to satisfy us even more when we are forever with Him, and forever like Him.

Concl: I have been presenting this Psalm from the standpoint of David's trials and experiences on earth, but leading to glory. But in closing I want you to see that this Psalm also speaks of Christ. In Acts 2:25-28 Peter quoted Psalm 16:8-11, and applied it all to Christ. And in Acts 13:35 Paul quoted just Acts 16:10, but he also applied this to Christ. And so we know that, while Psalm 16 records David's faith and his hope, yet God also had in mind what His Son would experience, and how He would be raised triumphantly from the dead, never to die again. These truths brought inexpressible joy to David, and they should do the same for us. The Lord died, but He was raised from the dead -- a fact of revelation found in the OT. And the very fact that this has been fulfilled should not only give us comfort in the trials we have, but it should give us peace as we think of death and what is to come afterwards.

The Lord wants us to be happy and at peace now, and to know that even greater joys are ahead when we will be with Him.

PSALM 23
April 4, 1994

Intro: It is impossible to overstate the popularity of this Psalm. It has been a favorite with the Lord's people from the time that it was written, and it continues to be the same today. Even multitudes of people who know do not know the Lord nor anything about the Scriptures, know Psalm 23 -- even though it belongs exclusively to the people of God. It contains a message which is true only of those who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. No one but a true Christian can say, "The Lord is my shepherd."

Spurgeon called this "David's Heavenly Pastoral," and "the pearl of Psalms." It is unsurpassed among the Psalms, and, one might say, among all songs which have ever been written. It is especially meaningful coming from David because in his early life he had been a shepherd. He knew what it meant to be a good shepherd, and had found his ideal in the Lord.

Being a shepherd was no special honor as we learn several places in the Scriptures. When David went to take food to his brothers who were in the army of Israel, and was offended at the challenges which Goliath hurled daily at the men of Israel, asking, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?", Eliab, his older brother was angry at David and reproached him with these words: "Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness?" (1 Sam. 17:28). It was as though David, being a mere shepherd boy, was not fit to be in the army of Israel.

We also see the scorn that was often attached to shepherds when Joseph brought his father and his brothers to live in Egypt. Joseph was careful to make sure that his family of shepherds were separated from the Egyptians because "every shepherd is an abomination unto the Egyptians" (Gen. 46:34).

David, of course, was not being irreverent in any way by calling the Lord, "my Shepherd," but even that showed how the Lord had humbled Himself to be a Shepherd to His people. Our Lord Jesus Christ seemed to revel in this title. He called Himself, "the good shepherd" (John 10:11, 14). Peter called the Lord, "the chief shepherd" (1 Pet. 5:4), and we read in the book of Hebrews that the Lord Jesus is "that great shepherd of the sheep" (Heb. 13:20).

Spurgeon's comment on this title is this: "What condescension is this, that the Infinite Lord assumes towards his people the office and character of a Shepherd!" (Vol. I, p. 353). We ought to add that we can be sure that David did not give the Lord this Name, but by revelation he was using the title which the Lord had taken for Himself. All that a shepherd was to his flock, leading them, protecting them, feeding them, the Lord was and always will be to His people. It is just as true today as it ever was. And so we, too, can say, "the Lord is my shepherd."

Spurgeon also made this good comment about the Lord in Psalm 23:

The position of this Psalm is worthy of notice. It follows the twenty-second, which is peculiarly the Psalm of the Cross. There are no green pastures, no still waters on the other side of the twenty-second Psalm. It is only after we have read, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!" that we come to "the Lord is my Shepherd." We must by experience know the value of the blood-shedding, and see the sword awakened against the Shepherd, before we shall be able

truly to know the sweetness of the good Shepherd's care (I, 353).

The Psalm is short and does not really need to be divided into several sections, but it will probably help us in understanding it to recognize certain things about the Psalm.

I like the suggestion may by Derek Kidner in his commentary that we have in the first four verses, David's Shepherd. Then, in verses 5 and 6 we have, David's Friend. That is very true because it seems that David changed from speaking of God as his Shepherd at the end of verse 4, and used the language of a Friend in the last two verses.

Note also if you will that verse 1 seems to be a title for the Psalm. Then in verses 2 through 5 he tells us what the Shepherd does for him day after day. All of this is in the present tense. Then in verse 6 David concluded by speaking of his assurance for the future.

Please notice also that in verses 1 through 3 David was speaking about the Lord. In verses 4 and 5 he was speaking to the Lord. And then in verse 6 he declared that in all the future, both in time and eternity, he was sure that the Lord would continue to be to him and to do for him what He had always been and had always done. It is a most remarkable Psalm, and we can easily see why people love it, and why we love it!

But not let us consider the Psalm.

23:1 "The Lord is my shepherd." It does not make a great deal of difference that the Lord is a Shepherd; we need to be able to say that He is "my shepherd." And, as I have already mentioned, He is not "my shepherd until He, Christ, is my Savior. He is not everybody's Shepherd. He is the Shepherd of His people.

It is interesting to compare the way we love to talk about the Lord, that He is "my Shepherd," with what the Lord said about us in John 10: "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep... My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (vv. 14, 27). We love to say, "My shepherd," and He loves to say, "My sheep."

Note also that David did not say, "He will be my Shepherd." Nor did he say, "I hope He is my Shepherd." But he said with all confidence, "The Lord is [present tense] my shepherd." And the Lord has been that to us from the first day that we knew Him and for all eternity. It is an expression of the great humiliation that He experienced to become our Shepherd. And David probably could never make this statement without deep gratitude to the Lord for His "goodness and mercy" which he would mention in verse 6.

Now, because He is "my Shepherd," David could also say (and he was going to prove it) that "I shall not want."

This meant that David, because the Lord was his Shepherd, did not, and would not, lack anything. David was here declaring the complete sufficiency that he had in the Lord. He actually needed no one, nor anything, beyond what He had in the Lord.

Remember that He was speaking of Jehovah. He was speaking of the ever-living, eternal, and unchanging God. He was speaking of Him Who was the Creator of all things. Jehovah was sufficient for all of David's needs,

physically, spiritually, emotionally -- all of His needs for time and eternity. His power is sufficient for our weakness. His wisdom is more than sufficient for our foolishness. His grace is sufficient for our sins. He is the all-sufficient God, and He will always be the same. He is sufficient for us in life; He is sufficient for us in death. He may not give us all that we desire, but He is pledged to give us all that we really need. And if there is something that He doesn't give to us, it is evident that we don't need it! How wonderful it is to be able to look ahead to all of the uncertainties of the future, and to be able to say, "I shall have no lack in anything that I need." "I shall not want." The NIV translates this phrase, "I shall not be in want." It does not mean that we will not have trials, but it does mean that the Lord will never leave us, nor will He ever fail to help us.

If we can say what David said here in verse 1, that is all that we need to say. Everything else is only an explanation of this. What a great God we have!

23:2 Here David began to explain what he meant by what he said in verse 1. Notice the times that David said "he" in verses 2 and 3. (Read them.)

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures." He causes me to lie down. It is a picture of contentment and peace. It speaks of a sheep which has had all that he wants to eat, and so he lies down satisfied in the very pasture where he has been feeding.

Spurgeon must be right when he said that the "green pastures" speak of the Word of God. The Word is food for our souls. It is always green, always nourishing, always satisfying. The Psalmist wrote in Psa. 119:165, "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them."

You can always tell a Christian who has been feeding upon the Word of God. He does not cause trouble. He is not trying to stir things up. He is not trying to run other people's lives. He is like a sheep resting in green pastures.

And this is also a picture of security. The wolf was the sheep's enemy, but the sheep was full and peaceful knowing that the shepherd was near and could drive away the wolves.

"He leadeth me beside the still waters."

Have any of you been up at Camp Menucha just beyond Corbett? Menucha is the Hebrew word for "still," quiet, peaceful. I have been told that it is important for sheep to have "still waters" because drinking from a rushing stream can cause them to get water in their noses, and this can cause infection for them. I don't know if that is really true, but that seems to be the idea that David was expressing here.

Whatever may be the case, this second part of verse 2 is another way of saying what the first part has said. We know that "water" in Scripture is a type of the Word of God, life-sustaining, refreshing. Nothing is more refreshing and invigorating on a hot day than a drink of cool water. And nothing is more refreshing and invigorating in the trials and troubles of life than to come to the "still waters" of the Word of God. Again you see a picture of contentment and peace. The Lord brings us to the "green pastures" of the Word, and to the "still waters" of the Word, and there we

lie down; there we drink to our complete satisfaction.

23:3. "He restoreth my soul." Notice that David is speaking of all that his Shepherd does for him, not what he does for his Shepherd.

The idea in the word restore is to bring back to the starting point. The sheep are tired and weary and perhaps wounded, but the shepherd sees to it that the sheep are renewed in strength, and perhaps healed of injuries.

The idea is that which Isaiah described in Isa. 40:28-31. (Read.)

Think also of the Lord's words in Matt. 11:28-30, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden..."

But notice that David was not speaking of the restoration of his body (although the Lord can do that, too), but the inner restoration of his soul. Only our Lord can do either of these for us, but we often need the restoration of our souls more than we need the restoration of our bodies. Sometimes the two go together.

In Jer. 6:16 we have these words:

Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways,
and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way,
and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.
But they said, We will not walk therein.

When the disciples had returned from a busy time of ministry, He heard the report of what they had done and taught, and then He said to them, "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while" (Mark 6:31). We put a premium on activity and work. And there is a time for that. But we often know very little about getting rested and being restored. It can't always mean a vacation. But it always means getting back to the Lord and to His Word.

"He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." This is the second time that David said, "He leadeth me." Both verbs are from the same root, and not only have the idea of leading, but even of carry-ing. In Isa. 40:11 we read about the Lord,

He shall feed his flock like a shepherd:
he shall gather the lambs with his arm,
and carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead those that are with young.

He not only leads, or carries, us to "still waters," but also "in paths of righteousness for his name's sake." These are "the old paths" we were speaking about a moment ago. And here we are speaking about the ways of the Lord. Cf. Isa. 55:8, 9, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts..."

By nature our ways are in paths of unrighteousness. Those are not the ways of rest and peace and renewal. The Lord leads us to the Word, and then He enables us to walk "in paths of righteousness." The Word first, followed by a walk that is pleasing to the Lord. That is what righteousness is, that which is pleasing to the Lord. That which is pleasing to the Lord is that which is according to the Word. And the result is a holy life. Cf. Phil. 2:12, 13,

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed,
not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence,
work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

For it is God which worketh in you,
both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

But what did David mean, "For his name's sake"? He meant that our Shepherd does all that He does for us for His own glory, not for ours. All of the good that is in us, and all of the good that we do, are traceable to His power and His patience and His wisdom and His grace. Sin is described in Rom. 3:23 as falling short of God's glory. We were made to glorify Him, but that is only possible now by the grace of God. We are to be "to the praise of his glory," the glory of His grace.

April 5, 1994

23:4 In this verse and in verse 5, notice the times that David said, "Thou." (Read them.)

"Yea" means moreover, in like manner, likewise. And it would appear that David was saying that the crowning blessing of life here on earth is that, when we come to "the valley of the shadow of death," the Lord continues to be with us, and to lead us. Kidner says, "All other guides turn back, and the traveller must go on alone" (p. 111). And yet he is not alone. David said, "I will fear no evil: for thou art with me." In life and in death the Lord continues to be with us. He continues to be my Shepherd, and yours.

Spurgeon again is excellent on this verse. Listen to what he wrote about the first part of this verse:

This unspeakably delightful verse has been sung on many a dying bed, and has helped to make the dark valley bright times out of mind. Every word in it has a wealth of meaning. "Yea, thou I walk," as if the believer did not quicken his pace when he came to die, but still calmly walked with God. To walk indicates the steady advance of a soul which knows its road, knows its end, resolves to follow the path, feels quite safe, and is therefore perfectly calm and composed. The dying saint is not in a flurry, he does not run as though he were alarmed, nor stand still as though he would go no further, he is not confounded nor ashamed, and therefore keeps to his old pace. Observe that it is not walking in the valley, but through the valley. We go through the dark tunnel of death and emerge into the light of immortality. We do not die, but do but sleep to wake in glory. Death is not the house but the porch, and the goal but the passage to it. The dying article is called a valley. The storm breaks on the mountain, but the valley is the place of quietude, and thus full often the last days of the Christian are the most peaceful in his whole career; the mountain is bleak and bare, but the valley is rich with golden sheaves, and many a saint has reaped more joy and knowledge when he came to die than he ever knew while he lived. And, then, it is not "the valley of death," but "the valley of the shadow of death," for death in its substance has been removed, and only the shadow of it remains. Some one has said that when there is a shadow there must be light somewhere, and so there is. Death stands by the side of the highway in which we have to travel, and the light of heaven shining upon him throws a shadow across our path; let us then rejoice that there is a light beyond. Nobody is afraid of a shadow, for a shadow cannot stop a man's pathway even for a moment. The shadow of a dog cannot bite; the shadow of a sword cannot kill; the shadow of death cannot destroy us. Let us not, therefore, be afraid. "I will fear no evil." He does not say there shall not be any evil; he had got

beyond even that high assurance, and knew that Jesus had put all evil away; but "I will fear no evil;" as if even his fears, those shadows of evil, were gone for ever. The worst evils of life are those which do not exist except in our imagination. If we had no troubles but real troubles, we should not have a tenth part of our present sorrows. We feel a thousand deaths in fearing one, but the Psalmist was cured of the disease of fearing. "I will fear no evil," not even the Evil One himself; I will not dread the last enemy, I will look upon him as a conquered foe, an enemy to be destroyed, "For thou art with me." This is the joy of the Christian! "Thou art with me." The little child out at sea in the storm is not frightened like all the other passengers on board the vessel, it is asleep in its mother's bosom; it is enough for it that its mother is with it; and it should be enough for the believer to know that Christ is with him (pp. 355, 356).

And then Spurgeon adds this word of counsel which I have never read in any other commentary, nor in any Christian book speaking of death:

Many persons profess to receive much comfort from the hope that they shall not die. Certainly there will be some who will be "alive and remain" at the coming of the Lord, but is there so very much of advantage in such an escape from death as to make it the object of Christian desire? A wise man might prefer of the two to die, for those who shall not die, but who "shall be caught up together with the Lord in the air," will be losers rather than gainers. They will lose that actual fellowship with Christ in the tomb which dying saints will have, and we are expressly told they shall have no preference beyond those who are asleep. Let us be of Paul's mind when he said that "To die is gain," and think of "departing to be with Christ, which is far better." This twenty-third Psalm is not worn out, and it is as sweet in the believer's ear now as it was in David's time, let novelty-hunters say what they will (p. 356).

Dr. Johnson, who has been with us for our Easter Bible Conference, was saying that he wished that he had become acquainted with the Puritans much earlier in his life. It is a blessing to me to think that David wrote this Psalm early in his life, when he was a shepherd boy, and that he had lived his life unafraid of death because the presence of the Lord was such a great reality in his life. May the Lord deliver us from the fear of dying and death.

At the end of verse 4 David said, "Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

The rod was for defense; the staff for controlling the sheep. These were both a comfort to David. No enemy could harm him, and the Lord providentially guided him with His staff, restraining him also when necessary.

Fausset brought out another idea about the rod. He said that the rod was also used for counting the sheep. Leviticus 27:32 speaks of the sheep who pass under the rod, i.e., as they are counted. The shepherd was always careful to make sure that all of the sheep were present and safe. If even one were missing, he would go after it. Cf. Matt. 18:12; Luke 15:4. When our Lord prayed His high priestly prayer one thing he told the Father was this: "Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost" (John 17:12). Is it any wonder that David found comfort in the Lord's rod and in His staff?

23:5 Here the figure of speech actually changes from that of a shepherd

to that of a friend, although we all know that our Lord is one and the same -- our Shepherd and Friend. Therefore, there really is not a change.

What does the Lord as our Shepherd-Friend do?

We come back again to the idea of eating -- just as we had it at the beginning of the Psalm. This is what the Lord is continually doing for us. There are times in this life when we have to wait to eat, but that is never the case with the Lord. He is always prepared ahead of time, i.e., "before" in time. And it must mean that David was speaking here again of the spiritual food that we receive from the Word. Have you never noticed how your Bible readings on certain days seemed to be just right for you? Or when you have gone to church, haven't you felt many times that the message had been prepared just for you? The Lord had prepared your table even though you were surrounded by all kinds of "enemies." Your head was anointed "with oil," and your cup was running over -- both expressions of the greatest of joys. The anointing with oil may be a reference to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Whatever the full details may be, again we see the full sufficiency of the Lord. With an overflowing cup, David not only had enough, but more than enough!

23:6 In verse 1 we had our theme. In verses 2 through 5 we have the proof of the theme: that which the Lord was doing for David from day to day so that he could anticipate even his own death without fear knowing that the Lord would not forsake him even then. Here in verse 6 we have David's conclusion, especially with respect to the future.

"Surely" -- This is both a word of assurance as well as of limitation. It could be translated, only. David saw the Lord's leading, His provision, and His protection from day to day, and he classed these all as "goodness and mercy." The Lord's "goodness and mercy" had been with him throughout his life from day to day, and, as David looked into the future he was sure that there would be no change. The resources that he had, and that we have, in the Lord, are inexhaustible!

And the "goodness and mercy" of the Lord would not only be available, but they would "follow" him, chase him, pursue him, all the days of his life. It was not that David would have to search for them; he was saying that he could not get away from them. It was like the crowds pursued our Lord when He was here on earth. Or like Paul's enemies pursued him from city to city -- to cite a negative example.

"Goodness" is the best which God has. It is that which is pleasing to God and pleasing to us. Again we have the idea of satisfaction, of sufficiency. In the words of Romans 8:28, God works all things together for good, for our spiritual growth and blessing.

"Mercy" is kindness, the favor of God upon us to take away the miseries which we would otherwise experience, even though most of the time we are completely undeserving. David knew that he could get to heaven with a full cup and a peaceful heart as long as he had God's "goodness and mercy."

"And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." The Hebrew has it, for the length of days. It is wonderful to have the Lord with us, but it is even more wonderful to know that we are with Him. Before the Lord left this earth, He assured His disciples that He would always be with them.

He said, "And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20), or the consummation of the age. But He also prayed,

Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me,
be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory...

How wonderful it is to be "in the house of the Lord"! Wherever He is, is where we want to be. This means heaven on earth, and it also means as far as the future is concerned, that wherever the Lord Jesus is, that will be heaven for us.

Concl: Spurgeon quotes many writers in his set on the Psalms which he called, The Treasury of David. One of his quotations on the twenty-third Psalm was from Henry Ward Beecher, and I want to read it to you as I close. This is what he said:

Blessed be the say on which that Psalm was born! What would you say of a pilgrim commissioned of God to travel up and down the earth singing a strange melody, which, when one heard, caused him to forget whatever sorrow he had? And so the singing angel goes on his way through all lands, singing in the language of every nation, driving away trouble by the pulses of the air which his tongue moves with divine power. Behold just such an one! This pilgrim God has sent to speak in every language on the globe. It has charmed more griefs to rest than all the philosophy of the world. It has remanded to their dungeon more felon thoughts, more black doubts, more thieving sorrows, than there are sands on the sea-shore. It has comforted the noble host of the poor. It has sung courage to the army of the disappointed. It has poured balm and consolation into the heart of the sick, of captives in dungeons, of widows in their pinching griefs, of orphans in their loneliness. Dying soldiers have died easier as it was read to them; ghastly hospitals have been illuminated; it has visited the prisoner, and broken his chains, and, like Peter's angel, led him forth...and sung him back to his home again. It has made the dying Christian slave freer than his master, and consoled those whom, dying, he left behind mourning, not so much that he was gone, as because they were left behind, and could not go too. Nor is its work done. It will go singing to your children and my children, and to their children, through all the generations of time; nor will it fold its wings till the last pilgrim is safe, and time ended; and then it shall fly back to the bosom of God, whence it issued, and sound on, mingled with all those sounds of celestial joy which make heaven musical for ever (Quoted in The Treasury of David, Vol. I, p. 357).

Beecher was certainly right when he said about this Psalm, "Nor is its work done." It is just as true for us today as it ever was for David, or ever has been for the people of God from that day to this. And we need to remember that it was not just a Psalm from David's heart, but primarily from God's heart to ours, that we might have the peace and joy in life and death which made David's life a foretaste of heaven on earth.

PSALM 34
April 11, 1994

Intro: This is another Psalm of David. The heading of the Psalm tells us that it was written after David's experience among the Philistines when he was fleeing for his life from King Saul. The account is recorded in 1 Sam. 21:10-15. (Read.)

So David's life at this time was beset with fears. Saul was after him and wanted to kill him. However, when he fled into Gath he found that he was in danger there as well. So, if this were a chapter in the life of David it would be entitled, The Fear of Man and the Fear of God. He feared Saul, and he feared Achish. It seemed as though there was no safe place for him. But the Lord used that time to teach David some of the greatest lessons of his life, and they are recorded for us in this Psalm. This was one of the major times in David's life when he learned to trust the Lord.

Each verse begins successively with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet -- with the exception of the last verse. Very few of the commentators try to explain the reason for such an acrostic (like the 119th Psalm), but it probably was to aid in the memorization of the Psalms. We know from verse 11 that David was interested in teaching others what he had learned about fearing the Lord, and so this may have been one of the reasons he wrote it in the form that he did.

A suggested outline of the Psalm:

- I. DAVID'S PRAISE (vv. 1-10).
- II. DAVID, THE TEACHER (vv. 11-14).
- III. DAVID'S LORD (vv. 15-22).

Notice the intensely personal nature of the first eight verses. In these verses David was recounting his own experience with the Lord. In verse 1 he wrote, "I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth." In verse 2 we read, "My soul shall make her boast in the Lord." In verse 3 he said, "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together." Verse 4 tells us, "I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears." He obviously was speaking of himself in verse 6 where he said, "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles."

David did not say what his troubles were, nor where nor how long he experienced his troubles and dangers. But we need to know that he was not speaking about things that he had never experienced himself. We know that his life was in danger, and that he must have felt trapped between Saul and Achish, but his heart was overflowing with praise to the Lord, and he was not content to praise the Lord by himself; he wanted everyone who learned about his deliverance to join with him in praising the Lord.

We might wonder at David's behavior before Achish, but our questions would probably be answered very quickly if we could know the terrible danger which David found himself in. But notice that he did not give himself the credit for his escape. All of the praise is given to the Lord.

Let us look at these first ten verses. How wonderfully David exalted the Lord!

- I. DAVID'S PRAISE (vv. 1-10).

34:1 Sixteen times David mentioned the Lord by Name in this Psalm, and ten times the Lord is referred to by pronouns, i.e., he, and his,

and him. And there are many verbs used where it is understood that the Lord is the subject. So the Psalm is full of the Lord.

David was intent on blessing the Lord, i.e., worshipping the Lord. Inherent in this word is the idea of kneeling. And so David was not only exalting the Lord, but in doing so he was humbling himself. "His praise" could mean that David was thinking of a hymn of praise, not just a verbal testimony, but singing the praises of the Lord to glorify the Lord. And this was not just done after David escaped from Achish, but he did it continually. That particular deliverance made him realize how often the Lord had blessed him, and how much he needed to praise the Lord "at all times...continually."

Paul agreed with David. He said, "In everything give thanks..." (1 Thess. 5:18), and "giving thanks always for all things" (Eph. 5:20). One thing we need to do every day and many times a day is to worship the Lord, to glorify Him, to bring thanks to Him for the way He actually loads us with His benefits. Cf. Ps. 68:19. But often it is with us that it takes some special deliverance, some special answer to prayer, to get us walking on the pathway of praise to God. And please notice that he did not just say that he was thankful. He was blessing the Lord. It was the Lord's praise that was continually upon his lips.

34:2 David's praise did not just come from his lips; it came from his "soul." It came from the depths of his being. It was real. This was not mere formality, but it was absolutely sincere.

The word "boast" is the Hebrew verb from which we get the word, Hallelu-jah. And it basically means to give a clear sharp sound. Thus David's boasting was audible, people could hear it, but they could also understand it. It was not muffled, not hard to detect. David's soul was speaking through his mouth for all to understand what the Lord had done for him, and how grateful he was.

Not everybody was interested in what David had to say. People generally do not recognize that their blessings, their deliverances, come from the Lord. But "the humble" do! Matthew Henry's comment on this was:

Those have most comfort in God's mercies, both to others and to themselves, that are humble, and have the least confidence in their own merit and sufficiency (III, 355).

David had not only been humbled by his experiences, but humiliated. He had been brought low, and his praise to the Lord was an encouragement to those who had also been brought low, but who may not have seen the Lord's deliverance for themselves. God's blessing upon our lives is meant to give encouragement to others who are in any trouble.

34:3 David seems to be calling upon "the humble" to join with him in praising the Lord. It is a blessing to praise the Lord by our selves, but it is even a greater blessing to join with others in praising the Lord, and it means even greater glory for God.

"O magnify the Lord with me." David wanted to make the Lord great! Now we can't make the Lord any greater than He is, but we can cause others to see His greatness and His glory when we praise Him. Many would have wanted to magnify David for his skill in getting out of trouble, but David wanted everyone to know more about the greatness and sufficiency of God, and so he sought to magnify the Lord. The disciples were magnifying the Lord when they said, after our Lord had calmed the storm, "What manner of

man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!" (Matt. 8:27).

David loved the Lord's Name, and he wanted to "exalt" it. He wanted to lift it up, but he wanted others to join with him -- like the servicemen who lifted up the flag on Iwo Jima when our forces took it during World War II.

34:4 David had "sought the Lord." This is the reason for David's intense desire to magnify the Lord. He had "sought" Him. He went looking for the Lord. It means that at the time there was no evidence that the Lord was with Him. He couldn't actually see the Lord when He found Him, but there was evidence that the Lord had "heard" him.

We seek the Lord in prayer. We seek Him first, and then His blessing, His help, His deliverance. But it is important to notice that it was the Lord that he sought -- not more allies, but the Lord!

David seemed to dwell in this Psalm on the fact that the Lord "heard" him. Cf. vv. 6, 15, 17. The Apostle John taught us that if the Lord hears us, that it all that it takes. We then "have the petition that we desired of Him: (1 John 5:15). The Lord knows our needs before we ask Him, but He loves to hear us when we pray, when we call upon Him for help. We can all be encouraged to read that when David "sought the Lord," the Lord "heard" him.

But will you notice that the Lord first of all delivered David from his fears. Some might argue that David was saying that the Lord took away the people and circumstances which made him fear. But that is not what David said. When we get down to verse 6 we read about the Lord delivering him from his "troubles," but here it is from his "fears." What a marvelous thing this is -- deliverance from our fears!

Our fears are usually greater than our troubles. We always fear the worst! But how wonderful it is to be delivered from our fears. This is what Phil. 4:6, 7 means. It is a very great blessing to be delivered from our fears while the danger still remains. Remember Isa. 41:10:

Fear thou not; for I am with thee;
be not dismay; for I am thy God:
I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee;
yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand
of my righteousness.

What more can we ask for than that?

Last week we had Psalm 23 where David said in verse 4, "Yea, though I walk through the valley..." When we seek the Lord and find Him because He hears us, the worst of our troubles are over right then.

"Delivered" -- He takes hold of us and preserves us, He rescues us. You and I need to seek the Lord if for no other reason than to be delivered from our fears. Notice the many times we have in the Word those two peace-giving words, "Fear not." If we are fearful when He says, "Fear not," then we are disobedient, and all disobedience is sin.

34:5 David must be talking here about "the humble" whom he mentioned in verse 2. When the humble heard what David had done, they looked to the Lord, and "were lightened." The picture here is of a sparkling brook. Even nature itself often shows us what we ought to be. It means that they were encouraged, and they became cheerful, and hopeful, where before they,

too, had been sad and worried. But when they looked to the Lord, and trusted Him, they were not disappointed. They found the Lord sufficient for their needs just as David had found the Lord sufficient for his needs.

The Lord does not fail His people. We never need to worry that we will blush with disappointment because the Lord has not stood by us and with us.

34:6 Again David was speaking here about himself. "This poor man cried." "Poor" means lowly, depressed, needy, helpless. He was without the resources in himself that he needed to face and overcome his enemies. He knew as he "cried" that, if the Lord did not help him, there was no one else who could. But the Lord "heard" him. And not only that but the Lord "saved him out of all his troubles." "Fears" in verse 4; the "troubles" which caused the fears here in verse 6. But it ought to interest every one of us that the Lord took away the fears first! The Lord delivered David from "all" of his fears, and then from "all" of his troubles.

34:7 Here is one of the most wonderful verses in the Psalm. Who is "the angel of the Lord"? Most of you know your Bibles well enough to know that this is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ. It was our Lord as the Angel of the Lord Who found Hagar and ministered to her. It was our Lord as the Angel of the Lord who stopped Abraham when he was ready to sacrifice Isaac. It was the angel of the Lord who stopped Balaam and would not let him curse the children of Israel. See Num. 22.

No man has seen God at any time. The Lord Jesus is the One Who revealed God in the NT when He came, and He is the One Who revealed God in the OT before He came to the earth as a Man.

And what a wonderful picture we have here of our Lord with David. The Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him. The Lord not only heard David, and came to rescue David, but He stayed with David. He surrounded David so that nobody could get to him from any direction. The Devil complained to the Lord because he said that the Lord had made a hedge around Job. Cf. Job 1:10. And the Devil was right! That is exactly what the Lord had done, protecting not only Job himself, but everything that Job had -- his family, his barns, his livestock, his health, everything! And the Lord did that for David according to this verse. But what the Lord wants from us is that we "fear Him."

"The fear of the Lord" is a statement which we all need to understand. It does not mean that we live in mortal terror of what the Lord might do to us. It means that we reverence and worship Him as God. It means that we are trusting Him, that we want to please Him and that, if we are fearful of anything, it is that we are fearful of displeasing the Lord. The person who fears the Lord is submissive to the Lord. It is when we can be described as people who fear the Lord that we experience His presence and see His blessing in our lives in very special ways. And remember that Solomon with his great wisdom given to him by God said, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." It is where we need to start in our relationship with the Lord.

It is wonderful to find the Lord. And it is wonderful to have Him take away our fears, and then our troubles. But the greatest of all blessings is to know that the Lord is always with us, always protecting us, always meeting our needs, great and small.

At this point David seemed to be overwhelmed with the goodness of the Lord from what we read in verse 8.

34:8 (Read.) The Lord does good things because He is good! And He works all things together for good. So David was calling upon others to "taste and see that the Lord is good," and that there was blessing, special blessing, and continuous blessing, for all who trust in Him.

What does it mean to "taste"?

A. R. Fausset said,

The sumptuous feast is ready, will you not taste it for yourselves? ... Mere hearing about the feat will not stand instead of tasting it.. Instead of brooding over theoretical objections, "Come and see," as Philip said in answer to Nathanael's objection... On tasting you will experience how "good" the Lord is (III, 172).

It is wonderful to read about how the Lord helped and delivered David, but it is even more wonderful to do what he did, to follow his example, to trust the Lord the way he did, and to see how the Lord will deliver us from our fears, from our troubles, and how He will surround us to protect us from the Devil and whatever enemies we might have to face.

So you and I need to take this as a personal invitation, not just from David, but from the Lord, because it was the Lord Who directed David in what he was writing.

But one invitation is not enough. We have another in verse 9.

34:9 Here we come to fearing the Lord again. Does this describe you? And I need to be sure that this describes me.

We are the Lord's "saints," His holy ones -- holy because of Christ and His Cross. "No want" means no lack. The Lord is completely sufficient for all of our needs, and we don't need to look anywhere else for our help. This is David's testimony to the complete sufficiency of the Lord.

34:10 One of the greatest examples of power and the ability to do what others cannot do, the animal who is known as the king of the beasts. All other animals, and human beings, too, fear him. But not he is always sufficient. Sometimes he goes hungry. "But they that seek the Lord shall not want (lack) any good thing." The Lord does not promise us everything that we want, but He does promise us everything that we need.

Now we come to the second main point in the Psalm. We have seen DAVID'S PRAISE; now we see:

II. DAVID, THE TEACHER (vv. 11-14).

34:11 "Come, ye children." David seems to have been especially concerned that young people learn what he had learned, but that they would not wait until they were older to learn to trust the Lord, to fear Him, and to seek Him. He wanted to be sure that they were hearing him: "Hearken unto me." It is easy for us to read this Psalm, and even to hear it taught, without really hearing what David was saying. Oh, that the Lord would give us ears to hear.

We don't have to wonder what it means to fear the Lord because David was

going to tell the young people in the hope that this would be a guide in their lives from day to day.

34:12 The question that David asked here is one that we can all answer with the words, "I do!" This is what everyone wants, whether he or she is a child of God, or not. We want to enjoy life and live a long time and "see good"! I do, and you do, too.

How is such a life possible?

34:13 We need to be careful about what we say, how we use our tongues and our mouths.

The Lord is good, and, by way of contrast, there are things which are "evil" to Him. David's statement indicates that there are things that are wrong, things that are sinful. We live in a world which tries to deny this. But there is sin, and we need to be careful that we are not using our mouths in a way that is displeasing to the Lord.

How interesting that David should talk about the tongue and the lips! We need to remember what James wrote in the third chapter of his epistle. He said in verse 2 of that chapter that if you can control your tongue, you won't have any trouble with the rest of your body. It seems from this that our mouth usually have something to do whenever there is sin. Our mouths get us into trouble. The most sinful member of our bodies is the mouth. You don't learn that in school, but you learn that from the Word of God.

34:14 The second thing that David mentioned was sin itself.

We need to remember that there are two kinds of sin. We sin when we do what is wrong in God's sight. Those are sins of commission. But we also sin when we fail to do that which is "good" in His sight. Those are sins of omission. And so David said that we not only must "depart from evil," but we need to "do good."

And then David said that we need to pay attention to what we are seeking. How rare to find even among the Lord's people those who really are seeking "peace." This means that we are not always going to insist on having our own way. It means that we are going to try to maintain peaceful and happy relationships with each other, and, as far as it is possible, with people who are in the world.

If you think about the things which are mentioned here in verses 13 and 14 you will see that what David said was very profound, touching every area of our lives, and showing us how much we need to depend upon the Lord to help us to show by the way we live that we really do fear the Lord. Remember those word I have given you before: "In the sweet fear of Jesus, let me begin this day..."

Now we come to the last part of this Psalm. There might be many ways in which we could describe what is here, but it seems to me that the main point of what David was saying here has to do with the Lord Himself. And so I have given it the heading,

III. DAVID'S LORD (vv. 15-22).

I won't try to go into as much detail as I have in the earlier verses of

this Psalm, but let me hit the high spots, and then leave it to you to meditate on what David said here about the Lord.

34:15 Let us be thankful for the Lord's eyes, and the Lord's ears. He sees everyone of us, and He hears us when we cry out to Him.

34:16 Although it seems that the Lord tolerates a lot of sin (and He does), yet let us remember that a day of reckoning is coming. The people of the world aren't getting away with what they think they are. How foolish it is to persist in a life of evil just because God doesn't settle accounts with us at the end of each day.

34:17 We might feel that the Lord heard and delivered His people long ago, but that He is not doing that today. David said that He is! He is the LORD -- He never will change. He is still sufficient for His people whatever their needs might be.

34:18 One commentator has written that the Lord may be high, but He is also "nigh." And He is especially near and dear to those who have broken hearts and contrite spirits. This suggests both the greatness of some of our burdens, but also that some of our troubles may be the result of our own doing. A broken and a contrite heart God will not despise. Cf. Psa. 51:17.

34:19 The truth of verse 17 is worth repeating. "Troubles" in verse 17; "afflictions," here.

34:20 This verse is cited in John 19:36 and applied to our Lord Jesus Christ. Nowhere and with no one was the presence and power and blessing of God more evident than in the life and death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

34:21 This verse goes with verse 16 -- a twofold warning against those who refused to listen to God and who persist in a life of sin. The wicked may think that things are going their way, and that it doesn't make any difference to God as to what they do, but it does! And they will find out about it when it is everlastingly too late! And so a Psalm like this, while it is primarily intended for the people of God, contains a message of the greatest importance for those who do not know the Lord. That which comforts and encourages the faith of the people of God, should strike terror to the hearts of all those who do not know the Lord.

34:22 This verse is in contrast with verse 21. Here the Lord confirms that the Lord has redeemed His servants, and that those who show that they are saved by their trust in the Lord shall not be held guilty. The people of God may have, and do have, their troubles and trials and afflictions, but they are preserved from the greatest of all troubles which people can experience, that of separation from God for all eternity!

Concl: Matthew Henry made the following comment at the end of his commentary on this great Psalm:

In singing these verses let us be confirmed in the choice we have made of the ways of God, let us be quickened in his service, and great encouraged by the assurances he has given of the particular care he takes of all those that faithfully adhere to him (III, 359). Spurgeon said, "Believer, thou shalt never be deserted, forsaken, given up to ruin. God, even thy God is thy guardian and friend, and bliss is thine (I, Psalms 27-57, p. 127).

PSALM 40
April 18, 1994

Intro: Psalm 40 is another Psalm of David. It is impossible to say exactly and in what circumstances, but we can tell that David had been in great trouble, trouble which threatened his life. But we also have his testimony as to the wonderful deliverance he had experienced. The first ten verses have to do with that past time of trouble, and it is really characterized by praise to the Lord.

However, when we come to verse 11 we find that David is faced with a new, life-threatening crisis, and so the last part of the Psalm is a prayer for another deliverance (vv. 11-17). The Psalm closes without telling us what the outcome was, but we can be sure that the Lord heard and answered David or he never would have become the King of Israel.

Derek Kidner, to whom I have referred a number of times in discussing the Psalms, made this very interesting statement about the Psalms leading up to Psalm 40. This is what he said:

The theme of waiting, expounded in Psalm 37, has had its painful application in Psalms 38 and 39, but now its triumphant outcome. The rescue pictured memorably in the opening lines, demands a fitting celebration, and David is enabled to see that no mere ritual can suffice for it: only an act of pure self-giving (italics mine). This he prepares to make, with a declaration which in reality none but the Messiah will be able to fulfil, as the New Testament makes plain. His 'Lo, I come' is the high point of the Psalm (Kidner, Derek, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, Psalms 1-72, p. 158).

Verses 6 through 8 are quoted in Heb. 10:5-7 and applied to our Lord Jesus Christ. So this makes Psalm 40 a Messianic Psalm. But I would remind you that, while David was enabled by the Holy Spirit to speak prophetically of Christ, yet the words in verses 6 through 8 were also David's words. And so we can carry the Psalm a step further and say that the Holy Spirit was indicating that David was a type of Christ.

Franz Delitzsch wrote in his commentary on this Psalm that verses 6-8 (7-9 in the Heb. text) are "the language of the Christ at His coming into the world." And then he went on to say this:

There can be no doubt in this particular instance that...this rendering is brought about typically. The words of David, the anointed one, but only now on the way to the throne, are so moulded by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of prophecy, that they sound at the same time like the words of the second David, passing through suffering to glory, whose offering up of Himself is the close of the animal sacrifices... (Biblical Commentary on the Psalms, Vol. II, pp. 34, 35).

But then he added this important statement: "We are not thereby compelled to understand the whole Psalm as typically predictive" (Ibid.).

Let me state it this way: Just because we have, in this case, three verses which point ahead to Christ, this does not mean that the whole Psalm points ahead to Christ. Nor does it mean that the words applied to our Lord in the NT did not have significance to David. Verses 6-8 do point ahead to Christ, and what He said. But they also point back to David and what he said.

I feel that many of our prophetic teachers have been guilty of misinterpreting the OT because in their desire to find prophecy they have overlooked the importance that those same statements had historically. David

may have been perfectly clear that he was speaking of the coming Messiah in verses 6-8. But they also tell us how he, David, felt, and how the Lord worked in his heart during the trial from which he had been delivered. And so verses 6-8 tell us what David learned and how he felt about the Lord, but they are also, to use Dr. Delitzsch's words, were "typically predictive" of Christ.

Now let me give you the outline which I want to follow, and it is different from any that I have seen, but I believe that it shows the message of the Psalm.

- I. DAVID'S PRAISE FOR A PAST DELIVERANCE (Psa. 40:1-3).
- II. WHAT DAVID LEARNED IN HIS TRIAL (Psa. 40:4-8).
- III. WHAT DAVID DID AFTER HIS TRIAL (Psa. 40:9, 10).
- IV. DAVID'S PRAYER FOR DELIVERANCE IN HIS NEW TRIAL (Psa. 40:11-17).

So the Psalm is built around David's praise and David's prayer, his praise for what the Lord had done for Him, and his prayer for what he needed the Lord to do for him when a new trial came upon him.

All of this should be both encouraging and instructive for us in our trials. We see the faithfulness of the Lord to David, and how David's past deliverances from the Lord encouraged him to turn to the Lord when he faced new troubles.

Now let us go to the text of the Psalm.

- I. DAVID'S PRAISE FOR A PAST DELIVERANCE (Psa. 40:1-3).

40:1 David did two things that are hard to do -- actually impossible to do apart from the grace of God. He "waited...for the Lord." And he waited "patiently." To wait for the Lord is good; to wait patiently for the Lord is best.

David practiced what he preached (in Psalm 37). He may have struggled at first because he had to wait. He needed the Lord to do something right away. He may have had to wait because there wasn't anything else that he could do. But the word "patiently" tells us that the Lord brought David to a place of real peace as he faced his trial (probably some evil scheme which Saul was trying to carry out so as to kill him).

These two words are the translation of one verb in the Hebrew. They suggest that David did not go to pieces, but that he fully expected that the Lord would do something to help him. "Waited" could accurately be translated, Waiting, I waited.

The David tells us five things that the Lord did for him.

- A. "He inclined unto me."

This meant that the Lord bent down so as not to miss a word which David said. This is like a father or mother will do when a child comes in deep distress.

- B. "And (He) heard my cry."

The Lord's attention was riveted upon David just like it would if the Lord had nothing else to do but to listen to David. The Lord did not want to miss a word which David had to say. David cried out to the Lord for help,

and the Lord heard him and knew exactly what David wanted him to do.

40:2 The third thing which the Lord did:

C. "He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay."

Many think that David was speaking here of his salvation. I don't think so. I doubt if verse 1 would correctly describe how David sought the Lord in salvation. Nobody has to wait to be saved. Whenever we come, He saves us.

No, he was describing in poetic language what his trouble seemed to be to him, "an horrible pit" in which there was no solid footing, but "miry clay."

Pits were sometimes used by armies to trap their enemies when they would fall into them. They were also used as prisons. Joseph's brothers put him in a pit. Often the pits had water in the bottom of them, and many died in pits because of the terrible conditions. The pits were greatly feared by everyone. David called his situation "an horrible pit."

Jeremiah was cast into a pit with miry clay at the bottom. Cf. Jer. 38:6. It often meant death by starvation because people were put in pits and forgotten. How wonderful it must have been to David to realize that the Lord had not forgotten him.

But the Lord did more than just lift David out.

D. "(He) set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings."

The Lord not only got him out of the miry clay, but planted his feet "upon a rock" (a familiar name for God or Christ in the OT). It is wonderful to think that David's experience, as difficult as it was and hard to bear, actually drew him closer to the Lord, and made some great and important changes in his life. This seems to be the meaning of "established my goings."

40:3 The fifth thing that the Lord did was this:

E. "And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God."

Notice that David gave the Lord the praise for making him thankful. The Lord had given him "a new song," a song he had never sung before, or it could have been a old song which had taken on new meaning for him.

But notice in the latter part of the verse what seems to have been David's greatest concern for the results which the Lord would achieve through his trial and deliverance. It was not that people would think of him as some kind of a hero, but that his experience would cause "many" others to see what he was singing about, and would find it in their hearts to trust the Lord in their trials.

In all that David said in these verses he obviously was intent on giving the Lord all of the glory for his deliverance.

Now let us see:

II. WHAT DAVID LEARNED IN HIS TRIAL (Psa. 40:6-8).

When David cried out to the Lord, He wanted the Lord to do something for him. But, as we are going to learn now, the Lord did more than that (and David touched upon this at the end of verse 3); the Lord taught him many things, and did much in his own heart. This, in turn, would affect the way that David would live from that time on.

40:4 While David would have experienced the fears and anxieties that anyone else would experience in facing possible death from his enemies, yet we have already seen that the Lord had taught him to wait patiently. Here he declared what inexpressible peace and joy comes from simply trusting the Lord instead of trusting in "the proud," or using lies as a means of escape.

Some times the need can be so urgent that it seems foolish to wait, and people can seem more likely to help us, even unregenerate people, rather than turning to the Lord. But David came out of this experience fully convinced that it is always the best and happiest thing to do to trust the Lord.

40:5 Another thing it did was to make David conscious of how often and how constantly the Lord was giving us His blessings. In Psa. 68:19 David wrote,
Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits,
even the God of our salvation.

And the Lord not only does things for us, but He is constantly thinking about us. We may sometimes forget Him, but He never forgets us. How important it is for us to remember God's "many...works" and His "many...thoughts" which are always directed toward us.

I got a letter yesterday from Earl Mets who has been serving the Lord with his wife and family for many years in Brazil. Recently they have had a lot of physical problems, and this is what he said in his letter:

Have you ever been grateful for the ability to breathe without pain?
Have you ever stopped to thank the Lord for the ability to sleep for a solid hour without coughing? What about the ability to bend over and tie your shoes? Or to be able to talk for two minutes without irritating your throat? What about the power to lie down and sit up under your own power?

Earl's wife Jo Ann had a cough for three months which for several weeks hit her every eight minutes around the clock day and night. Gradually it let us first to ten minutes day and night, and then to fifteen minutes, and then to twenty-two minutes, and then to forty-five minutes, and finally she is almost back to normal. But then Earl himself had a fall in which he broke two ribs and could not breathe without pain, had a hard time lying down and sitting up, or tying his shoes. Earl said in his letter that we take these things for granted -- "until we lose them."

When David saw how wonderfully the Lord met his needs, it made him grateful for all that the Lord had been doing for him, and he realized that he wouldn't be able to count them all if he tried. But he could give God thanks!

But let us go on to verse 6 to see what else David learned.

40:6 If I were teaching the book of Hebrews I would concentrate on how

these verses refer to the Lord Jesus Christ. But I am teaching Psalm 40, and so I want us to see how they applied to David without forgetting that they also refer to the Lord.

Do you remember that Samuel rebuked Saul, and the kingdom was taken away from him, because Saul did not kill all of the Amalekites along with their flocks and herds, but spared King Agag along with the best of the flocks and herds. And he said that it was because he wanted to offer sacrifices to the Lord. Samuel's response to Saul was, "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 15:22).

David learned that the Lord was not primarily concerned about any animal sacrifice that David might offer to the Lord; what the Lord wanted was David! The sacrifices had their place, but they were only significant if they were offered by one who first of all had given himself to the Lord.

This seems to be the meaning of "mine ears hast thou opened," or digged. This is usually taken as a reference to Exodus 21:1-6 when a servant asked to become the life-long slave of his master rather than to go free without his wife and his children. Others feel that this might be a reference to Isa. 50:4. The plural "ears" has caused some to back away from the Exodus reference, but it could mean even greater devotion to God that was normally required.

40:7 When we apply this verse to our Lord, it is apparent that the reference was to this Psalm. But perhaps in thinking of David it was a reference to what he wrote in Psalm 1, or Psalm 112.

"Lo, I come" shows David's ready response to the Lord concerning what he had written in verse 6. David has gotten the message from the Lord, and he agrees not only that obedience is better, but here he pledged himself to be obedient to the Lord.

40:8 No one could say this as completely as our Lord, but David's trials had brought him to the place where he not only wanted to do the will of God, but he delighted in God's will. And the Word of God was not only in his mind and on his lips, but in his heart.

Verses 6 through 8 are the OT equivalent of Rom. 12:1, 2. It is important that we love the Lord or obedience becomes only a form which can never satisfy God. The Lord wants us first, and then our obedience and our service can please and glorify Him. How important it is that we understand this, and respond as wholeheartedly as David did.

Now we come to the third section of the Psalm.

III. WHAT DAVID DID AFTER HIS TRIAL (Psa. 40:9, 10).

40:9 We don't know how much of a preacher David was before he had the trial from which the Lord delivered him. But we know that he was a preacher afterwards! His trial not only brought about some great changes in his own heart and life, but it gave him a greater burden for his people, to see them loving the Lord, trusting the Lord, and appreciating the blessings of the Lord as he did. Both verse 9 and verse 10 mention "the great congregation." This was his description of the people of God.

For David to preach righteousness meant that he was telling his people about the things which pleased God. Actually it was verses 4 through 8 which was the subject matter of his preaching. And he had not held anything back!

40:10 But he also spoke of God's righteousness, God's faithfulness (which is probably the meaning also of "thy truth"), God's salvation (deliverance), and God's lovingkindness. Notice that David's ministry was a God-centered ministry, not a David-centered ministry. Many people come out of their trials talking about themselves. David came out of his trial talking about the Lord.

AT THIS POINT IN THE PSALM THE PICTURE CHANGES COMPLETELY. DAVID HAD BEEN PRAISING THE LORD FOR HIS DELIVERANCE FROM A FORMER TRIAL, BUT HERE WE FIND HIM FACING A NEW TRIAL. And so I have given this the heading:

IV. DAVID'S PRAYER FOR DELIVERANCE IN HIS NEW TRIAL (Psa. 40:11-17).

As long as we live in this world under the conditions that we have in the world today, we are going to have our trials. We will be faced with situations that we don't like. We can be thankful that we get some relief, and that the Lord spares us from continual trials. However, when we get through one we can begin to look for the next one.

David didn't tell us what the new trial was, but it seems to have been just as severe, possibly worse, than the one he was concerned with at the beginning of this Psalm.

40:11 Here again he was crying out to God concerning the various characteristics that he had been preaching about. He had needed God before, and now He needed Him again. He would always need Him.

40:12 In verse 5 David had spoken of blessings which he could not count; here he speaks of evils, troubles, which he could not count. But the thing which apparently was different this time from the previous testing was that his suffering was aggravated by the fact that his iniquities had "taken hold upon him. They had humbled him to the point that he could not look anyone in the eye. They, too, were innumerable -- "more than the hairs of mine head." And he felt like he was going to die under the burden of it all -- "My heart faileth me."

40:13 Usually feelings of guilt and humiliation would cause a person to be so overwhelmed that he would not turn to the Lord. But because of the Lord's dealings with David before, the Lord had prepared him to face this new trial. How important it is for us to remember what the Lord has taught us previously! He will not let our trials get to be greater than we can bear by His grace. Cf. 1 Cor. 10:13.

So David cries out to the Lord to deliver him again.

40:14 In this verse and the next one David prayed against his enemies. You will remember that David would not lift a hand against Saul because Saul was the Lord's anointed. But in prayer it was different. He was asking the Lord to take vengeance upon his enemies, which is exactly what the Lord wanted him to do.

To be "ashamed" and "confounded" means that David was asking the Lord to make them disappointed that they were not able to do what they wanted to

do, and that they would be thrown into confusion in all that they were doing. He was asking the Lord to drive them back. Perhaps this was answered when Saul heard that the Philistines had invaded the land, and he had to quit chasing David to go back to face the Philistines. Cf. 1 Sam. 23:27, 28.

40:15. To pray that they would be "desolate" means that David was praying that his enemies would be stunned, stupefied, devastated.

The words, "Aha, aha," are "an exclamation of sarcastic delight, which finds its satisfaction in another's misfortune" (Delitzsch, II, 43). It is an expression of wicked glee when the enemy feels that he at last is going to be able to accomplish what he wanted to do, in this instance, to kill David. This must have been what the members of the Sanhedrin said when Judas came to them prepared to betray the Lord into their hands.

It seems that the Lord had let things go to such a point that David's enemies were prepared to claim the victory. However, that was not to be. The more impossible the situation became, the greater would be the Lord's glory in delivering David and his men.

40:16. David in prayer turned a corner here. He had been praying down judgment upon his enemies; now he prays for blessing upon those who were seeking the Lord as he was. He wanted them to be concerned most of all that the Lord would be magnified -- as Paul said, "whether it be by life, or by death" (Phil. 1:20).

40:17. The Psalm ends as it began. David had declared that the Lord was thinking about him in verse 5. Now David rests in that great truth. The Lord had helped David before, and delivered him. David concludes his prayer by calling upon the Lord to do it again, and to do it speedily.

Concl: When we have to admit (as we all do) that "I," like David, "am poor and needy," how wonderful it is that we can also say, "Yet the Lord thinketh on me." Since the Lord thinks upon us, it makes no difference what the troubles are. The Lord's thoughts lead Him to act for us, and therefore we can be at peace.

Spurgeon quoted a Samuel Lee in his Treasury of David (Vol. I, p. 251) who said, speaking of the Bible,

Sacred story derives from heaven the kindness of Abimelech to Abraham, of Laban and Esau to Jacob, of Ruth to Naomi, of Boaz to Ruth, and Jonathan to David. When others think of kindness to us, let us imitate David, 'tis the Lord that thinketh upon me, and forms those thoughts in their hearts.

So the Lord was thinking of David when he gave Jonathan, of all people, to him as his beloved and trusted friend. And the Lord is thinking of us when He gives us friends to stand with us in our times of need.

Years ago there was a young man attending Cambridge University who was being supported by his uncle. One day he received word that his uncle had died, and that source of support was cut off. The young man was grief-stricken, and, although he was a Christian, he wept bitterly because he felt that his university career was over. He spoke about his grief to a godly man at the University, and this wise believer just asked the young man one question. He said, "**Who gave you that friend?**" We often look at the instrument which the Lord uses in our lives, and forget that it was

the Lord Who was thinking about us and so he provided for us through that friend. And if He sees fit to remove that friend, He can certainly give us another.

That young man went on to finish his training at Cambridge, entered the ministry, and said years later that that question, "Who gave you that friend?", had often been a source of comfort to him throughout his life and service for the Lord.

David would want us to have high and holy thoughts of God. As we go from trial to trial throughout our lives, it is most precious, isn't it, to know that the Lord always thinks about us, and that He is always sufficient for our needs.

PSALM 46
April 25, 1994

Intro: This was Martin Luther's favorite Psalm. It was the inspiration behind his hymn, A Mighty Fortress Is Our God. In the darkest times of his life and ministry Luther used to say,
Come let us sing the forty-sixth Psalm,
and let them do their worst (Plumer, W. S., p. 522).

Luther also said about this Psalm,

We sing this Psalm to the praise of God, because God is with us, and powerfully and miraculously preserves and defends his church and his word, against all fanatical spirits, against the gates of hell, against the implacable hatred of the devil, and against all the assaults of the world, the flesh and sin (Op. cit., pp. 522, 523).

We can see from this that Luther believed that the truth of this Psalm could be applied to troubles which would arise from within the hearts of the people of God, to troubles they would face from the opposition of the world, and to troubles that would come upon them from the Devil and the forces of hell. He believed also that it applied not only to individual believers in their troubles, but also to Israel as a nation (for which it was written), and to the Church today. The Lord's people of all ages have learned to turn to this Psalm not only for comfort in times of need, but also for courage to face whatever troubles they might be facing. It is a Psalm which belongs to us as much as to anyone in the past.

No one knows exactly when it was written, nor by whom. And so it is a waste of time to speculate about that. We can tell that it was at a time of particular danger for "the city of God" (v. 4), which is Jerusalem, the place where God chose to put His Name.

There is a strong possibility that Psalms 46, 47, and 48 form a trilogy.

In Psalm 46 we can see that Jerusalem was faced with great trouble, possibly from some heathen nation. By the time the Psalm is finished we can see that there is nothing to indicate that the danger, whatever it was, was past. But the Psalmist's consolation and hope for the people is to be seen in the presence of the Lord. Cf. vv. 1, 5, 7, and 11. And there is the certain hope expressed in the last two statements of verse 10. (Read.)

Therefore, in Psalm 47 we see that the Lord is yet to subdue the nations (v. 3), yet even then he was "the Lord most high" and "a great King over all the earth." And this in turn give rise to the note of great confidence and assurance in Psalm 48 that God is sufficient for His people, and that He will be "even unto death" (v. 14).

Three Names for God are used in Psalm 46:

- 1) "God" in vv. 1, 5 (2x), and 10. In this connection God is called "the God of Jacob" in vv. 7 and 11, and Jerusalem is called "the city of God" in verse 4. This emphasizes God's great power.
- 2) "The Most High" in verse 4 -- a title which first appeared in Scripture at the time of Abraham's encounter with Melchizedek in Gen. 14. It speaks of God as the Sovereign God over all the universe, and also that He is the Creator and Possessor of the earth.
- 3) "The Lord" in verse 8, expanded to "the Lord of hosts" in vv. 7 and 11. This is the familiar Jehovah. This speaks of God as ever-living, and unchanging.

The refrain in the Psalm is obviously stated in vv. 7 and 11. And it seems that the divisions of the Psalm are marked out by the word "Selah"

which comes at the end of vv. 3, 7, and 11. This is not always the case with the word "Selah," i.e., that it marks out divisions, but it seems to be the case here.

Plumer, in his commentary on the Psalms, has given a very thorough discussion of the word Selah, most of which was the work of a Bishop Jebb. Cf. pp. 20, 21. After citing several authorities he came to the conclusion that it was a part of the original text, and that it is a musical marking. Just what it indicated, we are not sure, but it seems that it meant that there the music should stop after a rise in volume from the singers, and that those singing and those listening to the singing should give special attention and thought to the words which had just been spoken.

Plumer pointed out that the word Selah is found 74 times in thirty-nine Psalms, and 3 times in the prophecy of Habakkuk. The word is omitted in the later versions of the Latin Vulgate. It is not used in the Syriac or Arabic versions of the OT. And the Church of England has omitted it from its version of the Psalter. But it is a part of the original text, and should be retained. Whether or not it is read, is a matter of personal opinion. But for certain it should be noted. It is like an musical marking in our music today. We do not sing it, but the markings tell whether the music should be loud or soft, and whether or not there should be a break, or a rest, in the music. I usually do not read it if I am reading the Scriptures audibly, but I am always conscious that it is there.

The chief emphasis or theme of the Psalm has to do with the presence of God with His people. This is their security and the reason that they do not need to fear. Their security was not in their wall, nor in their numbers, nor in their allies, but in their God!

Therefore, let me suggest the following outline:

- I. THE PRESENCE OF GOD BRINGS PEACE (Psa. 46:1-3).
- II. THE PRESENCE OF GOD IS SUFFICIENT (Psa. 46:4-7).
- III. THE PRESENCE OF GOD INSPIRES FAITH (Psa. 46:8-11).

I. THE PRESENCE OF GOD BRINGS PEACE (Psa. 46:1-3).

46:1 The English text begins like the Hebrew text begins: with God!

This is Elohim. The statement has a majestic ring to it. And it also has an important lesson for us. When we are faced with our trials, how important it is to begin with God!

Interestingly this Name for God is plural in form, but it takes a singular verb. Undoubtedly we have in this an indication of the Trinity, and yet, at the same time, an indication of the unity that exists among the Members of the Godhead. Plumer says that "it expresses the excellence of the divine nature and authority" (p. 55). Inherent in this Name is also the idea that God is a mighty God! It is first used in the Psalms in Psalm 3:2. Next to Jehovah it is the most used Name for Deity in the OT. It appears over two thousand times.

The abruptness with which Psalm 46 begins is designed to make us consider the greatness, the majesty, the infinite power of God! We need to begin immediately thinking about God, Who He is, and what He is capable of doing.

Who is He, or what is He, according to this verse?

He is "our Refuge." Cf. Psa. 62:7, 8. Kidner suggests that this is the external, defensive protection which we have in God, while "strength" speaks of the internal power which God gives us to face our trials here in this life.

In Prov. 18:10 we read,

The name of the Lord is a strong tower:
the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.

"Safe" means set on high, out of reach of the enemy. The idea is similar to what the Lord said about gathering His people to Himself like a hen gathers her chicks. Cf. Matt. 23:37. The first thing to do when trouble comes is to run to the Lord, our strong tower, our place of refuge. And there He strengthens us.

Do we have trouble finding Him?

No, because He comes to us. He is "a very present help in trouble." This gives the idea that He suddenly appears. However, it does not mean that He has been away; it is that we realize that He is always near. And He is near to help us.

So God helps us by protecting us from without and by strengthening us within. Cf. what the Lord told Paul in 2 Cor. 12:9.

46:2 In the light of this glorious truth, the Psalmist went on to say that we will not fear "though" four things should happen:

- 1) "Though the earth be removed."
- 2) "Though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea."
- 3) "Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled."
- 4) "Though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof."

These are four of the worst catastrophes which can take place in nature, and yet the Psalmist said that since the Lord was our refuge, and our strength, we would be at peace through all of these trials. We all have a tendency to fear changes. Alexander has said that these are not only changes, but "violent changes and commotions" (Quoted by Plumer, p. 523).

I don't see any reason to see merely symbolic meanings to these statements, e.g., making "mountains" speak of kingdoms. To take these words as they are makes real sense.

For the earth to be "removed" simply means for it to be changed. This could come about through great earthquakes. We had an example of this here in the northwest when Mt. St. Helens erupted. Its shape has been different ever since, and volcanic ash was scattered around the world. It was a very disturbing time. The Psalmist was, however, not talking about some local disruption. He was talking about change taking place in the earth around the world! People's hearts would fail for fear, and there would be widespread destruction. But here we see the sufficiency of God in such a time. The Psalmist said, "Even if that happens we have no reason to fear."

"And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." We are inclined to look upon mountains as the strength of the earth. What if, instead of just losing its crown, Mt. St. Helens had shaken so violently that it was lost in the Pacific Ocean. We can't imagine such a thing happening, but we can never predict what is capable of happening when God moves in judgment against the earth.

46:3 "Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled." We need only to think of the disciples on the Sea of Galilee in the midst of a storm and how fearful they were. What if such a thing were to take place on a world-wide scale? What a terrible thing it would be. The Psalmist was describing a terrible, deafening noise, as well as huge waves, perhaps greater than had ever been seen before. It would strike the greatest fear in the hearts of people generally, but not so with the Lord's people.

"Though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof." This undoubtedly speaks of a tremendous earthquake. Mountains would not only disappear into the sea, but they would shake and crumble and be destroyed. If that were to happen with mountains, think of what it would like in the rest of the earth.

When we consider the possibility of such things, could we confidently say that they would not make us fear. This would be like natural disasters coming one after another, like the troubles which hit Job. We would feel like anyone would be foolish to claim that we would not be afraid if suddenly those things were to happen. And yet the Psalmist said that the presence of the Lord is sufficient to keep our hearts at rest and peace, not in fear, in such a time of universal catastrophes upon the earth.

The reason we find this hard to believe is because we haven't fully tasted of the meaning of verse 1. Our God is greater than we think He is. He is more sufficient than we realize. So let us not doubt what the Psalmist was saying. Let us not feel that he was just carried away with poetic enthusiasm. Let us realize that we have resources in the Lord which we have never tapped, but which are there to keep us in perfect peace whatever our circumstances might be.

Is it any wonder that this is followed with "Selah"?

But let us go on to the second point:

II. THE PRESENCE OF GOD IS SUFFICIENT (Psa. 46:4-7).

We have already seen in verse 2 and 3 that the Lord is sufficient for us when we are facing external dangers, terrible upheavals in nature itself which no one is capable of controlling. In that section we see how "God is our refuge." And so we can have peace when everything is violently changing all around us.

Now, in verse 4 and following we are going to see that the second part of verse 1 is also true. He is our "strength" within!

46:4 "There is a river." What a picture of tranquility we have here -- a river! Now we are thinking about what is going on within the city. "There is a river."

Not only that but this river is large enough to be able to feed many streams. So it speaks of an abundance of water. Cities have been destroyed in the past because they had no water. But here is an abundant supply. And this is sufficient for "the city of God." There is gladness because of the water. And in this "city of God" is "the holy place of the tabernacle of the most High." It is the place where God saw fit to dwell, the place where He chose to place His Name, the place which He gave to His people, but which still belongs to Him!

Jerusalem did not have such a river, and so it must be that the Psalmist was speaking figuratively of another river.

In Rev. 22:1, 2 we read this about a river in the new Jerusalem:

And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal,
proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.
In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river,
was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits,
and yielded her fruit every month:
and the leaves thereof were for the healing of the nations.

And then in the seventeenth verse of Rev. 22 we read this invitation to salvation:

And the Spirit and the bride say, Come.
and let him that heareth say, Come.
and let him that is athirst come.
And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.

Where do we find this water of life, this "pure river," as the Apostle John called it? We find it in the Word of God. Therefore, I would suggest that the river that the Psalmist was speaking about was the Word of God!

Isn't it the Word which makes us glad? Isn't it the Word which strengthens us? Isn't it the Word which reveals to us God, and Christ, and the Holy Spirit? Isn't it the Word which causes us to realize that God is not far off, but that He is with us and will never forsake us?

I think this interpretation is supported by the fact that after the Psalmist spoke of the river in the city, he spoke of "the city of God" as "the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High." This is where God had chosen to dwell among His people. Then in verse 5 he spoke of God in the city -- thus identifying the river with God.

46:5 "The most High," the creator of heaven and earth and the possessor of heaven and earth, the sovereign God, the One Who is greater than all -- the living God "is in the midst of her." No wonder that the Psalmist said that He is "a very present help in trouble."

"She shall not be moved." Now here is an amazing thing! The earth can be changed. The mountains can be swept into the sea. The waters cause death and destruction. And the mountains that remain are shaken to their foundations, but Jerusalem, the people of God, remain unmoved with fear. Why? "God shall help her, and that right early."

"Right early" means at the very dawn of the morning.

Spurgeon commented on this saying, "The darkest hour of the night is just before the turning of the morning; and then, even then, shall the Lord appear as the great ally of his church" (Vol. I, p. 341). He may not always work when we want Him to, but He is always there!

46:6 There is no doubt as we come to this verse but that the Psalmist had in mind the opposition of the nations to the people of God. In the first paragraph we saw how nature was in turmoil and commotion. Now the same is said of the nations. (Read v. 6.)

Verse 6 is similar to verses 2 and 3, only there the Psalmist was speaking

of nature; here he is speaking of nations. In verses 2 and 3 it seemed that nature was out to destroy God's people; here it is the nations.

"Raged" means that the nations have declared war! They were "moved," the same word which is translated "carried" in verse 2 with reference to the mountains. "The nations made an uproar; kingdoms were in commotion" (Plumer, p. 524). It is a most fearful sight. But what happened? God had only to speak, and the nations were destroyed.

This had happened many times during Israel's history -- with the Egyptians, with the Canaanites, with the Midianites, the Philistines, and so on. Things looked absolutely hopeless time and time again, and would have remained so if it had not been for the presence of the Lord with His people. "The earth melted." When the Lord spoke, the crisis was over!

Why? Verse 7 gives us the answer.

46:7 This is where we have the refrain again.

Here for the first time God is called "the Lord of hosts." Cf. Joshua 5:13-15. (Read.)

In Psa. 24:10 David asked the question, "Who is this King of glory?" The answer: "The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory." The armies of heaven are allied with the people of God on earth so our enemies, regardless of how many they may be, are no match for the armies of the heavens.

"The God of Jacob" -- What grace is expressed in this title God has taken for Himself. So often when we feel that we are not worthy of the Lord's blessing (which is the way we ought always to feel), remember that God is "the God of Jacob." Jacob got himself into trouble. He deserved all of the difficulties that he got into. But the Lord met him at Bethel as he left home, and then the Lord met him at Peniel on his way back. The Lord promised at Bethel to be "with" him which meant not only that the Lord would go with him, but that the Lord would be on His side, guiding Him, protecting him, giving him the victory. This was all in pure grace!

Let us remember this when we are overwhelmed with a sense of our unworthiness.

"Our refuge" -- not the same as in verse 1, but the same as in verse 11. The Lord is our high tower. In Him we are above and out-of-reach of the enemy.

"Selah" again.

Now we come to the final section, or paragraph.

III. THE PRESENCE OF GOD INSPIRES FAITH (Psa. 46:8-11).

Here we have the Psalmist's application of what he had been saying to the readers in any generation. This brings the truth of Psalm 46 to us.

46:8 "Come, behold the works of the Lord." The idea in the word "come" appears to be an invitation to take a journey. And the purpose of the journey is to "behold the works of the Lord." To "behold" them means to gaze upon them, to think about them until you are fully impressed with what has actually happened -- and that the things which we see really did

happen.

It doesn't take long to read the first seven verses of this Psalm -- probably just a little over a minute. The Psalmist has given us a lot of truth. But we are not going to be impressed with what he said, we are not going to believe what he said to the point where it will have a transforming affect upon our lives, unless we take our own journey through "the works of the Lord," gaze upon them, and think about them, until their truth really lays hold of our hearts.

How do we do this?

We take our journey through the Word of God. We look at what God has done on behalf of His people. We meditate on those passages. We think about them. We ask the Holy Spirit to show us what they mean, and what they should mean to us.

What do we look for?

"What desolations he had made in the earth." "Desolations" are ruins. They are the judgments which He has brought on the earth, or on the nations of the earth, to protect and to provide for His people.

Think of what He did to Egypt. Think of what He did in Canaan. Think of the wars the people of God had been involved in, and how the Lord has delivered them. Think of the victory He gave to Jehoshaphat. The OT is a record of "the works of the Lord." But we can see the same in the NT -- how the Lord delivered Peter and John and Paul. And even with our Lord Jesus Christ -- not only how He was continually being delivered from His enemies, but how He was delivered from death!

46:9 The Lord has brought many wars to an end, a successful end, for His people. The Lord has broken many bow. He has cut many spears in two. He has burned many a chariot. The women, you will remember, in David's day sang that Saul had killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands, but it was the Lord Who had done it. Who gave David the victory over Goliath? The Lord did. We need to read our Bibles correctly. There would be no nation of Israel today if God had not been with them. Keep walking through the Word, look carefully at what you see, think about it until the truth of what has happened really grips your heart. It is what the Lord has done, and since He is the Lord, Jehovah, and God, the Mighty One, and the Lord of hosts as well as the God of Jacob, He is still the same today. He is still present with His people, still on their side, and still able to meet their needs regardless of the obstacles which stand in the way.

And then look at what the Psalmist said.

46:10 "Be still, and know that I am God."

"Be still" -- which means, Relax! It is easier to be tense and worried and discouraged. But the Lord says in so many words, as an older servant of the Lord said to me once, "Let your heart down." God is asking us to trust Him, to really know that He is God, and what this ought to mean to us in our lives today.

If we are reading the Word, and thinking about what we are reading as we see the wonderful works of the Lord, we are going to find that this is

what will increase our faith, and increasing our faith will bring rest and peace to our souls. He is God. And He is going to be exalted among the heathen regardless of how invincible they might appear, and He is going to be exalted in the earth, regardless of all of the terrible things that He has had to do in the earth in days gone by.

So, "be still, relax, let your mind be filled with a knowledge and an understanding of the works of the Lord, and your heart (and my heart) will be filled with the peace of God because then we will be trusting Him as He deserves to be trusted.

You see, the last four verses of this Psalm give us the practical application of the truth that the Psalmist has been presenting -- the presence of the Lord with His people, and His sufficiency to meet their needs whatever they may be. What He has done for others in times past, He still is able to do because He is the Lord.

Therefore, verse 11 is our verse which we can say with the greatest possible assurance:

46:11. "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge."

Plumer gives three quotations at the end of his comments on Psalm 46. Let me pass them on to you:

"...the dying words of John Wesley: "The best of all is, God is with us." Slade: "through life and death let this be our answer to every trouble, and every enemy, and every danger, and every fear, "The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge." Dickson: "The strength of the church stands in renouncing her own and fleeing unto God's strength" (p. 527).

Spurgeon concluded with these words:

SELAH. Here as before, lift up the heart. Rest in contemplation after praise. Still keep the soul in tune. It is easier to sing a hymn of praise than to continue in the spirit of praise, but let it be our aim to maintain the uprising devotion of our grateful hearts, and so end our song as if we intended it to be continued.

SELAH bids the music rest,
Pause in silence soft and blest;
SELAH bids uplift the strain,
Harps and voices tune again;
SELAH ends the vocal praise,
Still your hearts to God upraise.

Cf. Vol. I, p. 343.

PSALM 51
May 2, 1994

Intro: One of the most tragic chapters in all of Scripture is 2 Samuel 11, the chapter which tells of King David's sin with Bathsheba. It was especially sad because it happened to David who was a man after God's heart. And it was a sin which affected many people because of the position which David held in Israel. When Saul and Jonathan were killed by the Philistines, David in grief over their death said at least three times, "How are the mighty fallen" (2 Sam. 1:19, 25, 27). When David committed adultery with Bathsheba another mighty man fell, only he fell in a much worse way.

Psalm 51 was a psalm which David wrote confessing that sin, and seeking to be restored to the favor of God. He probably wrote Psalm 32 about the same time. It was a great grief to David although it seems that almost a year went by before he felt the full impact of what he had done. The terrible nature of his sin was increased because it caused the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme the Name of God -- a thing which David would never have done, nor would he have wanted to be the cause of such a thing. It was Nathan the prophet who said to David,

By this deed thou hast given great occasion
to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme (2 Sam. 12:14).

And Nathan went on to tell David that, because of this, the child which he had fathered by his sin, would die. People down to the present day have used David's sin to excuse their own sin or the same kind of a sin of some leader.

The greatest tragedy of any sin is that it is always against God, but, after that, we have to realize that our sins are going to affect other people -- and possibly people that we don't even know.

God does not delight in exposing His people when they sin. And that is not the reason we have 2 Sam. 11 and 12, or Psalm 51. The reason we have it in our Bibles is so that it will serve as a warning for us, and keep us from doing as David did -- or from committing any other sin. It is an illustration of where "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes" can lead us. A prayer that we all need to pray much more than we do is that request found in the Model Prayer, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." That request may have to do with trials of any kind, but it certainly includes the temptation to sin, and the sin which too often follows the temptation.

So let us pray that we will learn from this Psalm truths which will strengthen us spiritually so that we will keep from dishonoring the Lord in any way. Perhaps one reason that specific sin of David is not mentioned in this Psalm is because we need to think about it in connection with any sin, not just the sin of adultery.

But let us get to the Psalm.

Psalm 51 is the first of what OT scholars have called David's the Elohim-Psalms, or Elohimic Psalms. Elohim is translated "God" in our Bibles. Actually Psalm 42 is the first Elohim-Psalm, but it is not considered to be one of David's Psalms. Here in Psalm 51, if you will let your eye run down through the Psalm you will see that David used "God" six times in this Psalm, and that he ~~never~~ spoke once of God as the ^{Lord} ~~Lord~~, Jehovah. See "God" in vv. 1, 10, 14 (2x), 17 (2x). Actually the second time "God" is used in verse 14 David used an abbreviated form of Elohim. It would be pronounced Elohay. But the meaning is the same.

↓ "Lord" in v. 15
is Adonai.

Those who have written on the Psalms are hesitant to express an opinion as to why only the word Elohim is used in some Psalms, but it appears to be that the Psalmist was thinking of the sovereign God of power to Whom man is responsible for all his thoughts, words, and actions. Elohim is the God of creation. See Genesis 1.

William Plumer pointed out in his commentary on this Psalm that this is the first Psalm in which we have the word Spirit used to refer to the Holy Spirit.

The Psalm has four sections to it:

- I. DAVID'S CONFESSION OF SIN (Psa. 51:1-9).
- II. DAVID'S PRAYER FOR RESTORATION (Psa. 51:10-13).
- III. DAVID'S UNDERSTANDING OF TRUE SACRIFICES (Psa. 51:14-17).
- IV. DAVID'S INTERCESSION FOR ISRAEL (Psa. 51:18, 19).

I. DAVID'S CONFESSION OF SIN (Psa. 51:1-9).

51:1 It is both interesting and important to see that David cast himself immediately upon the mercy of God. And he did not use the name Jehovah which would have suggested a closer relationship between God and David. He did not even say, "My God." He sensed what it meant that he had sinned so grievously against God, and that God had been highly displeased with him. There was no sacrifice an adulterer could bring. He deserved to die. The same was true of a murderer. And so David's only hope not only for forgiveness, but also for life, lay in the "lovingkindness" of God, and in "the multitude of" God's "tender mercies." You can see that David used three words to express his need and his desire for God to take pity upon him and to show mercy even though he fully deserved the full judgment of God.

Delitzsch pointed out in his commentary that David used three words for sin in verses 1 and 2.

- 1) "My transgressions" at the end of verse 1. Notice that it is plural. David's primary sin was adultery. But he had caused Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, and one of his faithful men to be killed. He had sinned against his army and the people of his kingdom. So many sins were involved in the one sin.
He called his sins "transgressions" because, as the Hebrew suggests, his sins were "a breaking loose or tearing away from God" (Delitzsch, I, 394, 395).

51:2 The other two words for sin are in this verse.

- 2) "Iniquity" is "a perversion, a distortion, a misdeed" (Op. cit., p. 395). It seems to compare with the word "sin" in the NT, as a missing of the mark.
- 3) "Sin" is "a deviation from that which is pleasing to God" (Ibid.).

David wanted his transgressions blotted out, his iniquity washed, and his sin cleansed. Blotted out pictures David's sin as a great debt which he was unable to pay, a dark cloud which was hanging over him. If his iniquity were to be washed clean, it would be like taking a terrible soiled garment and rubbing it up and down, like the wash boards which our mother's used to use, until all of the ground in dirt was removed. The word "cleansed" pictures sin as a leprosy. That was a disease which was hopeless for man, incurable, and yet God could make the leper clean. So David's words pictured his sin in the worst possible light, and expressed

the fact that only God could meet his need.

51:3 When David said that he acknowledged his sin, he meant that he was fully aware of it, how terribly wrong it was in God's sight, and how grieved he was that he had done what he had done. In this verse David was expressing how genuine his repentance was.

Delitzsch made this comment:

True penitence is not a dead knowledge of sin committed, but a living sensitive consciousness of it (Isa. lix. 12), to which it is ever present as a matter and ground of unrest and pain (II, 135).

David meant that his sin was so alive in his conscience that it was as though he had just committed it, instead of it being months before. Even though he had not said anything, he could not get away from it. This, obviously, was a work of God.

51:4 David was not denying here that he had sinned against Bathsheba, and Uriah, and against his men who were involved in the deadly plot with him, but he was saying that all sin is first and foremost against God. It is displeasing to Him. This is what makes sin, sin. It is that which is displeasing to God. When we see this it means that we realize that the most important thing is for us to get things right with God.

Cf. what the Lord said to Abimelech in Gen. 20:6. Remember also what Joseph said to Potiphar's wife in Gen. 39:9. And add to these what Samuel said to the people of Israel about his praying for them. Cf. 1 Sam. 12:23.

Now, having said this, David followed it up by saying that God was absolutely right in sending Nathan to him with a message of judgment. David did not try to excuse himself, nor did he try to blame someone else, or even God. He knew that God was totally right and he was totally wrong. He knew that God can never be charged with doing the wrong thing. We sin; God never does.

51:5 David must have asked himself more times than he could count, "How could I ever do such a thing?" And he found his answer in the theology of Scripture. He was a sinner at heart. He had been born that way. And, although he knew the Lord, yet the possibility of sin and even the inclination to sin, were still with him.

We speak of homosexuals as perverts (and they are), but this verse indicates that all of us are perverted by sin from birth. Every sin is a perversion of that which is right and good and holy in God's sight. We do not all sin the same way, but we are all guilty of perverting the ways of the Lord. David wrote in Psa. 58:3,

The wicked are estranged from the womb:

they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.

We as believers need to remember this, and this is truth which the world desperately needs to know. Our society is built upon the idea that man is basically good, and that if he is given a chance and treated right, he will be right and do right. But that is not true. Man is basically bad. He is a sinner from birth by nature, and no man can change himself. This is a work of God. Society may succeed in reforming some people, but the problem is that we need to be made right with the Lord, and only the Lord can do that for us.

51:6 David was speaking here about himself in particular, although the

same is true of every one of us. David's basic problem was that he had been born the wrong way. But the problem that led to his sin was that the truth was not really written upon his heart. People can know a lot about the Bible and yet not have their lives changed. It is hard for us to think this about David, but it seems that he was confessing here to the Lord that he was not living up to the truth that he knew. We need to be doers of the Word, and not just hearers.

What David said here is the explanation for every sin that believers get involved in. Either they do not know the truth, or they know it (at least in their heads), but it has not really become a part of their lives.

To say that God desires truth in the inward parts of our beings meant that God is pleased, yes, God is delighted, when the truth is written upon our hearts. And let us all realize that it is a work of God for us to "know wisdom." That is why you have so many verses in the Psalms where the Psalmists are asking the Lord to teach them. This is why we have received the Holy Spirit. He is with us and in us to teach us. And we don't really know any truth until and unless He has taught us.

51:7 Notice how many times in the Psalm David told the Lord to do some thing for him. "Purge me." "Wash me." In verse 2 it was also "cleanse me."

Hyssop is first mentioned in the Bible in Exodus 12 where it was used by the Israelites to apply the blood to the door posts of their homes on that first Passover night. It was also to be used according to Lev. 14 in the cleansing of the leper. Here in Psa. 51:7 it is mentioned for the last time in the OT. But it would seem to indicate that David was looking upon himself as a defiled leper who had no business mixing with the people of God.

When we come to the Lord confessing our sins, He not only forgives us, but He cleanses us from the defiling effects of our sins. Cf. 1 John 1:9. David knew that the Lord was the only One Who could meet his need. In this appeal David was confessing that only by shed blood could he be forgiven and cleansed.

51:8 Do any of us need to be told that sin does not hold any pleasure for a believer? The people of the world have a certain amount of pleasure in sin, but that is not the case with a child of God. And this is one proof that a person is a child of God: he isn't happy as long as he is in sin. It had been a long time since David could even "hear" joy and gladness.

Have you ever been like that? You are guilty of displeasing the Lord in some way, and you know it, but you haven't gotten it straightened out with the Lord. You go to church, and you hear the hymns that used to bring such blessing to you. But somehow they don't make you happy like they once did. You hear the Word, but the blessing is no longer there. Instead, it seems to aggravate your misery.

David felt like his bones were broken. ^{Cf. Psa. 34:20.} When a child of God is not walking with the Lord it does affect him physically. And David obviously longed for those days in the past when his heart was full of the joy of the Lord. And the only way that could happen was for the Lord to be pleased with him again. And so we have the request which is given in verse 9. Real joy is experienced in our hearts when we know that things are right between us

and the Lord.

51:9 As David was concluding his confession he did two things that we need to notice. First, he spoke of his sins in the plural. And, second, for the first time he added the word "all" -- "Blot out all mine iniquities." David wanted the record to be erased from the records in heaven. God cannot overlook our sins. Nor can He merely forgive them without dealing with them in righteousness. The only way our sins can be blotted out is through the penalty being paid. We know that our Lord Jesus Christ has done this for us. He took our sins upon Himself at the Cross. That is why He died! David was asking in this verse for forgiveness. When God forgives, He forgets. We can't do that. We remember our sins. And God lets us remember them, not because they are unforgiven, but so we will praise Him for His forgiveness and so the memory of what we have done will help to keep us from doing the same things again.

Now we know that at the close of these verses we could write the word, FORGIVEN!

Solomon had not yet written those wonderful words which we find in Prov. 28:13, but I am certain that David knew the truth. This is what the verse tells us:

He that covereth his sins shall not prosper:

but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.

David was no longer covering his sins. He confessed them, and Israel would sing his confession that they might be helped by it. He admitted before God that what he had done was sin -- all of it! But the wonderful part of his confession was that he had no plans to go ahead with his sins! David committed adultery, but he was not an adulterer. He did not live that way. An adulterer is one who continues to commit that terrible sin.

So we can assume that David was forgiven. And yet we know that he had trouble because of his sin from that time on for the rest of his days. And yet, because of the mercy of God, his future days certainly were not all bad. He saw many blessings from the hand of the Lord. But there was one more thing that David wanted from the Lord. He wanted to be restored! He wanted to be renewed! And this is what he now expressed his concern about in verses 10 through 13.

II. DAVID'S PRAYER FOR RESTORATION (Psa. 51:10-13).

51:10 Here for the second time in the Psalm he mentioned "God."

Could we say that:

- 1) In verse 10 David was thinking of himself as a sinner.
- 2) In verse 11 he was thinking of himself as the king.
- 3) In verse 12 he was thinking of himself as a child of God.
- 4) In verse 13 he was thinking of himself as a shepherd of the Lord's people.

The first verb in the Bible is the verb create -- "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). David used that same word here: אֵלֵךְ. For David's heart to be cleansed required the same sovereign power of God which was used to create the heaven and the earth. It is just as impossible for us to create a clean heart for ourselves as it would be for us to create the heaven and the earth. God alone can do it!

And will you note that David is appealing to God to do something "in" him, not just for him. The heart is the life-center for all of us. Cf. Prov. 4:23. It is only when the heart is changed, is cleansed, that the life can be right before God. This must come first.

Secondly, "and renew a right spirit within me." To "renew" is to rebuild, to repair. Sin damages us, and calls for spiritual repair. And this usually takes time. David was concerned about his spirit. Everything here speaks of what David felt that he needed on his "insides."

"A right spirit" is a stable, steadfast, faithful spirit. David's sin had revealed a weakness which evidently had surprised him. He needed to be made spiritually strong so as to be able to resist temptation in the future. We need to be cleansed, and then to stay that way. David didn't want to fall into sin again. And so He humbly asked the Lord to do for him what he could not do for himself. He was thinking of himself as a sinner.

51:11. Here he was thinking of himself as the king.

When David prayed that the Holy Spirit (and it ought to be capitalized) would not be taken from him, he had to be thinking of his anointing to be king. Rightfully David should have been removed as King because of the sins he had committed. He had shown himself unworthy of such a position. But he asked in faith that the Lord would not reject him as king, by putting David out of His presence, and that his anointing would stand.

We know from what followed that the Lord answered this request. David was the King over Israel and Judah for the rest of his life. This was another big manifestation of the mercy and grace and love of God.

51:12. Here David was thinking of himself as a child of God.

This had been his request in verse 8. "Restore" means that David wanted to get back what he had lost. Once you have experienced the joy of salvation you know that there is no other joy like it. David not only wanted "to hear joy and gladness" (v. 8), but he wanted to experience it himself again. He not only wanted to hear songs; he wanted to sing. And he not only wanted to sing, but he wanted to write psalms again.

And he wanted the Lord to hold him up, to sustain him. Cf. Psa. 37:23, 24, "The steps of a good man..." Illus: Jim Reborn or Dabs Trotman's child walking across a creek on stones.

We are making progress in the spiritual when we know that we cannot walk alone.

"Thy free spirit" probably should be translated as a willing spirit, i.e., a willingness to do God's will, a determination to do that which is pleasing to the Lord.

We can see how David was thinking of himself as a child of God.

51:13 I think that the context of this verse would show that David was thinking here about other believers who were still like he had been, transgressors and sinners -- not walking in fellowship with God, but living in disobedience and sin.

God always works all things together for good. And even our sins can be used under God to make us more effective as we minister to others. David may have been a king, but he always had the heart of a shepherd -- first, as a young man for animals, but later as the King he felt like a shepherd toward his people, and was especially concerned for their relationship with the Lord. When we get right with the Lord, then we want to help others. We will see more about this in the last two verses of the Psalm.

But now we come to the third part of the Psalm:

III. DAVID'S UNDERSTANDING OF TRUE SACRIFICES (Psa. 51:14).

51:14 David's reference to "bloodguiltiness" here may be a reference to the murder of Uriah which David planned. The word speaks of "blood violently shed" (Delitzsch, II, 140). However, at this point in the Psalm David's heart has been lifted up, and he was experiencing once again the joy of fellowship restored. He vows that his tongue will sing of the righteousness of God. What can this mean but that he was thinking of his own justification through the Redeemer?

51:15 His praise continued here. When sin is pardoned, the lips are opened by the Lord to sing His praises.

However, we come to the main point in this section when we come to verse 16.

51:16 As I have pointed out before, there was no sacrifice provided for the sins which David had committed. Adulterers were to die, and so were murderers. If there had been such a sacrifice, David would gladly have given it in order to have peace in his heart.

David's experience had taught him what must lie behind all sacrifices, and be the foundation of any approach to God. We have this in verse 17.

51:17 Spurgeon says that when the heart mourns for sin God is more pleased than when the bleeds beneath the axe. A broken heart is a crushed heart, crushed because of sin. But Spurgeon also said, "A crushed heart is a fragrant heart" (Vol. I, p. 407). Once the heart is crushed over sin, repentance is right there. A "contrite heart" is a repentant heart, and God has never been known to despise a sinner who comes broken and repentant. We rarely see true repentance in these days, either among sinners in the world, or sinning believers in the church.

The world may scorn people who are concerned about their sins, but God never does. This is the kind of sacrifice that brings joy to His heart. David learned that a broken and a contrite heart moved the heart of God as no mere sacrifice without such a heart could ever do.

Now for the last point:

IV. DAVID'S INTERCESSION FOR ISRAEL (Psa. 51:18, 19).

51:18 Just exactly what moved David to pray for Jerusalem in this way and at this time, we do not know. But perhaps it was the effect that his sin had upon the city. The Psalm tells us how David's fellowship with God was restored, and at the end of the Psalm he seeks blessing upon the city. When the Lord worked in the hearts of the people, and showed His good pleasure by building the walls of the city, thus providing protection

for them from their enemies, then their worship would mean something to the Lord.

51:19 God's work in David's heart made him realize that David's spiritual condition was what determined the value of animal sacrifices in God's sight. And so when the people were experiencing the blessing of the Lord, then the Lord would be pleased with the sacrifices He had asked them to bring. But sacrifices given without the love of the people was nothing but an offense to God.

Concl: How we could wish that David had never done what he did. But how thankful we should be that it did not mark the end of David's relationship with God. We can marvel that the Lord would save any of us, but we marvel that He keeps us when so many times He would be perfectly justified in having no more to do with us -- except for His promises.

May the story of David and his sin be a warning to us. And yet, at the same time, let a psalm like this cause us to rejoice even more that the mercies of God are new every morning, and that the Lord is going to be faithful to us, His people, even when we are not faithful to Him. Such a truth ought to cause us to cry out to the Lord that uphold us with hearts that delight to do His will.

PSALM 84
May 9, 1994

Intro: Even a quick reading of this Psalm (if thoughtful) would indicate to the reader that the Psalmist was concerned about the Tabernacle, or the Temple. In verse 1 the Psalmist mentioned "thy tabernacles." In verse 2, "the courts of the Lord." In verse 3, "thine altars." In verse 4, "thy house." In verse 10, "thy courts," and "the house of my God."

The Psalm has three stanzas clearly marked out by the word "Selah" at the end of verse 4, and again at the end of verse 8. These stanzas are:

- 1) Vv. 1-4.
- 2) Vv. 5-8.
- 3) Vv. 9-12.

We can see in the first stanza that the Psalmist is not where the Temple is because he is longing for "the courts of the Lord."

In the second stanza it seems that he is making his way toward the Temple.

In the third stanza he has arrived.

However, the Psalm indicates that it is not the Tabernacle, or Temple, as such, which the Psalmist longs for, but it is the Temple as the dwelling place of God on earth. It is God Whom the Psalmist adores, and he can never be satisfied until he is where the Lord is. And so this Psalm is a Psalm in which we see the Psalmist expressing his great love for his God. He truly loves the Lord his God with all of his heart and soul and mind and strength. Cf. Mark 12:30. He longs to be with Him, and that is the reason that he longs for the Temple. Others might make much of the building or tent, but the Psalmist was concerned with the One Who lived in the tent. And there is a great deal of difference between the two. Even the disciples were overwhelmed with the greatness and glory of the Temple as it stood in their day. Cf. Mark 13:1. How the Lord must have wished that they were more concerned about the God Whose house the Temple was!

To the Psalmist the Temple was nothing without God, but as long as His presence was there, it was the most glorious place upon the earth. And regardless of where one might go, no place held the attraction for the Psalmist that "the house of my God" held.

As we read this Psalm and think of the people of Israel who made their annual treks to Jerusalem for the Day of Atonement and other special times, if they went with the same feeling which the Psalmist expressed here. How easy it is for us to become formal and cold hearted in our prayers, our worship, and our service. Psalm 84 has been given to us to show how important it is for us to keep our eyes on the Lord, to love Him, and to let Him be the great attraction which brings us to our private times of prayer as well as to our churches where we hopefully have come to worship our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Spurgeon said this Psalm deserves to be called, the Pearl of Psalms. And then he went on to say this:

If the twenty-third be the most popular, the one-hundred-and-third the most joyful, the one-hundred-and-nineteenth the most deeply experimental, the fifty-first the most plaintive, this is one of the most sweet of the Psalms of Peace (II, 432).

There are some who feel that this Psalm was written by David when he was

fleeing from Absalom. In verse 9 we see that Psalmist said, "And look upon the face of thine anointed." David was an anointed one as the king of Israel. If this is the background of the Psalm, it is even more impressive in the message it contains because it shows that King David missed the house of God more than he missed his own house, and that He longed to be where God was.

All of this in no way is a denial of the omnipresence of the Lord. But it was true in OT times that God manifested Himself in special ways and in special places. That was true of the Holy of Holies. And this is what was in the mind and heart of the Psalmist as he wrote.

Now let us examine this wonderful Psalm and pray that the same longing for God and His blessing may fill our hearts as we see what the Psalmist had to say.

Our three headings will be:

- I. THE PSALMIST AWAY FROM GOD (Psa. 84:1-4).
- II. THE PSALMIST ON HIS WAY BACK TO GOD (Psa. 84:5-8).
- III. THE PSALMIST BACK WITH HIS GOD (Psa. 84:9-12).

Derek Kidner divides the Psalm into these same three stanzas, and this is what he calls them:

- 1) Distant home.
- 2) Eager journey.
- 3) Radiant presence.

Let us see what we have in the first four verses.

I. THE PSALMIST AWAY FROM GOD (Psa. 84:1-4).

We must not think of him as being out of fellowship with God. If David were indeed the writer, he was away because he had been forced to flee because of the treachery of Absalom. But the Lord had a purpose even in this for David. Being away made him realize how much he loved the Lord, and it was even the situation which made him love the Lord more. And so from a distance he said, "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts."

"Amiable" means lovely -- and this is the word used in several of our modern translation. Spurgeon pointed out that "he does not tell us how lovely they were, because he could not" (II, 432). How can anyone possibly describe what it is to be in the presence of the Lord? How can we portray in words the glory of our God? We can't! The most eloquent child of God would find himself totally frustrated when he tries to put in words what God is like, and therefore how lovely His dwelling place is.

We don't know why David spoke of the Tabernacle in the plural unless he was thinking of the many different places where the Tabernacle had been set up. Wherever it was, everything about it was lovely to David because the presence of the Lord sanctified it all.

You know how we visit the places where outstanding people were born, or lived, or accomplished some outstanding thing. In England we saw where Shakespeare was born. In Rome we saw where they said Paul was in prison. We visited Mars Hill in Athens where Paul preached. And just to be in Jerusalem and in Bethlehem were exciting when we think that the Lord was there when He was here on earth. However, nothing in the Psalmist's mind

could compare with being in the very place where the Lord of hosts was present. The Tabernacle was His!

Not everybody felt that way about the Tabernacle, and later about the Temple. Not everybody loved the Lord like David did. This was seen in the fact that many chose to worship in high places rather than to go to Jerusalem. We all need to examine our own hearts as to why we meet with the Lord's people. Is it mainly because we want to be with them, or because we want to be with the Lord? How we answer that question will go a long way toward showing us where we are spiritually.

David spoke of God here as "the Lord of hosts." He did the same in vv. 3, 8 (where it is "Lord God of hosts"), and 12. This speaks of the mighty power of God with all of the celestial hosts at His command, the army of heaven. David was evidently marveling that such a great and mighty God would condescend to dwell among men on the earth. This was a part of the reason that he looked upon the Lord's dwelling place on earth as lovely.

84:2 Here David was not speaking of some outward, superficial feeling, but one which dwelt deeply within him, in his soul!

David's longing for the Lord was so great that it made him physically weak. So desirous was he of being in "the courts of the Lord" that he felt that he might perish if he could not get there.

But in the second part of this verse we see why he had such a longing for "the courts of the Lord"; it was because that was where he would find "the living God." God was a great reality to David, "a living God." His whole being cried out for God: "My heart and my flesh crieth out." This was not a cry of distress, but a cry of joy, the great anticipation he had of at last being back where the Lord was pleased to dwell among His people.

So, on the one hand, he was weakened by the longing he had for the Lord. On the other hand, even at a distance he was crying out in joyful anticipation of at last being back in "the courts of the Lord."

When we read a verse like this we need to consider how and when we should experience the feelings which David had. One time would certainly be when we read the Word, either privately by ourselves, or with our families, or when we gather together as the Lord's people. Think of it! We don't have to go to a building where the Lord's presence will be seen. We really live in the courts of the Lord! The most humble dwelling of the least known saint can become a veritable Holy of Holies. Nothing should give us greater pleasure than what we find in our fellowship with the Lord.

34:3 Franz Delitzsch expressed his thought that the Psalmist was speaking of himself when he spoke of the sparrow and the swallow. Personally I don't think so. I think he was talking about sparrows and swallows. And he was perhaps telling us something about these little creatures which we wouldn't be able to find out if it were not in our Bibles. It seems to me that David was saying that even these little noisy birds felt like he did, and that they made their nests on the altars of the Lord because that is where they wanted to raise their young. And who among us is to say that that is not what David was saying. The house that the sparrow had found was the house of God! Sometimes these little creatures show more wisdom than people do. Countless numbers of people have had children and raised families without ever giving as much as a thought to bringing them up in the house of the Lord where the children could hear about the Lord

and learn to love Him and trust Him.

David seemed to be so amazed with what he was saying because he was speaking of the "Lord of hosts" Who was, as he said, "my King, and my God." David with all of the greatness which he possessed among his people could only humble himself in great submission and devotion to his King and to his God. How David loved to attach that word my to his God. "The Lord is my shepherd." "The Lord is my light and my salvation." Like Thomas who said to the Lord, "My Lord, and my God." Are you thankful that you can say, "My God," and "My Lord Jesus Christ"?

Loved with everlasting love, led by grace that love to know;
Spirit, breathing from above, Thou has taught me it is so!
Oh, this full and perfect peace!
Oh, this transport all divine!
In a love which cannot cease, I am His, and He is mine.

84:4 This stanza ends with the first of three beatitudes which we find in this Psalm.

Do you suppose the Psalmist was thinking of those sparrows and swallows when he said this? I think that he probably was. They can't sing the song of redemption like we can, but they can sing -- and they do sing! And they sing because they are "blessed" -- which means that they are happy!

Perhaps you have noticed when you have gotten up on these Spring mornings that the birds are already up, and that they are singing. Sometimes they are so loud that it wakes me up. And my first reaction is to get a little irritated at them. But then I wonder: Are they praising the Lord? Does the Lord get praise from singing birds which He rarely gets from those of us who know Him? And so I settle down and go to my study to spend some time praising the Lord, too.

This verse means that if you are enjoying the presence of the Lord, then you are going to be happy -- happier than you can be in any other way. And if you are happy, happy because of Him and happy in Him, then you will be constantly praising the Lord. "Selah."

Oh, the blessings we miss and the joy that we never experience because our fellowship with the Lord is so shallow and spasmodic. May the Lord draw us closer to Himself and teach us more about what it means to rejoice in Him.

II. THE PSALMIST ON HIS WAY BACK TO GOD (Psa. 84:5-8).

84:5 If we are right in thinking that this Psalm was written when David had to flee from Jerusalem to get away from his son, Absalom, then we are about to learn that this was a time when David learned some very wonderful, some very precious lessons. Notice what we have in this stanza.

Instead of ending with a beatitude, as the first stanza did, this stanza begins with a beatitude. (Read.)

In the first stanza we learned that David was physically weakened by his longing for the Lord. This stanza tells us that David realized as a result of his time in exile that he was spiritually weaker than he thought

that he was. Trials have a way of showing up our weaknesses, don't they? But he made another great discovery. He learned how happy we can be when we begin to find our strength in the Lord. And we usually don't learn that until we get to the end of our rope. It couldn't be stated any better than Paul stated it when he said, "When I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Cor. 12:10). The Lord used physical weakness in Paul to cause him to seek his strength in the Lord.

And the Lord did the same for David. It was a humiliating experience for him to have to flee for his life from his own son. And he felt that humiliation very, very deeply. But we are learning here that David came back to Jerusalem, to his throne, and to the Temple a changed man. He came back happy because he had found a new source of strength which he had not known before. You see, David never stopped learning, and neither should we. We can always be happier. We can always be stronger. But it all depends upon our relationship with the Lord.

"In whose heart are the ways of them" -- The margin of my Bible gives the translation, "In whose heart are the high ways (to Zion)." This is also the way you will find it in the NASB and in the old ASV. The NIV gives it, "Who have set their hearts on pilgrimage." The NKJ is very much like the NIV. What does it mean?

It means that the blessing which David was speaking about was a happiness which came to him from finding new strength in the Lord, but also from determining in his heart that he was going to get back where the Lord was pleased to dwell. It is like a person who has been out of fellowship with the Lord, and finally he decides to go back. It is like the prodigal son who came to the low place where he eventually said, "I will arise and go to my father." I can assure you that all of his unhappiness began to go when he was determined to go back home. In David's case it was undoubtedly in his heart before he was able to go back, but the anticipation of it all brought great happiness to him.

But there is more in verse 6.

84:6 "Baca" means tears, or weeping.

Do you remember how David's flight from Jerusalem is described in 2 Sam. 15:30? Let me read that verse to you.

And David went up by the ascent of mount Olivet,
and wept as he went up,
and he had his head covered, and he went barefoot:
And all the people that was with him covered every man his head,
and they went up, weeping as they went up.

It is not true that men do not weep. It is not even true that great men do not weep. The greatest of all men, our Lord Jesus Christ, "wept." And David wept. He wept bitter tears. We don't know all that was in his heart, but his tears speak volumes. David had his Valley of Baca. In Psalm 23 David spoke of "the valley of the shadow of death." Here it is the Valley of Baca. But isn't it wonderful that in both places David spoke of going through these valleys. God has a purpose for them in our lives, and we all have them.

But look at what David said about his Valley of Tears. He made it "a well," that is, a spring. Out of that sad experience those tears became a source of greater strength, spiritual refreshment. And then the Lord did

something else for him. The Lord gave David refreshing rains of blessing for his soul, showers of blessing, if you please. So from within and from without God was ministering to his servant in that time of his greatest humiliation. "The rain also filleth the pools." That which seemed so hopeless was turned by the grace of God into blessings beyond, far beyond, anything that David ever expected to see. And he was speaking of his relationship with the Lord and his fellowship with Him.

And so what was the result?

84:7 Notice that David was indicating by the word "they" that others, his own men, were deepened in their relationship with the Lord through those trying days which were so dark and appeared so hopeless. The Lord was leading them from strength to strength, from strength to more strength, and so on to greater strength than they had ever known before.

Where were they going? They were going back to Zion and to God. This expression, "Every one of them in Zion appeareth before God," is translated in this way by the NIV, "Till each appears before God in Zion." They all had their Valley of Tears, but they all got back to Zion, and to God!

But then look at verse 8.

84:8 What was the subject of David's prayer? It had to be what we have been reading about, that the Lord would get them back to the place where His presence was manifested. There could hardly be a more exalted title than the one David used for God in this verse: "O Lord God of hosts." David was enlisting the mighty power of God and all of the forces of heaven to get him back to the Tabernacle. But he also called God "the God of Jacob." David felt just as undeserving of the blessing of God as Jacob did. Both men had brought their troubles upon themselves by their disobedience. And so they had to cast themselves upon the mercies of God.

This is powerful praying. You will often hear some preachers demanding certain things from God as though they had the right to tell Him what to do. But that is foolishness. True prayer is taking the lowest possible place before God, and then casting ourselves upon His mercy and upon His grace.

And so the second stanza ends. What do we learn in the third?

III. THE PSALMIST BACK WITH HIS GOD (Psa. 84:9-12).

84:9 David is back home with God. And he here gives credit to God for defending him all of the time he has been away. And he called upon God to "look upon the face of his anointed." I think he was saying here that he had been anointed as Israel's king, an anointing that had not been taken away from him in spite of his terrible sins with Bathsheba and Uriah. David was humbling seeking full restoration with God.

84:10 David knew that just one day with the Lord was worth far more than a thousand spent anyplace else. Sometimes it takes a separation from the Lord like David had experienced to make us realize how precious that fellowship is.

And then he went on to make another comparison.

He was Israel's king, but if it were necessary, he would rather be a

doorkeeper in the house of the Lord than to dwell in the highest place among the wicked. Spurgeon said, "God's worst is better than the Devil's best" (II, 435). If all he could do was just to get an occasional glimpse of the Lord, that was a greater honor than could be bestowed upon him as the king if he had been without the Lord.

David's statement here is a reminder of the sentiment which Moses had when he made a life-changing decision when he was forty years old. We are told in Heb. 11:25 that he chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season."

Why would he say this? The answer is in verse 11.

84:11 The Lord is our "sun" for dark days, and He is our "shield" for dangerous days. And He gives "grace" to us for every trial, and ultimately "glory" will be ours. So we rejoice in what the Lord is, and in what the Lord gives. And David knew better than he ever had before that the most important thing in life is to live "uprightly" before the Lord. This means that we walk as He wants us to walk, morally pure and holy in His sight. The most important concern we have is to be pleasing to the Lord.

And what can we expect from the Lord when we seek to please Him. He will withhold nothing from us that is needful for our happiness and for His glory. God meets our spiritual needs, our physical needs, and our material needs.

84:12 Finally we come to the end of the Psalm, and the conclusion which David reached as a result of his exile, his time away, and his return under the blessing of God. "Blessed is the man that trusteth in thee." This sums up what David had learned as a result of having to leave Jerusalem, of being away, of seeing how the Lord saw fit to work in his heart, and then bring him back, not as he was when he left, but more in love with the Lord than ever and more determined to please the Lord and to trust Him.

To trust the Lord is to rely confidently upon Him, and to be unsuspecting of Him. Only God Himself can give us such faith.

Concl: Our experiences are not like David's, but God's purposes are the same. It is never pleasant for us to be humbled, but it is always good for us. The Lord's purpose is never to ruin us, but to sanctify us. And as we walk through this Valley of Tears, we learn how weak we are, and that our greatest need is to learn to trust the Lord more than we do. And as David's experience brought him a threefold blessing (the beatitudes of this Psalm), so the Lord will enrich us and bless us, too.

PSALM 121
May 16, 1994

Intro: From Psalm 120 to Psalm 134 we have fifteen Psalms of Degrees. We do not know exactly what "Degrees" means except that it speaks of a gradual movement. Some commentators suggest steps. It seems that whatever may have been the original purpose of these Psalms, they were used later by those who came to Jerusalem to sing as they approached the city and the Temple.

Opinions differ as to the circumstances under which this Psalm was written. Some call it a traveler's psalm, possibly of a pilgrim returning from exile; others call it a soldier's psalm, caught in the midst of dangerous circumstances and depending upon God for protection and deliverance. Whatever may be the true background, it is apparent from the Psalm itself that the Psalmist was in special need of protection.

The divisions of the Psalm are to be seen in the change from "I" and "my" in verses 1 and 2 to "thy" and "thee" in verses 3 through 8. Matthew Henry says that in the first two verses the Psalmist was assuring himself of God's help, but in verses 3 through 8 he was assuring others, possibly the nation of Israel, that God would help them.

But let us consider the message of the Psalm. In verses 1 and 2 we see:

I. THE PSALMIST COMFORTING HIMSELF (Psa. 121:1, 2).

121:1 Whenever we are in trouble or in danger, we are inclined to look anywhere we can where they might be some hope of help for us. And that seems to be the condition that the Psalmist was in. Often people do things in a time of emergency in order to get help that they would not think of doing at any other time. They want to exhaust every possibility and will not ignore any source of help.

Thus we remember that Saul consulted with a witch. The kings of Israel and Judah sometimes made allies out of heathen kings. Even Abraham left Canaan because of the famine, and went down into Egypt.

There are several good commentators who have suggested that the two parts of this first verse should both be questions. That seems to me to be the case. The Psalmist was saying in so many words, "Shall I lift up mine eyes unto the hills?" It seems that he was in trouble, and he was considering every option for help that was available.

I personally agree with those who make this a question. He had not made up his mind to look to the hills, but he was thinking possibly about what others might have done if they had been in a situation like he was.

But what are we to understand that he meant by thinking of "the hills," or mountains?

If you are reading through the historical books of the OT right now, as I am, perhaps you have noticed the expression which occurs quite frequently to the effect that even with many of the good kings it is said, "Howbeit the high places were not taken away" (2 Kings 15:35). And we must gather from this expression that God did not like for the people to offer their sacrifices on "the high places."

If you trace that expression back into the earlier history of Israel, you will find that Solomon, of all people, began to go after false gods as his

wives turned his heart away from the Lord. And so what did he do? Listen to 1 Kings 11:6-8:

And Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord,
and went not fully after the Lord, as did David his father.
Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh,
the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem,
and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon.
And likewise did he for all his strange wives,
which burnt incense and sacrificed unto the gods.

And even before this we find that Solomon himself "sacrificed and burnt incense in high places" (1 Kings 3:3).

Even in Moses' day the Lord had warned the children of Israel that if they would not listen to Him and do what He had commanded them to do, this would be a part of their punishment:

And I will destroy your high places, and cut down your images,
and cast your carcasses upon the carcasses of your idols,
and my soul shall abhor you (Lev. 26:30).

So what it seems had happened over many years was this: The Israelites had begun to worship where the heathen worshiped, thinking that this might give them greater acceptance with God. But it always was grievous to God.

Now it was evidently so well known that the people of God worshiped in the hills, or the mountains, that when the Israelites defeated the Syrians, the servants of the Syrians said about the Israelites,

Their gods are gods of the hills;
therefore they were stronger than we;
but let us fight against them in the plain,
and surely we shall be stronger than they (1 Kings 20:23).

Evidently the Syrians did not worship in the hills like other heathen nations did, and so they felt that they could defeat Israel if they got Israel out of the high places. But God gave Israel the victory again so that the Syrians would know that the God of Israel was everywhere!

Possibly you remember that the Lord got into this subject with the woman of Samaria when she said to Him,

Our fathers worshipped in this mountain;
and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place
where men ought to worship (John 4:20).

People have always had an attachment to places of worship. They have felt that it is better to worship in some particular place because there you would find God easier than in some other place. People feel that way about church buildings. The reason that God wanted the people to worship in Jerusalem at the Temple was because He did not want them to get involved in the kind of worship the heathen were involved in. But evidently throughout the history of Israel, right up to the time of the exile, many of the Israelites felt that to worship in a high place was better than to worship in the Temple.

I think that this is what the Psalmist had in mind: "Shall I lift up my eyes to the hills? Shall I go up to one of those high places?" He was saying in so many words, "Is God more likely to help me if I do what many people are doing, and seek him from a high place?" I think this shows how desperate he was. And so he asked himself another question: "From whence cometh my help?"

One year when I was reading my Bible through I came upon a verse which immediately made me think of Psalm 122. It is Jer. 3:23, and this is what it says:

Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills,
and from the multitude of mountains:
truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel.

This was all very personal with the Psalmist. Although he evidently was not one who was worshiping on the hills, yet he could not help but be influenced because so many were -- and they could give the stories of how they had benefited from what they had done. But God was at work in the heart of the Psalmist, and so we have his answer in verse 2.

121:2 Here he gave what Fausset called, "the joyful answer." (Read.)
Instead of looking to the hills for his help, he would look to the God Who made the "heaven and earth."

Think of what Moses wrote in Psalm 90, verse 2:

Before the mountains wee brought forth,
or ever thou hadst former the earth and the world,
even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.

The godless and abominable doctrine of evolution has caused millions of people to be more blinded in their minds than ever because they have been robbed of the power and blessing to be known that "God created the heavens and the earth." Creation shows the wisdom of God. It shows the power of God. It shows the goodness of God. A sight of the hills and mountains, oceans and rivers, the sky and the earth, should cause us to be lost in wonder, love, and praise. If we can get excited about a hill, or a mountain, think about how excited we ought to be about the God Who made them.

And so the Psalmist declared that his help comes from the Lord, the eternal and unchanging Jehovah, the all-sufficient God! Fausset said, "They who have such a Helper need never despair, however dark may seem their circumstances" (III, 376). And, as Psa. 46:1 tells us, God is always "a very present help in trouble." Spurgeon said of God that He is "help powerful, efficient, constant" (III, 14).

Obviously the Psalmist was saying this with the deepest and most sincere conviction that God not only can help, but that He will help. He is "my help" for my need, whatever that may be.

Matthew Henry had this excellent comment on verse 2:

We must encourage our confidence in God with this that he made heaven and earth, and he who did that can do anything. He made the world out of nothing, himself alone, by a word's speaking, in a little time, and all very good, very excellent and beautiful; and therefore, how great soever our straits and difficulties are, he has power sufficient for our succour and relief. He that made heaven and earth is sovereign Lord of all the hosts of both, and can make use of them as he pleases for the help of his people, and to restrain them when he pleases from hurting his people (III, 726).

Now if you can say what the Psalmist said here, there is not much more that needs to be said. And yet people need to know that what the Lord has done for some of His people, He can do for all of His people. And so the Psalmist begins to minister to others in the remainder of the Psalm. Please notice again that the "I" and "my" of verses 1 and 2 now changes to "thy" and "thee" in verses 3 through 8.

II. THE PSALMIST COMFORTING OTHERS (Psa. 121:3-8).

121:3 In the original language, the word used for "not" is the word usually used in request, and sometimes in a command. We must take it here as a request, a prayer request. And so the verse should read, "May He not suffer your foot to be moved..." The Psalmist was turning the Word of God into prayer -- which is the best way to pray. Many of the servants of the Lord, in Scripture, and since the Scriptures were written, have found great power and great blessing by turning the Word of God into prayer.

The "He" mentioned twice in this verse is, of course, "the Lord," Jehovah, of verse 2.

Now whether a person is in battle, or on a journey, the feet are very important. To have feet which are unmoved is to be standing, and to have feet that are "moved" is to fall. From Ephesians 6 we can assume that a standing Christian is a victorious Christian. And Jude 24 tells us that the Lord is "able to keep" us "from falling."

But let us always remember that the Lord uses divine means to accomplish divine ends and purposes. So, again as we learn from Ephesians 6, if this prayer of the Psalmist is going to be answered, it means that our hearts will be moved to put on the whole armor of God, every part of which has something to do with the Word of God. And it will also mean that we will be praying -- "Praying with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit..." (Eph. 6:18).

The second request of this verse is, May He that keepeth thee not slumber.

We know that there is no danger of the Lord slumbering. But the Psalmist makes this request as an indication of what the Lord's people in times of trial need to understand, and that is, that the Lord does not sleep. And we must not even think that He does. The Lord keeps us, that is, He guards us, He protects us, He set a hedge about us. And He never slumbers. He is never off duty. He never gets weary so that He has to slumber or sleep.

This verse and the verse which follows ought to remind us of Isa. 40:28,
Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard,
that the everlasting God, the Lord,
the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not,
neither is weary?

The Lord Jesus got weary and hungry and slept while He was here on earth, but that was a part of His humanity and His humiliation. However, even then the people of God were never without the protective care of the Godhead.

The word "slumber" means to nod from weariness, as all of us have done when we are struggling to stay awake. Many times an enemy has been able to take advantage of guards and overcome them when they have slumbered.

121:4 This verse asserts as an eternal truth what was hoped for in verse 3. And the "behold" is to call attention to that fact. The God Who kept Israel never nodded ("shall neither slumber"), nor has He ever finally had to give in to sleep.

It is interesting that this word for "sleep" is sometimes used for death.

That would be true for our Lord as well as the sleeping. He will never die. His people will never be left without a sovereign Keeper. And so we can rejoice in this truth just like Israel did hundreds of years ago.

121:5 In the second part of this Psalm the Lord has not been mentioned.

But now He is, twice! This living One, this unchanging God, is our Keeper. There may be times when He uses angels to protect us, and even other people to defend us, but behind all is no other than Jehovah! This statement is definitely emphatic! It is as though the Psalmist were saying, "Let there be no doubt in anyone's mind about this, 'The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand."

Spurgeon wrote in his Treasury of David (Vol. III, p. 15),

What a mint of meaning is lies here: the sentence is a mass of bullion, and when coined and stamped with the king's name on it will bear all our expenses between our birthplace on earth and our rest in heaven. Here is a glorious person--Jehovah, assuming a gracious office and fulfilling it in person--Jehovah is thy keeper, in behalf of a favoured individual--thy and a firm assurance of revelation that it is even so at this hour--Jehovah is thy keeper. Can we appropriate the divine declaration?

What a difference it would make in all of our lives if this truth were really expressive of what we know in the depths of our beings, and which we remember at all times!

But He is not only our Keeper; He is "thy shade upon thy right hand."

If the Lord is our Shade, then He has to be close by, with us, never leaving us nor forsaking us. And we are in this world as the children of Israel were in the desert, under the direct sun of trial and often persecution, which adds to our weariness. But the Lord protects us from the scorching heat of this desert-world.

David had this in mind when he wrote Psa. 63, and began with these words:

O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee:
my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee
in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is:
To see thy power and thy glory,
so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.

And Psalm 91 begins with these familiar words:

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High
shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

He is at our "right hand," the place of honor and of power. The right hand is the hand most people use to fight with the sword. Some of us are left handed, but the truth remains the same. It is the Lord who is our defense. David said in Psalm 110:5, "The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath."

Verse 6 goes along with verse 5.

121:6 The sun was given to rule the day, and the moon rules by night.

The day can bring us scorching heat, and the night can bring us chilling cold. What the Psalmist meant was that whether it is day or night, the Lord keeps us from whatever dangers may be a threat to us. Our blessed Lord is on duty for us twenty-four hours of every day. The protection we have when we are awake is the same protection we have when

we are asleep. As Spurgeon said, "Day and night make up all time: thus the ever-present protection never ceases. All evil may be ranked as under the sun or the moon, and if neither of these can smite us we are indeed secure" (Op. cit., p. 16).

To "smite" us means to beat upon us, or in the most extreme cases, even to kill us. Whatever the situation may be, it means "to smite injuriously" (Delitzsch, III, p. 274). This does not mean that we will escape trials and testings, but it does mean exactly what Paul wrote to the church at Rome in Romans 8:28. The Devil means to curse us, but our God is so great that He can turn the curse into a blessing.

121:7 Again the Psalmist mentioned "the Lord" twice as he brought this Psalm to a close, once in verse 7, and once in verse 8.

"Preserve" in the original Hebrew is the same word translated "keep" in verses 3 and 4, and it is the cognate of "keeper" in verse 5. So the idea continues to be that of protection and deliverance from harm, and even from death.

Here in this verse and in verse 8 the Psalmist mentioned three things that can be said about the protective care of the Lord. Fausset remarked in his commentary that the three times it is stated that the Lord "shall preserve" us is a testimony to "the greatness of man's unbelief, which needs so frequent assurances" (III, 376).

The first is that He protects us "from all evil." And be sure to notice that the Lord does it Himself. The word translated "evil" is one of the Hebrew words for sin. But it can also mean any affliction, anything that is designed to harm us, or to make life troublesome for us.

In verse 6 the Psalmist was emphasizing that the Lord keeps us in all evil times, whether it is in the day or night. Here in verse 7 he was stressing the fact that the Lord protects us from any and every evil thing itself, as Spurgeon said, "from evils great and small, temporary or permanent" (III, 16). There is nothing that is too hard for the Lord. Things don't have to be very great to get us down, but that is never the case with the Lord.

"He shall preserve thy soul." "Soul" can have reference to the sparing of life itself, or (and this seems more like what the Psalmist had in mind) the Lord preserves us inwardly as well as outwardly. He protects us physically and spiritually. Often it is our inner man that is most affected by our trials. We get discouraged. Our faith can falter. We may ever murmur against God as the Israelites did repeatedly in OT times. But we need to keep in mind what David said in Psa. 37:23, 24:

The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord:
and he delighteth in his way.
Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down:
for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand.

121:8 As we come to the end of this Psalm we realize that the Spirit of God directed the Psalmist to include everything. Here he was thinking about the goings and comings of our lives. We go out in the morning, and we come back at night. We begin things, and we finish them. The Lord enables us to start, and He enables us to persevere in spite of all of the difficulties so that we can finish the work which He has given us to do -- as with the case of our Lord. Cf. John 17:4, "I have glori-

fied thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. Moses and the children of Israel began to make the Tabernacle, and they finished it. Solomon and his men began to build the Temple, and they finished it. Ezra and Nehemiah has the responsibility of rebuilding the wall and the Temple in Jerusalem as they came back from captivity, and, in spite of the intense and constant opposition which they faced throughout the project, they finished it. When the Apostle Paul wrote his last Biblical epistle to Timothy, he had this to say:

I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course,
I have kept the faith (2 Tim. 4:7).

And can we add to this list of things in the Scriptures what the Lord is doing in our hearts? I am sure that we can. Cf. Phil. 1:6.

The truth of this Psalm not only has included our days in the past, but it includes today, and "from this time forth, and even for evermore." What more can we ask? "If God be for us, who can be against us" (Rom. 8:31).

Adoniram Judson once said about this eighth verse and the truth of this Psalm, speaking of the Lord, "He has not led me so tenderly thus far to forsake me at the very gate of heaven" (Treasury of David, III, 24).

In concluding his remarks on this Psalm, Spurgeon threw added light on the threefold repetition of the words, "the Lord shall preserve thee." This is what he said,

Three times we have the phrase, "Jehovah shall keep," as if the sacred Trinity thus sealed the word to make it sure: ought not our fears to be slain by such a threefold flight of arrows? What anxiety can survive this triple promise? This keeping is eternal; continuing from this time forth, even for evermore. The whole church is thus assured of everlasting security: the final perseverance of the saints is thus ensured, and the glorious immortality of believers is guaranteed (III, 16).

There is no command in this Psalm for us to obey, just promises for us to believe. But let us meditate on the words of this Psalm until its truth becomes ours so that we will rest in the Lord and His power to keep us and to bless us every day that we live.