

# Study Questions on the Psalms

## Habakkuk 3: A Model Psalm

1. Look carefully at the psalm in Habakkuk chapter 3.
  - (a) How do v. 1 and the last sentence in v. 19 differ from the rest of the psalm?
  - (b) What kind of information is in v. 1?
  - (c) What kind of information is in the last sentence in v. 19?
2. Look at Isa 38:9-20. Can you find parallels to the three parts of Habakkuk 3?
3. Compare these elements with Psalm 3.
  - (a) How do the parts of the opening of Psalm 3 align with Hab 3:1?
  - (b) Does Psalm 3 have a final sentence comparable to the one in Hab 3:19? What happened to it? (You might be interested to learn that “Neginoth” is the same word translated “stringed instruments” in Hab 3:19.)
4. Now let’s study the relation of Habakkuk’s psalm to the rest of the book.
  - (a) Read over chapters 1-2.
    - i. These chapters record a conversation. Who is speaking with whom?
    - ii. What two questions does Habakkuk ask?
    - iii. Is he happy with the answers he gets?
  - (b) Now analyze the body of Habakkuk 3.
    - i. Notice how the Psalm is divided into four parts based on a) what Habakkuk is saying and b) to whom he is saying it. What are these four parts?
    - ii. How does v. 2 reflect his attitude in the first two chapters of the book?
    - iii. How does he reassure himself in vv. 3-16?
    - iv. What resolution does he reach in vv. 17-19?
    - v. How does the whole book, and vv. 17-18 in particular, explain the meaning of “rejoice in the Lord”?

## Overview of the Psalms

1. Look over the headings of the Psalms to see who wrote them.
  - (a) How many authors are listed?
  - (b) When did these people live?
  - (c) Does the order of the Psalms with authors match the order of their lives?
  - (d) What does this tell you about the arrangement of the book?

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2. Read through Psalms 126 and 137.
  - (a) When were these probably written?
  - (b) When was the book of Psalms placed in its current order?
3. The first two psalms, with no headings, serve as an introduction to the book. These questions will help you meditate on the two big ideas in these psalms, and how they are related.
  - (a) Who are the main characters in Psalm 1?
  - (b) How many distinctions can you find between the righteous and the ungodly?
  - (c) Compare the behavior of the ungodly with Deut 6:4-9. How does God's law define both the righteous and the ungodly?
  - (d) Who are the main characters in Psalm 2? Can you align them with the characters in Psalm 1?
  - (e) Though Psalm 2 has no title, do we know who wrote it? Compare Acts 4:24-30.
  - (f) What event in David's life inspired this Psalm? Review 2 Samuel 7.
  - (g) Compare the vocabulary used in these two psalms. What words or concepts do they share in common?
  - (h) Psalm 1 focuses on the law of God, while Psalm 2 talks about the king. How are these ideas related? Read Deut 17:14-20.
  - (i) Two other Psalms that emphasize the law of God are Ps 19 and Ps 119. Look at the Psalms near them. Is either of them associated with a Psalm about the Messianic king?

## The Five Books of Psalms

1. What similarity do you see among Ps 41:13; 72:18-20; 89:52; and 106:48?
2. Note in particular Ps 72:20.
  - (a) Is this the last Psalm attributed to David?
  - (b) What does this verse suggest about the history of the book of Psalms, and in particular about the relation between Ps 72 and Ps 73?
3. Based on this indication, what is the likely function of the common phrases noted in the first question?
4. Look at the end of the book of Psalms. Is it marked in any way?
5. We have now identified five sections to Psalms—the five books (Pss 1-41, 42-72, 73-89, 90-106, and 107-150). I will show you how the different authors, the names of God (LORD vs. God), and the different genres are distributed across these books. You might enjoy exploring some of these yourself.
6. In which books do we find the Psalms we have identified as exilic or later (85, 118, 126, 137)?

## Study Questions on the Psalms

I will be drawing on the analysis of Palmer Robertson in his book *The Flow of the Psalms* (P&R Publishing, 2015) in exploring the progress of thought through these books. If you are especially curious, you might want to get a copy through Amazon (the Kindle version is only \$9.99).

### Psalms 14 and 53

These two psalms are almost identical, but one is in Book I and uses the name LORD (יהוה), while the other is in Book II and replaces these instances with God (אלהים). This shift is characteristic of the difference between books I and II. Robertson suggests that the shift reflects a focus in Book II on communicating the claims of the Messianic King to other nations. First we'll read through Psalm 14 to understand its message, then we'll try to understand how Psalm 53 differs from it in being modified for international consumption.

1. First consider Psalm 14 in itself.
  - (a) What outline would you propose for the psalm?
  - (b) Recall the different genres of Psalms that have been proposed: lament, hymn, confidence, remembrance, kingship, thanksgiving, wisdom. To which genre does this psalm belong?
  - (c) Where are vv. 1-3 quoted in the NT? (Use the Treasury, or Hint a.)
  - (d) The attribution of this Psalm to David has been challenged based on the reference to the captivity in v. 7.
    - i. Use your Bible software to find earlier verses that have the Strong's numbers for "bring back" (7725, שׁוּב) and "captivity" (7622, שְׁבוּת) (or consult Hint b). Where is the earliest reference to this event?
    - ii. From our study on Psalms 1 and 2, why would David have likely known of this promise?
2. Compare Psalms 14 and 53.
  - (a) How is this Psalm particularly appropriate to be revised for communicating with other nations?
  - (b) In addition to the change from LORD to God, how do they differ?
  - (c) The major difference is between 14:5-6 and 53:5.
    - i. How is the structure of these two sections parallel?
    - ii. How are God's actions different in the two sections?
    - iii. What is the likely antecedent of "they" in 14:5; in 53:5? The candidates are in v. 4. Notice in each Psalm the following explanation.
    - iv. To whom does "ye" refer in 14:6? how about "thee" and "thou" in 53:5?
    - v. How are these differences appropriate if Psalm 53 is intended for foreign nations?

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(d) Why might Psalm 53, but not Psalm 14, be assigned “to the chief musician” for public performance?

### 3. Hints

(a) Rom 3:10-12

(b) Deut 30:1-3

## Book 1, Pss 1-41: Confrontation

### Psalms 3-14

#### Overview

Throughout the Psalms are numerous clusters of psalms with a single focal psalm and equal numbers of psalms on each side. Robertson calls these “pinnacle structures.” They’re similar to the chiasms we’ve seen in other books, with corresponding features on each side of the center and often a shift at the center, but the corresponding features do not always occur in inverse order.

Psalms 3-14 appear to form a pinnacle structure centered around Psalm 8, with five psalms on each side. (There’s reason to think that Psalms 9 and 10 are two parts of the same composition.)

1. Read over these psalms, keeping in mind Robertson’s suggestion that the theme of the first book is Confrontation between the Lord’s king and the ungodly. How are they appropriate to introduce this theme?
2. See if you can distinguish psalms of lament from other kinds of psalms in this group. Does any one psalm stand out as distinct from the others?
3. There is good reason to think that David wrote Psalm 8 to commemorate his victory over Goliath, which would make it an ideal centerpiece for this section. How do its first and last verses reinforce the last verse of the preceding psalm and the first few verses of the following psalm to emphasize this central position?
4. Here are some features that appear an equal number of times on each side of Psalm 8. See if you can find them.
  - (a) The prayer “Arise, O LORD”
  - (b) References to God’s temple
  - (c) Opposition specifically in the form of speech (NB: don’t include the heading to Psalm 7, where “the words of Cush the Benjamite” may alternatively be translated “the matter of Cush the Benjamite”.)
  - (d) Laments where God himself appears to be opposing the Psalmist
  - (e) Can you find any others?
5. Can you find any themes that are common only on one side of the structure, but not the other?

# Study Questions on the Psalms

## Psalm 3

1. Note the heading to Psalm 3, and the time references in it and in Psalms 4-6. Can you suggest where in the history of 2 Sam 15-17 each of these four psalms fits?
2. In each verse, to whom is David speaking? How does this observation help you divide the psalm into sections?
3. To what characteristic of his adversaries does David draw attention?
4. How does this psalm illustrate the principle we saw in Hab 3:17-19 and Ps 14:6?

## Psalm 4

1. Again, consider to whom David is speaking in each verse. To what overall structure does this observation lead you?
2. Who are the people to whom David speaks in vv. 2-6?
3. Now what characteristic of his adversaries is in focus?
4. How are vv. 2-6 like Psalm 2:10-12?

## Psalms 5 and 12: Verbal Attacks

These two psalms share an emphasis on speech, and help to set off Psalm 8 at the center. We'll consider the two psalms, and some practical issues that they raise.

### *Psalm 5*

1. The stanzas in this psalm are marked differently than in Psalms 3 and 4. What grammatical feature sets them apart?
2. How would you characterize each of the three petitions that David offers to the Lord in the course of this psalm? What progression is there among them?
3. Does David's request in v. 10 seem harsh? Recall what he has said to these people in Psalm 4.
4. Make a list of the words that describe speech in this psalm. Who is doing the speaking in each of them?
5. Who is responsible for answering the words of the wicked?

### *Psalm 12*

1. This psalm is chiasmatic. I analyze it as AB C D D C AB. Can you find out what these correspondences are (or suggest your own analysis)?
2. Again, make a list of the words describing speech, and identify the speaker in each case.
3. What are "the words of the Lord" mentioned in v. 6?
4. Who is responsible for answering the words of the wicked?

# Study Questions on the Psalms

## Speech in Psalms 5 and 13

1. In Psalms 5 and 12, you made lists of whose speech is being discussed. Putting those lists together, who are the three speakers with whose speech David is concerned?
2. Think first about the speech of the wicked. How does the description of this speech align with Prov 26:18-19, Eccl 10:1, and James 3:1-12?
3. Now consider the speech of the righteous.
  - (a) To whom is it addressed? To whom is it not addressed?
  - (b) Think about how the pattern of these psalms aligns with Matt 5:44, Col 4:6, and Eph 5:3-4.
4. Finally, meditate on the Lord's words.
  - (a) Can they provide an effective defense for the righteous? Consider Isa 55:11.
5. How does Matt 10:19-20 fit into the pattern of speakers in these psalms?

## Psalms 6 and 13: Chastisement

1. Like other psalms in Pss 3-14 (with the exception of Psalm 8), these two psalms are laments. But they differ from the others in the nature of the opposition that David faces. What is this difference?
2. Do we ever face this opposition? What role does it play in our lives?

## Psalm 6

1. The Psalm begins with two petitions to God (vv. 1-2, vv. 3-5). Both of these mention "mercy."
  - (a) Use Strong's numbers (or Hint a) to distinguish the two underlying Hebrew words.
  - (b) Compare the end of v. 2 and the beginning of v. 3. What aspect of his being concerns David in each of these two petitions?
  - (c) Can you correlate these with the two words for "mercy"?
2. How does v. 6 contrast with David's attitude in Psalms 3 and 4? Can you think of what may make the difference?
  - (a) When in David's life do we find him weeping? Use the concordance, Bible software, or Hint b.
  - (b) What enemies may he have in mind in v. 8?
3. What argument does he give his enemies for ceasing to abuse him?
4. To whom is v. 10 likely addressed?
5. Hints
  - (a) "Have mercy" in v. 2 is Strong 2603, *chanan* חָנַן, indicating "to *bend* or stoop in kindness to an inferior; to *favor*, *bestow*," and emphasizes the unworthiness of the recipient. "Mercies" in v. 4 is actually a singular, Strong 2617, *chesed* חֶסֶד, and refers to covenant love.

## Study Questions on the Psalms

(b) 2 Sam 1:12; 3:32; 12:21; 15:30; 19:1

### **Psalm 13**

1. How does the Lord's treatment of David in this psalm contrast with that in Psalm 6?
2. What repeated phrase shows why David fears that the Lord is treating him this way?
3. What motives does David give God for intervening in vv. 3-4?
4. Vv. 5-6 both look forward to a future time of joy.
  - (a) What motive for this confidence does v. 5 present? Look up the Strong's number for "mercy" (or see Hint a), and consult Hint a under Psalm 6.
  - (b) How about v. 6?
5. Hints:
  - (a) This is Strong 2617, רחם.

### **God's Chastisement**

1. Here are some texts that describe God's people facing real or apparent opposition from God. Read over them. Why does God sometimes bring suffering on his people?
  - (a) Judges 2:11-19
  - (b) Job 1-2
  - (c) Isa 10:5-27
  - (d) Habakkuk 1-2
  - (e) Hebrews 12
2. How may Phil 3:10 explain some instances of suffering?
3. What promise does 1 Cor 10:13 make concerning suffering?
  - (a) Note in particular the word translated "way to escape" (εκβασις, Strong 1545).
  - (b) What meaning does this word convey in Heb 13:7?
  - (c) Compare the message of 1 Cor 10:13 with Heb 12:11.

### **Psalms 7 and 11: Fleeing from Saul**

1. We'll see that these two psalms share references to David's flight from Saul. Here are two other indications that the editors intend us to link them.
  - (a) Compare the first words in each Psalm.
  - (b) These two psalms use a particular family of words much more frequently than do other psalms. Read them through a few times and see if you can identify this distinctive theme.

# Study Questions on the Psalms

## ***Psalm 7: From the Cave of En-Gedi***

1. This Psalm is called a “Shiggaion.” The word appears only one other time, in the heading to Habakkuk 3. Recall our study on that Psalm ([http://cyber-chapel.org/sermons/psalms/notes/Ps\\_ModelPsalm.pdf](http://cyber-chapel.org/sermons/psalms/notes/Ps_ModelPsalm.pdf)). What did we suggest this heading means?
2. This psalm shows many parallels to Psalm 57.
  - (a) Read through the two psalms. How many parallels can you find?
  - (b) What was the occasion of that psalm, according to its heading?
3. The Psalm concerns “Cush, the Benjamite.”
  - (a) To whom does the name “Cush” refer elsewhere in the Bible? Use your concordance or Bible software (or Hint a).
  - (b) How did the nations that descended from Cush behave toward Israel?
  - (c) This earlier Cush was not from the tribe of Benjamin, but the editor may intend the name here as a pun on Kish.
    - i. To whom would he then be referring?
    - ii. What is the implication of linking this family with Cush?
    - iii. Note the grammatical number of the pronouns describing his adversary in vv. 4, 5, 11ff (and contrast 57:6). What adversary does he particularly have in mind?
4. In v. 1, what is the meaning of the verb “trust,” according to Strong (or Hint b)? How is this meaning appropriate to the setting of the Psalm suggested by the parallel with Psalm 57?
5. Read over 1 Samuel 24. How is David’s protestation of innocence in vv. 3-4 appropriate to this setting?
6. Recall the common family of words you discovered in this psalm and Psalm 11. How is it appropriate to this setting?
7. The word “people” in vv. 7, 8 is actually plural.
  - (a) How is David generalizing from his individual history to Israel’s future Messianic hope?
  - (b) Does this suggest why the editor may have adopted the pun in the heading?
8. Hints
  - (a) See Gen 10:6ff
  - (b) 1) (Qal) to seek refuge, flee for protection 1a) to put trust in (God),

## ***Psalm 11: From the Mountains of Ziph***

1. What setting does v. 1 suggest for this Psalm?
  - (a) Compare 1 Sam 26:20.



## Study Questions on the Psalms

- (b) Recall your study of the verb “trust” in Question 4 for Psalm 7. How does this verb continue to be appropriate to the setting?
2. Note again the common family of words. What is the basis for David’s plea to the Lord in these psalms?
3. What is the focus of David’s confidence in v. 4?
  - (a) How does verse 4 contrast with David’s immediate situation (1 Sam 26:19)?
  - (b) How does it comfort him?
  - (c) How does it recall Psalm 2:4?
  - (d) How may Psalm 18:6 recall this verse? (Note the heading to Psalm 18.)

### Psalm 9-10

1. I will suggest that these two psalms were composed as a single entity, and later divided. One line of evidence is the phrases that are common to the two psalms. See how many of these you can find.
2. Another line of evidence is that the two psalms together form an acrostic, with verses corresponding to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. If you read Hebrew, see if you can find the successive letters. Hints:
  - (a) Sometimes two lines starting with successive letters are separated by other lines with random letters.
  - (b) Six letters are missing in Psalm 10, disrupting the pattern. This appears to be intentional—see below.
3. An important clue to the structure of a psalm is the repetition of noteworthy phrases or themes. What repetitions seem prominent to you?

### 9:1-2

1. What sets these verses apart from all the later verses in Psalm 9-10?

### 9:3-18; 10:2-11

1. I will suggest that these two paragraphs are parallel to each other, and offer a contrast.
  - (a) In 9:3-18, the psalmist alternates between two groups of people with whom the Lord is engaged.
    - i. What are these two groups?
    - ii. Which verses describe the Lord’s engagement with each of them?
  - (b) 9:13-14 at first glance seems not to fit into the alternation. How might its relation to v. 12 make its position more understandable?
  - (c) Find the internal ABAB structure in the long paragraph in 10:2-5.

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- (d) The six missing letters in the acrostic correspond exactly with 10:2-5. What point may David be making in disrupting the acrostic in this way?
- (e) In view of your studies, what is the theme of each of these paragraphs?
- (f) What tension does this parallel set up?
- (g) Each of these paragraphs refers to God's senses as he oversees the world. What verses make these references, and what senses are involved?

### **9:19-10:1, 10:12-13**

1. I will suggest that these two paragraphs are parallel to each other.
  - (a) What similarities can you find between them?
  - (b) Each of these paragraphs ends one of the two longer paragraphs in 9:3-18; 10:2-11.
    - i. Can you paraphrase the relation between each longer paragraph and the following short one?
    - ii. How can such very different descriptions of the world as we find in the longer paragraphs lead to such very similar conclusions?

### **10:14-17**

1. How are 10:14 and 10:16-18 like each other, and unlike v. 15?
2. Notice the references to God's senses in 10:14 and 10:16-18.
  - (a) Which sense is in focus in each of these paragraphs?
  - (b) How does each of this recall the two longer and contrasting paragraphs, 9:3-18 and 10:2-11?

## **Psalm 8**

To understand this psalm, we must connect it with three other bodies of Scripture: Genesis 1, 1 Samuel 17, and the New Testament, then set it in its context of Psalms 3-14. Read over the Psalm several times, observe how it draws on the OT texts and how the NT texts draw on it, and meditate on its place in the book of Psalms.

### **Genesis 1**

1. In Hebrew, Ps 8:5a is "Thou has made him a little lower than God." How does this reflect the role for man that God establishes in Genesis 1?
2. To what verse in Genesis 1 does Ps 8:6-8 refer?
3. Were Adam and Eve successful in the role that God assigned them? Why or why not?
4. Do Adam and Eve fully satisfy the description of Psalm 8?

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## 1 Samuel 17

The connection of Psalm 8 with Goliath rests on

- the insight that part of the heading of Psalm 9, “To the chief Musician upon Muthlabben,” actually belongs to Psalm 8;
  - the understanding of the phrase “Muthlabben” as “death of the *ben*”
  - the fact that *ben* can mean not only “son,” but also the preposition “between”
  - the use of *ben* “between” as a noun in the Hebrew expression for “champion” in 1 Sam 17:4, 23: “one who goes between.”
1. Who is the *ben*, the champion, in 1 Samuel 17, and how did he die?
  2. How is David described in 1 Samuel 17?
  3. What language in the Psalm recalls this characterization of David?
  4. What encouragement does this focus of the Psalm give us in serving the Lord?

## New Testament

1. Use the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge (or Hint a) to find NT passages that quote or allude to Psalm 8. For each of these,
  - (a) Identify which verses the NT author has in mind;
  - (b) Meditate on the lesson the NT author is trying convey by this allusion.
2. Ultimately, whom is Psalm 8 describing?
3. Hints:
  - (a) Matt 21:15-16; Heb 2:5-9; 1Co 15:25-27; Eph 1:20-23; Phi 2:9; 3:21

## Summary of Psalms 3-14

1. How is Psalm 8 distinctive within Psalms 3-14? Consider the type of psalm it is, and its position. You may have other observations as well, setting it apart.
2. What correspondences can you detect between the psalms on either side of it?
3. Can you suggest a summary for the entire poetic pyramid, Psalms 3-14?

## Psalms 15-24

### Overview

These Psalms form another “pinnacle structure,” in this case with symmetry more like a conventional chiasm.

1. Read over these ten Psalms a few times. Can you detect any correspondences among them that might suggest a symmetrical arrangement?

## Study Questions on the Psalms

2. Compare Psalms 15 and 24. What marks them as corresponding to one another?
3. Now compare Psalms 20 and 21. How are they related to each other?
  - (a) What is the Psalmist requesting in Psalm 20?
  - (b) What is he describing in Psalm 21?
  - (c) Are these two themes connected?
4. Now read over Psalm 18. How does this Psalm correspond to the combination of Psalms 20 and 21?
5. If 15 goes with 24, and 18 with 20-21 (viewed as a unit, though made up of two Psalms), we should look for relations between the remaining Psalms on each side.
  - (a) How do Psalms 16 and 23 resemble each other?
  - (b) How about Psalms 17 and 22?
6. What Psalm does this analysis leave at the center?
7. How does the theme of this central Psalm relate to the two outermost Psalms? This arrangement is an example of Lund's third law of chiasm (out of seven), that related ideas often appear at the extremes and the center of a chiasmic structure.
8. Recall the themes of Psalms 1 and 2.
  - (a) Which one anticipates the central Psalm 19?
  - (b) Where in the other Psalms of this chiasm do we find the theme of the other introductory Psalm?

### **Psalms 15 and 24**

1. Compare and contrast these two Psalms.
  - (a) What common theme do they emphasize?
  - (b) Compare the structure of Psalm 15 with Ps 24:3-5. What three parts does each have?
  - (c) How do these Psalms differ from one another?
  - (d) Can you relate the development from Psalm 15 to Psalm 24, to the progression from Psalm 1 to Psalm 2?
2. Reread the story of how David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6). How might this history furnish the context for these two Psalms?
3. How might Isa 33:14-15 draw on these two Psalms?

### **Psalm 15**

1. How do vv. 1, 5b relate to the verses that come between them?
2. Compare the relation of v. 1 with vv. 2-5a, to Matt 7:21.

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3. How does the promise of v. 5b go beyond that of v. 1?
4. Compare the exhortations in v. 2 with those in v. 3 and those in vv. 4-5b.
  - (a) How would you characterize each triplet?
  - (b) What role does speech play in each of the triplets?
5. The three items in vv. 4-5 are pairs of statements rather than single injunctions. How do the two elements in each pair relate to one another?

### **Psalm 24**

1. How does v. 1 expand the scope of the Psalm beyond that of Psalm 15?
2. What is the source of the righteousness that these Psalms require, according to vv. 5-6?
3. This Psalm goes beyond Psalm 15 in describing the entry of the king, in vv. 7-10.
  - (a) How is the king described in these verses?
  - (b) What additional characterization of him is appropriate, in view of vv. 3-4?
4. How does this Psalm anticipate the drama of Psalm 118 (<http://cyber-chapel.org/sermons/psalms/notes/Psa118.pdf>)? Compare especially 118:19-23.

### **Psalms 16 and 23**

1. Our analysis of the overall section made up of Psalms 15-24 suggests that Psalms 16 and 23 correspond to one another. How many words, phrases, or key ideas can you find in both of these Psalms?
2. Can you think of a common title or theme for this pair of Psalms?

### **Psalm 16**

1. I will suggest that verse 1 summarizes the rest of the Psalm, in chiasmic (inverse) order. Can you find which verses correspond to each half of verse 1? (Think about this before going on to the next questions.)
2. How are vv. 2-6 organized, and how do they amplify what it means to trust in the Lord?
  - (a) How might the following verses help explain “heritage” in v. 6, and its relation to v. 3? Deut 4:20; 9:26, 29; 1 Kings 8:51
  - (b) How might 1 Sam 26:19 lie behind v. 4?
3. What successive examples of the Lord’s care are described in vv. 7-11?
4. Where is this Psalm quoted in the NT? (Use your center reference, the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge, or Hint a.)
5. Both NT references make the same argument from v. 10.
  - (a) What is that argument?

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- (b) Who is speaking in the Psalm?
- 6. Hints:
  - (a) Acts 2, Acts 13

### **Psalm 23**

1. As in Psalm 16, the first verse summarizes the rest of the psalm, but this time as an alternation (that is, the parts of v. 1 are in the same order as the verses they summarize). Which verses correspond to each half of verse 1?
2. What grammatical change distinguishes vv. 4-5 from the verses on either side of them?
3. How is this change aligned with the two parts of the Psalm you found in Question 1?
4. What NT passages pick up the theme of this Psalm?
5. Comparing the NT references to Psalms 16 and 23, what do these two Psalms together tell us about the Messiah?

### **Psalms 17 and 22**

1. We talked about the various genres or types of psalms (lament, hymn, confidence, remembrance, kingship, thanksgiving, and wisdom).
  - (a) Which genre seems appropriate for each of these Psalms?
  - (b) Are there any other Psalms of this genre in Psalms 15-24?
2. What words, phrases, or ideas can you find in common between these two Psalms?

### **Psalm 17**

1. Psalm 17 shares numerous phrases and ideas not only with Psalm 22, but also with Psalm 16. How many can you find?
2. See if you can divide the Psalm into paragraphs based on the shifts between *requests* that David is making of God and *statements* in which he is describing somebody.
3. What two kinds of people does he describe, and in which verses?
4. How are the requests arranged with respect to these statements? Hint: can you find a chiasm (ABA), followed by an alternation (ABAB)?
5. What is the basis for the request that David makes in vv. 1-2?
6. What three dimensions of ethical behavior does David describe in vv. 3-4?
7. What is David asking for in vv. 1-2? in verses 5-6?
8. What is David asking for in vv. 7-9?
9. What is the basis of this request?
10. Recall the dimensions of ethical behavior that you found in vv. 3-4.

## Study Questions on the Psalms

- (a) Can you find these same three dimensions in vv. 10-12? (Hint: what does “fat” describe in Psa 119:70 and Isa 6:10?)
  - (b) How might this Psalm have inspired Solomon in Prov 6:16-19?
11. Meditate on how v. 15 fits into (or does not fit into) the structure you have found so far.
- (a) Can you find the word in v. 14 that translates the same Hebrew word as “satisfied”? (Use Strong’s numbers.)
  - (b) How does v. 15 continue the theme we saw in 16:2-5 and Hab 3:17-18?

### **Psalm 22**

1. This Psalm was on the mind of our Lord in his agony on the cross; compare Ps 22:1 with Matt 27:46. Numerous other details in the Psalm correspond to the crucifixion, and several of them are cited explicitly by the NT authors. Read over the Psalm and the crucifixion accounts (Matt 27:33-56; Mark 15:21-41; Luke 23:26-49; John 19:16-37).
  - (a) How many explicit quotations of the Psalm can you find in these accounts?
  - (b) Can you find other allusions to the Psalm?
2. I will suggest dividing the Psalm into three parts, with successive sections starting at vv. 12 and 22.
  - (a) How does David set off vv. 1-11? Compare v. 1 with vv. 10-11.
  - (b) How about vv. 12-21? Pay attention to the names of animals in this section. The Hebrew word translated “unicorn” means “wild ox.”
  - (c) Read over each of these sections a few times, and summarize the theme of each.

### **22:1-11, Abandoned by God**

1. How would you divide this section into paragraphs? Notice in particular the contrasts between David and the Lord marked by “but.”
2. How are vv. 2 and 6-8 alike? What do they claim about God’s care for his servant?
3. How are vv. 3-5 and 9-10 alike? How do they contrast with vv. 2 and 6-8?
4. What principle of spiritual encouragement is David illustrating here?
5. How is the tension of these verses reflected in Rom 8:31-39?

### **22:12-21, Abused by Enemies**

1. The major division in the section is marked by a shift from statement to request.
  - (a) Where is this break?
  - (b) How does it align with the distribution of the names of the animals?
2. What alternation governs the statement paragraph?
3. What two forms of abuse does this alternation emphasize?

## Study Questions on the Psalms

4. This paragraph is particularly rich in descriptions appropriate to the crucifixion that are not explicitly quoted in the NT. Can you find some of them?
5. How does the request paragraph link to the first 11 verses of the Psalm?
6. How does the last sentence of the section differ from what he has said about the Lord up to this point?

### **22:23-31, Declaring the Lord's Deliverance**

1. What is the appropriate response to God's deliverance, as David illustrates in this section?
2. Notice the audience that David has in view. How does it change as you move through the section?
3. How is this progression appropriate to the NT understanding of the Psalm as referring to the Lord Jesus?

### **Psalms 18 and 20-21**

1. The overall structure of Psalms 15-24 suggests that Psalm 18 and Psalms 20-21 (seen as a pair) correspond with one another. Read all three Psalms a few times, and see what similarities you can detect between them. Here are some suggestions.
  - (a) Taken together, Psalms 20-21 tell a story. Can you find a similar story in Psalm 18?
  - (b) What title do these three Psalms give to David?
  - (c) Where else does that title appear in Psalms 15-24?
  - (d) Given that other reference, to whom does this title ultimately refer in these Psalms?

### **Psalm 18**

1. This Psalm has the most extensive historical introduction of any of the Psalms.
  - (a) Where in the books of Samuel was it probably written? (Warning: even though it is reproduced in 2 Samuel 22, that part of the book is an appendix, and does not come in chronological order.)
  - (b) How does this setting help explain the title that David claims at the end of the Psalm?
2. The key to the structure of this Psalm is recognizing the two narratives that it contains, and distinguishing them from the non-narrative material that surrounds them. A narrative describes a time-ordered sequence of events.
  - (a) Can you find the two narratives?
  - (b) Who is the dominant actor in each of them?
  - (c) Do you think the two narratives are describing the same events? Why or why not?
3. Trace the references to Gentiles in the Psalm. Are they uniformly distributed, or are they concentrated in one section?



# Study Questions on the Psalms

## 18:1-3, Introduction

1. Notice the images that David uses to describe the Lord.
  - (a) Which ones does he repeat later in the Psalm?
  - (b) Where do they occur? (This kind of repetition is an important clue to structure.)
2. Is this introduction more closely associated with the first narrative or with the second?

## 18:4-24, First Narrative

1. Look at the subjects of the sentences as you read through this section.
  - (a) Where are the Lord's actions in view?
  - (b) Where are David's actions in view?
  - (c) How are David's actions related to those of the Lord?
2. Can you think of earlier episodes in Israel's history where God's combat for his people is described in terms like those used here?
3. In what kind of circumstance might a believer take encouragement from this narrative?

## 18:25-31, The Central Principle

1. Note how David refers to the Lord throughout this section.
  - (a) How does he start the section?
  - (b) How does he end it?
  - (c) What is anomalous about vv. 28 and 29?
  - (d) Can you associate one of these verses with the first narrative, and one with the second?
2. What is the logical relation between this section and the two narratives? Compare the principle we saw in Psalms 15 and 24.

## 18:32-45, Second Narrative

1. Note how David refers to the Lord throughout this section. On this basis, identify its main parts.
2. What is the relation between the Lord's actions and David's actions?
3. How is this relation different than in the first narrative section?
4. What alternation dominates vv. 35-45?
5. In what kind of circumstance might a believer take encouragement from this narrative?

## 18:46-50, Conclusion

1. How many parallels can you find between the conclusion and the introduction?
2. How many of these features are also reflected in the central section?
3. How does Paul understand this Psalm, based on his quotation of v. 49 in Rom 15:9?

## Study Questions on the Psalms

4. Is the conclusion more closely associated with the first narrative, or with the second?

### ***Psalms 20-21***

1. Read both Psalms through a few times. How are they related to each other?
  - (a) What kind of event do both Psalms have in mind?
  - (b) In each Psalm, is this event in the future or in the past?
  - (c) Remember the distinction among the different kinds of speech acts: commands (requests for action), questions (requests for information), and statements (delivery of information). What kinds of speech acts are involved in each of these Psalms?

### **Psalm 20**

1. Find the paragraphs within the Psalm.
  - (a) Note shifts in the grammatical person (“thou” vs. “he”) by which the writer addresses the king, and the Lord.
  - (b) Compare the first line after the title with 5b. How does this confirm the division by grammatical person?
2. V. 1 presumes that the king has been speaking.
  - (a) To whom has he been speaking, and about what?
  - (b) How does 2 Chr 20 provide an example of what is going on behind this Psalm?
3. Vv. 2-3 presume that the king has been offering sacrifices. How might 1 Sam 13:9 and the surrounding context explain the motive for these sacrifices?
4. What is the attitude of the people toward the king’s prayer, in v. 5?
5. What example does this give us in our support for one another’s prayers?
6. Compare v. 6 with 2 Chr 20:14-17. What has happened between v. 5 and v. 6?
7. What does v. 9 teach about the ultimate source of successful government?

### **Psalm 21**

1. Again, the organization of the Psalm is marked by shifts in grammatical person (“he” vs. “thou” in reference to different people.)
  - (a) On this basis, where would you divide it?
  - (b) Dividing the Psalm in this way leaves two verses standing by themselves.
    - i. What are they?
    - ii. What attribute of God is in focus in each of these?
    - iii. Whose attitude does each of these verses describe?
    - iv. If we apply the Psalm to the Lord Jesus, how do these verses guide our worship?

## Study Questions on the Psalms

2. Compare 2 Sam 12:30 with v. 3 and 2 Sam 12:31 with v. 9. Does this suggest where this Psalm may fit in the life of David?
3. How might v. 4 apply to the Lord Jesus?
4. A key expression in this Psalm and elsewhere in Psalms 15-24 is “thy [God’s] face,” though it is translated variously. It appears at 16:11 “presence”; 17:15 “face”; 21:6 “countenance”, 9 “anger”; 24:6 “face”. Read over these references.
  - (a) How does the Psalmist’s attitude align with the desire expressed in Psalms 15 and 24?
  - (b) Contrast the Psalmist’s desire with that of Adam and Eve in Gen 3:8.
  - (c) How does this contrast illuminate the use of the expression in v. 9?
  - (d) What is unusual about the use in v. 9?
  - (e) How does this expression highlight the conflict described in v. 12?

### Psalm 19

1. Read over the Psalm a few times.
  - (a) What two kinds of revelation from God does it describe?
  - (b) How does this contrast structure the Psalm?
2. Now read Romans 1-2.
  - (a) What kinds of revelation does Paul describe there?
  - (b) What effect can each of them have?
3. Review Romans 10, where Paul quotes this Psalm (Ps 19:4 in Rom 10:18). What role does each of these kinds of revelation play there?

### ***1-6, Revelation in Nature***

1. In Hebrew, the rhythm of vv. 1-2 and 4b-5 is similar, and very different from 3-4a and 6. It has been suggested that 3-4a and 6 are two riddles, whose answers are in 1-2 and 4b-5, respectively.
  - (a) What is the riddle in 3-4a? Note that “which” is italicized. (Note the form of biblical riddles in Jud 14:14. We would probably frame it as a question. What would be the question-riddle from 3-4a?)
  - (b) How would vv. 1-2 answer that riddle?
  - (c) What is the riddle in v. 6?
  - (d) How would vv. 4b-5 answer it?
  - (e) What feature of natural revelation does David emphasize here?

### ***7-14, Revelation in Scripture***

1. What six terms for God’s revelation are given in vv. 7-9?

## Study Questions on the Psalms

2. How does David characterize each of them?
3. You might enjoy consulting the Strong number for each of these six terms and seeing how David's characterization is appropriate to the perspective on divine revelation that each term gives.
4. Compare 19:7 with Gal 3:21.
  - (a) What tension do you see between the two texts?
  - (b) How might you resolve it? (The phrase "converting the soul" also appears in Ps 23:3, where it is translated "restoring the soul.")
5. What sets vv. 7-9 apart from 10-12?
6. Why are vv. 10-12 associated with 7-9, more than with 1-6?
7. What two classes of sin does David distinguish in vv. 12-13? Compare Num 15:24-31.

### Psalm 25

1. Read over the Psalm a few times to get an idea for its organization. Here are some hints to help you perceive possible stanzas.
  - (a) What themes and words are repeated throughout the Psalm, and how are they clustered? (I found it helpful to copy the Psalm into a word processor, and color the repeated words differently. You could also photocopy the Psalm and then mark it up with colored pencils.)
  - (b) Where does the Psalmist make statements, and where does he utter requests?
  - (c) This is one of the acrostic Psalms. But the acrostic is missing a letter between vv. 5 and 6, and again between vv. 17 and 18, and has an extra verse outside the pattern at v. 19. Can you suggest any reasons for these variations?

### 1-3, 19-21

1. How many similarities can you find between these paragraphs? Look for repeated themes. (Hint: "transgress" in v. 3 is not related to "transgressions" in v. 7, but means "deal treacherously.")
2. Notice the variety of words describing "trusting" or "waiting on" the Lord in these verses. "Trust" in v. 20 is actually a different word than in v. 2. It is unusual for a single Psalm to use this many different words. You might enjoy looking at the Strong definitions and using Strong numbers to find other instances of the same words in the Psalter (or see Hint a).
3. What in these verses makes it necessary for David to wait, trust, and take refuge in the Lord?
4. What principle for interpersonal relationships do we see in these verses?
5. Hints:
  - (a) trust, v. 2: Strong 982, "A primitive root; properly to *hie* for refuge (but not so *precipitately* as [H2620](#)); figuratively to *trust*, be *confident* or *sure*: - be bold (confident, secure, sure),

## Study Questions on the Psalms

careless (one, woman), put confidence, (make to) hope, (put, make to) trust.

wait, vv. 3, 21: Strong 6960, A primitive root; to *bind* together (perhaps by *twisting*), that is, *collect*; (figuratively) to *expect*: - gather (together), look, patiently, tarry, wait (for, on, upon).

trust, v. 20: Strong 2620, A primitive root; to *flee* for protection (compare [H982](#)); figuratively to *confide* in: - have hope, make refuge, (put) trust.

### 4-18

1. What request does David make in vv. 4-5?
2. What evidence is there later in this section that the Lord is answering this request?
3. What request does David make in vv. 6-7?
4. What is the relation between vv. 6-7 and vv. 4-5?
5. How does David repeat the request of vv. 6-7 later in this section?
6. To what divine attributes does David appeal in 6-7 and its later echoes?
7. Overall, what is the structure of this section?
8. Contrast David's relation to the Lord in these verses with that he expressed in 1-3 and 19-21. What is the logical connection between these two kinds of relation?

### 22

1. This verse stands outside the acrostic pattern. In what other way does it differ from the rest of the Psalm?
2. Does this Psalm include a dedication to the Chief Musician?
3. Why might David have included v. 22?

## Psalms 26-32

1. These seven Psalms have an unusual concentration of references to God's house, temple, sanctuary, tabernacle, and similar words.
  - (a) Read over the section and note instances of these terms. Can you find at least one in each of these Psalms?
  - (b) How do these terms remind us of the previous group of Psalms, 15-24? (Recall in particular the first and last Psalms of that section.)
2. Now read these Psalms again, paying attention to their genre.
  - (a) Which are laments (asking for God's help in trouble)?
  - (b) Which are thanksgiving (thanking God for help in trouble)?

## Study Questions on the Psalms

- (c) Does any of them not fit into one or the other of these two categories?
- 3. Contrast the first three Psalms with the last three.
  - (a) Which ones contain a description of the type of Psalm in v. 1? (Pay attention to italics.)
  - (b) What is David's assessment of his own moral condition in Psalms 26-28? in Psalms 30-32?
  - (c) How does David connect his thoughts with those of other saints in each of these two groups?

### Psalm 26

1. Read Psalm 1 along with this Psalm. How are they related?
2. Notice which verses are asking the Lord for something, and which ones are making statements.
3. Can you distinguish different kinds of requests he makes to the Lord?
4. Can you distinguish different kinds of statements that David makes?
5. How does this Psalm relate to Psalms 15 and 24?
6. How does David express his relation with other saints in this Psalm?

### Psalm 27

1. Divide the Psalm into sections, based on the audience that David is addressing. (In v. 14, pay special attention to grammatical number.)
2. What problem does David face in vv. 1-6, and what promise does he make?
3. In verses 9-13, note the shifts between petitions and statements.
  - (a) Can you detect two different kinds of petitions that David makes to the Lord?
  - (b) How do the statements relate to the petitions that they follow?
4. With v. 14, compare Ps 42:5, 11; 43:5; 62:5; and contrast 30:4; 31:23, 24; 32:11.
  - (a) What progression is there between v. 14 and the exhortations in 30:4; 31:23, 24; 32:11?
  - (b) What spiritual principle can you derive from this progression?

### Psalm 28

1. This is the last of the three Psalms that describe David in the zeal of his youth. Recall the features of the two sets of three Psalms that we contrasted in our first study (slides at [http://cyber-chapel.org/sermons/psalms/notes/Ps\\_26\\_27\\_Charts.pdf](http://cyber-chapel.org/sermons/psalms/notes/Ps_26_27_Charts.pdf)). How is this Psalm typical of Psalms 26-28?
2. This is a classic example of a Psalm of Lament. These Psalms have some or all of the following parts: invocation, plea to God for help, complaint describing what is wrong, confession of sin, declaration of innocence, curse on enemies, expression of confidence in God's response, and hymn or blessing to the Lord. How many of these can you find in this Psalm?

## Study Questions on the Psalms

3. By distinguishing requests from statements, find the major sections of the Psalm.
4. What role does God's dwellingplace play in this Psalm?
5. Compare this role with the role that Solomon expected the temple to play, in his prayer in 1 Kings 8.
6. What is the relation between v. 9 and the rest of the Psalm?
7. What is unusual about v. 8, in the light of the rest of the Psalm?
8. How does v. 8 justify the application of the Psalm in v. 9?

### Psalm 29

This is the central Psalm in this section. The others all deal with events in David's life, being either laments or thanksgiving. This Psalm focuses on the nature of the Lord.

1. What repeated expression marks the main body of this Psalm?
2. What natural phenomenon is David using to illustrate the Lord's power?
3. Compare and contrast the first and last portions of the Psalm, those that are left after you recognize the central body. (It may help to divide v. 9 after the word "forests.")
  - (a) The title "ye mighty" in v. 1 is literally "sons of God" or "sons of the mighty." Compare Job 2:1 and Psa 89:6. To what beings is this exhortation being given?
  - (b) What group of beings is in view in 9b-11?
  - (c) What two dwellingplaces of the Lord are thus distinguished?
  - (d) What are both of these groups to ascribe to the Lord?
  - (e) What characteristic of the Lord is mentioned in both sections?
4. What geographical locations are mentioned in vv. 3-9? How does this sequence reflect the natural movement of a thunderstorm in the northern hemisphere?
5. Compare the movement between vv. 1-2 and 9b-11, and the natural imagery, with what we saw in Psa 18:6-16.
6. What parallels can you find between this Psalm and the song of Moses in Exodus 15?

### Psalm 30

The title is, "A Psalm *and* Song *at* the dedication of the house of David." In other Psalms, the last two words describe the author of the Psalm, in the expression "A Psalm of David," and it is likely we are supposed to associate them here with "A Psalm and Song," not "house." In this case, the Psalm was written at the initial dedication of a sanctuary for God.

1. Read over 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21.
  - (a) In what sense did David dedicate a sanctuary in these chapters?
  - (b) What else did he do in these chapters, before dedicating a sanctuary?

## Study Questions on the Psalms

- (c) How many allusions can you find in this Psalm to David's sin in numbering the people?
- (d) In particular, contrast v. 6 with 10:4, 16:8, and 62:5.
- 2. This Psalm is a Psalm of thanksgiving, not lament. What verses mention a previous lament to which God has responded?
- 3. What motive did God have for delivering David?
- 4. Notice v. 4.
  - (a) How does this differ from what we have seen in Psalms 26-28?
  - (b) What does this verse, and indeed, the whole Psalm, say about David's attitude with respect to his sin?
  - (c) What does this Psalm teach us about how we should respond when God answers our prayers?
- 5. This is the first of the three Psalms that describe David in the wisdom of his maturity. Recall the features of the two sets of three Psalms that we contrasted in our first study (slides at [http://cyber-chapel.org/sermons/psalms/notes/Ps\\_26\\_27\\_Charts.pdf](http://cyber-chapel.org/sermons/psalms/notes/Ps_26_27_Charts.pdf)). How is this Psalm typical of Psalms 30-32?

### Psalm 31

- 1. Like most other laments, this Psalm includes *statements* of confidence in the Lord and *requests* for help. But there are more than one of each.
  - (a) Identify which paragraphs are mainly requests, and which are statements of confidence.
  - (b) After v. 1 as a summary, we have three cycles of request and statement: vv. 2-8, 9-18, and 19-24. What is unusual about vv. 19-24, compared with the rest of the Psalm?
  - (c) Contrast the attack brought by the adversaries in vv. 2-8 with that brought in vv. 9-18.
  - (d) Can you find references to both kinds of attack in the expression of confidence in vv. 19-22?
- 2. Throughout the Psalm, David bases his requests on various attributes of the Lord.
  - (a) Make a list of the things that he describes as belonging to the Lord ("Thy X")
  - (b) Are these things all of the same kind?
    - i. Contrast the one in v. 5 with the one in v. 7. What two categories do these suggest?
    - ii. Sort out the things that belong to the Lord into these categories.
    - iii. How does each category encourage us when we cry to the Lord for help?
  - (c) How does David's preoccupation with characteristics of the Lord reflect the principle from 16:8?



# Study Questions on the Psalms

## Psalm 32

1. This Psalm is usually understood to belong, with Psalm 51, to the episode of David's sin with Bathsheba. Read over the two Psalms, as well as the record of David's sin in 2 Samuel 11-12.
  - (a) Where in the record would each of these Psalms fit?
  - (b) What similarities can you find between the two Psalms?
2. Compare 32:1-5 with vv. 6-11. Each of these sections concerns David's relation with someone or some group.
  - (a) Who is this other party, in each case?
  - (b) What two outcomes of the Lord's chastisement does David illustrate?
3. Within 1-5, how are 1-2 and 5 like each other, and unlike vv. 3-4?
4. What is the chronological sequence of the events in 1-5, and how does it relate to the order in which the verses appear?
5. Note the pronouns in vv. 6-11.
  - (a) Who is "him" in v. 6?
  - (b) Who is "thou" in v. 7?
  - (c) What might the relation of v. 7 be to v. 6?
  - (d) Who is speaking to whom in vv. 8-9? (Compare 51:12-13.)
  - (e) Who is "he" and "Him" in v. 10?
  - (f) Compare v. 11 with v. 6.
    - i. How are these verses similar?
    - ii. How are they different?
    - iii. How is the progression between them mirrored in the progression from v. 8 to v. 9?

## Psalm 33

1. Unlike most of the Psalms in Book 1, Psalm 33 does not appear to be part of a group of Psalms, but stands alone (as does Psalm 25). These first questions help you appreciate its position.
  - (a) Recall the groups of Psalms we have identified previously: 3-14, 15-24, and 26-32.
    - i. What is the theme of each of these groups?
    - ii. I will suggest that Psalms 34-41 are another group. Skim them over.
    - iii. Can you find similarities between pairs of groups on either side of Psalm 25?
  - (b) Recall the various kinds or genres of Psalms that we have discussed: those dealing with specific circumstances in the life of the Psalmist (lament, thanksgiving, and confidence),

## Study Questions on the Psalms

Psalms that recall Israel's history, wisdom Psalms that urge godly living, and Psalms that praise the Lord for who he is (kingship psalms and hymns).

- i. Read over Psalm 33. To which of these genres does it belong?
  - ii. Look over the other Psalms in Book 1 (1-41). Which other Psalms belong to this category?
  - iii. In which groups do those other Psalms, of the same genre as Psalm 33, occur?
  - iv. How does the location of Psalm 33 make up for the lack of such Psalms in the other groups?
2. Compare 33:1-3; 20-22 with the other verses in the Psalm.
- (a) How are they similar to each other, and distinct from the central body of the Psalm?
  - (b) What is the function of the rest of the Psalm in relation to them?
  - (c) What progression is there between vv. 1-3 and 20-22 in our relation to the Lord?
3. The central section has two parts, vv. 4-11 and 12-19.
- (a) What is the theme of the first part?
  - (b) How do vv. 4-11 echo Genesis 1 and John 1?
  - (c) What conclusion do vv. 10-11 draw from vv. 4-9?
    - i. What word is repeated to contrast the works of the Lord with those of men?
    - ii. Use Strong's numbers to find another word, repeated in Hebrew but translated differently in English, that reinforces this contrast.
  - (d) "Blessed" in v. 12 is the construction we saw earlier in Psalms in 1:1; 2:12; and 32:1, 2.
    - i. Use Strong's numbers (or Hint a) to find where it appears in books written before Psalms.
    - ii. How is the meaning in v. 12 related to an earlier use of the word?
  - (e) How do vv. 13 and 18 bracket this section?
  - (f) What response on the part of people does the revelation in vv. 4-11 stimulate? (cf. v. 8)
  - (g) What additional responses does the revelation in vv. 12-19 stimulate? (cf. v. 18)
  - (h) How does the conclusion, vv. 20-22, grow out of the second half of the body of the Psalm?
  - (i) Compare the two parts of the body of this Psalm with the two halves of Psalm 19. How are they related?
4. Hints
- (a) Deut. 33:29; 1 Ki. 10:8; 2 Chr. 9:7; Job 5:17; Ps. 1:1; 2:12; 32:1-2; 33:12; 34:8; 40:4; 41:1; 65:4; 84:4-5, 12; 89:15; 94:12; 106:3; 112:1; 119:1-2; 127:5; 128:1-2; 137:8-9; 144:15; 146:5; Prov. 3:13; 8:32, 34; 14:21; 16:20; 20:7; 28:14; 29:18; Eccl. 10:17; Isa. 30:18; 32:20; 56:2; Dan. 12:12

# Study Questions on the Psalms

## Psalms 34-41

### Overview

1. Robertson (*The Flow of the Psalms*) describes this group of Psalms as “Psalms of the Sufferer.” Read over the eight Psalms with this in mind.
  - (a) What suffering is in view in each Psalm?
  - (b) One would expect suffering to be expressed in lament, in which David prays for God’s intervention. Are these all laments? If not, are the non-laments related to suffering in some way?
  - (c) Psalms 34 and 37 are distinctive in that they are acrostics. Is this distinction correlated with any other feature that you have observed?
  - (d) Review Psalms 3-14. How does this section resemble that section?
2. Robertson also distinguishes the first four Psalms as “Psalms of the Innocent Sufferer,” in contrast with 38-41, the “Psalms of the Guilty Sufferer.” Read through the eight Psalms again, looking for places where David confesses his sin.
  - (a) How many of Psalms 34-37 have such confessions?
  - (b) How about Psalms 38-41?
  - (c) Is there a correlation between Psalms with such confessions and the kinds of suffering that is in view?
  - (d) In what previous group of Psalms have we seen a similar distinction between the Innocent David and the Penitent David?
3. Note references to sickness throughout the Psalms?
  - (a) Who is sick in each case?
  - (b) Is there a correlation with other features that you have observed in the previous questions?
4. Psalm 40 seems to have special links to some of the Psalms in 34-37. See how many you can find.

### Psalm 34

1. The historical setting appears to refer to the episode in 1 Sam 21:10-22:1.
  - (a) What difficulty is there with this identification?
  - (b) Consult a Bible dictionary under the name “Abimelech,” or a commentary, to see possible explanations. (The entry from Fausset’s dictionary is in Hint a.)
2. What is the genre of this Psalm?
3. What is David’s purpose for the Psalm, according to vv. 1-3?
4. What grammatical feature marks vv. 4-7 as distinct from 8-14?

## Study Questions on the Psalms

5. In 4-7, note the alternation between singular and plural pronouns. To whom do the plural pronouns refer? Consider the historical setting in 1 Samuel 21-22.
6. How is the verb “encampeth” (v. 7) particularly appropriate to David at this point in his pilgrimage?
7. What is the relation of 4-7 to 1-3?
8. How do vv. 8-14 correspond to David’s purpose in v. 1-3?
9. Peter quotes v. 8 in 1 Pet 2:3. How does he use this verse to support his argument?
10.       Grammatically, how are 4-7 distinct from 15-22?
11. Thematically, how are 4-7 distinct from 15-22?
12.       What is the function of vv. 15-22 with respect to the rest of the Psalm?
13.       Peter quotes vv. 12-16 in 1 Pet 3:10-12. How does he use these verses to support his argument?
14.       Use the Treasury (or hint b) to understand David’s inspiration for v. 20, and the application of this verse (and its antecedents) to the Lord Jesus.
15.       Hints
  - (a) Fausset on “Abimelech”: (“father of a king, or father king”). A common title of many Philistine kings, as Pharaoh of the Egyptians, and Caesar and Augustus of the Roman: Padishah (father king) is similarly a title of the Persian king. 1. Hence, we find Achish called Abimelech in the title of Ps. 34, which explains the seeming discrepancy of name in 1 Sam. 21:11.
  - (b) Exod 12:46; Num 9:12; Jn 19:36

### Psalm 35

1. This Psalm exhibits many of the components of the lament genre. How many of them can you identify? The complete list of components is Invocation, Plea to God for help, Complaints (description of the problem), Confession of sin or an assertion of innocence, Curse of enemies (imprecation), Confidence in God’s response, and a Hymn or blessing.
2. The Psalm is organized by repetition of some of these components.
  - (a) Which elements occur more than once, and where?
  - (b) On this basis, divide the Psalm into three stanzas.
  - (c) How are the first and third stanzas similar to one another, and dissimilar to the central one?
3. Though we have seen imprecations before as isolated verses (5:10; 6:10; 9:19; 10:2; 25:3; 31:17-18), this is the first Psalm in which imprecations form a major component, and we will discuss them. Here are some questions to help you explore them.
  - (a) Why are some people uncomfortable with the imprecations? Compare Matt 5:44; 1 Pet 2:20-25; Rom 12:17-21.

## Study Questions on the Psalms

- (b) David's laments are usually understood to come from two periods his life: his flight from Saul, and the rebellion of Absalom. In both cases, is the opposition against David personally, or because of his position?
- (c) What is David's personal attitude toward his enemies? You can see something of this by contrasting the outer two stanzas of this Psalm with the central one, or by recalling his encounters with Saul (1 Samuel 24, 1 Samuel 26).
- (d) Compare these *requests* for judgment with *predictions* of judgment elsewhere in the Psalms. With v. 4 compare 6:10; with v. 5, 1:4; with v. 8, 9:15; and more generally, read over the predictions in Psalm 37.
- (e) In the light of your observations, how would you explain New Testament imprecations, such as 1 Cor 16:22 ("anathema" means "accursed"); Gal 1:8-9; 2 Tim 4:14-15; 2 Thes 1:6-10; Rev 6:9-11?

### Psalm 36

1. Here (as in the title to Psalm 18) David calls himself "the servant of the Lord."
  - (a) Who else has borne this title in Israel's history? (Use your Bible SW)
  - (b) What does this say about the role in which David writes this Psalm?
2. David's main point in this Psalm is to contrast the characteristics of the wicked with those of the Lord.
  - (a) How many different characteristics of the wicked can you find? (You might want to consult Strong's numbers to distinguish some that are represented by the same English word.)
  - (b) How many characteristics of the Lord can you find?
  - (c) How would you contrast these two sets of characteristics?
3. How do these two sets of characteristics motivate David's request at the end of the Psalm?
4. Compare our world to the one that David contemplates here. How can his response to his world encourage us in ours?

### Psalm 37

1. We have often seen that the shift between imperative statements (commands) and declarative ones (statements) reveals the basic structure of a Psalm. What organization in this Psalm can you discern, based on this distinction?
2. Laments also involve imperative statements (in the Plea) and declarative ones (for example, in giving the Complaint, or expressing the writer's Confidence).
  - (a) How does this Psalm differ from a lament?
  - (b) In what other books of the Bible might you expect to find a poem of this sort?

## Study Questions on the Psalms

3. In addition to the broad division marked by the imperative/declarative contrast, the Psalm is characterized by several repeated themes, often with characteristic keywords. Read over the Psalm looking for the following themes. Does their distribution align with the imperative/declarative distinction?
  - (a) Moral instructions
  - (b) Words for trust or faith in God
  - (c) The duration of life (whether lengthened or shortened)
  - (d) Names for wicked people
  - (e) Names for righteous people
  - (f) The expression “inherit the land”
4. What instruction appears three times in vv. 1-8?
5. How does this instruction, and those that surround it, reinforce the message we saw in Psalm 36?
6. What contrast is repeated throughout vv. 9-26?
  - (a) What two kinds of people are contrasted?
  - (b) What differences does David point out between them?
7. How do 27-33, and 34-40, each serve as a summary or synopsis of the entire Psalm up to this point?
8. Can you distinguish these two sections from one another, based on which themes from the previous parts of the Psalm that each of these emphasizes?
9. Five times, this Psalm promises that someone will “inherit the earth” or “the land” (the Hebrew expressions are identical).
  - (a) What is the origin of this idea in Israel’s history?
  - (b) Where does our Lord pick up this promise in the Beatitudes?
  - (c) How are those who enjoy this blessing described?
  - (d) How do these descriptions flesh out the meaning of the “meek” in v. 11 (and in the Beatitudes)?
  - (e) With what kind of experiences is inheriting the land contrasted?
  - (f) How do those contrasts help flesh out what it means to “inherit the land”?

### Psalm 38

1. Recall from our overview that this is the first of the four Psalms of the guilty sufferer. Read over the Psalm, and identify the verses where David confesses his own sin.

## Study Questions on the Psalms

- Two other features are repeated in the Psalm: his plea to the Lord for help, and a description of his trust in the Lord.
  - Note the locations of these features, along with the confessions of sin. How are they arranged?
  - What shift in theme takes place at the center of this overall structure?
- The verb “bring to remembrance” in the heading appears in other laments as well: Psalm 70 (heading), 20:7, and 71:16. In addition, it appears in a thanksgiving Psalm in 77:11. Given this usage, what does it indicate about David’s purpose in writing this Psalm?
- There is a paradox in this Psalm: David confesses that he has sinned, but also asks God to defend him against the slanders of the wicked, which result from that sin. How does this situation reflect our relation to the Lord? Can you think of NT verses that tell of someone slandering us for our sin, and how the Lord deals with it?

### Psalm 39

- Where in this Psalm does David confess his personal sin?
- What upsets David in vv. 1-3?
- How do these verses relate this Psalm to Psalms 36 and 37?
- Compare and contrast the solutions to this problem presented in Psalms 36, 37, and 39.
- In particular, contrast the solution here with that in Psalm 37.
  - What difference is there in the situation of the Psalmist?
  - How might you explain that difference?
- Propose a subdivision of vv. 4-13 based on whether David is describing himself (first person pronouns) or mankind in general.
- What progression can you find across the first-person sections? Across the third-person sections?
- Each of the Psalms of the guilty sufferer ends with a dedication to the chief musician, indicating that it is intended for public use. None of the Psalms of the innocent sufferer ends this way.
  - What is ironic about this distinction?
  - What practical lesson can we draw from it?

### Psalm 40

- Read over the Psalm a few times, noting in particular the distribution of statements and requests. How would you divide the Psalm into parts?
- Each of the two parts of this Psalm has close ties to other Psalms.
  - With the first part, compare Psalm 69.

## Study Questions on the Psalms

- i. What words and phrases suggest that these are related to one another?
  - ii. In what chronological relation to these two Psalms stand to one another in the life of David?
- (b) With the second part, compare Psalm 70.
3. The first part of this Psalm (vv. 6-7) are quoted in Heb 10:5-10. To understand their application to Christ, we must first understand how they relate to David.
  - (a) Compare v. 6 with 1 Sam 15:22.
    - i. What historical event does David have in mind?
    - ii. What has he, as king, learned from that event?
    - iii. In the light of this parallel, what does he mean by “mine ears thou hast opened”?
  - (b) v. 7 can be translated, “I come with the scroll of a book written about me.” Can you explain this verse in the light of Deut 17?
  - (c) How does the claim to have the law of God within his heart go beyond the experience of most OT saints? Compare Jer 31:33.
  - (d) How does David’s understanding of his kingship in these verses anticipate the coming of the Messiah?
4. What earlier promises do vv. 9, 10 fulfill? Look up “great congregation” in your Bible SW (or see Hint a).
5. How does David tie together the praise of vv. 1-10 and the request of 11-17? (Recall the function of God’s attributes in Psalms 25 and 31.)
6. How does the description of the enemies in v. 15 recall Psalm 35? (Look at 35:21, 25, and use Strong’s numbers to see how common this word is.)
7. Hints:
  - (a) Ps 22:25; 35:18

### Psalm 41

1. Read over the Psalm, paying attention to statements and requests. What distinct parts can you discern?
2. Why might David be claiming the Lord’s blessings described in the first part of the Psalm?
  - (a) Think in particular of Psalm 35.
  - (b) Compare vv. 3, 8 with Psalm 38.
3. Identify the distinctive components of a Lament (Plea, Confession, Complaint, Confidence) in the second part of the Psalm.
4. To which attribute of God does David appeal in the Pleas?

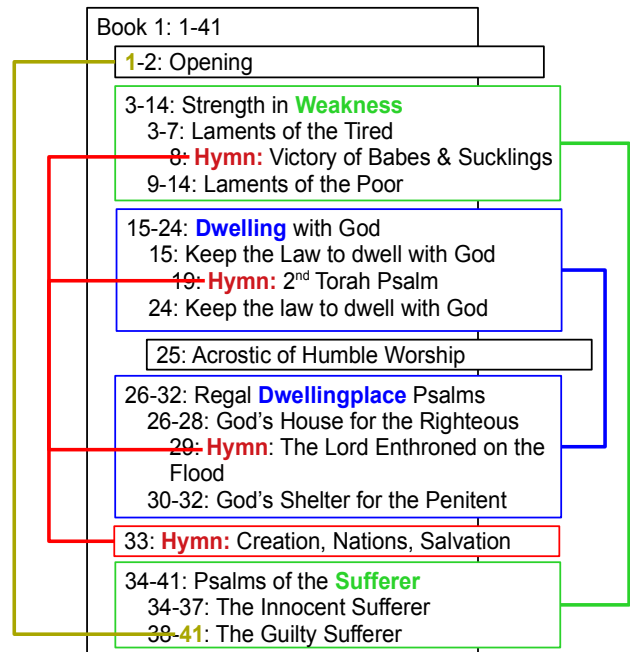


# Study Questions on the Psalms

5. To whom does v. 9 refer historically? Recall the history of Absalom's rebellion.
6. Use the Treasury (or Hint a) to find how the NT applies this verse.
7. What is surprising about v. 12, in the light of v. 4? How can these both be true of David?
8. What is v. 13 doing here? Remember that this is the last Psalm in Book 1, and compare the ends of Psalms 72, 89, and 106.
9. Hints
  - (a) John 13:18

## Review of Book 1

1. Figure 1 shows the groups of Psalms that we have found in Book 1. Read through the four large groups of Psalms (3-14, 15-24, 26-32, 34-41), observing the features that characterize each group (weakness and suffering in 3-14 and 34-41, the Lord's dwellingplace in 15-24 and 26-32).
2. An important contrast is between Psalms in which David thinks of himself as righteous, and those in which he is conscious of his sin and God's chastisement.
  - (a) Look for references to David's sin in each of the four major blocks of Psalms. Are they missing in any of the blocks?
  - (b) How are these references organized structurally in each block?
  - (c) How does the relation between righteous David and penitent David reflect the two opening Psalms?



*Figure 1: Structure of Book 1 (revised)*

3. The first two questions highlight two dominant contrast that David has emphasized: between our weakness and God's royal dwellingplace; and between the wicked and the righteous. Are these different names for the same thing, or are they skewed? For instance, are all the weak people wicked, or are some righteous? Do only the righteous enjoy God's dwellingplace, or is there a way for sinners to be there?
4. Four of the Psalms in Book 1 are acrostics (in which each verse, or each group of verses, begins with a successive letter of the alphabet): 9-10 (treated as a single poem), 25, 34, and 37. Can you discern any reason why these four Psalms are distinguished in this way, either in their relation to one another, or in their relation to their context?

## Study Questions on the Psalms

- Originally, I noted only three hymns in Book 1 (Psalms 8, 19, and 33), and suggested that 33 pointed back to the previous two hymns. But on review, Psalm 29 should certainly be considered a hymn (as shown in Figure 1).
  - Does Psalm 33 also allude to the themes of Psalm 29?
  - With four hymns, three of them at the pinnacle of the first three blocks of Psalms, perhaps Psalm 33 is related in a special way to the fourth block of Psalms. Reread Psalm 33 and Psalms 34-41 and see if you can find any links between them.
- The overall chiasmic structure highlights Psalm 25 at the center. This and its nature as an acrostic suggest that the editor wants to draw our attention to it in a special way. Reread it to see if it may serve as a summary of the major themes of Book 1.
- Can you summarize the message of Book 1 in a single sentence?

## Book 2, Pss 42-72: Communication

### Overview of Book 2

- Look over the Psalms in this book, in particular the headings. How does this collection differ from Book 1?
- Use your Bible software (or Hint a) to count the instances of LORD (Strong 3068) and God (Strong 430) in this section, and in 1-41. How do these compare?
- Hints
  - Book 1: LORD 279x (7x/Psalm), God 49x (1x/Psalm). Book 2: LORD 27x (< 1x/Psalm), God 198x (6x/Psalm)

### Psalms 42-49, Korah

#### Introduction to Korah

- Look up Korah in your concordance or Bible SW (or Hint a). What do we know about the history of this family?
- What makes the sons of Korah different from the sons of Korah's associates?
- Words for "the grave," "the pit," and "Sheol" (KJV "hell") are particularly common in the Psalms of the sons of Korah. Does their history help explain why?
- Hints
  - Num 16, 26 (note 26:11); 1 Chr 9:19; 12:6.

#### Psalms 42-43

- Read through these two Psalms a few times.

## Study Questions on the Psalms

- (a) Can you give at least two reasons to consider them as a single composition?
- (b) How would you divide the Psalm into parts?
2. Look for repeated phrases and ideas in the successive stanzas of the poem.
3. Look for a progression in the poet's thoughts as you move through the stanzas.
  - (a) How do the poet's words to God change?
  - (b) Can you characterize the main focus of each stanza in terms of time (past, present, future)?
4. Note from 1 Chr 12:6 the close relation of the sons of Korah with David. It has been suggested that they composed this Psalm to support David during a period of his life—what period would that be?
5. How does this Psalm anticipate the experience of our Lord during his earthly ministry?

### Psalm 44

1. Compare and contrast this Psalm with Psalm 42-43.
  - (a) How are they alike? Notice the questions.
  - (b) How are they dissimilar? Pay special attention to the pronouns.
  - (c) Though most of the first person pronouns in 44 are plural, the singular "I, me, my" pops up in vv. 4, 6, and 15. Can you suggest why the speaker shifts back and forth this way between singular and plural? (You might compare a similar shift in Psalm 20, and the explanation we proposed in our notes there.)
2. This Psalm is a lament. In addition to the plea to God that is the defining element of a lament, a lament may include one or more of these parts: Invocation, Complaint (description of the problem), Confession of sin, Assertion of innocence, curse on enemies, expression of Confidence in God's deliverance, or Hymn of praise to God.
  - (a) Can you recognize some of these in this Psalm?
  - (b) How do they help you organize the structure?
  - (c) Does this structure help you understand the apparent contradiction between v. 7 and v. 9?
3. The dedication to the chief musician (which now comes at the start of Psalm 45) mentions lilies ("Shoshannim"), a sign of spring, and it has been suggested that the Psalm was sung at Passover. Can you find any allusions in the body of the Psalm that might make it appropriate to the events that Passover commemorates?
4. What reason can the Psalmist find for the suffering that the nation is facing?
5. Where is this Psalm quoted in the NT? (Use the Treasury, your center references, or Hint a.)
6. How does the NT quotation rise above the level of understanding that the Psalmist shows?
7. Hints:
  - (a) Romans 8

# Study Questions on the Psalms

## Psalm 45

1. Use the shifts in pronouns to discern the structure of the Psalm.
2. What kind of event would be the occasion for a Psalm like this?
3. What main participants in that event does the Psalmist describe and address?
4. What feature of the Psalm emphasizes its Messianic reference (recognized even by ancient Jewish tradition)?
5. Use the Treasury (or Hint a) to find where the NT quotes this Psalm.
6. The pronouns in v. 16 are masculine. What is the Psalmist promising to the king?
7. How does this Psalm answer the discouragement of Psalms 42-44?
8. Hints:
  - (a) Hebrews 1

## Psalms 46-48, In Praise of God's Victory

1. These three Psalms reflect some great victory that God has given his people over their enemies. The most likely candidate is the defeat of the coalition of Moab and Ammon against Jehoshaphat, mentioned in 2 Chronicles 20. Read over that chapter and see how many parallels you can find with details mentioned in these three Psalms.
2. Trace the references in each Psalm to God's dwelling.
  - (a) How is it described in each one?
  - (b) How is the description in Psalm 47 different from that in the other two?
  - (c) How would this reference recall Psalm 29?
3. After you have studied each of these Psalms, see if you can explain their order.

## Psalm 46

1. What word marks the three stanzas of this hymn?
2. What refrain marks two of the stanzas?
3. How is the meaning of that refrain stated in the stanza in which it does not appear?
4. What is the theme of the first stanza?
5. How about the second stanza?
6. How does the third stanza combine these two themes into one?

## Psalm 47

1. Hymns of praise often combine a call to praise with a statement of the cause for praise.
  - (a) Can you find these elements in this Psalm?

## Study Questions on the Psalms

- (b) What kind of pattern do they form?
2. How is v. 5 related to this pattern?
3. Here are some other passages where God “goes up”: Gen 17:22; Judg 13:20. How would this fit into the events described in 2 Chronicles 20?
4. What would this imply for the meaning of v. 8?

### **Psalm 48**

1. How would you divide the Psalm into parts? Pay attention to changes in
  - (a) Who is being addressed?
  - (b) What is the subject being discussed?
  - (c) The Selah at the end of v. 8.
2. What topic recurs in each part of the Psalm?
3. Vv. 4-7 recall two events from 2 Chronicles 20.
  - (a) What are they?
  - (b) What common lesson do they convey?

### **Psalm 49**

1. What repeated refrain marks the ends of the two major stanzas of this Psalm?
2. Each of these stanzas begins with a similar theme. What is that theme, and where does it occur?
3. What other segments are left after you identify the two main stanzas?
4. In the opening to the Psalm, the author proposes to give his readers a “dark saying” or “riddle.” This word appears most frequently in Judges 14, where it is translated “riddle.”
  - (a) What is the nature of a “riddle” in Judges 14?
  - (b) Can you identify a comparable “riddle,” and its solution, in Psalm 49?
5. What two kinds of people does the Psalm contrast, and how do they differ from one another?

### **Psalm 50, Asaph**

1. Identify the main divisions of the Psalm, by observing
  - (a) the use of Selah
  - (b) distinctions between those who are being addressed.
2. God’s call to the heavens and earth in v. 4 suggest that this Psalm belongs to a literary form that we have seen elsewhere, for example, Deut 32 (cf. v. 1); Isa 1-3 (cf. 1:2). What is this form, and what cultural allusions does it carry with it? You might enjoy reviewing the notes on Isaiah 1, <http://cyber-chapel.org/sermons/isaiah/notes/Isaiah1.pdf>

## Study Questions on the Psalms

3. What two categories of people does God address?
4. What message does he have for each of them? Pay attention in each case to
  - (a) the warning of sin to avoid;
  - (b) the instruction of how to please God more closely.
5. Compare the message of this Psalm with 1 Sam 15:22 and Heb 13:10-16. Can you think of other passages that also develop this theme?

### Psalms 51-71, David

#### Psalm 51

1. Robertson suggests that this and Psalm 52 are associated with the two Levitical summons in Psalms 49-50. Compare the headings of Psalms 51 and 52 with the audiences in the previous two. Why might the editor have grouped these Psalms together in this way?
2. This Psalm is one of several that reflect the sad history of 2 Sam 11-12. Others associated with this time are Psalms 6, 32, and 38. Reread these, and see if you can suggest where in the history David might have prayed them.
3. Think about the overall structure of the Psalm. Here are some landmarks to consider:
  - (a) Shifts between imperative verbs (in this case, requests) and indicative verbs (statements, promises)
  - (b) The time associated with the indicative verbs (confession of past acts vs. promise of future acts)
  - (c) The scope of the prayer (David personally, vs. the nation)
4. In spite of the wrong done to Uriah and Bathsheba, David insists, “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned” (v. 4).
  - (a) What other biblical passages can you find that emphasize that sin is ultimately against God, not man? Use the Treasury (or hint a).
  - (b) Can you explain why David can make this distinction?
5. What is the syntactic connection of “that thou mightest be justified ...” in v. 4?
6. Reread Psalm 32. How does David fulfill the promise that he makes in 51:13?
7. Why should David’s personal sin have anything to do with the nation as a whole, vv. 18-19?
8. Hints:
  - (a) Gen 39; Exod 16; Lev 6; Luke 15; Acts 5

#### Psalm 52

1. Review the history of the event described in the Psalm’s title (contained in 1 Samuel 21-22).

## Study Questions on the Psalms

2. Two people are named in the title to the Psalm: Doeg, and Saul. Commentators disagree about which of the two is being described in the Psalm. Some people feel that the body of the Psalm must be about Saul rather than Doeg, because the person involved is said to be a “mighty man” (v. 1), and because he is involved in deceit (vv. 2-4). Evaluate this claim from the history, and from the editor’s placement of the Psalm.
3. Suggest a division of the Psalm into sections, based on
  - (a) The Selahs
  - (b) Changes in how the writer speaks of God.
4. Can you discern an inclusio around the Psalm?
  - (a) Compare the villain’s actions in v. 1 with David’s in v. 9.
  - (b) Use Strong’s numbers to compare “goodness” in v. 1 and “mercy” in v. 8.
  - (c) What additional language draws this latter pair even closer together?
5. How does David contrast himself with the enemy in vv. 6-8?
  - (a) What verse in Psalm 49 anticipates the description of the enemy in these verses?
6. This Psalm doesn’t fit cleanly into the genres we usually experience (Lament, Confidence, Hymn, Kingship, Remembrance, Thanksgiving, Wisdom).
  - (a) Which of these genres would seem most appropriate for it?
  - (b) It has been compared with Isa 22:15-19. How would this comparison be appropriate in the context of Psalms 49-52?

### **Psalms 53-60, David’s Specific Enemies**

1. Five of these eight Psalms have headings identifying specific enemies that David has encountered in the past. Find the corresponding episodes using the Treasury (or Hint a), and read over the historical context.
2. We will see that the other three can be associated with specific episodes in David’s life where he faced different adversaries. Read these three Psalms carefully and try to think of episodes where they fit.
3. Doeg (Psalm 52) was also an enemy of David, and it may be that we should consider that Psalm along with these eight. If we do that, what pattern of ethnicity do we see in the organization of all nine Psalms as suggested by the headings?
4. Hints
  - (a) 1 Sam 19, 21-26; 2 Sam 8, 15-17

### **Psalm 53**

1. Compare this Psalm with Psalm 14. How does it differ?

## Study Questions on the Psalms

2. Can you think why the editor might have chosen to include this Psalm, a near-duplicate of one he has already used, with a collection of those that describe David's enemies? (Look at the Strong's entry to see the Hebrew word for "fool," or see Hint a.)
3. How does the reference to an enemy "encamping" against David (v. 5) fit this period of time? Who would this enemy be? (Cf. 1 Samuel 26; note the Strong's entries on "pitched," 26:3, 5).
4. Hints:
  - (a) "Fool" is the Hebrew word *nabal*. The first line is literally, "*nabal* has said in his heart, there is no God."

### **Psalm 54**

1. This Psalm is a concise example of the lament. Recall the components that a lament may include: Invocation, Plea to God for help, Complaints describing the problem, Confession of sin or an assertion of innocence, Curse of enemies (imprecation), Confidence in God's response, and Hymn or blessing. How many of these can you find in this Psalm?
2. What was the ethnic affiliation of the people of Ziph (Title; 1 Chr 2:42)?
3. Why does David refer to these enemies as "strangers" (v. 3)?

### **Psalm 55**

1. While this Psalm has no historical title, it twice alludes (vv. 12-14, 20-21) to someone who has betrayed David. From your knowledge of David's life (or 2 Samuel 15-17), who is this likely to be?
2. The repetition of this section suggests that the Psalm has two parts, with one description of betrayal in each. Let's see if we can discern the overall structure of the Psalm from this hint.
  - (a) What is the subject of the verses that immediately follow 20-21?
  - (b) Can you find similar material immediately after 12-14?
  - (c) Now compare the material before 12-14 with that before 20-21. How are they related?
3. What remedy does David propose to seek from this opposition (vv. 6-7), and how does it fit our reconstruction of the setting of the Psalm?
4. v. 17 describes David's agony of soul over his situation as persisting day and night.
  - (a) What earlier group of Psalms did we study that showed David's nighttime agony?
  - (b) What was the setting of that group of Psalms?

### **Psalm 56, David in Gath**

1. From this Psalm through Psalm 60, and once more in Psalm 16, we have poems with the heading *Michtam*. The most likely meaning of this heading is "epigram," and it appears to mark Psalms of David that are characterized by a pithy saying, often marked either by repetition or a



## Study Questions on the Psalms

phrase such as “I have said.” As you read each of these Psalms, see if you can figure out what is its *Michtam*, its core saying.

2. The history behind this Psalm is in 1 Sam 21:10-22:1. Read it over. On the basis of the history, can you explain the word “took” (“seized”) in the heading?
3. Based on internal repetitions, how would you divide the Psalm into stanzas?
4. What progression can you find between the stanzas?
5. What progression is there between v. 3 and v. 4?
6. What are the two parts of vv. 5-9?
7. Compare v. 13 with 116:7-9. How has the author of 116 drawn strength from Psalm 56?
8. This and the next two Psalms are three of the four Psalms whose dedication to the Chief Musician includes the phrase, “Al-Taschith.” (The other is Psalm 74.) The phrase means “Do not destroy,” and it appears elsewhere at Deut 9:26; 1 Sam 26:9; and Isa 65:8. Read these passages in their context. What common theme do they have that would apply to David in the setting of these Psalms?

### ***Psalm 57, In the Cave with Saul***

1. Use the TSK (or Hint a) to find occasions in David’s flight from Saul that involve a cave.
2. What expressions in the Psalm contrast with David’s situation in a cave?
3. How would you divide the Psalm into stanzas, and why?
4. What are the two parts of each stanza, and how do they correspond?
5. What divine attributes encourage David in the cave?
6. What is the *Michtam* for this Psalm?
7. Hints:
  - (a) 1 Samuel 22, 24

### ***Psalm 58, Irresponsible Judges***

1. This Psalm, like 53 and 55, has no historical heading. Why do you suppose it is included with other Psalms describing opposition to the kingdom by government officials (King Saul, the army of Edom)? Use your concordance or Bible software (or hint a) to see what kind of people are called judges or do judgment.
2. What theme from Psalm 53 (and Psalm 14) is repeated in this Psalm?
3. What two verses in this Psalm share several words in common?
4. Guided by this correspondence, can you find a chiasm in this Psalm?
5. Why are the imprecations in vv. 6-9 appropriate in this context?
6. What is the *Michtam* for this Psalm?

## Study Questions on the Psalms

7. Hints:

(a) 1Sa 8:4; 2Sa 15:4; 1Ki 3:9, 28; 2Ki 15:5

### ***Psalm 59, When Saul Watched the House***

1. Read over the setting for this Psalm in 1 Sam 19:11-18. Can you find any allusions to this history in the body of the Psalm?
2. What is the *Michtam* for this Psalm? Compare vv 9-10 with 17. How are they alike? How do they differ?
3. The repeated motto divides the Psalm into two parts.
  - (a) What parallels can you find between them?
  - (b) Can you find structure within the parallel parts?
  - (c) When we find multiple parallel panels, we should look for some distinction in theme or emphasis among them. Can you discern any distinction between these two parts?
4. Vv. 5 and 8 mention the heathen.
  - (a) Why does David bring them up in a Psalm about the opposition he faced from Saul?
  - (b) Go back over all of Psalms 52-60. Clearly 52, 56, and 60 concern Gentiles, but how many of the others also mention the “nations,” “gentiles,” or “peoples” (plural—you may have to recall from the exposition, since the KJV regularly translates “peoples” as singular)?
5. Pay attention to the description of David’s adversaries as dogs (vv. 6-7; 14-15)
  - (a) There is no difference in Hebrew between the verbal forms in these two passages—our translators are making an interpretive point by translating the verbs in 6-7 as indicatives but those in 14-15 as requests. (The verb forms themselves could be either.)
    - i. Why do you think they made this change?
    - ii. Do you agree with it?
  - (b) Dogs in the Bible are not like the house pets we have in our society. A Bible dictionary is a good tool to read about this kind of background (or see Hint a). How does this image of the dogs correspond to the historical setting of the Psalm?

6. Hints:

(a) Bible dictionary entries on dogs:

ISBE: The pariah dogs of Syria and Palestine resemble the jackals, especially in color and in the tail, differing in their greater size and in the shape of muzzle and ears. It is fair to assume that they are much the same as existed in Bible times. They are in general meek and harmless creatures, and are valuable as scavengers, but disturb the night with their barking. Each quarter of the city has its own pack of dogs, which vigorously resents any invasion of its territory. A dog which for any reason finds itself in foreign territory gets home as quickly as possible, and is lucky if it does not have to run the gauntlet of a pack of vicious foes.  
Easton: There were also then as now troops of semi-wild dogs that wandered about

## Study Questions on the Psalms

devouring dead bodies and the offal of the streets (1Ki 14:11) (1Ki 16:4) (1Ki 21:19),(1Ki 21:23) (1Ki 22:38) (Psa 59:6),(Psa 59:14)

### ***Psalm 60, At War with Edom***

1. The setting is in the context of David's wars with Edom.
  - (a) Read over the other descriptions of these wars, in 2 Sam 8:3-14; 1 Chr 18:5-13; and 1 Ki 11:14-17. See if you can piece together an overall description of what went on.
  - (b) Where would this Psalm fit in your overall reconstruction?
2. What is the *Michtam* for this Psalm?
3. Note the changes in speaker as you move through the Psalm. On this basis, what structure would you suggest for it?
4. The verb "tremble" in v. 2 (רָעַד, Strong 7493) is a favorite in Book 2 which has four out of the six instances in the Psalter). Look at the others in your Concordance or Bible software (or Hint a) and see if you can find one that might reinforce what David is saying here.
5. Note the places over which God claims dominion.
  - (a) Are these the names of Gentile places, or of Israelite ones? What does this observation suggest? (Compare Ps 87.)
  - (b) Find these places on a map. Do you see a general pattern in the order of the names?
6. Hints
  - (a) Ps. 18:7; 46:3; 60:2; 68:8; 72:16; 77:18

### **Psalms 61-71, Dialog of the Kings**

1. What leads us to separate Psalm 72 off from the Psalms that remain in Book 2?
2. Read over these eleven Psalms and see if you can discern clusters among them. Look for:
  - (a) Whether the predominant tone of the Psalm is lament or thanksgiving;
  - (b) In laments, whether or not the speaker calls for God's judgment on his enemies.

### ***Psalms 61-64, Laments of the Exiled King***

1. What sets these laments of David apart from most of the laments in 52-60? (Notice how he describes himself in Psalms 61 and 63, and the geographical perspective from which he writes.)

### **Psalm 61, Prayer for the King's Preservation**

1. Contrast David's location when he writes this Psalm, and where he wants to be in the future.
2. Why does he want to change his location?
3. What two things does David want to continue forever, according to the last part of the Psalm?

# Study Questions on the Psalms

## **Psalm 62, Exhortations to Two Kinds of People**

1. How do the *Selahs* divide the Psalm?
2. What other marks reinforce this division?
3. To whom does David speak in the first stanza?
4. To whom does he speak in the second?
5. How does he combine and extend these two categories in the third stanza?
6. What two possessions of God form the basis of his exhortations?

## **Psalm 63, Physical and Spiritual Thirst**

1. As in Psalm 61, where is David as he writes, and where does he want to be?
2. How does his physical condition reflect his spiritual feelings?
3. Contrast his attitude in the morning and in the evening. How are these related to each other?
4. What overall alternation (built on contrast) gives structure to the Psalm?
5. How do the themes of the two panels differ from each other?

## **Psalm 64, Universal Insight**

1. Look for the usual features of a lament (plea, complaint, confidence, praise).
2. What is the nature of the attack that is directed against David?
3. Note the repetition of “all” in the last three verses. What are the ultimate results of wicked persecution?

## ***Psalms 65-68, Praise for God’s Provision***

1. How do the titles of these four Psalms differ from those of the other Psalms in 61-71?
2. How are these distinctive titles appropriate, given the theme of these Psalms?

## **Psalm 65, God’s Grace, Might, and Plenty**

1. The three stanzas in this Psalm are distinguished by their themes. Read the Psalm over several times and see what different acts of God are described in each section.
2. How does this Psalm emphasize David’s return to the temple?

## **Psalm 66, Invitation to Experience God**

1. See if you can figure out the structure of this Psalm, using these clues.
  - (a) Three instances of *Selah*
  - (b) A repeated invitation
  - (c) A shift from plural pronouns to singular

## Study Questions on the Psalms

2. My analysis shows two major stanzas, each with three parts that correspond with each other, ABC-ABC. If you find something similar, think about how the corresponding members of each stanza relate to one another.
3. How does the contrast between the first and the second stanza align with the notion that Book 2 is focused on communicating God's kingdom to all the world?

### **Psalm 67, Expanding the Levitical Blessing**

1. How might this Psalm be inspired by Num 6:23-27?
2. For what group of people was that blessing intended?
3. How does the Psalmist broaden this scope in vv. 2, 4, and 7? (In fact, every instance of the word "people" in this Psalm is also plural, and should be translated "peoples.")
4. As with Psalm 66, how does this shift align with the notion of Book 2 as communication?
5. How would you divide the Psalm into sections?
6. What does the Psalmist request in each section?

### **Psalm 68, The March of God to his Dwellingplace**

1. How many distinct names and titles for God can you find in the Psalm?
2. How many mountains can you find named or alluded to in this Psalm?
3. The Psalm contains many allusions to events from Israel's past history.
  - (a) See how many you can recognize.
  - (b) Do they fall into any recognizable order?
4. Compare 1-4 with 32-35. How many parallels can you find between them?
5. What portion of Israel's history is recalled in vv. 5-10? Why? (Note also the parallel to v. 1 in Num 10:35.)
6. What kinds of activities are in view in 11-23?
  - (a) Note parallels between 11-14 and Judges 5.
  - (b) There are several references to Bashan in this passage. Use your concordance or hint a to recall what happened in Bashan.
  - (c) 15-16 compare the hill of Bashan with "the hill which God desireth to dwell in."
    - i. What hill was that?
    - ii. How did Israel come into possession of it?
7. What kind of activities are in view in 24-35?
8. These verses mention God's sanctuary (v. 24) and temple (29). What is the relation between the construction of this facility, and the events of 11-23?
  - (a) Compare the introduction to 2 Samuel 7.

## Study Questions on the Psalms

- (b) How was the construction of the temple (and earlier, the tabernacle) funded?
  - i. Where did David get the resources he provided for the temple, 1 Chr 29:2?
  - ii. How about the materials for the tabernacle, Exod 25:1-9? Where did slaves get such wealth?
- 9. Paul quotes v. 18 in Eph 4:8. Compare and contrast the two passages. We will discuss these differences in the exposition.
- 10. Hints
  - (a) Num 21:33-35; Deut 3:1-7

### Psalm 68 and Ephesians 4:8

1. The main theme we discovered in Psalm 68 is that the Lord's victories through Israel's history lead to the establishment of his sanctuary on Mount Zion. This theme of a divine warrior erecting a temple to celebrate his victory is ubiquitous in ancient near eastern thought, and can be discerned in other OT passages as well. See if you can identify the divine warfare and the temple in Exodus 15 and (less clearly) Psalm 29.
2. The book of Ephesians grows out of Paul's prayer in 1:18-19 that the Ephesians would know three things.
  - (a) What are these three things?
  - (b) He discusses the answers to these questions in inverse (chiastic) order in the rest of the book. See if you can find these three sections. (Hint: compare 1:18 with 4:1-6; my outline of the entire book is at <https://www.cyber-chapel.org/sermons/ephesians/notes/Overview%20of%20Ephesians.pdf>.)
3. How does 1:20-2:10 reflect the notion of divine warfare?
  - (a) Who are the parties to the conflict?
  - (b) What is the outcome to the battle?
4. How does 2:11-3:13 reflect the image of building a temple?
  - (a) Who does the building?
  - (b) What are the materials?
5. In the outline referenced above, I suggest that chapters 4-6 cover the same themes as 1-3, but in reverse order, describing how we are involved in the events of the first three chapters.
  - (a) Where in chapters 4-6 do we see echoes of the divine warfare?
  - (b) Where do we see details on how the temple is constructed?
6. Now concentrate on Paul's quotation of Psalm 68:18 in Eph 4:8.
  - (a) Who are the captives whom he has taken?
  - (b) Paul changes the Psalm's "received gifts among men" to "gave gifts to men."

## Study Questions on the Psalms

- i. Recall our exposition of Psalm 68:19. What was the attitude does David predict for those whom he has conquered and whose wealth he has taken?
  - ii. What is the relation between the captives in Eph 4:8 and the gifts discussed in the context of this verse?
- (c) To what does “ascended” refer in Ps 68:18, and in Eph 4:8?
- i. Where did David ascend, and what did he accomplish there?
  - ii. Where did our Lord ascend, and what did he accomplish there? Cf. John 16:7

### ***Psalms 69-71, Committing Judgment to the Lord***

#### **Psalm 69**

1. Next to Psalm 22, this Psalm is the most frequently quoted in the NT. How many allusions or citations can you find? Scanning over the entries in the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge for each verse can lead you to relevant references, or consult the list in Hint a.
2. How does the tone of the Psalm shift at v. 30?
3. Vv. 1-29 appear to be organized as two parallel panels, divided at the middle of v. 13, with numerous verbal correspondences among them.
  - (a) How many correspondences can you find?
  - (b) Some sections in the second panel do not have clear correspondences in the first.
    - i. What are they?
    - ii. How do these additions show the development of David’s thought in moving from the first panel to the second?
4. This is one of the imprecatory Psalms, with an extensive prayer asking God to judge David’s enemies.
  - (a) Some people think that these imprecations are inconsistent with NT teaching. Would the NT writers who quote this Psalm agree? (Look for NT citations within the imprecatory section.)
  - (b) How can we reconcile these imprecations with our Lord’s instructions to love and bless our enemies?
    - i. Compare our discussion on Psalm 35, [https://www.cyber-chapel.org/sermons/psalms/notes/Ps\\_34thru41.pdf](https://www.cyber-chapel.org/sermons/psalms/notes/Ps_34thru41.pdf)
    - ii. Consider the progress from Psalms 61-64, through 65-68, and now into the last three Psalms.
      - A. Psalms 61-64 and 69-71 are all laments. How do the last three differ from the first four with respect to imprecations?
      - B. How might this change be related to the lessons of the intervening Psalms 65-68?
5. Like vv. 1-29, vv. 30-36 also are organized into two parallel sections.

## Study Questions on the Psalms

- (a) Find these sections.
  - (b) How does the thought progress from the first to the second?
6. Hints:
- (a) Matt 23:38; 27:34; Mark 15:23; John 2:17; 15:25; 19:28-29; Acts 1:20; Rom 11:9-10; 15:3

### **Psalms 70-71**

1. What is unusual about the heading of Psalm 71?
2. What did this circumstance reflect with Psalm 10 and Psalm 43?
3. Compare Psalm 70 with Psalm 40. What is the relation between the two?
4. What echoes of the following Psalms can you find in Psalm 71? 22:1, 10, 11, 19; 31:1-3; 35:4, 26; 38:22; 40:13, 14
5. Do the answers to the previous two questions help you understand the title of the pair 70-71?
6. Viewing the pair as a single composition, look for repetitions of these themes that mark two stanzas: request for God to “make haste,” imprecations, references to youth and old age.
7. How do the two stanzas differ in the motive that they give God for answering David’s request?

### **Psalm 72, Solomon**

1. How are verses 1 and 18-19 like each other and different from the verses between them?
2. Compare this Psalm with the last words of David in 2 Sam 23:1-7.
  - (a) What two characteristics of the ideal human ruler did God describe to David in 2 Sam 3:3-4?
  - (b) Where is each of these described in the Psalm?
  - (c) Based on repetition of these characteristics, can you discern two stanzas in the Psalm?
3. Look through the rest of the Psalter in the light of v. 20.
  - (a) Is book 2 really the end of David’s Psalms?
  - (b) The inscription “for Solomon” is the same construction elsewhere used to indicate authorship (in the common expressions “by David,” “by Asaph,” “by the sons of Korah”). If Solomon wrote this Psalm, knowing of David’s last words in 2 Samuel 23, what might he have meant by v. 20?



# Study Questions on the Psalms

## Book 3, Pss 73-89: Desolation

### Overview of Book 3

1. Skim over this book (Psalms 73-89), paying special attention to the headings. How are the Psalms grouped?
2. Who is Asaph?
  - (a) Use your Bible software (or Hint a) to see where else he is referred to in the Bible.
  - (b) How do those references explain why he would write Psalms, and what perspective would you expect him to take?
  - (c) What special ability did he have, according to 2 Chr 29:30?
3. Compare and contrast Books 2 and 3 by comparing the first two Psalms of each, and the last two Psalms of each.
4. Hints
  - (a) 1 Chronicles 15-16

### Psalms 73-74, Opening Laments

#### Psalm 73

1. The sections of this Psalm are marked mainly by changes in Asaph's attitude—toward God, toward God's people, toward the wicked. It is reflected in shifts in the pronouns (I/they, I/thou, etc.). What sections can you discern?
2. Can you find any symmetry among them, based on Asaph's attitude? (The pronouns help, but to a lesser degree.)
3. Based on the number of verses in each section, how does Asaph's emphasis shift as you move from the first half of the Psalm to the second?
4. What theological problem bothers Asaph?
5. How should one seek to answer such questions, according to v. 17?
6. What twofold answer to this problem does he set forth in 17-28?
7. Structurally, how does he help the reader to recognize both points of this answer?
8. Compare the beginning and the end (v. 28) of the Psalm. What change do you see in the Psalmist's language? What lesson has he learned? Compare John 21:21-22.

# Study Questions on the Psalms

## Psalm 74

1. This is one of four psalms designated “Altaschith” in the subscript (in our version, at the head of the following psalm). The others are 56, 57, and 58. “Altaschith” means “Do not destroy.” Why is this designation appropriate to this Psalm?
2. The “mode” of a verb is its characteristic as a statement (indicative mode), request (imperative mode), or query (interrogative mode). As Asaph talks to God, the modes of his verbs change, dividing the Psalm into five parts. What are those parts?
3. The two indicative paragraphs differ in the kinds of events that they describe. Please characterize the events in each paragraph.
4. Historically, what events might Asaph have in view in verses 4-9, and why are they of interest to him? Here are some references, to both biblical and secular history:

With v. 7, compare 2 Kings 25:9 and Josephus, “Jewish Wars,” 6.265-266,

and besides, one of those who went into the place ahead of Caesar [Titus], when he ran so hastily out to restrain the soldiers, and threw the fire upon the hinges of the gate, in the dark; whereby the flame burst out from within the holy house itself immediately, when the commanders retired, and Caesar with them, and when no one any longer forbade those who were without to set fire to it. And thus was the holy house burnt down, without Caesar's approbation.

With v. 9, compare the date of the last prophet (Malachi, about 420 BC) with that of the events described in 1 Macc 54-59,

Now the fifteenth day of the month Casleu, in the hundred forty and fifth year, they [the forces of Antiochus Epiphanes] set up the abomination of desolation upon the altar, and builded idol altars throughout the cities of Juda on every side; And burnt incense at the doors of their houses, and in the streets. And when they had rent in pieces the books of the law which they found, they burnt them with fire. And whosoever was found with any the book of the testament, or if any committed to the law, the king's commandment was, that they should put him to death. Thus did they by their authority unto the Israelites every month, to as many as were found in the cities. Now the five and twentieth day of the month they did sacrifice upon the idol altar, which was upon the altar of God.

With v. 4, compare Josephus, “Jewish Wars,” 6.316,

And now the Romans, upon the flight of the seditious into the city, and upon the burning of the holy house itself, and of all the buildings around it, brought their ensigns to the temple and set them opposite its eastern gate; and there did they offer sacrifices to them, and there did they make Titus emperor, with the greatest acclamations of joy.

5. When did Asaph live, in comparison with the dates of these events? There is a further puzzle: no one of these events satisfies all three descriptions, and the Psalm was certainly written before the third.
6. How might 2 Chr 29:30 resolve these puzzles?
7. To what events do verses 12-17 refer, and how are they related to the gods of the heathen?
8. To what events do vv. 13,15 refer? I will explain their significance in the light of ancient near eastern mythology.
9. What motive does Asaph repeatedly lift up to God in asking for his deliverance? Note the second person possessive pronouns throughout the Psalm, and compare Ezek 36:22.
10. What lesson does this Psalm teach us about how we should respond to the Bible's prophecies about the coming times of trouble?

# Study Questions on the Psalms

## Psalms 75-76, God's Kingship

1. How does the tone of these two psalms contrast with that of Psalms 73-74?
2. These two Psalms are described as "a Psalm, a Song." This double title appears in the following Psalms: 30:1; 48:1; 65:1; 66:1; 67:1; 68:1; 75:1; 76:1; 83:1; 87:1; 88:1; 92:1; 98:1; 101:1; 108:1.
  - (a) What do most of these Psalms have in common?
  - (b) What exceptions can you find, that we will need to consider more closely?

## Psalm 75, Resolve of the Messianic King

1. The shift of pronouns between v. 1 and the rest of the Psalm is critical to understanding this Psalm. (If you're reading a version other than the KJV, you will probably reach a different answer to these questions than if you're reading the KJV. I will follow the KJV.)
  - (a) Who is speaking in v. 1?
  - (b) Who is speaking in vv. 2-3?
  - (c) Who is speaking in vv. 4-9?
2. What does it mean for the Lord's name to be near (v. 1)?
3. If someone "receives the congregation" (v. 2), somebody else must give it. How does Psalm 2 help your understanding of this Psalm?
4. What period of time is in view in vv. 2-9?

## Psalm 76, God's Victory over the Enemy

1. It has been suggested that Psalm 76 describes God's victory over the army of Sennacherib described in Isaiah 36-37.
  - (a) What parallels can you find between the Psalm and the historical description?
  - (b) How could Asaph, living in the time of David, describe this event three hundred years later?

## Psalms 77-83, God's Judgment on a Sinful Nation

1. We have suggested that most of Book 3 follows the same structure as Book 2. This correspondence aligns Psalms 77-83 with Psalms 49-60. What was the theme of those chapters in Book 2?
2. I will suggest that the structure of 77-83 is organized symmetrically around Psalm 80, promising the coming of the Son of Man, with the Psalms on either side recapitulating the main themes of the first four Psalms.
  - (a) What was the basis for hope in Psalm 73?
  - (b) How about 74?

## Study Questions on the Psalms

(c) How about 75-76?

(d) Read over 77-79 and 81-83, and see if you can detect these themes there.

### Psalm 77

1. Notice the pronouns throughout the Psalm. How and where do they change?
2. What verb appears repeatedly in this Psalm that links it to the lesson of Psalm 74?
3. Following the note in the KJV for v. 2 (that the word translated “sore” is really “hand”), how does this verse contrast with the last verse in the Psalm?
4. How do the questions in vv. 7-9 challenge the Lord’s revelation of himself in Ex 34:6?
5. v. 10 is probably best understood as a challenge to another aspect of God’s revelation of himself. Note that “I will remember” is in italics (not in the Hebrew). The Hebrew word translated “the years” is identical in form with a word meaning “the change.”
  - (a) What claim did God make for his right hand in Exod 15:6, 12?
  - (b) What would it mean for the Lord’s right hand to change?
6. Consider vv. 11-15.
  - (a) How do they echo Ex 15:11?
  - (b) How do they answer the complaint of v. 10?
  - (c) What event from Israel’s history is in view here?
7. How might 16-19 answer the complaint of vv. 7-9?

### Psalm 78

1. What refrain divides vv. 1-11 into three parts?
2. How does this refrain recall the lesson of Psalm 74?
3. Vv. 12-72 offer two panels of an alternation.
  - (a) What expression in v. 12 is repeated later to mark the start of the second panel?
  - (b) In each panel, look for the same sequence of events.
    - i. If you need help, see hint a.
    - ii. How does this pattern recall Judg 2:11-18, and indeed the whole book of Judges?
    - iii. What element from the first panel and from Judges 2 is missing in the second panel?  
Can you suggest why?
4. How does the final element of the alternation recall the encouragement of Psalms 75-76?
5. Hints

## Study Questions on the Psalms

- (a) Look for an account of God's gracious acts, the rebellion of the people, divine anger and punishment, and God's restored favor.

### Psalm 79

1. What period of Israel's history does this Psalm likely describe?
2. How does it continue the theme of Psalm 74?
3. Note the prevalence of the word "heathen" in the Psalm (the densest in the Psalms). The second densest is Psalm 9-10. Review that Psalm, and contrast what the two Psalms are saying about the heathen.
4. Recall the common elements of a lament: Invocation, Plea to God for help, Complaint, Confession of sin or an assertion of innocence, Curse of enemies (imprecation), Confidence in God's response, Hymn or blessing.
  - (a) How many of these can you find in this Psalm?
  - (b) What grammatical feature is repeated in the two Plea sections and nowhere else in the Psalm?
  - (c) Based on repetitions of the different elements of the lament, what structure would you propose for the Psalm?
  - (d) Which of these features aligns this Psalm with the lesson of Psalm 73?
5. On what basis does Asaph ask God to intervene? Note the occurrences of the second person singular possessives "thy," "thine."
6. What three kinds of speech toward God are mentioned in vv. 11-13?

### Psalm 80

1. The LXX includes in the title of this Psalm the words, "concerning the Assyrian." Note the tribes mentioned in vv. 1-2.
  - (a) What period in Israel's history does this Psalm likely describe?
  - (b) How does that make it a good partner for Psalm 79?
  - (c) How could Asaph, in the time of David, have written these Psalms?
2. The structure of this psalm is marked by a repeated refrain.
  - (a) What is it, and where does it occur?
  - (b) How is this refrain appropriate to the historical context you discerned in question 1a? (What two senses might the first clause of the refrain have?)
3. How does the refrain vary from one instance to another? What pattern do you see in this variation?

## Study Questions on the Psalms

4. What does the request “turn us” mean? Suggestion: look at the parallels available through the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge in your Bible SW. What reason for the nation's suffering does this verb suggest?
5. Compare and contrast the distinct stanzas marked off by the refrain, in terms of length and subject matter. Can you suggest how the earlier stanzas function with respect to the last one?
6. Given v. 1, which of the tribes in v. 2 would you expect to be mentioned, and which would you not expect?
7. How does Num 2 explain the inclusion of the unexpected tribe? You might also find the ISBE (International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia) article on this tribe helpful (available as a free module in e-Sword and other Bible sw).
8. In what two ways does God show his anger against his people (vv. 5, 6)?
9. Whom does the metaphor of the vine represent (vv. 8-16, cf. Isa 5:1-7; Ezek 17), and from where does Asaph borrow it (Gen 49:22)?
10. Whom does the “son of Man” represent (v. 17)? Look up the Hebrew word translated “branch” in v. 15 (using Strongs), and consider the background of “man of thy right hand” in the light of v. 2.
11. In the light of the refrain, how does v.18 represent the climax of the Psalm?
12. The subscript of this Psalm (“Gittith,” 81:1) probably refers to the winepress, making this Psalm appropriate for the feast of Tabernacles. Why would a vintage theme be appropriate for this Psalm?

### Psalm 81

1. The word translated “time appointed” in v. 3 is extremely rare, but based on other Semitic languages, it probably refers to the full moon.
  - (a) When in Israel’s sacred calendar were both the new moon and the full moon celebrated with holy days? See Leviticus 23; Numbers 28.
  - (b) What other holy day was also during this period? (Hint: the Hebrew verb forms encourage us to read vv. 13-16 as future, “Oh that Israel would walk in my ways ... I would ...”)
  - (c) How might this third holy day be reflected in the Psalm?
2. v. 7 mentions several episodes during the time of the Exodus. Can you find the historical passages that describe them? (Hint a)
3. What passage is being quoted in vv. 8-10? (Hint b)
4. Hints
  - (a) Exod 3:7; 19:16; Num 20:13
  - (b) Exodus 20

# Study Questions on the Psalms

## Psalm 82

1. The major question in this Psalm is the identity of the “gods” (vv. 1, 6). The word (Strong 430) is the common word for “gods,” often used of the true God (as indeed in the first word of v. 1).
  - (a) Can you find this word, translated differently, in Exod 21:6; 22:8, 9? (Hint a)
  - (b) How does Exod 22:28 help clarify this usage? (I would prefer to render “gods” as “God” here.)
  - (c) What does this usage teach about the responsibility of civil magistrates? Compare Rom 13:1-2; Dan 4:17.
2. I have suggested that this Psalm corresponds to the end of Psalm 78, and to the kingship theme of Psalms 75-76.
  - (a) How does this interpretation of “gods” align with this structure?
  - (b) Contrast the behavior described at the end of Psalm 78 with that in this Psalm.
3. Our Lord quotes this Psalm in John 10:34-36. In the light of our interpretation of the word, can you explain his argument?
4. Hints
  - (a) The word is translated “judges.”

## Psalm 83

1. The description of the enemies in vv. 5-8 recalls the attack against Judah in the days of Jehoshaphat, recorded in 2 Chronicles 20.
  - (a) Why would a Psalm about that event be especially the concern of Asaph?
  - (b) We suggested that Psalms 46-48, by the sons of Korah, also describe different phases of this battle. Review those Psalms and 2 Chronicles 20. Where in the timeline is the attitude of Psalm 83 appropriate?
2. Vv. 9-11 look back to Israel’s victories in the book of Judges.
  - (a) See if you can find the battles described here.
  - (b) What is unusual about the order in which Asaph mentions these adversaries?
3. Compare the pronouns in this Psalm with the other imprecatory Psalm in this section, Psalm 79. What is the focus of Asaph’s concern in both Psalms?
4. What is the purpose for which Asaph prays for God’s judgment to fall on the adversaries?
5. This is the third and last of the Gittith Psalms (after Psalms 7 and 80). The reference to the winepress associates the Psalm with the harvest celebration at the feast of Tabernacles. Compare and contrast the relevance of each of these Psalms to that festival.

# Study Questions on the Psalms

## Psalms 84-87, Restoration

1. Justify the section break here by comparing these Psalms with the previous seven in terms of
  - (a) authorship
  - (b) theme
  - (c) Use of divine names
2. These Psalms have strong ties to Psalm 80, the Messianic Psalm at the center of the judgment section (77-83), or to other of the Psalms in this section. How many of these ties can you find?

## Psalm 84

1. Compare this Psalm, the first by the sons of Korah in Book 3, with their first contribution overall, Psalm 42-43.
  - (a) What common interest do they show?
  - (b) Why is this appropriate given the history of the sons of Korah? Recall our discussion around those earlier Psalms.
2. What different routes to blessing does this Psalm present?
3. Combining these declarations of blessing with the Selahs, how would you outline this Psalm?
4. What is the source of the blessing in each of these sections?

## Psalm 85

1. Considering the first verse, when was this Psalm most likely written?
2. Contrast vv. 4-7 with 1-3.
  - (a) What two kinds of restoration are in view?
  - (b) How might the time of Ezra-Nehemiah fit this Psalm?
3. What attributes of God's rule offer hope to his people who seek him? Compare Ps 89:14; Isa 16:5.

## Psalm 86

1. How is this Psalm different from the other Psalms in this section?
2. Considering the links of other Psalms in this section to the judgment section, why might the editor have included a Psalm of David here? And why this Psalm?
3. v. 15 is a close echo of a verse from the Pentateuch that we have often seen cited in the Psalms and elsewhere. What is it? (Hint a)
4. It has been suggested that this Psalm is a chiasm around v. 10, marked by repetitions of "thy servant," "plenteous in mercy," descriptions of David's trouble, and "glorify thy name."



## Study Questions on the Psalms

- (a) Identify these markers.
  - (b) Find a grammatically coherent paragraph around each one
  - (c) Summarize the Psalm by summarizing these paragraphs.
5. Hints
- (a) Read Exodus 34.

### Psalm 87

1. This Psalm emphasizes that Gentiles will one day be citizens of Zion.
  - (a) Where was this outcome anticipated in the judgment section (Psalms 77-83)?
  - (b) How might this outcome be anticipated in Psalm 86?
  - (c) What nation is indicated by “Rahab” in v. 4? Compare Isa 51:9-10.
  - (d) In what way does this Psalm correspond to Psalm 72, at the end of Book 2?
2. The musical subscription of this Psalm “Mahalath Leannoth” probably means “Dancings, shoutings.” The first of these terms also appears at the end of Psalm 52.
  - (a) When in the life of David was there dancing? Use your concordance, or Hint a.
  - (b) Do any of these episodes suggest a setting for this Psalm?
3. The “chief musician” subscript to this Psalm is preceded by a repetition of the attribution to the sons of Korah. Can you think of any reason why this might have been done?
4. Hints
  - (a) The verb appears in David’s history in 1 Sam. 18:6; 21:11; 29:5; 30:16; 2 Sam. 6:14, 16.

### Psalms 88-89, Concluding Lament

1. How are the authors of these two Psalms described?
2. These two names occur together in two different contexts, suggesting two different pairs of men.
  - (a) Use your concordance or Bible software (or Hint a) to find the passages that name both Ethan and Heman.
  - (b) What tribal affiliation is implied by each of these contexts?
  - (c) How does the title given to these men in Psalms 88 and 89 help indicate which pair of men is intended?
3. Why is their tribal affiliation appropriate to these final laments?
4. Hints
  - (a) 1 Chr 2:6 and 1 Ki 4:31; 1 Chr 15:17, 19.

# Study Questions on the Psalms

## Psalm 88

1. Find two echoes of the first verse that divide the Psalm into three stanzas.
2. What similar expressions connect the first and last stanzas?
3. What other biblical character has an experience like Heman?
4. What form of sentence characterizes the central stanza?
5. Contrast Heman's response to his troubles with an alternative response proposed in Job 2:9.
6. Where in this Psalm do we see Heman's faith in the midst of tragedy?

## Psalm 89

1. Observe the changes in speaker as you read through the Psalm, and the Selahs. What major sections can you identify on this basis?
2. How do vv. 1-4 summarize the first two of these sections?
3. The first section (5-18) is organized around three allusions to Ex 34:6, in vv. 5, 8, and 14. These introduce three paragraphs.
  - (a) What is the focus of the first paragraph (vv. 5-7)? Recall Psalm 29; Job 1; Micaiah's vision in 1 Kings 22.
  - (b) What is the focus of the second paragraph (vv. 8-13)?
    - i. Remember what "hosts" (plural) refers to.
    - ii. What historical event lies behind vv. 9-10? (Recall what you learned about Rahab in Psalm 87.)
    - iii. How does v. 12 encompass all of creation?
  - (c) What is the focus of the third paragraph (vv. 14-18)?
  - (d) What progression do you see as you move through these three paragraphs?
4. What episode from the historical books does Ethan have in view in the second main section (19-37)? Use the Treasury, or Hint a.
5. What keywords from this historical passage occur frequently throughout Psalm 89?
6. Where do verses 19-37 refer to Ps 80:15, 17? (Check the Strong's numbers; see Hint b if you get stuck)
7. Compare the third section with Psalm 88.
  - (a) How does this section challenge the promise embedded in the keywords you found in question 5?
  - (b) See if you can discern distinct sections in the third section that correspond with what you found in Psalm 88.
  - (c) How does this section refer to Psalm 80?

## Study Questions on the Psalms

- (d) What national disasters might have led to this lament?
- 8. Hints
  - (a) 2 Samuel 7
  - (b) Look closely at v. 21

### Book 4, Pss 90-106: Maturation

#### Overview of Book 4

1. Read over these seventeen Psalms a few times to see if you can detect clusters among them. Look for distinctive headings and repeated phrases within nearby Psalms.
2. Compare how this book begins and ends with the beginning and ending of Book 3.
3. See if you can associate each Psalm with one or more of the questions raised by Ethan in 89:46-49.
4. Where do official musical notations such as “to the chief musician” and “selah” appear in this book?
5. What setting does the answer to the last question suggest for this book?

#### Psalms 90-91, Ancient Foundations

1. What image for God is common to both of these Psalms?
2. Compare this image with the beginning of Psalm 18.
3. How does this “dwelling place” differ from the dwelling place mentioned in 26:8 and 68:5?
4. Recall the attitude of the people toward the temple just before the captivity (e.g., Jeremiah 7). What different attitude does Moses encourage them to have?

#### Psalm 90

1. Compare and contrast the two instances of “Return” in this Psalm.
2. How does this usage pick up the theme of Psalm 80?
3. What feature of human life is emphasized in the sections that begin “Return”?
4. Compare this feature with the opening verses of the Psalm.
5. What repeated theme in vv. 7-12 explains this feature?
6. What seven requests does the Psalmist make at the end of the Psalm?
7. Can you find a progression or other pattern among these requests?
8. How does the last request return to the theme of vv. 1-2?

# Study Questions on the Psalms

## Psalm 91

1. V. 9a should be translated, “Surely thou, O LORD, art my refuge.” With this translation, note the shifts in who is speaking to whom throughout the Psalm, and suggest an outline for it.
2. How do vv. 1, 2, 9 relate to the beginning of Psalm 90?
3. What promise do the speakers in vv. 3-8 and 9b-13 make to the one who speaks in vv. 2 and 9a?
4. How did Satan try to use this Psalm to tempt the Lord (Luke 4:1-13)?
5. Consider other Scriptures that make Satan’s quotation of the Psalm highly ironic:
  - (a) What earlier Scripture lies behind v. 13?
  - (b) How does the Lord interpret the Psalm in Luke 10:17-20?
6. How might spiritual meaning that the Lord sees in the Psalm be a special encouragement to the Jews in Babylon?

## Psalms 92-100, The Lord Reigns

1. What sets this series of Psalms off from those on either side? Pay attention to their genre, distinctive words or phrases, and authorship.
2. Can you find any alignments among individual Psalms in this section? To explore possible links, I made a table, with the Psalms as columns and different features I found within them as rows. Some rows in my table that I find interesting include Genre, the description of the Lord as king, references to the Gentiles or “all the earth,” God’s mercy or lovingkindness, the opposition of the wicked, the Lord’s relation to other gods, exhortations to sing to the Lord, references to God’s house or his holy hill, and references to his coming in judgment.
3. In blocks of Psalms like this, we have often found that the central Psalm occupies a special place.
  - (a) How is Psalm 96 distinguished here?
  - (b) Can you find evidence of a chiastic arrangement of the Psalms around it?
  - (c) What theme is rare in the first half of this section, but dominates in the second?

## Psalm 92

1. Note the frequent references to Jehovah (“LORD” in all capital letters).
2. How do the instances of this name in vv. 4-9 differ from the others?
3. Compare and contrast the two paragraphs (4-7, 8-11) introduced by these instances.
4. How do the two remaining groups of verses correspond to each other?
5. Why might this Psalm be appropriate for the Sabbath day (heading)? Hint: compare Gen 2:1-3.
6. Which of the questions of 89:46-49 does this Psalm address?

# Study Questions on the Psalms

## Psalm 93

1. How are vv. 3-4 distinct from the rest of the Psalm?
2. What might be the significance of these verses be, in the light of Genesis 1, Exodus 14-15, and Joshua 3?
3. What things are said to last forever in vv. 1-2 and 5?
4. Which of the questions of 89:46-49 does this Psalm address?

## Psalm 94

1. How does this Psalm differ from the other Psalms in this section?
2. From your study of repeated words and themes throughout this section, can you suggest why the editor put this Psalm here?
3. How are vv. 1-2 consistent with the theme, “The Lord reigns”?
4. What challenge to the Lord’s rule do vv. 3-7 present?
5. How do vv. 8-11 answer this challenge?
6. How does the tone of the Psalm change at v. 12?
7. What explanation do 12-15 give for the events of 3-7?
8. How do vv. 16-23 resolve the problem of vv. 3-7?
9. Now go back to vv. 1-2. How do these summarize the entire Psalm?
10. Which of the questions of 89:46-49 does this Psalm address?

## Psalm 95

1. How would you outline this Psalm? Note
  - (a) The alternation of exhortation and explanation
  - (b) Shift in who is speaking
2. What great act of God is the basis for our praise in vv. 1-5?
3. How about in 5-7a? When did the Lord “make” Israel? Compare Isa 43:15-21.
4. To which of these great acts do vv. 8-11 refer?
5. How does this Psalm show the superiority of the Lord to the other gods?
6. What warning does the overall Psalm convey to those who would respond to the invitations of vv. 1-2 and 6?
7. How does the writer to the Hebrews apply this Psalm in Hebrews 3-4?
8. Note the numerous parallels between this Psalm and Psalm 100.
  - (a) What theme does Psalm 100 emphasize that this one does not?

## Study Questions on the Psalms

(b) Can you suggest a reason for this difference?

### Psalm 96

1. How would you outline this Psalm? As with 95, note the alternation of exhortation and explanation.
2. Almost all of this Psalm is repeated in 1 Chronicles 16.
  - (a) What was the occasion described in that chapter?
  - (b) Why would a Psalm written for that occasion be appropriate for a collection about the Lord's reign?
  - (c) How does the version of the Psalm included by the editor differ from the version in 1 Chronicles?
  - (d) How do these changes fit in with his theme in this section?
3. We suggested that this Psalm, at the center of 92-100, includes all of the major themes seen in the various other Psalms of the section: The LORD is King over All Gods; The LORD comes in Judgment; The LORD shows Lovingkindness and Truth; Worship in the LORD's Temple; and The LORD rules the Nations.
  - (a) See if you can identify each of these themes in this Psalm.
  - (b) Which of these themes appears in every section of the Psalm?
  - (c) Consider the theme that the Lord is over all other gods. How is this point elaborated in this Psalm, beyond what was said in Psalm 95?

### Psalm 97

1. This Psalm contains numerous expressions found elsewhere in the Bible. You might enjoy seeing how many parallels you can find.
2. Compare vv. 1-5 with Psalm 18. What is the Lord doing in these verses? (Compare the last verse of Psalm 96.)
3. "Righteousness and judgment" in v. 2 is probably a hendiadys, using two nouns to express a single idea.
  - (a) What is this idea?
  - (b) Why is this not an obvious connection? Recall 94:15
4. What two groups of people respond to these events, in vv. 6-9?
5. How do 6-9 develop the idea of "righteousness and judgment" from v. 2?
6. This is the third Psalm emphasizing the Lord's superiority over other gods. How is this theme further developed here?
7. Compare and contrast vv. 10-12 with 1-5.

# Study Questions on the Psalms

## Psalm 98

1. What common structural pattern divides this Psalm into stanzas?
2. Contrast the person doing most of the action in the first stanza with the second stanza.
3. We have found that some words or ideas commonly appear in pairs in the Psalms. One such pair appears in the first stanza, and another in the second.
  - (a) What are these pairs?
  - (b) What aspects of God's character do they reveal?
4. How does the behavior of the ocean in this Psalm contrast with that in 93?

## Psalm 99

1. What repeated refrain marks the stanzas of this P salm?
2. How do shifts in grammatical person (I vs. you vs. he; singular vs. plural) divide each stanza?
3. v.1 says that the Lord "sitteth between the cherubim."
  - (a) To what is this a reference? Use your concordance or Hint a to find other instances of this description.
  - (b) How is this reference appropriate to the refrain of this Psalm?
4. Meditate on the relation between the first and second stanzas. What do the events of the second stanza have to do with the character of God as revealed in the first?
5. Hints
  - (a) 1 Sam. 4:4; 2 Sam. 6:2; 2 Ki. 19:15; 1 Chr. 13:6; Ps. 80:1; 99:1; Isa. 37:16

## Psalm 100

1. What common structural pattern divides this Psalm into stanzas?
2. What attitude on our part dominates the first stanza? the second?
3. Can you relate these attitudes to the cause for praise in each case?
4. The title of the Psalm is literally "A Psalm for Thanksgiving."
  - (a) Can you find any other Psalm with this title?
  - (b) What makes this title particularly appropriate for this Psalm?
5. After the last verses of Psalms 96 and 98, what is appropriate about the action this Psalm and Psalm 99 invite us to take?

# Study Questions on the Psalms

## Psalms 101-103, David's Example

1. It has been suggested that 101:1-2a (through the question) are a summary of Psalms 101-103. Read over all three Psalms.
  - (a) In which one does he sing of mercy? (Compare 101:1a with 103:6, 8).
  - (b) In which does he amplify his determination to conduct himself uprightly?
  - (c) In which does he pray for the Lord's intervention?
2. If this analysis is correct, who probably wrote Psalm 102?
3. Why would the editor place this cluster of Davidic Psalms here, after the discouragement of Psalm 89 and after emphasizing the reign of the Lord in Psalms 92-100?

### Psalm 101

For vv. 1-2a, see the questions above.

1. How does this Psalm reflect the attitude of Psalms 75:2 and 99:4?
2. What progression is there from vv. 2b-4 to vv. 5-8?
3. How does this progression honor our Lord's teaching in Matt 7:1-5?

### Psalm 102

1. Our analysis of Psalms 101-103 as a unit suggests that this Psalm, like the outer two, is by David. Can you find other Psalms of David that show him as an afflicted person? Trace "afflicted" with Strong's numbers, or see Hint a.
2. This Psalm is a lament, and like many laments, includes both complaint (description of the Psalmist's problem) and confidence. Use this distinction to outline the Psalm.
3. What attribute of the Lord is the source of the Psalmist's confidence in the face of his problems?
4. Heb 1:10-12 quotes vv. 25-27 with reference to our Lord. Can you figure out why the writer of Hebrews thought of this Psalm, and what point he is making with the citation?
5. Hints
  - (a) For example, in Book 1 alone, 22:24; 25:16; 34:6; 35:10; 40:17.

### Psalm 103

1. Use the Treasury (or Hint a) to recall the original setting of v. 8. (Note the hint in v. 7.)
2. Can you relate vv. 9-18 to the divine attributes listed in v. 8?
3. Having established the internal coherence of vv. 7-18, can you discern correspondences between vv. 1-6 and 19-22 that suggest an overall outline for the Psalm?
4. Hints



# Study Questions on the Psalms

(a) Exodus 34

## Psalms 104-106, First Hallelujah Cycle

1. What expression, coming at the end of each of these Psalms, ties them together? (After studying the individual Psalms, we will see another unifying feature.)
2. Use your Bible software or concordance (or Hint a) to find where else this expression appears in the Psalter.
3. Compare and contrast the function of these three Psalms, coming at the end of Book 4, with how each of the previous three books ends.
4. Hints
  - (a) See Psalms 111-117, 135, 146-150

### Psalm 104

1. Read over this Psalm and Genesis 1 a few times. Can you find any evidence that the author of the Psalm might have Genesis 1 in mind? (Think about the order of events.)
2. How does each section of Psalm 104 amplify and motivate the corresponding part of Genesis 1?
3. The author begins and ends this Psalm with a call to “Bless the Lord.” Recall the distinctive focus of this verb on giving thanks for blessings that we have received. How is this exhortation appropriate to the extensions you have noticed in question 2?

### Psalm 105

1. Compare the first six verses with the rest of the Psalm.
  - (a) How are they distinct?
  - (b) How do they serve as an introduction to the rest of the Psalm?
2. See if you can divide the rest of the Psalm (vv. 7-45) into sections, based on the episodes those sections describe.
3. On what portion of the Bible history do these episodes focus?
4. Contrast the opening of this Psalm with that of Psalm 104. How is the opening exhortation here appropriate to the material discussed?

### Psalm 106

1. What grammatical shift shows a break between vv. 5 and 6?
2. The main body of the Psalm describes a series of episodes. Where in the Bible history is each of these described?
3. How do vv. 43-46 summarize these episodes?

## Study Questions on the Psalms

4. Compare vv. 1-3 with 47-48.
  - (a) How do they form a chiasmic frame around the main body of the Psalm?
  - (b) The opening exhorts us to “thank” the Lord (cf. also v. 47), while the conclusion tells us to “bless” the Lord. Keeping in mind the distinctive significance of these verbs, what emphasis does each place on the events of the Psalm?
5. Compare and contrast v. 48 with the last verse of each of the previous books of the Psalter (at the ends of Psalms 41, 72, and 89).

### Summary of 104-106

1. We have traced each of these to specific episodes in the biblical history. Looking back over all three, what unifying principle can you find?
2. Recall our observation of the emphasis of Book 4 on Moses.
  - (a) How does this emphasis contribute to the editor’s response to the questions of Heman and Ethan in Psalms 88 and 89?
  - (b) How does this concluding triple of Psalms reinforce this response?

### Book 5, Pss 107-150: Consummation

1. Read these Psalms over once or twice, looking for features that might identify structural clusters. These could include indications of authorship, musical titles, or repeated phrases.
2. Can you identify any pattern among the clusters that you identify?
3. How do Psalms 118-119 echo the themes of Psalms 1-2?

### Psalm 107, The God who Reverses Fortunes

1. The theme of God’s “mercy” (v. 1), his loyal love, pervades this Psalm, though our translation uses different words for it. Using Strong’s numbers (or hint a), can you find this word elsewhere in the Psalm?
2. What refrain divides this Psalm into stanzas?
3. What material is not encompassed within the stanzas thus marked?
4. What role does this additional material fill?
5. The end of v. 3 is literally, “from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the sea” (following the KJV marginal note; not “the south”). Can you relate these terms to the four stanzas you found in v. 1?
6. Hints
  - (a) The word **חסד** (Strong 2617) appears in vv. 1, 8, 15, 21, 31, and 43.

# Study Questions on the Psalms

## Psalms 108-110, First Davidic Cluster

1. Read over these three Psalms. Can you see a progression among them?

### Psalm 108, Recalling Confidence

1. We have seen the contents of this Psalm before. Use the Treasury or center references in your Bible (or Hint a) to find where.
2. Review our study of these earlier Psalms ([https://www.cyber-chapel.org/sermons/psalms/notes/Ps\\_53thru60.pdf](https://www.cyber-chapel.org/sermons/psalms/notes/Ps_53thru60.pdf)).
  - (a) To what kind (or genre) do the sources of Psalm 108 belong?
  - (b) What part of each of these Psalms has been selected for inclusion in Psalm 108?
  - (c) How does this selection transform the emphasis from the original Psalms to this one?
  - (d) What adversary is in view in each of these Psalms?
3. In its present location, how does Psalm 108 respond to Psalm 107? (Note vv. 2-3)
4. Hints:
  - (a) Psalms 57, 60

### Psalm 109, Judgment on the Wicked

1. Recall the possible components of a lament (Invocation, Plea to God for help, Complaints, Confession of sin or an assertion of innocence, Curse of enemies, Confidence in God's response, Hymn or blessing).
  - (a) Which ones do you find in this Psalm?
  - (b) Outline the Psalm, based on the shifts among these elements.
2. This is one of the Psalms that emphasize imprecation; others include 5, 10, 17, 35, 58, 59, 69, 70, 79, 83, 109, 129, 137, and 140.
  - (a) Recall our study of Psalm 35, in which David both prays for his adversaries, and asks for God's judgment on them. How did we resolve this apparent inconsistency in his behavior?
  - (b) How is this same contrast apparent in our Lord's ministry? Compare John 3:17 and 12:47 with 12:48 and Matt 25:31-46?
  - (c) How is the intense imprecation in this Psalm appropriate in view of its location in Book 5?
3. Where is this Psalm quoted in the NT, and whose judgment does it describe? Use the Treasury, or Hint a.
4. How is the description of the Lord's adversaries in vv. 2-5 particularly appropriate to the NT reference?
5. Hints:

## Study Questions on the Psalms

- (a) It's in Acts 1, in a quotation that also involves Psalm 69, another imprecatory Psalm.

### Psalm 110, The Coming King-Priest

We will consider both the Psalm itself, and its use in the NT.

#### *Exposition of the Psalm*

1. Explore the structure of the Psalm.
  - (a) Note the difference between LORD and Lord in v. 1. Use Strong's dictionary (or Hint a) to find the difference.
  - (b) Where else in the Psalm does each of these occur?
  - (c) How are vv. 1 and 4 similar?
  - (d) How are the endings of vv. 3 and 7 similar?
  - (e) Compare and contrast 2-3 with 5-7. What happens to the Lord's enemies in each case?
2. What two roles does this Psalm give the Messiah?
  - (a) What is unique about the combination of these roles, compared with Israel's other kings? (Compare 1 Samuel 13; 2 Chronicles 26.)
3. Where else is Melchizedek mentioned in the OT? Use your concordance, Bible software, or Hint b, and see what you can learn about him.
4. Hints:
  - (a) LORD: Strong 3068. yeh-ho-vaw'. (the) self Existent or eternal; Jehovah, Jewish national name of God: - Jehovah, the Lord.  
Lord: Strong 113. aw-done', aw-done'. From an unused root (meaning to rule); sovereign, that is, controller (human or divine): - lord, master, owner. Compare also names beginning with "Adoni-".
  - (b) Genesis 14

#### *Use in the NT*

1. How does the Lord Jesus interpret this Psalm in Matt 22:42-46?
2. In Acts 2, Peter uses this Psalm, along with Psalm 16, as the basis for his sermon on Pentecost. Compare Acts 2:24-27 with 33-35. How are the two citations similar? How are they distinct?
3. How do the following passages draw on Psalm 110? Acts 5:31; 7:55, 56; Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; 1 Pet 3:22.
4. How does Paul use Psalm 110 in 1 Cor 15:24-28? What other Psalm does he also cite there, and how does he link the two?
5. The Psalm is quoted or alluded to many times in Hebrews.

## Study Questions on the Psalms

- (a) Here's a list of suggested references. How many of them can you figure out? Ps 110:1 in Heb 1:3, 13; 2:9; 8:1; 10:12–13; 12:2, 22; Ps 110:4 in Heb 2:17; 3:1; 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:3, 11, 17, 21, 24, 25, 28; and 10:21.
- (b) What parts of the Psalm does the writer to the Hebrews use?

### **Psalms 111-117, Second Hallelu-Yah Cluster**

1. Compare the distribution of Hallelu-Yah (“Praise ye the Lord”) in the first Hallelu-Yah cluster (104-106) with its distribution here. How would this distribution lead you to divide this section?
2. What is distinctive about Psalm 114? Given the subject matter, can you explain this distinctive character?
3. Look for words and themes that are repeated across these seven Psalms.
  - (a) How many allusions or echoes can you find of Ex 34:5, 6?
  - (b) Pay special attention to references to God's people and the nations or heathen.
  - (c) Can you find a correspondence in emphasis between 111 and 115; between 112 and 116; and between 113 and 117?
4. Besides Psalms 103-150, where else in the Bible does Hallelu-Yah (“Praise ye the Lord,” “Alleluia”) appear?
5. What commentary do these other citations make on the focus of Book 5?

### **Psalms 111 and 112, the Works of the Lord and of his People**

1. This Psalm and 112 are both acrostics: each half-line begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. We have seen this device before, in Book 1 (Psalms 9-10, 25, 34, 37), and now it returns in Book 5 (Psalms 111, 112, 119, 145). Can you think of what the poet might be trying to emphasize with this device?
2. In addition to both being acrostics, Psalms 111 and 112 have many other points in common.
  - (a) Read them through a few times, looking for shared phrases and expressions.
  - (b) Some phrases that are repeated between the two Psalms refer to slightly different things. What general principle do these differences present?
3. What concept frames Psalm 111?
4. What concept frames Psalm 112?
5. Look up the Strong number for “I will praise” in 111:1 (or see Hint a). This is one of the two specific words for praise that we discovered in Book 4.
  - (a) Which aspect of praise does it emphasize—confession of God's nature, or gratitude for his blessings?
  - (b) What is the meaning of “Blessed” in 112:1? (Strong, or hint b)

## Study Questions on the Psalms

- (c) Which aspect of praise is in focus in Psalm 112?
- 6. What word dominates Psalm 111?
- 7. How does this concept link this Psalm to 114 and 115?
- 8. Hints
  - (a) ידה, Strong 3034. “yâdâh: A primitive root; used only as denominative from H3027; literally to use (that is, hold out) the hand; physically to throw (a stone, an arrow) at or away; especially to revere or worship (with extended hands); intensively to bemoan (by wringing the hands): - cast (out), (make) confess (-ion), praise, shoot, (give) thank (-ful, -s, -sgiving).”
  - (b) אֲשֶׁרִי, Strong 835. “’eshér: From H833; happiness; only in masculine plural construction as interjection, how happy!: - blessed, happy.”

### Psalm 112, the Works of the Righteous

#### Jewish Usage of Psalms 113-118

Psalms 113-118 are recited every Passover by the Jews, and there is a good chance that they were used this way in the first century. In particular, the reference to the final hymn in Matt 26:30 probably refers to Psalm 118. As you study these Psalms, try to think of what meaning each would have in the context of the Passover meal in general, and at the Last Supper in particular.

#### Psalm 113, The God who Stoops to Save

1. This Psalm, unlike 111, 112, and 115-117, does not quote Ex 34:6. In spite of this, how do vv. 1-3 take us back to Exodus 34? (Compare Ex 33:19; 34:5.)
2. Use your Bible software (or Hint a) to find all the places in the OT that refer to “the rising of the sun and the going down of the same.” (Search for “rising,” “sun,” and “going down” all together.)
  - (a) Contrast this use of the expression with the earlier one. What two different activities are in view?
  - (b) How does the later use of the verse draw on this Psalm?
3. v. 4 refers to “the nations,” Strong H1471.
  - (a) Where did we read earlier in this section about the nations? (The English word is different; use your Bible software to search for the Strong number, or consult Hint b.)
  - (b) How does this reference differ from that one?
4. What movement on the Lord’s part do vv. 4-6 describe?
5. Can you think of a passage in Paul’s writings that might be inspired by these verses?
6. Why does the Lord make this movement, according to vv. 7-9?

## Study Questions on the Psalms

7. Use the Treasury (or Hint c) to find the earlier Scripture on which the Psalmist draws in vv. 7-9.
8. The Psalmist is quite selective in his use of that earlier Scripture. Can you characterize what he uses and what he does not use?
9. How would our Lord understand this Psalm if he sang it at the Last Supper?
10. Hints
  - (a) Psalm 50, Malachi 1
  - (b) 111:6
  - (c) 1 Samuel 2

### Psalm 117, Calling All Nations to Worship

We will consider this Psalm out of sequence, to explore its parallels with Psalm 113.

1. How is the reference to “nations” here like that in Psalm 113, and unlike other references in Psalms 111-117?
2. What is the original setting of v. 2?
3. What is unusual about the quotation of v. 2 in the context of v. 1? (In addition to the word “nations,” you should know that the word “people” is actually plural, “all ye peoples.”)
4. Again, think of our Lord as singing this Psalm, and compare his role with that of David. How is this a fitting conclusion to 111-117?

### Psalm 114, When God Returns

1. How did we explain the lack of the characteristic “Hallelu-Yah” (“Praise ye the Lord” in this Psalm, alone of those in 111-117)?
2. How does the use of divine names in this Psalm align with this emphasis?
3. How would this Psalm motivate the use of this group of Psalms at Passover?
4. What historical events lie behind v. 3?
5. The references in v. 4 are more complex.
  - (a) What past events may be in view? Use the Treasury or Hint a.
  - (b) What future events are also described in these terms? Compare Hag 2:6-7; Rev 20:11.
  - (c) How would this Psalm be an encouragement to the Lord at the Last Supper?
6. What encouragement does v. 8 offer those who long for these future events?
7. Hints
  - (a) Exo 19:18; 20:18; Jdg 5:4-5

# Study Questions on the Psalms

## Psalm 115, Whom do you Trust?

1. The changes in pronouns suggest that the speaker changes over the course of the Psalm.
  - (a) Can you identify these shifts, and suggest who might be speaking in each section?
  - (b) How does Ezra 3:11 illustrate this kind of responsive singing? (Look up the Strong number for the word translated “they sang together,” or see Hint a.)
2. In v. 1, what is the relation between God’s name, and his mercy and truth? See Ex 34:5,6.
3. Use the Treasury (or hint b) to find other instances of the taunt in v. 2.
4. How might the memory of this taunt have encouraged our Lord during his passion (cf. Matt 27:43)?
5. How does the answer to this taunt in v. 3 show the difference between pagan (and modern) views of God, and the biblical view?
6. Compare the critique of idols in vv. 4-8 with Isa 44:12ff or Isa 46.
7. What is the difference in vv. 9-11 (or again in 12-13) among Israel, the house of Aaron, and those who fear the Lord? (Compare Acts 13:16, 42-43)
8. Who are “the dead” in v. 17, and what do they have to do with the Psalm?
9. Hints
  - (a) 6030, “‘ânâh, A primitive root; properly to eye or (generally) to heed, that is, pay attention; by implication to respond; by extension to begin to speak; specifically to sing, shout, testify, announce: - give account, afflict [by mistake for H6031], (cause to, give) answer, bring low [by mistake for H6031], cry, hear, Leannoth, lift up, say, X scholar, (give a) shout, sing (together by course), speak, testify, utter, (bear) witness.”
  - (b) Ps 42:3, 10. 79:10. Jl 2:17.

## Psalm 116, Calling on the Lord

1. Note the phrase that is repeated in vv. 4, 13, 17, and abbreviated in v. 2.
  - (a) This expression occurs throughout the Bible. You might enjoy reviewing our discussion of its use in Gen 4:26, in <https://www.cyber-chapel.org/sermons/genesis/notes/Genesis4b.pdf>.
  - (b) How does the meaning of this expression shift from v. 4 to vv. 13 and 17?
  - (c) Which meaning do you think the abbreviation in v. 2 is meant to anticipate?
2. What kind of person is “the simple,” v. 6?
  - (a) You might consider the use of the word throughout Proverbs (use your concordance or Hint a). How does the simple differ from the fool (Hint b)?
  - (b) How might the use of the word in Prov 14:15 explain v. 11 here?
  - (c) How does this word explain the Psalmist’s need for the Lord’s “grace and compassion” (v. 5) or “bounty” (v. 7)?



## Study Questions on the Psalms

- (d) Think of our Lord's teachings in the sermon on the Mount and in Matthew 18. How might this term appropriately describe him and his followers?
3. How does v. 9 finish the thought from v. 3?
  4. How might the contrast between these two verses have encouraged our Lord in his sacrifice?
  5. How might v. 4 have encouraged his prayer in the garden (e.g., Matt 26:36ff)?
  6. What is the speech to which faith leads in v. 10? Compare the use of this verse by Paul in 2 Cor 4:13.
  7. What symmetry can you find in vv. 13-19?
  8. As a unit, how do these verses answer the question of v. 12?
  9. Hints
    - (a) "Simple": Prov. 1:4, 22, 32; 7:7; 8:5; 9:4, 13, 16; 14:15, 18; 19:25; 21:11; 22:3; 27:12
    - (b) "Fool": Prov. 1:22, 32; 3:35; 8:5; 10:1, 18, 23; 12:23; 13:16, 19-20; 14:7-8, 16, 24, 33; 15:2, 7, 14, 20; 17:10, 12, 16, 21, 24-25; 18:2, 6-7; 19:1, 10, 13, 29; 21:20; 23:9; 26:1, 3-12; 28:26; 29:11, 20

### Revelation 19:1-5

These verses are the only place, other than in Psalms 104-150, that the term "Hallelu-yah" (in Greek, "Alleluia") appears.

1. What echoes of the Hallelu-Yah psalms, and of 111-117 in particular, can you find here?
2. Who is the one speaking from the throne in 19:5?

## Psalms 118-119, The Righteous Messiah Returns to Zion

### Psalm 118, Messiah Returns to Zion

1. Read over the Psalm, noting when the speaker changes between singular and plural, and see if you can detect the major divisions. (Hint: the "I" in v. 25 is a translation artifact; the Hebrew simply says, "Please save now ... please send prosperity," without any indication of number. The expression is the word "Hosanna.")
2. Note the repetition of v. 1 in v. 29. What does this tell you about the overall theme of the Psalm?
3. I will suggest that vv. 5-18 respond to the invitation to Israel in v. 2.
  - (a) Where in earlier (that is, pre-exilic) Scripture have we seen Israel depicted as a single individual?
  - (b) What is the significance of representing the nation as an individual in this way?

## Study Questions on the Psalms

- (c) Read over these verses, noting things that have happened to this individual in the past, statements of his present situation, and things he anticipates in the future. How might these events correspond to the experiences of our Lord?
4. vv. 19-21 appear to be an interchange between the Israelite of 5-18 and the house of Aaron.
- What is the Israelite requesting?
  - How do they respond?
5. I will suggest that vv. 22-27 respond to the invitation to the house of Aaron in v. 3
- Do you recognize any of the verses in this section from the NT? Check the Treasury, and also look up the word “Hosanna” from v. 25 in your concordance, or see hint a. During what event were these verses cited, and how would that event be related to the event enacted in the Psalm?
  - Let’s explore two reasons that in spite of this similarity, the Psalm may anticipate a further, later event.
    - The first reason has to do with the attitude of the house of Aaron.
      - What attitude toward the Israelite do the priests and Levites exhibit in this Psalm?
      - Compare this with the attitude of the temple personnel when our Lord came to the temple on Palm Sunday (Matt 21).
    - The second reason has to do with chronology.
      - Recall the “past-present-future” structure of vv. 5-18. At what point in our Savior’s experience would he have expressed the sentiments in this section?
      - Was that point before or after the events during which the verses of 22-27 are echoed in the NT?
  - To what would “the stone which the builders refused” (v. 22) refer in the minds of the original Psalmist?
    - Some suggest that the reference is to the attitudes of Ezra 3:10-13. What do you think about that suggestion?
    - We have already seen evidence that the Psalmist knows Isaiah’s prophecies.
      - How might Isa 28:14-16 explain the meaning of v. 22? Who would be the “builders,” and how would they have rejected the “stone”?
      - If this understanding is correct, how would v. 22 relate to the arrival of the Israelite?
  - Remember that the “I” in v. 25 is a translation artifact; the house of Aaron is still speaking in this verse.
    - To whom are they speaking?
    - How might this reflect the growing awareness of the person of Messiah in the post-exilic period? (Note the ambivalence in other postexilic passages, such as Zech 12:10.)

## Study Questions on the Psalms

- (e) What is the significance of the plural pronoun at the end of v. 26?
- (f) How does Ezra 9:8 help you understand the beginning of v. 27?
- (g) Finally, consider the sacrifices commanded in v. 27. (Note: “even unto the horns of the altar” doesn’t mean that the animals are to be tied to the altar, but that there are to be so many that the court is crowded all the way up to the altar itself.)
  - i. Use Strong’s numbers (or Hint b) to understand the kind of “sacrifice” described in v. 27.
  - ii. How does Ezra 6:17 illustrate these sacrifices?
  - iii. How does Heb 13:15-16 help us understand the fulfillment of this prophecy?
- 6. In the Jewish Passover liturgy, Psalm 118 is the final Psalm in the series 113-118 that is sung at Passover. Review these Psalms in the light of the Gospel record. What would each of them have brought to our Lord’s mind during the Last Supper?
- 7. Hints
  - (a) Matt 21
  - (b) Strong’s H2282, “1) festival, feast, festival-gathering, pilgrim-feast 1a) feast 1b) festival sacrifice”

### Psalm 119, Taking Refuge in God’s Law

#### Overview

This is the longest Psalm, and the longest chapter in the Bible. On the one hand, its structure is very simple: 22 stanzas of eight verses each, one stanza for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet, with all the lines of each stanza beginning with the stanza’s letter. On the other hand, the very mechanical nature of this system makes it difficult to understand the progress of thought—but there is one.

1. Almost every verse contains a word that describes God’s law.
  - (a) Read through the Psalms and collect them.
    - i. How many such words can you find?
    - ii. How many of each do you find?
    - iii. How are they distributed across the stanzas of the Psalm?
  - (b) There is a similar list of names for the law in Psalm 19. Which ones do both Psalms discuss?
  - (c) You might want to review our notes on Psalm 19 ([https://cyber-chapel.org/sermons/psalms/notes/Ps\\_15thru24.pdf](https://cyber-chapel.org/sermons/psalms/notes/Ps_15thru24.pdf)) to see the emphasis of each of these terms.
2. Read through the Psalm again, this time looking for other terms that recur. Some of these are verbs that describe what the Psalmist will do with God’s law. Others describe his feelings. You

## Study Questions on the Psalms

might also look for requests that he makes to God, or instances of the names of God. Are these various items distributed uniformly?

3. In the light of the last question, what makes the following stanzas distinctive? Gimel (starts in v. 17), Zain (49), Kaph (81), Ain (121), and Qoph (145).
4. Of the various genres of Psalms that we have seen (Confidence, Hymn, Lament, Kingship, Wisdom Psalm, Remembrance, Thanksgiving), which seems most appropriate for this Psalm?<sup>1</sup>

We will group the stanzas for study, treating the first two (Aleph and Beth) as an introduction, followed by five cycles, beginning in Gimel, Zain, Kaph, Ain, and Qoph.

### **Vv. 1-16, Introduction**

1. What verb repeatedly expresses the Psalmist's desire in vv. 1-8?
2. What outcome does he expect if he achieves this desire?
3. What means does he propose in vv. 9-16 to achieve his objective?
4. What parts of the body are involved in this activity?
  - (a) Compare Rom 10:8-10; Prov 6:16-19 (note the odd chiasm); Matt 15:16-20.
  - (b) What advice would you give somebody who wants to achieve the goal of vv. 1-8?

### **Vv. 17-48, First Cycle**

1. What problems does the Psalmist face in vv. 17-24?
2. Where do these problems come from?
3. What requests does he make of the Lord in vv. 17-24?
4. How are these requests extended in vv. 25-32 and 33-40?
5. How does 33-40 promise a resolution to the problems of 17-24?
6. In 41-48, what series of benefits does the Psalmist anticipate as God grants his requests in the previous stanzas of this section?

### **Vv. 49-80, Second Cycle**

1. Up to this point, the Psalm has been very personal, concerning the Psalmist's relation to the Lord. How does this section advance beyond this point?
2. Each of the first three stanzas introduces a key word that characterizes the following stanza, thus linking them into a chain. Can you find this chain?
3. Contrast the affliction stanza in this cycle (Zain, 49-56) with that in the first cycle (Gimel, 17-24). How does Zain show the beneficial results of the Psalmist's experience in the previous cycle?

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1 This analysis draws heavily on the results of W. Soll, *Psalm 119*, CBQ Monograph Series 23 (1991).

## Study Questions on the Psalms

4. Use Strong's numbers to compare the vocabulary in vv. 58, 64, 75, 76, and 77 with Ex 34:6. Meditate on how this relationship illuminates two features of this cycle:
  - (a) the emphasis on his relation with others who fear the Lord;
  - (b) his dedication to "keep" the law of God in the second and third stanzas of the section (57-72).
5. What is the distinctive request in the third stanza (65-72)?
6. What mechanism does the Lord use to answer this request?
7. What result does the Lord's instruction bring to the Psalmist and his associates in the final stanza, 73-80?

### **Vv. 81-120, Third Cycle**

1. This cycle appears to have five stanzas rather than four. This feature corresponds to a key theme that is repeated throughout the section. Can you find it? (Hint: vv. 89, 90, 111, 112)
2. How does the Psalmist's condition in the first stanza (81-88) relate to this theme?
3. What solution does the second stanza (89-96) provide for the Psalmist's dilemma in the first?
4. What distinctive benefit does the word of God give to those who meditate on it in 97-104?
5. In 105-112, look for expressions of the Psalmist's resolve to follow the Lord.
6. In 113-120, look for a contrast between how God treats the righteous and how he deals with the wicked.
  - (a) How do these relate to the Psalm's overall theme?
  - (b) What is the Psalmist's response?

### **Vv. 121-144, Fourth Cycle**

To compensate for the length of the third cycle, this cycle has only three stanzas: Ayin, Pe, and Tsade.

1. What word is particularly distinctive of this stanza? (Look in the first, and especially the third, stanza.) Hint: In Hebrew, the word begins with the letter Tsade, which is the initial letter of vv. 137-144. So you can check your answer against Strong's.
2. What does this term usually describe throughout this cycle?
3. In Hebrew, this term also describes the conduct of the Psalmist ("justice"). How does this conduct explain what he is experiencing?
4. Each stanza contains at least one statement about the Psalmist's attitude toward God's word, and another about his adversaries' attitude.
  - (a) Find these statements.
  - (b) What result does he describe or desire, given the adversaries' attitude in each case?

## Study Questions on the Psalms

5. This section contains an unusual concentration of imperatives (requests to the Lord to do something).
  - (a) What verse in the first stanza (121-128) motivates these requests?
  - (b) Make a list of the imperatives. Can you sort them out on the basis of what they request?

### **Vv. 145-176, Fifth Cycle**

1. What word is distinctive of this cycle? (Look for distinct English words with similar meanings.)
2. Both the first stanza (145-152) and the second (153-160) describe the Psalmist's dilemma, but from different perspectives. Can you identify them?
3. The third stanza (161-168) describes the Psalmist's response.
  - (a) What is it?
  - (b) What is his motive for this response, according to v. 168?
  - (c) Can you find other instances in the Bible of this motive for the kind of conduct promised by the Psalmist?
4. What different forms of assistance does the Psalmist request of the Lord in the last stanza of the Psalm (169-176)?
5. Meditate on the last verse.
  - (a) In Hebrew, the verb "I have gone astray" is set off from the rest of the verse by a strong disjunctive accent. The result is to make "like a lost sheep" depend on "seek thy servant." What illustrations can you find in the Bible of the kind of care that the Psalmist is requesting?
  - (b) What kinds of behavior can be included in "gone astray"? Use Strong's numbers (or the Hint) to find some other passages where this verb is used.
  - (c) Based on the last clause of the verse, which of these kinds of behavior do you think the Psalmist has in view in this verse?
6. Hints
  - (a) Gen 21:14; 37:15; Job 38:41; Ps 58:4; 95:10; 107:4; 119:110; Prov 7:25; Isa 16:8; 28:7; 35:8; 53:6; Ezek 14:11; 48:11

## **Psalms 120-134, Returning to the Temple**

### **Overview**

1. Compare these 15 Psalms with those on either side. What do they have in common that sets them apart from the others??
2. The word "degree" (Strong 4609, sometimes translated "ascent") appears in Ezra 7:9. To what does it refer there?

## Study Questions on the Psalms

3. The related verb “go up” (Strong 5927) appears with a specific meaning in Ex 34:24; 1 Sam 1:3; 1 Kings 12:27, 28; Ps 122:3-4; Isa 2:3; among others. What does it describe in these passages?
4. How might Ex 23:13-17 provide a context for the use of these Psalms?
5. Which Psalms have authors assigned to them?
  - (a) How are these Psalms situated within the entire set of 15?
  - (b) Where does this arrangement place the focus?
  - (c) Using Strong’s (or Hint a), compare 127:2 with 2 Sam 12:25.
6. Compare 132:8-10 with 2 Chr 6:41-42. Can you suggest the occasion for which these Psalms were composed?
7. Numbers 6:24-26 records the blessing that the Levites pronounced over the people. Some elements of this blessing are repeated frequently in these Psalms. Which are they, and where are they concentrated?
8. It has been suggested that these Psalms fall into three sets of five each: 120-124, 125-129, and 130-134.
  - (a) The final Psalm in each set contains a request for the hearers to say something. Compare these requests.
  - (b) The final Psalms also contain references to blessing, of and by the Lord; Compare these.
  - (c) What common theme do the central Psalms of each set share?
9. Hints
  - (a) “beloved” in 127:2 is Strong 3039 *yedid*, which is the root of the name *yedidiah* (Strong 3041) in 2 Sam 12:25, given by Nathan to Solomon.

### **Psalms 120-124, From Opposition to Peace**

1. See if you can find parallels between 120 and 124, and then between 121 and 123, that would suggest a chiasm in this section.
2. Which expressions from the Priestly Blessing of Num 6:24-26 are especially concentrated in these five Psalms?

### ***Psalm 120, Pagan Opposition***

1. Where does the pilgrim begin his journey? You might look up other biblical references to Meshech and Kedar (Hint a). We’ll talk about where these are in the study.
2. What kind of environment is he seeking to escape by setting out on his journey?
3. What kind of environment does he seek?
4. Hints:

## Study Questions on the Psalms

- (a) Meshech: Gen 10:2; 1Ch 1:5; 1Ch 1:17; Psa 120:5; Eze 27:13; 32:26; 38:2, 3; 39:1  
Kedar: Gen 25:13; 1Ch 1:29; Psa 120:5; Son 1:5; Isa 21:16, 17; 42:11; 60:7; Jer 2:10; 49:28;  
Eze 27:21

### ***Psalm 121, God's Keeping on the Road***

1. Read the end of v. 1 as a question. What common source of help in Israel does the Psalmist consider and reject? Review 1 Kings 12, 13.
2. What part of the Levitical blessing does this Psalm emphasize?
3. How are the promises of this Psalm particularly appropriate to a pilgrim on the way to Jerusalem?

### ***Psalm 122, Arriving at Jerusalem***

1. What part of the pilgrimage does this Psalm record?
2. What part of the Levitical blessing does this Psalm emphasize?
3. What pun is the Psalmist making with the name of the city? Compare Heb 7:2

### ***Psalm 123, God's Mercy on the Way Home***

1. What clause, repeated from Psalm 121, encourages us to compare the two Psalms?
2. What part of the Levitical blessing does this Psalm emphasize?
3. How is their relation to God and his blessings different in this Psalm than in 121?

### ***Psalm 124***

1. What does the Psalmist encourage the returning pilgrims to confess?
2. How is the pilgrims' attitude here different than when they began their journey in Psalm 120?
3. What characteristic of God assures them of his protection?

### ***Psalms 125-129***

1. Read over these five Psalms.
  - (a) How are the first and last related to the first and last (120, 124) of the previous five?
  - (b) How is the center Psalm related to the central Psalm (122) of the previous set? (Compare the themes here with 2 Samuel 7.)
  - (c) Compare and contrast the second and fourth (126, 128) with the corresponding Psalms (121, 123) of the previous set.

### ***Psalm 125***

1. We saw a progression in the description of the wicked between 120 and 124. How does this Psalm further advance that progression?



## Study Questions on the Psalms

2. How does the end of this Psalm echo the end of Psalm 120?

### **Psalm 126**

1. The expression “turn the captivity” appears numerous times in our version. Our version derives the word translated “captivity” from a verb meaning “to take captive,” leading most of these references to be understood of the Babylonian captivity
  - (a) This expression also appears in Job 42:10. Was Job taken captive?
2. The word translated “captivity” can alternatively be derived from the verb “turn” that appears with it, “turn the turning.”
  - (a) How would this derivation solve the puzzle of Job 42:10?
  - (b) In this case, can you suggest an alternative rendering that we might apply in our Psalm?
  - (c) How does this rendering support the possibility of pre-exilic authorship of this collection?
3. Meditate on the agricultural image in vv. 5-6.
  - (a) Why would sowing be accompanied with tears?
  - (b) What general promise does this Psalm offer?

### **Psalm 127**

1. How do the blessings promised in this Psalm correspond to God’s promise to David in 2 Samuel 7?
2. V. 2 refers specially to Solomon. To see this:
  - (a) The word “beloved” is “Jedid.” Compare the name given by Nathan to Solomon at his birth, 2 Samuel 12.
  - (b) If we translate “sleep” as an adverb “in sleep” rather than a direct object, note the correspondence with the events of 1 Kings 3.

### **Psalm 128**

1. How does this Psalm develop the promises of Psalm 127?
2. How does it correspond to Psalm 126?

### **Psalm 129**

1. How does this Psalm share the tone of 125 and go beyond the description of the wicked in 120 and 124?

### **Psalms 130-134**

1. Compare these five Psalms with the previous two sets
  - (a) How is the central Psalm (132) like the central Psalms (122, 127) of the other two sets?

## Study Questions on the Psalms

- (b) What has happened to the chiasmic structure of the previous two sets?
- (c) Contrast the ending of this set with that of the previous two sets. What promise does this convey?

### ***Psalms 130-131***

1. What verb is repeated in these two Psalms to tie them together?
2. What has happened to the theme of “the wicked” in these two Psalms?
3. What response to personal sin does David demonstrate in these Psalms?

### ***Psalm 132***

1. Recall the two components of the Davidic covenant from 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 127. By distinguishing these two themes, outline the structure of this section.
2. Where was this Psalm used in Israel’s history? Compare 2 Chr 6:41-42.

### ***Psalms 133-134***

1. How do the events depicted in these Psalms reflect a pilgrim’s experience in Jerusalem?
2. What hope does the compiler give us by ending his collection with these two Psalms?

## **Psalms 135-137, Themes for Blessing and Thanksgiving**

1. What sets these three Psalms apart from those that precede it (120-134) and those that follow (138-145)?
2. What portions of the first half of Book 5 (Psalms 107-117) correspond to 120-134 and 138-145, respectively?
3. Review Psalm 107, with its repeated stanzas.
  - (a) What features are repeated in each stanza?
  - (b) Can you find these features in 120-134 and in 135-136?
  - (c) Which of these features is echoed in 137 as well?
4. Review Psalms 108-110.
  - (a) How would you summarize each of these Psalms?
  - (b) How does 137 echo these Psalms?

### **Psalm 135, Anthology of Praise**

1. How is this Psalm linked to 134, the end of the Psalms of the Stairs?
2. In light of this connection, how may 135 have been used?

## Study Questions on the Psalms

3. Every verse in this Psalm is drawn from another Psalm. See how many of these quotations or allusions you can identify. Some good sources are Psalms 113, 116, and 136, but if you explore the Treasury you can find many others.
4. Recall our discussion of the three verbs for praising God in Psalms 104-106. Which ones does this Psalm emphasize?
5. Note the shifts between imperative verbs (those that give a command) and indicatives (those that make a statement). How would you divide the Psalm into sections?
6. How would you further divide the central section, and on what basis?
7. Compare v. 4 with v. 18. What is the implication of one's choice of deity?

### Psalm 136, Tokens of God's Loyal Love

1. Recall again the three verbs for praising God. Which one is in focus in this Psalm?
2. For the high-level structure, note again the shifts between imperative and indicative verbs.
3. Note the regular structure of each verse.
  - (a) How does this refrain recall Psalm 107? (Use Strong's numbers to compare the vocabulary of the two refrains.)
  - (b) What may this regular refrain suggest about how the Psalm was performed? Compare Deut 27:14-26; 2 Chr 7:3; Ezra 3:11.
4. How would you group the various statements telling us why to praise the Lord, and why?
5. What shift in pronouns takes place at v. 23?
6. What further shift takes place in v. 25?

### Psalm 137, Longing for Judgment

1. How does the first part of this Psalm recall Psalm 107?
2. How does Psalm 110 help explain the harsh language in this Psalm? Compare Ps 2:9 and Rev 6:10.
3. How does this Psalm anticipate and introduce Psalms 138-145?

### Psalms 138-145, Second Davidic Cluster

Read over the Psalms in this section, and try to assign a brief title to each one. Then see if you can find associations among them. For example,

1. Compare the first and last Psalms in the group (138, 145). What similarities can you find between them?
2. What do the central four Psalms (140-143) have in common?

## Study Questions on the Psalms

3. These correspondences suggest that we should compare 139 with 144. Can you suggest a common theme for these Psalms that complements the common themes evident in the outermost two Psalms (138, 145) and the central four (140-143)?
4. Can you suggest how each of 140-143 is distinct from the other three or what sort of progression of thought there might be among them?

### Psalm 138, Initial Promise of Praise

1. What progression can you find between vv. 1-3 and vv. 4-6?
2. Contrast what is happening in these verses with the situation in Psalm 137.
3. What text does David have in mind in v. 2 when he speaks of “thy lovingkindness and ... thy truth”?
4. Contrast v. 3 with vv. 7-8.
  - (a) What spiritual principle is reflected here?
  - (b) How is the same principle reflected in Rom 8:32?

### Psalm 139, God’s Care: His Knowledge

1. What characteristic of God dominates David’s thought in vv. 1-6?
2. What is his initial response to this realization in 7-12, and what does he conclude about it?
3. What alternative response to this realization emerges in 13-18?
4. What two applications of this characteristic of God does David make in 19-22 and 23-24?

### Psalm 140, First Prayer for Deliverance

1. Notice the plethora of names for two kinds of people.
  - (a) How many names for bad people can you find?
  - (b) How many names for good people can you find?
  - (c) How does David classify himself?
2. Note the Selahs at the ends of vv. 5 and 8. Compare and contrast the divisions of the Psalm that they set off.
3. How is the contrast from Question 1 reinforced in the structure of vv. 9-13?
4. How are vv. 1-3 parallel to 4-5?
5. How are they distinct? (Notice the different kinds of opposition that David faces.)

### Psalm 141, Second Prayer for Deliverance

1. What is the relationship of the requests in vv. 3-5 to David’s activity in vv. 1-2?

## Study Questions on the Psalms

2. How do vv. 3-5a soften the description of himself that David presents in Psalm 140?
3. The pronouns in vv. 5b-6 can be understood either of the wicked or of the righteous. Observe the grammatical number of these pronouns, and also of the pronouns used of the righteous in 5a and of the wicked in v. 4.
  - (a) To which group do you think 5b-6 are referring?
  - (b) What is David claiming in these verses?
4. What two requests does David make in 8-10?

### Psalm 142, Third Prayer for Deliverance

1. The heading to this Psalm describes David “in the cave.”
  - (a) Use your concordance or Bible SW (or Hint a) to find the various times that David was in a cave.
  - (b) Compare the heading of this Psalm with that of Psalm 57. How are they similar?
2. Look back at our discussion of Psalm 57 ([https://www.cyber-chapel.org/sermons/psalms/notes/Ps\\_53thru60.pdf](https://www.cyber-chapel.org/sermons/psalms/notes/Ps_53thru60.pdf)).
  - (a) What was the likely occasion of that Psalm?
  - (b) Contrast the body of these two Psalms. How does their tone differ?
  - (c) How might difference in setting explain the difference in tone?
3. Contrast how David describes his adversaries in this Psalm with the titles used in Psalms 140 and 141.
4. Hints:
  - (a) 1 Sam 22; 1 Sam 24; 2 Sam 23

### Psalm 143, Fourth Prayer for Deliverance

1. How does David describe his adversaries here, compared with the previous three Psalms?
2. The previous three Psalms all talk about “the righteous” as a class of people.
  - (a) Does this class appear in this Psalm?
  - (b) Who is associated with righteousness in this Psalm?
  - (c) What realization in this Psalm prompts this shift?
3. Based on these contrasts, how is David’s basis for the Lord’s deliverance different in this Psalm from Psalm 140?
4. The Selah at the end of v. 6 divides the Psalm into two parts.
  - (a) Look at the forms of the verbs. How do the parts differ?
  - (b) Can you detect a chiasm in vv. 7-12?

## Study Questions on the Psalms

(c) Can you find the themes highlighted in this chiasm in vv. 1-5?

### Psalm 144, God's Care: His Action

1. Vv. 1-11 are an assembly of quotations from, and allusions to, Psalms 8, 18, 33, 39, 89, and 104. How many of these references can you find?
2. How does the theme shift at v. 3, and again at v. 9?
3. We should probably read a period at the end of v. 11, with v. 12 starting a new paragraph explaining the “such” in v. 15. (You can read these verses as statements; “that” can have the sense of “when, in the case that.”)
  - (a) Can you recognize any clear parallels between 12-14 and earlier Psalms?
  - (b) v. 9 promises a “new song.” How might vv. 12-15 fulfill this promise?
  - (c) The petition of v. 11 is repeated from 7b-8. Why might David quote this earlier petition at the start of his praise section? (Look for common vocabulary in vv. 11, 12.)
4. Think about the contrast in tone between vv. 1-11 and 12-15, and also the many citations of earlier Psalms in 1-11. Do you think David's current condition when he writes the Psalm is characterized more by 1-11 or by 12-15? In other words, is this Psalm mainly a lament with praise tacked onto the end, or praise that recalls earlier episodes of lament?

### Psalm 145, Concluding Promise of Praise

This Psalm is an acrostic; each letter of the Hebrew alphabet (except for N) begins a successive verse. But groups of lines show a thematic development, marked by repetition of key words or phrases.

1. Vv. 1-2 and 21 form an inclusio around the entire Psalm. How many correspondences can you find between them?
2. What word at the start of v. 3 and the end of v. 6 shows the theme of these three verses?
3. Look for a similar clue to the theme of vv. 7-9.
4. What repeated keywords shows a consistent theme for vv. 10-13?
5. What is the theme of vv. 14-16?
6. Each section of the Psalm so far is mostly spoken *to* the Lord in the second person, but all the sections but 10-13 also contain one or two verses that talk *about* the Lord in the third person. (We'll talk about why even 10-13 may not be an exception.)
  - (a) How do vv. 17-20 break this pattern?
  - (b) What does this suggest about the function of vv. 17-20?

### Psalms 146-150, Final Hallelu-Yah Cluster

1. Read over these five Psalms a few times.

## Study Questions on the Psalms

- (a) What do they all have in common?
- (b) What distinguishing features can you find for each of them?
2. Several themes are repeated throughout these Psalms. These include God's power in creation and his care for Zion.
  - (a) Can you find any others?
  - (b) How are these distributed?
3. Pay special attention to the distinction between commands to praise the Lord and the reasons that the Psalmist gives. How are these distributed throughout the five Psalms?
4. Pay attention to the speaker(s) in each Psalm.
  - (a) Notice pronouns that describe the speaker(s). How do these change as we move through the five Psalms?
  - (b) What different groups are summoned to praise the Lord as we move through the five Psalms?
5. Recall that "Praise ye the Lord" in Hebrew is "Hallelujah." The LXX renders this term "Alleluia."
  - (a) Where does this word appear in the NT?
  - (b) To what period in the world's history do these five Psalms have special reference?

### Psalm 146

1. What parallels can you find to vv. 3-4 in the following Psalms?
2. v. 5 is the 25<sup>th</sup> instance in the Psalms of the declaration, "Happy is he ..." (sometimes translated "blessed," as in Psalm 1:1). You might enjoy using Strong's numbers (or Hint a) to find the others and study the different things that can bring happiness.
3. Hints:
  - (a) Ps. 1:1; 2:12; 32:1-2; 33:12; 34:8; 40:4; 41:1; 65:4; 84:4-5, 12; 89:15; 94:12; 106:3; 112:1; 119:1-2; 127:5; 128:1; 137:8-9; 144:15; 146:5

### Psalm 147

1. Notice the alternation between imperative and indicative verbs. How do these lead you to divide the Psalm?
2. Compare the parts of the Psalm with each other.
  - (a) What components do they share?
  - (b) What components do they not share?

### Psalm 148

1. What contrast is there between v. 1b and v. 7?

## Study Questions on the Psalms

2. How do the verses following each of these correspond to the introductory verse in each case?
3. How does this Psalm continue the expansion of the chorus begun with the move from “I” in Psalm 146 to “we” in Psalm 147?

### Psalm 149

1. Who is called upon to praise the Lord in this Psalm?
2. What marks the division between vv. 4 and 5?
3. What is the relation between the role of the saints in vv. 1-4 and vv. 5-9?
4. What NT teaching corresponds to vv. 5-9? Use the Treasury (or hint a).
5. How does this Psalm expand the chorus beyond the individuals mentioned in the previous Psalms? (Hint: recall the distinction in Psalm 35 between David’s prayer for his enemies, and his imprecation. What allows the saints in 149:5-9 to act the way they do?)
6. Hints:
  - (a) 1 Cor 6; Rev 3

### Psalm 150

1. Use the “Wh-” questions to outline the sections of this Psalm.
2. What does this Psalm lack that appears in each of the other Psalms?
3. Hint a lists all the other passages that contain the Hebrew expression translated in v. 6, “every thing that hath breath.”
  - (a) What characterizes the entities referred to in each of these verses?
  - (b) What is unusual about the role described for such people in v. 6?
  - (c) How does this observation answer the dilemma posed in Question 2?
4. Hints:
  - (a) Gen. 7:22; Deut. 20:16; Jos. 10:40; 11:11, 14; 1 Ki. 15:29

## Concluding Summary

Summary charts of each of the five books are in [www.cyber-chapel.org/sermons/psalms/notes/Ps\\_FinalSummary\\_Charts.pdf](http://www.cyber-chapel.org/sermons/psalms/notes/Ps_FinalSummary_Charts.pdf).

1. Review the five books of Psalms.
  - (a) Skim over each book with the help of its summary chart.
  - (b) How do the Psalms in each book reflect the theme of the book (respectively, confrontation, communication, desolation, maturation, consummation)?



## Study Questions on the Psalms

- (c) Note the eight acrostic Psalms (Psalms 9/10; 25; 34; 37; 111; 112; 119; and 145) in Books 1 and 5. How do they highlight prominent themes in their books?
  - (d) Pick one Psalm from each book that seems particularly characteristic of the book's theme.
2. We have talked about how the five Books outline Israel's past history and the overall history of the world (see the last slide in the deck above. Think about where each of them fits in your personal pilgrimage.
- (a) In what book are you currently living?
  - (b) What instruction can you gain from the Psalms in your book for your current situation?
  - (c) What needs to happen for you to move to the next book?
  - (d) See if you can pick out one Psalm from each book that is particularly meaningful for your pilgrimage, and meditate on it (or better yet, commit it to memory).