

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY IN THE BOOK OF PSALMS – PART TWO – PSALMS 42-72

Nearly all the first book of Psalms were written by David. The first 10 Psalms in book two are attributed to the sons of Korah who are identified in Exod.6:21,24 as Levites who were singers, and Asaph who was the chief musician appointed by David. This gives us a clue to the composition of the musical team surrounding David whose influence is seen in their work.

Again let's use the same basic questions as we explore this new section of the Psalms.

Each Psalm is a 'prescription'. But the right prescription must be fitted to the right disease. Read one Psalm at a time and then answer these questions.

1. Was the writer admitting a particular problem or need? What was it? How do people have the same need today?
2. To what extent had the writer's need been met by the end of the Psalm? What questions still remain unanswered?
3. What answer does the writer find to his own questions? How does the New Testament present the same idea?
4. To a person facing what sort of life circumstances might you recommend this Psalm?
5. What does the Psalm teach us about Christ?

When you have completed this section of Psalms, answer two more questions.

6. What ideas have you found repeated in more than one Psalm?
7. How does each Psalm lead on to the next one?

Psalm 42 asks a series of questions sometimes of God and sometimes the writer asks himself. The questions are provoked by the critical questions others ask him which have provoked a deep thirst to know the Lord better, born of an inner despair. He wonders when he will face the Lord in person. He has learned to do the right thing with his questions, to pass them on to the Lord. When he does, the Holy Spirit takes him back to particular places and times in the history of his people and he looks afresh at the beauty of God's creation. He becomes aware once again of how much the Lord loves him. He has now a fresh sense of how foolish he is to let questions, criticism and adversity get him down. All he has to do is to look at the Lord, say thank you and draw hope from Him.

Psalm 43 continues with the same struggle. People without the Lord are cheats and liars who give us a hard time for no good reason. They give us the feeling that God has deserted us. But everything hangs on where we look for answers to life. If we allow the light of His truth to shine on our circumstances He brings us back to how He wants to live in us, beginning at His altar, the cross. Every situation becomes a time for immense joy, for bursting into song.

Psalm 44 builds on this new confidence by taking us back to what the Bible describes of the ways God intervened in the history of His people. The writer is led to review the story of the conquest of Canaan and how it was only the Lord's doing, not their own. It follows that this will be the only secret of facing new challenges. We again have only to say thank you and celebrate. There continue to be times when we feel deserted, defeated and objects of public ridicule. This is what our enemy, Satan, would have us believe. When this happens we are to stay constant in our confidence that if we truly trust Him no-one can touch us.(Heb.13:5) God is not asleep to our need of redemption through the cross and of resurrection because of His life in us.

Psalm 45 puts the heartaches of the last three Psalms behind us to honour the One who brings these victories about. The King in this Psalm is not David or Solomon but Christ Himself. He is the most wonderful Man who ever lived with words of abundant grace, (Luke 4:22) and evidence of God's richest blessing. His sword, the word of God, (Heb.4:12) is the ultimate weapon for dealing with the nonsense of the enemy. Because His Father in heaven is the ruler of the universe, His Son on earth was anointed with the Holy Spirit, (Heb.1:9) and is able to rule in our hearts with the very best qualities. Jesus Christ's queen is His church, (Rev.21:2). He loves us deeply and this will be evident to all on earth if only we trust Him. We, His bride, will be the means of Him having many sons for which all people will eventually give Him thanks.

Psalm 46 now translates the triumph of the previous Psalm into practice in the chaos of life on earth. Whatever happens in the way of natural or man-made disaster, He is in charge. His river of life, (Ezek.47:1-12; Rev.22:1,2) flows unstoppably through our turbulent world. He will stop what is wrong and rout the enemy. We can relax in Him and know Him in every situation.

Psalm 47 is another song of celebration for two reasons. Again it is a huge relief to know that the Lord gives victory over every kind of enemy. This is always our starting point. This time there is a second reason to be excited. He chooses our inheritance which is available to us because we are His children. Paul will have much to say in the New Testament about what it really means to be an heir of Christ. (Rom.8:17; Gal.3:29; Eph.3:6) Join God's orchestra and sing your heart out. He is so good to us!

Psalm 48 shifts the focus to the city of God's people, Jerusalem, and to His temple in the centre of that city. Enjoying our inheritance in Christ is not a solitary activity but a family and a community one. Faced with the church as a united body as we are meant to be, the enemy are helpless and they know it. So make yourself at home in God's place with God's people. Don't forget that it is your responsibility to share your inheritance with the next generation. Teach your kids, particularly on this occasion your daughters, and make sure they know the Lord invites them to His party too.

Psalm 49 explores one of the major causes of defeat over which we need victory, the love of money. (I Tim.6:10) In the minds of most people our inheritance is the money and property we hope to receive when our parents die. Our worth is measured in dollars which we believe can fix any problem. What we have failed to notice is that in no way can our money be used to redeem us from sin, although with a smart lawyer many have tried. Only the blood of Christ can buy our redemption. We equate property with identity but we are fooling ourselves. Death is the great equaliser. At that point in time the only question to ask is whether or not Christ has redeemed us. Otherwise there is no difference between the rich man, the poor man and an animal.

Psalm 50 sets out the eternal consequence of our defeat by sin. God is the judge and is Himself without sin. What are the charges He brings against us? In the case of the Jews it was not their failure to offer animal sacrifices. Sacrifices really do not matter to God because He does not need their meat but it is their failure to thank Him from the heart and keep their promises to Him. What really grieves God is the hypocrisy of preachers who proclaim the truth for others but steal, commit adultery, lie and slander others. The Lord insists that our actions must match our words. (Jas.1:22-25)

Psalm 51 is the first in the Psalms of Book Two to be written by David and it is a devastating one. The setting is his adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of one of his best friends, after which David organised Uriah's death in war to make everything look right so that David could marry the pregnant Bathsheba. (II Sam.11) No-one except his general Joab – and God – knew the truth. The

Lord sent the prophet Nathan to confront David with his sin and to tell him what the consequence would be in the death of the baby.(II Sam.12) David is crushed by the realisation of what he has done against God. He recognises how the problem is not one piece of bad behaviour but his sin nature present from conception and now expressed just one more time with devastating results. He is aware of his need for the Lord to cleanse him thoroughly. No good works could pay for what he has done. He is utterly undeserving of the Lord's presence in his life yet he still longs to serve Him.

Psalm 52 moves on from the disaster of David's own sin of adultery to the first of a series of wrongs he suffered from others. The setting this time is the occasion when David approached Ahimelech, the priest, to request the bread offered to God in the tabernacle for his hungry followers who were on the run from King Saul.(I Sam.22) David had misled Ahimelech into believing that he was acting in the service of Saul. Doeg the Edomite overheard the conversation and rushed off to Saul to repeat what he had heard, leading to his murder of Ahimelech. David is outraged by Doeg's crime but recognises that it springs from rejecting God. He knows that the only answer is to trust the Lord all day and every day so that His life will flow through him like a fruitful olive tree.

Psalm 53 repeats Psalm 14 almost word for word. Once more David is reviewing where all sin begins - in the heart of the man who thinks and acts as if there was no God. He reminds us that all of us have exactly the same problem even though we express it in vastly different ways. Paul picked up the message of verses 1-3 as the foundation of his explanation of the gospel starting in Romans 3:10. This is why Paul tells us our only hope is to be justified by faith in Christ, the only Man to whom this description of the human heart does not apply.

Psalm 54 recalls yet another time when others treated David badly. This time it is the Ziphites who reported to Saul that David was hiding in their part of the Judean wilderness.(I Sam.23:19) David's response in this Psalm is to recognise that his enemies are motivated by their own rejection of God but that all he has to do is to trust the Lord to protect him and that the Lord will deal with them.

Psalm 55 is a general prayer to help us cope with all the times when others are against us. Always the answer is the same; instead of complaining to ourselves and everyone else, tell God about how we feel and let Him deal with firstly our angry hearts and secondly the troublemakers. The hardest attack to deal with is from those who have been our good friends and with whom we have shared Christian fellowship but who now turn against us. The most painful part is when they continue to say nice things but in their hearts they are at war with us. There is only one solution, to cast our hurt on Him and let Him keep our hearts pure and undistracted. Peter recognised this wonderful truth.(I Pet.5:7)

Psalm 56 is set in another story of how others are treating David badly though he had brought the problem on himself. He had taken the unwise step of seeking refuge from Saul among the Philistines who had every reason to hate him after his defeat of their hero Goliath. In the hope of overcoming their suspicion of him he had pretended to be mad, dribbling insanely and scribbling on the wall.(I Sam.21) The king of Gath was not impressed, not wanting another psychiatric patient to deal with, and had him thrown out. He remembers what he should have done, to seek God's protection and on-one else's.

Psalm 57 is another time when David is on the run from Saul.(I Sam.22,24) On this occasion he finds the cave of Adullam in which to hide. His family and 400 men find their way there to join

him. The 400 are seemingly most unpromising. They are described as distressed, discontented and in debt and yet under David's leadership and teaching, including probably singing some of the Psalms, they become one of the most exciting Christian groups in history. But David recognises right from the start in this Psalm that his refuge is in the Lord not a cave. Because of this he is able to see the traps that Saul sets for him but falls into himself. Consequently he can even praise God in a cave.

Psalm 58 reflects the violent world of the unbeliever whose thinking and behaviour are compared to a poisonous snake or a raging lion. David describes how we all feel at times when we are the victims of evil people. He does the right thing with his angry thoughts in sharing them with God who alone can deal with them in an eternal way. He knows it is a huge relief for us under pressure to know our enemies are God's problem, not ours.

Psalm 59 is one of David's earliest Psalms, describing how he felt when Saul, out of jealousy at David's military success, sent men to arrest him despite him being Saul's son-in-law.(I Sam.19) Michal, David's wife, tricks Saul's messengers by putting her household idol in David's bed to give him time to escape and then lies to Saul that David threatened her to protect herself. David repeatedly compares his enemies to a pack of howling dogs. David is learning however that the hostility of others is not necessarily the result of any wrong by him but is a problem within their own hearts. This frees him to rejoice in God's goodness rather than wallowing in his own self doubt.

Psalm 60 by contrast is a much later Psalm when David has become king of all Israel and is in the process of consolidating his nation. Much of the Promised Land had been lost under Saul's leadership so he sets out to regain it from the Arameans and the Edomites who took every opportunity to rob Israel.(II Sam.8) This time David is doubting at first their position in God's favour, supposing defeat is the result of sin, though not his own. He knows only the Lord can fix the situation and therefore trusts the coming battles into God's hands.

Psalm 61 takes a break from the challenges of life to celebrate the joy of answered prayer. He knows that whatever the problem he can always talk to the Lord about it and then relax on the rock of Christ, a solid mountain top from which the world looks so different. He realises how sensible it would be to stay in that relationship all day and every day in future and how deeply satisfying life will be when he does.

Psalm 62 revisits the Rock in whom David has previously hidden or on whom he has stood.(Matt.16:18,19) He is learning to wait for the Lord, not in the sense of fidgeting impatiently from one foot to the other and looking at his watch but like a good waiter in an exclusive restaurant, quietly attentive to every wish of the one he serves. In this attitude he can cope with those who try to bring him down with their lies and hidden hatred. He realises that low or high position, wealth or the lack of it, is nothing to God, but what matters to Him is whether we trust Him.

Psalm 63 written during David's time in the dry, barren wilderness of Judea describes the hunger for God's word and the thirst for His presence which utterly satisfy our own hearts, and give us so much to say to other hungry people, and in praise and thanks to Him.(Jn.4:7-14) Particularly when we wake in the night and could be worrying about yesterday or tomorrow, a marvellous peace comes when we think instead about Him. Then no-one and nothing can touch us.

Psalm 64 reminds us that the most painful attacks from our enemies are made with one weapon, the human tongue. With cruel and dishonest words they plan to bring us down. The overwhelming

temptation is to fight back in defence with our own harsh words. There is a simple solution, to let God do it in His way with the super weapon of His word.(Eph.6:17) If we let Him do it, our attackers will again be amazed and reduced for the moment to silence.(Acts 4:13,14)

Psalm 65 explores the nature and outcome of prayer which begins with silence rather than a long list of demands. As we listen to Him He lets us know how great His promises are to us, how He understands the problems we face but how our sin prevents us enjoying His best. He has demonstrated His immense power in the physical world but above all He offers us His forgiveness. He cares for all our needs on a daily basis because 'the stream of God is full of water'.(Ps.46:4) His life in us overflows in blessing to us and to those around us if we let Him.(Jn.7:37-39)

Psalm 66 is a full-blooded, full volume, out-pouring of thanks for God's great power. Eventually no-one will be able to deny how amazing God's power is but sadly there will always be those who will only pretend. Even when God allowed Israel to cross the Red Sea or later the river Jordan without getting their feet wet, there were those who did not trust Him in their hearts. In the same way today God can guard our every step when we trust Him so no-one can harm us. Trusting Him begins with the sacrifice Christ made on the cross, which leads us to believe He can handle absolutely anything. We then have something to shout about!

Psalm 67 is a short, simple Psalm which looks forward to the blessing of the grace of God. The unnamed writer anticipates that people will see the light of who God is like the disciples did on the Mount of Transfiguration.(Matt.17) For the rest of the world this will happen as we hear of the Lord's way, the gospel, which brings us to salvation when we trust Him to manage every detail of our lives and to provide every need we have. Our experience will be one of joy and fear, a seemingly strange mixture but remember that joy is our experience of grace, and fear is wonderful when we fear someone who loves us beyond our wildest imagination.

Psalm 68 returns to God's victory over His enemies pictured first as a conquering King in the desert who liberates the oppressed - the orphan, the widow, the lonely and the prisoner. The Lord had demonstrated His victory when He protected and provided for His people after they left Egypt. Women were so often the victims of a harsh system so God's victory is to set them free to proclaim His message to the world. One mountain above all others symbolises the victory of God over death as verse 18 anticipates Jesus' resurrection in Eph.4:8 which made the grace of God available to all who trust Him. We are invited to let Him carry all our burdens of all kinds.(Matt.11:28-30) A victory parade led by musicians reminds us of what He has done. The temple of God which from the New Testament on is us,(I Cor.3:16; 6:19) is where victory begins. Celebrate His strength at all times.

Psalm 69 is another Psalm of the cross. While Psalm 22 was actually spoken by Jesus as He hung on the cross of Calvary, this Psalm must surely also have been in His mind. It could also be the prayer of any of us in deep trouble and wondering what the Lord will do. As we read it keep both circumstances in mind and we will learn what it means to be 'crucified with Christ'.(Gal.2:20) It begins with the image of having fallen into a swamp with no rock to stand on because of being wrongfully accused and alone. David has a deep concern that the Lord would not be dishonoured in the eyes of others because of the way he responds to adversity. Both he and Jesus were written off by their brothers at one stage. Both also had a passion for the house of God, David to build it and Jesus to cleanse it. Both were a joke for drunks at times. David recognised that the answer to all our prayers is - saving truth, not a specific solution but the message that He saves from which everything else flows. Redemption at the cross is the starting point for answering every question. People will abuse or neglect us, or they may offer inadequate and disgusting help.(Matt.27:34,48)

They will face the judgement of God. If they refuse the love of God they will miss out for eternity on what He wanted to give all of us.(Rev.13:8; 17:8; 20:15) The Lord hears the needy who trust Him at the cross so that they can enjoy His inheritance to the full through the resurrection.

Psalm 70 could be considered a brief summary of Psalm 69. It reviews how Jesus could have felt on the cross, how David felt when he was persecuted by Saul and later others, and what can be our reaction to injustice. Lord save me – but hurry up! It anticipates the consequences for our enemies who are attempting to kill us, injure us or at least ridicule us. In each case he is not asking for physical damage to them but for the sense of shame which comes with God's conviction of sin. At the same time he recognises in theory the joy and thanksgiving to God which comes to those who trust in God's salvation and greatness. But for the moment although he knows the theory he is still struggling with the pain of his situation – so Lord hurry up!

Psalm 71 has no recorded writer but it sounds like David in old age looking back on how good God has been but still looking ahead through the rest of his life confident that the Lord will always be exactly the same. He alternates between testifying how God has been his rock to live in as in Psalm 31:1 and calling on the Lord to help him because his enemies are once more pursuing him. The rock is used 21 times in the Psalms following many different themes but explained in I Cor.10:4 as representing Christ Himself. His expectation is that the Lord will continue to protect and vindicate him as much as an old man as He had when he was a boy, that he will always be learning from Him and always able to teach and sing about Him to the generations which follow.

Psalm 72 is a fascinating prayer, apparently by Solomon yet described in the last line as the final prayer of David. Perhaps they wrote it together as David anticipated his death and handing over to his son. It echoes the idea from I Kings 3 of Solomon's request to God for wisdom for his royal responsibility. The first concern is that he might demonstrate God's righteousness and justice as he brings peace to those he leads. This will show in the way the needy and their children are cared for. The result of this will be in them having a deep reverence for the Lord as the one who blesses, provides and gives them peace. Solomon's enemies will have to respect and honour him but this will not distract him from caring for those who are desperate and oppressed. The resources which are provided by international recognition can be used for the poor rather than lining the pockets of the elite. If Solomon trusts God he will be so overwhelmingly blessed with resources he will never lack the means to care for the needy entrusted to him. And it will be all God's doing, not Solomon's.