

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY IN THE BOOK OF PSALMS – PART FOUR

QUESTIONS ON THE PSALMS, BOOK IV 90-106

Most of the Psalms in this section are suitable for either congregational singing or prayer; a few are still individual prayers fitting different needs and problems.

1. Decide to which of these 3 groups each Psalm belongs. What are the main differences between these 3 kinds of Psalms?
2. Take a Psalm intended to be sung by a congregation and answer these questions.
 - (a) What does it remind us of concerning creation?
 - (b) What does it teach us about salvation?
 - (c) What does it show us of Christ?
 - (d) What use does it make of Old Testament stories?
 - (e) If you were choosing this Psalm as a hymn before preaching, what sort of sermon theme would it fit?
 - (f) What are hymns really for? What does this Psalm have that most modern hymn seem to lack?
 - (g) Put the Psalm into your words so that someone with no Bible knowledge could understand it. If you are really clever, fit it to a tune you think would be suitable. (I will not make you sing it)

Psalm 90 is the only Psalm acknowledged to be written by Moses though his influence is obvious in many others. It sets the scene by reminding us that the only place in creation worth living is in Him. He made us and gave us a very brief time on earth compared with eternity. Every day is to be treasured. The one factor which spoils life is our sin which deserves the judgment of God. When we have messed up let us immediately welcome Him back into the running of our lives so that we can enjoy Him and His wisdom and teach our children.

Psalm 91 develops the theme of dwelling in the Lord by trusting Him. He will protect the one who does this like an eagle protecting its young. They will now have nothing to fear even though devastation is all around in the lives of those who trust themselves. He promises the protection of His angels in the threats of daily living. The Devil misquoted this scripture to Jesus to try to persuade Him to jump off the temple to attract attention, (Matt.4:6) but the Lord wisely refuses to listen. The song ends with a direct promise from God to keep us safe if we trust Him only. He promises a long life of enjoying His salvation.

Psalm 92 was written to be sung on the Sabbath, the day of rest. It is a simple song of thanks first for who God is, His lovingkindness and faithfulness, and therefore the source of all our genuine joy. It needed to be appreciated with a full orchestra. It celebrates both the work of God and His unique wisdom which sees first the emptiness of life without the Lord which is so temporary. By contrast the one who has trusted God wholeheartedly will have true, lasting success. He will be untouched by adversity and age, having a vitality which springs from eternal life within him. As an old man I can still be as excited about my Lord as ever.

Psalm 93 is short which does not mean it is unimportant. It has a very simple message. The Lord is all powerful and eternal. He controls the earth. He can even control floods. He

could control us and our circumstances if we let Him. His way of doing it is through His word translated into Christian living in us. Let Him!

Psalm 94 examines a contrasting aspect of the character of God. He is the Judge and will deal with man's sin if it is not forgiven. People suffer horribly at the hands of the proud who behave as if they were God. The most needy, widows, orphans and refugees, are the easiest victims. But it is not our business to judge the oppressors. We struggle to leave judgement to God. How does He deal with our pride? By teaching us from His word to change our whole way of thinking. Only then can we be content to let God deal with those who treat us and others badly. When He opens His word to me the first sin I will recognise is my own. (I Tim.1:15) My first sin is anxiety because I try to run life myself instead of taking refuge in Christ where I am safe against the worst the world can do to me. Wow, what a relief!

Psalm 95 returns to the theme of enjoying the Lord as the owner of creation and the absolute rock on whom our lives can be built. But to enjoy Him we must submit to Him, regarding Him as the shepherd of us, His sheep, and listening carefully to all He says. The Psalm reminds us how the people of Israel trusted God to get them out of Egypt and through the Red Sea but quickly doubted when conditions became tough and they ran out of water. Moses had to strike the rock for water to flow, (Exod.17) as Christ our Rock had to be crucified for the Spirit to flow. Meribah reminded them of how they had quarrelled with God, and Massah of how they tested God. For 40 years that generation repeated the same mistake and so failed to enjoy His best and therefore His rest. Don't let us do the same!

Psalm 96 is another song of praise. This time the emphasis is on the message of salvation which should be at the heart of all our music and worship. Everyone worldwide needs to hear this good news. We are to make plain Who He is, and what He has done. As the Creator He is above all other so-called gods which are man-made. He is strong and beautiful. Make sure everyone knows this. Our response must be not just words but sacrifice which is the only way we can escape the judgement of God. Jesus made that sacrifice on the cross. He would be coming to make that sacrifice, to live in those who trust Him and finally to rule the world whether as our Saviour or as the Judge. Make up your mind!

Psalm 97 emphasises the Lord's supreme power which should be a source of immense joy. Heaven knows this. Even the physical creation acknowledges His power and welcomes His presence. How embarrassing it should be therefore to remain an idol worshipper. How wonderful it will be by comparison to reject all that and love the Lord without reservation. Then His light is sown like seed in our hearts, and through us in the world around us. Just thank Him and receive the means of a bountiful crop for all to enjoy.

Psalm 98 urges God's people to sing a new song, an idea used several times before. (Ps.33:3; 40:5; 96:1) We enjoy old and familiar songs but every now and then it is exciting to hear a new one. What is new about this Psalm? First it celebrates what He has revealed about Himself, His actions that brought victory on our behalf over sin, His lovingkindness in showing His faithfulness and righteousness to His people and then to the world. These are grounds for bringing in the whole orchestra. The entire creation joins in the song. But what is new? He is coming to judge what we have done with what He entrusted to us. (Matt.25:14-46) For that to happen the sealed book of God's plan for our future has to be opened. (Rev.5:9) This could only be done by Jesus once He had died on the cross, risen again and returned to heaven. Are we confident the new song will be good news for us?

Psalm 99 lifts God up in our thoughts as the King who is great, strong and absolutely just. He will deal with us completely fairly if we trust Him and recognise His uniqueness. Moses, Aaron and Samuel are used as examples of God's justice as they came before Him as priests on behalf of the rest of the people. They listened as God spoke to them and obeyed what He said. Yet there were times when they disobeyed and God then forgave them and dealt with the consequences of their mistakes. Trust Him as they did.

Psalm 100 is a short simple song of thanks to God. It gives seven instructions about worship in which each time there is encouragement about the attitude in which it becomes meaningful. We are to shout joyfully, serve Him with gladness, come before Him with joyful singing, know Him as our Maker, enter into His presence with thanksgiving and praise, give thanks and bless His name with a real understanding of who He is. All this is to be based on truly knowing His work and His character. He, not I, made me, so He is my shepherd and I am His sheep. He is good, loving, kind and faithful always and to all people. Our praise of God should therefore tell and show the whole world.

Psalm 101 builds on the previous Psalm by describing the personal choices we need to make if we want to be genuine in our praise of God. We are to choose His way of living all day and every day, starting in our homes with absolute honesty. This involves rejecting things and actions which could gain a hold on our lives. This starts in the heart. It means rejecting talk against others and any attitude of superiority. It is a decision that our true friends will be those who also desire God's best, not liars and cheats. This is to be a new decision at the start of every day.

Psalm 102 is in striking contrast to the songs of praise which have gone before. The writer's world has collapsed and he is suffering greatly. He feels desperately lonely. As in many other Psalms his affliction is aggravated by the mocking attitude of his enemies. The deepest pain at this moment is in the question –where now is God? The answer begins to come as he again remembers God. He is eternal, unchanging, compassionate, gracious, and waiting to hear from us when we again open our hearts to Him. In the Old Testament God's presence was especially manifested in Jerusalem so let us start by going back there in our thinking. Let us again return to the task of telling the world about Him, beginning with our own families. He is longing to help the destitute, those in pain, the trapped and the weak. Let us expect that He will give us the full lives He planned for us and for the generations which follow.

Psalm 103 returns to the theme of praise to God but this time it explores the greatest reason for praise. It is another Psalm of David who knew first hand why this cause for praise was so important. He was 'a man after God's own heart' who had been an inspiring example of faith but at the same time he had committed one of the meanest acts in the whole Bible in stealing his friend Uriah's wife and arranging for Uriah to die in battle to cover his crime and its consequence.(II Sam.11,12) He had already written two powerful Psalms about the forgiveness of God.(Ps.32, 51) Now he thanked God not just for forgiveness but for the new life which must follow it. The secret of a full life right into old age is to know God's forgiveness day after day. Forgiveness opens the way for God's compassion to us, whose lives are so brief, to be lavished upon us and our children for generation after generation. But there is one condition. We must want with all our hearts to be the people He planned us to be. That is what praise should be saying.

Psalm 104 is a song of praise for the superb job God made of creation. He caused everything to come together in a unique way to make the earth. He designed each feature of land and sea to accommodate different life forms. He has cared for every species He created. The whole animal and plant aspect of creation has the wisdom to look to Him for life and support. Man should do the same but we do not always do so.

Psalm 105 moves on from God's goodness in creation to His faithful care of the people of Israel beginning with Abraham and the covenant He made with them. He protected them in the land of Canaan. When famine came He provided Joseph who suffered slavery and imprisonment but then caused him to be promoted to Pharaoh's prime minister so that he was in a position to care for his family when they came looking for help. When the attitude of the Egyptians changed from appreciation to oppression He still protected them and under the leadership of Moses sent plagues on the Egyptians until they set Israel free. Again it was God who brought them out of Egypt with generous resources, the cloud of His presence to lead them and miraculous provision of food and water in the wilderness. He brought them back to the land of Canaan and continued to bless them. All they had to do was trust and obey Him. So do we.

Psalm 106 is the third in a series of songs of praise, first for God's love in creating the world and providing for us, second in His care of Israel through difficult times and now in the Lord's forgiveness of Israel when time after time they doubted Him or rebelled and turned to other gods. They are reminded of their panic faced with the Red Sea and the Egyptian army behind them. Despite the miracle of crossing the Red Sea they doubted Him when they ran out of water and food,(Exod.15,16 and 17) but soon they were repeating the same mistakes.(Num.11) Some leaders became jealous of Moses and Aaron.(Num.16) They made the golden calf to be their god when Moses was away too long.(Exod. 32) They grumbled and doubted again when entering the land of Canaan seemed too hard.(Num.14) They turned to the gods of the Moabites when tempted by the Moabite women.(Num.25) They drove Moses to act rashly when they again faced a lack of water and he struck the rock twice instead of just speaking to it as instructed.(Num.20) Once in Canaan they still forgot God's instructions over and over and trusted the local gods even to the extent of sacrificing their own children. Every time they suffered defeat and hardship as a result but every time the Lord totally forgave them and began to bless them again. He still does when we let Him.