

The Poetry, Book 2

Psalms

The Book of Psalms is a collection of ancient poems, originally written to be sung in worship, to the accompaniment of musical instruments. The English title is from the Greek, *Psalmoi*, meaning "Songs." The Hebrew title is *Sepher Tehillim*, meaning "Book of Praises," and the Book of Psalms may be thought of as Israel's hymn book; the psalms are still sung today in synagogues. Some Christian groups, such as the Reformed Presbyterian Churches, use no other hymnal. Since the 1960s, in charismatic Christian circles, there has been a revival of the singing of Scripture, particularly the psalms.

1. Its Universal Appeal. The Book of Psalms is perhaps the best-loved book of the Bible. Of the 283 quotations from the Old Testament which appear in the New Testament, nearly half of them (116) are from the Book of Psalms. Even people who have no knowledge of Scripture (nor any desire for such knowledge) will probably have some familiarity with Psalm 23, and can probably quote the first verse verbatim.

2. The Messianic Psalms. The Book of Psalms we have today is the same one from which Jesus read and quoted during His earthly existence. In His teachings, He said that there were many things in the Psalms that speak of Him; today, we call those psalms "messianic psalms."

3. Numbering of the Psalms in the Septuagint. The Septuagint (the Old Testament in Greek) combines four of the psalms into two: thus Psalms 9 and 10 are combined as Psalm 9; and Psalms 114 and 115 are combined as Psalm 113. Because of this, the numbering of the Psalms in the Septuagint is different from that of the Hebrew Book of Psalms, and that of the English translations (which are based on the Hebrew); but the content is the same¹.

4. The Imprecatory Psalms. Some of the psalms are referred to as "imprecatory psalms." The word is derived from Latin "imprecari," meaning "to request, or pray about another"; and, by extension, it means prayer for punishment of one's enemies. To our modern minds, with our New Testament values, it may seem wrong that some of the psalms ask the Lord to break the enemies' teeth, or arms. Three things, however, must be remembered when considering these psalms.

a. First, they were written in times of great danger and distress and in a time when such violence was commonplace.

¹ The Septuagint, completed ca 300 BC in Alexandria, is believed to be the very first book ever to be translated from one language to another (from Hebrew to Greek). It was the version of the OT in popular use in the early centuries AD. For this reason, the wording of OT quotations in the NT are sometimes different from the wording in our (Hebrew-based) OT.

b. Second, these expressions, such as “break their teeth, O God, in their mouth,” are used metaphorically, and simply mean “break their power to hurt me.”

c. And, third, these psalms represent the heart cry of men in desperate situations, and do not necessarily represent the heart of God. Like the erroneous arguments of Job’s friends, the imprecatory Psalms are an inspired record; but they do not necessarily represent the mind or will of God.

5. Some Interesting Facts about Psalms. The longest and shortest chapters in the Bible are in Psalms. The longest chapter is Ps 119 (176 verses); the shortest chapter, Ps 117 (two verses), is also the middle chapter of the Bible. (And, if you are **really** interested in Bible trivia, the middle verse of the entire Bible is Ps 118:8.)

6. The King David Connection. When the Book of Psalms is thought of, King David usually comes to mind. In the titles (superscriptions) of the psalms, 73 are attributed to David, 28 are attributed to others (including one to Moses), and 49 are anonymous². Some of the Psalms attributed to David are directly related to things that happened in his own life; examples include Psalms 23, 51, 52 and 57. David loved music, and he took the music of praise very seriously; as king, he ordained musicians and singers for worship in the Tabernacle (and, later, the Temple). According to I Chronicles 23:5, David organized and ordained an orchestra and choir of 4,000 men, and made some (or all) of the instruments for the orchestra. And, in II Samuel 23:1, David is referred to as “the sweet psalmist [singer] of Israel.” All things considered, he might justifiably be thought of, not only as the dominant figure in the Book of Psalms, but as the father of musical praise and worship as we know it³.

7. Organization. In the Book of Psalms, each psalm is treated as a separate chapter. Thus, the First Psalm is Psalm (or Psalms) 1; The 23rd Psalm is Psalm (or Psalms) 23, etc. Each verse within a psalm is treated as a verse within a chapter. Thus, the 4th verse of the 23rd Psalm is referenced as "Psalm 23:4" or, alternatively, "Psalms 23:4."

For reasons unknown, the Psalms have, since ancient times, been divided into five sections in the Hebrew Scriptures. One possible explanation is that this was done to conform to the arrangement of the five books of the Law (Pentateuch). Whatever the meaning, this organization is ancient in origin, and is worthy of our notice. The five divisions are:

² These numbers cannot be assigned with certainty, for in Hebrew the prepositions "of" "to" and "for" are the same word. Thus, "a Psalm **of** David" could mean one written **by** him; but it could also mean a psalm dedicated **to** David, or a psalm written **for** David.

³ I am speaking here of musical praise and worship in a purely human sense; musical praise and worship of God in the Heavenly Realm have gone on forever.

- a. The Genesis Book (Psalms 1-41);
- b. The Exodus Book (Psalms 42-72);
- c. The Leviticus Book (Psalms 73-89);
- d. The Numbers Book (Psalms 90-106); and
- e. The Deuteronomy Book (Psalms 107-150).

8. The Superscriptions of the Psalms. Many of the Psalms have superscriptions (introductory information, titles or headings). When reading a psalm it is helpful to know the meaning of the terms used in its introduction, in order to fully understand and appreciate its content. The superscriptions may identify the author, style of the song, or the musical instrument to accompany it. Others explain the circumstances of, or reason for, its being composed; perhaps chief among these is that of Psalm 51 concerning David's sin with Bathsheba. Another example is Psalm 18, written when David had escaped from Saul; another is Psalm 34, about the time David escaped from the Philistines by pretending to be insane; still another is Psalm 52, concerning the Edomite, Doeg, one of the most wicked and cruel men in human history.

9. "For the Sons of Korah." Troubling to some students of the Bible are 11 psalms "for the sons of Korah," for this seems to refer to those whom God destroyed for rebelling in the wilderness (Numbers 16). However, according to I Chronicles 9:19, 31-33, there were Levites, descendants of Korah, who survived the events of Numbers 16 (and who, presumably, took no part in Korah's rebellion); and these, it appears, constituted a special group of singers. This seems to be the most likely explanation, for God would not honor with holy songs those who were the very personification of evil rebellion; nor would He allow them to lead His people in worship.

10. The superscription most compelling to me is that of Psalm 51, for it is the cry of David's heart immediately after the trouble over his terrible sins concerning Bathsheba and Uriah the Hittite. This psalm should always be read with this in mind.

11. Terms Used in the Superscriptions. The meanings of some of the terms are unknown or uncertain, and authorities have differing opinions as to their meanings. The following are the terms, with their generally accepted meanings.

- a. Ajeleth Shamar ("hind of the morning") - meaning uncertain--perhaps the timing.
- b. Alamoah ("young maidens/virgins").
- c. Altaschith ("destroy not") - purpose uncertain.
- d. Asaph - David's Chief Musician. In most churches today he would be "Minister of Music."

- e. Gittith (the meaning of this is uncertain) - perhaps a Gittite harp, or to a Gittite cadence. "Gittite" refers to the Philistine city of Gath, Goliath's home town.
- f. Higgaion ("meditate on this").
- g. Jeduthun (one of David's music leaders).
- h. Jonath-elem-rechokim ("cry of the dove in the distance") - perhaps a style of singing. **Trivia note:** this is one of the two longest words in the English Bible (18 letters); the other is in Isaiah 8:1, the name of a son of Isaiah.
- i. Leanoth ("dancing").
- j. Mahalath ("shoutings").
- k. Mahalath Leanoth ("shoutings" and "dancings").
- l. Maschil ("instruction" or "teaching").
- m. Michtam ("a poem or writing").
- n. Muth labin ("to die for the son") - probably the name of the melody.
- o. Neginoth or Neginah (a stringed instrument).
- p. Nehiloth (a wind instrument, such as a flute).
- q. Selah (a musical term, probably meaning to pause and reflect).
- r. Sheminith (a musical term, meaning uncertain, possibly 8 strings, or 8 octaves).
- s. Shiggaion (meaning uncertain).
- t. Shoshannim ("lilies") - probably trumpets.
- u. Shushan-eduth ("testimony").
- v. Song of Degrees (the meaning of this is unknown).

NOTE: For more information on the superscriptions, and their meaning, see "Terms Used in the Superscriptions of the Psalms" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).

12. Selah. At the end of some verses in Psalms there appears the word "Selah." It appears with spacing, capitalization, and a period, as if it is a separate, one-word sentence. Opinions differ as to its meaning, but it is probably a musical term meaning "pause." It is my personal opinion that it can also mean, "Pause and reflect" (on the meaning and significance what has just been written--to give it some thought).

A. Author. The human compiler is unknown. Seventy-three of the psalms bear David's name; however, as we have seen, this may not mean that he composed them all. Others bear the names of Asaph (David's chief musician), Moses, Solomon, Heman, Ethan, and the sons of Korah. There is reason to believe that some of the 49 psalms which are anonymous were actually written by David and Solomon. Some authorities assign the final compiling of the psalms to Isaiah or Jeremiah; others believe that Ezra was the final compiler, working under the

authority of the Great Synagogue, at the time of the finalizing of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Ezra seems to me to be the most likely compiler, for some of the psalms, such as Psalm 137, had to have been written after the Babylonian captivity.

Whoever it was who composed the psalms, or assembled and put them together in their final form, we must always remember that they are all inspired, and that the Holy Spirit is the ultimate Author.

B. Place and Date. The Psalms were composed and accumulated over a period of many centuries, and in places scattered from Egypt to Babylon. If Moses really did write one or more of the Psalms (Ps 90 bears his name), their dating goes back at least to the time of the Exodus, and extends down to the time of Ezra, a total period of about 1,000 years.

C. Occasion. The Israelites had been away from the Promised Land for a very long time, since the first carrying away of the people of the Northern Kingdom by the Assyrians, until the return of the people of the Southern Kingdom (and the remnant and descendants of the Northern Kingdom) from Babylon. In fact, they had not been a united nation since the death of Solomon, about 400 years earlier. In the final ingathering from exile, the Temple was rebuilt, Jerusalem was rebuilt, the priesthood reorganized, and Temple worship was restored. As a vital part of this reorganization and restoration, the Hebrew Scriptures were gathered and organized, including the Psalms, the Israelites' great hymnal.

D. Theme. Although the Psalms contain prophecy, history, and cries for help in times of distress, the underlying theme of Psalms is praise, thus the name given to the book when it was compiled, "Songs of Praise."

E. Highlights. Because of the richness of Psalms, for our purposes its highlights are too numerous to list them all. Selected highlights are as follows:

1. Life's Two Options. (Psalm 1)

The Book of Psalms opens with 6 concise verses, in which are laid out in clear terms the two options that all men have in life: to live in righteousness, or in ungodliness. The results of the two lifestyles are clear, and the choice is ours.

2. The Sovereignty of God, and a Begotten Savior. (Psalm 2)

Psalm 2 summarizes a fundamental fact of the Universe: that powerful men may think that they are sovereign, with absolute power, but that God looks upon them and their foolish pride and laughs. This psalm is both a messianic psalm, and an imprecatory psalm. It contains the vital fact that the Messiah to come will be **begotten** of God (not like the angels, who are **created** beings). To make this important point, Paul the apostle will later quote v 7 in preaching in the synagogue

at Antioch of Pisidia (see Acts 13:33)⁴. In fact, this distinction is so vital that the entire Church gathered in Nicea in 325 AD to clarify, declare and establish it.

3. When David Fled from Absalom. (Psalm 3)

The superscription of Psalm 3 is interesting because it both identifies David as the writer, and sets forth the situation in which the psalm was written. This psalm is also one of the imprecatory psalms, and is one sung today in Christian circles.

4. A Psalm Quoted by Jesus. (8:1-2)

At the end of His earthly ministry, on the day of His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the religious leaders were offended that a crowd of children went before Him and into the Temple, shouting praises to God. Rebuking them for their arrogant error, Jesus quoted a verse from Psalm 8, "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength⁵."

5. Preservation of Scripture. (12:6-7)

A vital doctrine of the Judeo-Christian world is that of the inspiration of Scripture---that is, that the Bible really is the Word of God, inspired by Him, and not just the thoughts of men. It is the rejection of this doctrine that causes the deepest divisions among Christians, and among Jews, today; if the Scriptures are just the thoughts of men, then who is to say that we shouldn't murder helpless babies in the womb, live as sodomites, or believe that Jesus is only one of many ways to be reconciled to God? An equally vital doctrine is the doctrine of preservation of the Scriptures--that is, that God not only inspired the writers of Scripture, but then has seen to it that what they wrote has not been lost or changed since it was originally written. Psalm 12 contains a beautiful, clear statement that God preserves, not only His thoughts, but also His very words (note the plural in "words").

***NOTE:** A common article in statements of faith, adopted by Bible-based churches and other ministries, is that the Bible is the inspired word of God "as originally written." This means that they believe the original copies of each book (called 'autographs' in scholarly circles, because they often bore the signature of the writer) to have been inspired; but, since no one living has ever seen the original copies ("autographs"), we can't be sure that what we have today hasn't suffered loss, or changes in the copying, over the many centuries since they were originally written.*

⁴ Of all the places in Scripture where reference is made to another passage, this is the only one in which the specific location is cited ("in the second psalm").

⁵ Matthew 21:16. It is interesting to note that the word Jesus chose in his quotation, "praise," is, in the psalm, "strength." In this way He makes "praise" and "strength" equivalents, suggesting that there is strength to be gained when we praise the Lord.

*This position, it seems to me, has a serious problem.. What multitudes of theologians, preachers and teachers who call themselves Bible-believers don't seem to realize is that, by clear implication, "as originally written" implies that some portions of the Bible that we have today may not be inspired truth at all, or are at best imperfect remnants of what once was the inspired, clear message of God. If this is true, it means that we cannot be sure concerning the inspiration of some portions; and then we are confronted with a vital and unavoidable question: if some parts of the Bible are **not** "as originally written," then which parts **are**?*

If, however, we are to believe that God inspired the original Scriptures (the "autographs"), then it seems logical to me that, since He is omnipotent (all-powerful), He has also preserved them for us, and that nothing of his Word has been lost to us. We cannot, after all, obey his Word if we are not sure that what we have is his unchanging Word.

For a summary of evidence to support belief in the preservation of Scripture, see "The Debate Over Preservation of Scripture ["As Originally Written"] in Part IV {Selected Topical Summaries}.

6. A Prophecy about the Messiah. (16:10)

Many of the Psalms contain prophetic statements about the Messiah to come. Psalm 16 contains such a verse (v 3), rich in its implications, which reveals that although the coming Messiah will die and be buried, His body will not decompose. Peter will quote this verse about 1,000 years later as he preaches Jesus as the risen Lord on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:27,31); and in like manner Paul will speak of the resurrection of Jesus in the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:33). On that occasion he also quoted Psalm 2:7.

7. The Heavens Declare the Glory of God. (Psalm 19)

Psalm 19, with only 14 verses, is one of the very richest chapters in the Bible. And, although brief, it is also amazingly diverse, dealing with several separate topics in eloquent, beautiful poetry. Portions of it are frequently quoted in preaching, prayer and in liturgy; and verses 7-11, declaring the perfection of God's Word and the blessedness that comes from obeying it have, in recent times, been sung in many informal gatherings.

8. Amazing Prophecy of the Suffering Messiah. (Psalm 22 [See especially vv 1, 6, 7, 8, 12-16 and 18.])

Many of the Psalms speak prophetically of the Messiah to come; but Psalm 22 stands alone in this way, in that nearly every verse speaks of the Messiah. And, not only that, 10 of its 31 verses contain amazingly specific prophecies concerning the crucifixion of Jesus the Messiah, 1,000 years before the crucifixion occurred, and **600 years before the Romans invented crucifixion!**

NOTES:

*a. The enemies of the belief in the divinity of Jesus will quote v 1 to "prove" that Jesus was just a man, and that he didn't even understand why He had to die. Nothing could be farther from the truth; see in this regard the study guide to Mk 15:34-37, "The Sin-Bearing Moment," and the explanatory **NOTES** following.*

b. Verse 6 is wonderful, but requires some explanation. The Hebrew word translated here as "worm" is "tola"; it means a worm, but not just any worm. The tola is the source of a precious red dye used in coloring fabrics, including the curtains of the Tabernacle; but, to obtain the dye, the tola must die and be crushed. The word is translated elsewhere in the Scriptures as "crimson" (once) and as "scarlet" (31 times). In order for us to obtain the benefits of the blood of Jesus, He had to be crushed--He had to die.

9. The Shepherd's Psalm. (Psalm 23)

Psalm 23 is probably the best-known, and most-loved, passage in the entire Bible; people who do not know the Lord, and who have never made any effort to memorize Scripture, can probably quote the first verse. Its six verses have probably brought more comfort to those in fear, to the broken-hearted, and to those facing death (their own, or the death of loved ones) than all the rest of the Bible combined. Its nearest rival would likely be the opening verses of John 14, and that passage, in my humble opinion, would occupy a distant second-place. This little psalm also contains great lessons concerning the relationship of man with God, the function of those in pastoral ministry, the ministry of Jesus, the Great Shepherd, and the blessed, eternal future of the redeemed.

NOTE: It is entirely possible that David, a native of Bethlehem, wrote this psalm while a young shepherd, watching his sheep in the very same Bethlehem fields where, 1,000 years later, the angels would announce to shepherds the birth of Jesus, "David's greater Son." I find this possibility exciting.

10. A Precious Promise. (27:10)

In one verse of Psalm 27 there is the precious promise that, although men may betray and abandon us--although even our mothers and fathers may forsake us--the LORD (YHWH) never will. We will never be left alone, for God, and God alone, is utterly faithful, when no one else is.

11. The Certainty of a Blessed End. (30:4-12)

Troubles and pain will come in life, and at times it seems that there is no help, and no reason to hope. We may even be suffering for offending and rebelling against Him. Yet, if we will trust in God, cling to Him, and submit to His will, victory will eventually come. Our mourning will give way to joyful dancing. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

12. The Ultimate Declaration of Trust. (31:1-5)

To please God we must trust Him; and He is utterly trustworthy. A sure way to offend Him is to doubt His trustworthiness; hear His heart-cry to Moses in the wilderness, "How long will this people provoke me? And how long will it be ere they **believe** me...⁶?"

It is one thing to trust God with what will happen to our bodies⁷; it is a far greater thing to trust Him with our eternal destinies--what will become of our spirits. Jesus made this ultimate declaration of faith from the agony of the cross when He quoted 31:5. In like manner Stephen, the first Christian martyr, made this declaration as he was being stoned to death. Every Christian should wish that his dying words would be "Into thine hands I commit my spirit."

13. Key to a Nation's Blessedness. (33:12a)

Sometimes a single verse can be so important as to be a highlight; in this case, only half a verse rises to this level of significance. In 9 words there is to be found the key to the prosperity and blessedness of nations (or to their poverty and accursed state): "Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD." It is, of course, possible to have a god other than our God; so, to make this clear, the passage reads "Blessed is the nation whose Elohim is the YHWH." No other "Lord" qualifies. But can it be that simple? Yes--the Israelites proved it over and over, and it appears that our nation is now in the process of demonstrating this principle--negatively.

14. A Psalm Uniquely Rich in Comfort and Insight. (Psalm 34)

Psalm 34 is, in my opinion, in a class all its own; and yet it is almost impossible to give that class a title. Many have sung the first 4 verses. This psalm is uniquely rich in blessed assurances of God's watch-care and loving-kindness, and in promises of the ultimate victory of the righteous. There is a special promise for the broken-hearted, for the Lord knows that broken hearts hurt worse than broken bones; and He promises to save those who are of a contrite spirit⁸. We are warned about the importance of what we say. There is the formula for living a prosperous and happy life. There is a clear warning that the righteous will suffer, but it is softened with the promise to see us through the bad times. There is the warning that the wicked are destroyed by their own wickedness, plus the fundamental principle that we must choose to do either good or evil. **There is even a challenge for us to put Him to the test:** to "taste and see that the Lord is good."

⁶ Numbers 14:11.

⁷ Job 13:15. This is probably the second most powerful declaration of trust in the Bible.

⁸ The Hebrew rendered "contrite" in v 18 is a particularly strong word, meaning to be crushed like powder.

And v 20 is an important prophecy of the Messiah and His atoning death. What a psalm!

15. The Problem of the Prosperity of the Wicked. (Psalm 37)

In life we often have occasion to be troubled by the prosperity and wealth of the wicked; it raises the unavoidable question as to why the Lord allows evildoers to prosper, when the righteous often have so little. The answer is in this psalm. The answer is also in its companion, Psalm 73⁹.

16. A Prophecy of Betrayal. (Psalm 41:9)

Here, in one verse, is a messianic prophecy, a prophecy of the betrayal of Jesus by Judas, one of his own. The prophecy is reinforced by the prophet Obadiah (Obad 7), and was quoted by Jesus with a heavy heart (Jn 13:18) on the night of His betrayal.

17. A Wedding Song for Christ and the Church. (Psalm 45)

David seems to have been under an unusually strong anointing and urging by the Spirit to write Psalm 45 (see v 1), and it fairly bursts with the writer's zeal and excitement. It seems to be speaking of the Messiah to come ("the Son of David"), and is written in unusually beautiful poetic language. Apparently a wedding song for Christ and the Church, it is an extremely important psalm in at least two ways: (1) It is a messianic psalm, in that vv 6-7 are quoted in Hebrews 1:8-9 as applying to Jesus; and (2) it is a key to understanding Song of Solomon. Psalm 45 is written in elaborate, romantic metaphor, very much like Song of Solomon, and v 9 could be applied to the Queen of Sheba. But David could not have written this psalm for his earthly son, Solomon, for he was not a warrior (vv 3-5), and his throne was not "for ever," nor was he God (v 6)¹⁰. No, Psalm 45 seems clearly to be a wedding song for Christ and His bride, the Church. Jesus may have had it in mind when He spoke the parable of the wedding feast (Matt 22:1-14).

18. Our Very Present Help in Times of Trouble. (46:1-3)

It is comforting to know that our God is with us in times of trouble, to strengthen us. He has promised never to leave us nor forsake us; but He stays particularly close in times of trouble¹¹. He is not a remote power, watching us from a distance; instead, He is with us very closely and personally, and we have his total intention¹². This promise is also found in Psalm 27:13, where it is stated that this

⁹ Note that the numbers assigned to this pair of similar psalms are reversals: 37 and 73. I do not dwell on such numerological details, and so I will leave it as "interesting" and move on. I am convinced, however, that there is meaning in this, for I believe that there are no "coincidences" in the Bible--even to the smallest detail. It all has meaning.

¹⁰ David had other sons who were warriors; but they could not fulfill the rest of the requirements in this psalm.

¹¹ Deuteronomy 4:31; Hebr 13:5-6.

¹² The Hebrew word rendered "very" in v 1, *meh-ode*, is an intense superlative, meaning that He is not just standing by, observing; it means that He is intensely with us in times of trouble.

promise is for us now, "in the land of the living," and not just at some future time in Heaven.

19. You Can't Take It With You. (Psalm 49)

Psalm 49 is an essay on the vanity and transitory nature of earthly wealth and power. Hammered home is the lesson that life is short, that we can't take anything with us when we die, and that a man, no matter how wealthy and powerful he may be, cannot buy his own spiritual redemption, or that of anyone else. King Solomon pondered this matter in the Book of Ecclesiastes¹³. The good news, however, is that we can be redeemed "from the power of the grave" if our trust is in God, no matter how great or how small our earthly possessions may be.

20. David, Bathsheba and Nathan the Prophet. (Psalm 51)

King David, the man after God's own heart, has had a faithful soldier, Uriah the Hittite, killed in order to hide his own sin and take the man's wife (Bathsheba). God, of course, knew all about it, told Nathan the prophet about it, and Nathan courageously confronted the king with his guilt ("Thou art the man"); this tragic story is recorded in II Samuel 11. Here in the Psalms is the record of David's repentance, confession, and fervent prayer for forgiveness. He pleads for restoration to a right relationship with God. The psalm is so intimate and personal that reading it is like being an eyewitness to David's reaction.

NOTE: *There are vital lessons to be learned from Psalm 51, including the following:*

*a. Forgiveness and restoration begin with frank and honest confession. God, of course, already knows--the confession is essential for **our** sakes (v 3);*

*b. We harm and offend others, but we **sin** only against God (v 4);*

c. Although we must live with the consequences of our sin, the effect of forgiveness is that, in terms of our relationship with God, it is as if we had never sinned (vv 7-12);

d. God is always most interested in what is in our hearts ("...man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart" [I Sam 16:7]). He is less interested in our religious behavior than in our attitudes, requiring honesty; restoration can only begin with a broken spirit and a contrite heart. (vv 16,17)

21. Water from a Rock. (78:15-20)

Often a psalm will shed light on an earlier passage of Scripture (including messianic psalms); Psalm 78 is an excellent example of this¹⁴. Liberal theologians tend to deny the accounts of all miracles in the Bible, and they work diligently to

¹³ Ecclesiastes 2:18-26.

¹⁴ Another example is Ps 105:17-19; these verses tell us that Joseph suffered pain from leg irons while in Pharaoh's prison; the Genesis account does not tell us this.

explain them away. They generally reject as non-literal the accounts of the two times that God caused water to flow from large rocks to meet the needs of Moses and the multitudes in the wilderness. Their usual explanation is that some of the rocks are soft limestone, and that at night dew condenses on the surface and collects in small pockets in the rocks. Thus, when the rock is struck, the tiny pockets are crushed and moisture will ooze from the rock. Of course, even if this were what really happened, how could this provide enough water for two million thirsty people to drink, cook, and water their vast herds of livestock? It is an absurd idea; but the writer of this psalm wasn't at all confused about it, and he makes the facts clear for the rest of us. He writes of a flash flood--an instant river of water¹⁵. His clear descriptions of those great miracles in Psalm 78 not only confirm the accounts in Exodus 17 and Numbers 20, but provide us with details more vivid.

22. The Days of Our Lives: A Psalm of Moses¹⁶. (90:1-12)

In the only psalm to bear his name, Moses ponders the fleeting nature of our mortal lives, and admonishes us to treasure the days we have, and to live them well. Since Moses lived 500 years before David, this may have been the very first of the Psalms to be written. It is rich in metaphor, such as "our dwelling place," "as a watch in the night," "as a tale that is told," and "the days of our years." Also interesting is the thought that we can only expect to live to be 70 or, if particularly healthy, perhaps 80; yet this was probably written by a man who lived to be 120, and was in perfect health until he died ("his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated")¹⁷.

23. The Song of Promises. (Psalm 91)

One of the best-loved passages of Scripture is Psalm 91, for it is one unbroken stream of promises. The promises are for protection in times of trouble. The last three verses are written in the first person, as if the LORD is putting his personal imprimatur on the rest of the psalm. Some call this psalm "God's insurance policy" because of its promises of protection. It should be noted, however, that all the promises are conditional, a fact made clear in the first verse: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High..."; everything that follows in this beautiful psalm depends on this condition, which is repeated (albeit in a different form) in v 14.

¹⁵ See also in this regard Ps 105:41.

¹⁶ Psalm 90 is the only Psalm to identify Moses as the writer. The following 9 Psalms are un-attributed in their superscriptions, and Jewish tradition holds that Moses was also their author.

¹⁷ Deuteronomy 34:7.

***NOTE:** Verses 11 and 12 were misquoted by Satan in his third and final attempt to draw Jesus into an error, during the temptation in the wilderness.*

24. "Old Hundred." (Psalm 100)

In the days before most Americans had hymnals in pew racks for singing, and on the frontier, where most worship services were held in the open, under brush arbors, or in crude buildings, people sang from memory or from their Bibles. In those days Psalm 100 was such a favorite among Christians for singing in worship services that it came to be called, "Old Hundred." As a century or two passed, and most congregations worshipped in modern buildings with pews and hymnals, the singing of psalms, with few exceptions, was gradually abandoned. Then, in the 1960s and '70s, there was a great charismatic revival which began among disillusioned young people; revival fires blazed all across the land. These "Jesus people," for the most part, rejected traditional churches and the organized religion they had known growing up. All they wanted was their Bibles, and fellowship with other excited, like-minded, new Christians. Once again, like their pioneer ancestors, they met outdoors, in crude coffee houses, abandoned store buildings, or in whatever shelters they could find. Also like their pioneer ancestors, they baptized one another in creeks, ponds, lakes, and in the ocean. Eschewing hymns and hymnals, they sang from their Bibles and, once again, "Old Hundred" quite naturally became a favorite (if not **the** favorite)¹⁸.

25. Reflections on the Goodness of God. (103:1-6, 22)

Psalm 103 is one of the best-loved of the Psalms; according to tradition, it was written by David late in his life, reflecting on the goodness of God. Within this psalm there are precious promises for faithful believers, and profound revelations about God and His dealings with man. Verses 1-6 express our desire to praise and acknowledge God as we consider His total goodness to us; they are like the bursting-out of a heart full of awe, wonder and gratitude. Verse 1 is often sung today as a doxology. The last six words of the psalm repeat the first six words; it is as if David, in summary, is saying, "I don't know any other way to express this-- as I think on the goodness of God, all I can say is 'Bless the Lord, Oh my soul!' "

26. Treasures in Psalm 103. (Psalm 103)

Within Psalm 103 there are small glimpses of huge matters concerning the nature of God and His dealings with us. Some are expressed so succinctly that they are easy to overlook. Among these are:

- a. God's Limitless Power to Forgive and Heal. (verse 3)

¹⁸ After a lifetime in traditional churches, I came to truly know the Lord among those Spirit-filled hippies, and the first "scripture song" I learned was "Old Hundred." More than 40 years later, I still love to sing it.

In the 10 brief words of verse 3 there is the marvelous revelation that there is no limit to God's power and willingness to forgive, nor to His power and willingness to heal. He can forgive anything, and He can heal anything.

b. Personal Relationship. (verse 7)

In the 14 brief words of verse 7 there is revealed the wonderful fact that we can actually know God--that we can have a personal, intimate, relationship with Him. Here we can see the profound difference between knowing **about** Him, and **knowing Him**.

We are told that the people of Israel in the Exodus were aware of the wonderful things that God did--they knew **about** Him; but Moses knew his ways, that is, Moses **knew Him**, and knew what He is like. Under the Old Covenant, only a select few, such as Abraham, Moses, the prophets, and some of the judges and kings, could have this relationship--this knowing God personally. Under the New Covenant, however, the atoning work of Jesus has made it possible for all of us to have a vital, intimate, personal relationship with God. We can know, not just his works; but, like Moses, we can know his ways. What a wonderful reality this is!

c. Grace. (verses 10-14)

The grace of God can be thought of as His willingness to forgive us and cleanse us of our unrighteousness, not because we deserve it, but because we need it¹⁹. The doctrine of grace is fully revealed in the New Testament, but only in glimpses in the Old Testament, as in Psalm 51:7-14, Isaiah 1:18, and here in verses 10-14.

d. "As Far As the East Is from the West". (verse 12)

It is wonderful to know that we can be forgiven; but verse 12 reveals the ultimate, infinite, total nature of that forgiveness: it is as if the sin had never been committed²⁰. Consider the fact that north and south have limits. If we travel north until we reach the North Pole, we can go no farther north; if we continue in the same direction, we begin to go to the south. Likewise, if we travel south until we reach the South Pole, we can go no farther south; if we continue in the same direction, we begin to travel north. But it is different with east and west. We can travel eastward forever and we will never reach its limit; we will still be traveling eastward. Likewise, we can travel westward forever and never reach its limit; we will still be traveling westward. The distance from north to south can be measured and expressed; but the distance from east to west is infinite--so great that it cannot be measured or expressed, for it has no end-point. This is how far God removes

¹⁹ Grace, in the most general of terms, can be defined as "unmerited favor"; without the grace of God, we would all be dead in sin, lost and without hope. This concept is profoundly expressed in a single New Testament verse: Rom 6:23.

²⁰ We may have to live with the consequences of our sins; but in the eyes of God we are no longer guilty.

our sins from us when we are forgiven, and it is all revealed in the 18 simple words of verse 12.

27. A Song of Creation. (104:1-15)

Psalm 104 identifies no author in the superscription; however, it seems to have been written by David, for it is so similar to Psalm 103, and follows it in both the Hebrew and Christian canons. In fact, it reads like a continuation of 103; like 103 this psalm begins and ends with "Bless the Lord, oh my soul." Whereas 103 is a hymn to the goodness of God, 104 is a hymn to the majesty, greatness and power of God, and His wonderful works of Creation. If you wonder why commentators call the Psalms works of poetry, this one should make it clear; it is expressed in vivid, beautiful, poetic language. This is especially true in the creation verses.

28. Creation's Overseer. (104:16-35)

The second part of Psalm 104 speaks of God's sovereignty over His creation, and His provision for it. Again in vivid, poetic language, the psalmist (almost certainly David) describes God's provision for the Earth and its creatures, and His power over His creation. To make his point, the psalmist paints word pictures so vivid as to be almost shocking ("He looketh on the earth and it trembleth; he toucheth the hills and they smoke," verse 32). I think it is valid to say that it is impossible for us mere mortals to understand and to describe the greatness of God adequately. As we have seen before, God is infinite, inhabiting eternity, while we are finite and greatly limited--like grass in comparison. Truly, we now see through a glass (only) darkly or dimly²¹. For us, even inspired by the Spirit of God, to attempt to grasp and describe God and His greatness would be like a small child, trying to understand nuclear physics, and to explain it with a vocabulary of 10 words. Here in Psalm 104 the writer makes a heroic effort to express the power and majesty of God, and he must express it in powerful poetic language in order to give us even an imperfect concept of God's greatness, majesty and power. Then the psalmist, himself probably overwhelmed by what he does see, can only close by saying, "Bless the Lord oh my soul" and urge us to praise Him.

29. Additional Light on Exodus. (105:37-45; 106:1-12)

As we have seen before, one of the wonderful things about the Book of Psalms is that it sheds additional light on Scripture that came before it. Psalms 105 and 106 provide an example of this, giving us additional details of the Exodus, making it clear that the crossing of the Red Sea and the miracles of water from the rocks were indeed miracles.

30. David's Greater Son. (Psalm 110)

²¹ I Corinthians 13:12.

Psalm 110 is not only one of the psalms from which Jesus quoted, but is perhaps the most important, and the most interesting. On his last day of public ministry, his enemies in the Jewish leadership sent their best and brightest out into the public places to entangle him in his words, embarrass and discredit him. They also wanted to trick him into speech for which they could accuse him to the Romans of a capital crime. They failed completely (as usual), and then he asked them one question: "When the Messiah comes, whose son will he be?" Probably thinking, "That's easy--why don't you ask us a tough one?" they replied that the Messiah would be the son of David. Quoting from the first verse of this psalm (which his enemies knew to be a prophecy of the Messiah), Jesus asked how it could be that if the Messiah were David's son, David called him "Lord"²²? They were stumped. Their problem was that they refused to believe that the Messiah to come would be divine; they expected him to be a political and military hero. Because of their preconceived opinion that the Messiah would not be divine, they had no answer. And, from that moment they were afraid to ask Jesus any more questions²³.

And so they gave up trying to embarrass him, and set about finding a way to kill him instead²⁴. In the seven verses of this landmark psalm, at least four are prophecies of the Messiah to come; the great commentator Matthew Henry believed that all seven were ("This psalm is pure gospel; it is only, and wholly, concerning Christ the Messiah...").

31. A Hymn to the Majesty and Power of God. (Psalm 114)

Psalm 114, with its eight explosive verses, is an outburst of praise to the majesty and power of God! Here the psalmist seems to be so full of the revelation of God's inexpressible power that he must shout it to the heavens. In fact, he is mocking nature and its laws--belittling what we normally think of as nature's awesome, irresistible, ultimate power, by comparing it with the power of God. In this moment of revelation, he is virtually dancing and shouting that his God is absolutely, uniquely, incomparably, supreme. He also, in the final verse, confirms the miracle of water flowing from the rock in the Exodus,

32. God's View of Death. (116:15)

What a difference there is in the death of the unredeemed and the death of the redeemed! The unredeemed often die in terror, seeing and feeling horrible things, sometimes screaming to be kept back from what they see and feel. For the

²² Notice that in this first verse the wording is "The LORD (YAHWEH) said unto my Lord (Adonai)..."; this combination of LORD with Adonai is found nowhere else in Scripture. Notice also the use of the past tense ("said"), also clearly making the expected Messiah divine, i.e. One Who has always existed.

²³ Matthew 22:46.

²⁴ You can read of this final, futile attempt to entrap Jesus in his words in Matt 22.

unredeemed, death is the final tragedy in life; it is the entry into an eternity without God, a thing so horrible as to be beyond the imaginings of man to describe. Dante, with all his brilliance, attempted to describe it; but his thoughts probably fall far short of the awful reality.

The prophet Ezekiel made it clear that redemption is a choice, one available to every man; and he expresses eloquently God's desire that no one die lost. In Ezekiel's account, we can hear the heart-cry of God: a plea for the unredeemed to repent and live²⁵. I believe that it is not overstatement to say that the death of the lost breaks the heart of God. This basic fact of life is confirmed in Peter's second letter to the Church (II Pet 3:9)²⁶.

In profound, blessed, comparison, is the death of the redeemed. They typically die in peace, as if gladly crossing over into a joyful reunion in a perfect place, often speaking, at the end, of the beauty of what they are entering, the peace, and loved ones waiting to greet them. Likewise is the response of God; it seems that His reaction to the death of the redeemed is a glad, everlasting, welcome home. In stark contrast with His heartbreak expressed in Ezekiel 18, there is one verse in Psalm 116, verse 15, that reveals God's quiet, satisfying, delight in the death of his own: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints."

33. "This Is the Day Which the LORD Hath Made." (118:22-24)

Psalms 113-118 are called by observant Jews, "The Hallel" (Hebrew for praises), and are sung at Passover. The tradition is that any psalms from this group may be sung at the dinner, but if only one is sung, it must be Ps 118:22-24; this is required.

Since in Mark's account of the Passover meal on the night in which Jesus was betrayed we are told, "And when they had sung an hymn..." (note the singular "an"), we can know that only one hymn was sung²⁷. Because of this, we can know exactly what they sang. With this in mind, and knowing that Jesus knew exactly the terrible thing that lay before Him, these words crackle with new meaning for us! As He sang, He declared that the terrible torture that awaited Him, and the horror of becoming the sins of mankind, would not be the work of the Romans, or of the wicked members of the Sanhedrin; rather, it would all be the outworking of the plan of the LORD, his Heavenly Father, and it was "marvelous in [his] eyes." The significance of this should take our breath away²⁸!

At this point I recommend taking some time--quiet time--and give this some undistracted thought.

²⁵ Ezekiel 18:27-32.

²⁶ II Peter 3:9.

²⁷ Mark 14:26.

²⁸ See in this regard Highlight 34 in the study guide to Mark, "The Sin-Bearing Moment."

34. Psalm 119, the Bible's Longest Chapter. (Psalm 119)

Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible, with 176 verses; but its size is not what makes it truly distinctive. This very long psalm is arranged like no other; it is what is called an acrostic.

It consists of 22 chapters (or groups of verses), each titled by one of the 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet in order, from Aleph to Tau²⁹. Each chapter consists of 8 verses; and the first (Hebrew) letter of the first word in each verse is the letter with which the chapter is titled. For example, the heading of the first group of 8 verses is "Aleph," the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet; and the first letter in the first word of each of the 8 verses in that section is aleph. The heading for the second group of 8 verses is "Beth," the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet; and the first letter of the first word in each of those 8 verses is beth. This pattern is carried all the way through with the last section headed "Tau," and the first letter in the first word of each of those last 8 verses is tau. This is what makes 119 an amazing acrostic³⁰.

It is commonly believed that every verse speaks of the Word of God in some form (e. g., "law," "word," "statutes," etc.), making it an amazing hymn to God's Word³¹. Highlights within this great psalm include the following:

- a. A beloved liturgical song (verse 11);
- b. We are guided by the Word (verse 105);
- c. Love of the Word and abiding peace (verse 165).

This longest of chapters in the entire Bible is truly a marvel!

35. A Psalm of Comfort.

Little Psalm 121 is remarkably reminiscent of little Psalm 23; it is definitely a companion piece to that best-loved of psalms. Its eight brief verses are an uninterrupted message of comfort and assurance; and, like Psalm 23, it has been adopted into liturgies in its entirety. Brief, beautiful passages from other psalms, such as Psalm 119:11, have found their way into our most familiar declarations of belief and worship; but these two, 23 and 121, are invariably read aloud or sung in their entirety. Also, like Psalm 23, it begins with a declaration of fundamental, fixed, trust in the LORD (YHWH). This keystone of commitment to, and trust in, the LORD, is what makes possible the comforting assurances that follow in each of these two precious psalms. (Psalm 121)

²⁹ This last letter in the Hebrew alphabet is sometimes spelled "tau" and sometimes spelled "tav," depending on how the last letter is pronounced. Hebrew scholars differ on this, leaving us to choose, and I prefer "tau."

³⁰ There are other acrostics in the Old Testament, including Psalms 25 and 34, and Lamentations.

³¹ Actually, I find three verses (90, 122 and 132) that seem to be exceptions; others find more. One problem may lie in the choice of words in translating from Hebrew to English. At any rate, even if this is true of only 173 of the 176 verses, Ps 119 is still an amazing hymn to the Word of God.

***NOTE:** The punctuation of the first verse can make its meaning more clear if it is ended with a question mark. Then, verse 2 becomes the answer to a fundamental, rhetorical question. At times it is important to remember that **there are no punctuation marks in the ancient manuscripts**; they have been added by the translators. Had I been the translator of 121:1, I would have ended it with a question mark.*

36. The Presence of God as the Focus of Life. (Psalm 122)

Little Psalm 122 is another brief-but-very-rich psalm. It speaks of the centrality of being close to the LORD (YHWH), as the focal point in the life of a believer. It was written in the time of the Temple when the very presence of God was there, in the Most Holy Place; it was to that "house of the LORD" that the people of God were drawn, to worship Him, pay their vows, and experience His presence. For this reason, in this psalm the Temple (or the Tabernacle) is the metaphor for the presence of God; they all knew that that was where He was to be found and experienced. The often-quoted first verse is a familiar part of liturgies; and verse 6 is a familiar reminder that Jerusalem is central in the plans and ultimate purposes of God.

37. A Psalm for Solomon. (Psalm 127)

Although Psalm 127 does not bear David's name, the superscription, and the nature of the content, make it nearly certain that David penned these 5 pithy verses as guidance for his son. Here in this little song are contained some of the most important underlying principles of mortal life, and guidance for living it. The first two verses make it clear that it is vain to try to create or accomplish great things if God does not approve and is not involved; and there is no sense in working day and night to accomplish such a goal, for God intends for His children to rest. The last three verses speak of the blessedness of children in our lives, making it clear that they are the heritage of the LORD (YHWH).

***NOTE:** These verses about children seem to reflect the thinking of an ancient oriental prince, seeing a large number of children as an important part of his wealth; but, after all, that is what David was--an ancient Oriental prince. Except for his one lapse into sin concerning Bathsheba and her admirable husband, Uriah, David's one great failure was in not correcting his children and allowing wrong behavior to grow into tragedy. But, then, that was also the way of ancient Oriental princes; they did not play an active role in the rearing of their children, for this was done by trusted servants.*

38. The Importance of Unity among Believers. (Psalm 133)

The three verses of little Psalm 133 tell us how it pleases God when His children are living in harmony³². The peaceful, sanctifying effects of harmony among us are compared to the anointing oil that flowed downward and covered Aaron when he was set apart as founder of the priesthood, and the soothing, life-supporting mists that envelop Mt. Hermon, whose perpetual snow cap is the primary source of water for the Jordan River.

39. "His Mercy Endureth Forever." (Psalm 136)

Psalm 136 is a recitation of the wonderful nature, and the acts, of God (some speaking of His specific accomplishments, including names); and, above all, it is a hymn to his great mercy. Each verse is a reason to give thanks, and each verse ends with the declaration, "for his mercy endureth forever." It may very well be that this psalm gave birth to what some liturgical churches call the Psalter, or Responsive Reading, for it requires no alteration to be used in that way.

40. A Lament as Captives Remember. (Psalm 137)

Psalm 137 is a melancholy song, a lamentation, as the oppressed Israelite captives remember "the good old days" back in Jerusalem³³. It was obviously written during the captivity, perhaps near the end, as the captives could see the coming collapse of the Babylonian Empire. As they remember the brutal cruelty with which the Babylonians slaughtered the inhabitants of Jerusalem when it fell, as their Edomite sympathizers cheered, the captives anticipate the similar fate of the Babylonians, when their captors finally fall to the Persians. Of all the "imprecatory" psalms, this one is probably the most troubling and offensive to those who do not understand it, because of its final verse. It is important to remember that this psalm, including v 9, is not an expression of the will of God. It is the expression, perhaps hyperbolic and not literal, of a conquered, oppressed people, who remember how their conquerors treated them, as their capital city was overrun and its people slaughtered. The psalmist is saying, "Let these receive the same merciless treatment with which they brutalized us" (and, be assured, those pagan conquerors had killed the Jewish babies in this horrible way--it was a common practice in ancient and medieval times among pagans and, in some cultures, still is).

41. The Riches of Psalm 139.

Psalm 139 is one of the richest and most often-quoted passages in the Bible. It deals with several fundamental matters in life, and yet flows in beautiful poetry

³² This is the way life will be in Heaven; but it appears, after 4,000 years of trying, that we will never fully achieve this goal here on our sin-cursed planet, until the Millennial reign of Christ.

³³ We naturally associate the word "lamentation" with Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, who ministered in Jerusalem as Nebuchadnezzar completed its destruction, and penned the Book of Lamentations. The Septuagint ascribes this psalm to Jeremiah.

when it is read. Its overall message has to do with two things: the wonderful attributes of God; and how we should respond to them. Highlights include the following.

a. One of the things about life that staggers my mind is that God loves us so much, in spite of the fact that He knows us so well. He knows every thing we do, every word we speak, and even every thought that we have. What an awesome, nearly incomprehensible, fact of life! In the first six verses, David mulls over all this and confesses that he can't grasp it either. (verses 1-6)

b. We can experience the presence of God in heightened or powerful ways in times of worship and at other special times (sometimes at unexpected moments); but the Spirit of God is always present, no matter where we are or how distracted with other things we may be. The theological term for this fact about God is "omnipresence"--He is simply everywhere, and we cannot escape his presence. This is a comforting thought for the saint, and a disturbing thought for the sinner³⁴. (verses 7-13)

c. The last clause of verse 15 seems to contradict verse 13, which clearly, and accurately, declares that each of us develops into a baby, ready to be born, in our mother's womb (uterus). And yet the last clause of verse 15 speaks as if we are formed ("curiously wrought") in "the lowest parts of the earth"³⁵.

If we think carefully, however, there is no contradiction here; for our bodies are (literally) made from the very same atoms and molecules that are to be found in the soil, sand and stones in the "lowest parts of the Earth." It makes no difference that, at the very center of the Earth, beneath the Earth's crust and tectonic plates, these atoms and molecules are in the form of molten magma; they are still the same atoms and molecules that are in solid form as soil, sand and rocks, at the surface of the Earth. Gold, Silver and lead, all solids when dug from the earth, can easily be melted in crucibles and they become liquids; but they are still gold, silver and lead. And, when allowed to cool, they resume their natural, solid, state.

And did not God create Adam "from the dust of the ground"?

As Dr. Henry M. Morris puts it, "He Created within the body [bodies] of Adam and Eve the marvelous and complex ability to multiply that body [those bodies] , finally to generate from the lowest parts of the Earth, through the curiously

³⁴ In v13, "For thou hast possessed my reins" calls for explanation. The Hebrew word rendered "reins" is *kilyah*. The literal meaning is "kidney" or "kidneys"; figuratively, however, it means the inner self, the thoughts and attitudes, "the real us." We might think of it as the conscience. "Reins" (*kilyah*) appears 8 times in the OT, and always in this figurative sense.

³⁵ The Hebrew rendered "curiously wrought" is *raqam*, meaning "embroidered." Henry M. Morris, PhD, LLD, LittD, sees in the word "embroidered" an ancient expression of the exquisite perfection of the double helix form of the DNA molecule, which determines the actual form that our bodies will become. (Morris, Henry M.: The New Defender's Study Bible, Nashville, Tennessee, World Publishing, 1995, p 940.)

wrought embroidery of DNA, all the many billions of their descendants, including David [who wrote this beautiful psalm] himself” (see footnote 35 below).

d. It seems true that, although sinful, selfish and cruel man denies it, each of us becomes an individual person, known to God and precious to Him, not at birth, but at the moment of conception. The human body is a God-ordained miracle. He knows us as we are being "formed in secret" in our mothers' wombs. When we are still only a tiny cluster of cells, He not only sees us then as individuals, made in His image, but he sees us as fully developed, seeing our organs and members "when as yet there was none of them." (verses 12-18)

*NOTE: The concept that the life of each human being begins at the moment of conception is a scientific fact; and, intellectually honest consideration of two demonstrable things makes it undeniable. A human egg cell and a human sperm cell, not united, will live for only 48 hours. Yet **those very same egg and sperm cells**, united in conception, become a fertilized egg (zygote), multiply and grow, and can live for more than 100 years in their ultimate developmental form, a human man, or woman³⁶.*

e. Is it alright to hate? Many of us grow up with the belief that, since God is love, it is always wrong for a Christian to hate³⁷. But wait--there are many things that God hates; He loves all men, but hates many of the things that men do, especially the selfish, cruel things we do to one another. We should hate the things that God hates; but in this psalm David takes the concept one step farther, setting himself firmly against those who hate God. (verses 19-22)

f. The last two verses are a prayer that we would all do well to pray. (verses 23,24)

42. Spiritual Sacrifices. (141:1-2)

David lived under the Mosaic system of blood and material sacrifices, 1,000 years before the abolition of that system and its replacement under the New Covenant by spiritual sacrifices and attitudes of the heart. And yet he had a prophetic awareness that the elaborate system of animal and commodity sacrifices were but a representation of what God really wanted: the surrender of our wills and our hearts to Him, the offering up of our lives, our prayers, worship and our love. The New Testament Book of Hebrews makes this very clear; but David somehow knew it a millennium before that. This unorthodox concept pops out in his

³⁶ I owe this insight to my physician brother, Jerry B. McKenney, MD; we have discussed it many times through the years, and find it intellectually unassailable.

³⁷ I never hated Satan and his works the way I should until I was asked to pray for a baby with cancer--in a large hospital ward filled with babies and small children with cancer.

writings in a number of unlikely places (see Psalms 40:6, 51:14-19, 134:2), and is beautifully expressed here.

43. A Precious Promise. (147:3)

God has provided for the healing of our sick and broken bodies, and this is a cause for grateful praise throughout the Psalms (e.g. 103:1-5). But God, who knows us so well, has also provided for the healing of our broken hearts, because He knows that broken hearts hurt worse than broken bones. Not only that, but broken bones, if properly aligned, will heal naturally; yet broken hearts don't. In fact, emotional injuries, left to themselves, not only don't heal, but will probably get worse. God, of course, knows this, and has made provision for that kind of healing also. The totality of this wonderful provision for healing, physical and emotional, is expressed here in just 11 words³⁸.

44. The Final Psalm: A Summation. (Psalm 150)

As we saw in the beginning, the Hebrew name for the Book of Psalms is *Tehillim* ("Songs of Praise"); and that is what the 150 psalms are--150 songs of praise.

This is eloquently summarized in the book's final song, in the form of a commandment. The people of God are called upon to praise the LORD (YHWH):

- a. everywhere (verse 1);
- b. because of His excellent greatness (verse 2);
- c. not only with our voices and dancing, but with all sorts of musical instruments (verses 3-5);
- d. everyone who is breathing (i.e. alive) is to praise Him--no exceptions (verse 6).

This psalm begins, and ends, with the commandment, "Praise ye the LORD"; this emphasizes the point, and makes it a perfect package. This little song is the perfect ending for this wonderful book of praise.

³⁸ God has built into our physical bodies healing processes that begin automatically when injured physically; and yet this seems not to be true of emotional injuries. Time **does not** heal all wounds; in fact, as already observed, emotional wounds, left unattended, can grow worse with time. It seems that we must ask the Lord to heal our broken hearts; and a condition attached to the healing is to forgive the one who injured us. It doesn't mean that that person wasn't wrong; it simply means that we release his guilt, to be dealt with by God. Abiding, smoldering, resentment cannot harm the guilty one whom we resent; but it can consume and destroy us.