

Session 8:

Psalms

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Overview of Psalms

THE BOOK OF PSALMS is one of the most fascinating books in the Bible. It contains a large collection of hymns that were written by many different authors, on many different subjects, over a period that spanned a thousand years. Psalms has doctrine, comfort, prophecy, and praise – a *lot* of praise. The 150 hymns in the book of Psalms are eminently worthy of study, but because of the book's massive length there are few preachers who attempt to preach their way through it.

Since our time is limited, we are not going to try to go through the entire book. That would take years, and we only have a single month. However, I do want to show you just how fascinating the Psalms really are, and give you a better appreciation for one of the best-known but least-studied books of the Bible.

Let us begin!

The Longest Book in the Bible

The book of Psalms is, by a wide margin, the longest book in the Bible. It has 150 psalms and more than 2400 verses. This makes it more than twice as long as the runner-up Isaiah, which has just 66 chapters and approximately 1300 verses.

In fact, Psalms is so long that it is actually divided into five different books. I realize that our modern Bibles don't separate them out that way, but if you check the headings of the psalms you will see what I mean. Psalms is the only book where the

chapter divisions are a part of the text. The psalms are divided up as follows:

Book 1: Psalms 1 to 41

Book 2: Psalms 42 to 72

Book 3: Psalms 73 to 89

Book 4: Psalms 90 to 106

Book 5: Psalms 107 to 150

No one really knows why the psalms are divided up in this manner. The five books are not organized by author, subject, or chronology. If there is a pattern to them no one has ever been able to find it. Some people have speculated that this internal categorization reflects the way the Psalms came into existence. They believe that the first two books were compiled by David, the third and fourth by Solomon, and the fifth by Ezra. However, there's not a lot of evidence to support this, and no one really knows for sure.

The Hymnbook of the Bible

If you walked up to someone and ask them to name five songs from 3,000 years ago, the odds are pretty good that he wouldn't be able to do it. Although we are familiar with songs that are popular in our day and could perhaps even name a few songs from centuries past, the ancient world is pretty much lost to us. Historians might be able to name a few songs from distant ages, but for the most part the enormous amount of music that was written by ancient cultures has been lost.

There is a major exception to this rule, however, and that is the book of Psalms. Here we have a collection of 150 hymns

from the world before the time of Christ. It is easy to overlook the fact that Psalms is a *hymnbook*, and these psalms were written to be sung in worship. The New Testament even makes mention of this:

James 5:13: “Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.”

We might not sing very many psalms today, but in the past this was extremely common. In fact, there are some Christians who still do this today. There are a lot of great hymns out there, but I think there is something very special about singing the hymns that *God* wrote.

In the ancient world these hymns were sung on a regular basis. Some of them were even reserved for special occasions. For example, Psalm 120 to 134 are the Psalms of Ascent. (The King James Bible labels these as songs of “degrees”.) You see, the city of Jerusalem was set on a hill, and three times a year all of Israel had to *ascend* that hill in order to reach Jerusalem and celebrate the annual feasts that God had ordained. Scholars believe that as the Israelites made their way up the hill, they sang these fifteen psalms. This would have focused their mind on the Lord and put them in a spirit of worship and praise.

The Longest Chapter In The Bible

The longest chapter in the entire Bible can be found in the book of Psalms. It is Psalm 119, and it has an amazing 176 verses. This Psalm is actually an acrostic. The first eight verses all begin with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the second eight verses start with the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet,

and so on. That is why this Psalm is so extremely long. (We are going to take a closer look at this Psalm later in our study.)

The Shortest Chapter In The Bible

The shortest chapter in the Bible can also be found in the book of Psalms. It is Psalm 117, and has exactly two verses. Here they are:

Psalm 117:1: “O praise the Lord, all ye nations:
praise him, all ye people.
2 For his merciful kindness is great toward us:
and the truth of the Lord endureth for ever.
Praise ye the Lord.”

You have now read an entire chapter of the Bible. (That wasn't so hard, was it?)

The Mysterious Liturgical Terms

If you read through the book of Psalms you'll occasionally notice that in the heading of the psalm, right before the first verse, is a small note of some kind. Sometimes these note are very clear. For example, Psalm 40 has a note that says “To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David”. That's pretty straightforward and easy to understand! However, some Psalms have notes that no one has been able to translate.

For example:

Psalm 9: “To the chief Musician upon Muthlabben, A Psalm of David”. What is Muthlabben? No one really knows. Verse 16 of this Psalm also contains the mysterious word “Higgaion”. Some people think it's some kind of musical notation term, but its exact meaning is unknown.

Psalm 46: “A Song upon Alamoth”. No one knows what “Alamoth” is. Some scholars have suggested that it means the psalm was supposed to be sung by a soprano, but that's just a guess.

Psalm 53: “To the chief musician upon Mahalath, Maschil, A Psalm of David.” Mahalath might refer to the name of the tune that was to be used to sing this psalm, but no one really knows. No one really knows what a Maschil is either.

Psalm 59: “To the chief Musician, Al-taschith, Michtam of David, when Saul sent, and they watched the house to kill him.” What is a Michtam? No one knows.

Psalm 81: “To the chief musician upon Tittith, A Psalm of Asaph”. No one knows what Tittith (or Gittith in some translations) might refer to. There is some speculation that it may have had something to do with the grape harvest, but it's impossible to know for sure.

There are a number of other mysterious and untranslatable words that are found in the book of Psalms, but I think you get the point. In some ways this is a book of mysteries – it has more untranslatable words than any other book of the Bible. And yet, in spite of that, the psalms are still very understandable. The words that cannot be translated do not

impact our ability to comprehend the meaning of the psalms.

The fact that the Psalms contains so many untranslatable words is strong evidence that it is a very old book. If it was more modern and had been compiled closer to the time of Christ then it would have used the musical terms that were common in those days, which are much better understood. What we are glimpsing here is the enormous age of this book. These psalms really were written in the time of David. This is important because the psalms contain prophecy about the coming of the Messiah – prophecies that Christ fulfilled.

The Many Authors of the Psalms

The book of Psalms has quite a few different authors. All sorts of people wrote Psalms – including some that you might not expect. For example:

King David wrote 75 psalms. (73 are noted in the book of Psalms. Psalm 2 is attributed to David in Acts 4:25, and Psalm 95 is attributed to David in Hebrews 4:7). This means he wrote half of the longest book of the Bible! He wrote Psalms 3 - 9, 11 - 41, 51 - 65, 68 - 70, 86, 101, 103, 108 - 110, 122, 124, 131, 133, and 138 - 145.

Asaph (and family) wrote 12 psalms. He was a musician during the time of King David and wrote Psalm 50 and Psalms 73 - 83. Interestingly, 2 Chronicles 29:30 tells us that Asaph was also a prophet.

The sons of Korah wrote 11 psalms. They wrote Psalm 42, 44 - 49, 84 - 85, and 87 - 88. According to 1 Chronicles

9:19-21 the Korahites were doorkeepers and custodians in the Temple. They were a direct descendent of the famous Korah who rebelled against Moses in Numbers 16 and were cast alive into Hell. Some of that group did *not* rebel, though, and during the time of King David they became leaders in tabernacle music.

Heman the Ezrahite wrote Psalm 88. According to 1 Chronicles 6:33, Heman was the grandson of the prophet Samuel. 1 Chronicles 25:11 says that Heman was one of the three primary musicians appointed by King David. Interestingly, 1 Chronicles 25:4-6 says that Heman was a prophet (which makes it quite possible that Psalm 88, which speaks of a man who is being tormented and facing death, is actually a Messianic prophecy).

Solomon wrote 2 psalms: 72 and 127. He is well-known for his proverbs, but he wrote psalms as well. Interestingly, Psalm 72 appears to be a prophecy about the Millennial Kingdom (which is something we'll discuss in a future lesson).

Moses wrote Psalm 90. This is the first psalm in Book IV and is probably the oldest psalm. (It's impossible to know for sure which one is actually the oldest because there are a number of psalms that have no attributed author.)

Ethan the Ezrahite wrote Psalm 89. Very little is known about him. 1 Kings 4:31 says that Solomon was so wise that he was even wiser than “Ethan the Ezrahite”, so he must have been a very wise man.

No one knows who wrote the remaining 48 psalms. It is a great mystery (much like all those musical terms!).

A Book Of Many Themes

Psalms is a very long book, so it should come as no surprise that it has a great deal to say. The psalms can be placed into a wide variety of different categories:

Praise: Some of the psalms are psalms of praise. For example, here are the first few verses of Psalm 33:

Psalm 33:1: “Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous: for praise is comely for the upright.
2 Praise the Lord with harp: sing unto him with the psaltery and an instrument of ten strings.
3 Sing unto him a new song; play skilfully with a loud noise.”

As you can see, this psalm is full of praise – praise that, interestingly, was intended to be *loud*. This was not a quiet and serene hymn! Psalm 98:4 and Psalm 150:5 also specifically state that the hymn should be loud. (If you ever wondered what God thought about loud music, now you know!)

There are many psalms like this scattered throughout the book. Psalm 95 is another great example of this genre:

Psalm 95:1: “O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.
2 Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms.
3 For the Lord is a great God, and a great King

above all gods.”

Others in this category include Psalm 100, 103, 104, 111, 113, 114, 117, and Psalm 145 - 50. These are hymns of praise.

Lament: Some of the psalms were written from a perspective of suffering and pain. For example, take a look at Psalm 3:

Psalm 3:1: “Lord, how are they increased that trouble me! many are they that rise up against me.

2 Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God. Selah.”

These psalms fall into two categories. Some of these lamentations reflect personal problems that are afflicting one person, and that person is crying out to the Lord for mercy and help. Others, though, reflect the problems of an entire nation. For example, take a look at this one:

Psalm 44:9: “But thou hast cast off, and put us to shame; and goest not forth with our armies.

10 Thou makest us to turn back from the enemy: and they which hate us spoil for themselves.

11 Thou hast given us like sheep appointed for meat; and hast scattered us among the heathen.”

That was clearly written about a nation that was suffering persecution and difficulties. The psalmist is praying that God would deliver them from their enemies.

If you read through the book of Psalms you will see *many* psalms of lamentation. In fact, this is one of the major themes of the book:

Individual affliction: Psalm 3, 4, 5, 7, 9 - 10, 13
- 14, 17, 22, 25 - 28, 31, 36, 39 - 43, 52 - 57, 59,
61, 64, 70 - 71, 77, 86, 89, 120, 139, 141, 142

Group affliction: 12, 44, 58, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83,
85, 89 - 90, 94, 123, 126, 129

That is a lot of psalms! When the people of God were in trouble they cried out to the Lord – but one thing the psalms makes clear is that even in times of difficulty people still had faith in God. Psalm 3 starts out on a painful note, but look at what comes next:

Psalm 3:3: “But thou, O Lord, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head.
4 I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. Selah.”

Why do the psalmists cry out to God in their time of trouble? Because they know that the Lord hears them.

Thanksgiving: There are many psalms that give thanks to God for the great things that He has done. You can literally think of these as Thanksgiving hymns. In our culture there are far more songs about Christmas than any other holiday, but the Bible focuses its attention on times of thanksgiving. If you were ever looking for some good Thanksgiving hymns, the Bible is full of them. For example:

Psalm 75:1: “Unto thee, O God, do we give thanks, unto thee do we give thanks: for that thy name is near thy wondrous works declare.”

Psalm 107:1: “O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.”

Other thanksgiving hymns include 18, 21, 30, 32, 34, 40, 65 - 67, 75, 92, 107 - 108, 116, 118, 124, 136, and 138. As the Bible says, it is good to give thanks to God and to praise Him for all the marvelous things that He has done for us!

Wisdom: People usually associate the book of Proverbs with wisdom literature, but Psalms also contains a great deal of wisdom – and there are some psalms that seem to be dedicated to that topic. For example, Psalm 37 sounds like something that could have been taken right out of Proverbs:

Psalm 37:1: “Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity.

2 For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb.

3 Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.

4 Delight thyself also in the Lord: and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.”

Or take this one, for example:

Psalm 49:3: “My mouth shall speak of wisdom; and the meditation of my heart shall be of understanding.

4 I will incline mine ear to a parable: I will open my dark saying upon the harp.”

There is also Psalm 36, 73, 112, 127, 128, and 133.

Israel's History: Some of the psalms recount Israel's history and the way that God has worked with His people. For example, take a look at this excerpt from Psalm 105:

Psalm 105:9: “Which covenant he made with Abraham, and his oath unto Isaac;
10 And confirmed the same unto Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant:
11 Saying, Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance:
12 When they were but a few men in number; yea, very few, and strangers in it.”

More history can be found in Psalm 106:

Psalm 106:7: “Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt; they remembered not the multitude of thy mercies; but provoked him at the sea, even at the Red sea.
8 Nevertheless he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known.”

Psalm 135 and Psalm 136 also contain information about Israel's history. People don't usually think of Psalms as a repository of historical knowledge, but there is history to be found there.

Personal History: Some of the Psalms are personal in nature and are about events that are recorded elsewhere in the Old Testament. For example:

- **Psalm 59** was written when Saul sent people to David's

house to murder him (1 Samuel 19:11-18).

- **Psalm 52** was written when Saul came and killed the priests of the Lord for helping David (1 Samuel 22:11-19).
- **Psalm 63** was written when David fled into the wilderness (1 Samuel 23:14).
- **Psalm 54** was written when the Ziphites betrayed David to Saul (1 Samuel 23:19-20).
- **Psalm 57** was written when David fled from Saul and hid in a cave (1 Samuel 22:1).
- **Psalm 34** was written when David pretended like he was insane in order to escape from the Philistines (1 Samuel 21:10-15).
- **Psalm 18** is the psalm that David wrote when God delivered him from the hand of King Saul (2 Samuel 1).
- **Psalm 30** was written to dedicate the house that David built in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 5:11).
- **Psalm 51** was written after Nathan the prophet confronted David about the king's sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:1-12).
- **Psalm 60** was written after David battled the Edomite and Syrian armies (2 Samuel 8:14).

Special Occasions: Some Psalms were written with special occasions in mind. For example:

- **Psalm 92** was written specifically for the Sabbath day.
- **Psalm 102** was written for people who were afflicted.
- **Psalm 145** is specifically labeled as “David's Psalm of Praise”.

Prophecy: It may come as a surprise, but the book of Psalms

does contain prophecy. There are a number of Psalms that speak of the person and work of the Messiah – but we will take a closer look at those in our next lesson.

As we can see, Psalms is a book that is full of praise and thanksgiving – but it is also a book of lamentation and suffering. It contains both wisdom and prophecy, and it has history as well. Above all, though, it is a book that magnifies the Lord and that praises Him for the many great things He has done!

The Messianic Psalms

WHEN PEOPLE THINK ABOUT Bible prophecy they don't usually consider the book of Psalms. However, the Psalms actually contain a great deal of prophecy. In this lesson we are going to take a look at a number of prophecies that can be found in the Psalms – prophecies that concern the Messiah.

Prophecies About The First Coming

The psalms contain two types of prophecies about the Messiah: prophecies about the first coming of Christ, and prophecies about the return of Christ and the advent of the Millennial Kingdom. We are going to start our lesson by examining some of the prophecies that concern Christ's first coming. It's really quite remarkable how much the Psalms had to say about the person and work of the Messiah.

Son of God and King of the Jews

Let's start at the beginning. The book of Psalms makes it clear that the Messiah was to be the Son of God:

Psalms 2:7: "I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee."

But Psalm 2 is just getting started. Not only was the Messiah going to be God's Son, but He was also going to reign over Israel:

Psalm 2:6: “Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.”

This psalm also tells us that the Messiah will reign over the Gentiles as well – but we'll cover that later in this lesson.

Cleansing the Temple

Psalm 69 (which was written by David) says that the Messiah would be very zealous for the temple of God:

Psalm 69:9: “For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me.”

This passage may not seem that specific, but it has more meaning than it seems. It turns out that this very passage was later quoted in the book of John when Jesus cleansed the temple and threw out the money changers:

John 2:16: “And [Jesus] said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise.
17 And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.”

Jesus was indeed very zealous for the temple of God and for purifying the corrupted worship of the day. He simply would not tolerate the wickedness that was going on. The Messiah put a stop to it, just as the Psalms had foretold.

Rejected by His People

Psalms 118 says that the coming Messiah would be rejected by His own people:

Psalm 118:22: “The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.
23 This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.”

In the New Testament Jesus actually quoted this very passage and applied it to Himself. He told the Jews that it was talking about their rejection of Him:

Matthew 21:42: “Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?
43 Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.”

Just as the Psalms foretold, the Jews rejected the Messiah – and so God brought judgment upon them for what they had done. There were severe consequences for rejecting the Savior.

Palm Sunday

Psalm 118 also contains this interesting reference to the one who would come in the name of the Lord:

Psalm 118:26: “Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord: we have blessed you out of the house of the Lord.”

It turns out that part of this verse is quoted in the New Testament. On Palm Sunday the people used that very phrase to praise the Messiah, who did indeed come in the name of the Lord:

Matthew 21:9: “And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.”

Of course, the people of Israel did not praise Jesus for very long. The Messiah was soon betrayed by one of His own disciples and handed over to His enemies to be killed – which was also prophesied about in the Psalms.

Betrayed by a Friend

Psalm 41 (which was written by David) prophesies that the Messiah would be betrayed by one of His trusted friends:

Psalm 41:9: “Yea, mine own familiar friend, in

whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me."

As we know, Jesus was indeed betrayed by one of His disciples. Judas was the one who fulfilled this chilling prophecy. Interestingly, Jesus actually quoted this very verse and applied it to the betrayal of Judas:

John 13:18: "I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me."

Jesus knew what Judas was going to do – and the Psalms foretold it long in advance.

He Would Suffer

The Psalms also foretold the suffering of the Messiah. We find this in Psalm 22 (which was written by David):

Psalm 22:14: "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.
15 My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death."

These verses are very similar to Isaiah 52:14, which tells us that Jesus was horribly tortured. Christ suffered tremendously on our behalf. Pilate had the Messiah scourged until He was all but dead, and then our Lord was crucified. Jesus was indeed

“poured out like water”, just as the psalms foretold.

Vinegar and Gall

Psalm 69 (which was written by David) prophesied that the Messiah would be offered vinegar and gall to drink:

Psalm 69:21: “They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.”

The book of Matthew tells us that this is exactly what happened. When Christ was suffering on the cross, He was indeed offered vinegar and gall:

Matthew 27:34: “They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.”

The psalms foretold all of this centuries in advance, and it came to pass exactly as it was written.

Casting Lots

Psalm 22 (which was written by David) said that people would cast lots for the Messiah's garments:

Psalm 22:18: “They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.”

The book of Matthew tells us that is exactly what happened. When Jesus was crucified the soldiers cast lots for His garments:

Matthew 27:35: “And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.”

Notice that Matthew 27 actually quotes the psalm and says that it was being fulfilled. It also says that the author of the psalm was a prophet. Most people don't think of King David as one of the prophets, but as we have seen in this lesson he actually wrote a number of prophetic psalms. In fact, no one else gave a clearer picture of the person and work of the Messiah until centuries later during the days of Isaiah. David's Messianic prophecies are some of the oldest ones found in the Bible.

“Let him deliver him”

Psalms 22 also says that the Messiah would be mocked in the day of His distress:

Psalm 22:7: “All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying,
8 He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.”

This prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus was crucified on

the cross. Those who stood around and watched His terrible agony had this to say about Christ's sufferings:

Matthew 27:43: "He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God."

The crowd mocked the Messiah *using the very words that the psalms predicted centuries in advance.*

“Why hast thou forsaken me”

Psalms 22 also says that the Messiah would cry out that He had been forsaken:

Psalm 22:1: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?"

This, too, came to pass. When the Messiah was crucified and approaching death that is exactly what Jesus cried out:

Matthew 27:46: "And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

As you can see, Psalm 22 is rich in Messianic prophecy – and it was written by David.

No Broken Bones

Psalms 34 (which was also written by David) prophesied that none of the Messiah's bones would be broken:

Psalm 34:20: “He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken.”

That is exactly what happened – and there's an interesting story behind this. Jesus was crucified along with two other people on the day before the Sabbath. Normally it takes a number of days to die from crucifixion, but since the next day was the Sabbath the Romans wanted to hurry the process along. The way to do this was to break the legs of the prisoners so that they suffocate to death. The Romans did break the legs of the two people by Christ, but when they came to Him they discovered that He was already dead. Since He was dead they didn't break any of His bones:

John 19:33: “But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: ...

36 For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken.”

As you can see, John actually quotes the psalm and specifically says that it was being fulfilled.

Rise From The Dead

Psalm 16 (which was also written by David) prophesied that, although the Messiah would die, He would not remain dead. The psalm said that He would rise again:

Psalm 16:10: “For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.”

As we know, that is exactly what happened. Jesus did indeed rise again on the third day – and He is still alive today. David prophesied of this centuries before Isaiah said the same thing.

We have seen that the Psalms prophesied about the identity of Christ, the rejection of Christ, the betrayal of Christ, the suffering of Christ, and the death and resurrection of Christ. But it does not stop there. The Psalms also speaks about the Second Coming and the Millennial Kingdom – and that is what we are going to study next.

Prophecies About The Second Coming

We began this lesson by talking about Psalm 2, which said that the Messiah was the Son of God and would reign over Israel. The psalm doesn't stop there, though. It also tells us that the Messiah will rule over all the nations with a rod of iron:

Psalm 2:8: “Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost

parts of the earth for thy possession.

9 Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

The New Testament teaches the very same thing. It also says that the Messiah will rule over the world with a rod of iron. For example, take a look at this verse from Revelation:

Revelation 19:15: "And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God."

This is not the only psalm that makes reference to the coming reign of Christ on Earth. The entirety of Psalm 72 (which was written by Solomon) is about the Millennial Kingdom and what life will be like during that amazing time. We are told it will be a time of tremendous righteousness and peace:

Psalm 72:7: "In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth."

That the Messiah will reign over the entire world:

Psalm 72:8: "He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth."

That all nations will bow down before Him and serve Him:

Psalm 72:10: "The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts."

11 Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him.”

This is exactly how the rest of the Bible describes the Millennial Kingdom. The book of Isaiah says that it will be a time of great peace and righteousness:

Isaiah 11:9: “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”

The book of Revelation teaches that Christ will rule over all the kingdoms of the world – and that His reign will never end:

Revelation 11:15: “And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.”

But there's more. Psalm 72 also tells us that the Messiah will receive the offerings and prayers of the whole world:

Psalm 72:15: “And he shall live, and to him shall be given of the gold of Sheba: prayer also shall be made for him continually; and daily shall he be praised.”

The book of Zechariah teaches the very same thing. It says that the whole world will gather together during the Millennium to worship the Lord:

Zechariah 14:16: “And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations

which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles.”

The Psalms don't just talk about the Millennium. It also speaks of the terrible days of the Tribulation. Psalm 110 (which was written by David) prophesies about the day of the Lord's wrath:

Psalm 110:5: “The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath.
6 He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the places with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries.”

Psalm 18 (which was also written by David) describes it like this:

Psalm 18:7: “Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth.
8 There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it.
9 He bowed the heavens also, and came down: and darkness was under his feet.”

This language is very similar to what we find written in the book of Revelation, which also speaks of the great and terrible day of God's wrath. In that day the earth will indeed shake and the kings of the world will tremble:

Revelation 6:12: “And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as

sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood;

13 And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.

14 And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

15 And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains;

16 And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:

17 For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?"

Psalm 21 (which was written by David) tells us that God will use fire to judge the world and destroy the wicked:

Psalm 21:8: "Thine hand shall find out all thine enemies: thy right hand shall find out those that hate thee.

9 Thou shalt make them as a fiery oven in the time of thine anger: the Lord shall swallow them up in his wrath, and the fire shall devour them.

10 Their fruit shalt thou destroy from the earth, and their seed from among the children of men."

This is exactly what the New Testament teaches. Peter said that when the Day of the Lord comes, God will use fire to destroy the world and all of its works:

2 Peter 3:10: “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.”

But this time of war and destruction will not last forever. Psalms 46 (which was written by the sons of Korah) says that one day God will put an end to war:

Psalms 46:8: “Come, behold the works of the Lord, what desolations he hath made in the earth.

9 He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire.”

The book of Isaiah teaches the same thing. When the Millennial Kingdom arrives the Lord will put an end to war and usher in an age of great peace:

Isaiah 2:4: “And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”

As you can see, Psalms is a remarkable prophetic book. Not only does it tell us about the coming of the Messiah, His death, and His resurrection, but it also tells us of things that are still to come. It says that God will pour out His wrath upon the world and destroy the wicked out of it, and will establish His Son

as king over the entire planet. It says that the Messiah will usher in a tremendous age of peace, where nations no longer fight against each other. The psalms have a great deal to say about the Messiah – if only we will take the time to study them.

The Imprecatory Psalms

IN OUR PREVIOUS LESSON we studied a number of prophetic psalms that looked forward to the person and work of the Messiah. This week we are going to take a look at some of the most difficult chapters in the Bible: the imprecatory psalms.

The word “imprecatory” comes from the word “imprecate”, and it means “to call down evil curses upon someone”. The imprecatory psalms are essentially psalms of denouncement. In these hymns (for the psalms *are* hymns), the psalmist is asking God to curse someone and bring disaster upon them. These type of psalms don't get talked about very much because they are difficult to understand. Some people have wondered why these psalms are even in the Bible in the first place. After all, aren't Christians supposed to love their enemies? Aren't we supposed to do good to those who hate us? So why are there entire psalms that ask God to bring disaster upon someone else? It's a good question – and today we are going to investigate the matter and see what we can discover.

There are numerous imprecatory psalms in the Bible. The one I would like to take a look at today is Psalm 109. It was written by David, who wrote about half of the book of Psalms. In this psalm David tells us that he is in a lot of trouble. The wicked are oppressing him:

Psalm 109:1: “Hold not thy peace, O God of my praise;

2 For the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful are opened against me: they have spoken against me with a lying tongue.”

The first problem David has is that the wicked are lying about him. They are accusing him of things that are simply not true. However, that's not all they are doing:

Psalm 109:3: “They compassed me about also with words of hatred; and fought against me without a cause.”

The wicked aren't just lying about David; they also hate him. David is being viciously attacked. As if that wasn't bad enough, he is being attacked by people who have no reason to hate him. David hasn't done anything to these people. In fact, he has actually shown these people a great deal of love and concern:

Psalm 109:4: “For my love they are my adversaries: but I give myself unto prayer.

5 And they have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love.”

David has shown these people love, and in return they hated him. David did these people much good, and in return they did him great evil. The fault is not with David; he's done everything he could to keep the peace. Yet in spite of all that, David finds himself the recipient of hatred and persecution.

This is where things take an unexpected turn. Given that Christians are to love their enemies and do good to those who hate them, you would expect David's response to be something along those lines. You would expect David to ask God to save them, or change their heart, or show mercy to them, or something like that. But that is *not* what David does. Instead David turns these wicked people over to the devil so that Satan can persecute them:

Psalm 109:6: “Set thou a wicked man over him:
and let Satan stand at his right hand.”

That alone is pretty severe – but David is just getting started. David urges God to ignore this man's prayers and condemn him when he is judged:

Psalm 109:7: “When he shall be judged, let him be condemned: and let his prayer become sin.”

David even asks God to *kill him* and give his job to someone else:

Psalm 109:8: “Let his days be few; and let another take his office.

9 Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow.”

But David is still not done. David asks God to persecute this man's children as well:

Psalm 109:10: “Let his children be continually vagabonds, and beg: let them seek their bread also out of their desolate places.”

He asks God to take away all of this man's possessions:

Psalm 109:11: “Let the extortioner catch all that he hath; and let the strangers spoil his labour.”

David asks God to make sure that no one ever shows mercy to this man's family, and to utterly destroy this man's entire family line:

Psalm 109:12: “Let there be none to extend mercy unto him: neither let there be any to favour his fatherless children.

13 Let his posterity be cut off; and in the generation following let their name be blotted out.”

Finally, David asks God to never forgive this man's sin:

Psalm 109:14: “Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered with the Lord; and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out.

15 Let them be before the Lord continually, that he may cut off the memory of them from the earth.”

As you can see, that is a great deal of cursing! David doesn't want to see this person forgiven; instead he wants to see him dead. David wants this man to lose everything he has, and he wants the man's family to be utterly wiped off the face of the earth. David *really* has it in for this guy.

This certainly isn't the sort of prayer you would expect to find in the Bible, is it? There's really not a lot of love to be seen here. Yet this is not the only psalm that's like this. So what are we to make of these chapters?

I think it might be helpful to take a step back and look at the bigger picture. The first curious thing about this psalm is that David doesn't name any names. David just refers to “the wicked” here, but he could have easily been very specific about the people who were causing him so much trouble. In fact, with a little effort I think we can figure out who David is talking about.

There are a number of people who caused David a lot of trouble. For example, David's son Absalom rebelled against him. However, David can't be talking about him because Absalom

didn't have any children (2 Samuel 18:18), but this man had a family. Shimei cursed David, but he didn't seem to have any children or any office that could be taken from him. Given what we know about David, the most likely candidate has to be Saul. No one caused David more problems than Saul did, and no one did more to persecute him. Saul certainly fits the description of the wicked person that David described!

In fact, let's take a minute to investigate the situation between David and Saul. The Bible tells us that David was one of Saul's most faithful servants:

1 Samuel 22:14: "Then Ahimelech answered the king, and said, And who is so faithful among all thy servants as David, which is the king's son in law, and goeth at thy bidding, and is honourable in thine house?"

David worked for Saul. David led Saul's armies and married Saul's daughter. David loved Saul and worked to enlarge Saul's kingdom. Yet, in spite of all of David's faithful service, Saul absolutely *hated* David. Saul drove David out of his home:

1 Samuel 19:11: "Saul also sent messengers unto David's house, to watch him, and to slay him in the morning: and Michal David's wife told him, saying, If thou save not thy life to night, to morrow thou shalt be slain.

12 So Michal let David down through a window: and he went, and fled, and escaped."

Saul took David's wife and gave him to another man (which was an incredibly evil thing to do):

1 Samuel 25:44: "But Saul had given Michal his daughter, David's wife, to Phalti the son of Laish,

which was of Gallim.”

Saul did his best to kill David:

1 Samuel 19:1: “And Saul spake to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, that they should kill David.”

But that's not all. If that was the full extent of Saul's wickedness it would be quite severe – yet this is only the beginning of Saul's sins. Saul also offered a sacrifice to God, even though he was not a priest and therefore was not able to offer sacrifices. Saul therefore despised and profaned the holy offering of God:

1 Samuel 13:12: “Therefore said I, The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the Lord: I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering.”

13a And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, which he commanded thee...”

When God commanded Saul to destroy the Amalekites, Saul disobeyed the Lord and kept them alive:

1 Samuel 15:9: “But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly.”

Saul spared the enemies of God – but Saul willingly murdered Abimelech, the high priest of Israel. In fact, Saul put to death Abimelech, his fellow priests, and the *entire priestly city of Nob* – along with its women, children, and infants:

1 Samuel 22:18: “And the king said to Doeg, Turn thou, and fall upon the priests. And Doeg the Edomite turned, and he fell upon the priests, and slew on that day fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod.

19 And Nob, the city of the priests, smote he with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and sucklings, and oxen, and asses, and sheep, with the edge of the sword.”

Saul was more than just a wicked man; he was a mass murderer. Refusing to kill the Amalekites, God's enemies, and then slaughtering an *entire city of priests* instead is an unbelievably wicked thing to do. Saul was perfectly willing to murder a whole city of people who had done him no harm. Saul was a really, *really* wicked man.

Amazingly, that is not the only mass murder that Saul was guilty of. The Bible also tells us that Saul was guilty of *genocide*:

2 Samuel 21:1: “Then there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year; and David enquired of the Lord. And the Lord answered, It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites.”

Saul didn't stop at killing an entire city. He also did his very best to *exterminate an entire people* – a people that Israel actually had a *peace treaty* with and was sworn to protect.

When David asks God to kill the person who had been wickedly oppressing him, we need to remember what that

person had actually done. Saul had forced him out of his house, had repeatedly tried to kill him, had illegally taken his wife and given her to someone else, had murdered an entire city, and was guilty of *genocide*. Considering the staggering nature of his wickedness, it's really not very surprising that David wants God to kill Saul, take away his possessions, and put an end to his family line.

Yet that last request seems a little disturbing, doesn't it? David asked God to make sure that there was no one around to "favor his fatherless children". That seems really harsh. After all, what did Saul's children do?

As it turns out, they did a lot of terrible evil. After Saul died there actually *was* someone around to "favor his fatherless children" – the man Abner. He helped Ishbosheth, and together they launched a civil war against David:

2 Samuel 2:8: "But Abner the son of Ner, captain of Saul's host, took Ishbosheth the son of Saul, and brought him over to Mahanaim;
9 And made him king over Gilead, and over the Ashurites, and over Jezreel, and over Ephraim, and over Benjamin, and over all Israel.
10 Ishbosheth Saul's son was forty years old when he began to reign over Israel, and reigned two years. But the house of Judah followed David."

With Abner's help, Ishbosheth launched a bloody campaign against David that lasted for *two years*, and which claimed many lives. If Abner had not been around then Ishbosheth would not have been able to do that, and many lives would have been saved. It would have been *much* better for Israel if Ishbosheth had been friendless and died with his father Saul. Since Saul's posterity was *not* cut off, Israel was plagued

with years of war and death.

The other factor we need to consider is how David responded to Saul. Yes, David wrote Psalm 109, which asked God to curse Saul. But it's important to remember that David *never* took matters into his own hands. David had several opportunities to kill Saul, and he never took advantage of them. Each time David had the chance to take his own revenge he refused:

1 Samuel 24:9: “And David said to Saul, Wherefore hearest thou men's words, saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt?

10 Behold, this day thine eyes have seen how that the Lord had delivered thee to day into mine hand in the cave: and some bade me kill thee: but mine eye spared thee; and I said, I will not put forth mine hand against my lord; for he is the Lord's anointed.”

In fact, David actually *put to death* the man who claimed to have killed Saul:

2 Samuel 1:14: “And David said unto him, How wast thou not afraid to stretch forth thine hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?

15 And David called one of the young men, and said, Go near, and fall upon him. And he smote him that he died.”

But that's not all. Do you know what David did when he heard that Saul was dead? He *mourned*:

2 Samuel 1:11: “Then David took hold on his clothes, and rent them; and likewise all the men that were with him:

12 And they mourned, and wept, and fasted

until even, for Saul, and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the Lord, and for the house of Israel; because they were fallen by the sword.”

In fact, David actually wrote a eulogy for Saul! The eulogy is truly remarkable. Instead of condemning Saul for all the horrible and wicked things he did, David urged Israel to remember all the good that Saul had done for them:

2 Samuel 1:24: “Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with other delights, who put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel.
25a How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle!...”

When David had a chance to revenge himself, he refused. When David had a chance to condemn Saul after his death, he refused. David *never* reached out his own hand to harm Saul or Saul's children. Instead David asked God to judge him. In doing so David did exactly what the Lord had commanded Israel to do:

Leviticus 19:17: “Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.
18 Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the Lord.”

Did David ever avenge himself? No, he didn't. He did rebuke Saul for his wickedness (which is what verse 17 commanded), but he never took matters into his own hands. David definitely wanted God to judge Saul, but David never hated

him. If David had hated Saul then he would have *rejoiced* when Saul was killed – but he didn't. If David had hated Saul then the eulogy he wrote would have been full of Saul's sins – but David didn't bring up any of the evil that Saul had done. In fact, each time David confronted Saul for trying to kill him *David didn't even yell at him*. Instead David simply rebuked the king and asked for peace.

David put the whole matter into the hands of God. In Psalm 109 he poured out his heart to God and asked the Lord to put an end to Saul's wickedness – and then David left it there. David had many chances to rain down pain and suffering upon Saul's family *and he never did*. If we had been in David's place, can we honestly say that we would have handled things as well as he did?

Yes, David did ask God to curse Saul. That is true. David was very unhappy about the wickedness that he saw in Saul. But we sometimes forget that *God* was unhappy about it as well. In fact, as unhappy as David was over Saul's behavior, the truth is that God was *vastly* more unhappy about it. God got to the point where He refused to answer Saul:

1 Samuel 28:6: “And when Saul enquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets.”

God was done having compassion on this man. In fact, God actually became Saul's *enemy*:

1 Samuel 28:15: “And Samuel said to Saul, Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up? And Saul answered, I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams: therefore I

have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do.

16 Then said Samuel, Wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing the Lord is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy?”

Saul had spent his life doing whatever he wanted. He persecuted the people of God, murdered the priests of God, and slaughtered an entire people group that Israel had sworn to protect. When Saul was in trouble he expected God to bail him out – but God refused. Instead God killed him in battle and put an end to his wicked reign.

This brings up a side of God that we don't talk about very often. Yes, it is true that God is a God of love and compassion. He will indeed show mercy to all who repent – but Saul never repented. God will forgive all those who seek forgiveness, no matter what terrible sins they have done – but Saul wasn't interested in any of that. Saul was a deeply wicked man, and *God was angry with him*.

You see, God is angry with the wicked:

Psalm 7:11: “God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day.

12 If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready.

13 He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death; he ordaineth his arrows against the persecutors.”

Take a close look at what this psalm says. It doesn't say that God is angry at sin. No, it says that God is angry with *the wicked*. We tend to think that God loves the sinner but hates the sin, but you will not find that statement anywhere in the Bible. Instead you will find a great many verses where God clearly displays His tremendous anger at the wicked.

Verse 12 explains what is going on. If the wicked man repents – if he turns from his wickedness – then God will have compassion on him. God shows mercy to all who repent and believe on His Son. However, if the wicked person does *not* repent – if he continues on in his sin, the way Saul did – then the anger of the Lord will burn hot against him. That man will not receive mercy, for he has rejected it. Instead he will face the sword of the Lord. That man will be marked for death, and God will destroy him and pour out His wrath upon him.

God offers great mercy to the wicked – but if they refuse Him then He will show them no compassion or love whatsoever. Those who refuse His mercy will instead face a wrath that they cannot endure. In fact, God said that when He calls someone to repent and they refuse, He will actually *laugh* when their day of trouble finally comes:

Proverbs 1:24: “Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; ...

26 I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh;

27 When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you.

28 Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me:

29 For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord:”

When a person makes the same choice that Saul did and continues on in their sin, that person cannot expect to receive any compassion from the Lord. When they are in trouble God will not pity them. You see, God *already* offered them mercy and compassion. He already offered to forgive all their sins and give

them everlasting life and joy, if they would only repent and believe. Jesus Christ actually shed His own blood and died a horrific, torturous death in order to pay the penalty for sin – and yet they still would not repent! So, since they rejected God's mercy, they will receive no mercy. Since they would not take God's pity when He offered it to them, they will instead face His wrath – wrath that will be poured out without mercy or pity or the least bit of consideration.

Does the Bible actually say this? It certainly does. In fact, it says it in both the Old and New Testaments:

Ezekiel 8:18: “Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them.”

James 2:13: “For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.”

Why is God doing this? *Because He offered them His mercy and they rejected it.* They had their chance.

There came a time at the end of Saul's life when he *did* try to cry out to God. The problem with Saul was that he didn't cry out in repentance and belief. He wasn't sorry for his wicked life and he wasn't trying to make things right. No, Saul was still a wicked man right down to his last breath. The only reason he was trying to reach God was to get God to bail him out of his latest problem. But guess what? *God refused.* God had become Saul's enemy and was determined to destroy him.

It's true that God is loving and merciful to all those who repent. However, *God is not merciful to those who do not repent.* The Lord has no mercy in store for the wicked. After all, Jesus Christ shed His own blood to make an atonement for sin, and

instead of repenting and believing they continued on in their wickedness. Since the wicked refused His mercy God has promised them terrible wrath:

Isaiah 63:3: “I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment.”

We need to understand that God is *incredibly* angry with the wicked. The Lord urges them to repent, because if they repent they will not face His wrath. If they repent and believe in Christ then they will find mercy. Then God will love them and care for them and will give them hope and a future.

But if they do not repent then they will face the full brunt of the Lord's anger – and the Lord's anger is terrifying beyond imagination. The verse from Isaiah 63 is talking about the Second Coming. When the Lord returns He will pour out His wrath upon His enemies. In that day the wicked will cry out, but by then it will be much too late. When judgment finally comes, the time of mercy is over. In that day it is far too late to ask for pity. You had your chance. This is how Jonathan Edwards described that verse:

“If you cry to God to pity you, he will be so far from pitying you in your doleful case, or showing you the least regard or favour; that instead of that, he will only tread you under foot. And though he will know that you cannot bear the weight of omnipotence treading upon you, yet he will not regard that, but he will crush you under his feet without mercy; he will crush out your blood, and make it fly, and it shall be sprinkled on his garments, so as to stain all his

raiment. He will not only hate you, but he will have you, in the utmost contempt: no place shall be thought fit for you, but under his feet to be trodden down as the mire of the streets.” (Jonathan Edwards, *Sinners in the hands of an angry God*)

It is not just the Old Testament that describes God's wrath in such violent and graphic terms. If anything, the New Testament is even more brutal. This is what the book of Revelation has to say about those who will take the Mark of the Beast during the Tribulation period:

Revelation 14:10: “The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb:
11 And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.”

The wrath of God is a very serious thing. It is an awful thing to endure; in fact, it *cannot* be endured. That is why it is so important to repent now, while there is still time. The wrath of God *can* be avoided. God is merciful to all who repent, and He will refuse none who come to Him.

It is not just David who sought to curse the wicked. We need to remember that *God* is vastly angrier with the wicked than David ever dreamed of being. God is the one who you need to be concerned about. Jesus Himself made that very point:

Matthew 10:28: “And fear not them which kill

the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

Jesus was warning everyone that the wrath of God was a real and serious thing. Since it was a real and serious thing, Jesus urged people to repent and believe in Him so they would not face it. Jesus was telling people *in advance* of the great danger they were in *so that they could avoid it*. The wrath of God is entirely avoidable.

The question is, what choice are you going to make? Many people are simply unwilling to turn their life over to Christ. They want to be in charge. Instead of obeying God and keeping His commandments they want to live as they please. They have no desire for holiness, and instead seek to do what is right in their own eyes. These people may be happy with their lives, but God is not. Saul was a person who lived as he pleased and did whatever he wanted. In the end he faced the wrath of God – and so will all who follow in his footsteps.

There is only one way to escape the wrath of God, and that is to surrender your life to Christ. You must repent of your sins and believe in the Messiah whom God has sent, and who shed His own blood as payment for your sins. Surrendering your life means that God is in charge. It means that you will do the things that *God* wants instead of the things that *you* want. It means that you will seek to obey the Lord in all things. It means that you sacrifice your own will and instead seek to do the Lord's will. In order to live forever in a world free from evil and death you must die to your own desires and give yourself wholly to the Lord. It means you have to cast aside all the sins that are holding you back and seek holiness. If you believe in Christ and turn your life over to God then the Lord will have mercy on you. The Lord will spare your soul, and you will never face the wrath of God.

But if you do not – if you continue in your sins – then do

not delude yourself into thinking that everything is going to be all right. The wicked may have their day in this life, but judgment is coming. Now is the day to avoid it, while there is still time. The day is rapidly approaching when it will be too late – and when that day comes God will show you no pity and no mercy. If you seek the mercy and forgiveness of God then *now* is the time to obtain it, while you are still alive.

The Longest Psalm

FOR OUR FINAL LESSON on the Psalms we are going to take a look at Psalm 119. This psalm is the longest chapter in the book of Psalms, and is the longest chapter in the entire Bible. It has a staggering 176 verses. As you might imagine, you could spend a very long time investigating this psalm. Since we only have one lesson, we are going to go over it fairly quickly.

One key fact to know about this psalm is that it is *not* a series of 176 random verses. If you look at your Bible you will see that it is actually composed of 22 sections of 8 verses each. Each of those 22 sections is labeled with a different Hebrew letter – aleph, beth, gimel, etc. What this is trying to communicate is that each verse in each of those sections starts with that particular letter. For example, the 8 verses in the “Aleph” section all start with the letter aleph, and the 8 verses in the “Beth” section all start with the letter beth, and so forth. That means that Psalm 119 is actually an acrostic psalm. (This is not the only passage in the Bible that is like this; part of Proverbs 31 is also an acrostic.)

Due to time constraints it simply isn't possible to take a look at all 22 sections in a single lesson. However, we are going to study what we can in the time that we have. This psalm has a theme – in fact, it has several themes. Let's take a look at the sections and see what we can discover.

Aleph – The Beginning

The psalm begins by telling us that God blesses those who

keep His Word:

Psalm 119:1: “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.

2 Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart.”

The section of Aleph ends with the psalmist promising to keep God's Word:

Psalm 119:8: “I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not utterly.”

The message here is very straightforward: God blesses those who keep His commandments and walk in His ways. Obedience is a central part of being blessed. Therefore, the psalmist promises to keep God's Law and do God's will.

Beth – Sanctification

The next section tells us that keeping God's commandments leads to sanctification:

Psalm 119:9: “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.”

Psalm 119:11: “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.”

How do you achieve sanctification? How do you learn to change your ways and lead a holy life? By memorizing the Word

of God and keeping the Lord's commandments. If you do that then you will cleanse your way. If you do that then you will change and will learn to not sin against God.

Therefore, the psalmist closes the Beth section by making a promise:

Psalm 119:16: "I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word."

The psalmist promises to delight himself in the Word of God and to memorize it so that he will not sin against the Lord. Aleph has told us that obedience to God's Word brings blessings; Beth has told us that it brings sanctification and a changed life. Let's see what is next.

Gimel – Pilgrims

The section of Gimel tells us that we are strangers and pilgrims in this world:

Psalm 119:19: "I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thy commandments from me."

In fact, not only are we strangers, but it seems that we are in enemy territory:

Psalm 119:23: "Princes also did sit and speak against me: but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes."

Now we are starting to see the journey. In Aleph we saw a new Christian come to know the Lord and rejoice in His

commandments. In Beth the Christian begins to study the Word, memorize it, and apply it to his life. The process of sanctification is beginning. In Gimel, however, the new Christian learns that the world is no longer his friend. He is now a stranger in a strange land. The world is against him – but all is not lost. He has a plan:

Psalm 119:24: “Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counselors.”

What does this Christian do when people speak against him? He delights himself in God's Word. He goes to the Word to find comfort and counseling. He lets the Word guide him.

Let's see what happens next.

Daleth – Affliction

Not only do princes speak against him, but life becomes even harder. In Daleth the new Christian is grievously afflicted:

Psalm 119:25: “My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word.”

Daleth is a period of great suffering. The Christian's soul is persecuted and troubled:

Psalm 119:28: “My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen thou me according unto thy word.”

In this time of trouble, where does the Christian run to strength? The Word of God. The persecution does not cause him to run *from* God; instead it causes him to run *to* God and to the words that God has given to him in the Scriptures. In fact, the

trials of Daleth lead the Christian to ask for grace so that he might stand strong and walk in God's ways:

Psalm 119:32: "I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart."

The Christian has not wavered; instead he seeks grace.

He – Desires

In the section of He, the Christian battles his own desires. He seeks to abandon his former loves and instead learn to delight in the things of God:

Psalm 119:36: "Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.
37 Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way."

The book of I John commands us to love not the world, for the things of this world are not the things of God. Those who are in love with the world are not in love with God, because this world is the enemy of God and the enemy of God's disciples. This Christian has come to understand that concept and seeks to change his desires. He doesn't want to long after worldly things anymore; instead he wants to delight himself in the Word.

In the past he longed for carnal things. Now he longs for something very different:

Psalm 119:40: "Behold, I have longed after thy precepts: quicken me in thy righteousness."

In Beth we were told that memorizing the Word and learning to walk in its ways would further the process of sanctification. In this section we see that this is coming true: the Word is changing the Christian's desires. He doesn't want the same things he used to; now he seeks the things of God. The Christian is being transformed.

Waw – Testimony

In the section of Waw we see that people are questioning the Christian's beliefs:

Psalm 119:42: “So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me: for I trust in thy word.”

There comes a time in everyone's life when they are asked to defend what they believe. Why does this Christian believe as he does? Why isn't he like the world? Why does he stand with God and do what is right? The Christian needs to have an answer – and since he has spent his time delighting in the Word of God, he has that answer. Since he trusts in the Word, he is able to answer those who attack him and demand a reason. Even if he is arrested and made to stand before rulers, he can still answer with confidence:

Psalm 119:46: “I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed.”

The section of Waw ends with the psalmist explaining the

secret to his boldness and confidence:

Psalm 119:48: “My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes.”

This Christian loves the Word. He has studied it and he continues to meditate upon it. He has hidden it in his heart. When he is questioned he knows what to say. When he is attacked he has a ready defense. When the world comes against him he runs to the Word of God.

It's worth noting that this Christian doesn't use clever arguments or worldly tricks. He doesn't try to impress anyone with his brilliance; instead he answers his opponents with the Word. He is not ashamed of the gospel, for he knows it is the power of God.

Zayin – Derision

In Waw we saw that the Christian used the Word to answer his accusers. If this was a movie then his accusers would have seen the error of their ways and would now be Christians. However, the real world isn't always like that. Even though the Christian has answered them and preached the Word to them, his life has not improved. He is still afflicted:

Psalm 119:50: “This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me.
51 The proud have had me greatly in derision: yet have I not declined from thy law.”

The world has not become any nicer to him; instead he is

held in great derision. In the Christian's time of distress, where does he find his comfort? In the Word. It is the Word that tells him how much God loves him, and that God has promised him everlasting life and joy. It is the Word that tells him the fate of the righteous – and the fate of the wicked:

Psalm 119:53: “Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law.”

The wicked may be in power, but the Christian is not tempted by their temporal success. He knows the fate of the wicked and he knows the judgment that is coming against them, and he is filled with horror at their sins. The Christian's time in the Word is paying off; he has learned a great deal and it is sustaining him. In fact, Zayin tells us that the Word has become his song:

Psalm 119:54: “Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.”

When the world is in trouble it has many different ways to find peace and happiness – but none of those can bring the peace that passes understanding. When the Christian is in trouble, though, he knows exactly what to do. Zayin tells us that he goes to the Word to find comfort and song.

Heth – Trials

We have seen that the Christian has sought to walk in God's ways. He has delighted in the Word of God and has done what is right. He has even testified before rulers and preached the gospel to them! So how is he rewarded? Well, people who

preach the prosperity gospel will tell you that the gospel brings health and wealth to all men. But that is simply not true. The Christian has done all the right things, but the world has only oppressed him still further:

Psalm 119:61: "The bands of the wicked have robbed me: but I have not forgotten thy law."

Heth tells us that the world has gone beyond just scoffing and deriding the Christian. It is now actively robbing him. The Christian's possessions are being stolen from him. His faith is costing him something.

So what does the Christian do? He finds his treasure elsewhere:

Psalm 119:57: "Thou art my portion, O Lord: I have said that I would keep thy words."

The world seeks silver and gold and fame and fortune; they seek worldly treasure. The Christian is different. The world can take his money, for that is not his wealth. The Lord is his portion and his treasure, and the Word is his delight. When the Christian's possessions are taken from him, he turns to the Lord and delights himself in God. Instead of bewailing what he has lost, he actually *gives thanks*:

Psalm 119:62: "At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments."

These trials do not drive him from God; instead they drive him closer to God. They teach him to love God's Word even more than he did before. When everything is lost and it seems that nothing is left, you learn what it truly means to have the Lord for

your portion and the Lord for your riches. God is ever faithful, and He has given to His children a wealth that the world will never have. The Christian delights in the salvation that God has given to him and rejoices.

Teth – Hidden Blessings

Most people hate to be persecuted. They hate affliction and pain and suffering, and they would *much* rather be happy. In Heth we saw that the Christian was grievously afflicted; he has suffered time and time again and has lost a great deal. In Teth we would expect the Christian to complain about the things that God has allowed to happen to him, but that's not what we find. Instead the Christian sees these events as a *blessing* instead of a curse:

Psalm 119:67: “Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.”

It seems that all of this suffering has actually brought the Christian closer to God. Before the time of trial came, the Christian had started to drift away from the Word. He had started to live more like the world – but the suffering brought him closer to God and back to the Word. Therefore, because of this, the Christian is thankful for the trouble he faced:

Psalm 119:71: “It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.”

That's a remarkable thing to say, isn't it? In Teth the Christian doesn't complain about being afflicted; instead he is grateful for it because it has taught him the commands of God.

The Christian loves the Word and therefore loves anything that brings him closer to the Word. If affliction is what it takes to bring him closer to God then the Christian is grateful for it. His desire truly is for the Word, even if it costs him something. The psalmist ends this section by saying that the Word means more to him than immense worldly riches:

Psalm 119:72: “The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.”

The Christian says that the world can have its silver and gold; what the Christian wants is the Word of God.

Yod – Understanding

In Yod the Christian shows a deep understanding of theology. He first tells us that God was the one who made him:

Psalm 119:73: “Thy hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.”

The Christian then acknowledges that *God* was the one who has been afflicting him:

Psalm 119:75: “I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.”

This brings to mind the book of Job. In that book the righteous Job was grievously afflicted. He lost his wealth, his children, and his health – and he lost it all because God removed

His hedge of protection from him and allowed the devil to afflict him. Job knew that God had allowed these things to happen and was very upset with God. Job was certain that God had wronged him and wanted to talk to God and set him straight. As it turned out, though, *Job* was the one who was wrong. He should have trusted the Lord instead of accusing Him.

The Christian in Yod does not make the same mistake that Job did. He truly *does* trust the Lord. Even though the Lord is afflicting him, the Christian continues to trust in God. He does this because he knows the Word, and the Word has told him that God is perfect and righteous in all He does. Since the Christian knows that all of God's judgments are right, he trusts God and accepts all that God gives to him – even if it is affliction. When he is afflicted he goes to the Lord for comfort:

Psalm 119:76: “Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant.”

The Christian doesn't run from God in times of suffering. Instead he understands that God was allowing that time of suffering to come, that God intends the suffering for good and not evil, and that God is righteous in all that He does. He therefore goes to God for mercy and comfort, knowing that God will give him the strength he needs to get through these difficult times.

The Christian ends the section of Yod with a special request:

Psalm 119:80: “Let my heart be sound in thy statutes; that I be not ashamed.”

What the Christian asks is that, in his great time of suffering, God would give him the grace *to keep God's*

commandments. The Christian seeks *obedience*. He wants to do what is right so that he will not sin and become ashamed. That's a remarkable thing to pray for in a time of suffering, isn't it?

Kaph – Grace

In the section of Yod the Christian acknowledges that God is behind his afflictions, and he asks the Lord to comfort and strengthen him. In the section of Kaph we find that things have become much *worse*:

Psalm 119:82: “Mine eyes fail for thy word,
saying, When wilt thou comfort me?
83 For I am become like a bottle in the smoke;
yet do I not forget thy statutes.”

In Yod the psalmist asked God for comfort – but comfort has not come. The psalmist is still waiting. He is still in a great deal of pain. The wicked are persecuting him and they are getting away with it:

Psalm 119:84: “How many are the days of thy
servant? when wilt thou execute judgment on
them that persecute me?
85 The proud have digged pits for me, which are
not after thy law.”

The Christian asked for comfort but comfort did not come. He asked for help, but instead of help he received more persecution. The psalmist is now wondering how much longer he has to live before the wicked take his very life from him. He is in tremendous danger:

Psalm 119:87: “They had almost consumed me upon earth; but I forsook not thy precepts.”

The Christian seems to be near death at this point. The wicked are persecuting him and have come after him, and he is almost consumed. The comfort that he prayed for has not come, and he has not been delivered from the wicked. The wicked seem to have the upper hand.

So how does the Christian end this section? With an unexpected request:

Psalm 119:88: “Quicken me after thy lovingkindness; so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth.”

In the Christian's hour of great need, when all seems lost and death seems near, the Christian asks for grace *so that he can keep God's commandments*. Even in this time of great pain, the Christian's primary focus is holiness! His great concern is that he would be given strength to walk in God's ways in spite of the great distress he is in. He doesn't want to sin and disobey God. Above everything else, he wants to walk in the Word – so that is what he prays for.

Lamedh – Deliverance

In Kaph we saw that things were looking very dire for the Christian – but in Lamedh things change. The Christian has found deliverance at last:

Psalm 119:92: “Unless thy law had been my

delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction.

93 I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me."

The end was near, but salvation has come at last. What is especially interesting is *how* the deliverance came. Lamedh tells us that God used His Word to rescue this person out of his time of great affliction. It was the Word that saved him and rescued him from peril. If the Word had not been there then all would have been lost and he would have perished.

Because of this deliverance, the Christian has begun to see that there is more to God's Word than he originally thought:

Psalm 119:96: "I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad."

The works of men can only go so far, but the further the Christian delves into the Word, the more treasure he finds.

Nun – Guidance

In Nun we are told that the Word is what guides the Christian:

Psalm 119:105: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

He doesn't just delight in the Word or meditate upon the Word; the Word is what guides his life and directs his actions. It

illuminates his entire life and causes him to see the world differently. Not only does it light his path, but the Word causes him to rejoice:

Psalm 119:111: “Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart.”

Despite all the difficulties that he has faced, he is determined to stand firm. He will continue to follow the Word to the end of his days:

Psalm 119:112: “I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes always, even unto the end.”

The troubles of his life have troubled him, but they have not caused him to abandon God. He is going to stay the course.

Qoph – Sorrow

Even though the Christian has faithfully served God, that has not made him immune to trouble and sorrow. In fact, in Qoph he has become overwhelmed with grief:

Psalm 119:145: “I cried with my whole heart; hear me, O Lord: I will keep thy statutes.
146 I cried unto thee; save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies.
147 I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy word.”

Some people try to claim that if you are living right then

you won't have problems in your life. They say that God wants to give everyone wealth and happiness, and all you have to do is claim it and it will be yours. But what we see in the Bible is that even faithful Christians can still experience times of tremendous sorrow and grief. This is not something unexpected or strange, for even Christ was referred to as the man of sorrows – a man well-acquainted with grief.

But what does the Christian do when he is broken and sad? He hopes in the Word. He goes to the Word for comfort and support and he keeps the commandments of God. In good times and in bad, the Word is never far away.

Tau – The End

In the section of Tau we come at last to the end of the psalm. At the end of our journey we find the Christian continuing to praise the Lord for all He has done:

Psalm 119:171: “My lips shall utter praise,
when thou hast taught me thy statutes.”

But he does more than praise God. He also speaks about the Scriptures and seeks to teach it to others. He is spreading the news of what God has said and done:

Psalm 119:172: “My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are righteousness.”

Interestingly, at the end of the psalm the psalmist does not claim to have all the answers or be a perfect Christian. Instead he still has a very humble opinion of himself. He sees

himself as a sinner who is in constant need of grace. He closes by asking God to be the good shepherd and take care of him:

Psalm 119:176: “I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments.”

This is a man who loves the Lord and His Word – and he realizes that he needs the Lord. The Word has taught him that the Lord is his strength, and so he cries out to God – for he knows that God is indeed the good shepherd who watches over His sheep.