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WORSHIP IN THE COVENANT
COMMUNITY

▶ International Sunday School Lessons

Worship in the Covenant Community

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Abram Builds an Altar

Devotional Reading: Philippians 4:10-19

Background Scripture: Genesis 12-13

Today's Scripture: Genesis 13:8-18

I. Abram's Offer

Genesis 13:8-9

8 And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren.

9 Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.

8. To be a nomadic *herdmen* was a common occupation in the ancient Near East. The success of this lifestyle depended upon the land's ability to provide. The territory of Canaan and the Jordan River valley was quite suitable for such an occupation; the Old Testament describes this land about 20 times as flowing "with milk and honey" (examples: Exodus 3:8; Numbers 13:23-27).

The problem here was what might be called "too much of a good thing." Despite the land's abundance, Abram and Lot had too much livestock for the area to support. Thus their respective herds came into competition for a fixed set of resources. To prevent any *strife* that could have endangered their herds, Abram suggested a resolution predicated on their shared kinship.

9. The location where Abram made

this offer was "between Bethel and Hai" (Genesis 13:3). At an elevation of 2,900 feet, Bethel is one of the highest places in the region. Taking the square root of that number and multiplying the result by 1.22459 yields approximately 66—that is the distance in miles that Abram and Lot can see before the horizon makes things no longer visible. Therefore, it's easy for us to imagine the two men standing on a high vista as Abram makes this offer to Lot.

II. Lot's Choice

Genesis 13:10-13

10 And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar.

11 Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other.

12 Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom.

13 But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly.

10. Much like the present day, access to water was a requirement for survival in ancient times. No water means no livestock. Moreover, in ancient times, all wells had to be dug by hand. An abundance of watering springs was part of God's original creation, which is what the verse means by the phrase *the garden of the Lord*. The Jordan River valley is compared to *the land of Egypt*, where annual flooding of the Nile River makes the land fertile.

The town of *Zoar* is about 64 miles from where Lot and Abram were standing. The town played an important role for Lot and his family when *the Lord* destroyed *Sodom and Gomorrah*. Furthermore, the reference to the destruction of these cities suggests that this event was widely known among the original audience of Genesis. The placement of this reminder in the text likely prompted the original audience to recall that, although Lot initially seemed to have chosen the most favorable land for selfish reasons, it did not ultimately lead to a positive outcome for him.

11. As Lot stood next to his uncle, he undoubtedly thought he had the better deal regarding the choice of land. But as events of Genesis 18–19 unfold, he may have come to realize how poor his choice was! Lot's selected territory means that he will be moving *east*, given the reference point in 13:3. In the Genesis narrative, traveling to the east has been associated with moves away from God. First, Adam and Eve were driven eastward from the garden (Genesis 3:24). Next, Cain moved east to the land of Nod, "out from the presence of the Lord" (4:16). Finally, the builders of the city of Babel are reported to have an eastward orientation or destination (11:2).

12. Lot's departure to *the cities of the plain* identifies his new home as being

just barely inside *the land of Canaan*, according to the boundary designations in Genesis 10:19. The phrase *pitched his tent* points to a nomadic lifestyle. The Hebrew preposition of the verse at hand describes this action as being *toward Sodom*. Soon enough, however, the preposition changes: in Genesis 14:12, he is described as living "in Sodom." In 19:1, he is described as sitting at the city gates, a place of importance. These verses depict Lot's transition from being a nomad to becoming a permanent foreign resident, as evidenced by his living in a house.

13. In selecting where to live, Lot had apparently not considered the moral climate, only the availability of water (Genesis 13:10, above). Specific information regarding the nature and depravity of *the men of Sodom* is found in Genesis 19:4–5 and Ezekiel 16:49–50.

III. God's Promises Genesis 13:14–16

14 And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:

15 For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.

16 And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.

14–15. With Abram alone, God makes a more expansive promise of territory in the land of Canaan. If we assume the same location as in Genesis 13:3, then the visibility computations of 13:9 above still apply. Thus, when God invites Abram to look *northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward*, that man can see

as far as 66 miles in any direction. If we imagine Abram standing in the middle of a circle with a visibility radius of 66 miles, the result is Abram's potentially being able to view about 13,700 square miles. That's about one-third the size of the state of Tennessee.

We also note the second mention of Abram's *seed* (compare Genesis 12:7). The word *seed* is often used as a collective singular noun to refer to a line of descendants, but it can also be used of an individual; Isaac will become this "seed" to Abram, the child of promise from God (21:12). Centuries later, the apostle Paul will note the difference between the singular and plural uses of this word regarding Abraham's descendants (see Galatians 3:16).

16. Here the word *seed* is used as a collective noun, standing for the enormous number of Abram's future family. The verse contains a complex hyperbole: *if the dust of the earth* could be counted (and it can't), then Abram's future descendants could be counted as well (and they can't either; compare Genesis 15:5). We should keep in mind that at this point childless Abram is 75 years old (12:4).

IV. Abram's Tour Genesis 13:17-18

17 Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.

18 Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the LORD.

17. In the ancient world, walking the length and breadth of a land was equivalent to claiming ownership of it. Therefore, in accordance with legal tradition, God instructed Abram to survey the land by walking through it. We note that the

boundaries with which Abram was familiar in Genesis 10:19 have mismatches with the borders described in Numbers 34:1-12. We keep two things in mind as we compare and contrast those differences. First, God promised in Genesis 17:8 to give "all" the land of Canaan to Abram and his descendants. What God gave to the Israelites in Numbers 34 probably reflected the Israelites' track record of rebellion at the time (compare and contrast Ezekiel 47:13-23). They could have had "all" the land of Canaan had they obeyed fully. But they didn't (Judges 1:27-35).

Second, several centuries elapse between the time of Genesis 13 and Numbers 34. Boundaries can change in location and name, given the rise and fall of cities and various other currents of history.

18. *Abram* responded to the directive and chose to live about 30 miles south-southwest of his location of Bethel stated in Genesis 13:3. The elevation of *Hebron* allows viewing of Sodom, Gomorrah, and Zoar. Perhaps Abram chose this location to keep an eye on Lot. The importance of Hebron is reflected in its being mentioned by name more than 60 times in the Old Testament.

An additional reference is the nearby *plain of Mamre*. The word translated as "plain" can also refer to trees, as it does in Genesis 35:8 and Hosea 4:13. In gratitude for God's provision and attention, Abram constructed *an altar* to offer sacrifices in worship. Stone altars were common to ancient Near Eastern religions, and Abram would have been familiar with their use. They also serve as monuments and places of memory (compare and contrast Joshua 22:26-28). They remind the observer of commitment and significance. Abraham and his wife, Sarah, were buried in a cave near their home in Mamre (Genesis 23:17-20; 25:7-10).

Involvement Learning

Abram Builds an Altar

Into the Lesson

Consider major forms of conflict happening in the world today and list them below:

Conflict is as old as humanity. Let's see how one conflict recorded in the Bible was settled unselfishly.

Key Verse

Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the LORD.
—Genesis 13:18

Into the Word

Read Genesis 13:8-18. When, if ever, did God instruct Abram to take his nephew Lot with him to the promised land?

Since Lot and Abram were close relatives, why did they keep their livestock property separate?

What factors are not recorded as playing a part in Lot's choice to settle near Sodom and Gomorrah?

It would not be right for us today to build altars to make sacrifices, now that Jesus has provided the full and final sacrifice for our sins. However, in Old Testament times, an altar or other structure was erected to commemorate something important.

Into Life

Consider some of the great things God has done for you. How could those blessings be memorialized in some way that honors God—a way of informing others of those blessings?

Imagine if you were to place a few items on a shelf or in a scrapbook as a reminder of God's aid in a victory. What might some of those items be?

Thought to Remember

Be ready to exercise a faith like Abraham's.

Solomon Dedicates the Temple

Devotional Reading: Psalm 34:11-22

Background Scripture: 1 Kings 8:22-53

Today's Scripture: 1 Kings 8:22-24, 37-39, 46, 48-50a

I. Impassioned Prayer

1 Kings 8:22-24

22 And Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven:

23 And he said, LORD God of Israel, There is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keep-est covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart:

24 Who hast kept with thy servant David my father that thou promisedst him: thou spakest also with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled it with thine hand, as it is this day.

22. The standing posture of prayer Solomon adopts is the most commonly seen in ancient Near Eastern art. Other postures, especially kneeling or prostration, were legitimate, of course. And by the time Solomon concludes the prayer, he will have switched from standing to kneeling; the changeover is explained more fully in 2 Chronicles 6:12-13.

In both postures, the fact that Solomon extended *his hands toward heaven* adds an aura of solemnity and earnestness. It reflects the idea of God as being far “above” creation, not just spatially but also figuratively. Humans look “up” to

God, seeking help during their hour of need.

Solomon voiced his prayer not just for his own benefit but on behalf *of all the congregation of Israel*. These were especially those Israelites who were in attendance personally for the temple dedication. Their presence is important partly because they must overhear the exhortations to avoid sin and partly because God wishes to emphasize the relationship with the people of Israel. They were united with each other and God by their history, present life, and hope for a blessed future. In a sense, they are being dedicated as much as the temple when we note the blessing mentioned in 1 Kings 8:14.

23. The following two verses are worded almost identically with 2 Chronicles 6:14-15. The confession emphasizes the uniqueness of God, an idea that appears in many biblical texts (examples: Psalms 115:3-8; 135:15-18). *The Lord God of Israel* brooks no rivals.

One area of His uniqueness appears in keeping a *covenant* in His merciful love. This language comes from Deuteronomy 7:9, 12, and it reflects the direction of that book. While Israelites were responsible for obeying God’s commandments, their relationship with God rested primarily upon His covenant promise. It was not earned by human merit.

Even so, the verse at hand emphasizes the attitude of the people. As indicated by “the Shema” (which means “hear”) in Deuteronomy 6:4-5, the people should hear and receive the Law of Moses with enthusiasm, commitment, and even rejoicing, as emphasized throughout Deuteronomy. Mindless, routine obedience cannot be the goal of the relationship because it is not sustainable.

24. The promise to *David* that his offspring would build the temple, now fulfilled, is evidence of God’s faithfulness. The eventual destruction of kingship and even that of the temple did not cancel God’s plan for Israel; rather, God used those events to symbolize His presence as they pointed to greater, eternal realities regarding spiritual and heavenly kingship and temple. God may carry out His promises in various ways, but the promises always remain just that.

II. Oppressive Circumstances

1 Kings 8:37-39

37 If there be in the land famine, if there be pestilence, blasting, mildew, locust, or if there be caterpillar; if their enemy besiege them in the land of their cities; whatsoever plague, whatsoever sickness there be;

38 What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house:

39 Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men);

37. The Old Testament often summarizes the calamities that may befall God’s

people in terms of “sword,” “famine,” and “pestilence” (examples: 1 Chronicles 21:11-12; Jeremiah 14:12). These three general categories speak to oppression and/or fatalities caused by human adversaries, meager harvests, and disease, respectively. *Blasting* (blight), *mildew*, *locust*, and *caterpillar* result in famine as crops are destroyed.

38a. Solomon asks God to reply to any prayer offered by those either in the temple or mindful of it. You may notice that the word *or* is italicized in your edition of the *King James Version*. That’s how the *KJV* indicates that there is no word in the text of the Hebrew language being translated. Thus the word *or* is the translators’ best judgment for smooth reading.

On the other hand, the ancient Greek translation (the Septuagint) omits the phrase *by all the people Israel*. The prayer does envision Gentiles praying, beginning in 1 Kings 8:41. But here the focus remains on Israelites as those especially subject to the curses following a violation of the covenant.

38b. The phrase *the plague of his own heart* speaks to pangs of conscience. Each person knows his or her own troubles and can express them in prayer as *hands* are lifted *toward this house*. This may work on two levels: (1) the suffering of the people as a whole may be expressed in different ways by different individuals, and (2) each person should be aware of his or her details and ably communicate about them to God. In other words, prayer can take many forms. On the one hand, it depends partly on forms shared by the community as a whole over time. On the other hand, it depends partly on individual experience and perception.

39. Humans do well to know their own hearts and minds as God knows them. That’s an ideal to strive for, although it is impossible to attain since God knows

us better than we know ourselves. Indeed, we humans have a tendency toward self-deception. If God responds to prayer based on an assessment of need (and He does; see Matthew 6:8, 32), how much more are His responses in reaction to the direction of one's heart!

III. Inevitable Sin

1 Kings 8:46, 48-50a

46 If they sin against thee, (for there is no man that sinneth not,) and thou be angry with them, and deliver them to the enemy, so that they carry them away captives unto the land of the enemy, far or near;

48 And so return unto thee with all their heart, and with all their soul, in the land of their enemies, which led them away captive, and pray unto thee toward their land, which thou gavest unto their fathers, the city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name:

49 Then hear thou their prayer and their supplication in heaven thy dwelling place, and maintain their cause,

50a And forgive thy people that have sinned against thee.

46. The prayer takes an important turn, assuming that the people may sin so grievously that the covenant might fail as the Israelites are removed from their promised land. This event did occur. However, the prediction goes beyond the curses for disobedience in Deuteronomy 28:15-68 to promises of prosperity in Deuteronomy 30:1-10. These envision the loss of the land as a punishment, and the return to it as an effect of God's mercy, respectively. The relationship between Israel and God was not based on human achievement but on God's love and kindness.

So the prayer ends with a request that

God will renew the people even after their communal sins have resulted in the curses of Deuteronomy 28:15-68. Even the collapse of their culture ought not to be the last word. God remains just and punishes sin, but He also shows mercy.

48. This part of Solomon's prayer assumes that suffering will cause people to reflect on their lives and amend them. It also assumes that God will hear their prayers of repentance when uttered in a land of exile. This means, in turn, that God's presence is universal and that He is interested in the prayers of people seeking change and redemption.

The verse also reveals the idea of praying toward the temple in Jerusalem. It may be the earliest evidence for that practice. Much later, Daniel prayed, facing Jerusalem while in Babylon (Daniel 6:10). This practice shows how posture indicates the direction of the heart. A good (and bad) example of this is Ezekiel 8:16, which describes "about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east."

49. It's one thing to *hear*, but another thing to *heed*. We see both elements in this prayer, with the request to *maintain their cause* as the heeding part. The "cause" has been given to the Israelites by God; it is the very reason for the existence of their nation. Thus, the prayer ultimately is that God's will be done as the nation of Israel fulfills its divine purpose. And God is certainly interested in having His will done!

50a. God takes no pleasure in our suffering, even when we have earned it. Spiritual reform sometimes results in suffering, since we need to eliminate certain attitudes and behaviors. But even the suffering draws the compassion of God and of righteous people. We hasten to add that neither this verse nor any other Bible text implies that all suffering is deserved.

Involvement Learning

Solomon Dedicates the Temple

Into the Lesson

Name things (not people) that are important to you. The responses can include physical items, good causes, intangible things that affect you, etc.

Key Verse

What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house: Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place.
—1 Kings 8:38-39a

Into the Word

Read 1 Kings 8:22-24. In what posture was Solomon praying?

What did Solomon confess about God?

Read 1 Kings 8:37-39. What did Solomon ask God to do in various circumstances?

What do these verses say about God's power?

Read 1 Kings 8:46, 48-50. Under what circumstances was God requested to act mercifully?

What do these verses say about God?

What do these verses say about the people's relationship with God?

Into Life

What elements in Solomon's prayer should we adopt into our own personal prayer lives?

Although our meeting places for worship are not parallel to the temple as the ancient Israelites' meeting place for worship, we can still dedicate our church buildings for holy purposes. Write a simple prayer in that regard.

Thought to Remember

Sin is real, but so is God's mercy.

Hezekiah's Prayer

Devotional Reading: Romans 8:29-39
Background Scripture: 2 Kings 19:1-34
Today's Scripture: 2 Kings 19:14-20, 29-31

I. Hezekiah's Prayer 2 Kings 19:14-19

14 And Hezekiah received the letter of the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up into the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD.

15 And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD, and said, O LORD God of Israel, which dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth.

16 LORD, bow down thine ear, and hear: open, LORD, thine eyes, and see: and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God.

17 Of a truth, LORD, the kings of Assyria have destroyed the nations and their lands,

18 And have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them.

19 Now therefore, O LORD our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the LORD God, even thou only.

14a. The contents of *the letter* that *Hezekiah received* are found in 2 Kings

19:10-13. The letter is only about 100 words long in English and 60 in Hebrew; its contents are threatening. The hostile sender was Sennacherib of Assyria. Being able to read and write was unusual at the time, although Israel's leaders apparently were all literate.

14b. *The house of the Lord* is the temple in Jerusalem. The point of departure for King *Hezekiah* regarding the task we see here was likely his nearby palace. The phrase *went up* when referring to travel to the temple was generally accurate, as the temple sat at a higher elevation than most other landmarks.

The fact that Hezekiah *spread* the letter *before the Lord* implies that the king asked God to read it and respond in a way that reflected Israel's place as God's people of the covenant. While 2 Chronicles 23:6 confirms that only the priests were to enter the temple, it's hard to believe that the phrasing here means that Hezekiah stood outside that building.

15a. Hezekiah's prayer invites us to reflect on God's names. At the most foundational level, you may find it surprising that God is known by three single-word names. When they are transliterated—that's where you swap letters of the Hebrew alphabet for similar-sounding letters in English—those three names are *Yahweh*, *Elohim*, and *Adonai*. But what about all

those lists on the internet that claim “16 names of God,” “God’s 20 names,” etc.? Most entries in such lists consist of one of the three names mentioned above combined with a descriptor (examples: “the living God” in Joshua 3:10; “a jealous God” in Deuteronomy 4:24; 5:9; 6:15). In the text at hand, the phrase *O Lord God* translates both the names *Yahweh* and *Elohim*. The longer phrase *Lord God of Israel* adds a descriptor; that exact phrase is not rare—it occurs in more than a hundred places in the Old Testament.

Another descriptor is added with God’s dwelling between the cherubims. The creatures known by that designation are mentioned dozens of times in the Old Testament. The most familiar discussion of cherubims is in conjunction with the ark of the covenant and the place to meet with God (Exodus 25:17-22; 37:6-9). The word translated “dwellest” can refer to a place where someone in authority sits, such as a throne or judgment seat. The idea that God figuratively dwells in a place on earth is reflected in Exodus 15:17; 1 Kings 8:13; Psalms 132:13-14; 135:21; and Matthew 23:21. Affirming that this concept is not intended to be interpreted in a literal sense are 1 Kings 8:27, 30, 39, 43, 49; and Acts 17:24.

15b. King Sennacherib of Assyria had claimed that other nations and their gods were powerless to stop his army. However, Hezekiah knew that the only true God was indeed God *of all the kingdoms of the earth*. This status necessarily derives from His role as Creator. The phrase *thou hast made heaven and earth* is reminiscent of Genesis 1:1. But Hezekiah was not quoting that passage. Rather, the text shows the idea that all things are part of the Lord’s creation and, therefore, all things are subject to the Lord. Creation implies ownership. That idea lay at the heart of Israel’s confession.

16. The language here is anthropomorphic, which means attributing human characteristics (having *ear*, *eyes*, etc.) to God. He knows all things, of course. Psalms of lament frequently ask God to hear the petitioner’s cry (examples: Psalms 4:1; 64:1) or to look at a situation (examples: 35:17, 22; 53:2). Sometimes He chooses to react positively on that awareness, sometimes in a negative way.

17-18. Sennacherib was at least partly right: *the kings of Assyria* had indeed *destroyed the nations and their lands*. Since the Assyrians had been able to do this, it logically follows that the *gods* of the conquered nations were powerless, therefore, fit only for *the fire*. The fact that an invader could destroy the idols proved their impotence. On this point, Hezekiah agrees with Sennacherib! But then the question was whether Sennacherib could defeat the Lord.

19. Hezekiah closed his prayer with the desire that *God* would triumph over the invaders. Sennacherib had rightly claimed to be superior in his encounters with foreign powers. Nevertheless, the survival of Jerusalem would prove the superiority of Judah’s God to all others.

Hezekiah wished all the nations to know about that superiority. This theme appears at many points in the Old Testament when Israel sought (or should have sought) to extol God before the Gentiles (1 Kings 8:41-43; 1 Chronicles 16:23-29; Isaiah 49:6). But Israel would not succeed in that task unless the nation stopped profaning the name of *the Lord* in the sight of *the kingdoms of the earth*.

II. God’s Response

2 Kings 19:20, 29-31

20 Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, That which thou

hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard.

29 And this shall be a sign unto thee, Ye shall eat this year such things as grow of themselves, And in the second year that which springeth of the same; And in the third year sow ye, and reap, And plant vineyards, and eat the fruits thereof.

30 And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah Shall yet again take root downward, and bear fruit upward.

31 For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, And they that escape out of mount Zion: The zeal of the LORD of hosts shall do this.

20. The material in the eight verses following this one gives God's full response to Hezekiah's request. The verse at hand is the preface to those eight; it notifies Hezekiah that God has *heard*. For God to "hear" also implies a willingness to "heed."

29. This part of Hezekiah's prayer is the other bookend to 2 Kings 19:21-28. Those verses taunt the Assyrian king, throwing his boasts of conquest back in his face.

The eventual defeat of the Assyrian army would mean a return to normal agriculture over time. The Assyrians were adept at siege warfare, and this time-consuming tactic led to the destruction of vineyards, orchards, etc., as the invaders foraged and otherwise lived off the land during the siege. A liberated land therefore required time to restore agriculture.

The first two years depicted here echo Leviticus 25:5. These two years would require faith as survivors of the war scrambled for food. Faith requires long-term thinking. Surely this points to God's profound care for the people of Jerusa-

lem and Judah! Their nation would survive one of the most desperate moments in their long history, despite all earthly odds.

30. By referring to *the remnant*, God's response acknowledged that not all Judeans would escape what was to come. Yet a kernel of the nation would survive and flourish. The verse before us, therefore, moves from an earthly sense of the text just before it to one of projecting imagery that includes spiritual robustness. The prophet Isaiah even named his son Shearjashub, which means "a remnant will return" (Isaiah 7:3). This concept is so important that it has given rise to a sub-field of study today known as the "doctrine of the remnant."

31a. Here we see an instance of parallelism that characterizes Hebrew poetry. The use of parallelism is evident in the repetition of similar ideas using different yet connected words. Thus "the house of Judah" from the previous verse parallels *Jerusalem* here. The identical English words *remnant* in these two verses hides the fact that the words are different in Hebrew—one being a verb, the other being a noun.

31b. The parallelism continues, with *they that escape* reflecting the previous two instances of "remnant." *Mount Zion*, for its part, is parallel to the previous "house of Judah" and "Jerusalem."

31c. In addition to the parallel text of Isaiah 37:32, this phrase is reflected in Isaiah 9:7. The *Lord of hosts* designation is one of the combination name-and-descriptors discussed earlier. Interestingly, the word *zealous* is virtually synonymous with the word *jealous*. We usually think of jealousy as a negative thing. But it can be positive when the fervency (zeal) is appropriately motivated and informed. We see the positive side in John 2:17 and the opposite in Philippians 3:6.

Involvement Learning

Hezekiah's Prayer

Into the Lesson

Pretend you are creating a “crisis response kit” for your household. What should go into such a kit?

Was *prayer* included on your list? Why or why not?

Key Verse

O LORD our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the LORD God, even thou only.
—2 Kings 19:19

Into the Word

Read 2 Kings 19:14-20, 29-31. What points of this text are salient? Consider the verses where Hezekiah thought, said or did.

Which aspects of Hezekiah's prayer ended up being addressed specifically by God?

Which aspects of God's response went above and beyond what Hezekiah requested?

Which aspects, if any, of the king's prayer did not draw a response from God?

Into Life

Going back to your “crisis response kit,” create a plan to respond to any crisis with immediate prayer to the Lord. State your plan in terms of what a prayer in a time of crisis *must* include, what it *should* include, and what it *could* include.

Thought to Remember

Pray with one desire: that God's will be done.

Josiah Celebrates Passover

Devotional Reading: 2 Chronicles 34:8, 14-27

Background Scripture: 2 Kings 22–23; 2 Chronicles 34:1–35:19

Today's Scripture: 2 Chronicles 35:1-6, 16-19

I. Preparation

2 Chronicles 35:1-6

1 Moreover Josiah kept a passover unto the LORD in Jerusalem: and they killed the passover on the fourteenth day of the first month.

2 And he set the priests in their charges, and encouraged them to the service of the house of the LORD,

3 And said unto the Levites that taught all Israel, which were holy unto the LORD, Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David king of Israel did build; it shall not be a burden upon your shoulders: serve now the LORD your God, and his people Israel,

4 And prepare yourselves by the houses of your fathers, after your courses, according to the writing of David king of Israel, and according to the writing of Solomon his son.

5 And stand in the holy place according to the divisions of the families of the fathers of your brethren the people, and after the division of the families of the Levites.

6 So kill the passover, and sanctify yourselves, and prepare your brethren, that they may do according to the word of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

1a. The beginning of this verse and the beginning of 2 Chronicles 35:19 form the

bookends of this account. The celebration of *passover* in this text was not only an act of obedience to the Law of Moses, but it was also an act of covenant renewal. Passover had not been celebrated for some time—or at least not in the manner that King *Josiah* intended to celebrate it. Hezekiah, who reigned over Judah from 716 to 687 BC, celebrated an extended Passover after he had renovated and reopened the temple.

Both observances, one by Hezekiah and the other by Josiah, are detailed for the readers of Chronicles (compare the much more condensed version in 2 Kings 23:22-23). And both were held *in Jerusalem*, the place where God put his name.

1b. The statement *they killed the passover* becomes clearer when we realize that the writer is talking about the Passover lamb. With the phrase *on the fourteenth day of the first month* (that is, sometime in late March or early April), the writer presents this Passover celebration as firmly rooted in the Law of Moses. Decades earlier, King Hezekiah deviated from the stipulation regarding *the first month*, but he had good reasons for doing so (2 Chronicles 30:1-20).

The record of Hezekiah's Passover observances in 2 Chronicles 30 and Josiah's Passover in 2 Chronicles 35 invited the postexilic readers of Chronicles (536 BC

and later) to renew the observance of Passover and reaffirm their covenant with God. The Passover celebrations of Hezekiah and Josiah were rooted in the state of the two men's hearts.

2. King Josiah established the agenda. We may look with great skepticism at church-and-state combinations today, but not so in ancient Israel. Here we see a king (a civic ruler) authorizing and directing *priests* (religious leaders) in their forthcoming role. Josiah placed the total weight of the monarchy behind the priestly *service*, as King Hezekiah had done.

3a. It's helpful to recall at this point that all priests are *Levites*, but not all Levites are priests. Since the Levites had a teaching role in Israel, the priests had that role as well. These teachers were responsible for guiding *Israel* in the lawful conduct of the nation's rituals. For that role and others, the Levites were expected to lead the way in being personally *holy unto the Lord*. To be holy is to be "consecrated" or "set apart" (1 Chronicles 15:11-14).

3b. This text begins with the first of a series of directives to the Levites. The reference to the need to *put the holy ark in the temple* recalls the initial placement of the ark there, some 336 years earlier. *David* reigned from 1010 to 970 BC, with his son *Solomon* reigning from 970 to 931 BC after him.

We do not know why the ark was no longer in the temple, but the culprit was probably evil King Amon, who reigned over Judah from 643 to 641 BC. The ark of the covenant was necessary for a complete reformation of the temple service. The temple was the resting place for the ark because God dwelt in it and was enthroned on the ark's cherubim. The ark represented the presence of God, and it also symbolized God's commitment to Israel.

3c. The Levites were the only ones au-

thorized to carry the ark. The original instructions were that they were indeed to carry the ark on their *shoulders* via poles. Thus, Josiah's directive here seems curious. Perhaps he was aware of the first disastrous attempt to transport the ark to Jerusalem and misunderstood what had caused the disaster.

3d. The Levites served *God* by carrying out their duties per those listed in 1 Chronicles 23:28-31. These duties changed when the immovable temple replaced the portable tabernacle.

4-5. The Levites were to prepare themselves for service by organizing themselves by their respective clans based on *the houses of their ancestors*. *David king of Israel* provided a list of these clans in 1 Chronicles 23:6-23, and *Solomon his son* followed the same pattern as documented in 2 Chronicles 8:14. Levites, like priests, rotated their service according to the *divisions* of their ancestral *families* per 1 Chronicles 24.

6a. The verse outlines three instructions along with the rationale for their implementation. Regarding the phrase *kill the passover*.

6b. Priests and Levites had been expected to *sanctify* themselves for their tasks for Hezekiah's Passover several decades earlier. Since this was only one of several tasks assigned to them, they were required to purify themselves following the sacrifice. This was an issue of setting a person or thing apart for a sacred task, rooted in the original sanctification of Aaron, his sons, and their priestly line.

6c. The first four words in this partial verse translate an uncertainty in the original Hebrew text. This kind of uncertainty is known as a textual variant. Some manuscripts have wording that translates as what the Levites were to do to prepare their *brethren*; others have wording that translates the text as directives for preparing the sacrificial lamb for those Judeans.

II. Celebration

2 Chronicles 35:16-19

16 So all the service of the LORD was prepared the same day, to keep the passover, and to offer burnt offerings upon the altar of the LORD, according to the commandment of king Josiah.

17 And the children of Israel that were present kept the passover at that time, and the feast of unleavened bread seven days.

18 And there was no passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet; neither did all the kings of Israel keep such a passover as Josiah kept, and the priests, and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel that were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

19 In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah was this passover kept.

16a. This verse sums up the various preparatory details of 2 Chronicles 35:7-15. All told, at least 41,400 animals were available for sacrifice in Josiah's Passover. This was more than twice the number for Hezekiah's Passover earlier. A considerable number of animals were needed to feed all the people since the celebration involved meals.

16b. The Old Testament lists four types of blood sacrifices: the burnt, peace, sin, and guilt offerings. These are discussed throughout the book of Leviticus. Two of those four types are present here. The Passover animal sacrifice was a peace offering. One thing that distinguished this type from *burnt offerings* was that meat was available to eat from peace offerings, but not from burnt offerings. Bulls were often used for burnt offerings, and the whole animal was burned up to God. It was a dedicatory offering where the worshipper gave God everything and expressed total commitment.

17. The meals continued throughout the week that followed as part of *the feast of unleavened bread*. Technically, this feast is distinct from Passover. But since the two occur right next to each other on the Jewish calendar, they are treated as a single celebration, practically speaking.

18a. *Samuel*, considered the last of the judges and the first of the prophets, served as a judge from 1067 to 1043 BC (1 Samuel 7-9). Thus, there had not been *such a passover as Josiah kept* for over 400 years! It dwarfed Hezekiah's Passover. It probably did so as well regarding the first Passover after return from exile, some 106 years later. No figures for the number of animals sacrificed are given for the latter, but comparing numbers at two dedications of the temple may be insightful: Solomon's dedication of the first temple involved some 142,000 animals, while the dedication of the second (rebuilt) temple involved a little over 700 (Ezra 6:17)—a magnitude comparison of about 200-to-1!

18b. When we read that the attendees included *all Judah and Israel*, we remember that those two designations identify the southern kingdom of two tribes and the northern kingdom of 10 tribes. Many members of the latter had been exiled 100 years earlier. Thus *all . . . Israel* would refer to the few who had not been taken.

19. This note serves as a bookend to 2 Chronicles 35:1. The abbreviated account in 2 Kings 23:24 adds this assessment:

Moreover the workers with familiar spirits, and the wizards, and the images, and the idols, and all the abominations that were spied in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, did Josiah put away, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the Lord.

Involvement Learning

Josiah Celebrates Passover

Into the Lesson

Write in the space below your favorite memories of a childhood holiday tradition and why that memory is special.

Write down a family holiday tradition that began when you were an adult. What made that memory special?

Let's look at a Passover celebration that took place under King Josiah and think about how to apply lessons from it to life today.

Into the Word

Compare and contrast Josiah's preparations for Passover in 2 Chronicles 35:1-6, 16-21 with the original instructions in Exodus 12:1-30 and Numbers 9:1-14; 28:16-24. What steps, if any, did King Josiah miss in his Passover preparations?

Which steps, if any, do we simply lack information about either way?

Determine what is being "consecrated" as you compare and contrast 2 Chronicles 35:1-6, 16-21 with Leviticus 11:44; 20:7; 2 Chronicles 29:34; 30:2-3, 15; Ezekiel 44:19; 46:20.

Key Verse

Josiah kept a passover unto the LORD in Jerusalem: and they killed the passover on the fourteenth day of the first month.
—2 Chronicles 35:1

Into Life

What physical preparation can I initiate for worship and kingdom service?

What spiritual preparation can I initiate for worship and kingdom service?

What physical consecration can I initiate for worship and kingdom service?

What spiritual consecration can I initiate for worship and kingdom service?

Thought to Remember

Embrace God's rituals.

Faithful Response

by Collin Schlotfeldt

“And ye shall be my people, and I will be your God” (Jeremiah 30:22). God’s covenant—His enduring promise of relationship and presence—is central to the worship of His people. Worship is the act of ascribing worth to and celebrating the glory of something or someone. The truth is, *all people worship*. For the people of God, the question is, *who* will receive our worship? Is the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the only one we will choose to direct our worship toward?

Scripture reveals a pattern to the worship of God’s people: God reveals himself, and His people respond through their worship. In the stories of Scripture, we read how they responded: they sang songs, raised their hands, played instruments, danced to music, and did good works of service.

The lessons of this quarter examine the worship that God’s people have offered. Although the ways His people worship may have changed throughout history, the reason for their worship remains the same: a faithful response to God.

Worship as Response

This quarter’s first unit gives examples from the Old Testament of God’s people responding to God’s revelation through worship. Abram (Abraham) built altars to mark an occasion when the Lord called him to greater faithfulness (Genesis 13:8-18, lesson 1). Solomon offered worship upon the awareness of the people’s tendency to sin (1 Kings 8:22-24, 48-50a, lesson 2). Hezekiah worshipped the Lord after being reminded that the Lord alone is God (2 Kings 19:14-20, lesson 3). Jo-

siah demonstrated spiritual leadership by calling the people back to proper worship by adhering to the requirements of the covenant (2 Chronicles 35:1-6, 16-19, lesson 4).

These examples demonstrate how the people’s worship of God is a response to the Lord and His work. Through worship, God’s people proclaim that the Lord truly is the worthy Lamb of God!

Worship as Song

The songs of the Old Testament were one way for the people of God to respond to the Lord’s work. While we may not know the melody of these songs, their lyrics reveal what the Old Testament people of God may have felt as they experienced His power and goodness.

These songs of worship are found throughout the Old Testament. Moses and Miriam celebrated God’s power to bring the deliverance of the Israelites (Exodus 15:1-21, lesson 5). The prophet Isaiah praised God for His deliverance (Isaiah 25:1-10, lesson 8).

In the Old Testament book of Psalms, we see examples of confession (Psalm 51, lesson 6), petitions for deliverance (Psalm 22, lesson 7), and proclamations of trust in God (Psalm 62, lesson 9). Thanksgiving and praise were among the main themes of the songs of the Hebrew Psalter.

Worship and Thanksgiving

The final unit of the quarter focuses on the Hebrew psalter. The psalmists invite us to “praise the Lord” (Psalm 146:1,

continued on page 48

Moses and Miriam

Lead in Praise

Devotional Reading: Psalm 104:1-9

Background Scripture: Exodus 14:21-31; 15:1-21

Today's Scripture: Exodus 15:1-3, 11-13, 17-18, 20-21

I. The Song Introduced

Exodus 15:1-3

1 Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously: The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.

2 The LORD is my strength and song, And he is become my salvation: He is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; My father's God, and I will exalt him.

3 The LORD is a man of war: the LORD is his name.

1. The use of the English word *Lord* with small caps indicates that the underlying Hebrew term reflects God's self-designation as revealed to Moses (Exodus 3:14). Its use in this verse highlights that the song is directed to none other than the only true and great God who had previously revealed himself to Moses.

The song praises the Lord for the ways He *triumphed* over Pharaoh and his army and thereby received honor (see Exodus 14:17-18). The *horse* and *rider* refer to parts of Pharaoh's army. Although his forces were considered all-powerful in their day, they paled in comparison to the power of the Lord.

2a. This half-verse reflects the Isra-

elites' response to the powerful work of *the Lord*. The people were pursued by the armies of Pharaoh (Exodus 14:23); the strength of the Israelites was inadequate to save themselves. Liberation came not through their own power but by the *strength* of the Lord. Before crossing the Red Sea, Moses commanded the people to "stand still" and "see the *salvation* of the Lord" (Exodus 14:13-14).

2b. The song removed any possibility of misidentifying the *God* of Moses' ancestors; He is the single objective of the Israelites' worship. For centuries, the people would *exalt* God for what He had done for them in the exodus.

3. The Israelites lived in a hostile world. They had been pursued by the nation that had enslaved them. Then, just weeks after the events of this song, the Israelites faced their first actual military conflict, against the Amalekites (Exodus 17:8-16).

The Old Testament describes the Lord as a divine *man of war* who would fight for His people (example: Isaiah 42:13). The Lord's *name* as a divine warrior is expressed later in the Old Testament by the phrase "Lord of hosts," with *hosts* referring to angelic armies (examples: 1 Samuel 17:45; Isaiah 13:4). It would have been easy for the Israelites to depend on their power or the power of other nations. Instead, the people of Israel were to

trust that just as the Lord protected them and brought them out of Egypt, the Lord would continue to do so.

II. The Song Continued

Exodus 15:11-13, 17-18, 20-21

11 Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, Fearful in praises, doing wonders?

12 Thou stretchedst out thy right hand, The earth swallowed them.

13 Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: Thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation.

17 Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, In the place, O LORD, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in, In the Sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established.

18 The LORD shall reign for ever and ever.

20 And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.

21 And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously; The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.

11. This verse contains two rhetorical questions that highlight the uniqueness of God. The Egyptians worshipped hundreds of gods and goddesses. However, those “gods” were fictitious and could not provide protection. By asking *who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods?* Moses emphasized the Lord’s superiority over these pagan gods. This was a question for which Moses knew the answer: there is none like the Lord God.

The second question builds on the first by distinguishing the ways that the Lord is incomparable to all other “gods.” The *holiness* of the Lord describes His moral purity. The Lord God is *glorious* and perfect in every way. The Lord is unique regarding His holiness.

Because the Lord is holy, His people are commanded to have lives of holiness (Leviticus 11:44-45; 1 Peter 1:15-16). For humans to be *fearful in praises* implies utmost respect and honor for the Lord and a willingness to follow His commands.

The *wonders* of the Lord’s work were displayed in His power to lead the Israelites safely across the sea on dry ground. Even in Heaven is the Lord worshipped for His holy and mighty acts.

12. In biblical times, the right hand or being located at a person’s right hand conveyed blessing (example: Genesis 48:17-20), demonstrated prestige (examples: 1 Kings 2:19; Matthew 22:44), or revealed power (example: Psalms 20:6; 98:1).

This verse uses a literary device called *anthropomorphism*, the practice of assigning human attributes to God. God does not have a physical body. The song uses this literary device to describe how the Lord conveys His power through His outstretched *right hand*. The expression is used twice in this song, once here and in Exodus 15:6. In this case, it celebrates God’s victory over the Egyptians on Israel’s behalf (Exodus 14:21-30).

Given that the song celebrates that *the earth swallowed them*, this verse also seems to point to future events. The Egyptian army was swallowed up by the sea, after all. Not long after the events of this song, Israel would see Korah and 250 rebels swallowed up when “the earth opened her mouth” (Numbers 16:32). In that instance, as when the sea swallowed the Egyptians, it was a sign of God’s judgment on wickedness and delivering his people.

13. When we think about provision, we might consider material things like food and shelter. While it is true that God provided these things for the Israelites, their greatest need was by no means material. The Israelites had experienced enslavement, and their greatest need was redemption. The Lord demonstrated *mercy* by noticing their suffering and promising deliverance. The concept of redemption consists of God's taking back or buying back what is rightfully His. God redeemed the people and took them back as people of His own. No longer were the people the possession of Pharaoh; instead, they would be the unique people of God.

After redeeming the people, the Lord led them to a *holy habitation*. The underlying Hebrew word translated *habitation* elsewhere refers to the tabernacle (2 Samuel 15:25), the city of Jerusalem (example: Isaiah 33:20), or a more general descriptor for the place of the Lord (example: Jeremiah 25:30). God was leading the people to the promised land of Canaan, the land where He would dwell with them.

God continues to lead His people to the ultimate holy dwelling beyond the physical realm. Thus, the saints in Heaven "sing the song of Moses . . . and the song of the Lamb" at their final destination (Revelation 15:3).

17. The Lord's leading to *bring* the Israelites into the promised land demonstrates His provision and the permanence of His care. The song acknowledges that the people's establishment in the land would come from the Lord's work to *plant them* and not because they made a name for themselves. The land was an *inheritance* given to them by the Lord. It had been promised to Abram (Genesis 12:6-7) and confirmed to Moses (Exodus 6:2-4, 8). It would be the place of God's

blessing to the people (Leviticus 20:24; Deuteronomy 8:7-8).

The land of Canaan is mountainous, unlike the flat, coastal region of Egypt where the Israelites had likely been enslaved. There are many mountains in Canaan, but the song probably refers to *the mountain Zion*. Centuries after Moses, Solomon would build *the sanctuary* that is the temple on this mountain, also called Mount Moriah.

18. This verse repeats the song's central theme: *the Lord* is all-powerful and eternal in His *reign*. Unlike earthly rulers, the Lord's reign over His people will be forever.

20-21. This is the first explicit reference to *Miriam* in the Old Testament. It is possible that she was the sister who watched the "ark of bulrushes" that contained the baby Moses (Exodus 2:3-4). The book of Numbers records an event that shows how her service in this role was somewhat of a mixed experience. In a misdirected way, she believed (accurately) that God had spoken through her (Numbers 12:2). This statement, however, came in a bout of rebellion against her brothers. As a result of her rebellion, she experienced leprosy as a punishment from God (12:10). However, she was restored following her brother's petition (12:11-15).

The refrain of the women's song celebrated how the Lord cast Israel's foes *into the sea*. It is very similar to the beginning of Moses' song, which also focused on the mighty acts of the Lord to save the Israelites (see Exodus 15:1).

The implication may be that *Miriam* is the one who leads the other women in a type of antiphonal rendition. (That's when one group answers another.) In any case, their words are a final reminder of how the most powerful nation in the world at that time was no match for the God of Israel.

Involvement Learning

Moses and Miriam Lead in Praise

Into the Lesson

In three minutes or less, write down as many lyrics from “It Is Well with My Soul” as you can from memory.

Songs can be a powerful tool for teaching because they can help reinforce important messages. Today’s lesson will study a song that taught the Israelites of God’s power and provision.

Into the Word

Read Exodus 15:1-3, 11-13, 17-18, 20-21. What are some examples from the song of God’s powerful actions?

What were the results of these displays of power?

What are some examples from the song of God’s provision for the people?

What were the results of these displays of provision?

What are some examples from the song that highlight God’s attributes?

How were these attributes on display to the Israelites?

Key Verse

Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.

—Exodus 15:20

Into Life

Write and sing a song of praise to God for His character and deliverance of His people.

Thought to Remember

The Lord has given us a reason to sing!

Prayers of Repentance and Confession

Devotional Reading: 2 Corinthians 7:5-11

Background Scripture: Psalm 51; 2 Samuel 11

Today's Scripture: Psalm 51:1-4, 10-12, 15-17

I. Confession

Psalm 51:1-4

1 Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.

4 Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.

1. The Hebrew word translated in this verse as *lovingkindness* occurs over 200 times in the Old Testament, with varying English translations. The word generally describes God's faithfulness to His people. An aspect of God's mercy is demonstrated in His response to sin.

The word picture used by David is that of a ledger used by the Lord to record sins. To *blot out* something from that ledger would be to remove it entirely. Centuries after David, God identified himself to the prophet Isaiah as the one who would blot out and no longer remember the sins of His people.

Transgressions are actions that willfully break God's law. The underlying Hebrew

word translated *transgressions* is elsewhere translated as "sins" (examples: Proverbs 10:19; 28:13). David acknowledged that he had broken God's law by his actions with Bathsheba and against Uriah. David also knew that God is full of *mercy* (2 Samuel 24:14) and never-failing compassion. In his sorrow and remorse, David requested that God show mercy and demonstrate forgiveness by removing all records of his sins.

2. This verse demonstrates *parallelism*, a rhetorical device frequently found in Hebrew poetry. It occurs when a line of poetry uses words or phrases that are different but synonymous. The repetition emphasizes the writer's point. In Psalm 51:1-2, parallelism is seen in the use of the words *blot out*, *wash*, and *cleanse*.

David's transgressions were like a stain on a garment that needed washing. His request, *wash me thoroughly*, reveals his knowledge of the depth of his sinfulness and understanding that only God could remove the stain of sin.

God promised to cleanse His people from their sins (Ezekiel 36:25). In response, God's people should confess their iniquities (Jeremiah 33:8) and commit to lives free from wrongdoing (Isaiah 1:16).

Of the dozens of uses of the underlying Hebrew word for *cleanse*, most refer to the ceremonial cleansing required by the Law

of Moses. God requires that His people live pure and holy lives, free from *sin*. By asking to be cleansed from *sin*, David sought to be made clean before God.

3. David could ask to be cleansed from sin because he knew the sins he had committed. For a person to *acknowledge* sin can be painful, but it must happen. Awareness of sin must occur prior to personal conviction, which is required for true repentance and mercy. David knew the extent of his *sin* (2 Samuel 12:13). His admission of that fact to himself was his first step to confessing to God and receiving forgiveness.

4a. Our sins can harm others. And yet, sin is ultimately a failure to follow the commands of a holy and righteous God. Therefore, sin is ultimately directed against God. This half-verse echoes David's statement of confession after he had been convicted of his sin: "I have sinned *against* the Lord" (2 Samuel 12:13).

The phrase *done this evil in thy sight* reflects the statement made by Nathan to highlight David's sin (2 Samuel 12:9). Because of God's holiness, He cannot tolerate the sight of evil. God sees the actions of all people, even those done in private. David acknowledged the severity of his sin. Not only was he aware of his wrongdoing, but he was also aware of God's knowledge of that sin.

4b. Some psalms describe God as an all-powerful and all-knowing judge who, in His righteousness, will judge the behavior of His people (examples: Psalms 96:13; 98:9). Because all sin is ultimately directed against God, His judgment against it is *justified*. David knew this and was prepared to accept the consequences of his actions.

II. Restoration

Psalm 51:10-12

10 Create in me a clean heart, O

God; and renew a right spirit within me.

11 Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.

12 Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.

10. This verse continues a turn for David that began in Psalm 51:7 (not in today's print passage). The turn is from his confession of sin to his request for a renewed relationship. David acknowledged that only *God* could clean his heart from sin. As such, David's prayer suggests an important insight regarding the state of humanity: we are incapable of having pure hearts and living completely righteous on our own. Only God, through His mercy, can give people a *clean heart* and a *right spirit* when they turn to Him. Only after God has provided this spiritual renewal can people then follow Him with obedience and love.

11. Under the covenant of Sinai, obedience to God's commands was a condition for Him to continue to dwell with the people (Exodus 29:42-46). Those who did not keep those commandments would be removed from the community and, thereby, the presence of God (examples: Genesis 17:14; Deuteronomy 17:1-5). David had previously admitted that he had disobeyed God. In this verse are his requests that result from that wrongdoing. He was fearful that he might suffer the loss of God's *presence* as a result.

David had received "the Spirit of the Lord" after being anointed by Samuel (1 Samuel 16:13). The request that God *take not thy holy spirit from* David reflects that past experience. After David's predecessor, Saul, had sinned, "the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul" (16:14; compare 18:10; 19:9). It's not stretching

our sanctified imaginations too much to think that David was fearful that he would suffer likewise.

12. David's sin caused a sense of separation between him and God. At one time, God's *salvation* had led David to rejoice. However, his feelings of *joy* had been replaced with grief because of the presence of David's sin.

David recognized that he could not experience transformation through his power; he needed God to provide support to *uphold* him. David had already acknowledged God's role in transforming David and strengthening the bond of their relationship.

III. Praise

Psalm 51:15-17

15 O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.

16 For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering.

17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

15. With this verse, David's prayer of confession and repentance transitions to praise. He had confessed to God, requested forgiveness, and asked to experience a renewed relationship with God. As a result, David promised that he would use the experience of forgiveness as an opportunity to "teach transgressors [God's] ways" so that "sinners shall be converted unto [God]" (Psalm 51:13, not in our printed text). David's acknowledgment of his sin led him to seek repentance and use his life as an example to others for their correction.

This verse also demonstrates another use of poetic parallelism. *My mouth shall shew forth thy praise* parallels the statement "my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness" (Psalm 51:14, not in our

printed text). Praise is the proper response to God's love and mercy. David would respond to God's mercy with public displays of praise and worship. His goal was not to manipulate God into granting forgiveness. Instead, he expressed his commitment to worship God in response to receiving God's promised mercy.

16-17. David states the basis for his confession of sin and prayer for forgiveness. Through the Law of Moses, God established a system of sacrifices and offerings for the people of Israel. Therefore, at an initial glance, this verse appears to negate the role of this sacrificial system.

We can find an explanation by looking again at the context that prompted David to write this psalm. Under the Law of Moses, adultery and murder required capital punishment. David knew that God desired a change of heart rather than sacrifices without any change.

Instead, God desires "internal" *sacrifices* from the contrite and repentant. These sacrifices include the attitude and stance of a person's *spirit* and *heart*. When people become aware of their sin, they will experience grief for what they have done—a "godly sorrow" that leads to repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10). This sorrow results from having a *broken spirit* filled with sadness for not having loved and obeyed God as intended. However, experiencing sorrow for the sake of itself is not the intended goal. God desires that His people have a *contrite heart* that shows remorse for sinful behavior.

This verse also teaches us that religious observances and practices are ultimately meaningless if they are not followed by a change of heart that results in following and obeying God's commands. God will *despise* such behaviors. Rather than sacrifices and offerings for their own sake, God desires a changed heart that results in worship and obedience.

Involvement Learning

Prayers of Repentance and Confession

Into the Lesson

Brainstorm a list of words that are synonymous with *sin* and write them below. Do the same with the following words: *acknowledge*, *confession*, and *praise*.

What is the relationship between *sin* and *acknowledge*, *confession*, and *praise*?

Into the Word

Read today's text, and then mark the following sentences as *True* or *False*.

1. David requested grace according to God's unfailing love. __ (Psalm 51:1)
2. David failed to recognize his sin. __ (51:3)
3. David proclaimed that he did evil in the sight of other people. __ (51:4)
4. David requested that God give him a pure heart and a new outlook. __ (51:10)
5. Despite his sin, David still felt the joy of God's salvation. __ (51:12)
6. David's sacrifices consisted of burnt offerings. __ (51:17)

For sentences you marked false, write verse references that show the falsehood of each statement and write out true sentences based on the verse(s) referenced.

Key Verse

Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.
—Psalm 51:10

Into Life

In the space below, write down a personal or corporate sin you wish to confess.

Reread Psalm 51:1-4, 10-12, 15-17 silently as a prayer of confession and repentance of individual sins. Describe how you feel.

Thought to Remember

Acknowledge. Confess. Repent. Praise.

A Plea for Deliverance

Devotional Reading: Psalm 107:23-32

Background Scripture: Psalm 22; Daniel 3

Today's Scripture: Psalm 22:1-11

I. Petition by David

Psalm 22:1-5

To the chief Musician upon Aijeleth
Shahar, A Psalm of David.

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?

2 O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; And in the night season, and am not silent.

3 But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.

4 Our fathers trusted in thee: They trusted, and thou didst deliver them.

5 They cried unto thee, and were delivered: They trusted in thee, and were not confounded.

1a. David was surrounded by enemies who mocked him and were eager to see him destroyed (Psalm 22:12, 16). In light of this seemingly hopeless situation, David cried out to God. His cries were notably not directed to any random pagan god. Instead, he called on the God with whom he had a relationship: *my God*.

By using this term of intimacy, David demonstrated confidence that the God who had entered into a covenant relationship with Israel would also be faithful and present to him. But David's situation was so dire that he felt compelled to ask

why God seemed distant. Throughout the history of Israel, God had promised His presence with His people. The promise of God's presence anchored the hope of the psalmists (examples: Psalms 9:10; 37:28; 94:14).

While suffering on the cross, Jesus quoted this half-verse in Aramaic: "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). In the lead-up to and during His crucifixion, Jesus was mocked, attacked, and forsaken as He was handed over to death. The suffering led Jesus to feel abandoned by His heavenly Father. By quoting this psalm as a prayer, Jesus expressed anguish regarding the rejection that He experienced on the cross.

1b. Any hope of rescue seemed *far* away. The kind of *helping* that David desired was deliverance from his enemies. All other avenues of deliverance had been exhausted; only the strength of the almighty Lord could save David.

The phrase *the words of my roaring* reflects the depths of David's despair. He was left to groan and cry out for any means of rescue. The sense of being abandoned by God led David to cry out as a last resort. His cries were like the roar of a wild animal in anguish.

2. David's cries for rescue were not a

one-time occurrence; he petitioned God *in the daytime* and *the night season* for deliverance. It is understandable for God's people to cry out to God and question whether or not He hears those petitions (examples: Psalm 42:3; Lamentations 3:8, 44). However, unlike the experience of other psalmists, it seemed to David that God *hearest not* the man's cries.

3. Although David had questioned why God seemed distant (Psalm 22:1, above), he still affirmed the unique characteristics of God. Notably, he proclaimed that God is *holy*, meaning He is totally perfect and free of any blemish of sin. There would be none other who could save God's people. God's holiness is often the foundation of worship in the psalms (examples: 29:2; 99:3, 5, 9; 145:21).

For ancient Israel, God's presence was represented by the ark of testimony. He would reveal His presence "from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony" (Exodus 25:22). However, in the verse before us, God's presence is in the midst of His people as He *inhabitest the praises of Israel*. Even in distress, David could worship God—the only one who is holy, faithful, and present in the midst of suffering.

4-5. The history of God's work with His people gave David confidence in God's faithfulness. Such reflection anchored David's worship and provided encouragement regarding God's active and all-powerful presence. Other psalmists shared this view (examples: Psalms 78:53; 107:6).

Perhaps David was reflecting on the exodus from Egypt. While enslaved in Egypt, the people *trusted* God's promises to their ancestors—promises of blessing, descendants, and land (Genesis 15:14-18; 17:4-8; 26:2-6, 24; 28:13-15; 46:2-4). Trusting these promises and God's faithfulness, the people cried out that

God would bring freedom from their enslavement (Exodus 2:23-24). God saw the people in their suffering, took pity on them (2:25), and *delivered* them from their oppression (12:31-42).

The word *confounded* typically means to be confused or perplexed. However, that is not its meaning in this verse. The underlying Hebrew word is translated elsewhere as "ashamed" (Psalms 25:2; 31:1; etc.), and that is the sense here. Those who hope in the Lord and trust His promises have hope that He will someday remove shame once and for all.

The three uses in these verses of a form of the word *trust* reveal the tension between trust and suffering. Feelings of sadness, anger, and fear are often associated with grief—such are normal human emotions. However, in those moments, we can also trust that God is present and with us and will be faithful to us. Such tension reveals a "both-and" situation: we can *both* cry out in our suffering *and* trust that God will provide comfort.

II. Insult from Enemies

Psalm 22:6-8

6 But I am a worm, and no man; A reproach of men, and despised of the people.

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.

6. Worms are associated with destruction, death, and decay (examples: Deuteronomy 28:39; Job 21:26; Isaiah 51:8). David's self-identification as *a worm* and not a *man* reveals the extent of his negative self-assessment. His enemies had treated him as though he was worthless and on the verge of death. He began to

believe that their threats and vile hopes would come true.

7. Although God seemed silent, David's enemies were not. They took advantage of David's situation to make a spectacle of his suffering. They ridiculed David and heaped *scorn* and insult on him because he trusted God. Mockery and insult led them to *shake* their heads out of disdain and disgust.

8. This verse reveals that David's enemies quoted his prayers back to him. However, they did so with a harsh and sarcastic tone. The confidence of David's enemies is displayed as they sarcastically invited God to *deliver* David. They refused to believe that God would miraculously intervene for the good of David. To the suffering psalmist, their mocking words seemed to have a kernel of truth; their sarcastic invitation likely reinforced the psalmist's doubts and lament.

God's people often face scorn and ridicule from the unrighteous. Even Jesus faced ridicule (Matthew 27:39) and sarcastic incitements (27:43) while suffering, adopting Psalm 22:1 as His own in the process (Matthew 27:46). In those moments of testing, we can trust that God will be faithful to us, even amid ridicule and mockery. This trust is our hope as believers.

III. Presence of God Psalm 22:9-11

9 But thou art he that took me out of the womb: Thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts.

10 I was cast upon thee from the womb: Thou art my God from my mother's belly.

11 Be not far from me; for trouble is near; For there is none to help.

9-10. David's delight in the Lord came from the ways that God had provided for

him—a provision that began while David was still in his mother's *womb*. While "covered" in his mother's womb, he was "fearfully and wonderfully made" by a caring God (Psalm 139:13-14). God's care continued after David was born and received his mother's love, care, and provision. God's care for His servant was on display from that man's conception to his birth and childhood.

By reflecting on God's provision during his conception, birth, and upbringing, David demonstrated the reason for his *hope*. A form of the underlying Hebrew word translated *hope* is also translated as "trusted" elsewhere in this passage (Psalm 22:4-5), and that is the sense in the verse before us. David's trust in God was not based simply on any good feelings that David felt. Instead, David's confidence came from the certainty he had because of God's previous demonstrations of provision (see Isaiah 46:3-4). Although David experienced suffering and felt doubt, he demonstrated trust that God would provide, leading the psalmist to proclaim in worship: *thou art my God*.

11. David's petition *be not far from me* is repeated later in the psalm (Psalm 22:19). The petition to God reflects David's deep need for urgent deliverance from his enemies and his situation. The psalmists frequently petitioned for the nearness of God's presence when they faced trials and suffering (examples: 35:22; 38:21; 71:12). They knew that God is always-present (omnipresent; example: 139:7-12). Surrounded by trouble, the psalmists desired to experience God's presence through their deliverance from suffering.

The sort of presence that David desired was an act of deliverance from the *trouble* brought on by his enemies. David sought the *help* that *none* other could provide, a deliverance that only God could give.

Involvement Learning

A Plea for Deliverance

Into the Lesson

Who do you call on when you experience a crisis?

How do you want that person to respond when you call on him or her?

Into the Word

Read Psalm 22:1-11. What possible situation might have prompted David to pen this psalm?

What feelings of David does this psalm communicate?

What true things did his feelings reveal?

What thoughts of David does this psalm communicate?

What true things did his knowledge reveal?

What possible tensions could arise between how David felt and what he knew?

A Plea for Deliverance

How could those tensions exist simultaneously?

Key Verse

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

Into Life

What is a struggle in your life or a personal trial that feels hopeless?

What evidence can you recall of God's faithfulness to you?

Write a prayer for God's help or rescue.

Thought to Remember

Cry out to God!

My Own Climb

by Scott Maclellan

It is with some concern that I share anything at all of myself. If the message from the most devoted believers in history is that we must deny ourselves, why would an author spend any amount of time talking about himself? The answer is perhaps in the recognition of how I once felt about the early Christian saints. When I first learned about these ancient ones, they seemed unrelatable at best and of no use to my real-world existence at worst.

My opinion was that if someone went off to live in the desert or a monastery, where they didn't have to deal with the world knocking on their door every minute of every day, surely their faith was a myth or panacea that held no real-world application to my life. So why bother listening to what they had to say?

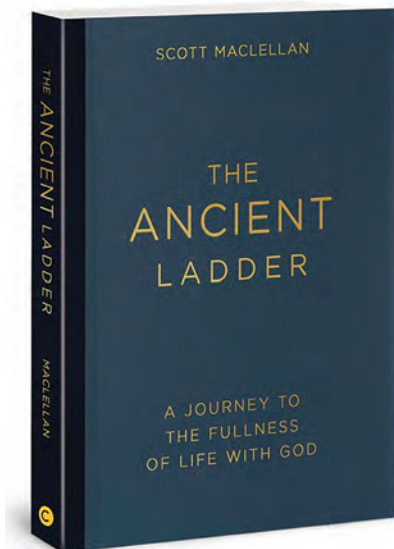
Faith must work in the real world or it is useless, at least as most people would view it.

Given that backdrop, it may be helpful to understand that I have spent most of my time in the muck and mire of the real world, with its many blessings and tribulations. I do not bring you this material out of a simplistic, isolated view of life, but rather out of a messy, complex, difficult view. Ironically, it is that fact that offers me so much hope. I am forever grateful for all of it.

I grew up in a wonderful family with two loving parents and a terrific, loving older sister. We went to church, and my dad sang in the choir. But as my sister and I grew, our activities began to take over our Sundays. Eventually, we joined the Christmas-and-Easter-only crowd for the most part, not out of an intentional abandonment of the faith, but because “life happens,” and matters of faith took a back seat.

Later, after I entered adulthood, my lovely wife and I married and had two sweet baby girls. My wife and I then embarked on the same journey our parents had taken. We started going to church to give the girls the foundation we had received. But life, once again, intervened. Our younger daughter developed cancer three times before the age of eight and underwent more than 150 surgeries by the age of seventeen. At one point, she was the only person alive in the world with her combination of illnesses.

Along with that came the pain of watching our child suffer—and the stress of two decades of more medical



debt than I could ever fathom surviving. Our daughter spent more time in the hospital than out of the hospital, and more than once we took her home to die. Our older daughter was left to fend for herself at a very young age, but we did our best to give her a normal childhood in the midst of the chaos. There was not a minute to think, let alone have structure in our lives of any kind. Our lives were more about survival than any kind of peaceful faith journey.

Had you asked me at that point in my life if I was a Christian, I would have said yes. But frankly, there was no evidence to back up that claim. I explored faith, sometimes deeply, to seek an explanation for our lives of constant trauma. But I found no answers there—only

more questions. I tried to be a man of faith and failed. I tried again and failed . . . and on and on and on.

And yet God gave me the grace to be curious. He gave me a burning desire to understand why our lives had turned out the way they had . . . not in a woe-is-me kind of way, but more to understand how He was using it to my good.

The above article is an excerpt from Scott Maclellan's *The Ancient Ladder: A Journey to the Fullness of Life with God* (Colorado Springs: David C Cook, 2023). You can find it at www.Shop.DavidCCook.org or at your local Christian bookstore.



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A God Worthy of Praise

by Trinity Van Gaasbeek

We live in a world of chaos, sin, and grief. But believers know that God is in control. Even while living in a broken world, we are invited to worship God. Throughout the psalms for this quarter, the writers contrast God's perfect power, love, and care against human leaders' weakness. God is above everything and deserves praise.

God Our Shepherd

As the shepherd, God protects and provides for His people: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil" (Psalm 23:4). In the dangers of this world, The Lord provides peace and goodness: "thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" (23:4). God cares for His sheep physically—leading them to "still waters" (23:2)—and spiritually—the "soul" (23:3). The psalmist knows that "goodness and mercy shall follow [him] all the days of [his] life" (23:6).

God Our Powerful King

The psalmist warns that earthly power means nothing to God: "men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie" (Psalm 62:9). Only God, our "rock," "refuge," and "salvation," has un-failing power. He alone provides what we need. The psalmist's soul is able to "wait . . . only upon God," for his "expectation is from him" (62:5). God can shelter us from all danger. We worship Him for His protective power.

Human plans and power turn to dust; human schemes are a frail joke before the mighty power of an eternal God. The psalmist writes, "Put not your trust in

princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish" (Psalm 146:3-4). God does not pass away. He "keepeth truth for ever" (146:6). He alone is worthy of our praise: our creator, healer, and sustainer. He "shall reign for ever, even thy God, O Zion, unto all generations" (146:10).

Psalm 150 encourages all creation to praise God with music and dancing. This psalm reminds readers of God's "mighty acts" and "excellent greatness" (150:2). Worship in this psalm overflows with joy.

God, We Worship

Psalm 100 calls for joyous worship in observance of God's character and faithfulness. The psalmist writes, "Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name." (Psalm 100:3-4). God is "good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations" (100:5).

In each of the previous psalms, God establishes Himself as loving and powerful. Psalm 139 shows that God intimately knows the psalmist. The writer reflects, "O lord, thou hast searched me, and known me" (Psalm 139:1). Because God sees his every moment, the writer stands in awe, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me" (139:6). No one is outside of God's reach (139:8). The omniscient God is worthy of all our praise.

Praise for Deliverance

Devotional Reading: Ephesians 1:3-14

Background Scripture: Isaiah 25; Daniel 6:10-28

Today's Scripture: Isaiah 25:1-10a

I. Praise the Lord Isaiah 25:1-5

1 O LORD, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; For thou hast done wonderful things; Thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth.

2 For thou hast made of a city an heap; Of a defenced city a ruin: A palace of strangers to be no city; It shall never be built.

3 Therefore shall the strong people glorify thee, The city of the terrible nations shall fear thee.

4 For thou hast been a strength to the poor, A strength to the needy in his distress, A refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, When the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall.

5 Thou shalt bring down the noise of strangers, As the heat in a dry place; Even the heat with the shadow of a cloud: The branch of the terrible ones shall be brought low.

1. Isaiah's response to the vision of devastation in chapter 24 was a prayer of *praise*. The prayer involves the prophet's use of two names for the same recipient: *Lord* and *God*. By adding the word *my*, the prophet leaves no doubt where his loyalties lie. The people of Judah were

to have a personal relationship with and loyalty to the only true God. He is not a fictitious regional god but the God who reigns over the whole earth.

Isaiah's reflection on God's *wonderful things* echoes a key element of some psalms: pondering God's accomplished works as indicators of His identity and character (example: Psalm 77). But in this regard, there's a difference between the psalmist's recall of God's wonders and Isaiah's recall: the psalmist speaks of God's wonders that were tied to positive elements of His works and provisions, while Isaiah's praise was for the destruction God had wrought on sinful people and places.

2a. History witnesses to the arrogance of those who trust in earthly protections. It's not wrong to take steps to protect oneself or others from harm (example: Nehemiah 3). But reliance on such human efforts to the exclusion of God leads to arrogance and disaster.

As we read the verse before us, we may wonder which *city* Isaiah refers to. Jerusalem could be the reference, given its destruction in 586 BC (Isaiah 64:10-11), but mentioning a palace of strangers (foreigners) works against this. Similar language of destruction is used for Damascus (Isaiah 17:). Another candidate is Tyre (Isaiah 23). Given the grammatical construction

of the phrasings, the best answer is “none of the above, specifically.” Instead, the prophet acknowledges God’s power over every city anywhere. No matter how *defenced* (fortified) a city or location may be, it is not, nor ever will be, able to resist God’s plans. As the previous chapter of Isaiah 24 speaks of the entirety of the earth, so also does Isaiah 25 by considering God’s sovereignty over all the earth’s cities. In effect, the prophet uses the metaphor of a city for the whole earth.

2b. Destroyed cities and towns were often rebuilt. Ideal places for cities in the ancient world involved three criteria: (1) access to water, (2) access to one or more trade routes, and (3) defensibility. So a city that had been destroyed was subject to being rebuilt if those three criteria still held for a given location. For God to forbid a city ever being rebuilt indicates His extreme displeasure of what went on there. To ignore this prohibition was to invite the wrath of God anew.

3. In the older language of the *King James Version*, the word *terrible* refers to “something that strikes terror.” The concept speaks of those who live by the principle of “might makes right” (compare Isaiah 13:11). Such people have no regard for God (Psalms 54:3; 86:14).

The parallel between the first and second lines in verse 3 indicates *the strong people* and *the terrible nations* refer to the same group. That may make us wonder if repentance is the way they will *glorify* God. That’s a possibility. Another possibility is that any respect they have for God is forced and grudgingly given.

4-5. The opening word *for* ties the previous discussion of the oppressive nations to a recognition of God’s concern for *the poor* and *the needy*. When people-groups neglect or abuse the most vulnerable, God comes to their defense. In that regard, Isaiah compares God to a *refuge*

from the storm or a shade *from the heat*. A military image can be detected here because the word translated *strength* is also translated “fortress” elsewhere (Jeremiah 16:19; Daniel 11:7, 10).

A pithy description of how God acts is that He “comforts the disturbed” and “disturbs the comfortable.” What we just considered describes the former; what Isaiah prophesies next describes the latter. The phrase *Thou shalt bring down the noise of strangers* is reflected more specifically in Jeremiah 51:55, where God is predicted to have “destroyed out of [Babylon] the great voice.” Loud noise is a characteristic of war and other conflicts (Psalms 46:6; 74:23; Isaiah 13:4). But no matter how much noise the enemies of God and His people make, the God of Israel can silence it with His voice (Isaiah 66:6).

II. The Lord Hosts a Banquet Isaiah 25:6-8

6 And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people A feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, Of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.

7 And he will destroy in this mountain The face of the covering cast over all people, And the vail that is spread over all nations.

8 He will swallow up death in victory; And the LORD GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; And the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: For the LORD hath spoken it.

6a. *This mountain* refers to God’s holy mountain in Jerusalem (Isaiah 27:13). The prophet locates a future banquet here as he uses that phrase a total of three times in 25:6, 7, 10). Beyond the devastation of the earth in Isaiah 24 and the judgment of the nations in Isaiah 25:1-5, Isaiah offers a hopeful vision because of

what will happen on the mountain where Jerusalem is located. It is important to note that the forthcoming feast will be available *unto all people*. The guest list for this feast is limitless. No one is meant to be excluded, “on the outside looking in.”

6b. This half-verse indicates the celebratory nature of the festival to come. The nature of the food and beverage indicates that this was not the regular diet of people who lived in Judah. Meat, which has bones *full of marrow*, was a rare delicacy, and *wine* was expensive and reserved for special occasions.

The phrase *wines on the lees* may sound strange to us. “The lees” refers to what is left over from the grapes after the initial stage of their pressing. Leaving wine on the lees strengthens its taste. Then when the wine is strained before consumption, what remains is wine of the highest quality. Clearly, God will serve only the best to those who attend this special feast. No shortcuts here!

This feast looks back to Exodus 24:1-11 where Israel ate and drank in the presence of God. They enjoyed a banquet where they saw God and experienced God’s saving presence on God’s holy mountain. This vision also looks forward to the messianic banquet in the age to come, where people will come from all over the earth to eat and drink in the kingdom of God with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

7-8. The *mountain* on which God will host a feast is the same mountain on which He will destroy something. There is salvation, and there is destruction. This salvation is deliverance from death itself. Death covers *the face of all people*. Everyone wears this veil as a shroud. Everyone is appointed to die. No one escapes death.

III. Testify About Him

Isaiah 25:9-10a

9 And it shall be said in that day,

Lo, this is our God; We have waited for him, and he will save us: This is the LORD; we have waited for him, We will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

10 For in this mountain shall the hand of the LORD rest.

9. Isaiah 25 begins with the prophet’s tribute of praise. Now the praise is on the lips of all who will come to the mountain of the Lord to share in the “wonderful things” to be provided there (Isaiah 25:1). The language is similar to the often-sung words of Psalm 118:24: “This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.”

We should note that the Hebrew name Isaiah means “the Lord saves” or “the Lord is salvation.” Given that the words *save* and *salvation* appear in this verse, also consider that the name *Jesus* means the same thing (Matthew 1:21). He is the one who has and will accomplish the wonders Isaiah described.

When banquet day arrives, no better words can be uttered than *This is our God!* The creator and ruler of life became its redeemer at the cross. Death held humanity in its grip until Christ accomplished His work; now Jesus holds “the keys to hell and death” (Revelation 1:18).

10a. *The hand of the Lord* is active throughout the Bible. Sometimes it is associated with blessing; at other times, it is extended for discipline or punishment. Here, however, the focus is on the hand’s being at *rest*. When God’s hand rests upon the land, it gives the land rest and protects it from all enemies, including death. God will rest after He ushers in His new creation—the new heaven and the new earth. Before that rest occurs, “The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (1 Corinthians 15:26). When death is defeated for good at the return of Jesus, it will be cast into the lake of fire, never again to cause pain and tears.

Involvement Learning

Praise for Deliverance

Into the Lesson

Define the phrase “mountaintop experience.”

Today’s lesson describes God’s character and past actions as well as a future mountaintop experience and what God will do for His people. Let’s take a look at how Isaiah describes both.

Into the Word

Read Isaiah 25:1-10a. Make a note of phrases that stand out to you. What struck you and why?

Key Verse

In this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.

—Isaiah 25:6

Write down other places in the Bible that share images or concepts with the phrases that stood out to you.

What actions in Isaiah 25:1-10a recount what God has done?

What actions in Isaiah 25:1-10a recount what God will do?

What are the implications of remembering or forgetting God’s works?

Into Life

Identify how Isaiah and the people did or would respond to God’s work.

How can you respond to God in these same ways throughout the week to come?

Write a personal testimony to God’s faithfulness, based on what has been studied today.

Thought to Remember

Gratefully wait for the fulfillment of the promised death of death.

Trust in God Alone

Devotional Reading: Jeremiah 17:5-11

Background Scripture: Psalm 62

Today's Scripture: Psalm 62

I. Calm Amidst Trouble

Psalm 62:1-4

1 Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my salvation.

2 He only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defence; I shall not be greatly moved.

3 How long will ye imagine mischief against a man? Ye shall be slain all of you: as a bowing wall shall ye be, and as a tottering fence.

4 They only consult to cast him down from his excellency: they delight in lies: they bless with their mouth, but they curse inwardly. Selah.

1. *Truly* translates a key word in this psalm (translated “only” in Psalm 62:2, 4-6 and “surely” in 62:9). Its repetition throughout the psalm emphasizes the truth of each statement, lending a heightened sense of the sincerity for the psalmist.

My soul identifies the seat of a person's commitments and loyalties. It is the “I” of personhood. *Waiteth* translates a rare Hebrew word in the Bible, occurring only four times (Psalms 22:2; 39:2; 62:1; 65:1). This waiting is restful, sometimes even silent. David was not an autonomous self but a dependent one. David entrusted himself to *God* because *salvation* comes from God, though we do not yet know from what David required rescu-

ing. In this instance, salvation should not be thought of as a distant spiritual reality but as a present, physical rescue.

We are wise when we entrust ourselves to the Lord and do not trust ourselves. Completely trusting God is related to the covenant. If David trusted God completely based on covenants in Israel, how much more should we, given that we have received what Israel hoped for?

2. Repeating the word *salvation* is another way David emphasized his confidence that he would find what he needed from the Lord. Only God, the *rock*, can serve as the source of stability and rest. When God was David's *defence*, he could confidently and boldly profess that he could never *be greatly moved*—and so can we. Grounded in God's gracious salvation and protected by God's power, we confess that nothing will shake us. Our feet will not slip or give way. The soul committed to God alone is stabilized by God's saving work and protective care.

3. This verse and the next feature several contrasts between what has come before to what will come after. *Ye shall be slain* and the images of an unstable *wall* and *fence* contrast the transient nature of David and his enemies with the unchanging, faithful God, who is David's “rock” and “defence” (Psalm 62:2, above). The contrast highlights God's power versus

the ultimate powerlessness of any human as well as God's integrity in His dealings with David against the unreliability of his enemies. We do not know the specific nature of the *mischiefs* David's opponents imagined, but we know that David's life was full of situations that might fit the bill.

4. The Hebrew adverb translated *only* appeared in Psalm 62:1-2. In the opening of the psalm, God is the only ground of assurance. But David's opponents lacked reverence for God, as evidenced by their total disregard for David, God's chosen king (1 Samuel 16:7-12; 2 Samuel 7:8-9).

Speaking of himself in the third person, David suggested these opponents conspired to *cast him down from his excellency*, referring either to his position in Saul's court or to the throne itself. Some examples come from before David became king while he was part of King Saul's court or exiled from it (1 Samuel 18:10-11; 23:7-29; etc). Another possibility occurs decades later when King David's own son Absalom revolted against his father and tried to depose him (2 Samuel 15:13-14). These and other efforts revealed David's enemies to be liars and hypocrites, willing to *bless with their mouth* while they *curse inwardly*. They sought to undermine God's chosen and unjustly attacked David.

II. Calm Discovered

Psalm 62:5-8

5 My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him.

6 He only is my rock and my salvation: he is my defence; I shall not be moved.

7 In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God.

8 Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us. Selah.

5-6. These verses form a refrain, largely repeating what was expressed in Psalm 62:1-2 (above). *Wait* is a form of "waiteth" that appeared in 62:1. In Psalm 131:2, the same word is used, describing a weaned child with his mother. There as here, the image is of security, peace, and silence.

7. This verse expands what is said in Psalm 62:1-2 and 62:5-6. Here as there, God is the psalmist's *salvation, rock, and refuge*. The only new language here is of God as the psalmist's *glory*. The word can also be translated "honour" (Psalms 26:8; 66:2; etc.). The first example of God's giving people glory is found at creation (Genesis 1:26-27; Psalm 8:5). We also think of Jesus' honoring people by becoming fully human in order to minister among us and die for our sins (Philippians 2:6-11).

8. Imagine a temple worship service where a singer offers a testimony and expresses his or her hope in God's loving care. Then the singer turns to the congregation and invites them to share in this testimony. The singer calls the people of God to *trust* God, just as the singer does. God is not only the singer's refuge but is a *refuge for us*. The people of God share the same story. They rehearse the story of God's powerful deliverance through the exodus and His loving election of Israel as the people of His Old Testament covenant.

III. Calm Grounded in God

Psalm 62:9-12

9 Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie: to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity.

10 Trust not in oppression, and become not vain in robbery: if riches increase, set not your heart upon them.

11 God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God.

12 Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work.

9. A stark contrast is drawn between God and *men*, whether of *low* or *high degree*. These contrasts are meant to be understood together, indicating all people. When compared to God, each person from least to greatest is *vanity* and *a lie*. The concept of vanity is familiar from the book of Ecclesiastes, which frequently uses this same Hebrew word to assert the meaninglessness observed in human life (examples: Ecclesiastes 1:2, 14; 2:11; 3:19). The word describes a mist that appears for a moment and then dissipates.

10. For the powerful, their success at *oppression* can feel like safety. The illusion of having control over not only one's own life but also the lives of others creates a false sense of self-determination and influence over the world. In truth, oppressors need fear God's wrath and judgment for their sins—a lesson Israel (and Judah) would learn long after David's reign ended.

11a. These two phrases poetically emphasize the efficacy of God's speaking. We might think of creation, when *God* had only to say a word, and what He said was created. For David to hear God's speech *twice* might mean He repeated a particular message, or it could simply emphasize that David took what he heard to heart. The latter is in view, based on the confidence David has expressed in the Lord.

11b-12a. God's *power* stands in contrast to the illusion of power that people might have. It has been alluded to several times already (see Psalm 62:1-2, 6-8), but here power is called out. For many, God's power, in combination with His wrath, is the primary way of understanding Him as revealed in the Old Testament.

But a closer reading suggests that God's power cannot be understood without also

considering His *mercy*. The Hebrew word translated "mercy" is frequently used in the context of God's covenant love and loyalty toward Israel (examples: Exodus 20:4-6; Deuteronomy 7:9-12). His mercy both initiated and sustained the covenant.

One example of God's power and mercy at work for Israel was the story of the exodus. Out of His covenant loyalty, God promised to bring Israel out of Egypt (Genesis 46:3-4), and He then began that work (Exodus 2:24). Bringing the Israelites out from their slavery as conquerors and providing for them in the desert—even in the face of multiple rebellions—were actions motivated by love and accomplished with power. Even the examples of God's wrath reveal His desire for mercy (see Genesis 18:20-33; Jeremiah 23:3; Jonah 3:10-4:2). Perhaps most striking is, even after pronouncing judgment for three or four generations, God says He shows love and mercy to thousands (Deuteronomy 5:10). This is a difference of degree; God limits His wrath and lets His love and mercy overflow.

We do not know whether David wrote this psalm before or after receiving God's promise of a house for David's family. God was powerful to keep that promise centuries later, and through it, we experience God's love in Christ. Unsurprisingly, then, many called on Jesus to have mercy on them throughout His ministry.

12b. Paul alluded to this phrase in Romans 2:6 and expressed a similar sentiment in 2 Timothy 4:14. Some students propose that neither David nor Paul seems to have had the Last Judgment in mind when making this assertion. Instead, God's conduct is appropriately contrasted with human conduct. Whereas we might act with a lack of integrity or with only selfish ends in mind, God acts out of His power and mercy and intends to set the world to rights.

Involvement Learning

Trust in God Alone

Into the Lesson

List examples of pairs of objects that
1) share something in common and
2) demonstrate extreme differences in
weightiness. (*examples:* a tricycle and a
cargo plane; both are forms of transporta-
tion, but one is far heavier than the other.)

It's easy to compare objects at extreme
ends of the scale and know which will
be weightier. In the same way, when we
compare God to anything or anyone else
we might trust, it is easy to see that He is
the only true option. As we study, pay at-
tention to the ways David describes God,
and how these truths prompt him to re-
spond to everything else.

Key Verse

My soul, wait thou only upon God; for
my expectation is from him.

—Psalm 62:5

Into the Word

Read Psalm 62 and list descriptions of
God found in the psalm along with verse
references; as well as a list of descriptions
of people, also with verse references.

What, if any, attributes are shared be-
tween God and people, as described in
Psalm 62.

Survey David's life for circumstances
that might have provoked the writing of
Psalm 62, using 1 Samuel 16–19, 2 Sam-
uel 1–7, and 2 Samuel 11–19 as referenc-
es. Summarize any circumstances you
find and any specific verse(s) that suggest
a connection.

Into Life

Write down a day this week and a spec-
ific time when you will wait quietly on
the Lord.

What will that waiting will look like?

Thought to Remember

We trust God because He is willing and
able to save us.

Confidence in God's Shepherding

Devotional Reading: John 10:1-10

Background Scripture: Psalm 23; John 10:11-14

Today's Scripture: Psalm 23

I. God's Shepherding

Psalm 23:1-4

1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters.

3 He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

1. The first verse introduces a reversal: whereas David had been a *shepherd* himself, God is David's shepherd. The metaphor of God as a shepherd is frequently used by Old Testament writers (examples: Genesis 48:16; 49:24; Psalm 28:9; Isaiah 40:11). Thus, the psalm is spoken or sung by an individual sheep of the metaphor. It would be strange for a shepherd to care for only one sheep. The psalmist does not feel the need to tell of any others. He focuses on the relationship between one sheep (himself) and the shepherd.

David was familiar with the role of shepherd, and he understood the great responsibility of providing for the needs of a flock. As domesticated animals, sheep are less able to provide for their own needs.

However good David may have been as a shepherd in meeting those needs, the psalmist depicts God to be all the more mindful in that regard. This confidence is evident in the phrase *I shall not want*.

Whatever need may arise for the speaker, God is ready and able to meet this need. A good shepherd will do this, but a bad shepherd will be far away when needs arise. God is not distant.

2a. The phrase *green pastures* reflects an image of ideal summertime abundance in the land of Canaan. But such abundance can be hit and miss in its semiarid climate as it experiences little or no rainfall for five months of the year. Shepherds constantly had to scout the best locations for grazing sheep.

Maketh me to lie down reveals the causative force of the Hebrew verb. Sheep are at ease as they are provided rest alongside their food.

2b. While sheep have the ability to survive without water for up to seven days, they are likely to consume a significant amount when the opportunity arises. The imagery of *still waters* is unusual since the flowing water of a river or stream is the preferred image for needs that are met (Psalms 36:8; 46:4). At least two interpretations of *still waters* have been proposed.

One reading holds that the shepherd brings the flock to a natural body of water

free of fast-flowing rapids—hence “still.” A difficulty for this interpretation is that shepherds tended to rely on wells to water flocks. Moreover, fast-flowing water was not common in this land.

Another way of understanding the image is to take the word *still*—a noun in the original language—to refer to a place of rest. This is a frequent translation of this word elsewhere (examples: Psalm 95:11; Isaiah 32:18; 66:1). It reinforces the image of a place where sheep feel free to lie down, unthreatened.

Whichever interpretation most accurately conveys the psalmist’s intended imagery, the central message remains that the shepherd leads the sheep instead of driving them. This presents a picture of tender direction, as depicted in Isaiah 40:11. Furthermore, this picture is deeply rooted in the theology of the exodus, when God guided the Israelites through the wilderness (Exodus 13:21-22).

3a. The psalmist is calm and untroubled as God’s provision for physical needs coincides with God’s provision for non-physical needs. The same thought, using the exact two Hebrew words translated *restoreth* and *soul*, appears in Psalms 19:7; 116:7; Proverbs 25:13; and Lamentations 1:16. Many psalms plead for God’s restoring favor. This one, however, views that favor as an accomplished fact.

3b. The imagery of shepherding continues. One way of thinking about God’s leading *in the paths of righteousness* is to imagine forks on the road of life. When a fork is encountered, one must choose which way is the right one.

A faithful or righteous shepherd—as God is—leads the faithful of the flock into right paths. God proves to be faithful; it is not in His nature to be otherwise!

4a. The psalmist continues by now emphasizing the protection side of God’s shepherding. We would all prefer that

there would be no more dark valleys of life. Nevertheless, there are, and there will be, until Jesus returns. There is no promise that the Christian will not have to endure such valleys—quite the opposite. But we do indeed have a promise of God’s presence.

The presence of God should signal the absence of *fear*. Fear is a God-given emotion that helps protect us. When our fear is justified because of real and imminent danger, it can save our life (assuming that fear doesn’t turn into panic). Fear (and its lack) can be related to *evil* in several ways. First, a person might fear neither evil nor God because he or she has embraced evil.

Second, a godly person can fear evil by deciding to avoid it because getting too close to it runs the danger of falling into its clutches. Third, a godly person doesn’t fear evil because he or she knows that God’s presence is stronger than any evil that may lie in the path. This third option is in view here.

4b. *Rod* and *staff* are tools of the shepherd. The Hebrew word that is translated “rod” also can take the sense of a “sceptre”—a sign of authority (example: Psalm 45:6) that might be used to inflict pain or punishment (2:9; 89:32). The word translated “staff” refers more to a walking stick or a cane (Exodus 21:19; Zechariah 8:4). The psalmist is comforted by the fact that God has these metaphorical tools at His disposal.

II. The Lord Supplies Psalm 23:5

5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

5a. With a new verse comes a change in metaphor. Sheep do not dine at tables, so the shepherd imagery seems to have given

way to something new. God is now depicted as a gracious host who has prepared a fine meal for the psalmist to enjoy. This could signify a role-reversal for King David since kings were known to have splendid tables to feed many people. Preparation *in the presence of mine enemies* could be intended to make these enemies jealous or simply to show that God was not hiding the display of His favor. Because of God's protection and provision, they can do nothing to harm the psalmist.

The verse just prior to this one bridges the two images. In verse 4, the psalmist spoke of a death-defying journey through shadowy places. And now he imagines a feast for himself, the weary traveler. Roads and mountain paths were dangerous in ancient times. Much later, under Roman rule—when roads had greater security for travelers—Jesus still would speak of thieves on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho (Luke 10:30). Enemies on the road were a danger for all travelers.

It is impossible to say whether the psalmist has particular enemies in mind, perhaps the literal foes of David. His anointing as king made several enemies, not the least of which was his predecessor, King Saul. A related text refers to a time “when [David] was in the wilderness of Judah” (Psalm 63), and it speaks of enemies seeking his life (63:9-10).

5b. The host honors the guest by anointing his *head* with oil. Given the fragrances that were available to add to olive oil, such anointing is a soothing and refreshing experience for a weary traveler. This anointing was not done for Jesus when Simon the Pharisee hosted Him for dinner, an intentional oversight noted by Jesus (Luke 7:46).

The psalmist possibly intends a double meaning: he may be recognizing David's physical anointing to be king over Israel while acknowledging God's continual

anointing in spirit. The latter projects an image of God as an hospitable host, with all the trappings of a grand meal involved. Since pouring oil happened in various contexts, the image fits both.

5c. The psalmist continues to acknowledge God's benevolence as host. Presumably, the host has given the guest a large cup of wine, and the guest is satisfied. The Hebrew word translated *runneth over* occurs elsewhere only in Psalm 66:12. There, it is translated “wealthy place” in the context of being rescued by God. This cup of satisfaction is equivalent to the waters of Psalm 23:2b.

III. The Psalmist's Future Psalm 23:6

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: And I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

6a. The text has twice mentioned hardship: danger in the dark valley (Psalm 23:4) and enemies in sight of the host's table (23:5). If the psalmist feels that he is being chased by death and evil, then he imagines that God's *goodness and mercy shall* pursue him all the more. It's insightful into God's character to see how the two Hebrew words translated as “goodness” and “mercy” are paired in other passages (see 69:16; 86:5; 100:5; etc.).

6b. The final line provides a fitting conclusion for the psalm as it vividly depicts nearness to God. The psalmist shared a table with God and expected to remain *for ever*. He did not expect to be shown the door. A *house* for any god in the ancient Near East was a temple. But in David's lifetime, God had no temple, and He denied permission for David to build one for Him. This fact of history points to *the house of the Lord* being the heavenly dwelling.

Involvement Learning

Confidence in God's Shepherding

Into the Lesson

Reflect on your time quietly waiting on the Lord from last week's lesson. How did it go?

Sometimes we need to seek out the rest that God intends for us. Other times, we are aware that the ways He leads us are for our own good. Today we'll look at one of the most familiar Bible chapters to discover how God promises His loving care to those who follow Him.

Into the Word

Read Psalm 23 and respond to the following prompts to describe the relationship between the Lord and the psalmist:

"He" Statements (statements about who God is or what He does):

"You" Statements (expressions directed to God):

"I" Statements (how "I" interact with the Lord):

Into Life

Make a list answering the question, "So what?" Name what the promises of this psalm can mean to believers today. Reference promises fulfilled in Christ.

In light of the approaching holiday season, write a short "recipe" that will help you remember important encouragement from Psalm 23. Consider slipping the recipe cards into a cookbook or other spot where you will see it throughout this season.

Thought to Remember

God has provided, is providing, and will provide.

True Worship of the True God

by Collin Schlotfeldt

For the ancient Jewish person, music and song had a great deal to do with worship. But worship was not expressed solely through those things. It was more important for the worship of the one true God to include encounters between the spiritual and physical realms. We see the importance of this in various psalms. One example is Psalm 119:105: “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” The impact of the Scriptures did not merely result in increased knowledge for the psalmist. The stress on the origin of the Scriptures had real and vital implications too.

Reminders Through Places

From the altars used in the days of Abraham to the tabernacle carried by the Israelites to the temple built by King Solomon, God’s story was told through physical components. The altar was where sacrifices were offered as acts of worship. The tabernacle and temple that followed—the figurative dwelling places of God himself (1 Kings 8:27; Acts 17:24)—were far more elaborate than the simple altars of earlier days. Rich in symbolism, the tabernacle and the temple were feasts for the senses. As their symbolism brought the story of God to life (or, rather, back to life), worshippers were reminded of the covenant between them and God. The two proper responses to this reminder were worship and obedience.

Reminders Through Feasts

The most valuable reminders are those that influence behavior. And one of the

best kinds of reminder in this regard is *reenactment*. A primary vehicle for these were the various feasts of ancient Israel, the Feast of Passover undoubtedly being the most important. We see this feast’s importance in 2 Chronicles 35, where Josiah reinstated this celebration, which had been established more than 800 years earlier!

Passover was one of three annual pilgrimage feasts, the other two being Pentecost and Tabernacles (they go by various other names as well; compare Exodus 23:14-16; Numbers 28:16-31; 29:12-34). By involving a meal, the reenactment was enhanced by taste and smell. Unleavened bread, bitter herbs, lamb bones, etc., all played their part in bringing the story of God’s provisioning back to life.

Worship Through Actions

Under the old covenant, the psalms often connected worship of the spiritual God with the physical actions of the earthly worshipper. Just two examples are Psalm 47:1 (“O clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph”) and Psalm 149:3 (“Let them praise his name in the dance: let them sing praises unto him with the timbrel and harp”). How many such actions still apply under the new covenant yet have been bones of contention throughout the centuries? But as the revelation of God’s words, God’s works, and even God himself prompted acts of worship, so must it be with us.

Worship in Truth

We take care, however, not to worship

God as we imagine Him to be (Isaiah 44:13-20; Romans 1:25; etc.). Instead, we worship as Scripture reveals Him to be (1 Samuel 3:21; Acts 17:26-31). Our worship “in truth” (John 4:23-24) will be revealed not only in our verbal confession (Romans 10:9-10) but also in and through our actions (1 John 3:17; 5:2; etc.).

True worship, whether in word or deed, focuses on the true God. “I [John] fell at his feet to worship him [an angel]. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10).



Faithful Response

continued from page 19

lesson 11) by making “a joyful noise unto the Lord” (100:1, lesson 12). The worship of the people of God should be filled with thanksgiving and praise to the Lord, for He is our good shepherd who sustains us (Psalm 23, lesson 10). The Lord is not distant and far off from us. Instead, the

Lord is near us and has invited us to have a close relationship with Him (139:1-12, lesson 13). As you study the worship practices of the people of God, consider how your worship is a response to the truth that the Lord is the one who is worthy of praise.

Songs of Praise

Devotional Reading: Psalm 148

Background Scripture: Psalms 146–150

Today's Scripture: Psalms 146, 150

I. Praise

Psalms 146:1-2

1 Praise ye the LORD. Praise the LORD, O my soul.

2 While I live will I praise the LORD: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being.

1. *Praise ye the Lord* is a translation of a Hebrew word most Christians know very well: *hallelujah*. The exhortation to praise is given first to the psalmist—to his *soul*, the seat of the mind and will. If Psalms 146–150 are linked by the common command to praise God, then the psalmist's choice to begin Psalm 146 with an exhortation to oneself is likely significant. Praise leaders, preachers, and other leaders in times of worship do well to adopt a habit of such encouragement for themselves.

2. Here the psalmist responded to his own exhortation with a commitment to praising *the Lord* for the entirety of his life. The two sentences in this verse are parallel to one another, and their points are essentially the same. The repetition of two thoughts that are nearly equivalent in meaning creates emphasis. This technique is found frequently in Hebrew poetry.

The speaker has expressed a full and firm commitment to glorifying the name of *God* for as long as he lives. This commitment will find fulfillment not

only in discourse but also in song. That distinction may imply praise both in conversation and in worship settings, encompassing all of life.

II. Trust

Psalms 146:3-10

3 Put not your trust in princes, Nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help.

4 His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; In that very day his thoughts perish.

5 Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, Whose hope is in the LORD his God:

6 Which made heaven, and earth, The sea, and all that therein is: Which keepeth truth for ever:

7 Which executeth judgment for the oppressed: Which giveth food to the hungry. The LORD looseth the prisoners:

8 The LORD openeth the eyes of the blind: The LORD raiseth them that are bowed down: The LORD loveth the righteous:

9 The LORD preserveth the strangers; He relieveth the fatherless and widow: But the way of the wicked he turneth upside down.

10 The LORD shall reign for ever, Even thy God, O Zion, unto all generations. Praise ye the LORD.

3. The speaker shifts focus to warn against placing one's trust in human leaders. While this shift is initially unexpected, it makes considerably more sense when read in light of the psalmist's expression of commitment to praising God in the previous verse. Israel and Judah were tempted at various points to make alliances with pagan nations rather than trusting in God. This legacy of infidelity eventually led to the fall of both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah.

4. The reason why one should not put trust in humans is because people are not only powerless but transitory. Our earthly lives have an ultimate limit in death. And when we die, any outstanding goals we have die with us. We are no longer able to affect the land of the living directly; only the indirect effects of our legacies remain to influence others. Thus, any mortal is unworthy of the kind of trust that others often place in them. Death is the ultimate example of the frailty of human beings. The rest of the psalm picks up this point of contrast between mortal, powerless human beings and the powerful, immortal, and merciful God.

5. This verse returns to the one in whom trust should really be placed: *the Lord*. Jacob is singled out here among the patriarchs. The probable reason is that *Jacob* here refers to Israel, the collective name for God's people. The expression emphasizes God's special care for Jacob the individual in particular, then to his descendants by extension. Just as God cared for the man Jacob, so the person who calls on *the God of Jacob* for help is exceedingly *happy*. This trust stands in contrast to the misplaced faith in human beings.

6a. The psalm shifts to highlight God's acts and characteristics that make Him worthy of trust and praise. God's role as creator of the cosmos and all its occupants shows how infinitely powerful He is.

6b. Here the psalmist introduces the next major set of reasons to trust in and praise God: His faithfulness. The claim that God *keepeth truth for ever* refers to God's constant loyalty to His people. The speaker does not switch topics here; God's faithfulness is rooted in His role as the creator of the cosmos. The link between God's fidelity and His role as creator was established in Genesis. After the flood waters receded, God made a covenant with humanity and all other living creatures, promising that He would never again destroy the world as He had before.

7a. God's care for *the oppressed* would have surprised many in the ancient context, as financial prosperity was often seen as a sign of divine favor. While God has sometimes blessed His people materially, a lack of means is not necessarily a sign of divine disfavor. Even so, the psalmist notes that God pays special attention to those who don't have enough.

7b-8a. One category of the oppressed are *the hungry*, pointing to a lack of necessities. The reference to opening *blind eyes* is most likely a metaphor for freeing *prisoners*, and the state of being *bowed down* is also associated with imprisonment.

8b-9a. These phrases highlight persons for whom God has a special concern. The first are *the righteous*, whom the text specifically identifies as those whom God loves. The second are *the strangers*, those who are foreign to the land.

The third highlights God's special care for *the fatherless and widow*. Indeed, James 1:27 affirms that God considers care for widows and orphans as a defining component of "pure" and "undefiled" religious faith.

9b. In looking after the righteous, the alien, the widows, and the orphans, God specifically acts against the designs and interests of *the wicked*. This is an example of what is called "antithetical parallelism."

This feature of Hebrew poetry supports the point of the second thought from the opposite perspective of the first thought.

10. In contrast to human leaders, God will reign *for ever*. This eternity, coupled with His creative power, means that God is able to do anything He desires. And this God is the God of Zion, the name for the hill upon which Jerusalem was built. By invoking the name *Zion*, the psalmist calls the readers' attention to the fact that their God chose to place His glory in Jerusalem. With that reminder, the psalm concludes with a final exhortation to *praise ye the Lord*.

III. Exhortation Psalms 150:1-6

1 Praise ye the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary: Praise him in the firmament of his power.

2 Praise him for his mighty acts: Praise him according to his excellent greatness.

3 Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: Praise him with the psaltery and harp.

4 Praise him with the timbrel and dance: Praise him with stringed instruments and organs.

5 Praise him upon the loud cymbals: Praise him upon the high sounding cymbals.

6 Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD.

1. Psalm 150 also opens with the exhortation *praise ye the Lord*. But right away, we are confronted with an interpretive difficulty: Do the next two exhortations speak of where God is or where the person doing the praising is to be?

The precise location of God's *sanctuary* and its proximity to *the firmament of his power* is debated. The sanctuary could refer to the temple in Jerusalem or to God's

heavenly home. The parallelism of the verses and the reference to *the firmament of his power*—a heavenly location—may support the celestial sanctuary. It is also possible, however, that the verse calls for worship in both earthly and heavenly realms. In that case, the psalmist would have envisioned the entire universe gathering to praise God.

2. Any discussion of God, whether concerning the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit, will essentially deal with (or presuppose conclusions to) two issues: *who God is* (in His nature and essence) and *what God has done* (in His acts of creating, ruling, and redeeming). To *praise him for his mighty acts* honors God in terms of what He has done; to *praise him according to his excellent greatness* is to honor Him in terms of His essential being and character.

3. These instruments are taken both from the religious rites of the priests and prophets and from the realm of the laity, which implies that every form of music should be mustered to glorify God.

4. *The timbrel* is similar to a modern tambourine, being small enough to be held in the hand. The term *stringed instruments* likely refers collectively to the various kinds of such instruments rather than a third type. The *organs* could refer to a pipe or collectively to various kinds of wind instruments but distinct from horns.

5. The percussion section is mentioned in this verse. Regardless of the exact items to which the text refers, the idea is that those present to praise God should make loud and joyful noises.

6. *Every thing that hath breath* could refer to human beings, specifically, into whom God breathed the "breath of life" (Genesis 2:7). However, animals are also said to possess the "breath of life" (7:15). Consequently, it seems likely that the psalmist has invited all creation to participate in praising the Creator.

Involvement Learning

Songs of Praise

Into the Lesson

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

1. Too much praise will keep a child from reaching his or her full potential.

2. The most praiseworthy person in my life has also been the most influential.

3. I can praise you without diminishing myself. _____
4. There aren't many situations or people in my life really deserving of praise.

Today's lesson is all about praise we can always feel good about: praise to God our Father. The psalmist was effusive with his praise. Let's open our Bibles to discover why.

Key Verse

While I live will I praise the LORD; I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being.
—Psalm 146:2

Into the Word

Read Psalms 146 and 150. What do these psalms say about *how to praise*?

What do these psalms say about *why we should praise*?

List the praiseworthy actions of God you find in Psalm 146. Besides each one, jot down ways you see God doing these things in our world today.

Into Life

Write down your own personal reasons to praise God from the list of reasons you compiled in your Bible study. Write or circle the encouragements to praise that mean the most to you.

Read Psalm 146:7-9 and write down ways God could use you to do each praiseworthy work.

Thought to Remember

God deserves our praise.

A Song of Thanksgiving

Devotional Reading: Ephesians 5:1-2, 15-20

Background Scripture: Psalm 100

Today's Scripture: Psalm 100

I. An Invitation to Worship

Psalm 100:1-2

1 Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands.

2 Serve the LORD with gladness: Come before his presence with singing.

1. The single Hebrew word here translated with the phrase *make a joyful noise* occurs 28 times in the book of Psalms. Four of those instances involve making such noise *unto the Lord* (see Psalms 95:1; 98:4, 6). The oldest English translation, that of the Wycliffe Bible of AD 1395, challenged the reader to “sing ye heartily to God.” The same verb is used for the shout at the siege of Jericho (Joshua 6:5, 10, 16, 20). The call to shout with joy in worship speaks to the high enthusiasm and excitement that should surround the praises of the faithful community.

2a. The invitation comes with certain expectations. The first is that serving *the Lord* can't be separated from worshipping Him. The deity served is the deity worshipped, and vice versa. Another expectation concerns the attitude or motivation that people bring to that privilege. We do not *serve* God primarily out of fear of violating His rules, nor do we serve as those who merely tick off boxes as a matter of ritual or for personal gain. Either approach assumes that our good works will

justify us in God's eyes. Rather, we serve *with gladness*, a word translated “joy” elsewhere. This approach dispels worry and allows for simple trust in God's mercy. The word translated “gladness” occurs 14 times in the book of Psalms, where it is also translated “joy” (Psalms 16:11; 43:4; 137:6). This sense of joy occurs in individuals and in the community.

The life of worship and service should be filled with joy whenever possible and deeply honest when it is not. While not under consideration in this psalm, it is important to recognize that Israel used laments to help them express the disorientation and pain they experienced. Asserting that we are to serve and worship the Lord with gladness is not an exclusive call to speak *only* happily to God. He has made room for all our experiences, as we see most clearly in the incarnation of Jesus.

2b. The invitation to *come*, here and in Psalm 100:4, is similar to Psalm 95:2, 6. Singing is mentioned more than 130 times in the Psalter, and joy takes concrete form as the community assembles in doing so. The psalm invites those hearing it to take delight in both God's merciful work and their fellow human beings' celebration of that work.

Ancient *singing* normally was accompanied by musical instruments, including stringed lyres or harps, wind

instruments such as pipes, flutes, or ocarinas, and percussion instruments such as drums or shakers. The talents of the people come together to express their pleasure in God's goodness. We do well to consider how we, too, are allowing our skilled artisans to lead us into the worship of our creative God.

II. An Invitation to Know Psalm 100:3-5

3 Know ye that the LORD he is God: It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

4 Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, And into his courts with praise: Be thankful unto him, and bless his name.

5 For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; And his truth endureth to all generations.

3a. We now come to the beating heart of Psalm 100. Here is the first key idea of the verse: *the Lord*—the God of Israel who rescued the people from Egyptian bondage, gave them the promised land, and sustained them repeatedly in times of crisis—is the one and only true *God*. Other “gods” do not merit the name.

Since the psalm probably addresses the whole world, and not just Israel alone, the confession that “the Lord he is God” is to be offered by all human beings. Or in other words, the evidence of God's deity, as revealed in the exodus and other miraculous events of Israel's history, also extends to non-Israelites (Gentiles).

The main idea of the psalm is the call to *know* God. Human knowledge of God is always limited and entirely dependent on God's self-revelation. We can know only what God has equipped us to know. And the main thing we know is God's mercy to human beings. By call-

ing Abraham and his descendants to be a people, God was forming a people who could be an example of the possibilities of righteousness and mercy for all human beings. The psalm invites its Jewish singers and all who overhear them to experience confidence in God's willingness to be with the reader in a deep relationship. Peoplehood is worth celebrating.

Knowing God is an important way the New Testament talks about the experience of being a Christian. The Gospel of John speaks of evidence as it relates to coming to the knowledge of the deity of Christ (John 4:39-42; 6:69; 8:28; 20:30-31). What we can know, we know through the revelation of the Son (1:18). This idea does not appear in this form in the Old Testament, of course. Yet its core ingredients do.

3b. The second idea, or rather confession, is that the Lord's status as the unique God means that He is the Creator. Ancient religions sometimes thought of the creator as a retired deity, the ancestor of the current leader of the gods of their pantheons. For the Bible, there is only one God, and so God must be the Creator.

3c. *We* did not make *ourselves*, having no godly power to do so. Saying so implies God's continued power over us and our relative powerlessness in the face of the Lord who formed us. The phrase *we are his people* implies a shared history and hope for the future, a deep relationship marked by prayer and service.

The last part of the verse restates and deepens that idea. “Shepherd” was a royal title (example: 2 Samuel 24:17), with God being the heavenly king who cares for human beings. While the image of Israel as a flock can have negative connotations—the sheep for the slaughter, etc. (Psalms 44:11, 22; 49:14)—it more ordinarily has a positive meaning. The image may be one of mutual love and desire for relationship (examples: 77:20; 78:52; 79:13; 107:41).

Even the negative uses are such because they hope for a positive relationship that does not seem available at the moment.

4a. This psalm was to be sung in the temple as part of congregational worship (see Psalm 100:2b). *Gates* and *courts* together form the part of the temple precinct to which the congregation had access. The temple centered on the holy of holies, which only the high priest could enter once a year in order to offer a sacrifice for atonement. A court outside of this was open to priests, another outside that to men of Israel, and the courts on the outside perimeter were available to women and Gentiles.

Because a large group was being called to praise, this psalm probably was sung at a major holiday when Israelites made a pilgrimage from the countryside and gathered at the temple in Jerusalem. Some scholars have connected this song to the feast of tabernacles (see Leviticus 23:33-43) but without great certainty. In the third century AD, the collection of Jewish law called the *Mishnah* reported the tradition that the priests in the temple sang Psalm 94 on Wednesdays and Psalm 93 on Fridays. So it is possible that Psalm 100 also figured in daily rituals, but this is also very uncertain. There are not enough specific clues in Psalms 93–100 to answer the question confidently.

What is more certain is that the psalm envisions a congregation singing it inside the temple courtyards, as do Psalms 24:7-10; 120–134; 149–150. These speak of processions, dancing, and crowds preparing themselves for worship together. Psalm 100 also excludes usage during a day of fasting or remorse (like Yom Kippur—the Day of Atonement; see Leviticus 16; 23:26-32). Such an observance would require a different sort of psalm.

4b. To *bless* God means to praise Him and give thanks to Him, or to give Him

all proper due. The congregation should praise God and elevate His *name* above all others. The congregation should revere God and treasure the opportunity to be in His presence. Worship, then, is not primarily a moment for inspiring people, but a time for connecting people to God as it brings to memory our deep dependence on God's love.

5. The psalm ends with closely connected reasons for human praise. The statement that *the Lord is good* is no mere cliché, for many ancient deities were far from good. The notice of God's goodness appears frequently in the book of Psalms, often as a reason for praise and confidence in the possibilities of a good life (examples: Psalms 25:8; 34:8; 86:5; 119:68; 145:9).

But how can God's goodness be proven? *His mercy* is seen in example after example of repeated acts of healing, forgiving, and rescuing Israel from oppressors. That merciful goodness has appeared again and again in Israel's history, as psalms reciting God's deeds show (examples: Psalms 105–106). God's goodness appears in the permanent nature of His trustworthiness (compare 98:3).

The word translated *truth* means "faithfulness," and it is translated that way in numerous passages (examples: Psalms 36:5; 89:8; 119:90). Thus, the idea is more than "factual accuracy." God's promises and actions are reliable, providing an un-failing guide to human happiness.

Because God's faithfulness endures *to all generations*, Psalm 100 points to the future. The countless experiences of the people with God illustrate divine faithfulness. The people's worship should recall those experiences. It should also express their confidence that such faithfulness awaits their descendants. Hope is "baked into" the worshiping congregations, understanding of reality and its behaviors.

Involvement Learning

A Song of Thanksgiving

Into the Lesson

What is the last thank-you card or expression you received?

What is the last thank-you card or expression you sent?

How did you feel when you received thanks? when you did not?

Today's psalm gives us words to express our thanks to the One who deserves it most. As we study, you can evaluate how well and how often you tell Him thanks.

Into the Word

Respond to the following prompts as you consider Psalm 100.

Verses 1-2: Describe the emotions here. Write one sentence to summarize the main idea of these verses.

Verse 3: What does praise affirm about our relationship with God?

Verse 4: Where are we supposed to praise and thank God? What does this say about the kind of relationship He wants to have with us?

Verse 5: How do these statements about God qualify Him for praise like no one else?

Key Verse

Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.

—Psalm 100:4

Into Life

Write down reasons to be thankful personally:

At home and with family:

With your church:

How will you better recognize and seize opportunities for thanksgiving in the coming week?

Thought to Remember

Know that the Lord is God and praise accordingly!

God's Promised Presence

Devotional Reading: Exodus 33:12-23

Background Scripture: Psalm 139

Today's Scripture: Psalm 139:1-12

I. Unsearchable Knowledge

Psalm 139:1-6

1 O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me.

2 Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off.

3 Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways.

4 For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.

5 Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me.

6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.

1. This verse introduces a central theme of the chapter, which is further emphasized by its near repetition in the conclusion of this psalm (Psalm 139:23). God's complete knowledge, often referred to as His omniscience, is the attribute that encompasses His infinite awareness and understanding of everything that has ever happened, is happening, or will happen. He is entirely aware of all things. But David did not set out to write a doctrine of God's knowledge. David assumed God's omniscience as fact and did not make an argument to convince others. David's intention was not to teach about God's in-

fallible, complete knowledge, but instead to marvel at it in awe and perhaps even in fear.

2. The psalmist employs the terms *downsitting* and *uprising* to convey God's knowledge of an individual's entire day. The two extremes point to God's total knowledge; nothing is left out.

3. The psalmist emphasizes that God possesses knowledge of both public and private aspects of one's life, from their travels (*my path*) to their rest (*lying down*). The Hebrew term translated *compasses* in context is an image of sifting grains to separate the grain from the chaff. This suggests God's metaphorically sifting David's life to separate chaff from wheat. A helpful analogy to clarify this notion involves likening the process to a gemologist who scatters an array of gemstones across a table, enabling the individual examination of each specimen for quality.

4. In human communication, the potential for misinterpretation looms large. This is perhaps especially apparent in text-based media when we realize how much of comprehension comes down to non-verbal cues. Even when face-to-face, myriad factors can create misunderstandings no matter how carefully words are selected—not least the words *themselves*, which can have wide variations in meaning and are highly context-dependent. Given the perils of

communicating even when both parties are acting truthfully, the risk of being deceived by a bad actor is always high. In stark contrast, God possesses an unparalleled ability to comprehend every *word* even when it is mere thought or intention. No context or body language confuses His understanding.

5a. Here David's focus shifts from the pure fact of God's knowledge to the action He takes with this knowledge. *Beset* is multifaceted, indicating an act of confinement, binding, or encircling. This can have positive or negative implications, depending on context. Most frequently, it denotes the plight of a city besieged by hostile forces. In one instance, however, the word is used by the beloved's friends: "If she be a door, we will inclose her with boards of cedar" (Song of Solomon 8:9). A similar concept, though with a different word entirely, is used to describe God's protection of Job: "Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side?" (Job 1:10). The evidence suggests David was experiencing God's presence *behind and before* as a hindrance of some kind.

5b. The metaphor of God's *hand* might shed some light on the context of "beset." Although God is an immaterial being and does not possess physical appendages such as hands or feet, the writers of Scripture were constrained by the limitations of human language in their attempts to depict God in a way that would resonate with their audience. There is precedent for desiring God to turn His attention to someone else, as communicated here with the metaphor of His hand. For instance, after eating the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, the *last* thing Adam and Eve desired was an audience with the Lord (Genesis 3:8)! Job asked God to withdraw His hand (Job 13:20-21). And Ezekiel described God as striking His

hands together to punish Judah (Ezekiel 22:13). Later, John the Baptist uses a winnowing metaphor to describe Jesus' hand at work in judgment (Matthew 3:12).

We should not discount that David could have experienced God's attention as being too intense for the man to bear. This psalm has no confession of sin—and, in fact, it asserts David's blamelessness. But one wonders if God's nearness was bringing to light what David would have preferred to leave in darkness.

6. This verse effectively conveys the profound distance between the positions of God and humanity. After contemplating the inscrutable nature of God's mind, David concludes that God's *knowledge* is far beyond the grasp of human comprehension. Rather than succumbing to despair, the psalmist portrays this phenomenon positively, evoking a sense of awe and amazement toward God. Furthermore, this reality leads the psalmist to acknowledge that he is "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14).

II. Unavoidable Presence Psalm 139:7-12

7 Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?

8 If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.

9 If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;

10 Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.

11 If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me.

12 Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.

7. This verse marks the beginning of Psalm 139's second stanza. This pair of questions can be read as an escape attempt or as an oblique acknowledgment of sin, praise, and adoration for God's constant presence, or some mixture of these. If the above reading of David's having found God's presence to be heavy is correct, then the first sense is most likely in view. David might have found God answering the king's questions with some questions of His own: "Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth?" (Jeremiah 23:24).

But even after fleeing from God, Jonah found relief in God's ability to save even from "the deep," considered to be the furthest place from God's heaven (see Jonah 2:2-6). So we might assume that, though David felt God's scrutiny too much, in the end, this would be a relief compared to a reality in which God was absent.

8. The word *if*, found four times in the English translation of Psalm 139:8-11, indicates the hypothetical nature of the declarations that follow. The first two of those verses give examples of places where David could not physically go to flee from God's presence (see Psalm 139:9). *Heaven* is obviously a no-go, as it is God's home, and David couldn't get there on foot in any case. In ancient Israel's understanding of the world, multiple levels of heavens existed above the earth (see Deuteronomy 10:14; 2 Corinthians 12:2). This suggests that the contrast of heaven with *hell* is another merism, where a combination of two contrasting parts refer to the whole. In this case, considering that the place of the dead was believed to be under the earth, these two places are as far from one another as can be. David's presence in either would not hide him from God.

9. In contrast to the vertical imagery of the previous verse, David shifts to hori-

zontal imagery. *Wings of the morning* is a poetic reference to sunrise, which happens in the direction east. *The sea* refers to the Mediterranean Sea, which lay to the west of Israel. Taken together, we see another merism as David describes going as far east as possible and as far west as was known. Hence, the depicted imagery expresses God's abundant presence, extending as far as the distance between the east and the west. What David knew instinctively the prophet Jonah would find out the hard way when he was told to go east to Nineveh but tried to flee by going west to Tarshish (Jonah 1:1-3).

10. Having established the hypothetical situations of the previous two verses, David identified two comforting actions linked to God's omnipresence. First, David could be guided by the *hand* of God regardless of David's location. This assurance was grounded in the understanding that one is never in a place where God cannot provide guidance.

Second, David asserted that one cannot be beyond the reach of God's protection and salvation, as exemplified by the phrase *right hand shall hold me*. This assurance brought comfort to David, who had in mind his adversaries who sought to do him harm.

11a. David introduces another conditional statement; the *darkness* here is figurative. Darkness characterizes the time when thieves are prone to operate. Thus, this "if" statement fits David's previous questions about attempted concealment.

11b-12. These conclusions all speak to the futility of trying to hide anything from God. Even opposites such as *darkness* and *light* make no difference to God's knowledge of David's physical and spiritual locations and status. The metaphor of God's illuminating presence is continued in the New Testament and is ascribed to Jesus Christ.

Involvement Learning

God's Promised Presence

Into the Lesson

Choose a side and explain the reasoning behind your stance.

1. There are benefits of having no personal secrets.
2. There are benefits of keeping one's secrets.

We know we don't have any secrets with God. Is that always reassuring? Today's psalm leaves room for us to be both comforted and frightened by God's knowledge and presence.

Key Verse

O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me.
—Psalm 139:1

Into the Word

Read Psalm 139:1-12 and write down reasons this is a *comforting* psalm.

Read the lesson text one more time and list reasons it is a *frightening* psalm.

Consider whether the psalm is *either* comforting *or* frightening or if it can be *both* comforting *and* frightening. Cite verses in Psalm 139 that support your answer, as well as other evidence from the Bible.

Into Life

Brainstorm and write down implications of God's presence in a world that we see contains much evil. Consider what barriers to and opportunities for evangelism God's presence poses.

Complete the following phrase:

"Something most people don't realize about me, but I'm glad God does . . ."

Thought to Remember

Take comfort in God's unsurpassed knowledge and presence.

September 2-8

- ☐ Mon, Sep. 2
- ☐ Tue, Sep. 3
- ☐ Wed, Sep. 4
- ☐ Thu, Sep. 5
- ☐ Fri, Sep. 6
- ☐ Sat, Sep. 7
- ☐ Sun, Sep. 8

September 9-15

- ☐ Mon, Sep. 9
- ☐ Tue, Sep. 10
- ☐ Wed, Sep. 11
- ☐ Thu, Sep. 12
- ☐ Fri, Sep. 13
- ☐ Sat, Sep. 14
- ☐ Sun, Sep. 15

September 16-22

- ☐ Mon, Sep. 16
- ☐ Tue, Sep. 17
- ☐ Wed, Sep. 18
- ☐ Thu, Sep. 19
- ☐ Fri, Sep. 20
- ☐ Sat, Sep. 21
- ☐ Sun, Sep. 22

September 23-29

- ☐ Mon, Sep. 23
- ☐ Tue, Sep. 24
- ☐ Wed, Sep. 25
- ☐ Thu, Sep. 26
- ☐ Fri, Sep. 27
- ☐ Sat, Sep. 28
- ☐ Sun, Sep. 29

- Romans 8:18-28
- Psalm 34:11-22
- Nehemiah 12:27-30, 44-47
- 2 Chronicles 7:12-22
- Luke 11:1-13
- 1 Kings 8:22-24, 27-30, 37-43
- 1 Kings 8:44-53

- Romans 8:29-39
- 2 Corinthians 4:8-18
- Psalm 69:1-15
- Psalm 69:16-21, 29-36
- 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5
- 2 Kings 19:14-19
- 2 Kings 19:20-31

- 1 Corinthians 5
- Revelation 5:6-14
- 2 Chronicles 34:8, 14-27
- Psalm 85
- Ephesians 5:3-14
- Exodus 12:3-17
- 2 Chronicles 35:1-6, 16-19

- Isaiah 42:13-17
- James 5:7-11
- 1 Peter 3:18-22
- Exodus 14:21-31
- Psalm 104:1-9
- Psalm 147:1-12
- Exodus 15:1-13, 20-21

September 30-October 6

- ☐ Mon, Sep. 30
- ☐ Tue, Oct. 1
- ☐ Wed, Oct. 2
- ☐ Thu, Oct. 3
- ☐ Fri, Oct. 4
- ☐ Sat, Oct. 5
- ☐ Sun, Oct. 6

October 7-13

- ☐ Mon, Oct. 7
- ☐ Tue, Oct. 8
- ☐ Wed, Oct. 9
- ☐ Thu, Oct. 10
- ☐ Fri, Oct. 11
- ☐ Sat, Oct. 12
- ☐ Sun, Oct. 13

October 14-20

- ☐ Mon, Oct. 14
- ☐ Tue, Oct. 15
- ☐ Wed, Oct. 16
- ☐ Thu, Oct. 17
- ☐ Fri, Oct. 18
- ☐ Sat, Oct. 19
- ☐ Sun, Oct. 20

October 21-27

- ☐ Mon, Oct. 21
- ☐ Tue, Oct. 22
- ☐ Wed, Oct. 23
- ☐ Thu, Oct. 24
- ☐ Fri, Oct. 25
- ☐ Sat, Oct. 26
- ☐ Sun, Oct. 27

- Hebrews 10:26-35
- 2 Corinthians 7:5-11
- Proverbs 28:4-18
- 2 Samuel 11:1-5, 14-24
- Lamentations 5:1-3, 15-22
- John 21:15-19
- Psalm 51:1-13, 16-17

- Luke 13:10-17
- Daniel 3:8-18
- Daniel 3:19-27
- Matthew 8:5-17
- Mark 10:46-52
- Psalm 107:23-32
- Psalm 22:1-11, 19-22

- Ephesians 1:3-14
- 1 Peter 1:3-12
- Daniel 6:10-17
- Daniel 6:18-28
- Judges 5:1-5, 12-22
- Luke 17:11-18
- Isaiah 25:1-10a

- Mark 9:14-27
- Psalm 28
- Proverbs 3:1-8, 13-14
- 1 John 4:4-13
- 1 John 4:14-21
- Jeremiah 17:5-11
- Psalm 62

October 28–November 3

- Mon, Oct. 28 Ezekiel 34:1-6
- Tue, Oct. 29 Ezekiel 34:7-16
- Wed, Oct. 30 Ezekiel 34:17-31
- Thu, Oct. 31 John 10:1-10
- Fri, Nov. 1 John 10:11-18
- Sat, Nov. 2 Revelation 7:1-4, 9-17
- Sun, Nov. 3 Psalm 23

November 4–10

- Mon, Nov. 4 Revelation 19:1-10
- Tue, Nov. 5 Psalm 147:1-6, 12-20
- Wed, Nov. 6 Psalm 148
- Thu, Nov. 7 Luke 1:46-55
- Fri, Nov. 8 Luke 1:68-79
- Sat, Nov. 9 Psalm 146
- Sun, Nov. 10 Psalms 149–150

November 11–17

- Mon, Nov. 11 Psalm 24
- Tue, Nov. 12 Ephesians 5:1-2, 15-20
- Wed, Nov. 13 Psalm 69:1-6, 30-36
- Thu, Nov. 14 Psalm 7:1-2, 6-17
- Fri, Nov. 15 1 Thessalonians 1
- Sat, Nov. 16 Philipians 4:4-9
- Sun, Nov. 17 Psalm 100

November 18–24

- Mon, Nov. 18 Matthew 1:18-23
- Tue, Nov. 19 Exodus 33:12-23
- Wed, Nov. 20 Exodus 34:1-9
- Thu, Nov. 21 Psalm 16
- Fri, Nov. 22 Matthew 18:15-20
- Sat, Nov. 23 Matthew 28:16-20
- Sun, Nov. 24 Psalm 139:1-12

In the Word

Your weekly Sunday school time will be enriched when you come to class each week prepared. One aspect of good preparation is continual contact with the Word of God. Of course, Bible reading is more than preparation. It is a vital link with the Father. Coupled with prayer, it is the most important item on your daily agenda.

There are a variety of Bible reading plans available. We offer this one because it is designed to enhance your weekly Bible study of these lessons with an adult class.

Your devotional time can be enriched if you add to these Bible readings a time of prayer and meditation. The quarterly booklet *Devotions*[®] combines these same readings with a meditation, daily Scripture verse, a hymn, and prayer thoughts. *Devotions*[®] is available from your local Christian bookstore or from David C Cook (order no. 1629324; order no. 1629524 for large print).

REMOVE THIS PAGE, FOLD, AND KEEP IN YOUR BIBLE
FOR REFERENCE.

August 26–September 1

- Mon, Aug. 26 2 Corinthians 1:16-24
- Tue, Aug. 27 Genesis 12:1-9
- Wed, Aug. 28 Genesis 12:10-20
- Thu, Aug. 29 Philipians 4:10-19
- Fri, Aug. 30 Colossians 2:6-12
- Sat, Aug. 31 Psalm 16
- Sun, Sep. 1 Genesis 13:8-18

Quarterly Quiz

Lesson 1

1. Abram chose to live in the land of Canaan. T/F. *Genesis 13:12*

2. God promised to make Abram's descendants as numerous as _____. *Genesis 13:16*

Lesson 2

1. God kept His promise with whom? (Abraham, Jacob, David) *1 Kings 8:24*

2. One consequence of the people's sin was that they would be taken captive by enemies. T/F. *1 Kings 8:46*

Lesson 3

1. Hezekiah asked the Lord to hear the words of _____. *2 Kings 19:16*

2. God promised that a remnant would come out of Jerusalem. T/F. *2 Kings 19:31*

Lesson 4

1. Josiah instructed the Levites to carry the ark on their shoulders. T/F. *2 Chronicles 35:3*

2. How many days was the observance of the feast of unleavened bread? (three, five, seven) *2 Chronicles 35:17*

Lesson 5

1. The Lord is "my strength and _____." *Exodus 15:2*

2. Who was Aaron's prophetess sister? (Miriam, Joanna, Hannah) *Exodus 15:20*

Lesson 6

1. David asked God, "create in me a _____ heart." *Psalms 51:10*

2. David asked God to restore the "joy" of what? (repentance, forgiveness, salvation) *Psalms 51:12*

Lesson 7

1. "My God, my God, why hast thou _____ me?" *Psalms 22:1*

2. David compared himself to what animal? (worm, ant, grasshopper) *Psalms 22:6*

Lesson 8

1. The psalmist proclaimed that ultimately the weakest people would "glorify" the Lord. T/F. *Isaiah 25:3*

2. The Lord will "swallow up death" and wipe away people's tears. T/F. *Isaiah 25:8*

Lesson 9

1. The psalmist proclaimed that God is what? (choose two: redemption, salvation, anchor, rock) *Psalms 62:2*

2. The psalmist states that people would pour out their hearts to God. T/F. *Psalms 62:8*

Lesson 10

1. The Lord's rod and staff will _____ David. *Psalms 23:4*

2. What two things will follow David "all the days of [his] life"? (choose two: grace, mercy, goodness, love) *Psalms 23:6*

Lesson 11

1. The Lord loves the _____. *Psalms 146:8*

2. The psalmist directs people to "praise God in his _____." *Psalms 150:1*

Lesson 12

1. The people of God are called "the sheep of his pasture." T/F. *Psalms 100:3*

2. The psalmist directs people to enter the courts of the Lord with thanksgiving. T/F. *Psalms 100:4*

Lesson 13

1. The Lord had searched and known the psalmist. T/F. *Psalms 139:1*

2. The psalmist asked, "Whither shall I go from thy _____?" *Psalms 139:7*

Types of Psalms

Wisdom Psalms

Psalms 37
Psalm 49
Psalm 119

Thanksgiving Psalms

Psalms 23
Psalm 62
Psalm 100

Imprecatory Psalms

Psalms 69
Psalm 83
Psalm 137

Lament Psalms

Psalms 10 (Lesson 6)
Psalm 22
Psalm 51
Psalm 139

Praise Psalms

Psalms 103 (Lesson 8)
Psalm 145 (Lesson 9)
Psalm 150

Psalms of Zion

Psalms 46
Psalm 48
Psalm 76

Royal Psalms

Psalms 2
Psalm 93 (Lesson 7)
Psalm 110

*Note: Psalms can
fit more than one category,
and thus list is not exhaustive.*