

# Resources

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“Commentary on the Book of Psalms” by John **Calvin** in *Calvin’s Commentaries* (1557)

“An Exposition, With Practical Observations, of the Book of Psalms” by Matthew **Henry** in Volume 3 of *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* (1710)

*The **Golden Alphabet**: A Devotional Commentary on Psalm 119* by Charles **Spurgeon** (1887)

*The **Treasury of David*** by Charles **Spurgeon** (Volume 1: Psalms 1-57; Volume 3: Psalm 111-150)

“The Book of Psalms” by Alexander **Maclaren** in Volume 3 of *Maclaren’s Expositons of Holy Scripture* (1959)

*Exposition of the Psalms* by H.C. **Leupold** (1959)

*A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* by Phillip **Keller** (1970)

*The Book of Psalms* by A. A. **Anderson** (Volume 1: Psalms 1-72; Volume 2: Psalm 73-150) in *The New Century Bible Commentary* (1972)

***Psalms 1-72**: An Introduction and Commentary on Books I and II of the Psalms* by Derek **Kidner** in the Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (1973)

***Psalms 73-150**: An Introduction and Commentary on Books III-V of the Psalms* by Derek **Kidner** in the Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (1973)

*Psalms: Songs of Devotion* (Volume 1: Psalms 1-50) by Robert **Alden** (1974)

*Psalms: Songs of Dedication* (Volume 2: Psalms 51-100) by Robert **Alden** (1975)

"Psalms" by Willem A. **VanGemeren** in Volume 5 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (1981)

*Psalms 1-50* by Peter **Craigie** in Volume 19 of the Word Biblical Commentary (1983)

"Psalms" by Allen **Ross** in the Old Testament volume of *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (1985)

*Commentary on the Psalms* by Allan **Harman** (1998)

*Psalms* (Volume 1) by Gerald **Wilson** in The NIV Application Commentary (2002)

*Psalms 101-150* by Leslie **Allen** in Volume 21 of the Word Biblical Commentary (2002)

"Psalms" by Warren **Wiersbe** in Volume 3 of *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (2003)

*Psalms* (Volume 3: Psalms 90-150) by John **Goldingay** in Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (2008)

"Psalms" by John **Hilber** in Volume 5 of the *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* (2009)

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scriptural citations are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

# Introduction to the Book of Psalms

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The book of Psalms (also called the Psalter) is an anthology, a compilation of songs (a psalm is a song—see the superscription to Psalm 66)<sup>1</sup> composed by various men (see under “Authorship” below). As such, it has been called the hymnal of the Israelites.

It is one of the "poetic" books of the Old Testament.<sup>2</sup>

The name, "psalm" is a transliteration of the Greek noun, *psalmos* (found in Ephesians 5:19//Colossians 3:16). The corresponding Hebrew word is *mizmor* (found in the superscription of 57 of the psalms and meaning “to pluck”), which indicates music accompanied by stringed instruments.

The book can be divided into five separate books: Book I (psalms 1-41), Book II (psalms 42-72), Book III (psalms 73-89), Book IV (psalms 90-106), and Book V (psalms 107-150).<sup>3</sup> Each of the five sections ends with a doxology, in 41:13, 72:18-19, 89:52, 106:48 (cf. 1 Chronicles 16:36), and 150. Some have speculated that the five sections correspond to the five books of Moses.<sup>4</sup> However, Leupold (p. 1) cautions: "No commentator seems to be able to say wherein this correspondence consists." As far as the overall structure of the Psalter is concerned, perhaps Kidner (*Psalms 1-72*, p. 7) says it best: "Its structure is perhaps best compared with that of a cathedral built and perfected over a matter of centuries, in a harmonious variety of styles, rather than a palace displaying the formal symmetry of a single and all-embracing plan."

## Authorship

The book of Psalms was authored by many different men, the most notable being David. The breakdown of authorship is as follows:

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<sup>1</sup>Other songs in the Old Testament may be found in Exodus 15:1-18, Deuteronomy 32:1-43, Judges 5:1-31, 1 Samuel 2:1-10, and Isaiah 38:10-20.

<sup>2</sup>The other Old Testament poetic books are Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. Craigie (p. 36) says that one-third to one-half of the Old Testament is poetic in form.

<sup>3</sup>Some interpreters have speculated that the five books were independently compiled and that the five were later compiled into one volume (perhaps by Ezra).

<sup>4</sup>Norman Geisler (*A Popular Survey of the Old Testament*, pp. 195-196) says that Psalms 1-41 are about man and creation and correspond to Genesis; Psalms 42-72 are about Israel and redemption and correspond to Exodus; Psalms 73-89 are about worship and the Temple and correspond to Leviticus; Psalms 90-106 are about our sojourn on the earth and correspond to Numbers; and Psalms 107-150 are about praise and the Word of God and correspond to Deuteronomy.

David, the “sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Samuel 23:1)—at least 73 psalms<sup>5</sup>  
Asaph—12 psalms (50 and 73-83)  
Sons of Korah—11 psalms (42, 44-49, 84-85, and 87-88)  
Solomon—2 psalms (72 and 127)  
Moses—1 psalm (90)  
Heman—1 psalm (88)  
Ethan—1 psalm (89)

Psalms in which no author is indicated are commonly referred to as "orphan psalms." There are 34 of them.

#### A Note Concerning the Superscriptions of the Psalms

Many of the psalms are preceded by a brief superscription (literally: “to write above”), indicating such things as the author of the psalm, the historical situation that occasioned the psalm, various musical notations, etc. There has been considerable debate among interpreters as to the accuracy of these superscriptions. Though not part of the original text (it is generally agreed that they were later added by the compiler(s) of the Psalter), conservative scholars view them as reliable, though not inspired. In fact, the Hebrew Bible considers them to be part of the text, making them the first verse of each psalm.

#### Date

The first psalm written was undoubtedly the one composed by Moses (Psalm 90), somewhere around 1400 B.C. The final psalms to be written include Psalm 137 (written during the Babylonian exile) and Psalm 126 (written after the Babylonian exile). Thus, the Psalms span a period of nearly 1,000 years, essentially spanning the time frame of the entire Old Testament. This would give the book of Psalms, by far, the longest time span of writing of any book in the Bible.

Dating the individual psalms is a tricky task. We are dependent upon whatever clues we can gather from the superscriptions and the psalms themselves.

#### Purpose

The psalms were written with a very practical purpose in mind, to be sung (cf. Ephesians 5:19//Colossians 3:16). The purpose of the book of Psalms, therefore, may be expressed as to provide the people of God with poetry to be put to music for praising Him. This purpose is reflected in the doxologies (literally “words of glory”) that conclude each of the five books within the book of Psalms, culminating with a crescendo of praise

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<sup>5</sup>Davidic authorship is indicated by 73 Psalm superscriptions. Based on the testimony of the New Testament (see Acts 4:25-26 and Hebrews 4:7), David likely also authored psalms 2 and 95.

in the 150<sup>th</sup> and final psalm.<sup>6</sup>

### Theme

The theme of the book of Psalms goes hand-in-hand with its purpose. Its purpose is to provide poems for the praise of the One (and only One) who is praiseworthy. The theme of the book of Psalms may be expressed as the artistic articulation (what poetry is) of the attributes and actions (the object of praise is God's person/perfections<sup>7</sup> and His works) of the One (and only One) who is worthy of admiration. Ross (p. 780) calls the book of Psalms "the most powerful and complete expression of the worship of ancient Israel."

### Classification

Interpreters have attempted to classify the psalms into distinct categories. Following is a representative sampling:

1. Psalms of lament
  - a. Individual—for example, Psalms 3, 7, 13, 17, and 22
  - b. Corporate (involving the nation of Israel)—for example, Psalms 44, 74, 79, 80, and 83
2. Messianic psalms (sometimes called "royal" psalms)—for example, Psalms 2, 20, 22, 45, 72, 89, and 110
3. Imprecatory psalms—for example, Psalms 35, 55, 58, 59, 69, 79, 109, and 137
4. Psalms of degrees or ascent (sometimes called "pilgrim" psalms). These were sung on the way to Jerusalem, an upward climb, for the three annual feasts—Passover in the spring, Pentecost in the summer, and Tabernacles in the fall—mentioned in Exodus 23:14-19 and Leviticus 23:4-44—for example, Psalms 120-134

Other classifications include wisdom psalms (1, 37, 49, 73, and 119) and penitential psalms (32, 38, 51, and 143).

### Four Features

1. *Its length*. At 150 chapters, the book of Psalms is, by far, the longest book in the Bible. Not only is it the longest book in the Bible, but it may also be the most

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<sup>6</sup>Which the *Zondervan Handbook to the Bible* (p. 392) entitles: "Praise God—with full orchestra!"

<sup>7</sup>"[The Psalms'] primary message is that God is great and God is good" (Wilson, p. 12).

longed-for book in the Bible, perhaps read more than any other.<sup>8</sup>

2. *Psalms 117 and 119.* Not only is the book of Psalms the longest book in the Bible, it also contains the longest chapter in the Bible, the 176-verse-long 119<sup>th</sup> Psalm. It also contains the shortest chapter in the Bible, the two-verse-long 117<sup>th</sup> Psalm. Psalm 117 is also the middle chapter of the Bible, number 595 out of 1,189.

Psalm 119, the “king kong psalm,” is not only notable for its length, but also its structure. It is an “acrostic psalm<sup>9</sup>”—its 176 verses are divided into 22 eight-verse sections, with the first word of each verse in each section beginning with the same Hebrew consonant and each section using one of the 22 consonants of the Hebrew alphabet in succession. Psalm 119 is also notable for its consistency of subject matter, the Word of God being mentioned in all but a few of its 176 verses.<sup>10</sup>

3. *Its use in the New Testament.* No Old Testament book is quoted more frequently in the New Testament than the book of Psalms. Harman (p. 64) claims: “There are about 360 quotations from the Old Testament in the New, and of these about one-third are from the Book of Psalms.” The most frequently-cited Old Testament verse in the New Testament is Psalm 110:1.
4. *The imprecatory psalms.* Due to their harsh nature, many have difficulty accepting the imprecatory<sup>11</sup> psalms, those in which the psalmist asks God to bring harm upon his enemies. To properly understand such psalms, one must remember that they were written in the context of the theocracy. In the theocracy, there was usually an immediate, tangible response to obedience (blessing) or disobedience (cursing). See Genesis 12:3. In the imprecatory psalm, the psalmist is not so much venting a personal vendetta against his enemies as he is asking God to uphold the terms of the theocratic covenant, punishing the disobedience of the transgressor, for His name’s sake. Another factor that must be taken into account is the relative silence of the Old Testament regarding the afterlife (thus, the tendency of the Old Testament saint to expect

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<sup>8</sup>Henry (p. 237) points to the likely reason: “There is no one book of scripture that is more helpful to the devotions of the saints than this.”

<sup>9</sup>Other such acrostic psalms include Psalms 9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, and 145. Proverbs 31:10-31 and the first four chapters of the book of Lamentations also have this structure.

<sup>10</sup>The only verses in the 119<sup>th</sup> Psalm that do not mention the Word of God are verses 84, 90, 121, 122, and 132.

<sup>11</sup>The word, imprecatory comes from the Latin verb, *precari*, meaning “to pray.”

God's blessing or judgment to be poured out exclusively in this life).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>For more on this issue, one may consult John MacArthur (*The MacArthur Bible Handbook*, p. 155); Gleason Archer (*A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, pp. 460-461); Norman Geisler (*A Popular Survey of the Old Testament*, pp. 202-203); Kidner (*Psalms 1-72*, pp. 25-32); VanGemeren (pp. 830-832); Leupold (pp. 18-20); Rolland McCune (*A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, 1:262-263); and Harman (pp. 58-62).

# Psalm 1

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## Introduction

Psalm 1 is commonly considered a “wisdom” psalm in that it closely resembles the wisdom literature of the Old Testament (such as Proverbs). With its call to forsake ungodliness and pursue godliness, it is certainly a fitting way to begin the Psalter.<sup>13</sup>

## 1:1

*How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!*

The author of the first psalm (whoever he may be<sup>14</sup>) begins by describing the godly man (verses 1-3).

According to verse one, the godly man is one who separates from sinful influence, being blessed<sup>15</sup> for doing so.<sup>16</sup> Separation is essential to sanctification.

There is a progression of intensity in verse one (walk → stand → sit; counsel → path → seat; wicked → sinners → scoffers<sup>17</sup>). According to Kidner (*Psalm 1-72*, p. 47), the progression is from thinking to behaving to belonging or (p. 48) from accepting their advice (“counsel”) to adopting their attitude (“scoffers”). Accepting advice (thinking) leads to actions (doing), which leads to assimilation/association/assembly (being). A prime example of this dynamic is Lot, who “moved his tents as far as Sodom” (Genesis

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<sup>13</sup>Anderson (1:57) is representative of many interpreters when he calls Psalm 1 “a prologue or an introduction to the whole Psalter.”

<sup>14</sup>Some say David based upon the claim that Psalms 1 and 2 were originally one psalm, and Acts 4:25 identifies David as the author of Psalm 2. Others say Solomon based upon the wisdom motif of the psalm. We can only speculate.

<sup>15</sup>According to Wilson (p. 94), to be blessed is “happiness that flows from a sense of well-being and rightness.”

<sup>16</sup>Unknown to the English reader is the fact that the Hebrew adjective translated “blessed” is in the plural. This is what Leupold (p. 34) calls a “plural of intensity.” In other words, the psalmist is trying to express in the strongest terminology possible the blessed condition of the godly man. One could translate: “O how blessed!”

<sup>17</sup>Such “trilogies” seem to be quite common in the psalms.

13:12), then “was living in Sodom” (Genesis 14:12), and finally was “sitting in the gate of Sodom” (Genesis 19:1). Separation means refusing to even interact with ungodliness (see Proverbs 4:14-15 and 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1). Notice that the separation is not from the sinner himself (isolation), but from his thoughts, actions, etc.

## 1:2

*But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.*

Having described the godly man in terms of what he does not do (sinfully associate with sinners),<sup>18</sup> the psalmist now describes him in terms of what he does do, namely, delights and meditates in God’s law (cf. Psalm 119:15-16, 23-24, 47-48, 77-78, and 97), saturating his mind with Scripture.<sup>19</sup> Someone who delights in God’s Word will take time to meditate on it continually (“day and night”). To meditate is to ponder or mull over. Henry (p. 239) says: “To meditate in God’s word is to discourse with ourselves concerning the great things contained in it, with a close application of mind, a fixedness of thought, till we be suitably affected with those things and experience the savour and power of them in our hearts.”

The man who delights in God's law is blessed (see also Psalm 112:1).

Verses one and two are corollaries, that is, separation from sin and scriptural saturation are inseparably linked (“This Book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this Book”; cf. Romans 12:2, James 1:21, and 1 Peter 2:1-2).

## 1:3

*He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers.*

The psalmist concludes his description of the godly man by noting his prosperous condition. He likens the godly man to a tree on a river bank, one that is stable (“firmly planted”) and fruitful (he has deep roots and, so, reaps fruit). Like such a tree, the godly

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<sup>18</sup>Leupold (p. 34) states: “It need not strike us as strange that this happiness is first pictured in terms of negatives—what such a man will not do. For, as has been rightly observed, wrong conduct in most manifold forms surrounds us on every hand, and we are continually under necessity of taking a position over against it. In other words, sins abound and must be shunned. For the same reason the Ten Commandments are primarily negatives. This, however, in no sense lessens their value.”

<sup>19</sup>I have borrowed this two-fold description of the godly man (separates from sinners and saturates his mind with Scripture) from a sermon on Psalm 1 preached by Dr. David Auckland at Maranatha Baptist Bible College in Watertown, WI on October 18, 1989.

man will prosper in all he does (see also Psalm 92:12-14 and Jeremiah 17:7-8).

Once again, a connection with verse two should be made. Saturating one's mind with Scripture leads to true spiritual prosperity/success (see also Joshua 1:8). Thus, verse two is the crux of the first half of the psalm.

In light of such passages as Psalms 34:19, Psalm 37, and Psalm 73 (as well as the story of Job), it must be remembered that this is a proverbial truth, i.e., one that is generally (not invariably) true. It was particularly true, however, in the theocratic economy, where godliness was blessed temporally (financial prosperity, good harvests, many children, etc.). Another point to bear in mind is the qualifier, "in its season." In the end, the godly will prosper, while the ungodly will perish. This idea is brought out more clearly in the second half of the psalm (see also Psalm 37:37-38 and 73:17).

#### 1:4

*The wicked are not so, But they are like chaff which the wind drives away.*

The psalmist now turns his attention to a description of the ungodly.

In contrast to the godly (verse 4 literally begins: "not so the wicked"), who are firmly rooted like a tree, the ungodly are like chaff (see also Job 21:18), which is anything but firm.<sup>20</sup> The chaff was the worthless husks of grain blown away during the threshing and winnowing process. In Matthew 3:12, Christ in judgment winnows the chaff of the wicked.

#### 1:5

*Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.*

Because the ungodly are unstable, they will not withstand the Day of Judgment; they will be blown away on Judgment Day (cf. Nahum 1:6).

Harkening back to the theme of separation (verse 1), the psalmist implies that there will be a separation of the godly from the ungodly on Judgment Day, a fact clearly borne out in Matthew 13:36-43, 47-50, and 25:31-46.

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<sup>20</sup>Interestingly, the Hebrew noun translated "wicked" comes from a root word meaning "loose" (Leupold, p. 35). The ungodly man has no firm standing before God. His instability manifests itself on Judgment Day, as seen in the succeeding verses. The stability of the godly and in the instability of the ungodly is also seen in Proverbs 10:25, 12:3, and 7.

## 1:6

*For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish.*

The psalmist concludes Psalm 1 by giving the basis for the stability of the godly (and the corresponding instability of the ungodly), namely, one's relationship with God (or lack thereof).

The Hebrew verb translated "knows" is not so much an intellectual term ("know about"), as it is a relational one ("know"). The Lord knows (i.e., has a personal relationship with) the godly (see also Job 23:10a, Matthew 7:23, and 2 Timothy 2:19). He does not have such a relationship with the ungodly; therefore, the ungodly shall eternally perish (cf. Proverbs 10:7b).

## Conclusion

In Psalm 1, the psalmist contrasts the godly man with the ungodly man in order to persuade his readers to pursue godliness.

The godly man is one who separates from sinful influence (verse 1) and saturates his mind with Scripture (verse 2). As a result, he will prosper like a well-rooted tree (verse 3).

By contrast, the ungodly man is unstable, like the chaff driven by the wind (verse 4), and, as a result, will not withstand the Day of Judgment (verse 5), all due to his lack of a personal relationship with God (verse 6).

In light of the destiny of the ungodly man, the godly man truly is blessed.

# Psalm 2

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## Introduction

The second psalm is commonly called a “Messianic” psalm because it clearly makes reference to the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ.<sup>21</sup> There is some debate among interpreters as to the focus of the psalm. While some contend that its focus is purely Messianic (i.e., only the future Messiah is in view), most believe that its focus is two-fold: its original focus is one of the Davidic kings, while its ultimate focus is the consummate Davidic king, Christ.<sup>22</sup>

Psalm 2 is frequently quoted in the New Testament<sup>23</sup> (see Acts 4:25-26, 13:33, Hebrews 1:5, and Revelation 2:27). Its author, though unnamed in the psalm itself, is David, as clearly attested by Acts 4:25 (a prayer of the early church, which cites this psalm, attributing it to David).

## 2:1

*Why are the nations in an uproar, And the peoples devising a vain thing?*

David begins the second psalm by describing the opposition of the ungodly to God and His earthly representative (verses 1-3).

The question in verse one is not one of inquiry (as if the psalmist didn't know the answer or was looking for an answer), but one of incredulity (i.e., how foolish it is for the ungodly to do this).<sup>24</sup>

David says that the ungodly are in an “uproar.” This word means to tumultuously assemble, like a mob banding together to decry their status (a modern-day picket line comes to mind). David concludes verse one by pointing out that such protests are in vain, as he will go on to show.

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<sup>21</sup>It is also called a “royal” psalm by some in that one of the theocratic kings is in view.

<sup>22</sup>VanGemen (p. 65) states: “While it is preferable to understand the psalm first in its historical and literary setting as a 'royal psalm,' the eyes of faith must look beyond it to the powerful message of the full establishment of God's kingdom in Jesus Christ.”

<sup>23</sup>Wiersbe (p. 88) says that Psalm 2 is quoted or alluded to in the New Testament more than any other psalm.

<sup>24</sup>As VanGemen (p. 66) puts it: “Why do the nations bother?”

## 2:2

*The kings of the earth take their stand And the rulers take counsel together Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying,*

Not only are the ungodly masses in opposition to God (verse 1) and His earthly representative, but also the kings and rulers of the earth (verse 2).

These earthly potentates form an alliance to overthrow God and His “Anointed.” Every theocratic king was set apart to the office by being anointed with oil by one of God’s prophets (such as David in 1 Samuel 16:13). Thus, each king was God’s anointed—he was God’s chosen representative over His earthly kingdom, the theocracy. Thus, to be against the Lord’s anointed was to be against the Lord, as well.

*Messiah* is the Hebrew noun for “anointed one.” The Greek noun for anointed one is *christos*. Christ was the Anointed One, the Messiah. The early church viewed verses one and two as a Messianic prophecy regarding the opposition of the Gentiles, Jews, Herod, and Pontius Pilate to Christ (see Acts 4:25-27).

## 2:3

*“Let us tear their fetters apart And cast away their cords from us!”*

The earthly rulers articulate their opposition to God and His anointed (“their”) in a most forthright way in verse three. Their desire is to be free from the shackles of divine rule. The “fetters” and “cords” may be a reference to what affixed a yoke to an animal. Wilson (p. 110) describes it rather as “binding by a rope or chain to a stake that can be ‘pulled up’ and then ‘thrown down’ to the ground when removed from the body.”

## 2:4

*He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them.*

Beginning in verse four, David gives God’s response to such foolishness. He “laughs” at any such attempts to overthrow His rule through His earthly representative. God laughing (see also Psalm 37:13 and 59:8) is an anthropomorphism, describing God in human terms for the benefit of our understanding.

He who sits in the heavens (an allusion to God’s sovereignty; cf. Psalm 29:10 and Isaiah 6:1) is the King of the universe. Any attempt to overthrow Him is pure foolishness. Notice that God sits, that is, He does not find it necessary to get up out of His seat.

## 2:5

*Then He will speak to them in His anger And terrify them in His fury, saying,*

God's response to the opposition of the ungodly is the outpouring of His wrath upon them. His wrath is an expression of His displeasure over their rebellion.

## 2:6

*“But as for Me, I have installed My King Upon Zion, My holy mountain.”*

The psalmist concludes God's response to the opposition of the ungodly by reminding His opponents that He has installed His earthly representative in Jerusalem (“Zion, My holy mountain”; cf. Zechariah 8:3, as well as Daniel 9:16), the seat of the theocracy. Leupold (p. 49) captures the essence: “You may rebel and make plans to overthrow my anointed one; but all I have to say is.”

## 2:7

*“I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.’*

As support for his right to rule as God's representative on earth, David alludes to the Davidic covenant (see 2 Samuel 7:12-16), “the decree.”

The theocratic king was God's “son” (2 Samuel 7:14).

The day in which the king became God's son (the idea of begotten here) was his coronation day. The New Testament writers saw this as a Messianic prophecy regarding Christ's resurrection (see Acts 13:33 and Romans 1:4).

## 2:8

*‘Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance And the very ends of the earth as Your possession.’*

God's intention was that His earthly kingdom (the theocracy) be a tangible reflection of His universal kingdom (His rule over all) by conquering the entire known world (cf. Psalm 72:8-11). Thus, He encourages the theocratic king to ask for the same. One day, the ultimate Davidic King, Christ, will fulfill this desire (see Revelation 11:15b).

## 2:9

*'You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware.'*"

God leaves no doubt as to the certainty of the success of His chosen representative. All opposition will be crushed (cf. Isaiah 30:14 and Jeremiah 19:11). According to Ross (p. 792), the imagery is drawn from an Egyptian custom in which the Pharaoh used a scepter to smash pottery jars that represented rebellious nations or cities.

John applies this prophecy to Christ at His return in Revelation 2:27 (see also Revelation 12:5 and 19:15).

## 2:10

*Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; Take warning, O judges of the earth.*

Beginning in verse ten, David gives his enemies (and, thus, God's enemies) an "out." In spite of their opposition, there is yet opportunity to avoid being destroyed. Rather than foolishly continuing their belligerence, they should do the wise thing of unconditionally surrendering to God.<sup>25</sup>

## 2:11

*Worship the LORD with reverence And rejoice with trembling.*

Surrender to God begins with revering Him, which includes restraining one's rejoicing.

## 2:12

*Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way, For His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!*

Surrender to God also includes "kiss[ing] the Son" (so KJV, NIV, and ESV), paying homage to Him by paying homage to the Son, His anointed.<sup>26</sup>

Kissing an opposing monarch (on the feet, ring, etc.) was a sign of surrender. The King of the universe demands unconditional surrender from His rebellious subjects.

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<sup>25</sup>"There is no higher folly than to oppose God and no better discretion than to submit to Him" (Leupold, p. 54).

<sup>26</sup>See 1 Kings 19:18 and Hosea 13:2.

To refuse to surrender is to incite God's wrath (cf. Deuteronomy 6:15), which can “flare up in a moment” (NIV). To accept His terms of surrender is to invite His blessing (see also Psalm 34:8).

To surrender is to place one's trust in Him. “There is no refuge from Him; only in Him” (Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, p. 53).

The choice is clear: bend/bow (verse 12) or be broken (verse 9).

### Conclusion

In the second psalm, David describes the opposition of the ungodly (verse 1) and their rulers (verse 2a) to God's rule through His earthly representative (verses 2b-3), an opposition that is futile (verse 1).

God responds to such opposition by “laughing” (verse 4), pouring out His wrath (verse 5), and reasserting His intention to rule through His earthly representative, whose headquarters are in Jerusalem (verse 6).

As support for his right to rule as God's representative, David alludes to the Davidic covenant (verse 7), which included the promise of a universal conquest (verse 8) that was certain (verse 9).

David concludes the psalm by offering terms of surrender to his opponents, a surrender that is wise (verse 10), involves revering the Lord (verse 11) and paying homage to and placing one's trust in Him (verse 12).

In keeping with the Messianic character of the psalm, the New Testament writers quote it frequently, viewing it as descriptive of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

# Psalm 8

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## Introduction

In the eighth psalm, David praises God for His greatness, as manifested in His creative work and in His exaltation of mankind. Accordingly, this psalm has been categorized by many as a psalm of praise.

## Superscription

According to the superscription, the eighth psalm was penned by David. It is for the “choir director,” the leader of the temple choir. Perhaps it was the psalmist's intention that this psalm be sung as part of the temple liturgy. The psalm is “on the Gittith” (cf. the superscriptions to Psalms 81 and 84), which may refer to a musical instrument of some kind, but literally means to the tune of the winepress treaders, signifying that it may be that the tune to which the words of this psalm were wed was one familiar to those who treaded grapes in the winepresses of Israel.

## 8:1

*O LORD, our Lord, How majestic is Your name in all the earth, Who have displayed Your splendor above the heavens!*

David begins the psalm by extolling God's greatness. The word translated “majestic” also has the idea of wide or lofty. God's “name” is representative of His character or essence (see Exodus 33:18-19, as well as Psalm 148, where to praise His name is to praise Him). In other words, we could just as well read: “how majestic are You.”

God's majesty or greatness is universally known; it is “in all the earth.” This is most likely a reference to the greatness of God revealed in creation (see also Psalm 19:1-4 and Romans 1:20).<sup>27</sup>

God's greatness (or splendor) is above, i.e., surpasses or transcends, the heavens (here a reference to both the atmospheric and astral heavens<sup>28</sup>; see also verse three). Since God created the heavens, He is greater than (above) them.

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<sup>27</sup>That creation is in view is seen by the succeeding context (especially verses three and five).

<sup>28</sup>There are three “heavens”: the first is the atmospheric heaven (the sky/what is seen by day), the second the astral heaven (space/what is seen by night), the third the abode of God (see 2 Corinthians 12:2).

## 8:2

*From the mouth of infants and nursing babes You have established strength<sup>29</sup> Because of Your adversaries, To make the enemy and the revengeful cease.*

At first glance, verse two seems out of place (both the preceding and succeeding verse have creation as their theme). To understand its place, reference should be made to Matthew 21, in which Christ triumphantly entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday to the praise of even the children, thus defusing the protests of His opponents. In verse 16 of the same chapter, Christ quotes this verse in response to the objections of the chief priests and scribes. In light of the context of the psalm (creation being in view), the point being made is that even children clearly recognize the greatness of God as revealed in creation, praising God as a result.

The purpose for such praise (“Because of”) is the silencing of the enemy. It is one thing to oppose the assertion of an adult; it is quite another thing to oppose the same assertion from a child. God delights in using the “simple” to confound the “wisdom” of the “wise” (see 1 Corinthians 1:27-28).

## 8:3

*When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained;*

Returning to his creation emphasis, David marvels at God's concern for man in light of man's frailty (verse four) and God's strength (verse three). When David considered the vastness of the heavens (which he would have had opportunity to do as he tended his sheep on the Judean fields at night) and the fact that God had ordained the moon and the stars (this includes such things as their “life span,” precise location, etc.), his exclamation in verse four is a fitting deduction.<sup>30</sup>

Creation is a work of God (cf. Psalm 102:25), with “fingers” (cf. Exodus 8:19) being an anthropomorphism (a description of God in human terms for the sake of human understanding), emphasizing the precision with which God created the heavens.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>The word translated “strength” could also be translated “praise.” The second option is preferable, especially in light of the fact that Christ in Matthew 21:16 uses the word “praise” when quoting this verse.

<sup>30</sup>“... [A] human being, upon seeing the nighttime universe reflected in the stars and moon, is to become aware of his own insignificance” (Craigie, p. 108).

<sup>31</sup>“All this vast, enduring monument to the creative power and art of God is but child’s play to the divine creator—spun off the tips of his fingers, without even breaking a sweat” (Wilson, p. 203)!

## 8:4

*What is man that You take thought of him, And the son of man<sup>32</sup> that You care for him?*

God's greatness is all the more magnificent in light of man's insignificance. The Hebrew noun translated "man" is the one that emphasizes his frailty (see also Psalm 9:20 and 103:15). The Bible pulls no punches in giving a true evaluation of man (see especially Job 25:6).<sup>33</sup>

In spite of man's lowly estate, God "take[s] thought of him" and "care[s] for him." The verb translated "take thought" means to remember or to give consideration to. Many times in the Old Testament, God is said to have remembered (see Genesis 8:1, 19:29, and 30:22) or forgotten (see Jeremiah 23:39) particular individuals. To remember was to bless, while to forget was to withhold blessing (see 1 Samuel 1:11).

David is utterly amazed that the great God of the universe would bless and care for (KJV: "visit"; cf. Genesis 21:1, Exodus 4:31, Ruth 1:6, Psalm 65:9, 106:4, Jeremiah 23:2, Luke 1:68, and James 1:27) mankind, thus his perplexing question (see also Job 7:17-18 and Psalm 144:3 for similar questions).

## 8:5

*Yet you have made him a little lower than God And you crown him with glory and majesty!*

In spite of man's insignificance relative to God, man is significant in relation to the rest of creation. That man is a "little" lower than God is an affirmation of mankind's significance in God's sight. God has crowned man with glory and majesty; man has an exalted position in God's creative order.<sup>34</sup> Though the Fall has certainly tainted mankind's glory, the psalmist's perspective seems to be pre-Fall (his concern is mankind's status at the moment of the man's creation).

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<sup>32</sup>The phrase "son of man" is clearly synonymous with "man" here in Psalm 8:4. Likewise, "God" and "son of God" elsewhere (see John 5:17-18).

<sup>33</sup>See the first stanza of "At the Cross" by Isaac Watts (unfortunately, some groups have removed the word, "worm," considering it to be unpalatable to modern man's sensibilities).

<sup>34</sup>There are basically four types of essence or being: God (infinite gap), angels (small gap), man (large gap), remainder of creation (animals, vegetation, etc.).

## 8:6

*You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet,*

Further evidence of mankind's exalted position is the fact that God has given man the responsibility to rule over the rest of creation and subdue it. This "dominion mandate" was first given to man in the Garden (see Genesis 1:27-28) and is still in effect in spite of the Fall (see Genesis 9:1-3, where the mandate was reiterated to Noah after the Flood, as well as James 3:7). Though the first Adam (and his descendants) failed to fulfill this mandate, the last Adam, Christ (1 Corinthians 15:45), will at His second coming to establish His kingdom (see Hebrews 2:5-9; see also 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 and Ephesians 1:22).

## 8:7

*All sheep and oxen, And also the beasts of the field,*

Man's dominion was to include domesticated ("sheep and oxen"), as well as wild animals ("beasts of the field").

## 8:8

*The birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, Whatever passes through the paths of the seas.*

Besides the land animals, man's dominion was to include animals of the air and of the sea.

## 8:9

*O LORD, our Lord, How majestic is Your name in all the earth!*

David concludes the eighth psalm by reiterating his opening exclamation, extolling God for His greatness. This is a fitting conclusion to a psalm praising God for His majesty.

## Conclusion

In the eighth psalm, David praises God for His greatness, as seen both in His creative handiwork (verses 1-3), a fact which even children can perceive (verse 2), and in His exaltation of mankind (verses 4-8), an exaltation seen in the fact that man is positionally only a little lower than God (verse 5) and in the fact that man has been given the responsibility of ruling over the rest of creation (verses 6-8). In light of these truths, God certainly is deserving of praise (verse 9).

# Psalm 19

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## Introduction

In Psalm 19, David focuses on God's revelation, both in nature (verses 1-6) and in the written Word (verses 7-11),<sup>35</sup> with His focus on the second producing a prayer for personal purity (verses 12-14). C.S. Lewis (cited in VanGemeren, p. 178) considered this psalm to be “the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world.”

## Superscription

According to the superscription, the nineteenth psalm was penned by David. It is for the “choir director,” the leader of the temple choir. Perhaps it was David's intention that this psalm be sung as part of the temple liturgy.

## 19:1

*The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse<sup>36</sup> is declaring the work of His hands.*

David begins the nineteenth psalm by focusing on God's revelation in nature (verses 1-6). Natural revelation is one aspect of what is commonly referred to as “general” revelation (the other being the human conscience). Both creation (see Romans 1:18-20) and the human conscience (see Romans 2:14-15) communicate general information about God (He exists, etc.).

Here in verse one, David indicates that creation (specifically, “the heavens”<sup>37</sup>) declares the glory (or greatness) of God. “It is as though the word ‘glory’ were written in capital

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<sup>35</sup>Accordingly, Kidner (*Psalms 1-72*, p. 97) entitles this psalm: “The Skies, the Scriptures.” VanGemeren (p. 178) uses “work” and “word.”

<sup>36</sup>Wilson (p. 361) describes the “expanse” as “a sort of upside-down bowl that sat on the circular, plate-like earth to form a sealed environment in which human, animal, and plant life were secure.” The Hebrew word describes something that is stretched out or expanded (see Job 37:18, Psalm 104:2, and Isaiah 40:22).

<sup>37</sup>There are three “heavens”: the first is the atmospheric heaven (the sky), the second the astral heaven (space), the third the abode of God (see Psalm 123:1 and 2 Corinthians 12:2). Based on the reference to the “expanse” later in verse one, both the first and second heavens seem to be in view here (see Genesis 1:6-8 and 1:14-19).

letters across the very heavens” (Leupold, p. 179). “Telling” and “declaring” are participles in the Hebrew, indicating the continuous nature of such revelation (are continually telling; is continually declaring).

### 19:2

*Day to day pours forth speech, And night to night reveals knowledge.*

Each and every day is a revelation of God and His greatness; likewise, each and every night. “Sun, moon, and stars are God’s travelling preachers” (Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, 1:271). The verb translated “pours forth” is a picturesque one, the idea being to bubble forth, like a spring, or even to gush.

### 19:3

*There is no speech, nor are there words; Their voice is not heard.*

God’s revelation in nature, though clearly seen by human eyes (Romans 1:20), is silent to human ears.

### 19:4

*Their line<sup>38</sup> has gone out through all the earth, And their utterances to the end of the world. In them He has placed a tent for the sun,*

God’s revelation in nature is universal in its extent.

David concludes verse four by focusing on the most visible aspect of the heavens, the sun. In the heavens, God has made a “tent” for the sun. “The tent is, apparently, the place where the sun ‘spends’ the night” (Anderson, 1:169).

### 19:5

*Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber; It rejoices as a strong man to run his course.*

To depict the sun’s radiance, David uses two similes here in verse five. First, the sun is like a groom leaving his home on his wedding day, the point of comparison being the exuberance associated with this day in a man’s life. Second, the sun is like a strong

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<sup>38</sup>Many suggest that, rather than the Hebrew noun for “line,” the actual word of the text is a similar noun that means “voice” (see NIV and ESV). Certainly, the second seems much more in keeping with the context. Furthermore, this is how Paul understood it when quoting this verse in Romans 10:18.

man (cf. Judges 5:31) running a race, the point of comparison being his confidence of running well due to his strength. In context, the particular strong man David may have in mind is an ancient messenger running to deliver a message.

### 19:6

*Its rising is from one end of the heavens, And its circuit to the other end of them; And there is nothing hidden from its heat.*

Continuing his depiction of the sun, David pictures it rising from one end of the expanse and making its “circuit” (or round) to the other end.

David concludes verse six with an observation regarding the sun's pervasive heat, yet another allusion to the universal scope of natural revelation.

The first six verses of Psalm 19 have been superbly summarized by Joseph Addison in his hymn, “The Spacious Firmament”:

The spacious firmament on high,  
With all the blue ethereal sky,  
And spangled heav'ns, a shining frame,  
Their great original proclaim.  
Th' unwearied sun, from day to day,  
Does his Creator's pow'r display,  
And publishes to every land  
The work of an Almighty hand.

Soon as the evening shades prevail,  
The moon takes up the wondrous tale,  
And nightly to the list'ning earth  
Repeats the story of her birth;  
Whilst all the stars that round her burn,  
And all the planets in their turn,  
Confirm the tidings as they roll,  
And spread the truth from pole to pole.

What though in solemn silence all  
Move round this dark terrestrial ball?  
What though nor real voice nor sound  
Amidst their radiant orbs be found?  
In reason's ear they all rejoice,  
And utter forth a glorious voice;  
For ever singing, as they shine,  
“The hand that made us is divine.”

## 19:7

*The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony<sup>39</sup> of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.*

Beginning in verse seven, David abruptly switches gears, shifting from God's revelation in nature to God's revelation in His Word. As opposed to general revelation, this is what is commonly referred to as "special" (in the sense of specific) revelation.

As in Psalm 119, several synonyms are used in this section for God's Word. Here in verse seven, David uses "law" and "testimony."

God's Word is, first of all, "perfect," that is, complete. This is the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture (see 2 Timothy 3:17).<sup>40</sup>

The Word of God also restores the soul (see Psalm 23:3). Sanctification is in view here, not salvation.

God's Word is also "sure" (see Psalm 93:5 and 111:7), that is, reliable.

The Word of God makes the simple wise (see Psalm 119:130b). The "simple" are those without discretion (see Proverbs 1:4, 14:15, and 22:3). God's Word gives discernment to the indiscriminate (see Hebrews 5:12-14).

## 19:8

*The precepts<sup>41</sup> of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.*

God's Word is right (see Psalm 119:128) and, as a result, brings rejoicing to the heart (see Psalm 119:111).

God's Word is also pure (see Psalm 12:6, 119:140, and Proverbs 30:5), or tried (see Psalm 18:30). The words "right" and "pure" (as well as "clean," "true," and "righteous" in verse nine) emphasize the Bible's veracity. This is the doctrine of the inerrancy of

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<sup>39</sup>According to Wilson (p. 367), "testimony" signifies that God's Word is "like a highway sign notifying drivers of winding roads or treacherous conditions ahead."

<sup>40</sup>The sufficiency of Scripture means that the Bible, in and of Itself, is all that is needed to save and to sanctify sinners, to make and mature disciples.

<sup>41</sup>According to Wilson (p. 367), "precepts" "has the meaning of 'orders' or 'directions' that guide one, like a road map or verbal directions that allow you to find a place you have never visited before."

Scripture, meaning that the Bible is without error.

Not only does God's Word rejoice the heart, but it also enlightens the eyes (see Psalm 119:105, 130a, and Proverbs 6:23). This is the doctrine of illumination (see 1 Corinthians 2:14 and 1 John 2:20 and 27).<sup>42</sup>

#### 19:9

*The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether.*

The fear (or reverence) of the God of the Word is a response to the Word of God (see Deuteronomy 4:10).

God's Word endures forever (see Psalm 119:89). This is the doctrine of the enduring infallibility/authority of Scripture (see Matthew 5:18 and 24:35).

God's Word is "true" (see Psalm 119:151, 160, and John 17:17). It is also "altogether" righteous. Every part of the Bible is true. This is the doctrine of the "plenary" (meaning full) inspiration of Scripture (see 2 Timothy 3:16).

#### 19:10

*They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.*

God's Word is more desirable than gold (see Psalm 119:72 and 127) and honey (see Psalm 119:103), two very valuable commodities in the ancient world.

#### 19:11

*Moreover, by them Your servant is warned; In keeping them there is great reward.*

God's Word warns us about sin and its effects.

Obedying God's Word brings blessing (see Psalm 119:1-2, Luke 11:28, John 13:17, and James 1:25).

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<sup>42</sup>Illumination is the supernatural work of God the Holy Spirit upon the mind of the believer that enables him to perceive the truth and significance of Scripture.

### 19:12

*Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults.*

David concludes the psalm with a very appropriate response to the revelation of God in His Word. The purity of God's Word, as expressed in the preceding verses, should cause one to recognize his own impurity, as it did David. "The contemplation of the 'perfect law, enlightening the eyes,' sends the Psalmist to his knees. He is appalled by his own shortcomings, and feels that, beside all those of which he is aware, there is a region, as yet unilluminated by that law, where evil things nestle and breed" (Maclaren, p. 68).

David's prayer for personal purity begins with a request for cleansing from "hidden" faults, or sins. Secret sins are sins done in ignorance (see Numbers 15:27-31, as well as 1 Timothy 1:13).

### 19:13

*Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins; Let them not rule over me; Then I will be blameless, And I shall be acquitted of great transgression.*

David's prayer for personal purity continues with a request for protection from "presumptuous" sins.<sup>43</sup> Presumptuous sins are sins committed with full knowledge.<sup>44</sup> Such sins enslave (cf. Psalm 119:133, John 8:34, Romans 6:16-17, 19-20, 7:14, 23, and 25).

John MacArthur (*Introduction to Biblical Counseling*, p. 330) summarizes verses 10-13 by saying that Scripture is the greatest possession (verse 10a), is the greatest pleasure (verse 10b), is the greatest protection (verse 11a), offers the greatest promise (verse 11b), and is the greatest purifier (verses 12-13).

### 19:14

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.*

David concludes his prayer for personal purity with a request for acceptable speech and thought. His prayer is directed toward God, his strength (or rock; see also Psalm 18:2, 31, 46, and 42:9) and redeemer (see also Psalm 78:35).

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<sup>43</sup>Henry (p. 304) summarizes David's words in verses 12 and 13 as a plea to be pardoned of sin (verse 12) and a plea to be prevented from sinning (verse 13).

<sup>44</sup>Other biblical expressions include sinning "with a high hand" (Numbers 15:30) and sinning "willfully" (Hebrews 10:26).

### Conclusion

In the nineteenth psalm, David discusses the revelation of God in nature, or natural revelation (verses 1-6), and the revelation of God in His Word, or special revelation (verses 7-11). He concludes with a plea for personal purity (verses 12-14) in light of the purity of God's Word.

# Psalm 23

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## Introduction

Of all the psalms, the twenty-third is undoubtedly the most beloved. “No other psalm comes close to its popularity” (Alden, p. 59). “Expositors vie with one another in describing the rare beauty and charm of this psalm” (Leupold, p. 208). It is a psalm that has spawned many a song (such as Joseph Gilmore’s “He Leadeth Me”).

In Psalm 23, David affirms his confidence<sup>45</sup> in God's provision through the use of two extended metaphors, that of a shepherd and his sheep (verses 1-4) and that of a host and his guest (verses 5-6).

## Superscription

According to the superscription, David is the author of Psalm 23. Once a shepherd himself (see 1 Samuel 16:11, 19, 17:15, 20, 34 2 Samuel 7:8, and Psalm 78:70-71), David knew full well the intimate relationship that existed between a shepherd and his sheep.

At what point in David's life may Psalm 23 have been written? J.J. Perowne (*The Book of Psalms*, 1:258) concludes: “As the outpouring of a heart which has found perfect rest in God, it was most probably written in advanced years, after a long experience of God's goodness.”

What event in David's life may have occasioned the twenty-third psalm? Our best guess is found in 2 Samuel 17:27-29, where several men provided David and his followers a meal (see Psalm 23:5) while they were being pursued by David's son, Absalom.

## 23:1

*The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.*

David begins the psalm with a general affirmation regarding the Lord's provision. Both halves of verse one are interrelated; our English translations, however, obscure this

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<sup>45</sup>Thus, this psalm is commonly considered a psalm of trust or confidence. “In psalms of confidence the psalmist asserts his trust in God, though enemies or some other threat are present. Under such circumstances, he is able to be at peace because his God is with him” (Tremper Longman, *How to Read the Psalms*, p. 31).

relation, causing some misunderstanding (especially among younger interpreters<sup>46</sup>). A clearer translation would be: “*because* the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want” or “the Lord is my shepherd; *therefore*, I shall not want.” Throughout the Old Testament, the Lord is likened to a shepherd (see Genesis 48:15, 49:24, Psalm 77:20, 78:52, 80:1, 95:7, Isaiah 40:11, Ezekiel 34, and Micah 7:14; cf. Psalm 74:1, 79:13, and 100:3).<sup>47</sup>

## 23:2

*He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters.*

The first provision of the shepherd for his sheep is rest. David illustrates the rest that the shepherd provides, using two images in verse two.

The first image is that of the shepherd causing his sheep to lie down in grassy pastures. Based on the word, “pastures,” some have mistakenly identified this first provision as nourishment (something the shepherd undoubtedly provides for his sheep). However, sheep do not graze lying down. They lie down<sup>48</sup> to rest (see also Jeremiah 33:12 and Ezekiel 34:15).<sup>49</sup> The pastures in which the shepherd causes his sheep to lie down are “green” (or grassy) pastures. These are pastures that contain fresh, new grass (see Deuteronomy 32:2, 2 Samuel 23:4, and Proverbs 27:25). Though such pastures are few and far between in the arid climate of Palestine, the shepherd skillfully leads his sheep to such abundant places. “It is characteristic of the everyday task of most Oriental shepherds that, with but scanty pasturage available, they must spend a good bit of time moving from one spot where a bit of grass is available to another” (Leupold, p. 211).

The second image David uses to illustrate the rest that the shepherd provides is that of the shepherd leading his sheep beside waters of rest (cf. Isaiah 49:10). According to some translations (for example, the KJV’s and ESV’s “still” and the NASB’s “quiet”), such waters are stagnant or placid. However, this verb is not describing the nature of the waters, but what the waters provide. They are not restful waters, but waters beside which rest may be enjoyed (the Hebrew literally reads “waters of rest”). These “waters” included rivers, pools, cisterns, and wells.

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<sup>46</sup>More than one child has misinterpreted verse one as: the Lord is my shepherd *that* I shall not want. Such misunderstanding can be avoided through the use of a contemporary synonym for “want” (such as lack, be in need, etc.).

<sup>47</sup>Likewise, in the New Testament the Lord Jesus Christ is likened to a shepherd (see John 10:11, 14-16, 26-27, Hebrews 13:20, 1 Peter 2:25, 5:4, and Revelation 7:17).

<sup>48</sup>The Hebrew verb translated “lie down” means to stretch or recline.

<sup>49</sup>According to Keller (p. 35), sheep will not lie down unless they feel satisfied and secure.

### 23:3

*He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.*

In the first half of verse three, David identifies a second provision of the shepherd for his sheep, namely, restoration, or restoration by means of refreshment. Is this speaking of physical restoration (as in Lamentations 1:11 and 19) or spiritual restoration (as in Psalm 19:7 and 60:1)? Based on the context (especially verse two), the first option seems preferable. However, this does not preclude an application consistent with the second option.<sup>50</sup> The physical restoration that the sheep receives as a result of the rest provided by its shepherd is symbolic of the spiritual restoration the believer receives from the Lord.

In the second half of verse three, David identifies a third item that the shepherd provides for his sheep, guidance. Perhaps more than any other animal, sheep need guidance (see Psalm 119:176, Isaiah 53:6, and 1 Peter 2:25). “No other class of livestock requires more careful handling, more detailed direction, than do sheep” (Keller, p. 71).

This guidance is in “paths of righteousness.” Are such paths physical (i.e., right paths) or spiritual (i.e., righteous paths)? Once again, the context calls for the first, but allows for an application consistent with the second. Just as the shepherd leads his sheep on the right paths (those that will bring them the least harm, difficulty, etc. physically-speaking), so the Lord leads His sheep on righteous paths (those that will bring them the least harm, difficulty, etc. spiritually-speaking<sup>51</sup>). Note, however, that these paths include the dark valley of verse four.

God leads His sheep in righteous paths for “His name's sake” (cf. Psalm 31:3). God does what He does first and foremost to uphold His reputation or character (see Psalm 106:8 and Ezekiel 36:16-24).<sup>52</sup>

### 23:4

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You<sup>53</sup>*

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<sup>50</sup>In fact, the entire shepherd-sheep metaphor is a comparison of the physical provision of the shepherd for his sheep with the spiritual provision of the Lord for His sheep.

<sup>51</sup>See Proverbs 4:11, 8:20, and 12:28.

<sup>52</sup>“He does all this because He has a reputation among His saints for faithful dealings with them, a reputation which must be cautiously upheld” (Leupold, p. 212).

<sup>53</sup>Notice the change from the third person to the second person, another intimate touch. Other such touches in the psalm include the use of God’s personal name, “LORD” (Yahweh), at the beginning and end, as well as the psalm’s 17 first person personal pronouns.

*are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.*

In verse four, David identifies a fourth item that the shepherd provides for his sheep, protection. Being virtually helpless, sheep are totally dependent upon the shepherd's ability and willingness to protect them. Though the shepherd may lead the sheep through the valley of deepest darkness (the idea behind "shadow of death"; cf. Jeremiah 2:6), the sheep fear no harm or injury, because of the presence of the shepherd (not because of the absence of danger). There is no need to fear when the Lord is near (see Genesis 26:24, Deuteronomy 31:6, Joshua 1:9, and Hebrews 13:5-6). This valley is more than likely one of the Palestinian ravines or wadis through which the shepherd led his sheep, ravines and wadis that often blocked the sunlight due to their steep and narrow slopes (VanGemeren, p. 216). Praise God, He leads us "through."

In order to protect his sheep, the Oriental shepherd used two implements: a "rod" and a "staff," the first for defense, the second for direction (Alden, p. 60). The rod (or club) was used for warding off predators.<sup>54</sup> David knew full well what it was like to protect one's sheep with a club, having slain a lion and a bear with one (see 1 Samuel 17:34-37). The staff was a long, narrow stick with a crook at one end. It was used to prevent the sheep from wandering off the path and into possible danger. The shepherd would wrap the staff's crook around the sheep's neck, pulling it back onto the path.

### 23:5

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows.*

Beginning in verse five, David switches metaphors. Instead of describing the Lord's provision in terms of a shepherd and his sheep, he does so in terms of a host and his guest. In spite of the change in metaphor, however, the shepherd may still be in view.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>A more modern example of how well-armed a shepherd might be is related in an 1867 eyewitness account by J. L. Porter (cited in Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, 1:360): "The shepherds themselves had none of that peaceful and placid aspect which is generally associated with pastoral life and habits. They looked more like warriors marching to the battlefield—a long gun slung from the shoulder, a dagger and heavy pistols in the belt, a light battle-axe or ironheaded club in the hand. Such were the equipments; and their fierce flashing eyes and scowling countenances showed but too plainly that they were prepared to use their weapons at any moment."

<sup>55</sup>"Not being able to express the fullness of God's provision with a shepherd-sheep image, he [the psalmist] turns our attention to the large tent of the shepherd and his graciousness as a host" (John J. Davis in *The Perfect Shepherd: Studies in the Twenty-Third Psalm*, p. 116). See also Calvin (p. 396), Wiersbe (p. 137), Leupold (pp. 213-214), and Keller (pp. 104-126).

Thus, whereas verses 1-4 are viewing the shepherd in his role as a shepherd, verses 5-6 may be viewing him in his role as a host.

The host (whomever he may be) provides a meal (the idea behind “prepare a table”).<sup>56</sup> Providing a meal was (and still is) the most typical way of expressing hospitality in the Middle East. Thus, the psalmist is alluding to God's favorable attitude toward him. The host provides this meal in the presence of the guest's enemies. This is an affirmation of the protection the host provides for his guest. The host also anoints the head of his guest with oil. This is yet another hospitable gesture (see Luke 7:46). The guest's cup (in which the beverage was poured) overflowed. This is a picture of the abundant provision of the host for his guest. See also Psalm 104:15.

### 23:6

*Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

David brings the twenty-third psalm to a close by expressing his confidence in the Lord's ability to prosper him in this life and in the next. The psalm has been building to a crescendo, and this final verse is a fitting capstone. Instead of being pursued by his enemies (as David often was), he was confident he would be pursued by the Lord's goodness and lovingkindness (Hebrew: *hesed*, God's loyal love or compassionate covenant commitment) the remaining days of his life. Not only that, he was also confident that he would dwell with his Lord forever, the “house of the Lord” being representative of His presence (cf. Psalm 27:4).

### Conclusion

In the twenty-third psalm, David expresses his confidence in the Lord's provision through the use of the shepherd-sheep metaphor (verses 1-4) and the host-guest metaphor (verses 5-6). Like a shepherd, the Lord provides every need of His sheep (verse 1), including rest (verse 2), restoration (verse 3a), guidance (verse 3b), and protection (verse 4). Like a host, the Lord provides His guests with abundant favor and protection (verse 5), as well as His goodness, lovingkindness, and presence (verse 6). The twenty-third psalm is a vivid picture of the Lord's provision for the believer. “[It] is such a popular psalm because it permits each believer to take its words on his lips and express in gratitude and confidence that all the demonstrations of God's . . . love are his too” (VanGemeren, p. 215).

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<sup>56</sup>See Psalm 78:19, Proverbs 9:2, and Isaiah 21:5.

# Psalm 51

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## Introduction

In the fifty-first psalm, David pleads with God to forgive him of his sin with Bathsheba and to subsequently restore him to fellowship with his Lord. Hence, it may be classified as a penitential psalm. Regarding this psalm, William Oesterley (cited in Leupold, p. 400) has said: “For the realization of the sense of sin, set forth with unflinching candor, it has no equal.”

## Superscription

According to the superscription, Psalm 51 was penned by David. It is for the “chief Musician” or choir director, the leader of the temple choir. Perhaps it was David’s intention that this psalm be sung as part of the temple liturgy. The historical event that occasioned the psalm was David’s sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11) and Nathan’s subsequent rebuke (2 Samuel 12:1-15).

## 51:1

*Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions.*

David begins the psalm by pleading for grace. Grace is getting what is undeserved. Because of his sin, David deserved nothing but God’s displeasure.

The basis for David’s plea is God’s character (see also Exodus 34:6-7a). God does what He does because of who He is; He forgives because He is gracious (He is under no obligation to forgive), loyally loving (“lovingkindness” is the Hebrew word, *hesed*, God’s loyal love, or compassionate covenant commitment), and compassionate.

Forgiveness is described with three different terms in verses one and two: blot out (verse 1), wash (verse 2), and cleanse (verse 2). Notice, as well, that sin is described with three different terms: transgression (verse 1), iniquity (verse 2), and sin (verse 2).<sup>57</sup> To “blot out” is to erase, as from a book (see Exodus 32:32-33 and Numbers 5:23). See also Psalm 32:2, Isaiah 43:25, and 44:22.

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<sup>57</sup>For the precise nuances of these three synonyms for sin, see Leupold, p. 401.

## 51:2

*Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity And cleanse me from my sin.*

David's plea for forgiveness continues in verse two. The Hebrew verb translated "wash" was used to describe the washing of dirty clothes. David wants the dirt of his sin thoroughly washed away (cf. Jeremiah 4:14).

The verb translated "cleanse" has ceremonial overtones. It was descriptive of the ceremonial cleansing that took place in conjunction with the sacrifices for sin, a picture of the spiritual cleansing experienced by the one who offered the sacrifice in faith. Here, the verb is a picture of the spiritual cleansing that follows forgiveness (cf. 1 John 1:9).

## 51:3

*For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me.*

In verse three, David gives the legitimacy for his plea (notice the "For"). One must confess sin in order to be forgiven of it (see 1 John 1:9). As a result of Nathan's rebuke, David readily acknowledged his sin (see 2 Samuel 12:13 and Psalm 32:5). David's transgressions (plural; cf. verse 1) included adultery, murder, and duplicity. David's conviction was so great that he could not get his sin off his mind; it was ever before him.

## 51:4

*Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge.*

David realized that his sin was, first and foremost, against the Lord (see also 2 Samuel 12:13). This is what makes sin so grievous.<sup>58</sup> Others who realized this fact included Joseph (see Genesis 39:9), Samuel (see 1 Samuel 12:23), and the Prodigal Son (see Luke 15:18). Sin is not only against God, but in the sight of God (cf. 2 Samuel 12:9).

The result ("So that") of David's confession was the acknowledgment that God is perfectly just in judging man for his sin (cf. Nehemiah 9:33, Daniel 9:14, and Revelation 16:4-7). Paul quotes the latter half of this verse in Romans 3:4.

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<sup>58</sup>This is the theological reason why the fires of hell are eternal. Because sin is committed against an infinite God, sin's penalty must also be infinite (or unlimited).

51:5

*Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.*

As part of his confession, David acknowledges his sinful state (sin can be a thought, act, affection, or state/disposition; it is the failure to be, think, feel, or act like God in the moral realm). David's sinful state began at the moment of his conception, the moment he became a human being (contrary to the thinking of the “pro-choice” crowd). Because of original sin (the sin of Adam imputed to all of his descendants), all men are born sinners (see Genesis 8:21, Job 14:4, 15:14, 25:4, and Romans 5:12).

51:6

*Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.*

Having just alluded to the womb in verse five, part of “the innermost being”/“hidden part” physically, David acknowledges the fact that God desires internal spiritual purity. This may be David's acknowledgment of the sinful thoughts that led to his sinful actions. It is only when the mind is purified by divine wisdom that sinful thoughts and actions can be avoided; thus, the need to “renew the mind” (see Romans 12:2, Ephesians 4:23, and Colossians 3:10).

51:7

*Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

David continues his plea for forgiveness by once again asking God to cleanse (“purify” here in verse 7 is synonymous with “cleanse” in verse 2b), wash (cf. verse 2a), and blot out (verses 1b and 9) his sin.

The hyssop plant was used by the priest to sprinkle the sacrificial blood upon the leprous (see Leviticus 14:4-7) and upon those who had come in contact with a dead body (see Numbers 19:16-19) in order to ceremonially cleanse them. David is asking the Lord to “sprinkle” his sinful soul in order to cleanse it. Once again, he is speaking metaphorically of the spiritual cleansing that God grants to the penitent soul, a cleansing that leaves him whiter than snow (see also Isaiah 1:18). Such cleansing comes from the blood of the Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 5:7) being applied to the doorpost of one's heart (see Exodus 12:22).

51:8

*Make me to hear joy and gladness, Let the bones which You have broken rejoice.*

In verse eight, David expresses his desire to be restored to fellowship with his Lord. Only the soul that is right with God can experience joy, gladness, and rejoicing. David longs for this reality. His bones (perhaps a synecdoche for the entire man; if so, the brokenness may be spiritual) had been “broken” (literally?) by the Lord. This is probably an allusion to the physical chastening David experienced as a result of his sin (see Psalm 6:2 and 32:3).

51:9

*Hide Your face from my sins And blot out all my iniquities.*

To the three previous expressions for forgiveness (blot out, wash, and cleanse), David adds a fourth here in verse nine (to hide the face from). Though David's sin was ever before him (verse 3b), he did not want it to be ever before God.

51:10

*Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.*

In keeping with God's desire for inward spiritual purity (verse 6), David asks God to cleanse and renew his heart/spirit (i.e., his mind) here in verse ten. See also Ezekiel 18:31.

51:11

*Do not cast me away from Your presence And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.*

Verse eleven has often been misinterpreted to mean that one can lose his salvation. David's fear is not the loss of the Holy Spirit's indwelling, but the Holy Spirit's “theocratic anointing.” The theocratic anointing was the temporary, Spirit-given ability to lead the theocracy (see Numbers 11:17, Deuteronomy 34:9, Judges 3:10, 1 Samuel 10:6, and 16:13-14). David was concerned that God would do to him what He had done to his predecessor, Saul (see 1 Samuel 16:14).

51:12

*Restore to me the joy of Your salvation And sustain me with a willing spirit.*

As in verse eight, David yearns to once again experience the joy of a right relationship with his Lord here in verse twelve. After having been chastened back to obedience (see Psalm 32:3-4), David now desires to willingly obey (see Psalm 32:9).

51:13

*Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners will be converted to You.*

David's desire in all of this was to be a vessel in God's hand to teach others the blessing of forgiveness, an opportunity that he was given in Psalm 32 (as well as in this one). His hope was that others would also be restored (the verb translated "converted" here in verse thirteen is translated "restore" in verse twelve) as a result of hearing what he had to share.

51:14

*Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation; Then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness.*

Having been responsible for the death of Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, David was guilty of his blood. Thus, he requests to be delivered from bloodguiltiness here in verse fourteen. As a result of being forgiven, David's tongue would be loosened to once again wholeheartedly sing praise to his Lord. "A great sinner pardoned makes a great singer" (Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, 1:406).

51:15

*O Lord, open my lips, That my mouth may declare Your praise.*

David repeats the thought with which he concluded verse fourteen.

51:16

*For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering.*

Verse sixteen seems odd in light of the many Old Testament commands to offer sacrifices (see also Psalm 40:6). However, in light of such passages as 1 Samuel 15:22, Isaiah 1:10-17, and Hosea 6:6, one can readily understand David's point. Sacrifices were effectual only if the heart of the one offering them was right. If one's heart was not right, God would rather that the sacrifice was not offered.

51:17

*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.*

In order for David to legitimately offer a sacrifice for his sin, his heart needed to be broken over his sin. God delights in the broken and contrite (literally: crushed) heart

(see also Psalm 34:18, Isaiah 57:15, and 66:2).

### 51:18

*By your favor do good to Zion; Build the walls of Jerusalem.*

Verses eighteen and nineteen have puzzled interpreters. After seventeen verses of personal penitence, the final two verses of the psalm have a corporate perspective. David prays for the welfare of the city of Jerusalem, the seat of the theocracy. Perhaps this is David's way of acknowledging the fact that, as king, his sin undoubtedly had an adverse effect upon his kingdom.

### 51:19

*Then You will delight in righteous sacrifices, In burnt offering and whole burnt offering; Then young bulls will be offered on Your altar.*

David begins the final verse of the psalm by reaffirming the point of verses sixteen and seventeen. If the heart of the one offering the sacrifice is right (i.e., broken and contrite, verse 17), then God will be pleased with the sacrifice. Such sacrifices are "righteous sacrifices" (see also Psalm 4:5). David concludes verse nineteen by pointing out that the prosperity of Jerusalem (verse eighteen) is crucial to the perpetuation of the sacrificial system.

### Conclusion

In Psalm 51, David pours out his heart in confession over his sin with Bathsheba. He pleads for forgiveness (verses 1-7, 9-10, and 14a) in order that he might be restored to a right relationship with his Lord (verses 8, 11-12, 14b-17, and 19a), in order that he might teach others about the blessedness of forgiveness (verse 13) and in order that the nation might not be adversely affected by his sin (verses 18 and 19b).

# Psalm 32

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## Introduction

In the thirty-second psalm, David basks in the blessing of God's forgiveness. Most interpreters consider Psalm 51 to be a companion to this psalm, viewing Psalm 51 as David's prayer of confession over his sin with Bathsheba (see 2 Samuel 11-12) and Psalm 32 as his musings subsequent to his forgiveness.<sup>59</sup> Like Psalm 51, this psalm is considered a "penitential" psalm.

## Superscription

According to the superscription, this psalm was penned by David. This fact is confirmed by Paul in Romans 4:6-8. The title, "Maschil" more than likely comes from the Hebrew verb meaning "to instruct." Thus, a Maschil (a designation affixed to thirteen of the psalms) may be a psalm of instruction. In Psalm 32, David instructs his readers regarding the blessedness of the forgiveness of sin (see Psalm 51:13 in this regard, as well as perhaps verse 8 of this particular psalm).

## 32:1

*How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered!*

David begins the psalm by proclaiming the blessed or happy state of the one who has been forgiven (verses 1-2).<sup>60</sup> Once again (see also Psalm 1:1 and 51:1-2) several triplicates are used. Sin is identified as transgression (verse 1), sin (verse 1), and iniquity (verse 2).<sup>61</sup> Forgiveness is also described with three synonymous expressions: forgiven (verse 1), covered (verse 1), and not imputed (verse 2).<sup>62</sup> The term, "covered"

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<sup>59</sup>Leupold (p. 401) states: "We believe those writers to be correct who regard both this psalm [Psalm 51] and Ps. 32 as the outgrowth of the same experience, Ps. 51 having been written while some of the keen anguish of a conscience in turmoil was still with the writer, Ps. 32 having been written after reflection had grown calmer, and the whole matter is viewed in a more distant perspective."

<sup>60</sup>The Hebrew adjective translated "blessed" in verses one and two is actually in the plural. This is what Hebrew grammarians call a "plural of intensity," the purpose of which is to intensify the expression. Thus, one could translate: "O, how blessed . . . !" See also Psalm 1:1.

<sup>61</sup>For the precise nuances between these three nouns, one may consult VanGemeren (p. 271), Harman (p. 145), Wiersbe (p. 153), Maclaren (p. 196f), Craigie (p. 266), and Wilson (p. 545).

<sup>62</sup>For the precise nuances between these three verbs, one may consult VanGemeren (p. 272) and

should not be misconstrued to mean that one's sin is simply hidden. When God forgives sin, He removes it (see Psalm 103:12). There are no "cover-up's." Verses one and two are quoted by Paul in Romans 4:6-8.

### 32:2

*How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit!*

David's third expression for forgiveness is an interesting one. To impute means to charge to one's account. The forgiven man is blessed because God does not count his sin against him.<sup>63</sup> When Adam first sinned, his sin ("original sin," according to theologians) was imputed to or placed on the account of all his descendants, resulting in the condemnation of the entire race. When that sin is forgiven at salvation, being placed instead on Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21a), God no longer counts it against the believer. Rather than imputing sin, He imputes the righteousness of Christ, resulting in the believer's justification (see Romans 4:6-8, 5:18-19, and 2 Corinthians 5:19).

The final expression of verse two limits forgiveness only to those who are sincerely repentant. A truly repentant person is one who is broken over his sin, not just one who is sorry he got caught or one who is merely grieving the consequences.

### 32:3

*When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long.*

In verses three and four, David reflects on the physical toll his unconfessed sin took on him (see also Psalm 38 and 51:8). His "silen[ce]" about his sin (i.e., his failure to repent of it)<sup>64</sup> caused premature aging (see also Psalm 6:2). His groaning may have been physiological (due to pain) or psychological (due to conviction), or both. The context seems to favor the first. Commenting on this verse, VanGemeren (p. 273) calls unconfessed sin a "festering sore." Likewise, Henry (p. 348; cf. Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, 1:82): "Let such expect that their smothered convictions will be a fire in their bones, and the wounds of sin, not opened, will fester, and grow intolerably painful." This verse is testament to the truth of Proverbs 28:13a.

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Maclaren (p. 201f).

<sup>63</sup>An analogy would be not having a poor mark on an assignment count against your final grade.

<sup>64</sup>Approximately a year elapsed before David repented (see 2 Samuel 12:13-18).

### 32:4

*For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. Selah.*<sup>65</sup>

In verse four, David attributes his physical infirmities to the chastening hand<sup>66</sup> of God (cf. 1 Samuel 5:11, Psalm 38:2b, and 39:10). God drained the life right out of David (“vitality” can also be translated “life sap,” Leupold, p. 270), a direct contrast to the blessed man of Psalm 1 (see verse 3).

### 32:5

*I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD”; And You forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah.*

David's confession (cf. 2 Samuel 24:17 and Psalm 38:18 for other instances of David confessing his sin) is succinctly summarized here in verse five (see Psalm 51 for a more elaborate account). Once again, there are a pair of triplicates (as in verses one and two). Sin is described in the same terms as in verses one and two, but in reverse order. Confession is synonymously described as acknowledged, not hidden (as Adam and Eve tried to do in Genesis 3:8 and as Achan tried to do in Joshua 7:21), and confessed. God's response to David's repentance was immediate forgiveness<sup>67</sup> (see Proverbs 28:13b and 1 John 1:9). Though God forgives sin, He does not always remove the consequences (as seen, for example, by the fact that the child born to the illicit relationship between David and Bathsheba died—see 2 Samuel 12:13-14).

### 32:6

*Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to You in a time when You may be found; Surely in a flood of great waters they will not reach him.*

In verse six, David begins to earnestly instruct his audience to repent in a timely fashion so as to avoid God's chastening. One should urgently repent, for God's conviction may

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<sup>65</sup>“Selah” is likely a musical marker of some sort. According to Kidner (p. 36), it is a signal for an interlude or a change of musical accompaniment. According to Leupold (p. 9), it calls for an increase in volume.

<sup>66</sup>“Hand” is an anthropomorphism (a description of God in human terms for the sake of human understanding) for divine chastening.

<sup>67</sup>According to Wilson (p. 547), the Hebrew word for forgive in this verse has the idea of “lifted away ... the beautiful image of removing the terrible crushing weight of guilt like a boulder.” It should be remembered that confession is a condition of forgiveness, not the cause of it. The cause is Christ's death (1 John 1:7b).

be fleeting (see Isaiah 55:6). The one who quickly repents will be spared the deep waters (cf. Ezekiel 26:19) David had to pass through.

### 32:7

*You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble; You surround with songs of deliverance. Selah.*

Continuing the thought with which he ended verse six, David expresses his confidence in God's renewed protection of him in light of his repentance.

### 32:8

*I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you.*

Though some interpreters (such as Ross, p. 818, Henry, p. 350, Harman, p. 146, and Calvin, p. 535) see verse eight as David's words, most view it as God's words. God interjects a direct affirmation of His watch care over David, "eye" being an anthropomorphism (see footnote 66) for such care (cf. Psalm 33:18 and 34:15). God's care is evidenced by His instructive guidance.

### 32:9

*Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding, Whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check. Otherwise they will not come near to you.*

David resumes his exhortation for timely repentance by comparing the unrepentant to an untamed beast, the point of comparison being the control that must be exerted upon each. Just as a man must exert direct pressure upon his beast to keep it from going where it should not, so God must do the same to His wayward child. David wants others to willingly follow God's way (see Psalm 51:12b), to avoid being man-handled by God, as he was.

### 32:10

*Many are the sorrows of the wicked, But he who trusts in the LORD, lovingkindness shall surround him.*

As further incentive to repent in a timely manner, David reminds us of the fact that the unrepentant life is a life of sorrow (as he discovered first-hand). The repentant man, on the other hand, is surrounded by God's lovingkindness, His *hesed*, or loyal love (NIV: "unfailing love").

## 32:11

*Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous ones; And shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart.*

Similar words are found in Psalm 64:10. David concludes the psalm on the same note with which he began it. The one who has repented and been forgiven has every reason to rejoice (see also Psalm 51:8a, 12a, and 14b-15, as well as Matthew 9:2).<sup>68</sup> This is just the opposite of the groaning of the unrepentant in verse 3. Ultimately, the reason for any such rejoicing is the Lord (cf. Isaiah 61:10, Habakkuk 3:18, Philippians 3:1, and 4:4). We can be happy because of Him.

## Conclusion

In Psalm 32, David expresses his delight over divine forgiveness (verses 1, 2, and 11), even though he did not avail himself of it in a timely manner. As a result, he paid the price (verses 3 and 4). In light of what he experienced, David's instruction to others is clear: quickly repent, lest God's hand also be heavy upon you (verses 6, 9, and 10a). Rather than experiencing God's chastisement, the one who repents experiences His forgiveness (verse 5), protection (verses 7), guidance (verse 8), and lovingkindness (verse 10b).

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<sup>68</sup>The 18<sup>th</sup> century Austrian composer Franz Joseph Haydn (quoted in Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, 1:101) once said: "I cannot make it [the church music he composed] otherwise [than cheerful], I write according to the thoughts I feel: when I think upon God, my heart is so full of joy that the notes dance and leap, as it were, from my pen: and, since God has given me a cheerful heart, it will be pardoned me that I serve him with a cheerful spirit."

# Psalm 100

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## Introduction

In Psalm 100, the psalmist exhorts the people of God to praise God for who He is and what He has done.

## Superscription

The superscription affixed to Psalm 100 tells us that it is a psalm of praise (see also the title of Psalm 145). The author is not named, making this one of the “orphan” psalms.

## 100:1

*Shout joyfully to the LORD, all the earth.*

The psalmist begins by commanding his audience to “shout joyfully” (see also Psalm 95:1-2).<sup>69</sup> This is “not the special contribution of the tone-deaf” (Kidner, p. 356), which the KJV’s “make a joyful noise” might lead one to believe, but is a shout. Shouting was a common expression of praise for the ancient Jew (see Ezra 3:10-13, Psalm 32:11, and 47:1).

This shout was to be directed “to the LORD.” Shouting (or any expression of worship, for that matter) is for God's sake. Any benefit that we receive from such activity is merely a by-product.

The command to shout to the Lord appears at first glance to be universal in scope (“all the earth”). Leupold (p. 698), however, convincingly argues that a more accurate translation would be “all inhabitants of the land,” limiting the scope of the command to the nation of Israel. Even if this is the case, the principles contained in the psalm still have universal applicability. See also Psalm 66:1, 96:1, and 98:4.

## 100:2

*Serve the LORD with gladness; Come before Him with joyful singing.*

The psalmist adds a second and third command regarding praise here in verse two. First is the command to serve (cf. Deuteronomy 6:13, 10:12, 1 Samuel 12:24, and Psalm 2:11). We are “saved to serve,” among other things. Service is an inextricable part of worship (compare Romans 12:1 in the KJV with Romans 12:1 in the NASB, NIV,

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<sup>69</sup>Psalm 95 bears some striking similarities to Psalm 100.

and ESV; we call our gatherings on the Lord's Day “worship services”).

The object of our service is the Lord. Once again, any benefit for us is a by-product.

Service for the Lord should be done “with gladness” (cf. Deuteronomy 28:47). There is “joy in serving Jesus,” even when the going gets tough! See Matthew 5:10-12, Acts 5:41, 2 Corinthians 12:10, Hebrews 10:32-34, James 1:2-3, and 1 Peter 4:12-16 in this regard.

Second is the command to sing. Singing is a command! Thus, the failure to sing (and to sing joyfully) is sin.

### 100:3

*Know that the LORD Himself is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves<sup>70</sup>;  
We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.*

In verse three, the psalmist gives the theological basis for what he has just commanded. Why should one praise the Lord through shouting (verse 1), serving (verse 2a), and singing (verse 2b)? Because of who God is and what He has done.

Verse three begins with yet another imperative: “Know (or acknowledge) that the LORD Himself is God” (see also Deuteronomy 4:39 and 1 Kings 18:39). We should praise God because He is God; He is worthy of praise simply because of who He is (regardless of what He has done). He is to be praised because He is both great (see 1 Chronicles 29:10-13) and good (see verse 5 of this psalm).

God's greatness is reflected in the act of creation<sup>71</sup>, an act deserving of praise (see Psalm 95:6 and Revelation 4:11). God owns us by virtue of the fact that He created us (see Psalm 24:1-2).

His goodness is reflected in the act of redemption, another act deserving of praise (see 1 Corinthians 6:20). God owns us by virtue of the fact that He saved us (see 1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

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<sup>70</sup>Another viable translation of “and not we ourselves” is “and we are his.” It is possible that the scribal error of “homophony” was committed here. Homophony is the substitution of one homonym (homonyms are words that sound alike) for another. The Hebrew word for “not” sounds the same as the Hebrew word for “to him.” The KJV and NASB reflect the first option, the NIV and ESV the second. All four versions, however, include a textual note giving credence to the other option. Interestingly, this same scenario occurs in Isaiah 9:3, where there is little doubt that homophony took place.

<sup>71</sup>It is possible that the creation that is being referred to in verse 3 is the creation of the nation of Israel (see Psalm 149:2, Isaiah 43:1, 21, and 44:2).

The nation of Israel, the recipient of the psalm, was “His people and the sheep of His pasture” (see Psalm 74:1, 79:13, 80:1, 95:7, and Ezekiel 34:30-31). See also Psalm 23.

#### 100:4

*Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name.*

The Jewish flavor of the psalm is more clearly brought out here in verse four. “Gates” is likely a reference to the gates that gave entrance to the temple, and “courts” is likely a reference to the temple courts (there was both an “outer” court and an “inner” one, the second containing the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies).<sup>72</sup>

One of the offerings offered at the temple was the “thank” offering (see Leviticus 7:11-13). This same sacrificial imagery is found in Psalm 96:8, 116:17, Jeremiah 33:11, and Hebrews 13:15. Thanksgiving is giving thanks, not just being thankful (see the story of the ten lepers in Luke 17:11-19).

Though somewhat synonymous, praise and thanksgiving can be distinguished, the first being one’s response to who God is and the second being one’s response to what God has done.

#### 100:5

*For the LORD is good; His lovingkindness is everlasting And his faithfulness to all generations.*

The psalmist concludes the psalm by once again giving a theological basis for what he has previously commanded. One should praise God through the giving of thanks (verse 4) because (“For”) He is good (see also 1 Chronicles 16:34a, Psalm 106:1a, 107:1a, 118:1a, and 136:1a).

His goodness includes His lovingkindness (cf. 1 Chronicles 16:34b, Psalm 106:1b, 107:1b, 118:1b, and Psalm 136:1b-3), that is, His *hesed*, or loyal love, and His faithfulness, both of which are constant. See also Exodus 34:6 and Lamentations 3:22-23.

#### Conclusion

In Psalm 100, the psalmist challenges the Jewish nation (and by application, us) to praise the Lord through shouting (verse 1), serving (verse 2a), singing (verse 2b), and giving thanks (verse 4). The theological basis for all of these activities is the character

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<sup>72</sup>“The temple of God was viewed as his palace. Consequently, its architecture featured walls, gates, and courtyards, as would the citadels or palace complex of any king” (Hilber, p. 406).

(verses 3a and 5) and works (verse 3b) of God. Psalm 100 is the basis for the hymns, "All People That on Earth Do Dwell" by William Kethe and "Before Jehovah's Awe-full Throne" by Isaac Watts.

"All People That on Earth Do Dwell" by William Kethe

1. All people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice; Him serve with fear, His praise forth-tell, come ye before Him and rejoice.
2. Know that the Lord is God indeed: Without our aid He did us make; we are His folk, He doth us feed, and for His sheep He doth us take.
3. O enter then His gates with praise, approach with joy His courts unto; praise, laud and bless His name always, for it is seemly so to do.
4. For why? The Lord our God is good, His mercy is forever sure; His truth at all times firmly stood, and shall from age to age endure.
5. To Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, the God whom heaven and earth adore, from men and from the angel host be praise and glory evermore.

"Before Jehovah's Awe-full Throne" by Isaac Watts

1. Before Jehovah's awe-full throne, ye nations bow with sacred joy. Know that the Lord is God alone; He can create and He destroy.
2. His sovereign power without our aid, made us of clay and formed us men; and when like wandering sheep we strayed, He brought us to His fold again.
3. We are His people, we His care, our souls and all our mortal frame. What lasting honors shall we rear, Almighty Maker, to Thy name?
4. We'll crowd Thy gates with thankful songs, high as the heavens our voices raise; and earth, with her ten thousand tongues, shall fill Thy courts with sounding praise.
5. Wide as the world is Thy command, vast as eternity Thy love; firm as a rock Thy truth must stand when rolling years shall cease to move.

# Psalm 103

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## Introduction

In Psalm 103, the psalmist exhorts everyone and everything to praise the Lord for who He is (His person) and for what He has done (His work), to bless Him for His being and His blessings. Consequently, this can be categorized as a psalm of praise.

## Superscription

According to the superscription, the one hundred and third psalm was penned by David.

## 103:1

*Bless the LORD, O my soul, And all that is within me, bless His holy name.*

David begins the psalm by “talking to himself,”<sup>73</sup> exhorting himself to bless (that is, praise) the Lord (see also Psalm 104:1 and 146:1).

God is to be praised with the entirety of one's being (“all that is within me”), worship being the response of all that we are to all that God is.

He is to be praised for who He is, “name” being descriptive of character (see comments on 8:1). According to verse one, He to be praised because He is holy (cf. Psalm 105:3, 106:47, and 145:21). God is holy, that is, separate (the basic meaning of the term) in two respects. First, He is *metaphysically* separate/separate in His being from His creation (see Exodus 15:11 and 1 Samuel 2:2); this is what is called the Creator/creature distinction. Second, He is *morally* separate/separate in His behavior from His creation; He is perfectly pure (see Habakkuk 1:13, 1 Peter 1:15-16, and 1 John 1:5).

## 103:2

*Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget none of His benefits;*

In verse two, David gives the reason for the exhortation of verse one. One should praise the Lord not only because of who He is (verse one), but also because of what He has done. The second David calls “His benefits,” seven of which he will mention in verses three through seven. Forgetfulness is a common deterrent to praise; the more we reflect upon what God has done for us, the more apt we will be to praise Him.

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<sup>73</sup>Allen (p. 25) translates: “Bless Yahweh, I tell myself.”

### 103:3

*Who pardons all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases;*

David now begins to list some of the benefits with which God has blessed His people. First is the forgiveness of all one's sins (see also Colossians 2:13).<sup>74</sup>

Second is the healing of all one's diseases. This second statement can be interpreted three different ways: in terms of physiological healing, psychological healing (see Psalm 147:3), or spiritual healing (see Isaiah 53:5, Jeremiah 30:12-17, and 1 Peter 2:24). In light of the context (verse 3a), the third option seems preferable.

### 103:4

*Who redeems your life from the pit, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion;*

A third benefit God grants is deliverance from some of sin's destructive effects (see also Job 33:28, Psalm 30:3, and 49:15). The wages of sin is death (Romans 5:12 and 6:23): physical, spiritual, and eternal.<sup>75</sup> When God saves an individual, He delivers him from both spiritual and eternal death.

A fourth benefit God grants His child is the bestowal of His lovingkindness<sup>76</sup> and compassion (see also Psalm 40:11 and 51:1), both of which David focuses on throughout most of the remainder of the psalm.

### 103:5

*Who satisfies your years with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle.*

A fifth benefit God gives is spiritual satisfaction. Only God can satisfy the hungry soul

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<sup>74</sup>“Among the separate blessings that especially call forth the praises of the Lord, forgiveness of our iniquities very properly stands first” (Leupold, p. 716).

<sup>75</sup>The basic meaning of death is separation. Physical death is the separation of the body from the soul or spirit (James 2:26); spiritual death is the separation of the individual from God (Ephesians 2:1); and eternal death is the permanent separation of the individual from God in hell (Revelation 20:14-15).

<sup>76</sup>The Hebrew word translated “lovingkindness” is *hesed*, a word that described God's loyal love for His Old Testament people, Israel. This same word is also found in verses 8, 11, and 17 of this psalm. Though of special significance to Israel, it also applies to God's people of this dispensation, the church.

(see Psalm 107:9 and John 6:35). David likens the one so satisfied to the eagle (see also Isaiah 40:31).<sup>77</sup>

### 103:6

*The LORD performs righteous deeds And judgments for all who are oppressed.*

A sixth benefit God gives is the vindication of His people (Allen, p. 25, translates: "Yahweh performs acts of vindication"). God delights in displaying His righteous justice on behalf of His own, especially when they are being oppressed (see also Psalm 146:7; notice how this verse also makes reference to some of the concepts found in verses four and five above). David may very well be alluding to the Exodus (based on the context of the following verse), when God executed His righteous justice upon the Egyptians, resulting in the deliverance of His oppressed people.

### 103:7

*He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the sons of Israel.*

A seventh and final benefit God gives is revelation. Though God is under no obligation to do so, He has chosen to reveal information about Himself to select individuals and groups. This "special" revelation was given to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament (see Romans 3:2). The first half of verse seven is likely a reference to God's revelation of Himself to Moses (see Exodus 33:19-23 and 34:5-7) in answer to Moses' prayer in Exodus 33:13. The second half of the verse is likely a reference to the mighty acts God performed in the presence of the nation in connection with the Exodus (see Acts 7:36).

### 103:8

*The LORD is compassionate and gracious, Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness.*

Having focused on what God has done in verses two through seven, David returns to a focus on who God is here in verse eight. God is to be praised because He is compassionate, gracious, longsuffering, and lovingkind (see also Nehemiah 9:17, Psalm 86:15, 145:8, Joel 2:13, and Jonah 4:2). David undoubtedly has God's self-revelation to Moses in Exodus 33-34 in mind, as the words he writes here in verse eight are nearly identical to those spoken by God to Moses in Exodus 34:6.

God's longsuffering is the disposition that causes Him to put up with His oft-rebellious creatures, as He put up with the nation of Israel even after the golden calf incident of

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<sup>77</sup>"Eagles, with six foot wingspans, soar effortlessly for long periods of time; the ancient marveled at their endurance and used this observation to compare the sustaining strength that comes from Yahweh" (Hilber, p. 407).

Exodus 32.

103:9

*He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever.*

Having highlighted God's compassion in verse eight, David elaborates on it in verses nine through seventeen. God's compassion causes Him to respond to His children in two ways according to verse nine. First, He does not always "strive," that is, accuse or bring a case against His own, though He has every right to prosecute to the full extent of His law those who are guilty of sin.

Second, His righteous anger toward the sin of His people is short-lived (see also Psalm 30:5, Isaiah 54:7-8, 57:16, Jeremiah 3:5, and 12). Though God has every right to continuously pour out His wrath upon the sinner (which He will do during the Tribulation and for eternity in Hell), His compassion precludes Him from now doing so.

103:10

*He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.*

Because God is compassionate, He does not always give us what we deserve because of our sin. Praise God, He has not rewarded us according to our iniquities (see also Ezra 9:13). If He did, who could stand (Psalm 130:3)?

103:11

*For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him.*

In verses eleven and twelve, David employs two similes (the first using two vertical extremities, the second using two horizontal extremities) to describe how great God's lovingkindness is. It is as great as the distance between the astral heaven and the earth (see also Psalm 36:5, 57:10, and Isaiah 55:9), a distance that was beyond measure as far as the ancient Jew was concerned. His lovingkindness is great (see also Psalm 117:2), however, only toward those who fear Him (cf. verses 13 and 17), that is, those who are His.

103:12

*As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.*

The greatness of God's compassion is also seen in the forgiveness of sin (cf. verse 3a). When God forgives, He removes our sin as far as the distance from horizon to horizon,

another immeasurable distance to the ancient Jew.<sup>78</sup>

### 103:13

*Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him.*

Using yet another simile, David describes the tenderness of God's compassion. God's compassion evokes pity for His children (cf. Jeremiah 31:20), causing Him to intervene in their behalf, ultimately in the person of Jesus Christ.

### 103:14

*For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust.*

God's intervention on His children's behalf is in response to His knowledge of their frail condition (see also Job 10:9 and Psalm 78:38-39), a condition embodied in the origin and destination of man's material make-up, dust (see Genesis 2:7, 3:19, Job 34:15, Psalm 104:29, and Ecclesiastes 3:20).

### 103:15

*As for man, his days are like grass; As a flower of the field, so he flourishes.*

David continues the thought begun in verse fourteen, once again emphasizing man's frailty<sup>79</sup> by likening his existence to the short-lived vegetation of the Orient, a common simile in Scripture (see Job 14:1-2, Psalm 37:2, 90:5-6, 102:4, 11, Isaiah 40:6-7, 51:12, and 1 Peter 1:24).

### 103:16

*When the wind has passed over it, it is no more, And its place acknowledges it no longer.*

Though Oriental vegetation flourished (verse fifteen), its prosperity was often short-lived. Its demise usually came at the hands of the intense desert winds, called "siroccos (the "scorching wind" of James 1:11).

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<sup>78</sup>“The ancient geographical viewpoint conceived of a flat earth in which ‘east’ and ‘west’ *never met*” (Hilber, p. 407; emphasis his).

<sup>79</sup>Interestingly, David uses the Hebrew word for man, *enosh*, which emphasizes his frailty (see comments on Psalm 8:4).

103:17

*But the lovingkindness of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children,*

This verse is cited by Mary in her Magnificat (her song magnifying the Lord), in Luke 1:50. God's lovingkindness, like Himself, is eternal (see Psalm 90:2). His righteousness is also eternal. This is in stark contrast to the feeble frailty of man described in the previous verses.

103:18

*To those who keep His covenant And remember His precepts to do them.*

As pointed out in verses eleven, thirteen, and seventeen, God's compassion is conditioned upon one's relationship to Himself (see Exodus 20:6//Deuteronomy 5:10 and Deuteronomy 7:9). God's own are marked by obedience to His commands (see 1 John 2:3-4).

103:19

*The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, And His sovereignty rules over all.*

Having concluded his emphasis upon God's compassion in verse eighteen, David turns to God's sovereignty (God is "merciful and mighty," as the song, "Holy, Holy, Holy" reminds us), that is, His rule over all (see 1 Chronicles 29:11-12) here in verse nineteen. God is to be praised because He is sovereign. He rules over all from His heavenly throne (see also Psalm 11:4).

103:20

*Bless the LORD, you His angels, Mighty in strength, who perform His word, Obeying the voice of His word!*

David returns to his original admonition ("bless the LORD"), thus "bookending" the psalm, by exhorting the angels to join in the chorus of praise to God.

103:21

*Bless the LORD, all you His hosts, You who serve Him, doing His will.*

David repeats the exhortation of the previous verse. See also Psalm 148:2. Angels are God's servants (cf. Hebrews 1:14).

## 103:22

*Bless the LORD, all you works of His, In all places of His dominion; Bless the LORD, O my soul!*

David concludes the psalm by exhorting all of creation to join himself, his readers, and the angels in praising God (see also Psalm 148:3-5).

## Conclusion

In Psalm 103, David exhorts himself (verses 1, 2a, and 22b), his readers (verses 2b-19), the angels (verses 20-21), and all creation (verse 22a) to praise the Lord both, for who He is (verses 1 and 8-19) and for what He has done (verses 2-7). God is to be praised because He is holy (verse 1), compassionate and lovingkind (verses 8-18), and sovereign (verse 19). He is also to be praised because He forgives sin (verse 3a), spiritually heals (verse 3b), delivers from some of sin's destructive effects (verse 4a), bestows His loyal love and compassion (verse 4b), spiritually satisfies (verse 5), vindicates His oppressed people (verse 6), and reveals information about Himself (verse 7). Psalm 103 is the basis for the hymn, "Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven" by Henry Lyte.

## "Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven" by Henry Lyte

1. Praise, my soul, the King of heaven, To His feet thy tribute bring;  
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, Evermore His praises sing:  
Alleluia! Praise the Everlasting King! Alleluia! Praise the Everlasting King!
2. Father-like, He tends and spares us, Well our feeble frame He knows;  
In His hands He gently bears us, Rescues us from all our foes:  
Alleluia! Widely yet His mercy flows! Alleluia! Widely yet His mercy flows!
3. Angels in the height, adore Him, Ye behold Him face to face;  
Sun and moon, bow down before Him, Dwellers all in time and space:  
Alleluia! Praise with us the God of grace! Alleluia! Praise with us the God of grace!

# Psalm 119

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## Introduction

In the one hundred and nineteenth psalm, the psalmist gives the most extensive focus on the Word of God in all of the Bible. The Psalm can be summarized in three statements:

1. *Love God's Word* (see verses 14, 16, 20, 24, 40, 47, 48, 70, 77, 97, 103, 111, 113, 119, 127, 129, 131, 140, 143, 159, 162, 163, 167, and 174).
2. *Learn God's Word* (see verses 12, 18, 26, 27, 33, 64, 68, 73, 108, 124, 125, and 135). One may do so by memorization of (verse 11) and meditation upon (verses 15, 23, 48, 78, 97, 99, and 148) God's Word.
3. *Live God's Word* (see verses 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 17, 22, 33, 34, 44, 55, 56, 57, 60, 67, 69, 88, 100, 101, 106, 112, 115, 129, 134, 145, 146, 166, 167, and 168). As D.L. Moody once said, "The best Bible is the one bound in shoe leather."

## Authorship

Though Psalm 119 is an "orphan" psalm (there is no superscription indicating authorship), many speculate that David was its author.<sup>80</sup> Especially convincing are the many similarities between this psalm and the last half of Psalm 19, which David authored.<sup>81</sup> Whoever the human author, it is apparent that he wrote this psalm during a time of difficulty (see, for example, verses 50, 67, 71, 92, and 143).

## Distinct Characteristics of the Psalm

1. *Its length.* At 176 verses, Psalm 119 is easily the longest chapter in the Bible.
2. *The pervasiveness of its theme.* Nearly every verse makes mention of the Word of God.<sup>82</sup> At least eight<sup>83</sup> different synonyms<sup>84</sup> are used, as the following chart indicates<sup>85</sup>:

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<sup>80</sup>Wiersbe (p. 309) makes a case for Jeremiah as its author.

<sup>81</sup>See Wiersbe (p. 308) for the many similarities between Psalm 19 and Psalm 119.

<sup>82</sup>Verses that do not are 84, 90, 121, 122, and 132.

<sup>83</sup>Some interpreters (such as Ross, Leupold, and Henry) opt for ten.

<sup>84</sup>For the precise nuance of each synonym, see pages 879-880 of Ross, 417-419 of Kidner, 737-738 of VanGemeran, and 401-402 of Calvin.

<sup>85</sup>The information for the chart has been taken from VanGemeran, pp. 737-738.

Hebrew transliteration	English translation(s)	Occurrences
<i>Torah</i>	law	25
<i>Dabar</i>	word	24
<i>Mispatim</i>	judgments, ordinances, laws	23
<i>Edot</i>	testimonies, statutes	23
<i>Miswot</i>	commandments	22
<i>Huqqim</i>	statutes, decrees	21
<i>Piqqudim</i>	precepts	21
<i>Imrah</i>	saying, promise, word	19

3. *Its acrostic structure.* The 176 verses of the psalm are divided into 22 8-verse sections. The first word of each verse in each section begins with the same Hebrew consonant.<sup>86</sup> Each section uses one of the 22 Hebrew consonants in succession. The same phenomenon is also found in Psalm 9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 145, Proverbs 31:10-31, and Lamentations 1-4 (Kidner, p. 417). This may have served as a memory aid.

#### A Survey of Some of Its Verses

- 9: *How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word.*

In verse nine, the psalmist stresses the role of the Word of God in progressive sanctification (see also John 17:17, Ephesians 5:26, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, James 1:21, and 1 Peter 2:2).<sup>87</sup>

It is obedience to the Word<sup>88</sup> that makes one spiritually clean, not just mere exposure to It. See such passages as Psalm 119:1-2, Matthew 7:24-27, Luke 11:28, and James 1:25. We are kept from sin by keeping Scripture.

<sup>86</sup>This phenomenon leads Brueggemann (quoted in VanGemeren, p. 737) to call the psalm “a massive intellectual achievement.”

<sup>87</sup>There are three phases to sanctification: 1) *initial* sanctification (at the moment of salvation; set apart from the penalty of sin); 2) *progressive* sanctification (throughout one’s Christian life; set apart from the power of sin); and 3) *final* sanctification (when one is glorified; set apart from the presence of sin).

<sup>88</sup>Allen (p. 170) translates the second half of verse 9: “by complying with your word.”

11: *Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I might not sin against You.*

In verse eleven, the psalmist once again stresses the role of the Word in progressive sanctification. However, rather than stressing the second aspect discussed with verse 9 (obedience to the Word), he stresses the first aspect (exposure to the Word).

Treasuring God's Word in the heart<sup>89</sup> (cf. Deuteronomy 6:6, Proverbs 2:1, and 7:1), that is, the mind (to the Jew, "heart" is synonymous with mind) is best done by memorizing It. Memorization of the Word (exposure) should result in not sinning (obedience). See the example of Christ (Matthew 4//Luke 4).

Sin is against God (cf. Genesis 39:9, 1 Samuel 12:23, Psalm 51:4, Jeremiah 3:25, 14:7, 20, and Luke 15:21).

18: *Open my eyes, that I may behold Wonderful things from Your law.*

In verse eighteen, the psalmist pleads for the Holy Spirit's illumination so that he might grasp the certainty and significance of God's Word. Because of sin's effect on the mind<sup>90</sup>, man is unable to perceive such<sup>91</sup> apart from divine intervention. Though always true of the unbeliever (see 1 Corinthians 2:14, 2 Corinthians 4:4, and Ephesians 4:18), this can also be true of the believer (see Ephesians 1:17-18). "We are by nature blind to the things of God, till his grace cause the scales to fall from our eyes; and even those in whose hearts God has said, *Let there be light*, have yet need to be further enlightened and must still pray to God to open their eyes yet more and more" (Henry, p. 689; emphasis his).

The idea behind the Hebrew verb translated "open" here in verse eighteen is to uncover with the intent of revealing, as a veil from the eyes (see Numbers 22:31, 2 Kings 6:17, and 2 Corinthians 3:14-16).

89: *Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven.*

In verse eighty-nine, the psalmist affirms the infallibility/authority of God's Word

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<sup>89</sup>Goldingay (p. 386) describes this as "hidden deep so that it cannot easily be ferreted out and removed."

<sup>90</sup>What theologians call the "noetic" (from *nous*, the Greek word for mind) effect of sin.

<sup>91</sup>Theologians distinguish between "meaning" and "significance." While any man can determine the meaning of God's Word, only the believer can perceive its significance through the Holy Spirit's work of illumination.

(cf. Psalm 119:152, Isaiah 40:8, Matthew 5:17-18<sup>92</sup>//Luke 16:17, Matthew 24:34-35//Mark 13:30-31, and 1 Peter 1:23-25).

97: *O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.*

In verse ninety-seven, the psalmist eagerly declares his love for God's Word (see also verses 47, 48, 113, 119, 127, 140, 159, 163, and 167), which, for him, would have been the Old Testament, and perhaps only a portion of it.

His love is evidenced by the fact that he meditates (see also Joshua 1:8, Psalm 1:2, 119:15, 23, 48, 78, 99, and 148) on the Word continually.

105: *Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.*

In verse one hundred and five, the psalmist declares his confidence in the Word's ability to guide his life.<sup>93</sup> It is the Word that lightens the dark path of life, showing one where to go. See also Psalm 43:3 and Proverbs 6:23a.

130: *The unfolding of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple.*

In verse one hundred and thirty, the psalmist expresses the Word's ability to give discretion to the indiscriminate when its significance is unfolded or opened ("unfolding"), another reference to illumination (see also Luke 24:32). Illumination gives one understanding (see also verses 104 and 169).

The "simple" are those without discretion (see Proverbs 1:4, 14:15, and 22:3), "those not experienced in the realities of life" (VanGemeren, p. 758). God's Word makes such individuals wise or discriminate (see Psalm 19:7b and Hebrews 5:12-14).

165: *Those who love Your law have great peace, And nothing causes them to stumble.*

In verse one hundred and sixty-five, the psalmist declares that those who love God's Word will experience great peace. The one who loves God's Word is one

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<sup>92</sup>Matthew 5:18 is an especially powerful testimony to the infallibility/authority of Scripture, extending to its every letter.

<sup>93</sup>Such guidance is often one step at a time. "The ancient world did not have lights such as we have today; the people carried little clay dishes containing oil, and the light illuminated the path only one step ahead" (Wiersbe, p. 324). "Lead, kindly light, amid the encircling gloom, Lead thou me on. The night is dark, and I am far from home, Lead thou me on. Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see The distant scene; one step enough for me" (John Henry Newman, cited in Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, 3:347).

who lives according to its precepts. The lot in life for such an individual is generally well-being (the idea behind *shalom*, the Hebrew word for “peace”).

Furthermore, the one who loves God's Word will not stumble. To stumble is a synonym for sinning (see James 2:10, 3:2, and Jude 24). The one who truly loves God will obey His Word (see John 14:15, 21, 23, and 1 John 5:2), thereby avoiding sin.

### Conclusion

In the one hundred and nineteenth psalm, the psalmist (David?) expresses many things about the Word of God. Among them are the fact that the Word of God progressively sanctifies the believer through exposure (verse 11) and obedience (verse 9) to It, the fact that Its significance can be perceived through the Holy Spirit's illumination (verses 18 and 130), the fact that It is infallible/authoritative (verse 89), the fact that It gives guidance (verse 105), and the fact that love for It results in meditation on It (verse 97), well-being (verse 165a), and avoidance of sin (verse 165b).

# Psalm 139

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## Introduction

In the one hundred and thirty-ninth psalm, the psalmist extols the omniscience and omnipresence of God, inviting God to scrutinize his life as a result.

## Superscription

According to the superscription, Psalm 139 was penned by David. It is for the “choir director,” the leader of the temple choir. Perhaps it was David's intention that this psalm be sung as part of the temple liturgy.

## 139:1

*O LORD, You have searched me and known me.*

David begins the psalm by acknowledging God's scrutiny of his life. God knows us thoroughly, a fact David will develop in the following verses.

God is omniscient, that is, He is all-knowing (see John 21:17 and 1 John 3:20), knowing all things—past, present, and future, actual and potential—in one eternal, indivisible act of intuition (Rolland McCune). God's knowledge of us should have a two-fold effect. First, it should *concern* us. God knows our hearts (see Psalm 44:21b and Acts 1:24) and will judge their thoughts and intentions (see Psalm 7:9, 17:3, Jeremiah 11:20, 17:10, and Hebrews 4:13). Second, it should *comfort* us. Nothing can happen to us without God knowing about it (see Proverbs 15:3).

## 139:2

*You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar.*

David begins to specify the extent to which God knows him. God knows when we sit down and when we get up (cf. Deuteronomy 6:7).<sup>94</sup> He knows our thoughts from afar.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup>This is an example of the literary device known as “merism” (see also verses 3 and 8). A merism uses the opposite extremes of a series to express the whole (i.e., from the one extreme to the other extreme and, by implication, everything in between). A modern example is “head to toe.”

<sup>95</sup>In light of God's omnipresence, David's focus in verses 7-12 of the psalm, the “afar” in verse 2 is likely chronological rather than spatial. In other words, God knows our thoughts long before we ever contemplate them.

139:3

*You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with all my ways.*

Using another merism (see footnote 94), David continues to elaborate upon what God knows about him. The Hebrew verb translated “scrutinize” is literally “winnow,” winnowing being the ancient process by which wheat was separated from its chaff. God “winnows” (or sifts) us. This is a very picturesque way of saying that He scrutinizes us. God scrutinizes all our ways, including where we walk (see Job 31:4) and when we lie down.

139:4

*Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all.*

God's knowledge of us is so pervasive that it includes our every word, even before we speak them.

139:5

*You have enclosed me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me.*

David finds God's knowledge of him to be restricting, as it should be. It is so pervasive that David cannot possibly escape from it.

139:6

*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is too high, I cannot attain to it.*

David, so to speak, throws up his hands, dumbfounded. God's pervasive knowledge of him is beyond his comprehension. God's knowledge is certainly incomprehensible (see Job 42:3, Isaiah 55:8-9, and Romans 11:33).

139:7

*Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?*

David now turns his focus to God's omnipresence.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup>In an attempt to harmonize this section with the previous one, interpreters have speculated that David's realization of God's pervasive knowledge of him (verses 1-6) naturally led him to seek an escape (not unlike Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3). David realized, however, that such an escape did not exist (verses 7-12).

God is omnipresent, that is, He is all-present or everywhere; He is ubiquitous (see Jeremiah 23:24), with the entirety of His presence filling the entirety of the universe at every moment.

David asks two rhetorical questions here in verse seven, the answers to which he will give in the following verses. For an example of one who found out the answers the hard way, see Jonah (notice especially the words of Jonah 1:3 and 10).

#### 139:8

*If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there.*

David once again uses a merism (as in verses two and three; see footnote 94), this time to express God's omnipresence. God's presence is in heaven and in Sheol (which can also be translated "grave") and, by implication, everywhere in between.<sup>97</sup> To the ancient Jew, heaven and Sheol were the highest and lowest locations in the universe. See also Amos 9:2.

#### 139:9

*If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea,*

Continuing his description of God's omnipresence, David contemplates going "sunbeam surfing" by riding the rays of light at daybreak across the horizon to the far side of the sea (which to him was the Mediterranean Sea to the west) in an effort to escape God's presence (this verse could also be seen as another merism—east to west and, by implication, everything in between). According to verse ten, such a feat would be futile.

#### 139:10

*Even there Your hand will lead me, And Your right hand will lay hold of me.*

David gives the first clear indication of his attitude towards God's omnipresence. Rather than viewing it as a cause for concern, he views it as a comfort. David views God's omnipresence much as a small child views his parent's seeming ubiquity; his attempted flight is an ambivalent one (Kidner, p. 464). David did not want to outrun God's

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<sup>97</sup>Though God is present everywhere, the *manifestations* of His presence vary. For example, God's presence in man differs from His presence in animals (His image is found in the first, Genesis 1:26-27, 5:1, 9:6, and James 3:9, but not in the second). Likewise, His presence in the saved differs from His presence in the unsaved (He indwells the first through the Holy Spirit, 1 Corinthians 6:19, but not the second). In like manner, His presence in heaven differs from His presence on earth or in hell (heaven is His permanent abode, 1 Kings 8:39, 43, 49, 2 Chronicles 6:21, 30, 33, and 39).

presence and was comforted by the fact that he never could. No matter where David might travel, God would be there to lead and protect (“lay hold of”; cf. Psalm 73:23) him.

#### 139:11

*If I say, “Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, And the light around me will be night,”*

David continues to contemplate the possibility of escaping God's presence. His final attempt is to escape into cover of darkness. This, too, was of no avail.

#### 139:12

*Even the darkness is not dark to You, And the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to You.*

David explains why his attempt to hide in the dark from God was futile: Night is as day to the One who is the Light. See also Job 34:21-22.

#### 139:13

*For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb.*

David once again shifts gears, beginning a new section in the psalm. Having discussed God's pervasive knowledge and presence, he applies both to what is unknown and unseen to man (especially in his day), the development of the child in the womb.

God creates both the immaterial (verse 13a) and material (verse 13b; “wove” can also be translated “knit”) parts of man through procreation, or natural reproduction (see also Job 10:11 and Jeremiah 1:5).

#### 139:14

*I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well.*

David's contemplation of the intricacy with which God had formed him (seen in the idea of being woven or knit in the womb, verse 13b) compelled him to burst forth in praise to the One who could accomplish such a feat.

#### 139:15

*My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth;*

Alluding to God's omnipresence, David acknowledges that he was not hid from God

during the embryonic stages of his life. Though such development was “secret” as far as man was concerned, it was not secret as far as God was concerned.

David ends the verse by once again (cf. verse 13b) making reference to the intricacy with which he was made, “skillfully wrought” having the idea of “embroidered” (Ross, p. 892). This included David’s “frame,” or skeletal structure. The phrase, “depths of the earth” is metaphorical for the deep concealment of the womb (Kidner, p. 466; see Job 1:21).

#### 139:16

*Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them.*

Though unseen by man, David's developing body was seen by God. Not only did God see David's developing body, but He also decreed his days (cf. Job 14:5).<sup>98</sup>

#### 139:17

*How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them!*

Once again (as in verse 14), David's contemplation of his intricate creation by God compels him to break forth in praise to the One who made him so. God's thoughts towards us are precious and innumerable (see also Psalm 40:5).

#### 139:18

*If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand. When I awake, I am still with You.*

The sum of God's thoughts towards us are, indeed, innumerable. They are more in number than the sand, which cannot be numbered by man (see Genesis 32:12).

Interpreters are divided as to the meaning of the second half of verse eighteen. Some have suggested that David fell into some sort of trance as he contemplated the vastness of God's thoughts towards him, awaking to the realization of God's pervasive presence. Others see a reference to the resurrection (see also Psalm 17:15). If so, David begins with conception (verse 13) and ends with resurrection (verse 18).

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<sup>98</sup>Commenting on this verse, Kidner (p. 466) states: “This appears to raise important ethical questions concerning the resort to abortion in the interests of, e.g., social convenience or an 'acceptable' level of health.” What an understatement!

139:19

*O that You would slay the wicked, O God; Depart from me, therefore, men of bloodshed.*

David once again switches gears, beginning a fourth section. Verses nineteen through twenty-two are imprecatory in tone.<sup>99</sup> David is not so much expressing his disdain for the wicked as he is his zeal for the Lord and His cause (see verses 20-21). “Men of bloodshed” are men who kill.

139:20

*For they speak against You wickedly, And Your enemies take Your name in vain.*

David expresses the rationale behind his harsh words in verse nineteen. He asks God to slay the wicked (verse 19a) and wants nothing to do with them (verse 19b; cf. Psalm 26:5) because of the way they treat his Lord.

139:21

*Do I not hate those who hate You, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You?*

David continues his harsh rhetoric towards the enemies of his Lord. God's enemies are David's enemies (see also 2 Chronicles 19:2). “Devotion to the Lord excludes any loyalty to those who hate him” (VanGemenen, p. 840). David is grieved over the rebellion of such men (see also Psalm 119:158). His hatred is a holy hatred.

139:22

*I hate them with the utmost hatred; They have become my enemies.*

David leaves no doubt as to where his loyalties lie.

139:23

*Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts;*

David concludes the psalm with the same thought with which he began it. Having acknowledged that God scrutinizes the heart (verses 1-6) and having realized that there is no escaping such scrutiny (verses 7-12), David invites God's scrutiny. “Yahweh loves and knows his people, and they, in turn, need not be afraid of his scrutiny”

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<sup>99</sup>See the introductory lesson for a discussion of the “imprecatory” psalm.

(VanGemeren, p. 835). His gaze is for our good. See also Psalm 26:2.

### 139:24

*And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.*

The purpose for such divine scrutiny is the exposure of wickedness that needs to be repented of. Such a desire for personal purity is characteristic of those travelling the everlasting way (see Psalm 1:6a, 16:11, and Matthew 7:14), unlike the ungodly, whose way shall perish (see Psalm 1:6b and Matthew 7:13).

### Conclusion

In Psalm 139, David marvels at the greatness of God, as seen in both His omniscience (verses 1-6) and omnipresence (verses 7-12), an omniscience and omnipresence that has particular relevance to the unknown and unseen (to the ancient Jew) development of the child in the womb (verses 13-18). Somewhat parenthetical is verses 19-22, in which David affirms his loyalty to his Lord. David concludes the psalm by inviting his omniscient and omnipresent Lord to scrutinize him (verses 23-24).

The following poetic summation of this psalm is from James Montgomery (cited in Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, 3:267-268):

Searcher of hearts! to thee are known  
The inmost secrets of my breast;  
At home, abroad, in crowds, alone,  
Thou mark'st my rising and my rest.  
My thoughts far off, through every maze,  
Source, stream, and issue—all my ways.

How from thy presence should I go,  
Or whither from thy Spirit flee,  
Since all above, around, below,  
Exist in thine immensity?  
If up to heaven I take my way,  
I meet thee in eternal day.

If in the grave I make my bed  
With worms and dust, lo! thou art there!  
If, on the wings of morning sped,  
Beyond the ocean I repair,  
I feel thine all-controlling will,  
And thy right hand upholds me still.

“Let darkness hide me,” if I say,  
Darkness can no concealment be;  
Night, on thy rising shines, shines like day;  
Darkness and light are one with thee:  
For thou mine embryo-form didst view,  
Ere her own babe my mother knew.

In me thy workmanship display’d,  
A miracle of power I stand:  
Fearfully, wonderfully made,  
And framed in secret by thine hand;  
I lived, ere into being brought,  
Through thine eternity of thought.

How precious are thy thoughts of peace,  
O God, to me! how great the sum!  
New every morn, they never cease;  
They were, they are, and yet shall come.  
In number and in compass more  
Than ocean’s sands or ocean’s shore.

Search me, O God! and know my heart,  
Try me, my inmost soul survey;  
And warn thy servant to depart  
From every false and evil way:  
So shall thy truth my guidance be  
To life and immortality.