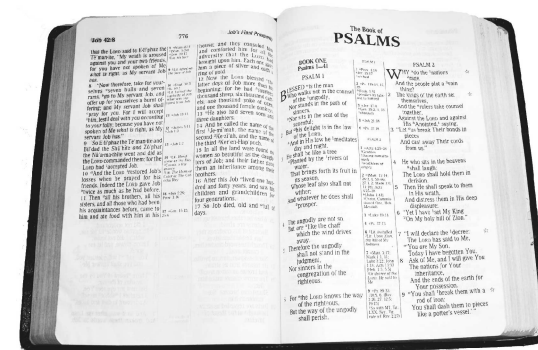


PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



December 2016

Bible readings from
2 Corinthians chapters 9 to 12 and Psalms 90 to 106

Book	Date
Daniel	August 2008; Pilgrims under Pressure
Hosea	May 2009
Joel	July 2010
Amos	November 2010
Obadiah	November 2010
Jonah	July 2011
Micah	July 2011
Nahum	July 2011
Habakkuk	August 2011
Zephaniah	December 2011
Haggai	January 2012; Pilgrims under Pressure
Zechariah	February 2012
Malachi	June 2012
Matthew	March to August 2012
Mark	August to October 2015
Luke	October, November 2013; February, March 2014
John	January to March 2011; Pilgrims under Pressure
Acts	June to August 2009; February to April 2016
Romans	October to December 2015
1 Corinthians	July, August 2016
2 Corinthians	November, December 2016
Galatians	October 2010;
Ephesians	May, June 2011
Philippians	September 2011
Colossians	December 2011
1 Thessalonians	October 2012
2 Thessalonians	November 2012
1 Timothy	December 2012
2 Timothy	March 2013
Titus	March 2013
Philemon	June 2013
Hebrews	June, July 2013
James	July 2014
1 & 2 Peter	October 2014; Pilgrims under Pressure
1, 2 & 3 John	December 2014; Pilgrims under Pressure
Jude	March 2015
Revelation	April and May 2015; Pilgrims under Pressure

Regular notes began publication in 1990. 'Through the Bible in a year' (selected readings from every book) was published in 1989 and 1996.

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Bible Reading Notes Index 2008 to 2016

Book	Date
Genesis	November, December 2013; January 2014
Exodus	April to June 2014;
Leviticus	August to October 2012
Numbers	August, September 2014
Deuteronomy	January to March 2015
Joshua	October, November 2008; January, February 2016
Judges	May, June 2016
Ruth	June 2016
1 Samuel	September, October 2016
2 Samuel	January, February 2010
1 Kings	May, June 2010
2 Kings	August, September 2010
1 Chronicles	August, September 2011
2 Chronicles	October, November 2011
Ezra	January 2012; Pilgrims under Pressure
Nehemiah	May 2012; Pilgrims under Pressure
Esther	May, June 2012
Job	March to May 2011
Psalms 1–16	November, December 2012
Psalms 1–12	Pilgrims under Pressure;
Psalms 17 to 23	March, May, June 2013
Psalms 24 to 66	Jan, June, July, Sept, November & December 2014
Psalms 67 to 78	March and December 2015
Psalms 79 to 89	June, October, November 2016
Psalms 90-106	December 2016
Psalms 107 to 119	Sept, November, December 2010
Psalms 120 to 150	Sept, Oct 2011. July, Dec. 2011; January, February, June 2012
Proverbs	January, February 2013
Ecclesiastes	March 2008; Pilgrims under Pressure
Song of Solomon	April 2013
Isaiah	April, May; August, September 2013
Jeremiah	May to August 2015
Lamentations	October 2015
Ezekiel	April to June 2008; Pilgrims under Pressure

NB. Pilgrims under Pressure is a 400 page book published in 2016. It is not available to download.

1 DECEMBER

2 Corinthians 9:1–6

He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly

Paul hardly needed to write to the Corinthians about ‘*ministering to the saints*’ (giving practical support to needy Christians). He had, a year earlier, encouraged the Macedonian churches to give by boasting of the apparent willingness of the Christians in Achaia (the province in which Corinth was situated) to give generously to his appeal. Paul pointed out that this could now be a source of embarrassment to him because of the failure of the Corinthians to honour their promise. He was sending Titus and two other brothers (8:16–22), with this letter, to ensure that their gift would be available when he himself arrived later. If he had Macedonian Christians with him, and if the gift was not ready, both he and the Corinthians would feel ashamed (1–5).

The words *bountiful gift* and *generosity* in verse 5 are from the same Greek word meaning ‘blessing’ whereas *grudging obligation* carries the idea of ‘covetousness’ (as translated in the AV). Paul was urging the Corinthians to see their gift as a blessing; they should give with a desire to be a blessing. They must not give grudgingly, thinking of all that they could do with the money were they to keep it for themselves.

Our giving is described as sowing (6). *He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully* (6). The more we sow, the more we harvest. The Lord Jesus said, ‘*Give, and it will be given to you*’ (Luke 6:38; cp. Proverbs 11:24–25). An inscription on the tombstone of a Christian illustrates this truth:

*Here lies a man, men thought him mad,
The more he gave, the more he had..*

We should be thoughtful in our giving. *Let each one give as he purposes in his heart* (7). There are thousands of worthwhile Christian causes and we cannot possibly support all of them. Our priority should be to support the work and ministry of our own local church of which we are members and then consider the wider needs of God’s people. Many churches struggle financially because some who benefit from their ministry and fellowship give little or nothing in return.

God loves a cheerful giver

We shall consider some other important principles concerning giving from 2 Corinthians, chapter 9:

- Our giving is to be cheerful: *God loves a cheerful giver* (7). **Grudged money, grudged time and grudged service are not acceptable to the Lord. Are you a cheerful giver?**
- We must beware of the unworthy motives peddled by the false teachers in ‘prosperity movement’ who urge us to give to God, in other words, to their organisation, in order to obtain blessings from God. Some charismatic church pastors also propagate this error. The motive for giving to God in order to get from him is unworthy. We give to God because we love him and desire the strengthening of his kingdom. We give because we delight in his people. The principle remains, however, that those who honour God with their money will never be the losers for it (Proverbs 3:9–10).. The Lord does not promise always to give us great wealth in return for generous giving, but sufficient to meet all our own needs and *an abundance for every good work* (8). God gives the sower sufficient harvest to provide seed for the following year’s planting, grain for his own food and a surplus. He also blesses the generous giver with enough to meet his own needs and to increase the fruits of his own righteousness so that he is able to continue to share with others (9–10; cp. Psalm 112:9).
- When we give to needy Christians, they will glorify God for meeting their need through his people. They will also pray for us and long for fellowship with us (11–14).

Generous giving is a mark of God’s grace working in our lives. Paul reminds us of the greatest gift that we have from God through grace, the gift of his beloved Son to save us from our sins. ‘Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!’ (15; cp. John 3:16).

According to the multitude of his mercies

Why did Israel fail in the Promised Land? They disobeyed God by not destroying the Canaanites and *they mingled with the Gentiles and learned their works*’(34–35). They became like the heathen in their thinking and they were soon like them in their behaviour. Notice that false religion is demon-inspired (36–39). What a warning to us! We are being enticed every day by worldly attitudes propagated by radio, television and newspapers. Worldliness weakens many a Christian because it is opposed to God and his holy standards (James 4:4; 1 John 2:15–17). We must not allow the world to mould our thinking (Romans 12:2).

The Lord was so gracious to faithless, rebellious Israel. When he brought them low because of their sin, they cried to him and he heard their cry. The Lord delivered the Israelites many times, though they often rebelled against him (43–45). God is very patient, but we must never take his patience for granted. The path of disobedience leads to unhappiness and judgment.

Look at the phrase, *According to the multitude of his mercies* (45; cp. verse 7). God’s mercies are so many that they are described as a multitude. How wonderful! Backsliding Christian, return to the Lord! He will receive you *according to the multitude of his mercies*. Discouraged, struggling believer, take heart, for your heavenly Father cares for you *according to the multitude of his mercies*. Afflicted, grieving child of God, be comforted because God will bring you through your troubles *according to the multitude of his mercies*.

And let all the people say, ‘Amen’ (48). **Do you grunt your ‘Amens’ under your breath after the prayers in the services of your church or in the prayer meeting, or do you add a distinct and joyful ‘Amen’?** The fourth book of Psalms ends with praise. Let us likewise end each day with heartfelt praise to God for *the multitude of his mercies*.

He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul

This psalm begins and ends with praise to God (1–3, 48) opening and closing with ‘Hallelujah!’ (*Praise the LORD!*). After praying for himself (4–5), the psalmist confesses his sin and that of his people. He likens their sin to the unfaithfulness of Israel in their wilderness journey from Egypt (7–33) and in the Promised Land (34–39). We are reminded here of the complaining, rebellion and idolatry of the people (details are found in the books of Exodus and Numbers). We must not imagine that we are any better than unfaithful Israel. The things that happened to them were written for our admonition. Their sins may easily become our sins (1 Corinthians 10:6–12).

What was the problem with Israel? They had witnessed signs and wonders in Egypt and had been miraculously delivered from bondage. They sang the praises of God (7–12) but they soon forgot his mighty works and it was not long before they forgot God (13,21). They despised the land that God had given them and *they did not believe his word* (24). If we do not walk with the Lord, we will soon forget him and become cold and unfaithful in heart.

See how the psalmist prays for himself: ‘*Remember me, O LORD, with the favour you have toward your people*’ (4). What privileges belong to the child of God! He is able to pray, knowing that he is a favourite of God, who delights in him, and works all things together for good.

Verse 15 refers to the time when Israel complained of a lack of meat. God sent quails but plagued them as they ate the meat (Numbers chapter 11). *He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul* (*leanness* = ‘a wasting disease’). Spurgeon comments, ‘Prayer may be answered in anger and denied in love. That God gives a man his desire is no proof of divine favour, everything depends on what that desire is’ (THE TREASURY OF DAVID). **God may be saying, ‘No!’ to some request of yours, because he loves you and is wisely preventing the coming of leanness into your soul. Trust in his wisdom and love!**

Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh

In this new section of the letter, Paul vindicates his apostolic ministry. Some in the Corinthian church had been bewitched by the apparent powerful ministry of the false teachers who had come among them. These visitors had backed up their claims with boasts of visions and ecstatic experiences (12:1) and they carried letters of commendation from other churches (3:1). Their Corinthian admirers despised Paul, whose humility they mistook for weakness. Paul’s life was marked by *the meekness and gentleness of Christ* but they failed to recognise this (1–2). They spread the lie that the apostle was timid when present among them and only bold in his letters to them. Paul’s meekness and gentleness is shown when he begged them not to make it necessary to be bold against those who were critical of him (2).

It is important to distinguish between walking *in the flesh* and walking *according to the flesh* (2–3). We all *walk in the flesh* (3) which means that we are all subject to human frailty and weakness. However, to walk *according to the flesh* is to lead a godless life which is conditioned by worldly thinking (cp. Romans 8:7; Ephesians 2:2; 4:7–19). The false teachers at Corinth claimed that Paul lived in such a manner, but nothing could have been further from the truth (2).

Paul reminds us that *though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh* (3). Who was behind the trouble at Corinth? It was Satan and the false teachers who were his servants (11:14–15). The devil also holds unbelievers in terrible spiritual bondage and blindness. We must use spiritual weapons to pull down his strongholds (4–5). Those weapons include prayer, the word of God and faith and truth (cp. Ephesians 6:13–18). We must also remember that we have the help of the Holy Spirit in our battles. **Let us ask God to help us to use these powerful weapons that he has given to us for our spiritual warfare.**

Do you look at things according to their outward appearance?

Paul's enemies at Corinth alleged that his 'weighty and powerful' letters made him appear strong, but in reality he had a weak bodily presence and was a poor speaker (7–10). It was probably one man, the leader of the opposition to Paul, who spread the lie that the apostle was a pathetic man who hid behind the skill of his pen (11). Paul was a meek man, a gentle man, but he was not a weakling. Consider his dealings with Elymas the sorcerer (Acts 13:9–12), and his fearless witness to the Roman governors Felix and Festus, and to King Agrippa (Acts 24:25;26:24–29).

We must not confuse meekness with weakness. Paul rebuked the Corinthians by asking them, 'Do you look at things according to the outward appearance?' (7). They were doubtless influenced by their Greek culture which made much of physical beauty and strength and which despised manual labour. By such standards, Paul had little to commend him. He was not very attractive in appearance, he was not an orator like Apollos, and he had worked with his hands at Corinth as a tentmaker (Acts 18:1–3,24). Paul and his fellow-workers belonged to Christ and had received their authority from Christ (8).

Paul now turns from his critics at Corinth to the boasters whom they admired. God had appointed Paul as a missionary to the Gentiles, including the Corinthians but these people commended themselves (12–14). We must beware of comparing ourselves with others. Paul wrote of himself and his fellow-workers, 'We dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves' (12). The false teachers boasted much, but they had not planted the church in Corinth; it was Paul who had taken the gospel to that city (15–16). We should be suspicious of those who commend themselves and who boast of their spiritual exploits. If they do not *glory in the LORD* (17; cp. 1 Corinthians 1:31) pay no attention to them. **Do not make superficial judgments based on outward appearances. What matters is that we all receive the commendation of the Lord (18).**

The word of the LORD tested him

The remainder of this psalm reminds us of God's *wondrous works* (2) in the life of Joseph (16–22) and for the nation of Israel when God brought them out of Egypt and led them through the wilderness (23–45). Notice the number of instances of God's *marvellous works* (5) cited in this chapter – *He called for a famine* (16) – *He increased his people greatly* (24) – *He turned their heart to hate his people* (25) – *He sent Moses* (26) – *He sent darkness* (28) and so on. 'All things come at the call of God. He called for plenty, and it came; for famine, and it came; for captivity, and it came; for deliverance, and it came' (quoted by Spurgeon in THE TREASURY OF DAVID).

Verses 26 to 36 recall the plagues that the Lord sent upon the Egyptians. He wonderfully provided for the Israelites when the Egyptians freely gave them silver and gold. He sent the quails and manna in the wilderness to feed them, he opened the rock from which the water gushed (37–41).

Things do appear to go wrong for believers just as they did for Joseph who passed through many years of trial and testing (17–18). *The word of the LORD tested him* (19). How does *the word of the LORD* test us? This happens when we cling to the promises of God when they appear to mock us and to be hollow. Abraham knew this when the Lord called him to sacrifice Isaac (Hebrews 11:17–19). All God's covenant promises would have seemed hollow to Joseph and even to mock him in those dark days of slavery and imprisonment, but the Lord was refining his character and preparing him for leadership.

Are you being tested by the word of the Lord? Are you perplexed or discouraged? Do you feel that God has forgotten you? Do not rely on your feelings, but trust in God's word. He always remembers his covenant promises to us (42). *Oh, give thanks to the LORD! Call upon his name*'(1). ***Seek the LORD and his strength*'(4) and you will soon find yourself rejoicing in him!**

He has remembered his covenant for ever

This psalm was composed by David and its first fifteen verses were sung when the ark of the covenant was brought into Jerusalem from the house of Obed-Edom (cp. 1 Chronicles 16:8–22). The *wondrous works* of the covenant God are emphasised in this psalm whereas Psalm 106 shows by contrast the ingratitude and unfaithfulness of his people, Israel.

We are encouraged to *give thanks to the LORD and to call on his name*. We are to *make known his deeds ... sing to him ... glory in his holy name* (the name of God speaks of his character). We are to rejoice in him and to seek him (1–4).

A covenant is a binding agreement between two or more persons, bringing them into a special relationship and commitment to each other. God made a covenant with Abraham (8–9; cp. Genesis chapter 15) and his dealings with the descendants of Abraham, the people of Israel, were on the basis of this covenant – *He has remembered his covenant forever* (8; cp. verse 42). He protected them (13–15) and he increased and prospered them (12, 24).

Christians are brought into a special relationship with God through the new covenant in the blood of Christ (Hebrews 12:24). We are reminded of this covenant at the communion service (Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25). We remember the marvellous work of God in giving his Son to die for us. Let us think about all that the Lord has done for us and give thanks to him and sing our joyful psalms and hymns to magnify him. **The Lord will never leave us, never forget us, because he has remembered his covenant for ever.**

*God of the covenant, Triune Jehovah,
Marvels of mercy adoring we see;
Seeker of souls in the counsels eternal
Binding thy lost ones for ever to thee.*

(Jesse F. Webb)

Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light

Paul was obliged to indulge in what he called, ‘*a little folly*’ (1) and to present his credentials at length to sweep aside the pretentious boasting of the false teachers at Corinth. These men were not only undermining Paul, but also the truths of the gospel that he preached (4). He had to defend himself by writing candidly to the Corinthians if they were to be recovered from their perilous state. He asserted that he was in no way inferior to *the most eminent apostles*. He may have been untrained in Greek eloquence but he was not lacking in the knowledge of God and his word (5–6). He had supported himself at Corinth and also had ‘*robbed*’ other churches (those in Macedonia) by taking support from them so that he could minister to the Corinthians (7–9).

Christians are betrothed to Christ and the apostle was looking forward to presenting his beloved Corinthians as a chaste virgin to Christ (2; cp. Ephesians 5:25–27; Jude 24). Paul’s *godly jealousy* was not motivated by self-interest, but was born out of an aching heart which longed for their well-being. He feared lest Satan corrupt their minds *from the simplicity that is in Christ* (3). The false teachers were preaching another Jesus, a different gospel, and they were introducing a different spirit into the church (4).

Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light and false apostles *transform themselves into ministers of righteousness* (13–15). We must recognise them for what they are – they are ministers of the devil! Satan uses ‘nice’ people who are skilful communicators. They appear to be sound in the faith and reasonable in what they say. There are many threads of truth woven into their teaching and this puts us off our guard. Before we realise what is happening, we are accepting error.

Christian, you are betrothed to Christ, to be faithful and committed to him. Satan wants to wreck your relationship to your Saviour and to spoil your Christian life by turning you aside *from the simplicity that is in Christ*. **Be on your guard! If the devil was able to deceive an unfallen Eve (3), he is also able to deceive you.**

If I must boast ...

Paul was reluctant to indulge in boasting about himself and he was at pains to show that such behaviour is foolish (1,16–21,23). The Corinthians considered themselves to be wise, but they *put up with fools gladly* (19). The apostle was referring to the fact that they had allowed themselves to be deceived by boasting false teachers. They had put up with those who had shamefully treated them but Paul and his companions were *too weak for that* (19–21). Paul would now boast like a fool rather than speak *according to the Lord* (17–18). He was reluctant to promote himself but his critics left him with no alternative.

The false apostles boasted of their Jewish pedigree and of their ministry (22–23) but Paul far excelled them. He was a Hebrew and he goes on to describe his toil and suffering for Christ. He had been repeatedly flogged, frequently imprisoned, often in danger of death, three times shipwrecked, once a night and day adrift in the open sea. He had been in peril from crossing dangerous rivers, from robbers, from his own countrymen, in cities, on the sea, from false brethren. Weariness, hard labour, sleeplessness, hunger, thirst, fasting, cold and lack of sufficient clothing were a pattern of life. In addition to these things, he carried a burden of *deep concern for all the churches* (23–28). We may admire Paul and long to be used by the Lord, but are we prepared for sacrifice, suffering and hard work?

Paul writes, *‘If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity’* (30; cp. 12:5). That does not do much for a person’s self-esteem! A Roman soldier who was the first to scale the wall of a besieged city was awarded the ‘corona muralis.’ This coveted decoration for valour was worn with great pride. Paul had no such honour but had been lowered down from the wall of Damascus to escape with his life (32–33; cp Acts 9:23–25). Paul did not try to cover up his weaknesses. Let us beware of pride (which is the sin behind boasting). **If we must boast, let it be of our dependence upon our great God and in the cross of Christ (Galatians 6:14).**

May my meditation be sweet to him

Who is ‘Leviathan’ (26)? — He is an awesome sea-monster who is now extinct. The whole of Job chapter 41 speaks of this creature. No amount of human effort could slay or capture Leviathan (Job 41:1–10, 26) who could hardly be a crocodile or a whale as some suggest. This awesome creature was created by God who made all things *both small and great* (24–26).

All creation depends upon God for its survival (25–30). We can only gather the things that he gives to us (27–28) and the toil of the farmer (23) would be pointless if the Lord did not provide suitable weather. The Lord Jesus encourages us to trust in God to meet all of our needs and not to allow anxiety to beset us (Matthew 6:25–33). The psalmist acknowledges God’s provision: *‘You open your hand, they are filled with good’* (28). The great 19th-century missionary, Hudson Taylor, never appealed for funds to finance his work in China. He was once asked if this was not a hand-to-mouth existence. ‘Yes’ he replied, ‘From God’s hand to my mouth!’

Why does the psalmist pray for the removal of the wicked in such a great hymn of praise (35)? He is grieved that they despise and reject God rather than giving him their grateful worship and praise. They rebel against his holy law. We should remember, however, that the Lord can turn sinners into saints and that he has done that very thing in our lives! That is why we sing our praises (33). *I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being* (33).

We should pray, *‘May my meditation be sweet to him’* (34). The psalm closes with *Praise the LORD!* (35) – the first time that the Hebrew word, which is also translated ‘Hallelujah,’ is used in the Psalms (it is used to open Psalms 106, 111 to 113, 117,135, and 146 to 150). **Let us bless the LORD with our joyful ‘Hallelujahs!’**

O LORD, how manifold are your works!

The hymn, ‘O worship the King, all glorious above’ is based on this psalm. It begins and ends with the same expression of praise found in Psalm 103 – *Bless the LORD, O my soul!* It is a great hymn of praise to Almighty God, the Creator and Sustainer of the world. God is worthy to be worshipped and adored because he is *very great*, he is *clothed with honour and majesty*, he covers himself *with light as a garment*. Do you worship God, the eternal, glorious King?

The progress of the psalmist’s meditation can be linked with the account of creation in Genesis chapter 1:

- He sings of the light and the heavens, the work of the first and second days of creation (1–6).
- He describes the work of the third day – the separation of water from dry land, the forming of rivers and the bringing forth of vegetation (7–18).
- The appointment of the sun to rule the day, and the moon to rule the night (19–23).
- God’s work on the fifth and sixth days – the creation of all living creatures (24–30).
- God rejoicing in his works on the seventh day (31).

The Genesis account of creation is true! The fact that God created the world is supported throughout the Old and New Testament. Satan knows that when people are deceived into believing the theory of evolution, God is dishonoured and robbed of their worship and praise. The greatness and the majesty of God should draw worship and adoration from our hearts (1–2). **Let us remember that this is God’s world and that he is in control of all his works. Think about the words of our reading and lift up your heart in joyful praise.** *O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all. The earth is full of your possessions* (24).

Read the words of the hymn, ‘This is my Father’s world’ by Maltbie D. Babcock; it is a hymn of joyful praise to God which reminds me of this psalm.

My grace is sufficient for you

False teachers had impressed the Corinthians with their claims of visions and revelations from God. Paul now turns to that subject. He was almost certainly speaking of himself when describing the man caught up into heaven which he describes as ‘*the third heaven*’ or ‘*Paradise*’. He made it appear that he was speaking of an acquaintance because of his reluctance to boast (1–4); he rather preferred to speak of his own *infirmities* or weaknesses (5–6). He then writes of a very painful and perplexing experience.

Paul recognised that *the abundance of the revelations* he had received (see Acts 16:9; 18:9–10; 27:23 for some examples) could lead to pride. For this reason, God had given him *a thorn in the flesh* to keep him from being *exalted above measure* (7). He does not explain the nature of this *thorn in the flesh* but it was not besetting sin as some believe. God does not give us grace to continue in sin (Romans 6:1,14). He describes it as ‘*a messenger of Satan*’ but we must not suppose that it was demon possession. No Christian can be demon possessed. **Paul knew that Satan’s messengers are under the control of God.** The problem was undoubtedly of some physical weakness, a trial which was in his flesh (Galatians 4:15–16). He pleaded with God three times that this thorn in the flesh would be removed, but the Lord replied, ‘*My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness*’ (8–9).

The Lord does not always say ‘Yes’ to our prayers, but he does give us grace and strength in all our trials. He has wise and loving purposes in every trial and he tenderly watches over us. **If you are passing through difficult times, remember the sufficiency of God’s grace.** He will never let you down; he will never let you go! He will bring blessing out of your distress and you will emerge a stronger and more godly believer. Go to God’s throne of grace in prayer where you *may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need* (Hebrews 4:16).

I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls

Paul again states that he feels the folly of boasting, but the Corinthians had compelled him to do so. They knew him and should have commended him, knowing that for all his weakness, he was in no way inferior to the false teachers, here designated as *the most eminent* (or ‘super’) *apostles* (11; cp. 11:5) who had come to Corinth. He reminds the Corinthians of his apostolic credentials which had been displayed among them – *signs and wonders and mighty deeds* (12). We look in vain for such signs in those who claim to be apostles today.

Paul was planning a third visit to Corinth (14; 13:1) and he stressed that he would not be burdensome to them. He was not seeking anything from them, but he was concerned for their well-being as a parent is for his children (14–16). Paul was a great-hearted Christian. What great love he had for the wayward Corinthians, though they had shown little love for him! Verse 15 is magnificent! *‘And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved.’* He was willing to give himself sacrificially for their benefit. Paul and his fellow-workers had never taken advantage of them and had done all things for their edification (17–19).

How are you serving God? Are you lazy and self-indulgent? The Lord is looking for men and women who will gladly spend and be spent for the souls of their fellow-Christians and for those who are perishing. **Pastor, deacon, Sunday school teacher, youth worker, church member, Christian parent, will you gladly spend and be spent for those whom God has committed to your care?**

*Go, labour on; spend and be spent,
Thy joy to do the Father’s will;
It is the way the Master went;
Should not the servant tread it still?*

(Horatius Bonar)

Bless the LORD, O my soul!

This psalm begins and ends with, *Bless the LORD, O my soul!* There is all the difference in the world between God blessing men and men blessing God. When God blesses men, he bestows favour and mercies upon them. When men bless God, they speak well of him, adoring him for his greatness, praising him for all his blessings. In this latter sense, blessing is the opposite of cursing. Psalm 103 is a call for us to bless God for all that he is and for all that he does for us. The hymn ‘Praise my soul, the King of heaven’ is based on this psalm.

Are your prayers just ‘shopping lists’ comprising, ‘Lord, bless so-and-so and please bless me’? Your prayer life would be much richer if you started to *Bless the LORD* and to open your heart to worship him with all your being (1).

- *Bless the LORD* because he has forgiven all your sins, healing you, redeeming you; he *crowns you with lovingkindness* (3–4, 12).
- *Bless the LORD* because he has made us his children even though we are dust, and he lovingly cares for us (13–14).
- *Bless the LORD* because he is righteous and just, because he is a merciful and gracious God, and he reigns supreme (6,19).

If all the angels and the heavenly hosts are called upon to *bless the LORD* (20–21), how much more we poor sinners, saved by his matchless grace and so abundantly blessed!

Bless the LORD, O my soul!

When I was a pastor, I visited a member of our church who was dying. This dear lady had not spoken all day and I read the first fourteen verses of this psalm to her. In her weakness, she struggled to speak and she then exclaimed, *‘Bless the LORD, O my soul!’* She departed peacefully to be with her Lord a couple of hours later.

But you, O LORD, shall endure for ever

This psalm is entitled. 'A Prayer of the afflicted' and in it we find the believer pouring out his heart to God in his distress. He cried to the Lord for a speedy answer to his prayer (1–2). When we pass through times of discouragement, doubt or physical weakness, Satan often makes things worse by attacking our minds with depressing thoughts. The psalmist describes his feelings. He felt that his end was near, his days being consumed and vanishing like smoke, like a lengthening shadow, like grass scorched in the sun or blasted by the wind (3,11); he was off his food (4); lonely (6–7; the pelican is a solitary bird); he was unable to sleep (7); he was hurt by the derision of his enemies (8–9) and he felt that God had cast him off (10).

What must we do when we feel afflicted and low? We must turn to the Lord like the psalmist. He fixed his eyes on God and he was soon encouraged. He compared his own trials which would soon pass to the eternal God who never changes and is unfailing in his faithfulness: *But you, O LORD, shall endure for ever* (12). God will have mercy on his people at his *set time* (13). The Lord looks down from heaven and sees us in our affliction and he hears our groans and prayers (17–20).

Verses 25 to 27 are quoted in Hebrews 1:10–12 with reference to Christ. The Holy Child born at Bethlehem is no ordinary person! Those (like Jehovah's Witnesses) who can read these verses and still fail to see that Jesus is LORD (Jehovah) are spiritually blind. **We change, but Jesus, the eternal Creator is always the same (27; cp. Hebrews 13:8). Let us encourage ourselves in his unfailing greatness and love!**

*'Thou remainest,' blest Redeemer,
Lord of peace and Lord of strife;
Jesus, Saviour, Lord for ever,
'Thou remainest,' Christ my life.*

(El Nathan)

Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith

Paul anticipated his third visit to Corinth with a sense of foreboding. He feared that when he came, he would still find trouble in the church and that many who were guilty of grievous sin had not truly repented (12:20–21). Love for others does not overlook sin but deals with it. It is for the offender's own sake that he is made to face up to his sin in the prayerful hope that he will repent of it and be restored to the Lord. Paul warned the Corinthians that when he came, he would not spare the unrepentant sinners among them. Church discipline is a painful business which requires courage from church leaders to deal with offenders (1–2; Matthew 18:15–20; cp. Deuteronomy 19:15). Paul may have appeared weak but he reminds us that Christ was crucified in weakness, but now lives by the power of God. The '*weak*' apostle would come among them by the power of God (3–4; cp. 12:9–10).

Some of the Corinthians had questioned Paul's apostleship and had unjustly criticised him. He now challenges them: '*Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves*' (5). He is asking them to put themselves to the test, to be sure that they are not reprobate or disqualified as counterfeit Christians. **Are you always ready to criticise others? Examine yourself! Be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure** (2 Peter 1:10).

We live in perilous times when there is much shallow Christianity. We need to be sure that our profession of faith is genuine. Matthew Henry rightly observes, 'Either we are true Christians, or we are great cheats.' There will be many shocks on the day of judgment (Matthew 7:21–23). The pace and rush of modern life does not encourage us to take time for self-examination. We must, of course, beware of being so introspective that we do not look to the Lord Jesus. Prayerful self-examination will open us to the sweet influence of the Holy Spirit who will reveal any sin lurking within. We will then be able to repent and seek the forgiveness of the Lord. **When did you last take a prayerful, careful look at your own life?**

Be complete

Paul closes his letter by assuring the Corinthians that he was praying that God would keep them from doing evil. He wanted them to do the honourable thing by dealing with sin in their own lives and in the church. They may have considered Paul and his companions to be *disqualified* (or reprobate) but they were committed to truth (7–8). True doctrine and integrity is essential in the lives of all who serve Christ. Paul reminded them that the apostolic authority which the Lord had given to him was not for the destruction of churches but for their edification (building up; 10).

Verse 11 spells out some essentials for a healthy Christian life and church fellowship:

- *Be complete* (cp. verse 9). The Greek word translated ‘*complete*’ (‘*perfect*’ – AV) is used elsewhere to describe the mending of nets (Matthew 4:21). It is translated *restore* in Galatians 6:1. The ESV has: ‘*Aim for restoration*’. We all have our battles, our victories and defeats and we need to be complete, to be restored if we are to be useful to the Lord.
- *Be of good comfort* which can be translated, ‘exhort one another.’ We need to encourage and to be encouraged if we are to ‘*be complete*.’
- *Be of one mind*. Unity was desperately needed at Corinth (cp. 12:20). There can be no true blessing in the church which tears itself apart!
- *Live in peace* (cp. Romans 12:18; Hebrews 12:14). We must wage war on sin, but we must also be peacemakers and not let Satan divide us on trivial matters.

If we make these things our aim, *the God of love and peace* will be with us. Think about the benediction: *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen* (14). **May our lives be marked by the favour and graciousness of Christ, by the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit to empower us and to guide us. What more could we desire?**

I will behave wisely in a perfect way

Some believe that David wrote this psalm at the beginning of his reign over Israel, but we cannot be certain. He made a number of resolutions (there are nine ‘*wills*’ and five ‘*shalls*’) which, if he had kept later in his life, would have spared him much grief. David vowed, ‘*I will behave wisely in a perfect* (or ‘blameless’) *way*’ (2). Earlier in his life, such behaviour was attended by the blessing of God upon him (1 Samuel 18:5,14–15). Let us now meditate on how we can behave wisely:

- By blameless (*perfect*) behaviour at home (2). One commentator (Adam Clarke) writes, ‘It is easier for most men to walk with a perfect heart in the church, or even in the world, than in their own families. How many are as meek as lambs among others, when at home they are wasps or tigers.’
- By controlling our eyes. *I will set nothing wicked* (‘worthless’) *before my eyes* (3). If we behave wisely, we will be very careful in our choice of television viewing and in the magazines and books that we read. Do you waste hours watching unedifying television programmes? Oh, be determined to redeem the time in these evil days (Ephesians 5:16)!
- In the choice of company that we keep. David was determined to have a royal court free from corruption. Oh, that governments today had such a holy resolve. The perverse (crooked), the slanderer, the proud, the deceitful, the liar and the wicked had no place among David’s close friends (4–5, 7–8). If we love the Lord, we will choose those who are *faithful* as our closest friends (6).

Christian, be determined to behave yourself wisely at home, at your place of work and in the church throughout your days. Be determined always to lead a godly life!

Serve the LORD with gladness

We sing this well-known psalm with the words, ‘All people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice ...’ It is a great little psalm which tells us how and why we should praise God:

- We must be joyful in our praise (1). Worshippers were encouraged to go to the temple with *a joyful shout* and to serve him with gladness (cp. Psalms 95:1–6; 98:4–6). It is a sad reflection on many of us that the dirge-like singing and the miserable looks on some of our faces as we praise God are more suited to a funeral lament than the worship of the living God. Matthew Henry comments, ‘Gospel worshippers should be joyful worshippers.’
- We must be thoughtful in our worship (3). *Know that the LORD, he is God; it is he who has made us.* Any form of worship that discourages thoughtfulness or the use of the mind is spurious. – ‘Knowledge is the mother of devotion, and of all obedience. ... Know it; consider and apply it, and then you will be more close and constant, more inward and serious, in the worship of him.’ (Matthew Henry).
- We must be thankful in our praise (4). *Enter into his gates with thanksgiving ... Be thankful to him.*

Why should we praise God? The Lord is worthy of our adoration and praise because:

- *He is good.*
- Because *his mercy is everlasting.* It will never be exhausted!
- Because *his truth endures to all generations* (5). It does not change and it will not fail us.

How do you worship the Lord? Is your heart overflowing with joyful praise to him? Serve the LORD with gladness; come before his presence with singing (2).

Let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us

The hymn, ‘Our God, our help in ages past’ is based on this psalm whose title states that it is ‘A prayer of Moses the man of God’. A man of God is certain to be a man of prayer and Moses was known for his life of intercessory prayer (Exodus 32:9–14, 30–32; Jeremiah 15:1).

How does Moses pray? He begins with worship, remembering that God is eternal. He has always been, he is, and he will always be. *Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, you are God* (2; cp. Revelation 4:8). We often comment that ‘time flies’, but to the eternal God, a thousand years pass like a day (4; cp. 2 Peter 3:8). By way of contrast, man’s life is so short and God returns our body to destruction in the grave, to dust (3). ‘God resolves and man dissolves’ (Spurgeon). We may live seventy or eighty years (10) but we soon pass away (5–6) like:

A flood — flowing, growing, going.
Grass — sown, grown, mown.

Moses also remembers that God is holy and that he is angry with sinners. We cannot hide our sins from him (7–8). Time is short and precious and we should often take up the prayer, *So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom* (12). We need always to make the best use of our time (Ephesians 5:16) in living to please God and to work for him.

Moses calls upon God for mercy and asks that he will let his work appear to his servants and that his glory will be seen by their children (16). The beauty of God must be seen in our lives if we wish to see him establish our work (17). The Hebrew translated ‘*beauty*’ means ‘pleasant’ or ‘delightful’ (cp. Psalm 27:4). **Biblical holiness is attractive and delightful, never a miserable thing. May our lives radiate the beauty of the Lord Jesus.** *Let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us* (17).

I will be with him in trouble

Psalm 90 begins by reminding us that the everlasting God is our *dwelling place* (90:1). In this psalm we are reminded of the priceless privilege of the child of God who *dwells in the secret place of the Most High* (1). He overshadows us with his almighty love and though he does not promise to keep us from illness or danger, we know that he is in control of all our circumstances. He does promise to be with us in our deepest troubles, though we do not necessarily feel his presence (15). The Most High God is our habitation (9) and whoever attacks us attacks God. Dare Satan and his wicked demons attack us? The Lord has charged his angels to care for us and to keep us in all our ways (11; cp. Psalm 34:7; Hebrews 1:13–14). Those upon whom God has set his love are given precious promises in verses 14 to 16. He promises deliverance and honour, answered prayer, his presence in trouble, satisfaction and salvation.

Christian, are you anxious and troubled? Take heart, the Most High God is with you! He lovingly and tenderly watches over you and promises to be with you in trouble (15). Trust in him, he cannot fail! In his comments on verses 9 and 10, Spurgeon writes, ‘It is impossible that any ill should happen to the man who is beloved of the Lord; the most crushing calamities can only shorten his journey and hasten him to his reward. Ill to him is no ill, but only good in a mysterious form. Losses enrich him, sickness is his medicine, reproach is his honour, death is his gain. No evil in the strict sense of the word can happen to him, for everything is overruled for good. Happy is he who is in such a case. He is secure where others are in peril, he lives where others die.’ (THE TREASURY OF DAVID).

My volumes of The Treasury of David were signed and presented by Spurgeon to a friend in 1887. These words must have been a great blessing to the man twenty-two years later. He pencilled in the margin, ‘My heart says, “Amen” with 10,000 “Hallelujahs.” This is my experience, 13–10–1909.’ **God’s promises are still the same for you!** — *I will be with him in trouble.*

Exalt the LORD our God

This is the third of the psalms beginning with the words, *The LORD reigns* (cp. Psalms 93 and 97). It has three sections each ending with a statement that God is holy (3,5,9). Cherubim (1) are angelic beings who were represented on the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant from which God spoke to Moses (Exodus 25:17–22). God’s holiness is revealed in his *great and awesome name* (or character, 3), in his righteous acts (4–5) and in answering the prayers of his servants (6–8).

The LORD reigns; let the people tremble! (1). Spurgeon comments, ‘Saints quiver with devout emotion, and sinners quiver with terror when the rule of Jehovah is fully perceived and felt’ (THE TREASURY OF DAVID). The earth trembles or shakes before God. When the Lord Jesus comes again, earth and heaven will shake, but Christians are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken. We shall be safe! Let us serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear (Revelation 6:12–17; Hebrews 12:25–28).

God answered the prayers of Moses, Aaron and Samuel on behalf of Israel. Though God forgave Israel, he chastised them for their sins (8). Spurgeon observes, ‘He forgave the sinners, but he slew their sins.’ We must always remember that God will not let us off with our sin even though he freely forgives us when we repent. These sins will not bring us into condemnation on the day of judgment but we are chastised for them here and now. David found that pardon for sin does not mean that the consequences of sin will be removed (2 Samuel 12:9–14).

Exalt the LORD our God ... for he is holy. There is no imperfection, no sin, no flaw in our glorious God. How are we to exalt him (5,9)? We are to exalt him in our worship, in our thanksgiving, by following him in joyful obedience, and in seeking to glorify him in all that we do. Most people around us are ignorant of God and his sovereign greatness. They have no interest in glorifying the Lord nor in worshipping him. Christians must be different! **We know that God is great and glorious. Let us exalt him!**

He has done marvellous things

This psalm begins and ends in a similar manner to Psalm 96. Matthew Henry points out that this psalm is a prophecy of the kingdom of the Messiah which sets forth the glory of the Redeemer (1–3) and the joy of the redeemed (4–9). The hymn of Isaac Watts ‘Joy to the world’, which is often sung as a Christmas carol, is based on this psalm.

Oh, sing to the LORD a new song! For he has done marvellous things (1). Psalm 96 is a new song in anticipation of Christ’s coming (96:13), but Spurgeon points out, ‘Now we have a new song, because he has come, and seen and conquered’ (THE TREASURY OF DAVID). We have every reason to be overflowing with gladness and joyful praise! *Shout joyfully to the LORD all the earth; break forth in song, rejoice, and sing praises* (4–6).

What are the marvellous things that Christ has wrought by his mighty power (*his right hand and his holy arm*)? We could think of his marvellous work of creation (Colossians 1:14–16) but it is his work of salvation to which we are directed (2–3): *The LORD has made known his salvation*. He triumphed over Satan, sin and death at Calvary to redeem sinners. He has wonderfully worked in the lives of his people through the Holy Spirit to bring about a glorious transformation (2 Corinthians 5:17). When he comes again, he will raise and transform our poor, weak bodies to make them like his own resurrection body (Philippians 3:20–21). He will then usher in a new heaven and a new earth (Isaiah 65:17; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1). Creation which now groans through the effects of the fall of Adam, will then rejoice because of its deliverance from bondage (7–8; cp. Romans 8:20–22).

Oh, sing to the LORD a new song! For he has done marvellous things.
Are you singing joyful songs of thanksgiving and praise to God?

*Joy to the world! the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare him room,
And heaven and nature sing.*

(Isaac Watts)

It is good to give thanks to the LORD

The title of this psalm is ‘A Song for the Sabbath day’. The Lord’s Day should be used as an opportunity to reflect on the greatness and goodness of God and to worship and praise him. Notice that the Sabbath praise was given to God in the morning and at night (2). If our churches have morning and evening services each Sunday, we should be at both services unless we have very good reason to be absent.

It is good to give thanks to the LORD (1). Why?

- Because of his loving-kindness and faithfulness towards us (2).
- Because of the greatness of his works (4–5). We stand in awe at his power in creating the universe, but his work in redemption to save sinners is even more amazing.
- Because his thoughts are beyond our understanding (5). **When we are baffled and troubled, we know that God is wisely and lovingly working out his purposes for good in our lives (Romans 8:28).**
- For victory over our enemies and for deliverance from those who would harm us (7–11). *A horn* (10) is a symbol of strength. The words, ‘*my desire*’ (11) are not in the Hebrew and would have been better left out. They were inserted by the translators, hence the italics in the text. The Hebrew word in verse 11 translated ‘*enemies*’ is not used anywhere else in the Bible. It indicates those who look at us with an ‘evil eye’ to harm us. We will stare them out, we will outlive them!
- Because God will make us flourish and we *shall still bear fruit in old age* (12–14). We can bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives (Galatians 5:22–23) until the day we die.
- Because God is just in all of his dealings with us (15).

*Sweet is the work, my God, my King,
To praise thy name, give thanks and sing;
To show thy love by morning light,
And talk of all thy truth at night.*

(This hymn of Isaac Watts is based on Psalm 92)

The LORD reigns

This is the first of a cluster of psalms which proclaim the glorious truth that *the LORD reigns* (1; Psalm 95:3; 96:10; 97:1; 98:6; 99:1). Spurgeon calls this psalm, ‘The Psalm of Omnipotent Sovereignty’. (THE TREASURY OF DAVID). Our King *is clothed with majesty ... he has girded himself with strength*. Spurgeon also observes, ‘Whatever opposition may arise, his throne is unmoved; he has reigned, does reign, and will reign for ever.’

There is great comfort for the Christian in the fact of God’s sovereignty. We belong to God who is living, who is personal and who reigns over the whole universe. He is eternal and his throne is everlasting (1–3). He reigns above turbulent nature, above the turmoil and strife of this restless world (4). We can rely on all of God’s promises because his *testimonies are very sure*. He cannot lie because holiness adorns his house (5). Spurgeon writes, ‘The whole psalm is most impressive, and is calculated to comfort the distressed, confirm the timorous, and assist the devout. O thou who art so great and gracious a King, reign over us for ever!’ **Always remember that *the LORD reigns* and you will be strengthened and encouraged to trust in him even through the darkest trials.**

*The Lord Jehovah reigns;
His throne is built on high,
The garments he assumes
Are light and majesty;
His glories shine with beams so bright,
No mortal eye can bear the sight.*

*And will this sovereign King
Of glory condescend?
And will he write his name
My Father and my Friend?
I love his name, I love his word,
Join all my powers to praise the Lord.*

(Isaac Watts)

Rejoice in the LORD, you righteous

This psalm begins and ends with a call to rejoice. We should rejoice because:

- God is absolutely sovereign and his reign is one of righteousness and justice.(1–2).
- God is awesome power and majesty and he will destroy all of his enemies (3–5).
- The sovereignty of God is a source of real encouragement when we pass through difficult times. *He preserves the souls of his saints* and he delivers us from evil (10).

Let all be put to shame who serve carved images, who boast of idols 7). Idols are deaf, dumb, blind and useless and those who worship them violate the third commandment (Exodus 20:4–6). *Worship him, all you gods* is quoted in Hebrews 1:6 where God calls on all the angels of God to worship his Son at his coming into the world).

Where is the evidence that we love the Lord? If we love him, we will hate evil (10). Spurgeon points out that ‘we cannot love God without hating that which he hates’ (THE TREASURY OF DAVID). We may pass through darkness but we will harvest the light and gladness which God has sown for us (11). Is it any wonder that we should *rejoice in the LORD* and give thanks to him (12)?

Let us rejoice in the greatness of God and in his goodness to us. Let us face the future with confidence in the almighty, sovereign God who will never fail us nor forsake us.

*We expect a bright tomorrow,
All will be well;
Faith can sing through days of sorrow,
All, all is well:
On our Father’s love relying,
Jesus every need supplying,
Or in living or in dying,
All must be well.*

(Mary Peters)

Proclaim the good news of his salvation from day to day

The devil has deceived millions into believing that to worship and serve the Lord will somehow make us miserable. The psalms that we are reading and on which we are meditating show that there could be nothing further from the truth. The note of overflowing joy is sounded again and again. Some people are so in love with their sin that they cannot imagine any happiness without it. *Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness!* (9). True holiness is beautiful, wonderful and it brings great joy.

This psalm was written by David when the ark of the covenant was brought back into Jerusalem; it is repeated in 1 Chronicles 16:23–33. We are again called upon to *sing to the LORD* but this is also a great missionary psalm which encourages us to spread the message of the gospel throughout the world. The tragedy of Israel of old was that with few exceptions, they had little desire to:

- *Proclaim the good news of his salvation* (2). God has chosen us and made us his own special people that we *may proclaim the praises of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light* (1 Peter 2:9).
- *Declare his glory among the nations, his wonders among all peoples* (3). The proclamation of the good news of his salvation glorifies God.
- Proclaim the greatness of God and the futility of idols (4–6). *The LORD is great and greatly to be praised.*
- *Say among the nations, 'The LORD reigns'* (10).
- Proclaim the Lord as the righteous Judge who will come to judge all people (10,13).

When did you last share the good news of God's sovereign greatness and power, and his salvation with someone who is not a Christian?

O LORD God, to whom vengeance belongs

We were reminded yesterday of the sovereignty of God (Psalm 93) and here God is presented as the sovereign Judge of all the earth (2). The psalm opens with an appeal to God to punish the wicked who oppress his people: *'O LORD God, to whom vengeance belongs — O God, to whom vengeance belongs, shine forth! Rise up, O Judge of the earth; render punishment to the proud'* (1–2). The very idea of God as a God of vengeance is repugnant to many people who imagine that they are wiser than God's word. They are muddled in their thinking and confuse vengeance with personal vindictiveness, spite and malice. God's vengeance comes from his passion for righteousness and justice. What kind of God would turn a blind eye to the atrocities of the wicked (3–6)? Sinners are foolish to think that God does not see them. He created us and our senses; he not only sees us, but he also knows what we are thinking (7–11)!

The cry of the psalmist for divine vengeance is echoed by the martyred people of God in heaven (Revelation 6:10). What are we to do when oppressed or unfairly treated? We must not seek personal revenge, but commit our cause to the Lord as the psalmist does here (see Romans 12:19).

Roman Emperor Julian did not throw Christians to the lions but he relentlessly persecuted the church by depriving Christians of their jobs in government service. He refused to allow the Christian instruction of the young and robbed churches of their possessions. At the same time, he vigorously promoted paganism. Lebanus, a scoffer, once asked a Christian, 'What is your carpenter's Son doing?' The Christian replied, 'He is making a coffin for Julian the tyrant.' Julian was killed in battle soon afterwards (AD 363) and brought home in a coffin! — *'O LORD God, to whom vengeance belongs ...'*

Your comforts delight my soul

The man whom God ‘instructs’ (the Hebrew word has the idea of discipline or chastisement) is blessed (12). Chastening is painful but necessary. *No chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it* (Hebrews 12:11). The Lord disciplines us because he loves us and he will never cast us off (14; Hebrews 12:5–11). He afflicts us to bring us back to himself (Psalm 119:67,71).

*He may chasten and correct
But he never can neglect;
May in faithfulness reprove,
But he ne'er can cease to love.*

God chastens us and also tests us in trial and conflict. The psalmist asks, ‘*Who will rise up for me against the evildoers? Who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity?*’ (16). He then answers his own question, ‘*Unless the LORD had been my help, my soul would soon have settled in silence*’ (the silence of death; 17). He reminded himself of the greatness, goodness and justice of God and he knew that God would bring him through his trials (18,22–23).

Are you beset by fears and anxious thoughts? There is a wonderful promise in verse 19: *In the multitude of my anxieties within me, your comforts delight my soul*. The comforts of God bring delight to the anxious soul! Where are these comforts to be found? They are found in the word of God (Romans 15:4) and through fellowship with him. Spurgeon comments, ‘Let us turn away from the mournful contemplation of the oppression of man and the present predominance of the wicked, to that sanctuary of pure rest which is found in the God of all comfort’ (THE TREASURY OF DAVID).

How is it with you? Your heavenly Father knows all about your fears and your needs (Matthew 6:25–34). Turn to his word and trust in him. He will never fail you and you will know his comforts.

Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving

Psalms 95 to 100 have a common theme – joyful adoration of Jehovah as the One who reigns over his creation and as the covenant God of his people. In Psalm 95 we are encouraged to have a praising heart (1–7) and we are warned against hardening our hearts (8–11).

O come, let us sing to the LORD (1). Do you sing often of the mercies of God (Psalm 89:1)? Do you have psalms and hymns and spiritual songs on your lips? Do you make melody in your heart to the Lord (Ephesians 5:19).

How should we worship God? We should joyfully *come before his presence with thanksgiving* (2), with reverence and awe (6). True worship is exuberant but never flippant and disordered. It is not worked up by endless chorus singing or clapping of hands. We must not however, confuse reverence with the dull, cold and joyless formality which is found in some of our churches.

Why should we worship God? We worship him because he is the Rock of our salvation (1), he is our King (3), he is our Creator (5–6) and he is our Shepherd and our God (7). We are bound to him through the new covenant which has been sealed by the blood of the Lord Jesus (Hebrews 13:20).

One of the marks of God’s sheep is that they hear his voice and follow him (John 10:27). If we refuse to listen to the Lord, we will harden our hearts like the Israelites at Meribah and Massah (8; translated here, ‘*rebellion*’ and ‘*trial*’). The words of warning in verses 8 to 11 are repeated in Hebrews 3:7–11, 15; 4:3,7. When we meet for worship we should *come before his presence with thanksgiving* (2) bringing our grateful adoration and praise. ***O come, let us sing to the LORD.***