

Blessed is the man whom you choose

Spurgeon calls this psalm ‘one of the most delightful hymns in any language’. It begins with silent praise, whereas the following psalm begins with noisy exuberant praise (66:1). The Hebrew translated ‘*is awaiting*’ is the word ‘silent’ as in Psalm 62:1. The verse could be translated, ‘Praise is silent for you, O God, in Zion.’ The psalm has three sections:– The God who hears prayer (1–4); the God who answers prayer (5–8), and a harvest song (9–13). The greatness and the goodness of God shine out of the verses of this psalm and we are encouraged to praise him.

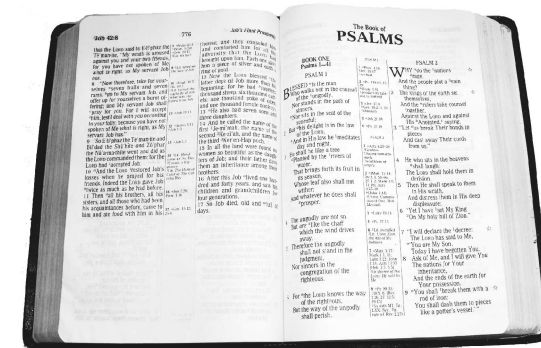
Every Christian has been chosen by God before the beginning of time (Ephesians 1:3–4; 2 Thessalonians 2:13). We read, *Blessed is the man whom you choose* (4). We are reminded of some of the blessings of being chosen by God in these verses:

- The Lord provides atonement for our sins (3). He did this by giving his beloved Son to die on the cross to save us from our sin (cp. Ephesians 1:7). This glorious provision satisfies God’s holy justice. We are no longer condemned and we are able to enjoy peace with God (cp. Romans 5:1; 8:1)
- We were once distant from God, but he causes us to approach him, drawing us to himself (4; cp. John 6:44; Ephesians 2:13).
- He satisfies us with the goodness of his house (4). This refers to the temple but in a broader sense it speaks of the church which is the temple of God, the household of God (1 Corinthians 3:16–17).
- God has awesome power to answer our prayers (5–6). We do not approach him with any doubts about his ability or willingness to answer us and nothing is too hard for him to do (Jeremiah 32:17,27).

The Lord visits the earth, watering it and enriching it to give us our food. *The river of God is full of water* (9). Think about this in the spiritual sense: The river of God’s goodness never dries up; it never suffers from drought. It flows continually and God crowns the year with his goodness (11). **The psalm began with silent praise but it ends with joyful singing. Let us praise our bountiful God.**

PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God’s holy Word simply explained and applied



November 2014

Bible readings from Psalm 37 to 65

But God ...

This is another psalm concerning the enemies of the righteous and of their sure punishment by the Lord. The enemies here are those who are malicious slanderers *who sharpen their tongue like a sword and who shoot their arrows – bitter words* at the righteous person and scheme to ensnare him (3–6). Spiteful, lying words can hurt us more than any physical attack and their wounds go deep (that is why we must guard our tongues and be careful in our speech). If we seek to please God, we must not be surprised when some will speak lies and evil concerning us. There is a little statement, however, that makes all the difference! Here are our enemies with their tongues secretly shooting out poison arrows, but God sees them. Christian, when you are troubled by enemies, remember that you have a wonderful and invincible friend. *But God shall shoot at them with an arrow ... He will make them stumble over their own tongue* (7–8).

The psalm has described David's enemies and his friend. There are also onlookers who have to acknowledge the way that God has worked wonderfully for him (9). There are also the righteous who rejoice in the Lord and are encouraged to trust in him (10).

This psalm reminds us of the words of the Lord Jesus, '*Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you*' (Matthew 5:11–12).

The Lord Jesus knew what it was to be slandered and mocked with the poison arrows of wicked men as he hung in agony on the cross. (Matthew 27:27–44). He understands, sympathises and helps the struggling believer (Hebrews 4:14–16). If you have been hurt by evil-speaking or by malicious gossip remember the words, *But God ...* **The almighty, sovereign Lord is on our side if we belong to him through the Lord Jesus Christ! Let us trust in him at all times and rejoice in him.**

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Your lovingkindness is better than life

David wrote many of his great psalms when he was enduring severe trials, either as a fugitive from Saul or when in exile after his son Absalom seized the throne. Psalm 63 was probably written in the latter situation *when he was in the wilderness of Judah* (see title; he was also king at this time, 11).

The Christian life is full of great privileges. One of these is to be able to say (and mean), *'O God, you are my God.'* The almighty, sovereign, eternal, infinitely wise God is my heavenly Father. In the parched wilderness, David knew physical hunger and thirst, but he also had a great spiritual appetite. *O God, you are my God; early I will seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh longs for you in a dry and thirsty land* (1). The Lord Jesus said, *'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled'* (Matthew 5:6). David was sure that God would satisfy him; notice how he describes the state of his soul: *'My soul thirsts* (1); *my soul shall be satisfied* (5); *my soul shall follow close behind you'* (8).

We will have battles in our 'wilderness experiences' (9–11), especially with the enemy of our souls, the devil. Let us be confident like David, knowing that the Lord will bring us through victorious. *'O God, you are my God ... Because your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise you'* (1,3). The word 'lovingkindness' is also translated as 'mercy' (eg. Psalm 57:3,10; 59:10,16–17; 62:12). The Hebrew 'chesed' is a lovely word that conveys all the goodness and love which God so freely bestows upon us. David also describes it as *marvellous lovingkindness* (Psalm 17:7) and wrote that the Lord *crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies* (Psalm 103:4). Life without God is uncertain and unfulfilled because he made us for himself. To know his lovingkindness is better than life. It is abundant life, eternal life – life under the smile of God. Are you in 'the wilderness'? **Oh, remember, dear Christian, God is your God and his lovingkindness is better than life. Hallelujah!**

Do not fret

This is another acrostic psalm which tells us three times, *'Do not fret'* (1,7, 8). To fret is to worry, to be agitated within, to be vexed. How soon we fret because of evil-doers, especially when they become more daring in their wickedness. It is right that we should be deeply concerned at the rising tide of wickedness around us, but it is possible to become so obsessed with wicked people and their deeds that we turn our eyes away from the Lord. We will then fret and become depressed. What is the antidote to keep us from fretting?

1. We must enjoy daily fellowship with God:
 - *Trust in the LORD ... and do good; ... and feed on his faithfulness* (3). Look to the faithful God and you will not fret.
 - *Delight yourself also in the LORD and he shall give you the desires of your heart* (4). This is a wonderful promise, but it is important to note that when we delight ourselves in the Lord, our desires will be God-centred rather than self-centred.
 - *Commit your way to the LORD* (5). The Hebrew says 'Roll your way upon the LORD' - Your cares may be too heavy to carry. Roll all of them upon God. Trust in him for he will bring his gracious purposes to pass in your life.
 - *Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for him* (7). Be calm, be patient. God's time is the best time.
 - *Cease from anger and forsake wrath; do not fret — it only causes harm* (8).
2. We should also consider the end of the wicked. *They shall soon be cut down and cut off* by God, the righteous Judge (2, 9, 28). The day of reckoning is coming (12–13). We must always remember that God is absolutely sovereign over this world. The wicked have no future (38). **Are you agitated within? Are you fretting?** Oh, let the precious words of this psalm be impressed on your mind! Meditate on them and rejoice in them and you will soon find that fretting will give way to praise.

The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD

Another great antidote to fretting is to consider the blessings of the righteous:

- Past blessings (25). David looked back on his life and was able to say that he had *not seen the righteous man forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread*. We so often forget to look back on the Lord's past mercies and on his good and wise providence. If we do this, it should rejoice our hearts and drive away any fretting.

*His love in time past forbids me to think
He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink.
Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review *
Confirms his good pleasure to help me quite through.*

(John Newton)

- Present blessings. The righteous can enjoy a little and be more content than the wicked who has great riches (16). *The steps of a good man are ordered* (margin = 'established') *by the LORD, and he delights in his way*. The Lord keeps us when we fall and supports us with his mighty hand (23–24). Why should we fret when the Lord so wisely and lovingly guides our steps?
- Future blessings. *The meek shall inherit the earth and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace* (11, 22; cp. Matthew 5:5). We have an everlasting inheritance which is reserved for us in heaven (18; cp. 1 Peter 1:4). The Lord will never forsake us (28–29). Look at the future of the righteous as compared with that of the wicked (37–38). The Lord will help us and be our strength in time of trouble (39–40). **We have great blessings. When did you last count them? Do not fret.**

* 'Ebenezer' means, 'Stone of help' Samuel set up a stone after God had given Israel a great victory over the Philistines and called its name 'Ebenezer', saying, '*Thus far the LORD has helped us*' (1 Samuel 7:12).

Power belongs to God

Spurgeon describes Psalm 62 as the 'Only Psalm'. *He only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defence; I shall not be greatly moved* (2,6) ... *My soul, wait silently for God alone* (5). Faith in God could be described as trust and confidence in him; this psalm rings with such confidence! David was able to wait calmly for God, his soul being silent in this waiting (1,5; if you have the AV, see margin reference. The word in the Hebrew translated 'waiteth' is the word 'silent').

What are enemies when God is for us (3–5)? He is our rock and salvation, our defence, glory and refuge. Let us *trust in him at all times* (8). Men who will vanish like a vapour are foolish to rely on oppression or robbery for gain (9–10).

There is also a timely message here for Christians in the affluent western world. *If riches increase, do not set your heart on them* (10). Many thousands of Christians have been ensnared by making creature comforts and luxuries their priority, rather than seeking first God's kingdom and righteousness, rather than laying up treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19–21,33; cp. 1 Timothy 6:9). The work of God is suffering because of a lack of real devotion from Christians. There is a desperate need for workers to go into the Lord's harvest and for money to support them.

God has spoken. What is his message to us? *That power belongs to God. Also to you, O Lord, belongs mercy* (11–12). He has power to deal with all who oppose him and he has mercy for all who call upon him. **Are you trusting in our great and wonderful God?**

*Drop thy still dews of quietness,
Till all our strivings cease;
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of thy peace.*

(J.G. Whittier)

When my heart is overwhelmed

David may have written this psalm when in exile following the rebellion of Absalom. He was away from his beloved Jerusalem and the tabernacle of God where he longed to worship (it seemed like being at the other end of the world, 2). He cried out to God in prayer, encouraging himself that God had been a shelter and a strong tower to him in the past, and that he could trust in God in the present desperate situation (3–4).

You may ask, ‘What must I do *when my heart is overwhelmed*?’ (2). Like David, you should come to God with urgent prayer and in a very positive frame of mind. Look at the progress of the ‘I wills’ in this psalm – *I will cry* (2); *I will abide in your tabernacle ... I will trust* (4); *I will sing praise* (8). We are again reminded that when we make promises to God (as we are prone to do when in trouble), those vows must be kept (5,8). What should you do when your *heart is overwhelmed*? Ask the Lord to lead you to the Rock that is higher than you (2). **In Christ you are safe and secure from the raging storm!**

*O safe to the Rock that is higher than I,
My soul in its conflicts and sorrows would fly,
So sinful, so weary, thine, thine would I be,
Thou blest Rock of Ages, I'm hiding in thee!*

*Hiding in thee! Hiding in thee!
Thou blest Rock of Ages, I'm hiding in thee!*

*In the calm of the noontide, in sorrow's lone hour,
In times when the tempter casts o'er me his power;
In the tempests of life, on its wide heaving sea,
Thou blest Rock of Ages, I'm hiding in thee!*

*Hiding in thee! Hiding in thee!
Thou blest Rock of Ages, I'm hiding in thee.*

(William O. Cushing)

In you, O LORD, I hope; you will hear, O LORD my God

This penitential psalm repeats many of the thoughts found in Psalm 6, opening with the same words. David recognised that he was in dire trouble because of his sin (3–8). He reminds us that we are foolish when we sin (5). A true Christian can never be happy when sinning against the Lord. He will identify with the words of William Cowper:

*What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill.'*

The Lord chastises us when we stray from him and he is angry with us when we sin (1, 3) but he chastises us because he loves us (Hebrews 12:6). God's chastisement may take different forms. We will not feel his smile upon us and there is a loss of the sense of his presence with us (1, 21). He may bring misery to us (4, 8–9) or cause loved ones to temporarily desert us and bring enemies against us (11–12, 19). The Lord may send physical illness and weakness (cp. 1 Corinthians 11:30–32). God does all this to make us ponder our ways so that we will repent.

It is a sad reflection of the evil days in which we live that we often sin and yet we hardly feel concerned. When we sin, we must repent. What is involved in repentance?

- Confession of sin (3,18). Confession involves naming our sins. When did you last confess your sins to God? The word of God assures us that *if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness* (1 John 1:9).
- Contrition (sorrow for sin). David said, *I will be in anguish over my sin* (18). When we sin, we grieve the Holy Spirit, and we should have a godly sorrow (2 Corinthians 7:8–9).

The Lord will not turn us away if our repentance is real. We know that he is gracious and we can say, ‘*For in you, O LORD, I hope; you will hear, O Lord my God*’ (15).

I will guard my ways, lest I sin with my tongue

The similarity in thought between verse 2 and verses 13 to 14 of the previous psalm may indicate a link between them. There are occasions when we are puzzled by the Lord's dealings with us and at such times we must choose our words carefully. We must watch our conversation at all times especially when in the company of the wicked (1). If we complain or gossip we bring dishonour to the name of our Saviour. The tongue is a very unruly member of the body and with many of us, it is hard to control (see James 3:1–12). We must be determined to avoid gossip, a sin which destroys another person's reputation. We must not lie by misleading people with half-truths. David resolved to discipline his tongue and said, *'I will guard my ways, lest I sin with my tongue'* (1). If you have allowed your tongue to cause you to sin, repent of it now. There is a time to be silent but there is also a time to speak. We should not hold our peace when we can speak of good things (2).

We must not suppress our feelings when passing through a period of trial or disappointment. As David was musing (meditating) he burned within himself (3). He could no longer hold his tongue and he poured out his heart to the Lord. He prayed, *'LORD, make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am'* (4). He recognised that human life passes like a vapour (5–7,11). We do not think about our end on earth as much as we ought. It is sobering to observe the swift passing of time. How easy it is to allow ourselves to be taken up with the passing things of this world, rather than seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

He also recognised that God was chastising him for his sin (8–11). God is eternal and he is majestic in his power. **He is not silent at our tears nor deaf to our prayers (12). We do not come to the Lord in vain.**

Note. The word *'Selah'* (5,11) is mentioned 71 times in the Book of Psalms. It signifies a pause. The musicians paused and the worshippers also paused to meditate on the words that they were singing. Do you stop to think about the words of the psalms and hymns that you sing?

Through God we will do valiantly

The heading over this psalm refers to some of David's conquests which are recorded in 1 Chronicles chapter 18. C.H. Spurgeon points out that the psalm has three sections, the complaining (1–3); the gladness (4–8); the prayerful (9–12) [THE TREASURY OF DAVID]. Part of the conflict against the Edomites is recalled (2 Samuel 8:12–14). It appears that Israel had previously suffered an unexpected defeat and David acknowledged that this was because of God's displeasure with his people (1–3).

There is a vital principle here! While it is true that the devil hates and opposes the child of God, we must not attribute all of our problems to satanic attacks. David does not do that here. He sees the hand of God in his troubles. He prays, *'O God, you have cast us off; you have broken us down; you have been displeased ... You have shown your people hard things; you have made us drink the wine of confusion'* (1,3). Do you ever acknowledge that God is displeased with you when you sin and do you ask him to restore you? It is only when we recognise that God will judge us for our sin, that we will see our need to repent. When the truth of judgment is denied, as it is by many today, we should not be surprised that there is little repentance for sin.

In warfare a banner served as an encouragement and as a rallying point in battle. God has given his people a banner *that it may be displayed because of the truth* (4). This is the only place in the Hebrew Scriptures that the word translated *'truth'* appears. The word implies 'certainty'. The English Standard Version translates the word 'bow' which sounds similar in the Hebrew, but this is misleading. Truth is most important and we must know our Bibles if we are to know God's truth and be preserved from error in these confusing times. David recognised that only God can help us out of trouble and that when we trust him we will prove the promise, *Through God we will do valiantly* (11–12). **Are you discouraged and weary in the battles of the Christian life? Rely on God and take heart! Through him you will do valiantly.**

My merciful God shall come to meet me

David wrote this psalm when he was in great danger. Saul's men were watching his house and were waiting for the opportune time to kill him (see the heading over the psalm; cp. 1 Samuel 19:1–18). David did what any godly person should do in such a dreadful situation. He cried out to God, *'Deliver me from my enemies, O my God; defend me ... deliver me ... and save me'* (1–2). Our enemies may be very powerful but what a great comfort it is to be able to address the Lord as *'my God'* (1). *We are more than conquerors through him who loved us* (Romans 8:37). David reminded God that he had done nothing against Saul to deserve such treatment (3–4). His great source of encouragement lay in the almighty, sovereign power of God, the *LORD God of hosts* (5). God is merciful and powerful, our shield and our defender (8–11). The Lord laughs at the wicked in their puny attempts to oppose him (8; cp. Psalm 2:1–5). We may be weak, but God is strong and we must learn to wait on him (9).

*And when it seems no chance or change
From grief can set me free,
Hope finds its strength in helplessness,
And, patient, waits on thee.*

My merciful God shall come to meet me (10). The AV translation is, *The God of my mercy shall prevent me*. The word 'prevent' as it is used here is an old English word which conveys the idea in the Hebrew of God's coming or going before or ahead of us (cp. Psalm 21:3; 79:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:15 AV). **When we face difficult situations, let us remember that our great and glorious God goes on ahead of us and we have nothing to fear.** Jacob proved this when fearful of meeting his brother Esau, who years before had vowed to kill him. The angels of God met him, the Lord prepared the way and Esau welcomed and embraced him (Genesis 32:1 to 33:4). While David's enemies were growling and howling like dogs (6, 14–15) he was singing of the power, strength and mercy of God, who is our defence and refuge in the day of trouble (16–17).

I delight to do your will, O my God

The Book of Hebrews (10:5–7) shows that verses 6 to 8 of this psalm refer to Christ. The Greek translation of the Old Testament renders, *'My ears you have opened'* (6) as *'a body you have prepared for me.'* This is the rendering used in Hebrews 10:5. God the Father prepared a body for the Lord Jesus who was born of the virgin Mary. He came to earth as a man, and as a man he was perfectly obedient to the will of God the Father. He suffered in a most horrible pit of pain and woe to save us (2). Jesus was in the form of God and in the likeness of men *And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.* (Philippians 2:6–8). The Lord Jesus said, *'I delight to do your will, O my God'* (8). He once said to his disciples, *'My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to finish his work'* (John 4:34). The words of verse 9 are similar to those in Psalm 22:22,25 which are spoken by the Lord Jesus (Hebrews 2:12)

The believer's experience is also reflected in this psalm. We cried to the Lord from the pit and the mire of sin, and he delivered us and set our feet upon the Rock, the Lord Jesus Christ (1–2). **Is your faith being tried? Wait patiently for the Lord. He will hear you and deliver you, and he will put a new song of praise in your mouth (1–3).** *Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust, and does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies* (4). We rejoice in the Lord for his many wonderful works and for his thoughts which are towards us (5). The living God has us in his heart and in his thoughts. He will never forget us. *I am poor and needy; yet the LORD thinks upon me* (17)!

Praise and obedience go hand in hand. If we love God we will delight to obey him (6–8) though we recognise that our best obedience is far from perfect. We will also proclaim the good news of how a man can be made righteous through the sacrifice of Christ (9–11). A life of obedience to God is not without difficulty or opposition, but it is a life of rejoicing in the Lord, as we depend upon him (11–17).

You will sustain him on his sick-bed

David probably wrote this psalm during the rebellion of his son, Absalom. He was stricken with sorrow, having been toppled from his throne by his own son. To make matters worse, his trusted friend and counsellor, Ahithophel had gone over to Absalom's side (2 Samuel 15:12,31). Verse 9 is quoted with reference to the treachery of Judas in betraying Christ (John 13:18).

Blessed is he who considers the poor (1). The word *poor* could be translated 'needy'. David was in great need when he wrote this psalm. There were good men who supported him in his time of need (2 Samuel 17:27–29). We were in desperate spiritual need before we came to the Lord Jesus for salvation. We were lost, *having no hope and without God* (Ephesians 2:12). The Lord had mercy on us and saved us. Surely, if we know the love of Christ in our lives we will be concerned for those in need, especially for needy Christians (Galatians 6:10; James 2:14–17; 1 John 3:17–18). Troubles do not always come singly, and David was also sick and was slandered at this time (4–9).

The child of God is not preserved from trouble, but the Lord does preserve him in trouble. Notice the promises that the Lord gives to the believer who has shown compassion to others. *The LORD will deliver him ... preserve him ... keep him ... strengthen him ... sustain him* (1–3).

Verse 3 contains a wonderful promise to those who are sick or dying. *The LORD will strengthen him on his bed of illness. You will sustain him on his sick-bed.* Spurgeon tells the story of a dying saint who was visited by a close friend who asked him, 'How are you today?' The dying child of God replied, 'My head is resting very sweetly on three pillows – infinite power, infinite love, and infinite wisdom.' No wonder David closes the psalm with the words, *Blessed be the LORD God of Israel!*

Surely there is a reward for the righteous

The heading of this psalm informs us that it is set to 'Do not Destroy.' C.H. Spurgeon, in his commentary on the Psalms writes, 'The wicked are here judged and condemned, but over the godly the sacred "Destroy not" is solemnly pronounced.' (THE TREASURY OF DAVID). David is probably addressing judges who are perverse in their judgment. They are the *silent ones* in the face of injustice (1–2). The root cause of wickedness is not our environment; man is born with a sinful nature and he goes astray as soon as he is born; he is alienated from God from his birth (3–5). A child needs much instruction in righteousness and truth, but does not need to be taught how to lie and sin.

David prayed that God would destroy the wicked (6–9). His prayer for God to *break their teeth*, etc. is a request that the Lord will stop them speaking malice and lies. It is quite right that we should pray that God will thwart the plans of those who persecute the righteous, that he will hinder them in their evil work. David declares that *the righteous shall rejoice when he sees the vengeance* of God upon evil-doers (10). You may wonder if it is right to desire revenge for suffering inflicted on you by wicked people? A longing for justice is found in the pages of Scripture (cp. Revelation 6:9–10). We must never avenge ourselves, however, but commit our cause to God, the righteous Judge, and do good to those who mistreat us (Matthew 5:44; Romans 12:19–21). We must also pray for our enemies; if the Lord brings them to repentance and saves them, they may become our friends. Think of the apostle Paul, who was transformed by the grace of God. The bitter enemy of the church became its greatest missionary.

There will be a day of reckoning for those who refuse to repent and forsake their sin but *surely there is a reward for the righteous* (11). **The Lord gives us rewards though we owe everything to his grace and mercy. Blessed be his great name!**

God who performs all things for me

This is one of four psalms set to ‘Do Not Destroy’ (57,58,59 and 75 – see titles); it was written when David fled from Saul and was hiding in a cave. He spared the king’s life when Saul wandered into that very cave (1 Samuel 24). In verses 1 to 6 David cries out to God in prayer; he then moves on to praise God in verses 7 to 11. Spurgeon comments, ‘The hunted one takes a long breath of prayer, and when he is fully inspired, he breathes out his soul in jubilant song.’ (THE TREASURY OF DAVID). David had six hundred men with him but Saul was closing in with three thousand chosen soldiers (1 Samuel 23:13; 27:2). He was in great danger and with his soul ‘among lions’ and ‘bowed down’ (4,6). What could he do? He cried to God for mercy, exclaiming, ‘My soul trusts in you.’ He knew that God would protect him as a hen protects her chicks (1; cp. Psalm 17:8; 91:4).

What was the basis of David’s confidence in the Lord that his prayer would be heard? He was able to say, ‘I will cry out to God Most High, to God who performs all things for me’ (2). The word translated ‘performs’ means ‘to perfect’ or ‘to complete’. The same word is translated ‘perfect’ in Psalm 138:8. How wonderful to know that God will complete all his good purposes for us (cp. Philippians 1:6)! The Lord had already accomplished much for his servant and David was now confident that God would send help from heaven to save him. David trusted in God, who is great in mercy and in truth, whose promises never fail (3). He praised God in this dangerous situation and was able to say, ‘For your mercy reaches unto the heavens and your truth unto the clouds’ (10). **We can have a heart that is steadfast (7) when we are in danger, if we will trust in our great God who cannot fail. He performs all things for us. Let us praise and magnify his great name.** ‘Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be above all the earth’ (5,11).

Why are you cast down, O my soul?

In Psalms 42 and 43 the psalmist pours out his heart to God. He is in deep distress and three times he asks himself the question, ‘Why are you cast down, O my soul?’ (5,11; 43:5). Depression and distress of soul may be caused by a sense of the absence of God. The psalmist longed for God and says, ‘As the deer pants for the waterbrooks, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God’ (1–2). Do you hunger and thirst for God? Do you long to enjoy a closer walk with the Lord? If you can go day after day without seeking fellowship with God, you must be backslidden in heart.

When things appear to go wrong for us, the enemy of our souls and those who serve him are quick to taunt us and whisper, ‘Where is your God?’ (3,10). Such experiences are common in the Christian life. We may remember times of great spiritual joy in the presence of God and in fellowship with his people (4), but when those times have faded as a dream, they seem to make the present suffering the more bitter.

The psalmist did what we often fail to do when we are troubled or suffering – he encouraged himself in the Lord. He spoke to himself and asked, ‘Why are you cast down, O my soul?’ and he told himself, ‘Hope in God.’ He turned to God in prayer, saying, ‘O my God, my soul is cast down within me; therefore I will remember you ... the LORD will command his lovingkindness in the daytime’ (6–8).

Are you feeling cast down in soul? Are you spiritually depressed? Do you feel starved of spiritual refreshment? Are you longing after God as the thirsting, panting deer longs for streams of fresh water (1–2)? ‘Hope in God’ (5,11). **Hope in God who is rich in mercy and in love, who is faithful. Hope in God because he will never, never fail you.** Come now and seek his face in prayer as did the discouraged psalmist. The Lord who is full of *lovingkindness* will give you a song (8). You will yet praise him (11) and rejoice in the One who is far greater than any of your enemies. He is the sovereign, eternal God.

Hope in God

The first four verses of this psalm are addressed to God and in the fifth verse the psalmist again asks himself why he should be cast down and encourages himself to hope in God. If we seek to lead a godly life, we will almost certainly suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:12). *An ungodly nation ... the deceitful and unjust man* (1) hate and oppress the righteous person and this may cause us to feel that God has cast us off (2). The psalmist asks God, ‘*Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?*’ (2; cp. 42:9). The ‘cast off’ feeling may cast us down, but we must never rely on our feelings at such times. If you are a Christian, God will never cast you off. He will vindicate you and he will deliver you (1).

The psalmist cries to God, ‘*Oh, send out your light and your truth! Let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your tabernacle*’ (3). God’s word is the truth and the light by which we are led (Psalm 119:105; John 17:17). Notice the importance of going to the tabernacle, the dwelling-place of God. When we are cast down we must not stay away from the house of the Lord. We need more than ever to meet with God in company with fellow-believers, and to worship God together, and to hear his word.

The psalmist describes God as his ‘*exceeding joy*’ (4). **Can you honestly say that God is your *exceeding joy*?** If you have not learned to delight yourself in the Lord, you are missing so much in the Christian life and you will rarely praise him. This short psalm closes in the same manner as Psalm 42. *Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise him, the help of my countenance and my God.*

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13).

Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in you

After Doeg had slain the priests at Nob, David fled from Saul to find refuge in the Philistine city of Gath. He *was very much afraid of Achish the king of Gath* (1 Samuel 21:10–15). The Philistines knew of his military exploits and distrusted him, so David pretended to be mad to avoid coming to harm. Even those who have great faith sometimes fail because of the fear of men! It was in this situation that David wrote this psalm (see title).

He begins this and the next psalm by calling on God for mercy. He was very conscious of his enemies round about who would have swallowed him up (1); they were slandering him and plotting against him (5–6). David remembered what he should have remembered before he fled from Saul to go to Gath: *Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in you* (3). He affirmed that he had trusted in God and would praise his word (relying on God’s promises) so that he had no fear of what man could do to him (4,10–11; cp. Psalm 118:6; Hebrews 13:6). If we belong to the Lord, we too can have the same confidence as David knowing that God is for us (9; cp. Romans 8:31). When we are in a difficult situation, we may make great promises to God, if only he will deliver us. We should think very carefully before making such promises because our vows are binding (12).

We all have fears, not necessarily on account of people who may hate us, but also with anxieties about the future, our health, job security, etc. **What should we do when we are afraid?** Should we hold our head erect, whistle a happy tune and keep a stiff upper lip? No, not at all! We should turn to the Lord and say, ‘*Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in you.*’

Cast your burden on the LORD, and he shall sustain you

Have you noticed from reading the psalms how their writers enjoyed constant fellowship with God? In distress the psalmist turned to the Lord and in happier times he praised him. He walked with God, trusting in him at all times. Some commentators believe that David wrote this psalm after his son Absalom had seized the throne, and Ahithophel, his counsellor and friend, had gone over to Absalom's side (2 Samuel 15:12,31). Opposition from enemies may bring fear and distress but it is much worse if a close friend turns against us (12–14, 20–21). The Lord Jesus knew the crushing burden of such a trial when he was betrayed by Judas, a close friend and a disciple.

When we are burdened or distressed, we may well desire a way of escape, to have wings like a dove so that we could fly away and be at rest (6–7). **There is a way of escape – not from our trials or difficult circumstances, but from defeat and despair in them (1 Corinthians 10:13).** We must be like David who called on God, his prayers being frequent and fervent (16–17). What is the secret of staying afloat in trial? *Cast your burden on the LORD, and he shall sustain you; he shall never permit the righteous to be moved (22).* What are you doing with your burdens and cares? Are you casting them on the Lord? *Casting all your care upon him, for he cares for you (1 Peter 5:7).*

*O Lord, how happy should we be
If we could cast our care on thee,
If we from self could rest,
And feel at heart that One above,
In perfect wisdom, perfect love,
Is working for the best.*

(Joseph Anstice)

Our fathers have told us, what deeds you did in their days

Are you troubled that many faithful churches are struggling and weak while false religion prospers? Are you troubled that so many professing Christians are worldly in their outlook with little practical concern to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ? This psalm has something to say to us in discouraging times. It can be divided into three sections:

- Confidence (1–8). *'We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what deeds you did in their days'* (1). He remembered the favour of God towards Israel in granting them conquest over Canaan (1–3). This encouraged him to trust in God and to glory in him (4–8) **Do you know about the mighty acts of God in Bible history and in the history of the church?** Read your Bible; read church history books and you will rejoice in God and be encouraged. Speak to others (and especially the young) about the mighty deeds that God has done. Boast in him and praise him (8). You will then find yourself encouraged in difficult times.
- Complaint (9–22). The psalmist now complains to God. *'But you have cast us off and put us to shame'* (9). It seemed that God had forsaken his people for no apparent reason (17–22). *'All this has come upon us; but we have not forgotten you'* (17). Such experiences leave us baffled and bewildered but we need to learn to trust God where we cannot trace his ways with us. Verse 22 is quoted by the apostle Paul who then points out that *in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us* (Romans 8:36–37).
- Challenge (23–26). The psalmist has expressed his confidence in God in a perplexing and difficult situation and he is challenged to pray. *'Awake! Why do you sleep, O Lord? Arise! Do not cast us off for ever.'* **Does trial or trouble drive you to urgent, fervent prayer?**

My heart is overflowing with a good theme

One of the titles of this psalm is ‘A Song of Love’ and it celebrates the marriage of a king to his queen. Spurgeon says this about the psalm, ‘Some here see Solomon and Pharaoh’s daughter only – they are short-sighted; others see Solomon and Christ – they are cross-eyed; well-focussed spiritual eyes see here Jesus only.’ (THE TREASURY OF DAVID).

My heart is overflowing with a good theme; I recite my composition concerning the King; my tongue is the pen of a ready writer. This is a theme which thrills the heart of every Christian. It concerns the excellence of our King, the Lord Jesus Christ, in his might and majesty, in his beauty and purity, and in his victory over his enemies (2–9). Verses 6 and 7 are quoted in the New Testament with reference to Christ showing him to be the eternal God (Hebrews 1:8–9). We do not think enough about the beauty of our Saviour, perhaps because we have not seen him with our eyes. He is *fairer than the sons of men* (2), manly and strong, but gentle, gracious and humble (2–5). Grace is poured from his lips to forgive the repenting sinner, to comfort the sorrowing, to lift up the downcast (2; cp. Luke 4:22).

There are words to the bride (10–12) and then her splendour and beauty are described (13–15). The church is the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:25–27; Revelation 21:2,9). The psalm closes with praise to the eternal King. How amazing those words which tell us, *The King will greatly desire your beauty* (11). He has taken us poor, wretched sinners and he has cleansed us and clothed us with his righteousness at tremendous cost! The King humbled himself, coming to earth as a child of a poor family. He was despised and rejected, tortured so that his face was beaten beyond recognition, and then crucified in order to save us (Isaiah 52:14 to 53:12). Oh, what matchless love and glorious grace! He desires our beauty. How we should love him, adore him, and speak about him. When we see him, we shall be lost in wonder, love and praise as we worship him. *My heart is overflowing with a good theme. Is yours?*

Behold, God is my helper

This psalm was written after the Ziphites had betrayed David to King Saul who was seeking to kill him (1 Samuel 23:19–26). David was in a desperate situation which drove him to urgent prayer. He cried out to the Lord, ‘*Save me, O God, by your name, and vindicate me by your strength*’ (1). In asking God to save him by his name, he was pleading with him to act according to his great and glorious character (cp. Psalm 52:9). His trust was in God who is strong!

In the second section of the psalm (4–7) David was calm and confident. He proclaimed, ‘*Behold, God is my helper.*’ Matthew Henry writes, ‘If we be for him, and he be for us, we shall have such help in him, that we need not fear any power engaged against us. Though men and devils aim to be our destroyers, they shall not prevail while God is our helper.’ Spurgeon comments, ‘The vigour of faith is the death of anxiety, and the birth of security.’ David’s circumstances had not changed, but the change was in him as he rose from off his knees.

The saying, ‘Prayer changes things’ is certainly true – it changes us! Are you anxious and fearful? Have you come to the Lord in prayer? Do you really believe that he is your helper? Trust in him and you will prove the promise of Philippians 4:6–7. *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

*O what peace we often forfeit!
O what needless pain we bear!
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer.*

(Joseph M. Scriven)

The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God'

This psalm is almost a repeat of Psalm 14, except for verse 5. Spurgeon comments, 'Holy writ never repeats itself needlessly, there is good cause for a second copy of this psalm; let us read it with more profound attention than before. If our age has advanced from fourteen to fifty-three, we shall find the doctrine of this psalm more evident than in our youth.' (THE TREASURY OF DAVID).

We must never allow ourselves to be intimidated by atheists who despise us and scoff at the message of the gospel. They are fools! *The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'* (1). The Hebrew word for 'fool' ('nabal' – cp. 1 Samuel 25:25) implies stubbornness of heart rather than lack of intelligence. Notice that the words 'there is' are in italics in your Bible. This means that they are not in the Hebrew in the original manuscript. *The fool has said in his heart, 'No God.'* He refuses to acknowledge God. Anyone who professes himself to be an atheist is a fool. It is possible to pay lip-service to God's existence, but to live as if he did not exist (practical atheism). That is also folly. If you ever enter discussion with an atheist, you will generally find that he has a closed mind. He is ready to believe anything that will strengthen his atheistic beliefs, however foolish (eg. the theory of evolution). The apostle Paul said of such people, *Their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools* (Romans 1:21–22).

Why is the world in such a mess? Surely it is because most people are atheists or live like atheists (as if God did not exist) and atheism breeds corruption and wickedness (1–4). *God looks down from heaven* and sees the corruption in the world. Everyone has sinned (2–3; cp. Romans 3:10–12). If sinners call on God, they have no need to fear, but will find mercy (4–5). The Lord is for us and will destroy our enemies (5). Let us be encouraged, but never smug. **The wickedness of the people drove David to pray for their salvation (6). In these evil days let us not despair, but get down to urgent prayer.**

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble

This wonderful psalm is divided into three stanzas, each ending with the word '*Selah*' (which means 'pause' to give singers a break for breath and to give us time to meditate on the words). *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble* (1). This is our confidence in an uncertain, godless, turbulent world (2–3). The almighty, eternal, sovereign, infinitely wise God is our refuge and strength.

The *river* (4) may refer to God or to his covenant with all its wonderful promises. The church is *the city of God* (cp. Revelation 21:2,9–10) and she is made glad in the Lord. God is in the midst of his people, bringing great stability and confidence. *The LORD of hosts is with us* (5–7, 11) in every difficult situation and he will destroy every weapon that is taken up against us (8–9; cp. Isaiah 54:17). Verse 10 has a message for God's people and for their enemies. We must learn to *be still* in perplexing and difficult times, waiting patiently upon the Lord. If we do not know the Lord, we should stop and be still, considering his greatness and his claims upon us. The message to God's enemies is that it is foolish to rebel against him. *Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.*

Let the words of this great psalm sink into your heart and be impressed upon your mind. They will be a constant source of encouragement throughout your life. If you are passing through a time of testing and trouble, turn now to your great God and trust in him. You will prove him to be *a very present help* in your trouble!

*In heavenly love abiding,
No change my heart shall fear;
And safe is such confiding,
For nothing changes here:
The storm may roar without me,
My heart may low be laid;
But God is round about me,
And can I be dismayed?*

(Anna L. Waring)

Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King

The joyful theme of the exalted God is carried over from Psalm 46:10 into this psalm. *He is greatly exalted* (9). We have here a song of great joy in the sovereign, triumphant God, who is worthy of our worship. *Sing praises to God, sing praises! sing praises to our King, sing praises!* (6).

Why should we sing praises to God?

- *The LORD Most High is awesome* (2). His greatness and splendour inspire reverent fear. A sense of reverence has been lost from the worship of many evangelical churches. How sad and insulting to God!
- *He is a great King over all the earth* (2). How often do you think about the greatness and majesty of our awesome God? He is sovereign over all the nations (2,7–8).
- He will cause us to triumph and even if we have no inheritance on earth, he has a glorious inheritance in heaven for us (3–4; cp. 1 Peter 1:3–4).

God has gone up with a shout, the LORD with a sound of the trumpet (5). Some commentators believe that this verse refers to Christ's ascension. *When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive* (Ephesians 4:8). When the Lord Jesus comes again, it will also be with a shout and the sound of a trumpet (1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16).

We must *sing praises with understanding* (7). If you could see the expressionless faces in many church congregations as they sing their hymns, you would perhaps be surprised. Is it because of a lack of interest or understanding? Are minds many miles away as mouths repeat words without much thought? If we do not think about the words of the hymns that we sing in our worship we are not truly worshipping God. **Let us sing praises with understanding; it will make all the difference to our worship.**

The goodness of God endures continually

David wrote this psalm in very distressing circumstances (see title). Doeg, an Edomite shepherd who tended Saul's flocks, reported to the wicked king that the fugitive David had been given food by Ahimelech and his fellow priests at Nob. Saul ordered his guards to slay the priests, but these men refused to kill the servants of God. Doeg readily obeyed the king's command and slew eighty-five priests as well as the members of their families (1 Samuel 21:1–9; 22:6–19).

David poured out his heart with great indignation against this wicked man, confident that God would severely deal with him (1–5). The righteous would in that day rejoice at the downfall of such an evil person (6–7). Some people believe that we should unconditionally forgive those who have wronged us. Many a Christian feels guilty when he cannot forgive those who have done wicked things against him and who refuse to repent of such deeds (eg. should a believer forgive someone who has murdered a loved one and shows no remorse or repentance?). God does not expect us to do what he is not prepared to do – to forgive those who do not repent! Having said this, we must pray for those who have wronged us and always be ready to forgive them if they repent (Matthew 18:21–35). We must not grow bitter and repay evil for evil, but leave God, the righteous Judge, to vindicate us and to avenge us (Romans 12:17–19). **If we have an unforgiving spirit, our Christian lives will be blighted.**

In his distress David reminded himself, *The goodness of God endures continually* (1). If we lose sight of the Lord's goodness, we will sink in despair. We must wait on his name, for it is good (9). God's name reveals his character and to wait on his name is to trust in God who is just and merciful. When we trust in him, we will flourish like a healthy olive tree (8) and we will bear precious fruit in our lives (cp. Romans 5:3–5).

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit

The title of this psalm indicates that David wrote it after he had been confronted by the prophet Nathan following his adultery with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:1–15). He was under great conviction for his sin and he truly repented. What is the evidence of true repentance?

- A plea for mercy based on the fact of the *loving-kindness* of God and according to the multitude of his *tender mercies* (1). Think of that! God's mercy is so great that there is a multitude of tender mercies to deal with a multitude of sins.
- A desire for forgiveness and for a thorough cleansing from sin (2, 7, 9–10).
- A frank confession of sin with no excuses (3).
- A sense of the enormity of sin. It is not only against those we have wronged, but also against God (4).
- A recognition that we sin because it is our nature to sin. We were '*brought forth in iniquity*' (5).

We should be deeply troubled when we sin. Sin will destroy our testimony and it will silence our lips. When God restores the joy of our salvation our mouths are opened to teach transgressors the ways of God and to praise him (12–15). Have you lost the joy of your salvation (12)? Is it because of sin? Oh, confess that sin to God and repent of it.

The blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7,9) but there are sacrifices that God wants from you. *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart — these, O God, you will not despise* (17). There is a false gospel which is influencing many evangelicals today – the gospel of self-esteem. The answer to the needs of sinners is not self-esteem but a broken heart for sin. **When our sin breaks our heart, we will not lightly sin again.** We were thinking yesterday about the sacrifice of praise (Psalm 50:14,23) but there is also the sacrifice of a contrite heart. Such sacrifices God will not despise, but will accept according to the multitude of his tender mercies.

We have thought, O God, on your lovingkindness

In this psalm God is again joyfully praised on account of his greatness (1), his lovingkindness (9), his righteousness (10) and his everlasting care and protection (14). The angry mob at Ephesus shouted out the name of their goddess crying out, '*Great is Diana of the Ephesians!*' (Acts 19:28). Muslims today shout, 'Allah is great,' but there is only one great God – the triune God, Jehovah, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. *Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in his holy mountain* (1). Read through the words of the hymn 'How great thou art' and praise God with gratitude and joy.

Jerusalem (*Mount Zion*) was a wonderful city when this psalm was written, *beautiful in elevation ... the city of the great King* (2,8). The temple, the palaces and the strong bulwarks of the city made an impressive sight (12–13). The city was great, however, not because of her buildings, but because God was in her midst (3). We have already seen that the church is now *the city of the living God* or *Jerusalem above* (Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 12:22). We may feel weak, but in God we are strong. *The gates of Hades shall not prevail* against Christ's church (Matthew 16:18).

The psalmist had heard of the great works of God in the past, but he records that they too have seen God work mightily *in the city of our God* (8). We need to know of God's work in Bible times and in the history of the church because it will encourage us and stir us up to pray for the work of the Lord.

Are you feeling downcast? The great antidote is found in verse 9. *We have thought, O God, on your lovingkindness. Think of all of the Lord's mercies to you – his love in giving his only begotten Son to die for you, for all the blessings of this great salvation and for answers to prayer.* Rejoice that he *will never leave you nor forsake you* (Hebrews 13:5–6). *For this is God, our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to death* (14).

But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave

The psalmist calls on all the people of the world to listen to him, both rich and poor, because he had an important message for them (1–4). His message for the rich is that they are foolish to trust in their wealth which cannot save their souls. *For the redemption of their souls is costly* (6–9). We know that though redemption is freely bestowed, it was purchased not with silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18–19).

Riches may bring honour but when death comes the wealth is left to others and honour does not remain. The wise man cannot escape death any more than the fool (10). The body rots in the grave just as the corpses of animals (12,20). Some translations (eg. ESV) show verse 14 to liken death to a shepherd, herding the ungodly into the grave. Let us be encouraged with the words of verse 5. *Why should I fear in the days of evil when I am surrounded by sin? We can face the future, confident that God is with us in evil times as well as good times.*

We live in a world where there is much envy and discontent. Christians should never be envious of the ungodly with their wealth. Why is it foolish to envy those who are wealthy? Death ends all their pleasures and judgment awaits them, but we can affirm, *But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave for he shall receive me* (15). We will hear the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, *‘Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’* (Matthew 25:34). **We may be poor here on earth, but we have a precious Saviour and a priceless inheritance.**

*I would not change my blest estate
For all the world calls good or great;
And while my faith can keep her hold
I envy not the sinner’s gold.*

(Isaac Watts)

Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you

In this psalm the mighty God, the great Judge, summons all the people of the world to listen to him (1–6). Among those gathered before God are his *saints*, who are bound to him by covenant (5). Christians are frequently called *saints* (‘holy ones’) in the New Testament (eg. Acts 9:32; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 1:1).

God’s word to those who profess his name is that sacrifices and burnt offerings are not enough for him. He doesn’t need them (7–13). The Lord wants a people who will offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving and of praise, and who pay their vows to him (14). We often fall short in giving thanks and praise to God who has called us to proclaim his praises (Hebrews 13:15–16; 1 Peter 2:9).

There is here a wonderful promise for the child of God when he is in trouble. *‘Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me’* (15). If we would claim the promises of God, we must also remember to obey his commands such as found in verse 14. Have you made vows to God in the past, but have forgotten to keep those solemn promises? **You will never enjoy God’s blessing on your life if you are a promise-breaker.**

The Lord rebukes the wicked who recite his statutes and speak as though they honour his covenant. They have an outward show of religion but they hate instruction and despise the words of God (16–17). God is not deceived by their words and he sees their wicked deeds (18–20). It is foolish of them to reduce God to their puny way of thinking and to imagine that he will not judge them (21–22). Those who say, ‘That’s not my idea of God ...’ should take verse 21 to heart.

How do we glorify God? By offering praise to him and by honouring him in our conduct (23). *Whoever offers praise glorifies me; and to him who orders his conduct aright I will show the salvation of God.*