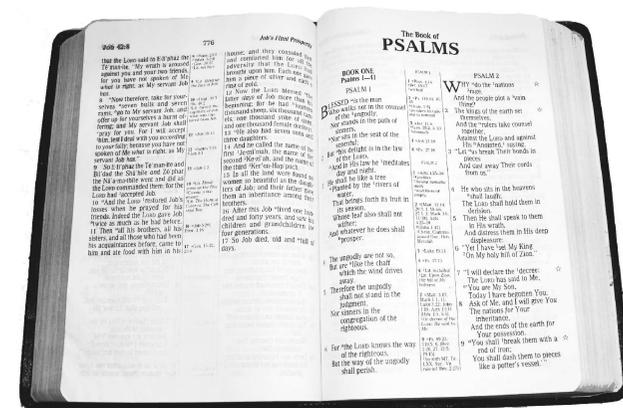


PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



December 2021

Bible readings from Acts chapters 8 to 12
Psalms 24 to 37

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| Book | Date |
|-----------------|---|
| Amos | March, April 2019 |
| Obadiah | April 2019 |
| Jonah | April 2019 |
| Micah | April 2019 |
| Nahum | August 2019 |
| Habakkuk | December 2019 |
| Zephaniah | December 2019 |
| Haggai | January 2020 |
| Zechariah | February 2020 |
| Malachi | April, May 2020 |
| Matthew | January to March, May, June 2019 |
| Mark | August to October 2015 |
| Luke | January to March, June to August 2021 |
| John | April to June 2018 |
| Acts | Feb. to April 2016, November 2021 to March 2022 |
| Romans | October to December 2015 |
| 1 Corinthians | July, August 2016 |
| 2 Corinthians | November, December 2016 |
| Galatians | February, March 2017 |
| Ephesians | May, June 2017 |
| Philippians | September 2017 |
| Colossians | October 2017 |
| 1 Thessalonians | November, December 2017 |
| 2 Thessalonians | January, February 2018 |
| 1 Timothy | September 2018 |
| 2 Timothy | November 2018 |
| Titus | November 2018 |
| Philemon | August 2019 |
| Hebrews | October, November 2019 |
| James | January 2020 |
| 1 & 2 Peter | March, May 2020 |
| 1, 2 & 3 John | July 2020 |
| Jude | October 2020 |
| Revelation | October, November 2020 |

Bible Reading Notes Index 2013 to 2021

| Book | Date |
|-----------------|---|
| Genesis | March to June 2021 |
| Exodus | August to October 2021; |
| Leviticus | May, June 2020 |
| Numbers | August, September 2014 |
| Deuteronomy | January to March 2015 |
| Joshua | January, February 2016 |
| Judges | May, June 2016 |
| Ruth | June 2016 |
| 1 Samuel | September, October 2016 |
| 2 Samuel | January, February 2017 |
| 1 Kings | March, April, May 2017 |
| 2 Kings | July, August 2017 |
| 1 Chronicles | July 2019 |
| 2 Chronicles | August, September 2019 |
| Ezra | December 2019 |
| Nehemiah | March, April 2020; |
| Esther | April 2020 |
| Job | February, March 2018 |
| Psalms 1–2 | December 2018 |
| Psalms 3 to 23 | January, November, December 2019 , |
| Psalms 24 to 37 | Dec 2021 |
| Psalms 38 to 66 | 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 107–134 | June, August, Sept, November, December 2017 |
| Psalms 135 –150 | June, September, November, December 2018 |
| Proverbs | January, February 2013 |
| Ecclesiastes | January 2018 |
| Song of Solomon | September 2020 |
| Isaiah | August, Sept, Nov, Dec 2020, January 2021 |
| Jeremiah | May to August 2015 |
| Lamentations | October 2015 |
| Ezekiel | July to September 2018 |
| Daniel | October 2018 |
| Hosea | December 2018 |
| Joel | December 2018 |

1 DECEMBER

Acts 8:26–33

Do you understand what you are reading?

The Lord was greatly blessing the ministry of Philip in Samaria as multitudes heard his preaching and saw great miracles performed (5–8). The Apostles in Jerusalem heard of this great gospel work and sent Peter and John to Samaria. On their return they preached the gospel in many Samaritan villages (14–25).

An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, telling him to leave Samaria and go south to a desert region between Jerusalem and Gaza. The evangelist obeyed God though it may have seemed strange to him to leave behind a thriving gospel work to go to a desert. The Lord was working however in the heart of a eunuch who held very high office in the royal court of Ethiopia, and was in charge of all the royal treasury (26).

Despite his influence and his wealth, the man was dissatisfied and was a seeker of truth. He was probably a Jewish proselyte; he had been to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home. While in Jerusalem, he had purchased a scroll with the prophecy of Isaiah. He was in his chariot reading Isaiah chapter 53 which prophesies the death of Christ in great detail. Philip went up to the man at the prompting of the Holy Spirit and asked him, *‘Do you understand what you are reading?’* He replied, *‘How can I unless someone guides me?’* (30–31).

We need to understand the teaching of the Bible. We cannot be saved without understanding what the Bible teaches about salvation. It is a great mistake to avoid the plain preaching of the Gospel because people will not understand it. Of course they won't (1 Corinthians 1:18–25)! **When the Holy Spirit works in the life of a sinner, he works in his mind as well as in his heart.** You will have noticed the emphasis on preaching Scripture in the ministry of the apostles and of Stephen and Philip. Many people go astray because they do not seek to understand the teaching of Scripture, or they attend a church where the Bible is not plainly and diligently taught.

Philip ... preached Jesus to him

Philip *preached Jesus* to the eunuch beginning with this passage of Scripture (35). The suffering servant of whom Isaiah prophesied is the holy Son of God. He was despised, rejected, humiliated and slain on the cross to save sinners. Philip would have told him how the other Old Testament Scriptures had prophesied of the coming of Jesus, but the Jews had failed to understand that the promised Messiah was to suffer and to die in order to save sinners. Many religious people still make the same mistake today; they may believe that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but they have no idea that he is God who took human flesh, that he lived a perfect life, that the reason he came into the world was to save sinners, that he really did rise bodily from the grave or that he is coming again in great power and glory. They do not understand that we can know God personally.

Philip would have told the man about Christ's resurrection and ascension into heaven and that he needed to repent of his sin and to trust in the Lord Jesus to save him. As they were passing a pool of water, the man asked Philip to baptize him. After confessing his faith in Christ he was baptized and went on his way rejoicing (36–39). Philip was miraculously transported by the Holy Spirit to Azotus and *he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea* (40).



Churches were being formed throughout Israel and Samaria and the gospel was now being taken by a Gentile to Ethiopia. The church was thriving, despite persecution. **When God works, who can hinder him?**

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* (23). The Lord keeps us when we fall and supports us with his mighty hand (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).

Do not fret

This is another acrostic psalm (see also Psalms 25 and 34) 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 (12–20). *They shall soon be cut down and cut off* by God, the righteous Judge (2, 9, 28). Verses 16 to 24 contrast the ways of the righteous and the wicked.

We must always remember that God is absolutely sovereign over this world. **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.

Lord, what do you want me to do?

Saul of Tarsus was relentless in his mission to destroy the church (1–2). He had seen and supported those who had killed Stephen and *made havoc of the church* (7:58 to 8:3), but the more he persecuted Christians, the greater the growth of the church. Christians were now to be found in Damascus, about one hundred and fifty miles to the north of Jerusalem and Saul was determined that they should be arrested and brought back to Jerusalem for imprisonment. He was however, kicking against a guilty conscience (5). He reckoned without God’s sovereign and gracious purposes, and the arch-persecutor of the church became its great missionary. Saul and his party approached Damascus at midday when he was suddenly blinded by a dazzling light from heaven (3; 22:6). The risen Lord Jesus spoke to him, saying, ‘*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?*’ (4). Those who persecute believers persecute Christ.

God blinded Saul and humbled him so that he was now trembling with fear and astonishment. He asked two questions:

- ‘*Who are you, Lord?*’ (5). The risen Saviour answered him, ‘*I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.*’ Saul had been kicking against a guilty conscience. He was to discover that Jesus is the holy Son of God (20), spoken of in the Old Testament Scriptures, who died to save sinners. We cannot be saved unless we know who Jesus is, and why he came into the world.
- ‘*Lord, what do you want me to do?*’ (6; cp. 22:10). **An evidence of conversion to Christ is submission to his lordship in our lives.** Jesus said that he was to go into Damascus where he would be told what he must do. Saul was to write some years afterwards, *We make it our aim ... to be well pleasing to him* (2 Corinthians 5:9). Those who love the Lord Jesus will keep his commandments (John 14:15). Have you submitted to the lordship of Christ in your life?

The blind persecutor was led into Damascus and did not eat or drink for three days (8–9).

He is a chosen vessel of mine

Ananias is not to be confused with the man who was punished by God for lying to the Holy Spirit (5:3). Paul later described him as ‘*a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews*’ who dwelt at Damascus (22:12). Ananias should be an encouragement to us all. He was not an apostle or a church leader but he was wonderfully used by God to contact Saul and to bring him into fellowship with the believers in Damascus.

The Lord came to Ananias in a vision, telling him that he was to go to a certain house and inquire for ‘*one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying.*’ Saul had been told in a vision that he would be coming to lay hands on him so that he might receive his sight. Ananias voiced his concern to the Lord, for he was aware that this man had come to Damascus on a mission of persecution (11–14). The Lord said to him, ‘*Go, for he is a chosen vessel of mine to bear my name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name’s sake*’ (15–16). Ananias found Saul and laid hands on him so that he would receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. He then baptised him and the new Christian spent some days with the disciples at Damascus (19).

Saul was *a chosen vessel* of God and was to be used more than any other man in the history of the church to proclaim the gospel and to plant churches. All Christians were chosen by God to salvation before he made the world (Ephesians 1:4–6; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2). Some mistakenly believe that the doctrine of election is a hindrance to evangelism. That is not so! This wonderful doctrine is taught in the Bible and it is a great encouragement for us to preach the gospel. **No one is too hard for God to save. He may have many chosen vessels among those who presently appear to be indifferent or opposed to the gospel.** Let us pray with faith and expectation and persevere in our work for the Lord!

How precious is your lovingkindness, O God!

This psalm begins with a description of a wicked man (1–4) and then extols the lovingkindness of God (5–9). David then prays for those who know God and for himself (10–12).

What a grim picture we have of the wicked man! *There is no fear of God before his eyes* (1; Romans 3:18). There are two Hebrew words translated ‘fear’. One word means ‘reverence’, the other means ‘dread’. The word used in verse 1 means ‘dread’. The sinner acts wickedly because he has no dread of God or of divine judgment. He flatters himself in his own eyes and deceives himself with his own wicked words. Rather than doing good, he evens plans wickedness while at rest on his bed (1–4). The Lord by grace can change transform the vilest sinner. Praise God for the message of the gospel!

We must beware of thinking so much about the wickedness of the world around us that we hardly give time to think about God and to praise him for his goodness. The mercy, faithfulness and righteousness of God reach to the highest heights and his judgments are unfathomable (5–6). Though David was surrounded by the wicked, he was so overwhelmed with the experience of God’s goodness to him that he exclaimed, ‘*How precious is your lovingkindness, O God!*’ (7). The Hebrew word ‘chesed’ is translated ‘*mercy*’ (5) and ‘*lovingkindness*’ (7.10); Some translations render ‘chesed’ as ‘*steadfast love*’ (eg. ESV). God’s precious steadfast love will never fail and it encourages us to trust in him at all times. The Lord cares for us and abundantly satisfies us. He gives us life and direction (8–9).

David then prays that God will continue his lovingkindness to those who know him. He prays that the Lord will deliver him from the attacks of the wicked and expresses his confidence that the wicked will be overthrown (10–12). Dare we murmur or complain when God has given us so many blessings? **Let us always remember to praise God for his lovingkindness!**

How precious is your lovingkindness, O God!

Let the LORD be magnified

David almost certainly wrote Psalm 35 while fleeing from Saul. He had not committed any crime, but was the victim of Saul's burning jealousy. The sentiments of verse 12 are reflected for instance in 1 Samuel 24:15,17. Spurgeon points out that the psalm consists of complaint, prayer, and a promise to praise God for the expected deliverance. These three elements are repeated in the three sections of the psalm – verses 1 to 10; 11 to 18; and 19 to 28.

David had been wronged and his life was threatened by Saul and his allies (7). He had done good, but was repaid with evil (12) and those who were against him had no reason to be his enemies (19). What was he to do? He came to the righteous Judge of all the earth in earnest prayer. He cried out, *'Plead my cause, O LORD, with those who strive with me. Fight against those who fight against me'* (1). The picture then changes to that of a battlefield when David calls upon God to fight for him (2–4). He prayed that *the angel of the LORD* would pursue his enemies (5–6). He returns to the law-court in verses 11 and 23. False witnesses had risen against him and he called on God to vindicate him. He prays for the confusion of his enemies and for the well-being of those who support him (26–27) before closing on a note of praise (28).

I wonder if this psalm raises a question in your mind? Should we not only pray for people, but also against them as did David? Didn't the Lord Jesus tell us to pray for our enemies (Matthew 5:44)? It is important to remember that David really loved Saul and twice spared his life (1 Samuel 24:18; 26:5–25). When Saul was later killed in battle against the Philistines, David was grief-stricken (2 Samuel 1:23–24). He did love his enemies. We have every right to pray against the enemies of the gospel. May God silence the atheist and the scoffer. May he bring down the occult practitioners and Satanists. May he destroy their evil works. May the Lord stop the mouths of false teachers. May God be pleased to bring many of these people to repentance and to faith in Christ. When our enemies become our brothers, we will then say, *'Let the LORD be magnified'* (27).

But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles

The Jews at Damascus were amazed to find Saul preaching in their synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. They knew that he had come to persecute the infant church in their city but he was now proving to them that Jesus is the Christ (the promised Messiah). They turned on him and plotted to kill him but the Christians at Damascus helped him to escape in a large basket over the city wall at night (20–25).

Saul returned to Jerusalem, but the Christians treated him with great suspicion. They could not bring themselves to believe that he had really come to faith in Christ. *But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles* (27). We can take verse 27 in two ways: either Saul testified of the Lord's dealings with him on the Damascus road and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus, or it was Barnabas who related these things to the apostles. Saul began to preach fearlessly in Jerusalem but the Hellenists (Greek-speaking Jews) attempted to kill him. Some of the men escorted him to Caesarea from where he was sent to Tarsus for his own safety (29–30).

Five things are mentioned concerning the churches (31):

- They had peace. The persecution eased and the believers were also at peace between themselves.
- They were edified (built up). We cannot be edified where peace between ourselves and love are absent (cp. Romans 14:19; 1 Corinthians 8:1).
- They walked in the fear of the Lord.
- They walked in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.
- They were multiplied.

Barnabas was a great encouragement to Saul (his name means 'son of encouragement'). He was prepared to trust Saul when others shunned him because of fear. Barnabas encouraged the new convert who was soon integrated into the life and witness of the church. **The ministry of encouragement is essential if a church is to be built up. Let us at all times seek to encourage one another.**

Full of good works and charitable deeds

This chapter closes with an account of Peter's ministry in Lydda and Joppa. The Christian communities in these places may have been established as a result of the ministry of Philip who preached in all the cities between Azotus and Caesarea (Lydda and Joppa are situated between these two towns, 8:40; see map in notes in page 4). The early Christians were known as 'saints' or 'disciples' (13,19,32,38,41). The word 'saint' means 'sanctified one'. A saint is one who has been set apart to God. Every Christian is a saint and is expected to be holy and to lead a life which pleases God (1 Corinthians 1:2; 1 Peter 1:15–16).

Peter visited the Christians in Lydda where there was a man named Aeneas who had been paralysed and bedridden for eight years. Peter said to him, 'Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed' (34). He was instantly healed and many turned to the Lord (34–35). Does the Lord Jesus heal today? The answer is that he does heal, but miraculous physical healing is the exception rather than the rule. The ability to heal the sick through the power of God was one of *the signs of an apostle* (2 Corinthians 12:12).

When the disciples at Joppa heard that the apostle Peter was in Lydda, they urgently sent for him after the death of one of their number. She was a well-loved sister in Christ, *full of good works and charitable deeds* (36). Her practical Christianity and compassion for those in need enhanced the witness of the church at Joppa (39). The raising of Dorcas from the dead also resulted in many believing on the Lord (42). Peter then *stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner* (43).

We may not see supernatural signs and wonders such as were wrought in the time of the apostles but we can be *full of good works and charitable deeds*. **Good works do not save us but they are an essential evidence of true faith (James 2:14–26) and of the love of God in our lives (1 John 3:17–18)**. Jesus said, 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven' (Matthew 5:16).

Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good

This is an acrostic psalm (see notes on Psalm 25). The title shows that David wrote it when he was fleeing from Saul; it was a time when he was in great danger (see 1 Samuel 21:10–15). Despite his distressing circumstances David could not refrain from praising God. *I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth* (1). He calls on us, 'Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together' (3). If we do not worship God in the company of his people, we miss great blessings.

Why was David so full of rejoicing? He knew by experience the reality of the Lord's hand upon his life. *I sought the LORD and he heard me, and delivered me ... This poor man cried out and the LORD heard him, and saved him* (4–6). God does look after his own. *The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear him, and delivers them* (7). How wonderful! That was a vital lesson that Elisha's servant had to learn (2 Kings 6:15–17).

At this time in David's life he had a rough band of four hundred followers (1 Samuel 22:1–2). He had to teach them some vital lessons concerning *the fear of the LORD* (11–22). Some of them became mighty men of self-sacrificing faith and courage (2 Samuel 23:8–39). *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom* (Psalm 111:10); it brings stability and leads to godliness in a person's life (11–14).

We will always have trials on this earthly pilgrimage, but the Lord watches over us with great concern and he hears our cry. He is near to us to deliver and to keep us (15–22). **This psalm is full of precious promises. Write them down and meditate upon them.** *Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in him!* (8).

*Through all the changing scenes of life
In trouble and in joy,
The praises of my God shall still
My heart and tongue employ.*

(Nahum Tate and Nicholas Brady)

Praise from the upright is beautiful

The righteous are called upon to praise the Lord (1–3) and then we are told why we should praise him (4–19). The psalm concludes with an expression of confidence in God and a prayer for his mercy (20–22).

Praise should be a way of life for the child of God. *Praise from the upright is beautiful* (1). We must be reverent in our worship, but reverence does not exclude joy (1,3). Spurgeon comments, ‘To rejoice in temporal comforts is dangerous, to rejoice in self is foolish, to rejoice in sin is fatal, but to rejoice in God is heavenly’ (THE TREASURY OF DAVID). It is beautiful thing to hear someone who is suffering trouble or tragedy singing of their trust in the Lord.

The Lord has chosen us that we may proclaim his praises (or virtues – 1 Peter 2:9). What are the virtues of God? Let us consider some of them which are described in our reading today:

- His word is right and *all his work is done in truth. He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the goodness of the LORD* (4–5). God is faithful and just; let us proclaim his goodness.
- God is the almighty Creator. He is awe-inspiring in his sovereign power (6–9). He created all things by his word (6; see Genesis 1:3,4,9, etc. – *Then God said ...*). Those who believe in the theory of evolution rob God of his glory.
- His sovereign purposes cannot be overthrown. *The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; ... The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations* (10–11).

Let us praise God that he looks from heaven and sees all the inhabitants of the earth, but he looks upon those who fear him with tender concern (13–15, 18–19). When the psalms were written, horses were highly valued on the battlefield just as tanks are today (16–17), but our trust should always be in the Lord. God is glorious in all his ways – *he is our help and our shield*. Let us trust in him at all times, rejoice in him and hope in him (20–22). **When did you last praise God with all your heart?** *Praise from the upright is beautiful* (1).

A memorial before God

The New Testament introduces us to several centurions (Roman army officers commanding one hundred soldiers) and they are all spoken of favourably. One was commended by the Lord Jesus for his great faith (Matthew 8:5–13), another glorified God as he saw the Lord Jesus die (Luke 23:47), and the centurion Julius *treated Paul kindly* (27:3).

Cornelius, a centurion based in Roman army garrison in Caesarea, was a devout, God-fearing man, prayerful and generous (2). It would seem that he was seeking a greater knowledge of God. The Lord sent an angel to Cornelius in a vision to tell him, ‘*Your prayers and alms have come up for a memorial before God*’ (4). God does take note of our prayers and kindness. Salvation is not by works such as giving generously to the poor and needy, nor by religious devotions, but we must not despise these things unless they are motivated by a proud, hypocritical heart. We should recognise that some who do these things are sincere seekers after God. We must be patient with them and show them the way of salvation from the Scriptures and encourage them to turn from their sin to Christ. **Cornelius was not yet a Christian but the Lord heard his prayers and approved of his compassion to the needy.** God told him to send messengers to Peter in Joppa who would tell him what he must do (5–8).

The Lord was already preparing Peter through a vision, to take the message of salvation to Cornelius. He was praying on the roof-top of Simon’s house about the sixth hour (noon) when he became very hungry. *He fell into a trance and saw heaven opened and saw all kinds of animals* descending in a great sheet. When a voice commanded him to kill and eat, he was not willing to do so. The voice rebuked him telling him that what God had cleansed, he must not call common. The Lord repeated these words twice more before the sheet with its animals was taken from his sight (9–16). The Lord Jesus had commanded that the gospel should be preached to all nations (1:8). Peter had not come to terms with preaching the gospel to the Gentiles whom the Jews considered to be unclean.

We are all present before God

As he was wondering what the vision could mean the Holy Spirit told Peter that three men were seeking him and that he should go with them for he had sent them (17–20). Peter asked them the reason for their journey and they told him about Cornelius and his vision (21–22). Peter invited them in and the three men stayed the night. Peter returned with them to Caesarea (some 25 miles, 40 kilometres) away, accompanied by six of the Christians from Joppa (23; cp. 11:12).

Cornelius had gathered together his relatives and close friends to hear Peter but he was still spiritually ignorant and he tried to worship the apostle. Peter told him, ‘*Stand up, I myself am also a man*’ (24–26). Peter then told Cornelius and his company about God’s dealings with him. Many early Jewish Christians still held to their old prejudices concerning Gentiles (non-Jews) considering them to be ‘unclean’. God had told Peter in a vision to eat unclean animals and he got the message. ‘*God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean*’ (28). Before receiving his vision, he would have considered Romans to be unclean and he would never have entered the house of Cornelius (28–29). The centurion then told Peter of his own vision and of the angel’s instructions to send for him (30–32).

Cornelius and his company were eager and expectant hearers of God’s Word. He acknowledged that they were in the presence of God saying, ‘*We are all present before God to hear all the things commanded you by God*’ (33). These words are full of instruction for us. **Do we come to worship each Lord’s Day remembering that we are all present before God?** Such an attitude will help bring a sense of awe and adoration into our worship and it will cause us to expect God to speak to us through the preaching of his Word.

*Jesus, where’er thy people meet,
There they behold thy mercy seat:
Where’er they seek thee, thou art found,
And every place is hallowed ground.* (William Cowper)

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven

There are many blessings in the Christian life, but surely the greatest blessing is that of God’s forgiveness. *Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven* (1) Without forgiveness of sin we would be under God’s condemnation, separated from him, without peace or hope. Paul quotes the first two verses of this psalm in Romans 4:6–8. David uses three words to describe his sin: ‘*transgression*’ is the breaking of God’s law; ‘*sin*’ is falling short of God’s standards, and ‘*iniquity*’ means crookedness. There are also three words which describe God’s dealing with sin:

- ‘*Forgiven*’ means that sin is taken away, as a burden lifted from our shoulders. *As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us* (Psalm 103:12).
- ‘*Covered*’ indicates that sin is hidden from God’s sight. We cannot hide anything from God, but when God forgives us, he also covers our sins. The devil loves to remind us of our sins but they are covered; he has no right to accuse us (Romans 8:33–34).
- ‘*Impute*’ means that sin is not put to our account – the debt is paid! One wonderful aspect of the gospel message is the truth that our sins were imputed to Christ and his righteousness has been put to our account (Romans 4:6, 22–25; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

David says that when he *kept silent*, (not confessing his sin), he was miserable (3–4). To receive God’s forgiveness, we must acknowledge our sin and confess it to him (5). It is foolish to refuse to confess our sin and continue to be miserable, when we could know forgiveness from God (5–6). David could say, ‘*You are my hiding place; ... you shall surround me with songs of deliverance*’ (7).

Look at God’s precious promises, ‘*I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with my eye*’ (8). *He who trusts in the LORD. mercy* (‘steadfast love’) *shall surround him* (10).

Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous (11) — ***Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven.***

My times are in your hand

A believer may swing from confident trust in the Lord (1–8) to distress and despair (9–13), and then come back to confidence and rejoicing in God (14–24). Have you noticed that David often told the Lord that he trusted in him (1,6,14; cp. Psalm 25:2,20)? When did you last tell the Lord that you trusted in him? The words of verse 5 ‘*into your hand I commit my spirit*’ were uttered by the Lord Jesus when he died on the cross (Luke 23:46). We can trust in the Lord in every situation in which we find ourselves, however dark our circumstances. David had a confidence in God because he knew him in a personal way.

David then describes the distress that he faced (9–13). He was in such trouble that it brought havoc to him physically and emotionally. He was slandered and like a broken vessel as some of his enemies sought to kill him. He was in a terrifying situation but he affirmed his faith in God: ‘*But as for me, I trust in you, O LORD; I say, “You are my God”*’ (14). We are able to say with David, ‘*My times are in your hand*’ (15). **We change and our circumstances change but God never changes! He is in complete control of all our times, good and bad. Doesn’t that encourage you?**

The Lord has laid up great goodness for those who fear him (19) and he is with us to protect us from our enemies (20). We should never forget the *marvellous kindness* of the Lord (21). We are sometimes far too quick to complain to God, but he still hears our prayers (22). The Lord will never fail us and he is gracious to us; this should strengthen us and encourage us to love him who means so much to us. ‘*Oh, love the LORD, all you his saints. ... Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all you who hope in the LORD*’ (23–24).

*My times are in thy hand,
Why should I doubt or fear?
A Father’s hand will never cause
His child a needless tear.*

(William F. Lloyd)

God shows no partiality

Cornelius was a devout, God-fearing man, but he needed to hear the gospel and that is why the Lord sent Peter to him. God had been preparing this Gentile to receive the gospel and had been working in his heart long before the apostle came to him. Peter began his message to Cornelius and those with him by telling them that *God shows no partiality*. God accepts from every nation those who fear him and work righteousness (34–35). **Prejudice is a hindrance to the work of the gospel. We must never despise anyone because they are of a different race or station in life to ourselves.** We are all sinners and we all need to be saved. The gospel is for all classes of people and for all races. *God shows no partiality*. Let us seek to reach all kinds of people. God may already be working in the lives of those who seem unlikely to be saved, preparing them to receive the message of the gospel.

Salvation is not restricted to certain races. Verse 35 could be misunderstood to teach that salvation can be obtained through good works but that is not so. The Bible plainly teaches that works of righteousness are not the basis of our acceptance with God (Titus 3:4–5). We are accepted by God only through the work of Christ in redemption (Ephesians 1:6–7).

Peter’s preaching was Christ-centred. He preached Jesus as ‘*Lord of all*’ (36) and reminded his hearers of the power and compassion of Christ. It would appear from verse 37 that they knew about Jesus and about the baptism of John. Peter told them that Jesus had been crucified but had risen from the dead. He had been seen by many witnesses chosen by God, including Peter himself, who had eaten and drank with him after his resurrection (38–41). The risen Lord had commanded the apostles to preach to the people and to testify that Jesus had been *ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead*. The prophets had spoken of him, *that through his name, whoever believes (trusts) in him will receive remission of sins* (42–43). Have you trusted in the Lord Jesus to save you?

The Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word

As Peter was preaching, *the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word* (44). We have already seen that God gives his Holy Spirit to all who trust in Christ and repent of their sin. Cornelius and his friends received a similar experience to that of the apostles at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them (44–48; cp. 11:15). They spoke with tongues and magnified God and this was an evidence that they had received the Holy Spirit. Not all Christians in the early church spoke in tongues and this experience was not the only evidence of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:30). The gift of tongues has now ceased (1 Corinthians 13:8) and any attempt to replicate the experiences recorded in the book of Acts fall far short of genuine languages. Moreover, the Holy Spirit fell upon all without exception in such visitations (44).

Why did God send the Holy Spirit in such a spectacular manner to the household of Cornelius? The Jewish Christians who were with Peter were *'of the circumcision'*. They were rigid in their ideas and could not accept that Gentiles would be saved. They *were astonished ... because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also* (45). They could not forbid baptism to these Gentiles (47–48). This outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the vision that Peter had received earlier, prepared the way for Peter and the church to accept Gentiles into their fellowship.

The Holy Spirit still works when the Word of God is preached. He convicts sinners, opening their minds and hearts to understand and to receive the message of the gospel. He brings life to sinners so that they repent of their sin. He also works in the hearts of believers when they hear the Word preached, bringing comfort, encouragement and rebuke. Let us thank God for the ministry of the Holy Spirit and look to him to work among us.

Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning

The heading of this psalm informs us that it was 'a song at the dedication of the house of David'. Bible commentators differ on their understanding of this, but many take it to refer to the time that David purchased the threshing floor of Ornan where he built an altar to the Lord and where the temple was to be built. The theme of praise is repeated throughout the psalm (1–3, 4, 9, 12). David begins the psalm with praise to God for delivering him from his enemies (1–2). David calls upon God's people, his saints, to praise and give thanks to the Lord (4).

For the believer God's *anger is but for a moment, his favour is for life* (for a lifetime); *weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning* (5). When we are troubled we must remember that weeping will not last! There will be joy in the morning! God will turn our weeping into dancing and he will clothe us with gladness (11).

David recalls a time when he had become complacent and self-reliant. *Now in my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved* (6). David owed this prosperity to God's favour and he was troubled when God hid his face from him (7). At such times God seems remote from us and that should trouble us enough to make us earnestly seek him and cry to him (2–3, 8–10). David asked the Lord what profit there could be from his death. The dust of the grave does not praise God or testify to his faithfulness (9).

If we are silent and hardly praise God in our lives, could it be that we do not think enough of his blessings day by day? Let us praise him with songs of thanksgiving (12).

*I'll praise my Maker while I've breath,
And when my voice is lost in death,
Praise shall employ my nobler powers
My days of praise shall ne'er be past,
While life, and thought, and being last,
Or immortality endures.* (Isaac Watts, based on Psalm 146)

The voice of the LORD

This psalm opens with a threefold call to *give unto the LORD* (1–2). The ‘*mighty ones*’ are most likely the angels. People are often slow to glorify God, especially rulers. Christians must be different! Let us *worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness* (2).

Storms bring fear and terror to those caught up in them (cp. Jonah 1:4–5; Mark 4:37–38). The believer should however, be like David, who saw God in the storm, and in it heard his voice. The expression, ‘*The voice of the LORD*’ is found seven times in verses 3 to 9. The God of glory thunders during the storm and his voice is *powerful* and *full of majesty* (3–4). He shatters the huge cedars of Lebanon and shakes the wilderness (5–8). God spoke and the world was created (Genesis chapter 1). The Lord Jesus spoke and the storm was stilled (Mark 4:39) and the dead raised (John 11:43–44). When Jesus comes again all the dead will hear his voice and be raised (John 5:28–29). When he speaks sinners are brought out of spiritual death to receive eternal life (cp. John 5:25; Ephesians 2:5).

*He speaks, and, listening to his voice
New life the dead receive,
The mournful, broken hearts rejoice,
The humble poor believe.* (Charles Wesley)

The Lord is King over every storm whether in nature or in spiritual conflict. He *will give strength to his people and bless them with peace* (10–11). The story is told of an elderly lady who was asked during an earthquake, ‘Are you afraid?’ She replied, ‘No, it rather thrills me to think that I have a God who can shake the world!’ We need not fear in the darkest storm if we will but learn to recognise the voice of the Lord. *The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty* (4). How should we worship our glorious, almighty God? *Give unto the LORD the glory due to his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness* (2, 9).

God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life

The opening verses of this chapter describe the great tension that came into the church with the admission of the Gentiles. The devil does not need to attack the church from outside if he can tear it apart from within. On his return to Jerusalem, Peter was called to give account and to defend himself against *those of the circumcision who contended with him* (2). These people were Jewish Christians who had difficulties in accepting that Gentiles could be saved. They were angry that he had kept company with Gentiles and that he had eaten with them. He had wisely taken some of the same persuasion to Caesarea who would be able to confirm that the Holy Spirit had indeed fallen upon Gentiles (10:45).

Peter told them about his vision and of all that had happened at the house of Cornelius (4–17). He reminded them that God had given them the Holy Spirit when they had believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and that he had done the same for these Gentiles. He dared not withstand God by turning them away (17). Peter’s critics were silenced when they heard these things and they glorified God, saying, ‘*Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life*’ (18). God is very gracious in giving us precious gifts. Though he commands all men to repent (Acts 17:30), repentance is a gift which he sovereignly bestows (cp. 5:31). **We would never have repented of our sin but for the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, bringing us to new birth.** The gift of repentance causes us to loathe our sin, to turn from it, to be committed to Christ and to obey God’s holy Word. There can be no genuine conversion to Christ without repentance.

Christian, think of all that God has done in your life. Thank him and praise him for his great grace, and for the priceless gifts of repentance and of the Holy Spirit.

When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad

The persecution which arose with the martyrdom of Stephen had scattered believers as far as Antioch in Syria, some 300 miles (480 kilometres) to the north of Jerusalem and to Cyprus (19). Some of these Christians were Greek-speaking Jews who had restricted their preaching to fellow-Jews. When they came to Antioch however, they also preached the Lord Jesus to *the Hellenists* (Greek-speaking Jews; 20). We read that *the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord* (21). *‘The hand of the Lord’* is an expression that speaks of God’s almighty power (4:29–30; 13:11; cp. Exodus 3:20; 1 Peter 5:6). Persecution led to blessing!

When the church of Jerusalem heard of this great work of God in Antioch, they sent Barnabas to visit this new and thriving Christian church. *When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord* (23). We may begin well, but the most important thing for us is that we continue with the Lord and finish well. When the hand of the Lord is with us, it can be seen in our lives and in the life of the church. There is a zeal for the Lord and a great desire to please him each day. **Do others see the grace of God in your life?**

Barnabas is described as *‘a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith’* (24). His ministry of encouragement is again described in these verses. He went to Tarsus to seek Saul, bringing him back to Antioch. They began to teach in Antioch, reaching a great many people with their message. *The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch* (26). There was a ‘Christ-likeness’ about them that was apparent even to unbelievers.

Agabus came with other prophets from Jerusalem and warned of coming famine. The grace of God was seen in the response of the believers at Antioch who sent Barnabas and Saul with gifts for the Christians of Judea. Notice their generosity, each giving *according to his ability* (27–30).

To you I will cry, O LORD my rock

In this psalm we have David’s prayer (1–5) and then his praise (6–9).

- David’s prayer. He is again found crying out to God for help in this psalm (1–3). *To you I will cry, O LORD my Rock: do not be silent to me* (1). David pleaded with God not to be silent to him. Spurgeon aptly comments, ‘When God seems to close his ear, we must not therefore close our mouths’ (THE TREASURY OF DAVID). The apparent silence and inactivity of God is a very trying experience for the child of God. We naturally want to see God answering our prayers now, but we need to be patient and to persevere, however dark our circumstances (Hebrews 10:36). David’s prayers were cries from his heart. When did you last ‘cry’ to the Lord in your prayers? David knew that the ungodly would have a terrible end and he prayed, *‘Do not take* (Hebrew = ‘drag’) *me away with the wicked’* (3). David prayed that the Lord would righteously judge them and punish them (4–5).

- David’s praise. The psalm closes on a note of rejoicing and praise to God for hearing his prayers (6–7), and with a prayer for God’s people (8–9). He encouraged himself in the fact that God is our strength to help us in every difficult situation and that he protects us. *The LORD is my strength and my shield* (7). We are painfully aware of our own weakness and vulnerability but our God is strong (cp. 1 John 4:4). David then prayed for the Lord’s people (8–9). The Lord Jesus prays for us and this should greatly encourage us (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25–27).

We must never be so preoccupied with our own troubles that we forget to pray for our fellow believers and for the spread of the gospel (8–9). Is your faith being tried? Come to the Lord in prayer, trust in him, and your cry will soon become a song of praise.

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)

Teach me your way, O LORD

David now calls upon God to hear his prayer and he expresses his own response to the voice of God. *When you said, 'Seek my face,' my heart said to you, 'Your face, LORD, I will seek'* (7–8). To seek the face of God is to come to him in prayer. God hides his face from us when he chastises us for our sin. When this happens, we do not enjoy his presence or peace in our lives. David dreaded the hiding of God's face from him (9). Do you?

There are ups and downs in every believer's life. David had earlier expressed his trust and confidence in God but now he calls on the Lord to answer him in a time of trouble (7–9). God has helped us in the past and he will take care of us in the future. Even when those nearest to us forsake us, the Lord will take care of us (9–10). David prayed, *'Teach me your way, O LORD, and lead me in a smooth path because of my enemies'* (11). He wanted to know God's way and leading in his troubles.

Most of us pass through times of discouragement or despair. What is the antidote to these things? We must never lose sight of the goodness of the Lord. David writes, *'I would have lost heart, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living'* (13). We will not lose heart if we have faith to see the goodness of the Lord. He is kind and he lovingly cares for us. He will strengthen our hearts if we wait upon him in childlike faith (and that involves patience; 13–14). **Let us praise him and pray with expectation.**

*When doubts and fears arise,
Teach me thy way!
When storms o'erspread the skies,
Teach me thy way!
Shine through the cloud and rain,
Through sorrow, toil and pain;
Make thou my pathway plain;
Teach me thy way!*

(B. Mansell Ramsey)

But constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church

This chapter records two incidents involving an angel of the Lord. Herod (Agrippa 1) the king was an evil man. He was a grandson of Herod the Great, who had sought to murder the Lord Jesus after the visit of the wise men. Agrippa 1 was also a nephew of Antipas, who killed John the Baptist. He killed James, the brother of John, and seeing that this pleased the Jews, he also had Peter arrested with a view to execution once the Passover was finished (2–4).

The church in Jerusalem was under siege and Peter was in prison. Herod may have been told of Peter's miraculous escape from prison some years earlier (Acts 5:17–24). Four squads of four soldiers were assigned to guard Peter round the clock. He was chained to two soldiers and another two were guarding the prison doors (4–6). Humanly speaking, Peter was in an impossible situation and execution seemed certain. *But constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church* (5). The health of any church is measured by its prayer meeting. If you have no interest in this vital meeting of your church, you despise a precious opportunity to meet with God's people to pray.

An angel of the Lord came to the prison the night before Herod intended to deal with Peter. The angel roused the sleeping apostle and he was miraculously released from his chains and from prison (6–11). Peter went to the house of Mary, mother of John Mark, where a prayer meeting was in progress. The praying Christians could not at first bring themselves to believe that their prayers had been so wonderfully answered (12–17). **Do you come to God in prayer expecting him to answer you or are you astonished when he does?**

Why did the Lord bring about a miraculous release for Peter but not for James? We do not know. We must always bow to God's sovereign purposes. He knows what is best for us and for his church. If we die unexpectedly, we know that for the Christian, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). James went on ahead of Peter to be with his precious Saviour.

An angel of the Lord struck him

The people of Tyre and Sidon, who depended on Herod for supplies of grain, had fallen foul of his anger. They sued for peace and Herod set a day for their delegation to appear before him. The king, resplendent in his royal robes delivered a speech and the people, seeking to gain his favour, kept shouting, ‘*The voice of a god and not of a man!*’ (20–22). Herod did nothing to prevent this blasphemous adulation. *An angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died* (23). The Jewish historian, Josephus, confirms that Herod was struck with an excruciatingly painful disease from which he died in August AD 44. This was four months after he had killed James. No one who opposes God and his church will escape judgment. *But the word of God grew and multiplied* (24).

Angels are a terror to the wicked (cp. 2 Kings 19:35) but their ministry is a great comfort to the child of God (11; cp. Psalms 34:7; 91:11). God created angels before he created Adam. They are spirit beings, invisible to the human eye except when God chooses to allow us to see them. They have immense strength (Psalm 103:20). They are *ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation* (Hebrews 1:14). *The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear him, and delivers them* (Psalm 34:7). Peter found this to be true in his own experience when he was rescued from prison (11:5–10). *The angel of the LORD fed and encouraged the prophet Elijah when he fled from wicked Jezebel* (1 Kings 19:1–8).

The Bible does not teach that each person has a single guardian angel but we do know that each child of God is watched over by many, many angels. *He shall give his angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways* (Psalm 91:11). Angels are present with the believer when he dies. The angels carried Lazarus to Abraham’s bosom (Luke 16:22) and they will gather up God’s people to meet the Lord Jesus at his second coming (Matthew 24:30–31). **Christian, rejoice in your priceless privileges and be encouraged. The Lord will never forsake you (Hebrews 13:5) and his angels watch over you.**

One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek

This is a lovely psalm which will be a greater blessing to us if we read it several times and meditate on its teaching (this principle, of course, applies whenever we read God’s Word). David expresses his wholehearted trust in the Lord (1–3), his supreme desire (4–6), his urgent prayer (7–12) and his confidence in the goodness of God (13–14).

The believer can know the peace of God in the strongest conflict and say, ‘*The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? [The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*’ (1). David had known God’s deliverance in the past (2) and this gave him confidence for the future (3; cp. Romans 8:37). Verse 2 should be in the past tense as in the NKJV, rather than the present tense as in the ESV. Are you tormented by fear? Christian, let the words of this psalm be fixed in your mind and impressed on your heart. The Lord will never fail you, but you must trust in him if you would enjoy his peace.

What is your supreme desire? David could write, ‘*One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple*’ (4). David wanted to be in the presence of God to behold his beauty, thinking on his perfection and greatness. This gave him confidence in times of trouble and led him to praise God (5–6). Do we long to be in God’s house each Lord’s Day to worship the Lord and to hear his Word?? Do we long for heaven, where we will see the Lord Jesus in his beauty, where we will gaze and gaze upon him with awe and wonder?

If we are not enjoying fellowship with the Lord, we will soon find ourselves seeking our joy and pleasure in the passing things of this world. If we are not delighting ourselves in him, it is an evidence of coldness of heart. If we delight ourselves in the Lord, he will give us the desires of our heart (Psalm 37:4). **How do you delight yourself in the Lord?**

Vindicate me, O LORD ... Examine me, O LORD

One of the most difficult trials for a Christian to suffer is that of being misrepresented or slandered. We may know that our motives and desires are right and also our hearts, but we are still slandered. What should we do in such circumstances?

- We must ask the Lord to vindicate us for he is righteous. David prayed, '*Vindicate me, O LORD*' (1). It may appear from a superficial reading of this psalm that David was being very smug and self-righteous (eg. verses 4–6). That was not the case. He prayed for God to vindicate him in the face of slander and opposition (1). We must never seek personal revenge but commit our cause to the Lord as David did on this occasion (cp. Romans 12:19).
- David prayed, '*Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my mind and my heart*' (2). We have to recognise that our hearts are still sinful and we may convince ourselves that we are right when we may be wrong. We should pray that God will examine us, prove us and try our minds and hearts and see if there is any wicked way within us (cp. Psalm 139:23–24). We must examine our own hearts. Are we able to say that we have trusted the Lord and have walked in integrity (1,11)? Have we kept God's *lovingkindness* ('steadfast love') before us and walked in his truth ('faithfulness'; (3)? Do we shun the gatherings of evil-doers to avoid partaking of their sin (4–5)?
- Christians cannot be at ease in the company of the ungodly but we cannot isolate ourselves from them (the Bible doesn't authorise us to build monasteries). We should be concerned to tell unbelievers of God's wondrous works (7). Do we love God's house and desire to worship him with his people (8)? If we are walking with God, the Lord's Day is the best day of the week because we appreciate the precious time set apart to worship him (cp. Psalm 27:4–6). **If our desires and motives are right, we can be sure that God will vindicate us and bless us when we are slandered (Matthew 5:11–12; 1 Peter 4:14).**

Who is this King of Glory? The LORD strong and mighty

Spurgeon points out in his TREASURY OF DAVID that this psalm is divided into three parts:

- The first glorifies the true God (1–2) and sings of his universal dominion.
- The second (3–6) describes the true Israel, who are able to commune with him (notice the similarity with Psalm 15).
- The third (7–10) pictures the ascent of the true Redeemer, who has opened heaven's gates for the entrance of the elect.

The psalm begins with a message for all the inhabitants of the earth. *The earth is the LORD'S* (1). The earth that we live in and walk upon, the earth that men have spoiled, is not ours. It belongs to Jehovah, the Lord, the living God. Our message for a rebellious world is that God is the almighty Creator who has sovereign right over us.

God, the Almighty Creator, is alone worthy of our worship (1–2). We are all sinners and are unclean in his sight. Who then is worthy to worship him (3–6)? The sinless Son of God, by his death on the cross, has made the way for us to be forgiven and cleansed from our sin. We are then able to *ascend into the hill of the LORD and to stand in his holy place* (3). He has gone ahead of us into heaven as our forerunner (Hebrews 6:20). He has opened heaven's gates for us.

Verses 7 to 10 point to the victory of the Lord Jesus Christ when he rose from the dead and ascended to heaven in triumph (Ephesians 4:8). He is *the LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory* (10; cp. 1 Corinthians 2:8). The Lord Jesus is not weak. He is *the LORD strong and mighty* and has conquered Satan and all evil powers (8; cp. Colossians 2:15). **Let us worship the King of glory and rejoice in his victories!**

*Who is the King of Glory, who?
The Lord who all his foes o'ercame;
The world, sin, death, and hell o'erthrew,
And Jesus is the conqueror's name.*

(Charles Wesley from his hymn . 'The earth with all her fullness own')

According to your mercy remember me

This is the first of the acrostic psalms (each verse begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet, working through that alphabet which has 22 letters). Spurgeon points out (TREASURY OF DAVID) that the psalm has prayer interspersed with meditation:

- Prayer (1–7) and meditation (8–10).
- Prayer (11) and meditation (12–15).
- Prayer (16–22).

This psalm has much to teach us from the school of prayer. When we pray, we lift up our soul to God (1). Spurgeon comments, ‘True prayer may be described as the soul rising from earth to have fellowship with heaven.’ David trusted in God and was conscious of great personal need. He had treacherous enemies who hated him with *cruel hatred* (2–3; 19) and he was conscious of his need for forgiveness on account of his own sin (7,11). He did not pretend that he had no problems but brought his needs to God in prayer.

The word, ‘remember’ appears three times in verses 6 and 7:

- David prayed ‘Remember, O LORD, your tender mercies and your lovingkindnesses, for they have been from of old.’
- He then prayed that God would not remember the sins of his youth (7). When God forgives our sins, he forgets them. Satan loves to accuse us and to rake up our past but he has no right to do so. A great promise of the new covenant is ‘Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more’ (Hebrews 8:12; 10:17; cp. Romans 8:33–34).
- He prayed, *According to your mercy remember me*. God will hear us and answer us for the sake of his goodness (7) and for the reputation of his character (‘for your name’s sake’, 11).

Christian, are you feeling low or perplexed? Are you distressed? Are you feeling the weight of remaining sin and know that you need to plead for forgiveness? **Drag your heavy soul to the throne of grace. Begin to lift it up, and it will take wings and soar up to God. He is merciful and gracious and will meet all your needs (Hebrews 4:16).**

The secret of the LORD is with those who fear him

David had prayed, ‘Show me your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me’ (4–5). He goes on to meditate on the goodness of God and he affirms that God teaches his way to the humble and that *all the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth* (9–10). If we love the Lord we will also love mercy and truth. Prayer involves trusting in the Lord (2) and waiting on him (3,5,21). To wait on the Lord is to be patient and to rest in him, trusting him to intervene for us in his good time. This requires much faith, especially when everything appears to be going wrong.

The Christian can enjoy intimate fellowship with God. *The secret of the LORD is with those who fear him, and he will show them his covenant* (14). To fear God is not to be in a state of cringing terror before him. It is to reverence him, to respect his Word and to obey his commands. The word ‘secret’ is the secret counsel which God communicates to his friends. Those who fear God and walk with him know his special friendship. We see this demonstrated throughout the Bible. The Lord revealed his secret to Noah concerning the coming of the flood to destroy the old world (Genesis 6:13–22). He told Abraham that he would destroy Sodom (Genesis 18:17–20). The Lord gave Paul and John visions of heaven and of things to come (2 Corinthians 12:2–4; Revelation 4:1). He reveals his secret to those who fear him and he shows them his covenant. Christians are bound to God in a covenant relationship through Christ. Do you delight to keep the terms of that covenant (10) – to love the Lord and to seek always to please him, to be faithful to him and to shun sinful ways?

David had many troubles (15–20) and we must realise that we are not kept from trouble and distress when we belong to the Lord. The great difference is that God is with us and he will bring us through. David said, ‘My eyes are ever toward the LORD’ (15). If we trust in the Lord, we can look to him with confidence and hope, knowing that he will never fail us. **Do you look to God in your troubles?**