

## GROUP BIBLE STUDY

The priority of any Bible study is to seek to understand what the Bible is saying to the people to whom it was first written as well as to understand it for our particular day and generation. So, the top priority is first to understand the text and then to make it meaningful and relevant. Here are some pointers to help you as you study the Bible:

### PRAY

Our preparation for any Bible study should begin and end with prayer. We need to ask God, through the help of the Holy Spirit, to guide us as we read the Bible and prepare for a study.

### ASK

In order to understand the Bible properly, we need to keep in mind six important questions:

1. **Who is speaking?** Everything in the Bible was written by men who were inspired by God. Though God inspired every writer of the Bible, sometimes the writers record words which come from the hearts of evil men. So, dealing with the question "Who is speaking?" will help us to know whether the words we are reading are words that we should obey today.
2. **Who is spoken to?** We need to realise that not every command that comes in the Bible is a command for us today. For example, the command by God to Noah to build an ark is obviously pertinent and relevant for Noah, but not for us.
3. **When is the Bible writer speaking?** In answering this question, we will need to make a distinction between those

who are living under the law and those who live under the guidelines and principles as outlined to us in the New Testament, the way of Christ. Therefore, the principles we see with regards to worship in the Old Testament have a relevance to us, but we need to read them in the light of the New Testament. It is always important to bear in mind that one part of the Bible can often help us to understand another part.

4. **What type of language is the writer using?** The languages used are usually one of two types: either literal or figurative. Sometimes both will be mixed together in one passage – for example, Jesus is spoken of as the Lamb of God, which is clearly a figurative form of speech. However, he is also described as the one who takes away the sin of the world, which is literally true for those who believe. So, Jesus was not an actual lamb, but he was the one who became the offering for our sins.

5. **What are the conditions or circumstances in which this writing is given?** If we can get to grips with the particular circumstances the writer is facing when he writes, it helps us to understand what he is saying.

6. **What is the context of the Bible passage?** Think about what has just been said and what is about to be said in the particular book of the Bible, as well as the context of the Bible passage within the whole of the Bible.

The Bible is indeed God's inspired word – it is his revelation to all mankind. So, in order for us to understand the Bible we must seek to study it properly. Only then can we "*correctly handle the word of truth*". And if we keep these six simple questions in mind as we prepare our study, we will find that we can indeed get to grips with God's word.

## PLAN

For those who are preparing and leading a study, the following steps should prove helpful:

1. Try to break the passage into parts or sections so that you can clearly divide up the passage you are looking at.
2. Think about what you don't understand in the passage and therefore what others might not understand as well. What parts do you need to gain more background and information about? Be ready to deal with puzzles that people will ask you about. So, for example, when studying John 3, people might ask 'What is the kingdom of God?', 'What is a Pharisee?'. These are obvious things that people might need to have some more information about.
3. Having broken the passage up into sections, we then come to thinking about questions. You can use the questions that are in this book. However, you may want to write your own, which is of course perfectly all right. Questions can be one of three types.
  - A **Understanding.** The first type of question should be aimed at trying to draw out our understanding of what the passage is saying.
  - B **Significance.** Only once we have begun to understand the passage can we move on to questions that try to highlight the significance of the passage in the light of the particular book or letter, and of course against the backdrop of the whole Bible.
  - C **Application.** Then we move on to questions which apply to the situations we are facing today.

## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

- Do make use of clergy and commentaries and other Christians who have a maturity which you can rely upon when you are seeking to tackle Bible passages.
- It will sometimes prove helpful to have more than one translation as this will give you some fresh insights into the verses which you are focusing on.
- As we come to study the Bible we need to keep in mind that all the books of the Bible have one great theme: that is God's plan to save mankind from his sins through Jesus Christ.
- Fundamentally, make sure that whatever you do, you seek to do it to honour and glorify God.

Let us not forget::

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”  
2 Timothy 3:16-17.

## Songs for all of God's People

### Introduction

The Bible is an incredible book. Not only is it divided into two sections, the Old Testament and the New Testament, but also it contains within it a whole variety of different styles of writing from narrative history to letters to biography to law to poetry and even love songs. However, it would be a mistake to think that this selection of writings has just been thrown together. Far from it. It has been carefully selected with a particular aim in mind. The belief that the Bible is a jumbled collection of writings can easily be the mistake that some people might make when looking at the Old Testament. For some, the Old Testament is seen merely as a book of secular history but in fact this is wide of the mark. The Old Testament focuses on 'holy history'. It provides us with an account of God's saving work and words. The encounters that are recorded in it are not picked at random but rather have been carefully chosen and selected by God and his people so as to give us a revelation of who God is. What we discover as we turn the pages of the Old Testament is that it is God who selects a people. We will discover within its pages covenants made between God and his people and great opportunities of rescue taking place in times of need. We will discover both his name and his character and we will be given an account of how the people come into what is going to be a land flowing with milk and honey.

The Old Testament reveals a God who humbles and disciplines his people because he longs for them to be a holy people as he is a holy God. This same holy God sent prophets to bring the people back into line, to encourage them to walk in God's ways. Do not be surprised to discover within its pages the judgements of God as well as his promises for the future.

Within the pages of the Old Testament we discover a God who has both spoken and acted in history to reveal himself. It will also provide insight as to why God has acted in particular ways to rescue, reprimand and reform Israel. In the Psalms we will get insight as to how God speaks with his people, both collectively and individually. It will also be an eye-opening opportunity for

our own communication with God in the light of what we have discovered about God through Jesus Christ.

### Psalms

The books of Psalms, or praises as it is called in Hebrew, has always been found to bring a response in the human heart right across the ages. This marvellous book, containing 150 Psalms, has time and again inspired people and nations in their devotion both to God and in their acts of worship. The Psalms can be seen as a book of private devotion and public worship. The Psalmists express not only their doubts and fears but also their joys and sorrows, their suffering and aspirations.

It has been used in the worship of God by both Hebrews and Christians alike down the years. In reading the Psalms we will also find that we are taken up by God's creation. Time and again the writers will give us breathtaking insights into the wonderful world that God has made and loves. Nowhere else in the whole Bible do we breathe a purer air about God's creation. We see the marvels of his work and grasp the importance of recognising that creation points to our Creator. But it is more than this, for it also looks to the inner life and speaks of people who have fallen short and who are in desperate need of God's love, mercy and forgiveness. Time and again over the centuries, the Psalms have helped Christians be led into a deeper relationship with God.

### Why should we still use the Psalms today?

Firstly, they put us in touch with Christ. Many people do not realise that we can hold in our hands in translation a copy of the very hymn book that Jesus himself used. This alone should be reason enough for us to study them as they filled the mind of our Saviour.

Secondly, there is probably no other form of prayer and praise which so exactly meets the needs of all kinds of people living at all periods of time. The Psalms seem just to have the right word for the right occasion and time and again have proved a rich source of devotional life for the individual and the nation.

Thirdly, these Psalms, with their whole range of emotions, put us in touch with God's people and the way that they worshipped

their God centuries before Christ came. This is important as it shows the link between the people of God before Christ and now the people of God since Christ has come.

### Hebrew Poetry

This is the main body of religious poetry in the Bible. However, anyone who glances across other books in the Old Testament will see that this is not the only place where we will find the poetic style in use. A careful study will find that a very high percentage of the Old Testament follows this particular literary style. So if we were to turn to the books of Obadiah, Nahum, Micah or much of Isaiah, we would see the poetic style very much in use. So it needs to be said clearly that the Psalms are poetry and should be read as such. However, we need to understand that the language in which they were written was Hebrew rather than English. This will mean that our approach to the poetry will have to be of a different order and of course a different understanding.

Hebrew poetry involves not rhyme or meter but the choice of words and especially what is called parallelism. In parallelism, a statement is made and then repeated in different words, or extended. This means that there is more time for the thought to sink in and more time for one aspect of the matter to be presented. It will allow the reader to see exactly what God is trying to say to his people. Sometimes the second line of the couplet is almost a straight repetition of the first, or we might it amplifies or takes up an idea in the first line and develops it or wants to emphasize maybe a negative point. To give you some examples: if we were to turn to Psalm 51 verse 3, we would find "for I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me". Then look at verse 7 "cleanse me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow". A further aspect of parallelism is the way in which the second line sometimes takes up and expands an idea that has begun in the very first line. Psalm 145 verse 18: "The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth". We see there how the second line helps to break down and give us a clearer understanding of what God is saying to his people.

This parallelism is the basic approach to Hebrew poetry. What is truly amazing is that, because the impact of the poetry is not on how it sounds, but on the ideas that are being expressed, little of its impact is being lost when it is translated from the Hebrew into English. So, as we get to grips with these Psalms during our series, try to grasp the way in which the mind of the writers is working so as to make an impact through the use of Hebrew Poetry.

### Shining a Light on the Psalms

We need to realise that though this is literature from the Bible, it is also poetic literature. We will find time and again the use of symbolism. Often we will be tempted to try and put the Psalms into some kind of historical context or situation. We may, however, find it easier to get the greatest value from them by realising that they are poetry that has stirred the hearts of its writers and readers over the last 3000 years. They were written at particular times in particular situations. However, it doesn't take long to realise that they also touch our emotions as they touched countless readers in generations past.

We need to come to the Psalms in a different way from other kinds of literature in the Bible. They are not doctrinal essays, though of course we will find them full of Christian teaching and application about our understanding of God and the way in which he works. However, it is important to remember that these Psalms were used as the songs of worship by Israel as they gathered in the Temple to worship the living God. In a sense, they were the Mission Praise of their day.

So, as in the study of all poetry, it will be important not only to grasp the facts and ideas that the writer is putting down before us, but equally to try and understand the feelings and emotions that the writer is seeking to express through the use of his words and metaphors and the atmosphere which he seeks to create through the pattern that is there before us in each of them. By doing this, we will begin to experience and understand the feelings and thoughts of the original writer and grasp something of what God is trying to say to us through their experience as they express it in the words before us.

## The Writers

At the head of the list of the writers of the Psalms stands David. He was not only the shepherd, he was the poet king and 73 Psalms have been linked to him. The Psalms are divided into five books and they can be broken down as follows: Book 1 – Psalms 1-41 – the oldest. Book 2 – Psalm 42-72 – an ecclesiastical section. Book 3 – Psalm 73-89 – these will include a section of Psalms by Asaph. Book 4 – Psalms 90-106 and they have been linked to Moses. Book 5 – Psalms 107-150 and these are mainly anonymous. So as we cast our eye over all 150 Psalms, we have to recognise that these are words that have been inspired by God and show us the great spiritual wealth of the Old Testament people. The Christian church has inherited from the Jewish nation a great spiritual heritage of their grasp and understanding of God as he has revealed himself through their songs of worship.

## A Home Group Approach to the Psalms

As we read the selected number of Psalms which we will study this term, we will find it easy to identify with them and the situations that the writers were facing. Often the writers will give us an insight into a particular issue or an aspect of God's character. But we need to realise that they were not primarily written for group discussion. There will be plenty to talk about, particularly if we are drawing on certain themes; we may find it a little less easy to do a verse by verse or line by line analysis. What may well be important for us both individually and as a group as a whole, is to allow the Psalmist's hopes, fears, joys and sorrows to touch the way we think and feel about any particular situation that we are encountering. It would also be good if, as a group, you have periods of silence, maybe at the end of the study, where you have the opportunity to meditate and reflect on what you have been learning and allow the words of the Psalm to sink deep into your heart. However, my chief hope and aim for each of the groups is that you will find it a time of studying afresh the word of God and allowing yourself the opportunity to hear his voice and to give you the privilege of responding to his message.

## Psalm 73 - I almost stumbled

### Introduction

When we read the Bible, we are constantly reminded that God rewards the righteous and will punish those who are disobedient and evil. However, the question hits us with fresh power when we look at the difference between theory and practice. It is all too easy to look around our world today and believe that those who are disobedient and who are rebels against God seem to prosper and do well. Constantly, in our newspapers, we read of those who run the multi-corporations exploiting the poor and the needy. All too often on our televisions as we watch Eastenders and Coronation Street, it appears that the most disreputable characters prosper whereas those who are honest and upright suffer. When we go to the funeral of a Christian and we see those who have ignored God stand at the gate, looking fit and healthy, we truly wonder "Where is the goodness of God?"

Psalm 73 comes as a helpful reminder of how we should face up to this perplexing and difficult issue, which we constantly face in life. Those who seek to live rightly before God do suffer and face injustice in this world. Baroness Cox rightly reminded us, when she spoke to us here at Moulton, of how the church in many parts of the world is facing persecution and suffering. We know only too well that Christians today are still martyred for their faith and yet this hardly makes a newspaper headline. We might well be asking "Why doesn't God answer our prayers?"

Psalm 73 is a Psalm by Asaph (he is believed to be the founder of the Temple choir) (see Ezra 2:41, 1 Chronicles 6:39 and 1 Chronicles 15:17). This Psalm raises before us one of the most difficult questions in the Bible: "The problem of holding together a belief in a sovereign God and his love for us with what we see around us". The picture painted by the Psalmist is that the people who do not appear to follow God or love him and honour his word prosper and find that all their troubles disappear like the morning mist. Psalm 73 contrasts this with the people of God who find that theirs is a life of trouble, strife, pain and suffering and, at every corner when they make the effort to be obedient, nothing seems to work out for them. Life, in all honesty, feels unfair.

This is a striking and contemporary theme which echoes in our own day and generation. All of us have, at some stage, experienced the question and the issues that this Psalmist writes about. We look around and ask the question "Why, Lord?" As is typical with many Psalmists, we find that the writer does not cover up his own true feelings. However, at the same time, he allows God to broaden his perspective, to help him gain a bigger picture and more importantly to see God in his true light. All this helps the Psalmist to see not only God's people but also himself in the light of eternity. As we explore this Psalm together it will be important for us not only to reflect on his feelings and thoughts but also to examine how we feel about this issue as we engage in God's word.

The Psalm can be broken down into five sections.

#### 1. Previous doubts being recalled (1-3)

The Psalm opens with a traditional affirmation of faith "Surely God is good to Israel". In a sense, this sets out the objective of the Psalmist as he writes on this great theme of how the ungodly appear to flourish in this world where the godly seem to suffer. It reminds us also that this Psalm is being written in a retrospective manner.

The positive confession of v1 now brings about a negative admission in vv2-3. We are told of the experience of the Psalmist and how he almost slipped in his walk before God. It is at this point that the main issue of the Psalm comes to the surface. As the Psalmist looks around the world, he is provoked to envy. As he sees those who have violated God's law, he sees in their experience prosperity, well-being and good health. So the question comes to us with fresh power: how can we believe that God is good if the wicked seem to prosper.

#### 2. The Facts Stated (4-12)

In this next section, the Psalmist gives us a commentary on how the wicked have prospered. In all that he says, he is trying to make a forceful argument to enable us to respond to his dilemma. We are told simply: (1) the wicked died peacefully (2) their

strength is firm (3) they don't know life's troubles (4) they accumulate a mass of possessions. All this leads the Psalmist to believe that the wicked have gained everything and seem to lack nothing. In v9 we are even told that these people are prepared to speak against God himself. This section comes to a conclusion as the Psalmist tells us of the arrogance of this group of people. They doubt the very knowledge of God, the fact that he is even aware of what they are doing.

Some of these ideas and thoughts we can see in our own day and generation, not just amongst those who are materially wealthy, but often amongst those who hold high academic office.

#### 3. The Problem Described (13-17)

The Psalmist clearly was tempted to doubt God as he reflected on the wicked and their apparent success in this world. Clearly the question of integrity is there before him. However the verse upon which the whole Psalm turns is verse 17, it is here that he enters God's sanctuary and meditates upon the ultimate state of the wicked. "Till I entered the sanctuary of God, then I understood their final destiny". We see at once that the complaint begun in v3 is now brought under the spotlight of God. If the Psalmist is to follow the outward evidence that is before his eyes, he would turn away from God and from his people. We see that to reject God's people is to reject God. What we glimpse at this moment is the eye of faith that sees beyond the world immediately before us into the light of eternity and God's dealings with the world. God has opened the eyes of those who were blind so as to see the reality of our world. As the Psalmist enters God's sanctuary, here in the context of the temple and worship, we find that God speaks. What we are given here is a glimpse of what will happen on the final day. It is like reading the very last page of a novel. Suddenly everything begins to make sense.

#### 4. God's Ways (18-25)

In vv18-20, the Psalmist now sees clearly that the wicked cannot flout God and escape. With the revelation of God in his mind, the Psalmist understands the end to which the wicked will come. What he has discovered is that he is not slipping. The slippery place will be for the wicked. What we learn here is that their

destruction will happen in a moment. The details of their destruction should not concern us at this stage, rather we should see that this is God working his judgement out on our world. The message is clear: death will reveal the true condition of those who hold themselves up against God. We need to remind ourselves constantly that it is God who will have the last word. This rightly reminds us that the place where we can understand our world is where the Bible is being taught faithfully to God's people.

It is at this stage, however, in vv21 and following, that we discover that the revelation God has given now cuts into the heart of the Psalmist. He sees the foolishness of his own thinking. He begins to grasp, as the Apostle Paul said generations later, the foolishness of the wisdom of this world (1 Corinthians 1:20). We realise that God's ways are not ours. Also in this Psalm and at this point we glimpse God's grace. The Lord does not treat us as we deserve but according to his mercy and his love. In these verses we find God's hand to guide us, his wisdom to lead us and we have the knowledge that there is one in heaven who cares for us and loves us. So in vv21-25 we have discovered that the Psalmist is aware of his own life with God and the great difference which that makes between himself and those who do not know God.

##### 5. A conclusion (26-28)

The Psalm now comes to a close with a summary of the Psalmist's thinking. Regardless of how good people look, regardless of their health, power or success, all will perish apart from those who put their trust in God. We rightly need to be reminded that the Lord is the Lord of life. Is it not encouraging that we read in v28, that "as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge, I will tell of all your deeds". Since God has the last word, it is right to put our trust in him.

When we look back over the whole Psalm, we see that a dark mood has an impact of closing our minds and colouring our judgement on all of life. Even at this level, Psalm 73 sets us a healthy example: first, the Psalmist reminds us of his refusal to spread his bitterness to others (v15); secondly, by his honesty in confessing to envy (v3) and a sense of grievance (vv13-14) that came to sour his outlook. Soon the Psalmist would see how

senseless and ignorant he had been (v22) in judging everything by its present showing and by his unaided vision. The Psalmist ends with a tremendous testimony, which we could make our own.

Q1. What was Asaph's sin? Is it true that God is good to those who are pure in heart (Psalm 73:1)? What might make you doubt it and what might make you believe it? (vv2, 13, 16)

Q2. What were the effects of prosperity on the wicked in vv 6, 8, 9, 11, 12? How would you describe the Psalmist's struggles in seeing others flourish in this way?

Q3. What do we find out from the Psalmist's example in coping with feelings about seeing others flourish and prosper when we feel that God does not hear our prayers and desires (vv15-17)?

Q4. How did the Psalmist discover that he had made a big mistake? What did he come to discover with regard to those who are wicked (vv17-20) and what did he then go on to realise that God had given to him (vv23-26)?

Q5. Take a few moments to go and look again at vv21-28, realising that Asaph was tempted to covet the life of wicked. What does this passage reveal of his greatest requests and passions? If you had to help a member of the church family going through a time of doubt because of troubles in their life and the apparent success of those around them how might this Psalm help?

# Psalm 97 - God's Sovereignty

## Introduction

Living as we do in the age of elections and political parties, it is increasingly hard to grasp and understand that God is our King and that he reigns on high. Since the English Civil War, political power has passed from the king to the people. Every few years an election takes place where parties move in or out of office. The focus on democracy has had an influence on the way in which we think about God as our Lord and King. Today, many of us do not think of God as a King or as our Lord, but more as our partner. It is all too easy for us to think that we chose him to belong to us rather than he chose us to belong to him.

It is timely to remind ourselves that God purchased us by the blood of his Son. He bought our freedom from the slavery of sin so that we might become his slaves and servants. We need to recall that he brings us not only to salvation but also to the point where we will submit to his rule and reign. The Lord Jesus, when he began his ministry in Galilee, announced that the Kingdom of God had arrived. This was followed immediately by the call to repent and believe the Gospel (Mark 1:15). We need to see at once that Jesus didn't come to be on our side, he came to be our King.

However, to the thoughtful mind, the reign of God as our King is very perplexing. As we look around us, we often see disorder, misery and wrong-doing in our world. It leaves us asking the question: "Is God really in charge? Is he really the King?" It is with this in mind that the Psalmist writes to remind us that the Lord does indeed reign. It is encouraging to note that we can take refuge in God's love from our own sin and trouble. So it is a happy reminder that, even though evil may appear to triumph, God still reigns and rules in our world.

The sovereignty of God involves three key areas: (1) his supreme power; (2) his rightful authority; and (3) the exercise of this power and authority in the life of the church and the world.

Psalm 97 breaks easily into two sections. The first section is a confession about the Lord's reign (vv1-6). The second section (vv7-12) is our response to this great truth.

## 1. The Lord Reigns (1-6)

The Psalm opens with a grand and fantastic spectacle not only of proclaiming that the Lord reigns but that the earth should rejoice (v1). It is a very helpful corrective to counter the distorted view that many in the world have of God and the way in which the world is heading. It brings us back on track and refreshes us, giving a new vision of how God is at work. Only when we see God as he really is will we also see ourselves secure and stable under his rule.

So the Psalm opens with this assertion that the Lord reigns. This echoes earlier Psalms (93 and 96). The Psalmist reminds us that it is this God who has delivered his people from the land of Egypt. We find that in vv2-6 we have a description of what it actually will mean for God to reign. We are told, first of all, in v2 that God's face is hidden. Here we find a natural echo of the people's encounter with God when they were in the Sinai wilderness (Exodus 19:16). Secondly, God is seated on his throne as the King who rules with righteousness and justice (v2). Thirdly, God deals with those who oppose him (v3) with his judgement that consumes his enemies and routs them. We saw this very effect on the Egyptian people, when they encountered the living God at the Red Sea. However, it is salutary to remember that, if God's people become his enemies through idolatry or immorality, then the very judgement that is given to God's enemies will now be turned on his own people.

Surely, these are challenging words for the church in our own day, when we are confronted all too often by those who will oppose God and his reign and rule within our own ranks. In v4 we are told that God will show his glory through his actions but will cause the earth itself to tremble. I can hardly imagine anything as powerful as a flash of lightning that not only shows great power but also causes the earth to tremble. This same idea is picked up in v5 where we are told that the mountains themselves will melt at the presence of the Lord. V6 now reminds us that the

heavens themselves will declare the glory of God. Surely we have seen this ourselves when we have stood outside on a starry night to see the beauty of God's creation. This same idea is picked up by Paul in Romans 1:20 when he speaks about the invisible qualities of God being revealed as we contemplate his creation. All that these opening verses have done is to expand and build upon the great opening statement that the God whom we worship is the God who reigns. Yes, the Lord reigns in righteousness and he will execute his judgements against his enemies. The world and its culture is certainly shocked by such statements but we need to be conscious and bold enough to uphold this great teaching.

The truth that God reigns is something that often causes great doubt and is denied by some. It is denied because of the problems they face in this present world. It can be because of the problems they are encountering, maybe in family life, with health or with some situation, that makes them question whether or not God indeed is the God who reigns in this world. For others, it is the teaching of science and the academic world that seems to make God a god who is removed far away from the world in which we live and move and have our being. For others, the question of God's reign is thrown into doubt as they ponder human suffering in all its dimensions.

## 2. An encouragement to respond (7-12)

The second part of the Psalm begins with a challenge to those who are worshipping false gods and who boast of idols. The Psalmist simply tells us that they will be put to shame because they are putting their faith and trust in worthless and powerless idols. The reign of God will vindicate his people. As they are put to shame, God will be exalted in all the earth (v8). We see here that to love God means that we must hate evil and this comes by way of encouragement to us (v10). This is underlined by the fact that the God who reigns is the God who takes care of his people. "He guards the lives of his faithful people". In v11 we find further encouragement, that light is shed upon those who will live rightly before God and joy and gladness will fill the hearts of his people. All this concludes in v12, with the fact that we are to rejoice in the way in which God is righteous and we are to give thanks as

we remember that he is a holy God and as we remember his holy Name. The challenges in vv7-12 are given both to the idolaters, the ones who will be put to shame, and also to the faithful, that is to God's people.

It is interesting to note that we have no choice about whether God reigns or not. God is God whether we like it or not. We cannot dethrone him. He is the one who reigns and it is he who sits upon the throne and it will be his judgements that will come to pass. So when we confess with our lips that the Lord reigns, it is a confession of what will become an actual reality in the life of the church.

As several Psalms in this part of the Book of Psalms show, Israel delighted to celebrate God's righteous rule over all creation. This Psalmist concluded with an encouragement to ponder and to reflect on God's holiness. The letter to the Hebrews stresses time and again not only God's holiness but also the confidence with which we can come to him through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 10). When we come to God, we rely on coming to him because of his mercy. This also will draw us into reverence and awe before God because we will see, as the Psalm so helpfully reminds us, that he is a consuming fire. So Psalm 97 creates for us a strong picture of a God who reigns and a God who calls and demands our worship.

Q1. Looking at verses 1-6, what aspects qualities and features of the Lord's character are revealed? What does this then tell us about God?

Q2. Psalm 97 teaches us that **God is just (v2)**. The Bible says that the Lord is a God of justice and that righteousness. This is the foundation of his throne. (see Isaiah 30:18; Psalm 97:2) God is our Judge rewarding and punishing, in time and eternity, with a justice that is perfect and beyond any appeal or dispute. What comfort and warnings can we take from this truth?

Q3. God rules over all He has created, and He is not hesitant in making that fact known. How has God made His kingship visible to you? What is most attractive to you about God as King, and what aspect remains a mystery?

Q4. What does the Psalm instruct us about worship especially, about our worship of a Holy God (see v7-9)? Do you share the Psalmist passion for worship? If not, why not?

Q5 Why do people who love the Lord hate evil? Why would joy be the result of being up right in heart? V(10-12) How will God react to the people are not yet Christians but who have been blessed by God's general revelation, (Creation) but who prefer living in darkness?

## Psalm 103 - All His Benefits

Traditionally this Psalm is linked to David. Clearly David was a man who knew a great deal about God's mercy (Psalm 51). The structure moves from a call to worship a merciful God (1-5) to the triumph of God's mercy (6-10); then we focus on the greatness of God's mercy (11-14) and the mercy of God is seen in the light of eternity (15-18); the Psalm comes to a conclusion with a call to worship the eternal King (19-22).

This Psalm is a beautiful piece of poetry that praises God for his incredible mercy. From the opening words, as David calls his inner being to praise God's holy name, to the closing verses, when David calls on the angels and all God's handiwork to do the same, there comes a list of all God's benefits (forgives, heals, redeems, crowns and satisfies) that finds an echo in our hearts today.

The writer also unfolds to us history, as we see that God has made his ways known to Moses. For the God who is being praised in this Psalm is the God who has revealed himself to his people. He has revealed himself to his people so that they may make known and appreciate his love. The Psalmist also will speak of his character, his compassion for the weak and helpless and his incredible love (v11, 17). Surely such a catalogue of incredible features of our God takes our very breath away. It is like a sumptuous feast that is being set before us: we hardly know where to begin. The picture then concludes with a wonderful glimpse of the Lord who is seated in heaven and who rules over all things.

### 1. The Merciful God (1-5)

The opening two verses call upon us to bless God. What does this mean? I believe it is for us to appreciate and express our gratitude and respect and to recognise our relationship with this God of mercy. David is opening up our minds so that we remember all that God has done for us. We need to recall that our memory is a strong aid to our relationship with God. The benefits that we have from him are now developed in vv3-5. We see his forgiveness (v3), the very corner-stone for fellowship with

God. Next, we appreciate that this is the God who heals us from our diseases. There is clearly a link between forgiveness and healing (see Ronald Dunn's book on "Healing"). Thirdly, he redeems us. Here we see that the ultimate benefit comes as he redeems us from death itself. For the Lord Jesus promised (John 11:25-26) "*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die*". We notice also the benefit of his love and his tender mercy. The final benefit in this section is that he satisfies. With all these blessings flowing to us, no wonder that David encourages his inner being to bless the name of God. Surely there is a lesson for us to learn?

#### 2. God's Mercy (6-10)

It is at this point in the Psalm that God shows us his mercy to sinners. Here, David reminds us of God's mercy for the children of Israel as they left of Egypt (the Exodus). If we look a little deeper into these verses, we also can catch sight of Jesus Christ, who also came to bear God's word and perform God's work. Now in vv9-10 we get a very sharp contrast between a human point of view and God's. On the one hand we see the generosity of God and his love. On the other we see the heavy and mean-spirited anger of man. It is man who keeps his quarrels going and who will nurse his grievances. God, who has been infinitely hurt, not only tempers his anger but tempers his justice, though at what cost to himself we will only discover in the New Testament.

#### 3. The Greatness of God's Mercy (11-14)

What we find here is almost like an architect's plan which shows us the dimensions of God's mercy. We see firstly that it reaches up to the very heavens themselves (v11). Next, we see how far it reaches and this time "*as far as the east is from the west*". And the final dimension is the compassion that God has for his children (v13). Surely here is mercy beyond all comparison. It is a mercy that has taken away our sins. God understands how frail the human being is and he knows the very struggles that we face within our lives. With the coming of Jesus Christ into the world, we will see that God has taken the very step of entering

into our pain and struggle so that he can too stand alongside us in our weakness. David has painted for us a picture of a God who knows us even better than we know ourselves.

#### 4. Eternal Mercy (15-18)

The Psalm continues to focus upon our human weakness by reminding us that our days are like grass (v15). These words are often repeated in a funeral service today. They took fresh meaning for me as I stood outside Jerusalem recently and saw the thousands of graves crammed into the space outside the city wall powerfully reminding me that all of us will return to dust and anonymity. However, we find that there is an alternative set before us and it is that God remembers us (v14). It seems amazing that our God can care for something even as fragile as a flower. We discover here that his eternal mercy rests upon those who fear him. It seems as if this mercy flows down through the generations but it is clearly linked to those who keep his covenant. David reminds us that the Lord in his mercy remembers those who remember him. Here is a challenge for us today.

#### 5. The Eternal King (19-22)

Set before us is the God who transcends both time and space. We may pass away but the God whom we worship does not. He is the God who rules over all. We glimpse here the depth and the height and the breadth of his sovereignty, we are reminded that every knee will bow before this great God. David brings his Psalm to a conclusion by reminding us once more of God's mercy and by calling on all creation to join him in praising his God. Firstly, the angelic beings are to join in that praise of God (v20). These great beings surround the throne of God and obey his bidding, they are his messengers and carry his word (Matthew 1:18-25). Secondly, in verse 22 we are told of those who minister and are there to do his work. They too are called to 'praise the Lord' (v21). Next comes the rest of creation (v22). This leads finally to David himself who will join this great assembly in praising God and blessing his name (v22).

Clearly Psalm 103 shows to us the mercy of God. This means that we do not get what we deserve. We know, in our hearts, that God should reject us but we receive acceptance. Where we deserve anger we receive mercy. The only response to such mercy is to thank God and to praise his name. Once the Lord has bought us and humbled us so that we recognise that we have sinned (Psalm 51) then we are in the place of repentance and can receive forgiveness and live a new life. Surely this is a picture of the cross, and this is where God will accuse us no more.

Q1. Ask the group to make a list of the spiritual blessings that are revealed in this Psalm. How are we living in the light of these blessings and so making the most of our time here on earth to bless the Lord?

Q2. Are we good at saying thank you to for the gifts we receive? How are we appreciating the source of the blessings that are given to us by God? What is David's attitude? Do we share his response? What does that involve?

Q3. What is mentioned by God's steadfast love? (vv4, 8,11,17) How has the Lord demonstrated his father-like care to us recently? God knows (vv13-17) how we are made, sees us as dust, and on that knowledge his expectations of us are based. Do we have unrealistic expectations beyond even what God has for us?

Q4. Forgiveness is essential to the Christian life. Why? What does this Psalm teach us about forgiveness? This week you may be grieving over some failure in your life, some act of foolishness, or sin, or misjudgement that has damaged relationships deeply. From Psalm 103 and from John 21:15-19 what can we learn about a fresh start with God?

Q5. How can we be motivated to greater fear of the Lord and greater obedience by observing the example of God's holy angels (vv20,21)? What do we know about angels? (Psalm 148:2,5; Daniel 12:1, 1 Timothy 5:21 and Hebrews 1:14) Compare God's generosity in meeting our needs with our response. What lessons do we need to learn?

## Psalm 113 - His Glory and his Love.

### Introduction

Psalm 113 comes as part of a group entitled "Hymns of Praise" that takes us up to Psalm 118. These particular Psalms were sung at the great Jewish festivals. In the Passover in a home, the first two of these Psalms, 113 and 114, were sung before the feast and others, from 115 to 118, were then sung at the end. It is interesting to ponder that our Lord Jesus himself would have sung these particular Psalms with his disciples as they gathered in the Upper Room to celebrate what would be the Last Supper.

As we get to grips with Psalms 113, I think it is important for us to ask ourselves a question: "What is God like?" Have you ever taken time to ponder that very question? After a few moments we begin to realise that it is, in fact, almost impossible for us to be able to grasp what God is like. This is because God himself is outside of our own very limited experience. We quickly learn is that the only way we can talk about God is by analogy. We talk about him being like a loving father and like a king (Psalm 97), and we talk about what God has done. In this great Psalm we will find that the Psalmist gives us both an analogy and tells us what he has done.

As we come to the start of exploring these verses, we realise that the Psalm is taken up with God. It is good that, when we come to worship, we should consciously and deliberately turn our thoughts to God. As we prepare to worship God in a small group or as we gather together in church on Sunday, we should take time to be quiet and still and reflect on the fact that God is with us. It is important that we quieten and still our hearts so that we are ready to worship him who is both our creator, our sustainer and also our saviour. Our worship of God will have two particular aspects which we have already touched on before: who God is and what he has done. At the start of our worship, Sunday by Sunday, the leaders should, like the Jewish priest in the Temple, invite us to praise the name of the Lord. The reason for doing this is that the name itself sums up all that a person is.

The Psalm has two sections: (1) servants who are to respond (vv1-3); (2) the motivation for worship, namely the why (vv4-6).

### 1. Servants (1-3)

The Psalm opens with the great cry that we are to “praise the Lord!” The repeating of this phrase seeks to amplify and develop the thought in our minds that the Lord we have come to worship is worthy of all our praise. We need to remind ourselves constantly that it is this God who has redeemed his people and who has called them into his kingdom. He is the mighty king, the one whose name is worthy of all praise. Surely the book of Hebrews has summed up what our attitude should be when we come to worship the living God: Hebrews 13:15 “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess his name”.

The importance of the name of God was stressed when he spoke to Moses at the burning bush. We see at once that, where his name is spoken in faith, a relationship is established. The Psalmist also rightly reminds us that praise is never out of season. There is always the opportunity to praise God and we should always make it the heart of our worship.

### 2. Motivation (4-6)

It is surely something that we can learn afresh for our own day and generation as we seek to worship God in this place. Clearly, when we get taken up in the worship of the living God, we will find that our own world and our own burdens will seem so much lighter as we get our focus properly upon the God who has made us, who loves us and who has redeemed us. Could it be that one reason why our world is filled with so much hatred, hostility and bitterness is that there is so little praise of the God who has made us? It could also be a challenge to the church that, like Daniel in his great prayer in Daniel 9, we need to confess the sin of our nation. However, we can also confidently look forward to the day when the whole world will praise our God and that every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth, before the one who is our Lord and King.

Having called his servants to praise God’s name, the Psalmist now turns us to the praise of God directly. In v5, we are told to worship God not only because of his transcendence, but also because of his uniqueness. This rightly reminds me of a preacher called James Ayre who constantly reminded his congregation that they needed to allow God to be God in their lives. This takes us on to ask the question: “who can compare to God?” The answer is “no one but God himself”. He is the one who will judge all and no one will be his judge. The Psalmist is full of encouragement to us because this is a God who is not too remote to understand the problems and issues that we face. The God who puts the stars in the heavens is also the one who puts food on our plates. Here we have an incredible picture of a mighty king who also cares for our small and individual lives. Surely, this is a preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ as he enters our world and seeks to draw us into a personal relationship with him. He is not only the creator but is also the God who will humble himself, even to death and death on a cross.

In this section we are reminded that the God who humbles himself is also the one who cares for the humble. This is the God who cares for the impoverished Christians who live in a shanty town outside a big city in South America as much as he cares for the king who lives in a palace. It is challenging to realise that, when Jesus began his ministry, he read from the prophet Isaiah and reminded both his disciples and us that the Spirit of the Lord was upon him and that he had come and been appointed to preach the Gospel to the poor. The Psalmist reminds us that no one is beyond his care and gaze. As the Psalm began, so it ends. We are encouraged once more to praise the Lord.

What have we learned? Surely we have learned that true worship, the praise of God, is based upon his character. Yes, he is the king who reigns above the heavens but he is also the God who has humbled himself and come to this world to feel our pain, to know our suffering and to reach out with love, care and compassion. This is the God who deserves the whole of our praise and the whole of our lives and we should call him our Lord and our God (John 20).

Q1. Retell again the story of God's people trapped in Egypt crying out for God's help (Exodus 2). How does one go about "praising the name of the Lord"? How is this different than just "praising the Lord"? What can we praise God's name for?

Q2. What does this Psalm tell us about the sovereign power of God in the world? Are all people considered the "servants of the Lord" because of their being created by Him? Or are only those called to be his chosen people viewed by God to be his servants? What is the difference?

Q3. How are you able to serve a God who lacks nothing and has no needs to be met? What does this Psalm teach us about worship?

Q4. Why is God considered to be merciful when he addresses the needs of the poor, helpless and childless, when in his sovereignty he could have spared them from ever experiencing those needs?

Q5. A writer used this Psalm to pen famous children's song (*From the Rising of the Sun*). What ideas would you use if you were going to write a song for the church family for this weekend? What points would you not mention?

## Psalm 132 - The King and His Rule

### Introduction

To any reader of the Bible, it is clear that a central theme in the Scriptures is that God is king. Our God is the ruler over all things (Psalm 19) and as king, he has power in his kingdom. We will see that he has power by his Word to bring creation into being. As king he also has the privilege of delegating his power to those whom he has created (Genesis 1:28). But this same king is also the king who will oppose his enemies and seek to defeat them. The Bible is full of examples how God has stepped in to defeat those who oppose his will and his way (for instance Exodus 3).

The moving story of 1 Samuel is that of a people who seek an earthly king. It must have been hard for God to take such rejection, yet God in his love willingly gave what the people wanted. This desire for a king ultimately brought them destruction and disaster. But God in his grace will also bring them a greater king who will bring them salvation and eternal hope. The high point of the earthly king is, of course, David. God has a special relationship with David and seeks to call him his son and makes his dwelling place in the temple. It is through David and his heirs that God will rule in his kingdom.

Psalm 132 is about the ascent of the Ark of God to Jerusalem in the days of King David. It is the longest of the 15 songs of ascent, roughly twice as long as any other, but it is here for two important reasons.

1. It was a Psalm that would be sung by the pilgrims as they made their way up the mountain to Jerusalem. Here they were retracing the last great journey of the Ark from its place in the tabernacle to its place in the Temple.
2. The Ark, as it was brought into Jerusalem, was the deposit of the most high and would go into the Temple of the living God. This Temple and this Ark would become the focal point of those who sought to worship the living God in the days of David and his successors.

So God's kingdom and his reign are the substance of Psalm 132. The liturgical context is set out in v8-10 of the Psalm. For more background we can find it appearing in 2 Chronicles 6:41-42. It is here that Solomon prays when he comes to dedicate the Temple to God. We find that the Psalm itself is broken into four clear parts.

#### 1. God's dwelling (1-5)

The Psalm opens with the request that God remember David and his afflictions. It seems unsure from the actual Psalm what these afflictions had been. However, we may guess that it might have been the taking of the Ark up into Jerusalem. We are reminded in v2 that David has sworn an oath before the Lord and the actual detail of the vow is given to us in vv3-5. What becomes clear is that David will not rest until God has found his rest there in Jerusalem. It seems that the king must secure the site for God and for his dwelling-place.

#### 2. The Fulfilment (6-10)

The Psalm now goes on v6 to remind us that Israel heard of the Ark in Ephrathah (or Bethlehem) (Micah 5:2), the home town of David. We learn that the pilgrims are being called together (v7) to go up and worship the living God in the temple at Jerusalem. Literally, the idea of worship here means to bow down before God. In a sense, the pilgrims are coming before the very throne of God himself.

What we discover now is that the people themselves cry out as worshippers before God (v8) calling upon God "to arise from your resting place". Clearly, there is a link between God's power and the Ark. We see that especially in the question of battles and wars that have been fought by God's people in the past (1 Samuel 5 and 6). The call here, however, is not to fight but to go to his resting place where the people may gather round to worship him. In v9 we are minded that the priests who are to lead the people in the worship of the living God should be people who live righteously before him. They are to be a holy people. We are

called to enter the place, bow before the God who is our king and to worship him there in all his strength and majesty.

#### 3. The Promise (11-12)

We now recognise that the place of God has been established in Jerusalem. Here we glimpse the way in which we may come before God in prayer. The Psalmist based his prayer upon the covenant promise that God gave to David (v10). We need to remember that God himself has made a promise to establish his kingdom forever (2 Samuel 7:12-16) so it is upon this that God is asked now to sustain the kingship of David. We have the advantage of looking back and so we know that this covenant relationship with the king was destroyed. However, we can also look back and see that, through God's goodness, this promise to David would be fulfilled in Jesus Christ. So what we glimpse here is that God's rule is not limited to some geographical area but a rule over all creation in both time and space.

#### 4. The Promise Fulfilled (13-18)

In this last section of the Psalm comes a prophecy with regards to God and Jerusalem (14-18). We are introduced to this prophecy by the statement that God has chosen Zion, the mountain on which Jerusalem rests. Since Jerusalem is God's home, it would be understandable to think that these verses relate to the actual geographical place of Jerusalem itself, thus giving the people the wrong belief that this city would never again fall to an enemy. We, however, must look deeper if we are to understand these verses. Here within this Psalm we will find a wealth of promises that spring from love that comes from the very heart of God. What we have before us in these closing verses is the fulfilment of the promises which God makes. What happens here is God's blessing on the people which will be both physical and spiritual (vv15-16). God's blessing involves material prosperity, ample provision and salvation for the priests and deep joy for all the people. This is a picture of Eden - haven't political leaders since the very beginning of time always dreamed of such a golden age? It has probably been the aim and aspiration of most governments that we have elected in the recent past.

However, we are only too well aware that no culture has ever achieved this high ideal. If we are to see a golden age, it surely will be when we see God face to face as the Bible promises in the book of Revelation. The Psalm closes with the coming of the Messiah and the establishing of his kingdom (vv17-18). These final verses of Psalm 132 describe how God will cause "a horn" to grow from David, that is a powerful ruler who will achieve all that God has promised. Surely we know who this ruler is? His crown and his character will be resplendent (v18). Yes, we are talking of the Messiah.

Foolishly today, people will look to a government and to a politician to solve their problems when all along, right before their very eyes, is the one who can bring them hope and salvation. Surely, we need to publish abroad again the name of Jesus, and it is our pilgrimage in the Christian life to ascend once more to the City of Zion to prepare ourselves for that coming kingdom. For our goal, our aim, is to be like him. As Paul writes in Philippians 3:14, and as we too can echo in our hearts, *"I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called us heavenwards in Christ Jesus"*.

Q1. What are the lessons we learn about God's presence among his people from this psalm? Where is God's dwelling place today? Vv5, 8, 13,14,16

Q2. As you read the Psalm thinking about presence of God and his dwelling in us (our body as God's temple) and the body of Christ as God's temple, (1 Corinthians 12:1-12) what insights do you achieve?

Q3. How well do we know the lives and stories of the heroes of the Old Testament, like Jacob and David? Why are their stories important to us? How do their lives illustrate God's dealings with his people? How does this Psalm speak about a messiah? (vv 10, 11,17). What do we learn about the messiah?

Q4. As we meditate on the Lord's faithfulness to his promises . . . how faithful are we to the commitments we make to the Lord? Do we carry through our promises? What did it cost David to have such zeal for the Lord?

Q5. What are the implications here for the assurance for believers – those whom God has called into his kingdom? What security or comfort do we gain from these truths about God's sovereign choice?

## Psalm 144 - David's God

### Introduction

Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ has given us a mission. The church has called this the Great Commission. The final words that Jesus spoke before ascending into heaven were these *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"* (Matthew 28:18-20). The mission of the church is that of leading people to accept Jesus Christ and to become his disciples. This is the priority for the life of God's people. I recognise that this is radical but I believe it is vital if we are to make a difference for God in our community. The lives and destinies of people will depend upon our willingness to take this up as our challenge and calling.

We need to realise, of course, that the turning to God is a work of God, but he has called his people (you and me) to share this work with him. We need to realise as we undertake this that the eternal destinies of men and women hang on God and our co-operation with him. Therefore, the focus for us as Christians and the work of the church family is to see how we may fulfil this Great Commission that God has called us to undertake. Psalm 144 is a timely reminder to us that we will need God with us to guide us and bless us if we are to fulfil this great work.

This Psalm of David is, in many ways, a string of quotations that are taken from Psalm 18. It is often seen as a Psalm of war which is for some bewildering and mystifying. However, we need to understand that the Psalm speaks about the God we worship and who holds this world in his hands. As David gathered this Psalm together, he is using past expressions of worship to express his confidence in God. Use the Psalm as a spur to encourage you to pray.

### 1. The Power of God and the Weakness of Man (1-4)

The Psalm opens with David blessing God, whom he calls 'my rock, my fortress and my deliverer'. This is a very helpful reminder. We live in a time when the world thinks that if it throws enough money and resources at a problem it can be cracked. The church is always in danger of travelling down the same road. So, wrongly, we believe that if we just launch a bigger and better advertising campaign, more people will come to church. We think that if only we become more and more like the world around us, we will gain the world's respect.

In these opening verses we see the marked contrast between the power and strength of God and the weakness and powerlessness of mankind. The Psalm begins with an acknowledgement of God and his provision. Immediately we have a picture of something that will not be moved. It reminds us of the wise man who builds his house upon the rock. David's 'fortress' is a defensive position of strength and security. He reminds us that God is his protection and covering. God is the one who gives him security at home for God is the one "who subdues people under me". Little wonder then that David blesses God.

However, once David reflects upon this, he is somewhat overwhelmed by the fact that God is committing himself to David and gives him both security and strength.

Going on to look at vv3-4, we see immediately a contrast. These verses reveal to us what man is really like. In many ways it is like seeing ourselves truly to scale when standing next to God. It is salutary to understand how weak and frail we are when comparing ourselves to the eternal and living God, who has called us to share in this work of salvation. It overwhelms us that God should choose to love us and that he does so much for us. When we stand back, it is amazing that God can raise us out of the gutter and make something of us. He wants to include us in his plans and draw us into his family. Notice how the questions that are posed are left unanswered. David rightly helps us to maintain our sense of wonder and worship before the living God. So, in this opening section, we discover something of both the power of God and the weakness of man.

## 2. From Prayer to Praise for God (5-10)

In the light of the fact that God has equipped him for battle and knowing his own unworthiness, David now calls upon God to act. This great power of God draws from his people the heartfelt cry of prayer as we seek him in the middle of difficult and pressing situations. David has already shown us in the Psalm both God's love for him and how God acted for him in the past. However, David still needs God's help and support in the present. So in v5 we have the cry "O Lord, come down!". It is easy, if we are not careful, to be a people who look back and never look around and see that we still need God today to give us victory. David recalls how God's great deliverance (v7) must be done again in our day. This is because the dangers we faced in the past are still the dangers that we face today. Sin is still very much at work in the life of the Christian and the church. The church is still under fire from those who oppose her.

Here is the prayerful cry of God's people; we need a God who is neither remote nor disinterested, but one who cares and loves us and is ready to save and rescue. As we see in v9 it is for this reason that our prayers will turn to praises as we see the victory won by our God. This gives us a new song in our heart. David is anticipating a great victory. The song will be a celebration of God's triumph. David will praise God as "the One who gives victory to kings". Salvation here is that of being rescued or saved from his enemies.

What is being revealed to us here is that God is willing to come down from heaven and fight for his people, in some senses like a great and powerful storm coming to shake the world. Surely we saw this when the angel of the Lord passed over the land of Egypt and brought death and destruction in the story of the Exodus. He was like a mighty storm, so that all who looked in faith for God's provision of the blood upon the door post, by the death of the lamb, were saved.

For us, it draws us to the storm that gathered around the cross at Calvary on that first Good Friday. It was there, at the cross, that Christ died to save us from our sins. He faced death and defeated it so that we might taste victory and life. Again, David reminds us here that he is the one who calls upon God to stretch out his hand. This is a sign to us again that it was God who was at work

making the transaction so as to pay the price. Our prayers will be turned into praise for God.

## 3. The Expected Blessing from God (11-15)

David final words are looking forward to the blessing that he expects to be given by God after the defeat of those who are his enemies. David looks with the eye of faith to God about the future. Our future rests not upon our own work, but upon all that God has done. So in this final part of the Psalm we find verses which are difficult to grasp and understand. Take a moment to read them again. We can see the link from God's delivery of his people from their enemies. There will now be no more military risk. The people will be able to flourish and prosper. As it draws to a close, the Psalm is focussing the people away from war and to the work of bringing in the crops and seeing the economy flourish.

This prayer for deliverance is not a desperate cry, but rather a prayer of confidence in God. It is right to recall that happiness is not ultimately secured in this life, but in the life of the world to come. What are these blessings? V12 "*Then our sons in their youth will be like well nurtured plants and our daughters will be like pillars carved to adorn a palace*". The prayer starts with the family and the rising generation of young people. It is by their character that we will see that they are a source of pleasure and blessing that has come from God. The sons are a picture of strength and the daughters of elegance. The blessings begin with the family that is the foundation to any strong society. In v14, we find the blessings bring security. Finally the blessing ends with knowing the very one who is the giver of all good things, our God! Sadly, the people around us want these blessings, but they want them without God!

It is immediately obvious that there is a difference here from the way people are living today. We know that people are not meant to be alone, but to live with others. Most people dream and desire to have a loving and supportive family and friends. But they want this without God. In effect they are building their family life upon sand. The foundation that we need, and that our world needs, is that of the rock which is our God. If we look at

the collapse of family life in our society, surely this is evidence that we are increasingly moving away from God and the things of God.

This Psalm also speaks about wealth. Which one of us doesn't want to live in comfort and enjoy the good things of life? However, even when we gain wealth and possessions, does this bring contentment and peace? Many people would say not. Surely it is because we begin to grasp that these things do not really satisfy. As Christians, we can point to someone who can satisfy, who can meet our deepest needs, the very bread of life, the Lord Jesus Christ. We also know that people want to be safe. We have seen this in recent days with the worldwide disruption that can come through terrorism and violence. People are looking for security. God is the one who can make us secure, not just for an hour or a day or a year, but for eternity when we look to Christ in faith.

The Psalm reminds us that we have a glorious future. It reminds us that this is not our home and that we are merely journeying through as pilgrims. Yet in this life we labour with all our energy to work with God for the drawing in of his people into his care. We are playing our part in the Great Commission. This Psalm is a picture of prayer that is being offered up to God and is made all the more attractive because it replaces disorder and deceit with blessings and peace. V15 says "*Blessed are the people of whom this is true; blessed are the people whose God is the LORD*".

Q1. Looking at v1, how do we understand the words "who trains my hands for war"? How have we allowed the Lord to equip us for the battles we fight? Have we taken advantage of the opportunities the Lord has provided through the work of sermons, courses and books? What have you found helpful and why?

Q2. What does David confess before God? How do the pictures of God in v2 give us the opportunity to gain a bigger picture of him? How do they provide us with comfort? Contrast this with vv3-4 when humankind is seen as fleeting. What do we learn about ourselves?

Q3. What do we find out about our relationship with God from the Psalm? What do we discover about how far above man God is and yet how he

personally loves and cares for us? What might we share with a friend about our stay on this earth and what a tremendous opportunity it affords us to walk in faith with God?

Q4. Do we picture the powerful forces of nature (of thunder and lightning) as unleashed by God on our behalf to defeat our enemies? How can we question whether God's arm is too short to deliver us? Do we have a new song to sing about God's work?

Q5. What are the special lessons for leaders in God's church that we can take from this Psalm? In particular, what are the characteristics revealed by vv11-15? What is vital to receive God blessings v15 and what does it mean for God to be Lord?