

Sampling the Psalms

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Sampling the Psalms

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INTRODUCTION

The book of Psalms has been a delight and blessing to the people of God for a hundred generations. In more ways than one, it is at the very heart of the Bible. The central chapter of the Bible is Psalm 117, which is also the shortest chapter in the Bible. The next chapter contains the central verse of the Bible, Psalm 118:8, which affirms very appropriately that: "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man." Then the next chapter, Psalm 119, is the longest and most amazing chapter in the Bible (see page 142).

But, more importantly, the book of Psalms is the heart of the Bible in that it speaks to our own hearts more eloquently and fervently than does any other book. It is the book of praise, the book of singing—but also the book of comfort and even sometimes the book of anger. It is a book of testimony and a book of prayer; it speaks of joy in the midst of sorrow and hope in the midst of despair.

In our own family devotionals, extending now every day through the past 50 years, the Scripture readings have been from the book of Psalms more than from any other book of the Bible. Speaking personally (and, no doubt many other Christians would agree), although I love and try to study all the Bible, the book of Psalms is my *favorite* book!

I believe that the book of Genesis is the most *important* book of the Bible, since it is the foundation of all the rest. Similarly, the book of Revelation is the most thrilling book of the Bible, because it is the climax of all the rest, ushering us into the very vestibule of eternity. Nevertheless, the book of Psalms is my

favorite, because here I experience more direct communion between my own heart and the heart of God than anywhere else in Scripture.

A verse-by-verse study of any of the psalms inevitably yields a great harvest of spiritual blessing. They are far more than mere devotional poems for pious reading. Each contains depths of revelation that seem inexhaustible. Furthermore, there are probably more direct and concrete marks of divine inspiration in the Psalms than in any other book. There are numerous scientific insights far in advance of their discovery by scientists, many amazingly-fulfilled prophecies of the coming Savior, and even many evidences of remarkable geometric structure in the very combinations of words and concepts that are inexplicable except in terms of inspiration by the Holy Spirit.

This book is written with the purpose of sharing with others some of the blessings I have experienced in studying the marvelous book of Psalms. There are, of course, 150 chapters in the entire book of Psalms, and I have covered only a fraction of them in this particular book. The ones discussed, however, are among the most remarkable psalms, both in their evidences of divine inspiration and in their impact on our hearts and souls as we study them. The exposition of these, hopefully, will encourage others to devote similar studies of their own to all the other psalms as well.

After an introductory section, dealing with an overview of the book of Psalms and an analysis of the first Psalm, I have tried to provide a fairly detailed exposition of a number of psalms which bear on various aspects of modern science. Most of these chapters were originally broadcast on our I.C.R.

A third section deals in some depth with several of the more important Messianic psalms. These contain a number of amazing prophecies fulfilled a thousand years later in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Christian life, from beginning to end, is the theme of the next section, focusing on the series of 15 remarkable psalms known as the Songs of Degrees. Finally, the last section features the grand Epilogue to the book of Psalms, the great Hallelujah songs in its final five chapters.

The beauty of the Psalms is brought out most effectively in the King James translation, and this is the translation followed herein. I would urge the reader to have his King James Bible open at the appropriate psalm as he reads this book, following the passage concurrently with the exposition. In most cases, the study proceeds verse-by-verse (or at least section-by-section), and continual reference to the psalm itself is essential for maximum benefit.

I can only hope that these studies—admittedly making a somewhat unusual approach to the exposition of this tremendous book—will yield as much blessing to the reader as they have to the writer. As we proceed to the study, there are no words more appropriate than those of the Psalmist himself:

*I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy
name for thy loving-kindness and for thy truth: for thou
hast magnified thy word above all thy name*
(Psalm 138:2).

PART ONE

**MESSAGE
AND METHOD
IN THE PSALMS**

Chapter 1

SONGS IN THE NIGHT

The book of Psalms is unique in the Bible. It was the hymnbook of Israel and, to a great extent, has been the pattern for all the other hymnbooks used by God's people through the ages. The Jews call it "The Hallal Book"—"The Book of Praises." It is replete with songs of praise, of course, but it contains also a strong component of songs of suffering, songs of battle, and even songs of imprecation.

The word for "psalms" (Hebrew *mizmer*) means "songs," probably implying songs which were to be sung with musical accompaniment. Most of them were written originally by David, but some had other authors (even Moses), and many are anonymous. They were collected by some unknown process of selection into five Books, with a total of 150 psalms comprising 2,461 verses in all.

The Theme of Conflict

Although the note of praise does sound often in the psalms, the theme of spiritual warfare is even more frequent. In almost every psalm (only Psalms 100, 133, and 150 seem to be exceptions) the element of conflict is either implicit or explicit. The great conflict of the ages is the struggle between truth and deception, between sin and righteousness, between

the godly and ungodly, between the chosen nation and the heathen, and finally between God and Satan.

The first Psalm contains the definitive statement on this conflict and is the foundation for all the other psalms. The final Psalm (150) speaks of the final and eternal victory of God and His purposes. This victory is foreshadowed in the first Psalm, but the conflict is very real throughout all the intervening psalms.

It is singularly appropriate, of course, for a book whose theme is songs of praise to be also a book of warfare and struggle and suffering. This present world is groaning and travailing together in pain (Romans 8:22), and "man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7).

But it is trust in God that enables the believer to be joyful in spite of trouble. "As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (II Corinthians 6:9,10).

Such is the note sounded throughout the Psalms. The world is in darkness, but the light of God's promises continually illumines the way. "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me. Yet the Lord will command His loving-kindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life" (Psalm 42:7,8).

It is significant that the first actual reference to singing in the Psalms is in the verse immediately following the first of the so-called "imprecations" in the Psalms. Note the contrast: "Destroy thou them, O God; let them fall by their own counsels; cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions; for

they have rebelled against thee. But let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice; let them ever shout for joy [same as "sing for joy"], because thou defendest them: let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee" (Psalm 5:11).

Structure of the Book of Psalms

The book of Psalms actually consists of five "books," composed as follows:

Book I	Psalms 1 through 41	=	41 psalms
Book II	Psalms 42 through 72	=	31 psalms
Book III	Psalms 73 through 89	=	17 psalms
Book IV	Psalms 90 through 106	=	17 psalms
Book V	Psalms 107 through 145	=	39 psalms
Epilogue	Psalms 146 through 150	=	5 psalms
Book of Psalms		=	150 psalms

No one knows the original reason for the compilations as listed. Probably they represent ancient chronological and/or thematic compilations, but the details are obscure. Most Bibles indicate the last five psalms to have been a part of Book V, but, for reasons to be discussed in the last section, it appears more likely that they are intended as a grand epilogue to the entire five books.

The ancient Jewish commentators believed the five groupings corresponded to the five books of Moses, the "Pentateuch." Any supposed correlation in subject matter based on this idea seems quite tenuous, however.

Authors named in the traditional inscriptions on the psalms may account in part for the collections. For example, Book I consists almost entirely of Davidic psalms, and so may represent

the first collection of his father's psalms as published by Solomon. Altogether, seven different authors are found listed in these inscriptions, but fully a third of the psalms carry no name. Authorship is divided among the various books in accordance with the following tabulation.

Author	Book I	Book II	Book III	Book IV	Book V	Epilogue	Total
David	37	18	1	2	15		73
Asaph		1	11				12
Sons of Korah		7	3				10
Moses				1			1
Solomon		1			1		2
Heman			1				1
Ethan			1				1
Anonymous	4	4		14	23	5	50
Total	41	31	17	17	39	5	150

Actually, one of the anonymous psalms in Book I (Psalm 2) is attributed to David in Acts 4:25, and Psalm 72, called "A Psalm of Solomon," closes with the words, "The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended," so that it may have been written by David instead of Solomon. Also, Psalm 127 is called "A Song of Degrees *for* Solomon," and the eleven psalms attributed to the Sons of Korah were actually inscribed as "*for* the Sons of Korah." Thus the total may, with these revisions, become somewhat more symmetrical.

Author	Book I	Book II	Book III	Book IV	Book V	Epilogue	Total
Dvid	38	19	1	2	15		75
Asaph		1	11				12
Moses				1			1
Heman			1				1
Ethan			1				1
Anonymous	3	11	3	14	24	5	60
Total	41	31	17	17	39	5	150

Many of the "anonymous" psalms, of course, may well have been written by David or one of the other psalmists listed above.

One significant feature of the five books is that each ends with a great doxology. These are:

- I. Psalm 41:13. "*Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting, and to everlasting. Amen, and Amen.*"
- II. Psalm 72:19. "*And blessed be his glorious name forever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory: Amen, and Amen.*"
- III. Psalm 89:52. "*Blessed be the LORD for evermore. Amen, and Amen.*"
- IV. Psalm 106:48. "*Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting: and let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the LORD.*"
- V. Psalm 145:21. "*My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD; and let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever.*"

The Epilogue ends not with a similar "blessing," but with an even greater exhortation and doxology:

Let everything that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD (Psalm 150:6).

Just prior to each of these grand book-ending doxologies, however, had been a testimony of great conflict with the enemies of God and God's people. Psalm 145:20 is representative: "The Lord preserveth all them that love him: but all the wicked will he destroy."

Such is the book of Psalms—God's gracious assurances to all who love Him in the midst of a sinful world, to the accompaniment of their praises and their songs in the night.

Chapter 2

THE TWO WAYS AND THE TWO DESTINIES

Psalm 1

The Foundation Psalm

The first Psalm is an introductory psalm, laying the foundation for all the others. Appropriately, its author is anonymous, but he outlines in graphic language the great theme of the age-long conflict between the ungodly and the righteous, with their two ends. The first three verses describe the way of the righteous man and the last three verses the way of the ungodly. The righteous will be sustained in the midst of an ungodly world, but the ungodly will ultimately be destroyed in the judgment. Though men commonly claim there are many ways and all lead to God, the Scriptures make it clear from beginning to end that there are only two ways, one leading to heaven and one to hell. The Lord Jesus made this fact forever clear: "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:13,14).

The two ways and the two destinies constitute the theme of innumerable other Scriptures. For example:

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel (Genesis 3:15).

And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2).

Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not (Malachi 3:18).

Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation (John 5:28,29).

[God] will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, ... (Romans 2:6-9).

The conflict has many faces and forms. Behind it all is the primeval and continuing Satanic rebellion against God. Satan has gained dominion over the world once given to Adam, and this will continue until God's final victory over him at the end of the age. In the interim, God through Christ has paid the price of redemption and is recovering many souls from the snare of the devil, their salvation being accomplished through their faith in His Word. The spiritual battle rages primarily now in the minds

of men, who must decide between "the counsel of the ungodly" and "the law of the Lord" (verses 1,2), but this decision of the mind and will has all manner of consequences in life and character. The counsel of the ungodly is nothing less than the philosophy of the natural man who seeks to understand his existence and control his destiny without regard to God. It is man-centered rather than God-centered, humanistic rather than theistic, based on the myth of evolution instead of the fact of creation. Standing in stark contrast is the infallible Word of God, revealing the Lord as sovereign Creator and Judge, and man as hopelessly lost without God's salvation.

The Way of the Righteous

Verses 1-3

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

The psalm begins with the wonderful word "Blessed." This word (Hebrew *ashere*) means "happy," and is often so translated. It occurs in the book of Psalms more than in all the rest of the Bible put together. Thus, even though the theme of conflict is prominent throughout the psalms, they begin on a note of happiness and end (Psalm 150:6) on a note of praise.

We do not know who wrote this psalm, although most of the psalms in Book I (Psalms 1-41) were written by David. Its terminology (particularly the word "scornful") is unique to this particular psalm, perhaps seeming more appropriate for the

book of Proverbs than the book of Psalms. Possibly it was originally written by Solomon as an introduction to the first compilation of his father's writings. In any case, these first verses constitute a marvelous testimony of assurance. If one desires happiness, here is the key.

Verse one indicates the separation of the happy man from the broad way leading to destruction, while verse two describes his commitment to the narrow way leading to life. Note the progression in verse one—"walketh not,"—"nor standeth"—"nor sitteth." This corresponds to the progression of commitment to the humanistic world-view. First, the unwary soul would hearken to the "counsel of the ungodly"; then, he would begin to associate with "the way of sinners"; finally, he would settle down permanently in "the seat of the scornful." This is always the order. First, one is impressed by the high-sounding philosophy of ungodly intellectuals; then, having rejected God's truth, he falls away from God's standard of righteousness in practice, and, in the end, he assumes an attitude of scoffing superiority to all who believe God, becoming one who himself offers the "counsel of the ungodly" to those who have neglected God's Word.

Such a pathway, however attractive it may seem to the natural man, can never produce true happiness. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 14:12). The way of the ungodly shall perish.

Happy is the man who, despite the inducements of temporal acclaim or wealth or pleasure, refuses to be intimidated by the humanistic, naturalistic, evolutionistic wisdom of this world—"the counsel of the ungodly"—and who, instead, takes his knowledge and counsel from God in His Word. "Happy is that people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people, whose God is the Lord" (Psalm 144:15).

Such a man is characterized by love for the Scriptures. "His delight is in the law [Hebrew *torah*] of the Lord." The "law" was essentially the only part of the Scriptures then available to the psalmist, whereas we today have the complete revelation of God, and therefore far greater reason to delight in it even than he had. Furthermore, this godly man meditates in the law day and night—not that he never thinks of anything else, but rather that all his thoughts and actions are governed by his deliberate desire to be obedient to God's Word in every way. No doubt his terminology was inspired by the testimony of Joshua, with which the psalmist was familiar: "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success" (Joshua 1:8).

It is noteworthy that the Scriptures are set in direct confutation of the counsel of the ungodly. This is a very necessary truth for us to learn today. Ungodly counsel, sinful ways, and a scornful heart may be answered and corrected not by human wisdom and good resolutions, but only by the Word of God!

The godly man is also likened to a deep-rooted tree growing along a natural watercourse, whose leaves never wither because of drought and whose fruit is produced regularly and abundantly. The "rivers of water" may speak of the Holy Spirit (John 7:38, 39) and the "bringing forth of fruit in season" of the godly life and productive witness produced in that man by the Spirit (John 15:16; Ephesians 5:9) through the Word. As God had promised to Joshua, such a man would prosper in all he set out to do—because, of course, all of his undertakings would be directed by the Lord. "In all thy ways, acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:6).

In contrast to the tree of the righteous, the tree of the wicked is described in Psalm 37:35,36: "I have seen the wicked in great

power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found." The second half of Psalm 1 focuses on the ungodly man.

The Way of the Ungodly

Verses 4–5

The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.

Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

The grain was commonly flayed on the summit of a high and windy hill, so that the lighter chaff could be easily separated. The psalmist used such wind-driven chaff to illustrate how the ungodly would one day vanish from the earth. Though ungodly philosophies, all centered in evolutionary humanism, now spread themselves abroad in great power, like a green bay tree, they will soon pass away and never be found again. The day is coming when all ungodliness will be revealed for what it is. "And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:" (II Thessalonians 2:8). Even now, in the minds and hearts of right-thinking people, such systems quickly dissipate in the light of God's Word.

Of course, it should not be forgotten that all of us are among the "ungodly" until redeemed by Christ. None are truly in "the way of the righteous." "There is none righteous; no, not one:" (Romans 3:10). All were originally "in the way of sinners," because "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God;" (Romans 3:23).

We were all ungodly people, but "when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6). Though we could in no way ever earn salva-

tion, "to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Romans 4:5). Even though we could never find and follow the way of the righteous ourselves, Jesus said: "I am the way" (John 14:6), so when we are "in Christ," we are indeed on the way of the righteous. In fact, Christ is not only the Way, but He also is the very personification of righteousness. He is "Jesus Christ the righteous" (I John 2:1), and He is made righteousness unto us (I Corinthians 1:30; II Corinthians 5:21). In the final analysis, the battle is the Lord's. Jesus Christ is the ultimate Righteous One; the Antichrist is the ultimate Ungodly one. In fact, the word "ungodly" in Psalm 1 is the same word as "wicked," and the final great Antichrist is "that Wicked one" in II Thessalonians 2:8.

Since Christ is not only "the Way of the Righteous," but also will be the Judge (John 5:22), it is clear that "the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment." The "great congregation" of the redeemed cannot include any who are unrepentant and therefore still among the ungodly. There will finally have to be an eternal separation of the wheat from the chaff. "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God" (Psalm 9:17).

Verse 6

"For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish."

This climactic verse of the first Psalm thus becomes the key verse of the entire Book of Psalms. Though the heathen rage and earth's leaders seek to break the rule of God and His Christ (see the second Psalm!), the way of the ungodly shall perish. Therefore, for all eternity, "Blessed is the man who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly," and, furthermore, "Blessed are all they that put their trust in him" (Psalm 2:12).

PART THREE

THE PSALMS
AND
THE SAVIOR

Chapter 12

THE SON OF GOD

Psalm 2

In one sense, practically all the psalms could be understood as prophetic of the coming Savior. In type, if nothing else, each one seems to foreshadow in one way or another either "the sufferings of Christ" or "the glory that should follow" (I Peter 1:11).

There are a number of psalms, however, which are so explicitly clear in their description of the person or work of Christ that practically all Bible-believing Christian writers after Christ, as well as even some Jewish rabbis before Christ, have recognized them as peculiarly "Messianic" psalms. Their prophetic descriptions are so accurate as to be outside the range of speculative probabilities, and thus they provide uniquely powerful evidence of divine inspiration.

The first, and one of the greatest, of these Messianic psalms is Psalm 2, the psalm immediately following the great introductory psalm. The two groups of mankind categorized in Psalm 1 quickly become personalized in Psalm 2 in a great council of Christ-hating leaders arrayed against Christ and His followers.

The second Psalm is unique among the psalms in three interesting respects. It is actually referred to by number in the New Testament (Acts 13:33), a fact which indicates that the chapter divisions were present in the Book of Psalms right

from the start. Secondly, its Davidic authorship is confirmed in the New Testament (Acts 4:25), even though the heading of the psalm itself, contrary to the usual situation, does not say who the author is.

This psalm is also one of the greatest of the Messianic psalms. It is one of the very few Old Testament passages—and the only one in the psalms—which refers by name to the Son of God (verses 7, 12). The psalm is written in the form of a great dramatic poem, in four stanzas of three verses each. The first stanza is written directly in terms of David's perspective; the second stanza stresses the viewpoint of God the Father; the third is in the form of a direct statement by God the Son; the final stanza is a testimony which most appropriately would come from God the Holy Spirit.

The Kings of the Earth

Verses 1-3

Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?

The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his Anointed, saying,

Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.

In the first stanza, it is as though David were carried forward in the Spirit to a future time. In his vision, he sees great assemblages of people coming together, perhaps in many different times and places, and, as he listens to their speeches and deliberations, he is greatly disturbed and perplexed at what he hears. Finally, he cries out: "Why?"

"*Why do the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing?*" The word "heathen" refers especially to the Gentile

nations, and "people" (by parallelism) to the people of those nations and probably of the Jewish nation as well. The word "rage" is literally, "tumultuously assemble." Evidently the people of various nations are coming together, through their representatives, in a great convocation, and they are boisterous and riotous. Their purpose is to "imagine" (literally, "study" or "plan") a "vain thing." The latter phrase is one word in the Hebrew, but the translation is accurate.

And what is the vain thing which the nations are planning? "*The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against His anointed.*" The word "anointed," of course, is *Messiah*, the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek *Christ*. Thus, the assembly has been called together to plan a concerted rebellion and opposition against Jehovah and against Jesus Christ!

The prophecy was fulfilled in a precursive way at the trial of Christ. After quoting this very verse, the early church then applied it thus: "For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together" (Acts 4:27).

The ultimate fulfillment, however, will no doubt be at the very end of the age, in the last great rebellion against God, of both men and devils. "For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty" (Revelation 16:14). This "gathering together" is to Armageddon (Revelation 16:16), but there is even another such assemblage after the millennium. "[Satan] shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle" (Revelation 20:8).

Between the initial fulfillment of this prophecy, at the trial of Christ, and the final fulfillment at the end of the age, there have been innumerable other partial fulfillments. The word "rulers" in verse 2 can be applied to leaders of any sort. Whenever there is an educational convocation, a scientific convention, a political conference, an industrial gathering, the almost universal practice is to ignore the leadership of God and His Christ, and, in some cases, actively to oppose them. Men operate under the awful delusion that they can plan and decide things on their own, without consulting the will of God.

Perhaps the most conspicuous example is the Assembly of the United Nations. Another was the great Darwinian Centennial Convocation in 1959 at the University of Chicago, where the convocation keynote speaker, Sir Julian Huxley, boasted that "Darwinism had removed the very concept of God from the sphere of rational discussion." More recently, the American Humanist Association, in its 1973 Manifesto, blatantly declared: "No deity will save us, we will save ourselves."

The essential man-centered theme of all such assemblies is, as David foresaw, "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us." What little restraint is still practiced among men because of the fear of God must be fully removed. God and His Word, Christ and His salvation, must be banished from the schools, from the airwaves, from the press, and an atheistic or pantheistic bondage (such as now exists in many of the world's nations) replace the bonds of love and cords of compassion which constrain all who serve God.

Truly, this is a *vain thing* which the people *imagine*! "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became *vain in their imaginations*, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools" (Romans 1:21,22).

Heavenly Derision

Verses 4-6

He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision.

Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.

Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.

One of the most tragic verses in all the Bible opens the second stanza of this psalm. "*He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision,*" When men take counsel to dethrone God, it hardly provokes Him to fear or flight! It provokes Him to derisive laughter. The fact that men foolishly reject God as their Creator does not mean He did not really create them. "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at naught all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh" (Proverbs 1:24-26).

The scene thus shifts in this stanza to the heavens, where God the Father sits on the throne. After laughing at the fools who say there is no God (Psalm 14:1), then He speaks. "*Then shall He speak unto them in His wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure.*" First, He laughs at them, then speaks to them, and finally "troubles" them. There is coming a day of "vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (II Thessalonians 1:8).

When God finally does break His long and patient silence, these will be His words: "*Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.*" Though men would take counsel together and plot against the Lord, finally even condemning His anointed one to be crucified, it was all merely in the accomplishment of God's

plan, "For to do whatever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done" (Acts 4:28).

There are two senses, of course, in which God will set His king upon the hill of Zion. The word used for "set" actually means either "offer" or "pour out." It is translated "offer," for example, in Psalm 16:4. "Their drink offerings of blood will I not offer." Thus, the reference here is first of all to God's offering of His anointed one on Mount Zion, pouring out His blood in atonement for sin. What divine irony! When men and devils took counsel together to put the Savior to death, it was only that "through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil" (Hebrews 2:14).

But then also He will be anointed on Mount Zion not only for death, but as King. "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; ... behold, thy King cometh unto thee" (Zechariah 9:9). "And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; ... And the Lord shall be king over all the earth" (Zechariah 14:8, 9). "For out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:3).

The Son of God Speaks

Verses 7-9

*I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me,
Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.*

*Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine
inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy
possession.*

*Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash
them in pieces like a potter's vessel.*

In the third stanza is heard the voice of the Son of God, the one who had been offered up as a sacrifice on the holy hill of Zion, the one against whom the world's leaders would take counsel

together, whose cords they would, age after age, seek to unloose. If there was a mystery concerning how He could be anointed both as sacrifice and king, it is resolved in this stanza. He would not only suffer death, but would, in the process, *conquer* death!

"I will declare the decree." "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:18). The Father made the decree, the Son declared it. He is the *Word* of God, and when we hear Him, we hear the Father. And what is that decree?

He quotes from the Father: *"The Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee."* There are several senses in which Jesus Christ is the only-begotten Son of God, but here the emphasis is on His resurrection from the dead. He had been condemned and crucified, and, if that had been all, no one would have believed on Him. But He was "declared to be the Son of God with power, ... by the resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4). He was the "firstborn from the dead" (Colossians 1:18). He is "... the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth" (Revelation 1:5).

Any question that this verse refers to His resurrection is dispelled by its quotation in the New Testament: "And we declare unto you glad tidings how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that He hath raised up Jesus again, as it is also written in the second psalm, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee" (verse 7). This same verse is also restated in Hebrews 5:5.

Because of His victory over death, He will triumph over all lesser enemies. Continuing His declaration of God's decree, He quotes the Father: *"Ask of me, and I shall give thee the*

heathen [or 'nations'] for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." The Son is also the Heir and He is to be "heir of all things" (Hebrews 1:2). Since He "created all things" (Colossians 1:16), is "upholding all things" (Hebrews 1:3), and died to "reconcile all things" (Colossians 1:20), therefore, eventually He will "gather together in one all things in Christ" (Ephesians 1:10).

"Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron, thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." The kings and rulers and leaders of the earth, with few exceptions, will not submit willingly unto Him, and so He must "put down all rule and all authority and power" (I Corinthians 15:24). "And out of His mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations: and He shall rule them with a rod of iron: and He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God" (Revelation 19:15). Furthermore, those who are His followers will share in His reign. "And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father" (Revelation 2:26, 27). These great promises will, so far as we can tell from Scripture, all be fulfilled literally in the coming Tribulation and Millennium periods. The Good Shepherd shall constrain all rebels in the flock with a rod of iron.

The Exhortation

Verses 10-12

Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth.

Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.

Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.

The last trilogy of verses contains an exhortation, a warning, and an invitation. Though the psalmist does not say so specifically, it is appropriate to think of these as the direct urgings of God the Holy Spirit. It is His ministry to "reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:" (John 16:8), and that is exactly what these verses do.

"Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth." The emphasis is on *now*. Don't persist in your rebellion until that day when every knee shall be forced to bow, and every tongue compelled to confess Christ as Lord. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (II Corinthians 6:2). The kings and rulers who vainly imagine they can do away with God and His Christ, though professing themselves to be wise, have become fools, for "fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Proverbs 1:7).

"Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling." These are parallels and are strongly emotional terms. Serving the Lord is joyful, but is to be with great reverence and holy awe. "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Hebrews 12:28).

"Kiss the Son, lest He be angry and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little." This is the other Hebrew word for "son." In verse 7 it is *ben*; here it is *bar*. There is no doubt, however, that both verses identify Him as the Son of God. Some versions (e.g., Revised Standard, Living Bible, etc.) either replace or modify this command by "kiss his feet," but such a translation reveals more about the bias, than the skill, of the translators. The "kiss" is one of true and selfless love. Not only are men to serve the Lord, but also to love the Lord. "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha" (literally "accursed, for our Lord is coming") (I Corinthians 16:22).

The word for “but a little” is also in other passages rendered “soon,” and it may be that such is the emphasis here. The day of the “wrath of the Lamb” (Revelation 6:16) is soon coming and then it will be too late. Men should be wise *now*, therefore!

This great psalm concludes with a beautiful gospel invitation: “*Blessed [or ‘happy’] are all they that put their trust in Him.*” This invitation down through the ages, has been accepted and proved by many kings and leaders, even by evolutionists and atheists, as well as by multitudes of ordinary “people” in all “nations.” It is still a promise in God’s Word and will still prove true today, for all who believe.