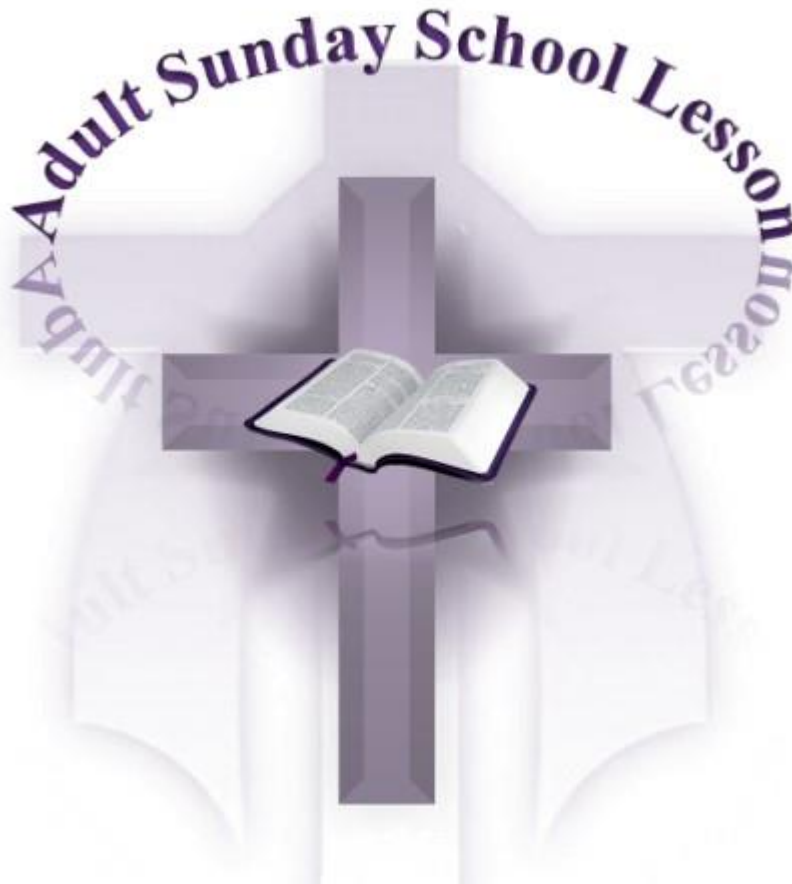




Corinth Missionary Baptist Church
"The City of Faith"
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FALL – 2023

Sept 2023 – November 2023

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Free Access - Previous Lessons
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“Diligent study of these lessons will not only bless you spiritually, but also aid you in discovering God's plan for your own life.”

-John Alva Owston



CORINTH
MISSIONARY
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ADULT
SUNDAY SCHOOL
CLASS



ADULT

FALL 2023 SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

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You can also follow the lesson by joining live each Sunday morning via our website:

<https://www.thecityoffaith.org/sundayschool>



Sunday, September 3, 2023

Lesson 1 - "Go Provides Refuge"

Lesson Text: **Psalm 46:1-7**

Background Scripture: **Psalm 46:1-7**

Devotional Reading: **Jeremiah 31:3**

Psalm 46:1-7

1 God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. 2 Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; 3 Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah. 4 There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. 5 God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early. 6 The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted. 7 The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.

INTRODUCTION

There is no way for us to avoid all the stresses life has to offer. Some of us are more prone to stress than others, but even the best of us will at times be faced with situations that cause stress. On those occasions we sometimes wish we could flee like a bird to the mountains, as David was told to do in Psalm 11:1.

There is a place for believers to go in times of dire need. Proverbs 18:10 tells us that "the name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." The Bible does not promise believers that their lives will be trouble-free. The promise is that God will provide stability for us and help us weather the storms that arise. This is not a new strategy. Today's lesson derives the same message from a psalm written three millennia ago, and its truth still speaks today.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Time: unknown

Place: Judah

Psalm 46 is an expression of victory, relief, and thanksgiving. Although the author is not specifically named, the psalm appears to have been written in the aftermath of a significant threat to the city of Jerusalem that had been overcome. The psalm ascribes this wholly to the Lord, showing us the hopeless situation that prevailed.

A possible setting for this is during the time of King Hezekiah, who reigned over Judah about 727–696 BC. Hezekiah's Jerusalem was besieged by the mighty host of Assyria's King Sennacherib in 701 BC. Sennacherib and his armies had raged through Syria (capital city, Damascus) and northern Palestine, crushing all opposition.

The prospect of being conquered by the ruthless Assyrians terrified the trapped residents of the city. Sennacherib later claimed to have confined Hezekiah "like a bird in a cage." But the people were delivered by one of the mightiest miracles recorded in the Old Testament: the angel of the Lord slew 185,000 of Sennacherib's troops in their sleep, causing him to retreat to Nineveh (2 Kings 19:35,36).

We can imagine the relief and celebration that followed such a victory. However, there were no armies to fete and no generals to acclaim. The victory was entirely the work of God, and the desire to praise Him was overwhelming.

TODAY'S AIM

Facts: to understand from David's experiences how to trust God to sustain us during troubling times.

Principle: to show that God will always be our solid refuge and strength.

Application: to remember that when we are afraid of all that is happening around us, we can trust God to be our refuge.

CONFIDENCE IN GOD'S POWER (Psalm 46:1)

1. What is indicated in the first verse about God's care for His people (Psalm 46:1)?

The psalm begins with a bold statement of two major characteristics of God. Calling God both "refuge" and "strength" indicates a strong shelter that is impenetrable and unconquerable. God is often described this way in the Psalms. "I will love thee, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower. I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies" (18:1-3).

It was common in Old Testament days to build cities on hilltops and surround them with thick walls. No matter how strongly they were constructed, however, it was possible to break into them with sieges and prolonged attacks. "While other nations boasted in their impregnable castles perched high on inaccessible cliffs secured with iron gates and protected by fierce warriors, Israel was in a safer position than them all. God was her refuge and her strength" (Falwell and Hindson, eds., Liberty Bible Commentary, Thomas & Nelson).

2. Why is it important to us that God is a "very present help" (v. 1b)?

The second line of this verse expands on the image of God as a protective fortress to glorify the Lord's active role in our troubled lives. The psalmist sees God as much more than a wall to hide behind for shelter. God is "a very present help," one who fights alongside of us. Our relationship with God involves more than safety. It involves assistance. When this is fully grasped, its comfort is immense. We are not called to run away from harsh realities. Instead, we can face life without being paralyzed by fear (see Isaiah 41:13).

CONFIDENCE IN GOD'S PROTECTION (Psalm 46:2,3)

3. What do the descriptions of seas and mountains in turmoil indicate regarding fear (vs. 2,3)?

"Therefore will not we fear." The "therefore" reveals the result of recognizing the fact of God's help in verse 1. Fear is a horrible reality in the lives of many people. Fear can freeze us into inaction. Fear can haunt our every waking moment, even disrupt our sleep.

The psalmists described several possible scenarios that would normally cause panic (v. 2). In hyperbolic description, they portrayed tremendous upheaval on the earth, speaking of it as giving way and having its mountains carried away into the middle of the sea. They described the waters as roaring and greatly disturbed, so much so that even the stately mountains were shaken by it. Can you picture an earthquake of such magnitude that mountains shake and collapse into the seas, causing huge, rolling waves?

This physical description is intended to convey anything that would be earthshattering circumstances for us. We expect that natural disasters will strike terror in the hearts of those affected. Yet all of these are connected with the psalmist's earlier affirmation "therefore will not we fear." There is no imaginable circumstance that should shake our trust in the Lord (compare Hebrews 12:27). Whether our tsunamis and earthquakes are caused by people or nature, we are secure in God's protective hands.

That is when we need to remember God's repeated words of assurance regarding His presence: "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.... For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee" (Isa. 41:10,13). We understand that these words were originally spoken to Israel, but the universal truth contained in them can encourage us as well.

The psalmist ends this section with the Hebrew word Selah. We do not know exactly what this word means, but it seems to be some type of musical direction related to the public performance of a psalm. It may indicate a planned pause or that a different group of singers is to begin its part. Selah occurs again at the end of verses 7 and 11.

CONFIDENCE IN GOD'S PRESENCE (Psalm 46:4-7)

4. What does the "river" and the "city of God" most likely refer to (vs. 4,5)?

There is a stark contrast between the description of this peaceful river (v. 4) and the turbulent waters just mentioned (vs. 2,3). The immediate meaning of "the city of God" appears to be Jerusalem, where the

temple was located and the presence of God was symbolized in the inner sanctum called "the most holy place" (1 Kings 6:16). Jerusalem, however, does not have a river flowing in it.

The city of God was threatened by neighboring nations, but the inhabitants of Jerusalem were calmly trusting in God for protection. How could that be? The answer is that ever since the Garden of Eden, God has always had a river to bring peace to His own. It is the river of God's grace. The psalmist is so certain of God's, grace in bringing about victory that he exclaims, "God shall help her, and that right-early" (before disaster overtakes them).

If this psalm is written in the context of the deliverance of Jerusalem from the Assyrian horde, we can understand the power in these words. Imagine the relief the city feels after it had first cowered in fear when threatened by this overwhelming, hostile military force!

David, the most well-known of the psalmists, celebrates these themes often in his musical poems. After he is delivered from his enemies, including King Saul, he breaks out in ecstatic praise and piles up many images of God's immovability in his life. God is his "rock," his "fortress," his "deliverer," his "shield," his "horn of ... salvation," his "high tower," his "refuge," and his "saviour" (2 Samuel 22:2,3; compare Psalm 18:2). God is powerful to deliver us from danger or threat. God's presence in our lives brings a stability that we cannot duplicate on our own.

5. What effect does the raging of heathen nations have on God? How is this encouraging to us (v. 6)?

The stability and protection provided by the Lord is contrasted here with the ungodly nations that are helpless before God's power. God is more than the protector of Jerusalem; He is the master of all nations. When it comes to God's protecting His people, it does not make any difference whether the number of the enemy is small or large. You might have one person opposing you about something significant right now, and God is more than able to protect you and bring about a solution. Maybe you have had to take a stand at work that is different from that of everybody else in the office. The numbers are

not important to God; He will care for His people whether the threat is small or large.

Entire nations might rage against Jerusalem, and other kingdoms might have already fallen, but God will do what He wants for His city. Hezekiah was once threatened by the Assyrians, who were conquering many nations (2 Kings 18:17). Their boast was that they had overtaken other nations whose gods had not been able to protect them and that Israel should not count on their God for protection, either. But God stepped in, sent an angel, and destroyed 185,000 of the enemy (19:35). Psalm 46:6 was proved true!

On the other hand, God can refuse to help. Joash had turned away from Him. We read, "For the army of the Syrians came with a small company of men, and the Lord delivered a very great host into their hand, because they had forsaken the Lord God of their fathers" (2 Chron. 24:24). Israel could count on God's help as long as they stayed in a right relationship with Him, but when they decided to live on their own terms, He sometimes refused to protect them. Obedience to the Lord is very important for His people.

Whatever Jerusalem was facing at that time, when God spoke, everything changed (Ps. 2:1-4). The nations are under His control (Isa. 40:15).

6. What is meant by the term "Lord of hosts" (v. 7)? What reassurance do we find in this verse?

The final verse of today's lesson text includes a dramatic title for God: Lord of hosts. This phrase occurs more than 250 times in the Old Testament and means "master of the heavenly armies." No earthly army can stand against the angelic hosts of God. Consider that the 185,000 soldiers of Sennacherib were killed by 1 angel (2 Kings 19:35). What earthly army can stand against 12 legions of angels mentioned in Matthew 26:53 or against the 10,000 times 10,000 angels of Revelation 5:11?

Sometimes the armies of ancient Israel are seen as a part of these angelic battalions (see 1 Samuel 17:45). For this psalmist, however, the potential of military power is not the most important thing. The key concept is that the commander of these armies is with us. His presence ensures victory. It is OK to be under martial law if your commander is the Lord, perfectly

just and invincibly powerful. In this sense, military rule is a refuge.

This perspective is important for us in understanding the protective power of God as it applies to us today. Although this psalm may have been written to celebrate an ancient military victory, it has resonated throughout the centuries for the people of God who look heavenward for help in times of distress and discouragement. Our God is still here!

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. God provides all the protection and strength we need to endure trying times (Psalm 46:1).
2. If we fear God, there is no reason to fear circumstances or people (vs. 2,3).
3. God does not promise us freedom from trouble but rather what we need to endure trouble (v. 4).
4. We trumpet God's grace when we stand unmoved while all around us are disturbed (v. 5).
5. The wicked should not distress us, for God will eventually end their rebellion (v. 6).
6. If God is with us, no one can triumph over us (v. 7).

CONCLUSION - The Mighty Fortress

The most famous hymn to come out of the Protestant Reformation was Martin Luther's "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," written around 1527. It is still sung regularly in churches nearly 500 years later. Luther drew the basic ideas for this hymn from Psalm 46, our focus text for this lesson. Luther transformed the victory over the Assyrians to the Christian victory over Satan.

We may see evidence of this in several phrases. Luther's description of God as a "mighty fortress" is derived from Psalm 46:1. Luther pictures God as "our Helper" in the flood of "mortal ills," a paraphrase of the psalm's description in verse 1 of God as "a very present help in trouble." Luther identifies God as "Lord Sabaoth" (46:7, same as the "Lord of hosts"). Luther states that the devil's "rage" can be endured, for "his doom is sure," a reference to the rage of the "heathen" who are powerless before

the Lord (46:6). Luther recognizes the might of the voice of the Lord when he claims, "One little word shall fell [the enemy]" (compare 46:6).

Luther's final phrase sums up the message of the psalm: "His kingdom is forever." Kingdoms and nations may come and go. Families, careers, and fortunes may wax and wane. But the eternal kingdom of God Almighty does not change and will never fail. There is no end to the reign of our king (Luke 1:33; compare Revelation 11:15). When we are part of the people of God, we are citizens of the eternal city. Our hope and future are secure in the rock of our salvation.

PRAYER - Holy God, Lord of hosts, You are our rock, our fortress, and our refuge. Though the storms of life assail us, may we trust in You. Though the attacks of the devil bear down on us, may we be loyal to You. In the turmoil of our lives, may we be still and acknowledge that You are God. May we exalt You above everything in our world. We pray this in the name of Your Son, Jesus. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER - God still provides an unassailable refuge.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

In next week's lesson, "God's Presence Comforts and Assures," concludes the unit by reminding us that He comforts His own by providing for our very need. Study Psalm 63:1-11.

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY Willie Ferrell
Jesus Is All Ministries



Sunday, September 10, 2023

Lesson 2 - "God's Rule Over the Nations"

Lesson Text: **Psalm 47:1-9**

Background Scripture: **Psalm 47:1-9**

Devotional Reading: **Colossians 1:27**

Psalms 47:1-9

1 O clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph. 2 For the LORD most high is terrible; he is a great King over all the earth. 3 He shall subdue the people under us, and the nations under our feet. 4 He shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob whom he loved. Selah. 5 God is gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet. 6 Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises. 7 For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding. 8 God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness. 9 The princes of the people are gathered together, even the people of the God of Abraham: for the shields of the earth belong unto God: he is greatly exalted.

INTRODUCTION

Isaiah 11:3-5 says that God's Spirit "shall make him (Messiah) of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his reins."

We do not see much true justice in the world today because there is no way for human judges to know the facts without doubt. It is common for witnesses to promise to tell nothing but the truth but then to lie under examination. Lying, in fact, has become so commonplace in today's world that it is no longer considered wrong. What a difference there will be when Jesus Christ is ruling on earth in Jerusalem! As Isaiah explained; He will not be bound by witnesses

say or by physical evidences. Since Jesus is God, He is omniscient, just like His Father, meaning He already knows all things without being told.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Time: unknown **Place:** Judah

Psalm 47 lends itself to public worship and praise. Its enduring qualities are shown by its current place in the celebration of Rosh Hashanah (New Year's Day) in some Jewish congregation today. By tradition, Psalm 47 is recited seven times before the blowing of the shofar (ram's horn) to mark the beginning of the New Year and its celebration.

Psalm 47 is the fifth in a series of seven psalms associated with "the sons of Korah." Descendants of Korah seem to have been important pioneers in the liturgical worship of the temple in Jerusalem (see 1 Chronicles 9:19; 2 Chronicles 20:19).

The psalms traditionally are divided into five "books." Seven psalms of the sons of Korah begin Book II, which consists of Psalms 42-72. Originally, Psalms 42 and 43 were one unit, so the seven are 42/43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, and 49 (Psalms 84-88 comprise another collection of Korah psalms).

The superscription of Psalm 47 calls it A Psalm. By contrast, some other Korah psalms are identified as maschil. We are sure what a maschil is. One theory is that this title is given to song-poems of a personal, contemplative nature, while the designation A Psalm is attached to works written as expression of praise to God for use in public worship. We note, however, that Psalm 88 features both designations. Psalm 47, for its part, combines words of praise to the Lord with active participation from the congregation.

We do not know the precise historical context of Psalm 47, but it has allusions to the history of Israel.

For example, the reference to “a trumpet” in verse 5 reminds us of the miraculous victory of Joshua over the walled city of Jericho (Joshua 6). The psalm, then, combines praise of God with a patriotic celebration of the victories of the nation of Israel.

TODAY’S AIM

Facts: to show that God is on the throne and all the nations of the earth are under His control.

Principle: to state that God is over all the nations of the earth.

Application: to demonstrate that we have nothing to fear, for our God is absolutely in charge of all the nations of the world.

CELEBRATING GOD’S REIGN (Psalm 47:1-4)

1. Why do Bible scholars refer to Psalm 47 as a royal psalm (Psalm 47:1)?

Many bible scholars refer to this psalm as a royal, or an enthronement, psalm because it portrays the Lord as the King of earth. It seems that the authors, again said to be the sons of Korah, spoke in prophetic statement expressing future certainty. At the time they wrote these words, it was true that God was in charge of the earth and, as such, ruled over it. However, there is a millennial fulfillment coming in which the Lord Jesus Christ will literally reign on earth.

Clapping for the Lord (v.1)

There are certain human practices that predate recorded history because they instinctive. We smile. We laugh. We cry. We stomp our feet. And we slap the palms of our hands together to make noise. Clapping, among other things, is an auditory gauge as measured by its loudness and length. Clapping is a physical act that requires active involvement.

This is a participatory psalm. It is not intended to be droned out in a monotone voice to an unresponsive crowd. It begins by encouraging the worshippers to clap and shout. Such crowd noise is reminiscent of the celebration after a military victory. It’s not praise for an army, though, but a tribute to the mighty God of Israel.

2. What evidence do we see today that God is “King over all the earth” (vs.2)?

Verse 2 uses some fabulous descriptions for God. The Bible’s first use of the title “Lord most high” appears in the record of Abraham’s encounter with

Melchizedek, the king of Salem (Jerusalem; Genesis 14:18). During this episode, Abraham confessed an oath to “the Lord, the most high God” (Genesis 14:22). The sense of this phrase is not to say that the God of Israel is the greatest among a large group of competing gods. It is to affirm, rather that the Lord is on a unique plane and has no rivals.

3. What did the psalm writers mean when they referred to God as “terrible” (v.2)?

Psalm 47:2 describes the Lord as “terrible.” In this context, the word terrible is not a negative term, as in “awful.” Rather, it denotes the one who strikes terror in those who encounter Him. This is not terror associated with a fear of evil, but a reverential awe of the mighty power of God. Describing as “terrible” is a way of saying that He commands great reverence because He is so awesome. He inspires awe in those who contemplate Him. We often tend to be too reserved to let ourselves rejoice with enthusiastic clapping and shouting. In that day our joy will be so great it will be unhindered.

The second line of verse 2 affirms the unlimited sovereignty of God. The description great king is sometimes extended to earthly, human kings in the Bible (compare 2 Kings 18:19, Ezra 5:11). In an absolute sense, however, God is the ultimate king, the unrivaled and unquestioned king of the universe (see Malachi 1:14). We are wise to remember that while we may have an intimate, personal relationship with God, He is still the King of Kings and Lords of lords (see Timothy 6:15).

The end of verse 2 expresses the fact that God “is a great King over all the earth.” This explains the call for all people to express joy by clapping their hands and shouting to God with expressions of triumph. Notice that the call is not restricted to Israel but includes all those living on earth. The day is coming when He will rule as described.

4. How is the psalmist’s faith seen in the statement in verses 3-4? How can we demonstrate similar faith?

Verses 3-4 are set in the future tense (shall), but they have larger sense: the people’s anticipation of great victories in the future are based on the mighty triumphs in the past. This is what allows them to expect God’s continuing assurance of protection and success.

It is clear that the writers of Psalm 47 had Israel in mind in verses 3-4, as seen in the words “us,” “our feet,” “our inheritance,” and “the excellency of Jacob whom he loved.” The exaltation of Israel began when God chose Israel as His special nation. We have seen its complete fulfillment in history, however; so, there is a time coming when Israel will be the dominant nation of the world. Historically, it might also be that these verses have reverence to Israel’s conquest of Canaan under Joshua.

With peace comes prosperity. Rather than worry about the looming threat of war caused by a foreign invasion, the people can truly look to enjoyment of their inheritance, a land chosen for them by God (v. 4). This is a marvelous heritage, worthy of celebration with all the clapping and shouting that the crowd can muster!

UNDERSTANDING GOD’S REIGN (Psalms 47:5-9)

5. How is God seen as a victorious warrior (v. 5)?

The psalm now moves to a celebratory picture drawn from the world of military acclamation. After a great victory, the Israelite army would march back to Jerusalem in triumph. Upon approaching and entering the city, the army naturally would ascend the “holy hill” to the temple, the focal point of the city (Psalm 24:3; 43:3). In this case, the ascending victor is an army of one, God, for it is the Lord who has gone up to the applause and shout of the crowd and with the ringing “sound of a trumpet.” The scene being pictured is one of near pandemonium, of joy and exuberance directed to God for His victory.

We speak sometimes of the “roar of the crowd” as when a collection of people has a single voice like a lion. You might have experienced this in a large sports stadium when an unexpected yet brilliant play on the field moves the crowd to a spontaneous combination of yelling, whistling, stomping, and clapping. The people rise to their feet as one without any direction. You can feel a wave of emotion sweep the stadium. It can bring goose bumps to any spectator.

To be recognized in this way is breathtaking for the shouters and for the player who caused the uproar. To be the focus of the loud, spontaneous praise of 50,000 fans is a thrill like no other. This is the

phenomenon that the psalm describes here, but all the praise and focus is for the Lord.

In the same manor, our worship celebrations are our recognition of Jesus’ victory over death. The shout and trumpet also remind us of the description of the Lord’s return in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, where we read, “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God.” This refers to the rapture, when God will begin a process of events beyond mankind’s control, leading to His later return to earth to establish His kingdom.

6. The psalmist calls upon us to sing praises to God (vs. 6-7). What does the psalmist mean by “sing ye praises with understanding?”

Four times here the words “sing praises” are given, along with one “sing ye praises.” The Hebrew word translated “sing” is *zamar*. It can refer to singing or playing a musical instrument. It is defined as “sing, sing praise, and make music” (Harris, Archer, and Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Moody). Thus, we understand that there are various ways in which we can offer praises to the Lord. The important thing is that we praise Him!

However, there is a qualifier here: the people are enjoined to sing praises “with understanding” (1 Corinthians 14:15). If a time of praise devolves into mindless chaos, the purpose is lost. Some may enjoy such bedlam, but praise without focus and understanding is not what this psalm is advocating. The more we know about God, the more effective and satisfying our times of praise will be. We do not need to park our intellect at the door when we come to praise the Lord. We should bring both our heads and our hearts to the service of praise.

7. In what sense is God King over the “heathen” who reject Him (v. 8)? Why should this be a comfort to us?

The psalm moves toward its conclusion with a picture of God enthroned in holiness. His reign is not confined to Israel, but extends to pagan nations. The psalmist does not make the mistake of elevating his own nation, Israel, to a position of power over all the nations of the earth. To do so would be historically inaccurate and doctrinally erroneous. Israel is never a dominating world power, even during its heyday of

Solomon. Ancient Israel never challenges Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, or Rome for word domination.

What a lesson for every believer! “God reigned over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness” (v. 8). No matter what you might be facing right now, it is all under the control of God’s almighty hand. It is easy to accept this when circumstances are good, but we must remember that the same truth holds in unpleasant and trying circumstances.

8. What hope does verse 9 give us? Should we expect great numbers of people to turn to the Lord as the end of time approaches? Explain.

The psalm pictures a gathering of all nations at the throne of God. This might be a reference to leaders of the various countries on earth during the millennium (compare Revelation 7:9). Israel is among them, “even the people of the God of Abraham.” These many nations are represented by their princes and their shields. In this context, these two terms are equivalent. The legitimate king of any nation has an obligation to protect his people from foreign invasion, and thus is a shield to that nation’s sovereignty. However, all of these guardians are subservient to the dominant, all-powerful reign of God. There is no shield from His wrath and no challenge to His authority.

The final line of the psalm is a fitting summation: he is greatly exalted. The reality of God’s exaltation is not in question, only our understanding of it. At some point, however, we must confess our inadequacy to comprehend fully the reign of God over the earth (see Romans 11:33). Our limited understanding does not lessen God’s eternal power. When words fail and comprehension falters, we may always fall back on praise. We may yield to our inborn, created function and give Him all the honor and glory of which we are capable.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. God’s awe-inspiring nature demands praise from all people (Psalm 47:1,2).

2. God’s work on behalf of Israel is proof that He is compassionate and faithful (vs. 3,4).

3. One of our primary responsibilities is to acknowledge God’s works with praise (vs. 5,6).

4. Nothing is beyond God’s rule and control; He is worthy of our praise and commitment (vs. 7,8).

5. It is comforting to know that all the powers of the earth are under God’s control, whether they realize it or not (v.9).

CONCLUSION - National Praise

The doctrines and purpose of Psalm 47 remain unchanged. It still has a place in the worship of God’s people, the church. Here we can sing and praise to our utmost. We can be told repeatedly to “sing praises” and agree by our joyous obedience. And we know that the final picture of the psalm still rings true. Our God is more than the God of ancient Israel whom Christians have adopted. He is, rather, the God over all nations and all princes and all people. This is true whether the leaders and citizens of any given nation choose to acknowledge it or not. He is the only God, the true God. May we sing His praises!

PRAYER - O Lord God, all-powerful Ruler of the universe, to You we bring our praise and honor. May You reign from the mighty throne of Your holiness and from the tiny thrones of our hearts. May our clapping and shouting be for Your glory. We pray this in the name of Your Son, Jesus, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER - Bring joyous praise to His throne.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON - In next week’s lesson, “God’s Presence Comforts and Assures,” reminds us that He comforts His own by providing for our very need. Study Psalm 63:1-11.

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY Deloris H.
Washington
Jesus is All Ministries



Sunday, September 17, 2023

Lesson 3 - "God's Presence Comforts and Assures"

Lesson Text: **Psalm 63:1-11**

Background Scripture: **Psalm 63:1-11**

Devotional Reading: **Proverbs 14:26; Hebrews 13:6**

Psalm 63

1 O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; 2 To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary. 3 Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. 4 Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name. 5 My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips: 6 When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches.

7 Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice. 8 My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand upholdeth me. 9 But those that seek my soul, to destroy it, shall go into the lower parts of the earth. 10 They shall fall by the sword: they shall be a portion for foxes. 11 But the king shall rejoice in God; every one that sweareth by him shall glory: but the mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped.

INTRODUCTION

Some of the psalms have historical superscriptions that indicate a time element. According to the superscription of this psalm, David was in the wilderness of Judah when he wrote it. There are two possible occasions for this writing. It might have been when he was running from Saul, or it might have been when he fled from Jerusalem and his son Absalom. The second incident is the more likely of the two, because in verse 11 David referred to himself as "the king," which he was not when Saul was pursuing him.

The incident regarding Absalom is recorded in 2 Samuel 15 through 18. Absalom had rebelled against the king (15:7-12). In this psalm we read the

reflections of a man on the run. Understanding these circumstances causes us to marvel at the great faith expressed in the psalm.

TODAY'S AIM

Facts: to show how David found sustaining comfort in the wilderness by drawing close to God.

Principle: to state that God's presence will always be a source of comfort to sustain us.

Application: to show that when we feel alone and miserable, God's presence can bring the joy back into our lives.

Seeking God's Comfort (Psalm 63:1-4)

1. What was David longing for when he said he was thirsty in a dry land where there was no water (Psalm 63:1)?

In his opening cry of desperation, David called out to God. David was thirsty and longing for just one thing: God's help. "The psalmist yearns for fellowship with the Lord like one who thirsts for water in the desert" (Barker and Kohlenberger, eds., Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary, Zondervan). He was seeking Him "early."

This is the Hebrew word *shachar*, which means "to seek, seek early or earnestly, look early or diligently for" (Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Oxford). This helps us understand the desperation of David's heart. He was eager to talk with his God about his situation. Rather than let bitterness and disappointment control him, he knew enough to lean heavily upon God when the trial was hard. His reference to thirst and fleshly need in a dry, barren land where he could not find water is a symbolic way of expressing spiritual need rather than physical. He could not live spiritually without God any more than he could live physically without water.

What Do You Think?

What is the best time of the day for you to seek God? Why?

Talking Points for Your Discussion:

- Allowing “the urgent” to squeeze out “the important”
- Frequency of seeking God

2. What made his present experience even more difficult (v. 2)?

What made it even more difficult was David's memory of having been in the presence of God in the past and enjoying the worship and security he had there. He had been able to witness God's power and glory during those days; now he suffered in the wilderness, feeling absent from God. To him it was nothing short of pure torture. If only he could repeat the past experiences of being in God's presence! If only he would not feel so alone and deserted! With his own son turning against him, he needed God all the more.

3. What enabled David to continue to praise God in this trial (vs. 3,4)?

David now offers another phrase of great depth: God's “lovingkindness is better than life.” David would rather enjoy the sweet fellowship of God in the dawn hours than any other aspect of living. His spiritual needs take priority over his physical needs.

What an attitude David displayed in the middle of a severe trial! He focused on the loving-kindness of God instead of on the negative circumstances that were engulfing him at the time. What an example for every believer! A great deal of discouragement and depression in believers results from not doing exactly what David did. Humanly speaking, it is easier to focus on our immediate circumstances than it is to focus on the unseen God. The solution is found in genuinely knowing God so well that we can trust Him.

On a human level, we trust most the family and friends we know the best. We cannot trust those we meet until we come to know them well and see that they are people of integrity and therefore trustworthy. Nor can we trust God until we know Him well, and the only way that happens is through devouring His Word and learning everything about Him we possibly can. Those who do not spend time

with God in His Word, in prayer, and in church will not be able to have the level of trust needed in trials.

David determined, in fact, that he would maintain an attitude of praise to God as long as he lived (v. 4). To bless the Lord is a form of praise coupled with thankfulness. David praises actively and physically, lifting his hands toward Heaven in a posture of prayer. This was a gesture of respect for God and His Word. Psalm 119:48 says, "My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes." David's trust would not waver.

Resting in God's Presence (Psalm 63:5-8)

4. How did David describe the satisfaction he found in God (v. 5)?

David said the presence of God was as satisfying to his soul as good food was to his body. Regarding the phrase "marrow and fatness," John MacArthur noted in *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Thomas Nelson) that this is "a metaphor comparing the spiritual and emotional satisfaction of the divine presence with the satisfaction of rich banquet food."

The Holman Old Testament Commentary makes this observation: "He used the metaphor of a royal banquet prepared with the choicest of foods. David probably remembered the stately feasts he enjoyed as Israel's king. With this regal background, he reminded his own heart that only God could satisfy the true yearnings of his soul" (Anders, gen. ed., Broadman and Holman). No wonder he could go on to speak of praising God with joyful lips. David was not merely indulging in spiritual jargon. These were sincere feelings from within.

5. What did David do during the night to encourage himself (vs. 6,7)?

David now shifts to the other end of his day, the time before sleep. This is not so much a time of praise, but of meditation and remembering. He can look back on the day and count its blessings, ways in which God has been his help. To do this on a regular, daily basis causes one to appreciate more fully the constant care that God provides. This period of David's life is stressful beyond expression. Will there be enough food today? Will Absalom find David's place of refuge and take his life? What about his family members?

In stressful times, we might begin our day saying, "How will I ever get through this?" At the end of the day, we should remember that we have survived and God has not abandoned us. As the mother hen gathers her young brood of chicks under her wings for protection as they sleep, we may end our day and take our rest knowing that we are always under God's loving protection (v. 7).

6. What did David mean by "My soul followeth hard" (v. 8)?

To "follow hard" is an old expression that means to follow very closely, right behind. It does not imply that it is difficult for David to follow God's leading. David is more than willing to follow and not strike out on his own. This sense of proximity is reinforced by the image of the active, supportive presence of the leader's right hand. David understands that he will fall without the support of the Lord. The right hand is presumably the stronger hand, the hand of power.

David does not see his relationship with God to be static and unchanging. He is being led to places that he may not anticipate. In this case, he does not know how things will play out. David knew his safety was in God even more than in the army that was accompanying him. He would have to hold onto God's hand for his future. This is the grasp of faith.

God's Justice Assured (Psalm 63:9-11)

7. Of what was David confident regarding his enemies (vs. 9,10)?

Here we see for the first-time reference to David's enemies. In speaking of them, he expressed confidence that those who sought to destroy his life would be destroyed in turn by God. Their going to "the lower parts of the earth" is a description of the realm of the dead. The implication is that they would be slain and never seen again. David would live on, but they were going to perish. Such was his confidence in the justice of God.

David went on to say that his enemies were going to die by the sword and be left for wild animals to devour (v. 10). There was no honor in this. Absalom and his loyal followers were attempting to put David out of commission so that they could occupy the throne and govern the country in their own way.

The result of the battle that eventually ensued was the defeat of Absalom's army and his death. When it

happened, it was a source of deep grief to David (2 Sam. 18:33); it surely was not as satisfying to him as he anticipated in this psalm. His trust in God remained, however, and his enemies were destroyed while he continued his life and reign.

8. What is the universal truth we find in the last verse?

David now spoke in the third person, stating that he would rejoice in God, knowing he would survive the present crisis. At the moment he wrote this, there was no evidence of the outcome; so, this is a statement of faith based on his knowledge of God. He was determined to stay true to God throughout and expressed it with the phrase "every one that sweareth by him." Deuteronomy 6:13 says, "Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name." This describes staying true to Him.

The person who stays true to God will be able to boast about God and His presence and help. What believer has not found this to be true? God works on our behalf in so many ways, giving us repeated opportunities to testify of Him and His wonderful works. "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!" (Ps. 107:8).

There is a universal truth in the statement at the end of Psalm 63:11, as seen in "everyone." Those who stay true to God will have reason to praise Him! In contrast, those enemies (described as liars) who try to defeat the truth will be stopped and have nothing to say. David's enemies were fighting against God and therefore would not have any hope of victory. They would be stopped, and he would carry on.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Daily fellowship with the Lord should be our constant desire and priority (Psalm 63:1,2).
2. Contemplating God's steadfast love, or "lovingkindness," will give us a proper perspective on life (vs. 3,4).
3. True satisfaction comes only from fellowship with God and dwelling on Him (vs. 5,6).
4. We are to cling to the Lord at all times, knowing He will sustain us always (vs. 7,8).
5. Though we are treated unjustly, with God ultimate justice is assured (vs. 9,10).
6. We can rejoice that we share in God's victory (v. 11).

CONCLUSION

Not Just on Sunday When do you recognize your relationship with God? How often? Do you praise Him on Sunday, but not during the week? If your time of communion with your Creator is limited to once a week, what happens if you miss a couple of weeks? Can you maintain a strong relationship if you neglect it for 7 or 14 or 21 days? What if you miss a couple of months, maybe during a sports season or due to a change in shifts at your job?

The answer to this is obvious: any relationship withers if it is not cultivated. David understood this, even in his times of deepest distress. He languished as a fugitive in a remote wilderness hideout. Whatever his worship patterns had been, they would have been difficult to maintain. There must have been days when he was confused, wondering why his own son would seek his death. But today's psalm shows us that David did not despair of his strong, sustaining relationship with the Lord.

A mature, growing relationship with God will not be confined to Sunday. It will spill over into the other days. It can begin as we seek time alone with the Lord every morning and/or evening. We do not need a carefully planned program with people designated to pray and read Scripture. There is nothing wrong with these things, but worshipping "only on Sunday" is not enough.

As our relationship grows deeper, we will begin to understand what David learned: that God's "lovingkindness is better than life." We will begin to acknowledge that our souls have a deep, unquenchable thirst for God and that we need to experience His presence to sustain us.

PRAYER

Holy God, lover of our souls, we praise You with lips of joy. We want to seek You in the morning, in the evening, and all the day through. Our souls are destitute without Your presence. They are like the parched ground in a desert during a long-term drought. They need and seek the living water that comes from You. May You continue to bless us with

Your presence and comfort. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER - God is always available.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

In next week's lesson, Psalm 66 shows us how powerful our God truly is. He has not forgotten His people. He is involved and active and protects His people from harm and danger. Study Psalm 66:1-20, "God Is Awesome."

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY Willie Ferrell
Jesus is All Ministries



Sunday, September 24, 2023

Lesson 4 - "God Is Awesome"

Lesson Text: Psalm 66:1-12

Background Scripture: Psalm 66:1-20

Devotional Reading: Psalm 40:1-5

Psalm 66:1-12

1 Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands: 2 Sing forth the honour of his name: make his praise glorious. 3 Say unto God, How terrible art thou in thy works! through the greatness of thy power shall thine enemies submit themselves unto thee. 4 All the earth shall worship thee, and shall sing unto thee; they shall sing to thy name. Selah. 5 Come and see the works of God: he is terrible in his doing toward the children of men. 6 He turned the sea into dry land: they went through the flood on foot: there did we rejoice in him. 7 He ruleth by his power for ever; his eyes behold the nations: let not the rebellious exalt themselves. Selah. 8 O bless our God, ye people, and make the voice of his praise to be heard: 9 Which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved. 10 For thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us, as silver is tried. 11 Thou broughtest us into the net; thou laidst affliction upon our loins. 12 Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water: but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place.

LESSON AIM

Facts: to show what God did to protect His people and how we need to respond.

Principle: to assert that God is awesome in His actions to protect His people.

Application: to demonstrate that when we are in need of protection, we can count on our God to come forth with His powerful acts and protect us.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Time: unknown

Place: Judah

Psalm 66 is a hymn praising God for awesome deeds in the present as well as in the past. The hymn is divided into two parts. The first part (vs. 1–12) is in the first-person plural (we, our, us), and is a

communal exhortation to praise God for His awesome works on behalf of His people, even during times of testing instigated by God. The second part (vs. 13–20) however, everything is in the first person singular (I, my, me). Both group and individual praise are emphasized, and both are still important today.

Praise expressed by God's people is such a joyful sound. The music in a church service is a good example. In congregational singing, we corporately lift our voices in praise and express to God and to each other how blessed we are. Individual praise is equally important and equally beautiful in God's ears. Not all of us have beautiful quality in our voices, but God listens to the heart and is pleased.

No one knows what crisis (if any) is the background for this psalm. Most scholars suggest two possibilities. One is the Assyrian crisis of 701 B.C., involving Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem and King Hezekiah's faithfulness to God to trust in His deliverance (Isaiah 36, 37; 2 Kings 18:13, 17–37; 2 Chronicles 32:9–19). Only by the intervention of God was the city of Jerusalem spared. To this end Hezekiah had prayed the words we see in Isaiah 37:16–20. If the words of Psalm 66:13–20 are from Hezekiah's lips, then we can see their deep significance. The praise and sacrifice offered by the king are not on his own behalf alone, but for the people whom God has rescued.

The second possible background is the release from Babylonian captivity. The date under this possibility would have to be after the rebuilding of the temple in 516 B.C. since Psalm 66:13 refers to that structure. But no one knows which theory (if either) is correct. Yet this uncertainty does not rob this psalm of its power and dynamic. It can be applied to any

“deliverance” the people of God experience in any circumstance.

Neither do we know who wrote the psalm. Both Psalms 66 and 67 are without a named author, but both are surrounded by “Davidic” psalms. This uncertainty does not, of course, prevent our appreciation for the content of the psalm.

GLORIOUS PRAISE (Psalm 66:1-4)

1. To whom did the psalmist direct his appeal for praise to God, and what particular means did he suggest? (Psalm 66:1-2)

In the first nine verses of this psalm, we find an appeal to the nations to praise God. Psalm 65 ends with nature praising God, but now the attention goes to people. The call is to magnificent praise, as seen in the phrase “make his praise glorious” (66:2), that is, praise that is exceptionally beautiful, outstandingly lovely, and inspiring. This describes heart qualities more than tonal beauty. We have to wonder whether most of our congregational singing fits this description! The psalmist said that the expressions of praise should come from making joyful noises and singing.

In the Hebrew, the phrase all ye lands is precisely the same as the phrase “all the earth” in verse 4. Together they emphasize the fact that the God of the Hebrews is also the God of the whole earth. Thus, the tone of the psalm is universal. The peoples of the earth cannot refuse to recognize God’s awesome deeds. His sovereignty demands universal worship and obedience. This should be done with joy. When we “sing forth the honour of his name” (v. 2), we praise God, we brag about Him to Him and/or others. Such boasting would fulfill the description of glorious praise, as it would indeed be pleasant to God's ears.

2. What is one thing that should cause praise from God's people? (v. 3)

What might the nations say in their words of praise? These two verses give us an example. It is the works of God that cause praise. Psalm 107 describes several different situations we face in life. In each case there is reassurance of deliverance followed by this cry from the psalmist: “Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!” (vs. 8, 15, 21, 31). We have joy when we discern God's working every day.

When one reviews all the works of God in the Old Testament and the great deeds of Jesus in the New Testament, the large catch of fish is a small thing compared with the other awesome works of God. God’s “power” is so great (v. 4) that when it is manifested, the enemies of God have no choice but to submit themselves to His authority (example: Revelation 6:15–17).

3. When will the scriptural admonitions for all nations to praise God be fulfilled (v. 4)?

“All the earth” should be taken prophetically. At present only about a third of the earth’s population calls itself “Christian,” and that number undoubtedly includes many who are Christian in name only. Not until some future day will all the earth worship God the Father as revealed through Jesus and as known by His Spirit (compare Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:10).

The verse has now come full circle so that we see a vision of a future people singing unto God and honoring His name. God’s people in their present circumstances do not yet see the whole earth either bowing down in homage to God or singing to Him. But by faith we can envision them doing so (Revelation 15:3,4).

AWESOME WORKS (Psalm 66:5-7)

4. What awesome and powerful works does the psalmist invite us to examine? (vs. 5-6)

In order to encourage the response of praise that comes from examining the works of God, the psalmist issued an invitation to come take a look at what He had done. Once again we see the word “terrible” and realize that God's works do not normally inspire terror (unless they are punishment) but, rather, awe.

The invitation to come and see God’s activities or works is also offered in Psalm 46:8. If one worships an awesome God, it must be because He has done awesome works. This is the reason for our worship. Indeed, it can be a terrifying (awesome) experience when God begins to work on behalf of His people, such as He did during the exodus events. Think of the 10 plagues (Exodus 7–11). Think of the Passover meal on that climactic night (Exodus 12). Think of the crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 13, 14). The Israelites had been terrified by the Egyptians (14:10–12). But as God revealed His awesome power, the

Israelites feared Him instead (14:31). The reader is invited to see what the Israelites saw.

God has shown His awesome power in the past by delivering His people from the Egyptian army by opening a way through the Red Sea. At just the right moment, with the Egyptian soldiers and chariots caught in the mud, God causes the walls of water to crack, releasing the deadly waters upon the path (Exodus 14:26–28; compare 15:1, 4, 5, 10, 12, 19, 21). The exodus is ancient Israel’s most beloved and well-known story of salvation, and we are invited to examine it.

God’s awesome power controlled the chaotic waters during the Red Sea event, and He delivered His people from their enemies. The rejoicing after this awesome event refers to the songs of Moses and Miriam (Exodus 15:1–18, 20, 21). Moses’ song became a pattern for such rejoicing at great events ever since.

5. How does the Exodus illustration show that God rules “by his power forever”? (v. 7)

The song of Moses ends with this declaration: “The Lord shall reign for ever and ever” (Exodus 15:18). It is God who is the king of all the earth. In that capacity He rules with great power and His accomplishments are awesome (see Exodus 14:31). The divine king is always watching the nations, for He is sovereign over them as well as over Israel. Any nation can suffer the consequences of being an enemy of God (see Psalm 66:3, above) when it refuses to honor God’s name or acknowledge His awesome power and great deeds. Look at what happened to the Egyptians! No nation should dare try to exalt itself above God’s sovereign power.

VOICED PRAISE (Psalm 66:8-12)

6. What in addition to God's help in the past encouraged the psalmist? (v. 8)

We sense an increase in the intensity of the psalmist's desire for God to be praised. The present generation of God’s people (in terms of this psalm) are to praise God loudly! All the nations are to hear God’s people praising Him for deliverance. The generation this psalm is written to is to identify itself with the exodus generation. We in the twenty-first century must do so as well (compare 1 Corinthians 10:1–13).

The psalmist’s intensity probably stemmed from the fact that the God who was so faithful to help Israel's past generations was willing to show Himself faithful to those now living. That is the encouragement we get from studying the past.

7. What evidences do we have of the present help of God? (v. 9)

God's present help and protection are verbalized next. The fact that we have life is evidence of His hand upon us. The fact of His keeping us from danger is another evidence of the same. It also indicates that during those times when He does allow difficult situations, He sustains and strengthens us. Sometimes we face circumstances that would normally destroy a person, but God grants help and deliverance, and our lives are preserved.

8. What had God done prior to their praise to teach and test Israel? How did the psalmist describe the way God had proved them? (vs. 10-11)

This is where the exact incident that prompted the psalm is left unidentified. Israel had evidently gone through something very difficult from which God delivered them. It might even be that the time of difficulty was simply an extended season of hardship, such as a time of famine or being threatened by an enemy nation, from which God finally gave them relief. Whatever it was, the psalmist saw it as a time of purposeful trial meant to strengthen God's people.

God is described as having taken them into a fortress and laying affliction on their backs. What they had experienced had not been accidental but was something that robbed them of normal freedoms. God had taken them directly into it in order to test them. A metal-smith heats precious metals in a hot furnace in order to remove all impurities. The furnace will melt the metal and allow the impure foreign particles to separate from it.

God has ways of refining His people when He sees in them, things that do not please Him. Israel as a nation has been through many trials through the centuries, but the people are still not what He wants them to be. Believers who allow sin in their lives will often have to go through chastening trials. The mature believer can understand when this is happening. The immature believer tends to become

angry or depressed and blame God instead of responding properly.

9. How did he describe the trials, and what did he say was a result? (v. 12)

In figurative language the psalmist said that men had been caused to ride over their heads (possibly an indication of enemy harassment) and that they had traveled through fire and water. Eventually they were brought out into a place of great abundance. None of this had been accidental, for God is described as designing and directing it. After the trial had run its course, His people were given blessings and fulfillment they might not have received apart from the trials.

This is reminiscent of Isaiah's words: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee" (Isa. 43:2). None of us enjoy trying times, but when we know that God allows or designs them for our spiritual growth, we can trust during them. Then we can say with Job, "But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10).

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. God's power is worthy of praise, for it is always directed toward good ends (Psalm 66:1-3).
2. The glorious acknowledgment of God in the future is reason for us to praise Him now (v. 4).
3. By remembering God's past works, we bring Him praise in the present (vs. 5-6).
4. Let's not be deceived by the triumph of the ungodly now; God is still in control (v. 7).
5. When we praise God, we should do it openly and vocally (vs. 8-9).
6. Trials will make us stronger when we allow God to work through them (vs. 10- 12).

CONCLUSION - Our God Is an Awesome God

Indeed, our God is an awesome God, and His works are awesome! Creation itself testifies to this characteristic of God. But bending nature to His will seems easy compared with shaping a people for God's purposes. A slave-nation in Egypt, the

Hebrews were to become a holy nation, a kingdom of priests, and God's most-prized treasure. God led His fickle people through the wilderness and across the Jordan River to conquer the promise land.

Eventually, a nation became a kingdom with eternal and unconditional promises given to David. That kingdom thrived until sin divided it. Yet a remnant returned from exile, and God's awesome deeds were recognized by a renewed people.

Finally, the Messiah came. It is the resurrection of Jesus that causes us to declare most completely that our God is an awesome God! Even the Jewish scholars who translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek about 200 years before Christ entitled Psalm 66 as "a song of resurrection." Our God is an awesome God!

PRAYER - O God, You have given us new life and kept our feet from slipping. Purify us for Your purposes and lead us through fire and water to You. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER - Worship only the awesome God.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

In next week's lesson, "God Is Forever," we will learn something more about God's divine nature – He is eternal. We are limited to time. God transcends time and lives in eternity. Our God can protect us because He is eternal. Study Psalm 90:1-17.

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY Renee Little
Jesus Is All Ministries



Sunday, October 1, 2023

Lesson 5 - "God Is Forever"

Lesson Text: **Psalm 90:1-12**

Background Scripture: **Psalm 90**

Devotional Reading: **Psalm 48:14**

Psalm 90:1-12

1 Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. 2 Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God. 3 Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men. 4 For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night. 5 Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass which growth up. 6 In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth. 7 For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled. 8 Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance. 9 For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told. 10 The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. 11 Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath. 12 So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

TODAY'S AIM

Facts: to show that God is eternal and we are finite and that He is a great Protector.

Principle: to emphasize that our God is forever and therefore can protect us.

Application: to show that we are frail and finite beings and that God, the eternal One, can protect us when we look to Him.

INTRODUCTION

One day a man in the crowd following Jesus spoke up and said, "Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me" (Luke 12:13). Jesus then warned, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (v. 15).

Jesus explained that a certain rich man had reaped such abundant crops that he became concerned over his lack of storage space. As he thought the problem through, he came up with a solution: he would tear down his present barns and build bigger ones adequate to hold his crops.

The man concluded that he would then be able to say, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry" (Luke 12:19). His perspective was entirely temporal; so God responded. God said, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?" (v. 20).

Jesus concluded by reminding His listeners that this is what happens when a person focuses only on his temporary situation and leaves God out of the equation.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Time: 1445-1405 B.C.

Place: unknown

The superscription attributes this psalm to Moses, making it the oldest in the Psalter. There is a good possibility that it was written during the years of Israel's wilderness wanderings. When we see how clearly Moses delineated and contrasted the eternity of God with the transitory nature of people, we are struck with the depth of his understanding. The same can be said of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and others. Much was known about God early in mankind's history.

THE ETERNITY OF GOD (Psalm 90:1-6)

1. Why did Moses begin the psalm with a statement of the eternity of God (Psalm 90:1,2)?

We are going to see a contrast between the infinite God and finite humans; so the psalmist began with a statement of the eternity of God. If Moses wrote this while Israel was wandering, it would be especially meaningful to express the fact that God was—and always had been—their dwelling place. This term means more than a home; it includes the thought that God is a protecting shelter. It is more than a geographical location; it is our sheltered position in God Himself that is so meaningful and comforting when it comes to our security.

Generations come and go, but God is a constant and has been since long before Creation. In eternity past, God was there; in fact, He has always existed. As difficult as it is for human minds to comprehend, it is true that God is self-existent. He had no beginning and will have no end. Isaiah said of God, "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy" (57:15).

2. What is the end of man's brief time on earth (v. 3)?

In comparison, man's time on earth is fleetingly brief. We were created from dust and will return to dust (Gen. 3:19). The Hebrew word used in Psalm 90:3 for "destruction" is not the term that is used for "dust" in Genesis, but the context indicates that this is probably what Moses had in mind. The word for "destruction" is one that sometimes means "crushed to powder," which describes quite well man's return to dust at the end of his life. It is God who decides when this will occur ("Thou turnest").

Warren Wiersbe wrote, "While we all thank God for modern science and the ministry of skilled medical personnel, we cannot successfully deny the reality of death or delay it when our time comes. The school of life is preparation for an eternity with God, and without Him, we cannot learn our lessons, pass our tests, and make progress from kindergarten to graduate school!" (The Bible Exposition Commentary, Cook).

3. How did Moses compare the eternity of God with the transitory nature of man (v. 4)?

Is there any way to compare God's eternity and man's transitoriness? Although it probably falls far short of adequacy, Moses attempted to do so by

saying that a thousand years in our perspective is nothing more than a day in God's. Peter quoted the statement: "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Pet. 3:8). His context was that while things will get worse in the last days and we might be concerned, God will judge men in His own time.

One of the most difficult things God requires of His children is waiting upon Him for answers to prayer and resolutions to difficult situations. We become impatient when God does not act according to the time table we try to set for Him. We must endeavor to understand that the eternal God sees things from a much different perspective and has everything under control. As we see worsening conditions during these last days, we can be confident that justice will soon be rendered and we will be safely in His presence.

A "watch in the night" (Ps. 90:4) was typically four hours long. As only one portion of the night, it also illustrates the brevity of life.

4. How did Moses illustrate the fleeting nature of life on earth (vs. 5,6)?

Moses then described more fully the fleeting nature of human life on earth with three illustrations that build climactically. The first is that of a flash flood. The Hebrew word used "iszaram", which means "to gush." It has been translated "carriest them away as with a flood." We have seen television reports of the devastating effects of flooding. At times we have seen large buildings, cars, and other items being swept along by raging waters. That is how swiftly life passes.

The mention of sleep is a euphemism for death. When people are swept away in the figurative flash flood just mentioned, the end result is their death. All of us are swept away by God into the sleep of death as if by a flood (see Psalm 76:5,6).

The third part of this illustration is a comparison of the brevity of life with the life span of grass. Moses described grass as growing up, glistening with dew in the morning, then being cut down in the evening, and withering away. Isaiah wrote, "All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the

people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth" (Isa. 40:6-8).

THE TEMPORAL NATURE OF MAN (Psalm 90:7-12)

5. What had made God angry with Israel? Why do we live under the cloud of His anger today (vs. 7,8)?

Humanity's sin and guilt have a consequence that consumes all of life. This consequence is the wrath of God. This is one of God's responses to human sin. This wrathful, angry response includes God's command to all humanity to "turn back to dust!" (see v. 3 above). What He intended in the creation of Adam and Eve was ruined by their rebellion. They were cast out of the Garden of Eden to till the ground during their short lives, eventually to die in the "dust of death" (see Genesis 3:19,23).

Moses was also writing from the perspective of Israel's refusal to enter the Promised Land at God's command, resulting in their many years of wandering in the wilderness. They had rebelled and caused God to be angry with them (Numbers 14:11-25). Moses wrote that they had been consumed by God's anger and troubled by His wrath. The years of wandering were filled with numerous trials and failures, along with multiple deaths as the older generation disappeared. Warren Wiersbe commented, "Moses asked God to pardon their sins, but the Lord still judged Israel by causing the older generation to die in the wilderness during the next forty years. It was the world's longest funeral march." God was greatly grieved by their sin.

David once wrote, "God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day" (Psalm 7:11). Those who think their secret sins are hidden from God are only fooling themselves (see Psalm 44:21; 101:5; Jeremiah 16:17,18). "The light which streams out from the divine face illumines the dark places of human culpability; God knows human beings—all of us—as they actually are" (Marvin Tate).

God desires that we confess sins and seek His face instead (see Psalm 38:18; 51:2-17). Which will we

hide in our hearts: our sins or God's Word? Psalm 119:11 says that we hide God's Word in our hearts that we might not sin.

What Do You Think?

What was a situation where a public figure tried to hide his or her sin? What tactic did he or she use? How does this serve as a warning to you personally?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Rationalizing
- Blame-shifting
- Claiming victim status
- Denying the reality of the sin

To be continued...

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY Willie Ferrell
Jesus Is All Ministries



Sunday, October 8, 2023

Lesson 6 – “God Is Forever” (*continued*)

Lesson Text: **Psalm 90:1-12**

Background Scripture: **Psalm 90**

Devotional Reading: **Psalm 48:14**

Psalm 90:1-12

1 Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. 2 Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God. 3 Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men. 4 For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night. 5 Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass which growth up. 6 In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth. 7 For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled. 8 Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance. 9 For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told. 10 The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. 11 Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath. 12 So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

TODAY'S AIM

Facts: to show that God is eternal and we are finite and that He is a great Protector.

Principle: to emphasize that our God is forever and therefore can protect us.

Application: to show that we are frail and finite beings and that God, the eternal One, can protect us when we look to Him.

THE TEMPORAL NATURE OF MAN (Psalm 90:7-12)

Review - 5. What had made God angry with Israel? Why do we live under the cloud of His anger today (vs. 7,8)?

David once wrote, "God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day" (Psalm 7:11). Those who think their secret sins are hidden from God are only fooling themselves (see Psalm 44:21; 101:5; Jeremiah 16:17,18).

God desires that we confess sins and seek His face instead (see Psalm 38:18; 51:2–17). Which will we hide in our hearts: our sins or God's Word? Psalm 119:11 says that we hide God's Word in our hearts that we might not sin.

6. What does the mention of seventy and eighty years illustrate (vs. 9,10)?

The concept of time is a major theme throughout this psalm: "in all generations" (v. 1); "from everlasting to everlasting" (v. 2); "a thousand years" (v. 4); "yesterday" (v. 4); "a watch in the night" (v. 4); "morning" (vs. 5,6); "evening" (v. 6); "days" (vs. 9,12,14,15); "years" (vs. 9,10,15); "soon" (v. 10); and "how long" (v. 13). Here our life span is measured in terms of days and years.

From the hard taskmasters of Egypt to the wrath of an angry God displeased at their sin, Moses' people had known little in life but trouble. "We spend our years as a tale that is told" (Ps. 90:9). The word translated "tale" means a "muttering" or "sigh." John MacArthur commented, "After struggling through his life of afflictions and troubles, a man's life ends with a moan of woe and weariness" (The MacArthur Study Bible, Thomas Nelson). Everything good enjoyed in life draws to a close at the moment of death. That does not mean that we should not enjoy what God allows us to have and do in this life. God gives joy, peace, and contentment to those who walk with Him. Even so, we recognize the brevity of life and know very well that it is going to end one day.

Seventy years is mentioned here as average, and an extra 10 years is evidence of extra strength. These numbers are not a guarantee of a certain length of life but are given to represent the fact that life is brief. Moses himself lived 120 years; Joshua, his successor, lived 110 years. Caleb was already 85 years old when Israel entered Canaan (Josh. 14:10). Yet the longest of lives amounts to a minuscule moment on the clock of eternity.

As good as life can be when one is walking in fellowship with God, it is always uncertain. Moses said there is always labor and sorrow, after which life ends, and we fly away into eternity. The most important thing for us is to know where we are going to spend that eternity.

7. What are we unable to comprehend about God's holiness and sin (v. 11)?

One of the things we will never understand in this life is the vast gulf between God's holiness and man's sinfulness. Sin is not just something God can wink at and let mankind get away with it. It is the violation of His awesome holiness.

The context of this psalm as a whole reveals the meaning of this verse. The psalm is not just about encouraging us mortals generally to brace up against the trials of life that are caused by our own sins and imposed on us by God's wrath. Rather, the community being addressed is suffering extensively from some particular adversity, and the question Who knoweth the power of thine anger? or, If only we knew the power of your anger! (NIV) indicates that nobody knows the ultimate extent of the affliction (compare 2 Samuel 12:22; Proverbs 24:22). Thus, we have the question "How long?" in verse 13 (not in today's text). The community wants relief for as many days as it has been afflicted (v. 15)

The second phrase here in verse 11, "Your wrath is as great as the fear that is your due" (NIV) means that God's wrath should be matched by our fear of Him (see Proverbs 9:10). When we approach God in prayer, we should do it with reverence and humility. Let God be God and humans be humans.

8. What should be our attitude and desire in light of God's eternity (v. 12)?

The emphasis throughout verses 3–11 has been how mortals live under the wrath of God. All of life has its sorrows. It is the attitude we take toward all the toil and trouble we face daily that makes the difference.

The attitude should be that we are to petition God to teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. The ability to number our days is one of the most important discernments we may have! When we have this discernment, we will not waste the life process. Life is too precious to waste on counterproductive pursuits.

A wise heart seeks God's will in life; when that happens, one can deal properly with life's brevity and sorrow. To number our days is to evaluate and make judgments concerning our thoughts, attitudes, and actions every waking day! Are we consciously trying to please God or ourselves?

What Do You Think?

What are some ways that people "number their days" properly?

What are some ways that people "number their days" improperly?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- **Luke 12:15–21 NKJV**

15 And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."

16 Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully.

17 And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?'

18 So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods.

19 And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." '

20 But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'

21 "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

- **Philippians 1:21 NKJV**
21 For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Because our God is eternal, we have eternal hope (Psalm 90:1,2).
2. God's plans are assured, for they are not confined to our lifetimes or limited by our power (vs. 3,4).
3. As transitory creatures, our hope and meaning must be found in our eternal God (vs. 5,6).
4. We should be quick to confess our sins, for they can never be hidden from God (vs. 7,8).
5. We understand God only if we recognize that He is a God of righteous wrath (vs. 9-11).
6. Our brief time on earth demands that we seek God's wisdom to live rightly (v. 12).

CONCLUSION - Make Time for God

Ecclesiastes 12:1–8 is a sober look at growing old and dying. The shortness of human life requires that we take seriously our relationship with the eternal God as He is known to us through Jesus the Christ and present to us in the Holy Spirit.

The church I attend promotes this relationship through small groups for fellowship, Bible study, and spiritual growth. My wife and I join several other couples in a weekly meeting. In March 2007, one of our members had a seizure and was diagnosed with a brain tumor. Within seven months he was gone. Bill was only 64 years old. For our group he was “young” and just at the point of enjoying years of retirement. But we were comforted by the fact that he had a great relationship with God, the Scriptures, the church, and his family.

We all miss Bill. But I am confident that Bill had “numbered his days” correctly, because in his 64 years he had made time for God. Bill now has eternity with Him and the certain hope of a coming resurrection. I wish my dad in his 90 years had made time for God. —A. R. W.

PRAYER

Eternal Father, teach us to number our days so that we don't waste our lives in trivial pursuits or sinful living. Be our dwelling place throughout all generations so that we may experience Your unfailing love forever in eternity. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER - Seek God in all circumstances.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

In next week's lesson, “God Delivers and Protects,” we will see how in His care we have nothing to fear. Study Psalm 91:1-16.

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY Willie Ferrell
Jesus Is All Ministries



Sunday, October 15, 2023

Lesson 7 – "God Delivers and Protects"

Lesson Text: Psalm 91:1-6, 9-16

Background Scripture: Psalm 91:1-16

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 57:7-12

Psalm 91

1 He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. 2 I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. 3 Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. 4 He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. 5 Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; 6. Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. 7 A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; [but] it shall not come nigh thee. 8 Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. 9 Because thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; 10 There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. 11 For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. 12 They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. 13 Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet. 14 Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. 15 He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. 16 With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation.

INTRODUCTION

If we were asked to describe life in one word, one possibility would have to be "uncertain." There are both joys and sorrows in life, and we have no way of knowing ahead of time which is coming next. Our lives include concerns about health, accidents,

financial disasters, unexpected breakdowns of appliances and vehicles, crimes, marriage problems of family and friends, loss of friendships, and unexpected deaths – to name a few. It is good that we cannot predict the future, for we would surely become depressed.

In spite of such uncertainties, the child of God who lives in a close relationship with the Lord can still have a sense of security. That comes from knowing that our God is sovereignty in control at all times; nothing is going to happen to us that He does not allow. That, in turn, allows us to enjoy life and experience a great deal of happiness, peace, joy, and contentment. The intimacy of that relationship is closely tied to the believer's commitment to being obedient to God and maintaining a daily walk with Him. Psalm 91 reminds us of God's protection and care of His children in the face of all the dangers included in this life.

LESSON BACKGROUND Last week's lesson from Psalm 90 starkly pointed out the difference between the eternal God and frail humanity as God's wrath overrides all human sin. Today's lesson from Psalm 91 moves us forward in emphasizing the fact that God's protection and grace are sufficient in times of great distress if we take refuge in Him. Psalm 91 is a song of trust. Its aim is to encourage the individual to put trust in a God who cares and protects those committed to Him.

TODAY'S AIM

Facts: to show how God delivers and protects us in all situations.

Principle: to underscore that we need to look to God alone for deliverance and refuge.

Application: to grasp that in God's almighty care we have nothing to fear.

Asylum of Protection (Psalm 91:1-2)

1. What are the four names the author used to identify God? How do they differ in meaning? (vs. 1-2)

The theme of Psalm 91 is stated clearly and concisely here in verse 1. The fact that the only place where one can find protection and security in the midst of threats is the secret place of God.

God is referred to in Psalm 91:1-2 by four names. He is called “the most High,” a translation of elyon, a word referring to something lofty and supreme, emphasizing His sovereignty. He is also called “the Almighty,” from shaddai, including God’s power (His omnipotence) and sufficiency to handle every situation. The third name is “Lord (Yahweh),” the personal name of God that expresses His self-existence and faithfulness to His promises. The last is “God,” elohim, the supreme, providential Ruler over all the affairs of mankind.

2. What does it mean to dwell in the hidden place of the Most High?

This is a great promise of blessing to believers. Yet, the promise is not made to all who believe, but only to those who are willing to make their abode in the secret place, to sit down or take up residence there. To those who have developed an intimacy of fellowship with and obedience to God. The words shall abide (Heb lun) signify to pass the night. They imply a constant and continuous dwelling, and not just a temporary visitation during trouble or calamity. Psalm 91 is a promise to those who take up residence in the secret place.

With the theme stated in verse 1, the psalmist now gives a personal testimony as he makes the theme his own (v. 2). This forms the basis for the exhortations to follow in verses 3–13. That God is a refuge (c.f. 18:2; 144:2) and a God who can be trusted (c.f. 31:6; 55:23; 56:3; 61:4; etc.) is a frequent theme of the Psalm. Yet, it is of little comfort that God is a refuge or a fortress unless we are to say “He is my refuge and my fortress... in him will I trust.”

Assurances of Protection (Psalm 91:3-6)

3. In what way are the enemies the psalmist referred to like a fowler? (v. 3)

Verses 3–8 present a list of adversities. Since these are stated in general terms and bold imagery, the reader undoubtedly can identify with at least one of the metaphors. The snare of the fowler is a trap used

for catching birds (compare Psalm 124:7; Hosea 9:8). The psalmist sometimes refers to himself as a defenseless bird (see Psalm 11:1; 102:6, 7). This metaphor thus represents persecution by others.

Pestilence, by contrast, is not something we normally think of as being inflicted on one person by another (although there are cases of that happening). Rather, pestilence or plague is seen as being inflicted by God (see Exodus 5:3; 9:3, 15; Psalm 78:50; Habakkuk 3:5). It can be deadly (noisome). Just as birds are helpless before a well-constructed trap, so human beings are helpless before destructive pestilence. This is particularly true in a time before antibiotics and vaccines, which is most of human history. Even today, there are many diseases that are beyond our control. A literal pestilence can be terrifying (see v. 6). God is the one able to deliver from both persecution and plague.

4. In what way is God (Yahweh) referred to? (v. 4)

Yahweh is portrayed as a mother hen that protects her brood with outspread wings [Psalm 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 63:7; also, Jesus used this metaphor in Matthew 23:37–39 and Luke 13:34, 35 (see chart below)]. The imagery is a strong one for protection, but the believer in Yahweh must willingly seek the refuge under His wings! That’s the idea of shalt thou trust. Notice that Jesus says “ye would not” in the two New Testament passages above. When we willingly seek that protection, we discover that God is true to His promise of providing it. His faithfulness is like a “shield and buckler” (defense). A shield is the perfect symbol for protection.

Psalm 17:8	Keep me as the apple of Your eye; Hide me under the shadow of Your wings,
Psalm 36:7	How precious <i>is</i> Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings.
Psalm 57:1	Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You; And in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge, Until <i>these</i> calamities have passed by.
Psalm 63:7	Because You have been my help, Therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice.

<p>Matt hew 23:3 7-39</p>	<p>³⁷“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under <i>her</i> wings, but you were not willing! ³⁸See! Your house is left to you desolate; ³⁹for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed <i>is</i> He who comes in the name of the Lord!’”</p> <p>(Verbatim message in Luke 13:34, 35.)</p>
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5. What imagery did the author use to explain God’s constant care? (vs. 5-6)

In typically poetic style, the psalmist beautifully portrays that God’s protection of those who dwell in the secret place is cot, never failing day or night. “Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night,” a probable reference to robbers (cf. Job 24:14-16; Jer. 49:9; Ob. 5), “nor for the arrow that flieth by day,” perhaps a reference to open warfare (cf. Job 6:4). We have already encountered the word “pestilence” in verse 3. The deadly implications of that word are enhanced by the acknowledgment that it “walketh in darkness.” The idea seems to be that no one sees it coming.

The certainty of death is associated with these metaphors. If we fear the threat of diseases and plagues today, even with knowledge of modern medicine, think of how much more the ancient peoples fear such attacks on the body! Ultimately, however, the threat of pestilence or destruction that wasteth—whether at night or noonday—is irrelevant to those who trust God. We are not to fear such things, for God is with us and we are with God—under His wings!

Additional Resource - God Knows and Cares About Every Detail of Our Lives

If someone said this to you, how would you respond?

“I don't think God really cares what happens to us. The universe is so huge and we're so small, so why should He worry about us? He's too big to be interested in what happens to us, and we ought to be honest enough to admit we're on our own.”

Suggested Response: If God was like us — limited, and able to concentrate on only a few things at a time — then you might be right; He probably wouldn’t care about us. After all, you and I can barely keep track of what’s happening in our own lives, let alone what’s happening to everyone else. But God isn’t like this!

We are limited — but God is not. We can’t keep track of everything that’s happening — but He can. You say God is “too big” to care about us, but that’s the point: He is so great that He knows about even the smallest details of our lives. The Bible says, “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Hebrews 4:13). This is why you can [trust Him](#) and turn to Him with every concern you have...He loves us and cares about every detail of our lives — and the proof is that He [sent His Son](#), Jesus, into the world to offer us eternal life.

Perhaps you like to think God doesn’t care about us, because it leaves you free to live any way you want to. But that’s a dead-end road. Instead, face honestly your need of God, and [turn to Christ](#) in faith and trust. (<https://billygraham.org/answer/god-knows-and-cares-about-every-detail-of-our-lives/>)

To be continued...
 LESSON SUMMARIZED BY Deloris H.
 Washington
 Jesus Is All Ministries



Sunday, October 22, 2023

Lesson 8 – “God Delivers and Protects” (continued)

Lesson Text: **Psalm 91:1-6, 9-16**

Background Scripture: **Psalm 91:1-16**

Devotional Reading: **Isaiah 57:7-12**

Psalm 91

1 He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

2 I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. 3 Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. 4 He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. 5 Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; 6. Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. 7 A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; [but] it shall not come nigh thee. 8 Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. 9 Because thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; 10 There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. 11 For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. 12 They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. 13 Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet. 14 Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. 15 He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. 16 With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation.

The Sure Place (Psalm 91:9-13)

6. What are the conditions for receiving God’s deliverance? (vs. 9-10)

The Hebrew word translated “because” (v. 9) is the structural word for the psalm. The overall context here is that of something being conditional. The

people to whom the psalmist is speaking are to fear none of the things mentioned in verses 3–8 because of the fact that they already have put their trust in Yahweh (“thou hast made the Lord”). They are seeking Him as their refuge (the theme of the psalm). The condition for receiving the promised deliverance from evil is to make the Lord one’s refuge or habitation.

7. What did the author say about the help believers receive from angels? (vs. 11-12)

God protects us during our daily walk. He has many ways of doing this, one of which is through the sending of angels. The following texts mention angels providing protection from harm: Genesis 24:7; 48:16; Exodus 14:19; Psalm 34:7; Isaiah 63:9; Matthew 4:11; Acts 12:7; Hebrews 1:14.

However, we must take care not to misapply this promise. Wherever we go in life, there is always the possibility of stubbing one’s toe against a rock, either physically or spiritually (see Psalm 35:15; 37:24; 38:16; Proverbs 3:23; etc.). It was this passage that Satan used in his temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. Matthew and Luke recorded this, explaining that Satan took Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and challenged Him to throw Himself off since God had promised in His Word to send angels to bear Him up (Matthew 4:5-6; Luke 4:9-11). Though Satan quoted Scripture, he did so out of context and twisted its meaning. He made it sound like it justified testing God instead of the intended meaning of the psalm, which is to trust Him.

8. How did he portray evil enemies? (v. 13)

Here the psalmist figuratively portrayed ferocious enemies. Lions and many kinds of snakes (“adder”) can be hazardous to our health and well-being! In the same way, those who know us and the testimony we bear for Christ may hate everything we stand for and

want to destroy us. The psalmist had probably seen times when God’s children had been viciously attacked in attempts to destroy them. He had also seen these animals and the devastation they could do to their prey. It was a realistic analogy. But deliverance is available for the one whose confidence is in God. We can know victory in the deepest of valleys and the greatest of trials. David could walk through the valley of the shadow of death and fear no evil (Ps. 23:4); so can we.

Affirmation of Protection (Psalm 91:14-16)

9. To whom are God’s promises of special care and provision directed? (v. 14)

Here we have another “because,” which indicates a new part of the psalm’s structure. Verses 14–16 represent what is called an oracle of God. It is the climax of the psalm, for God is giving His own assurance of protection from every conceivable evil that is hurled at those who take refuge in Him. The oracle confirms the psalmist’s assertions in verses 3–13. God delivers those who cling to Him! He delivers them by setting them securely on a high place out of the way of harm (compare 2 Samuel 22:34; Psalm 18:33; Habakkuk 3:19).

2 Samuel 22:34	Psalm 18:33	Habakkuk 3:19
He makes my feet like the <i>feet</i> of deer, And sets me on my high places.	He makes my feet like the <i>feet of deer</i> , And sets me on my high places.	The Lord God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer’s <i>feet</i> , And He will make me walk on my high hills.

God, indeed, protects and defends His people because they know His name. His name is not Allah, Baal, Zeus, or “the man upstairs.” His name is God—Yahweh. To know Yahweh, is to trust Him.

In Need of Protection

There are a few people who seem to be so able to take care of themselves that they apparently don’t need anyone to protect them. André the Giant was one of those. His appearance was intimidating. Billed as being 7’4” and weighing 500 pounds, he was one of the world’s most famous professional wrestlers in the 1980s and early 1990s. In private life, he could also hold his own. On one occasion, four men in a bar

were hassling him. Although he tried to avoid a confrontation, he eventually chased the hecklers out to their car. André grabbed the car and turned it over with the four men inside. Yet, this big man suffered a premature death at age 46, as a result of the medical condition that caused his abnormal size. Even this powerful man was powerless in the face of death. May we have no illusions that we can protect ourselves in that regard! There is still only one who is able to deliver us from these frail bodies into eternal life. —C. J. F.

10. In what ways does God honor His people (vs. 15-16)?

When Christians make God their prayer refuge, God answers (v. 15). Notice that God does not promise to take the trouble away from us. Rather, He will be with us in trouble. So once again God promises to deliver, even honor, His people. God grants us His favor in all phases of the distress.

Psalm 90:12 (last week’s lesson) challenges us to “number our days” aright. We do this by trusting daily in God as a refuge. This is how He satisfies us (v. 16 of today’s lesson). But even better than that, He wants to reveal His salvation. Jesus’ name means “saves.” It is to Him we must cling. God is our protector, both now and through eternity. The length of our eternal life will certainly be enough to satisfy anyone!

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Putting our faith in the Lord is putting ourselves in a place of perfect safety (Psalm 91:1-2).
2. Unexpected trials reveal to us God’s compassionate concern for His children (vs. 3-4).
3. God is in control and limits our suffering; so, we need never fear (vs. 5-6, 9-10).
4. God Himself will see that nothing prevents His faithful ones from honoring Him (vs. 11-13).
5. Trials will come, but we are assured of God’s presence and help (vs. 14-15).
6. What is important is not how many days God gives us but how many days we give Him (v. 16).

CONCLUSION - Let God Be Your Security Blanket

The presence of evil in this world is a fact of life for all, but especially for God’s people who seek to live righteously. Sometimes the danger includes premeditated entrapment by evil people or epidemic

diseases of a fallen world (Psalm 91:3,6). Some attacks come in the dead of night, others at midday (vs. 5,6). Harm and disaster are never far away (v. 10).

There is no time or place on this earth when we are not endangered by evil. Yet for all these threats God is still our protector. His promises are certain. He will rescue and protect those who know His name (v. 14). When we cry out for help, He will answer by being with us, delivering us, and even honoring us in the end (v. 15). How can we not trust God to be our refuge and fortress (vs. 2,9)?

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER – *God Cares*

Additional Resource:

5 Inspirational Bible Verses reminding you that “God Cares About Every Detail of Your Life”.

Psalm 37:23-24, NLT *The Lord directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives. Though they stumble, they will never fall, for the Lord holds them by the hand.*

Psalm 37:5, NLT *Commit everything you do to the Lord. Trust him, and he will help you.*

Isaiah 43:2, NLT *When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you.*

Isaiah 41:10, NIV *So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

Philippians 1:6, NLT *And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.*

PRAYER

Almighty God, hear our prayer for protection. We are bombarded continually by evil. Shelter us in the shadow of Your wings. Be our shield and wall of protection. Give us victory over those who would harm us. Show us Your salvation. For the sake of Your kingdom and in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

In next week’s lesson, “God Is All-knowing,” we find protection in God’s great omniscience. Study Psalm 139:1-6, 13-16, 23-24.

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY Deloris H.
Washington
Jesus Is All Ministries



Sunday, October 29, 2023

Lesson 9 – “God Is All-Knowing”

Lesson Text: **Psalm 139:1–6, 13–16, 23, 24**

Background Scripture: **Psalm 139**

Devotional Reading: **Ecclesiastes 3:11**

Psalm 139:1–6, 13–16, 23, 24

1 O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. 2 Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising; thou understandest my thought afar off. 3 Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. 4 For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. 5 Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. • 13 For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother’s womb. 14 I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. 15 My substance was not hid from thee when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. 16 Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. • 23 Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: 24 And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The superscription of Psalm 139 tells us that it was written by David. The difficulty of understanding this psalm is in determining how verses 19 and following (dealing with vengeance) relate to verses 1–18 (dealing with praise) since the tones of the two sections are so different. Some scholars have proposed excising verses 19–24, declaring that they do not belong with the psalm. This is surely wrong. All of Psalm 139 must be considered.

There are examples throughout the psalms that feature much praise of God along with condemnation of enemies and “the wicked” (see Psalms 5, 7, 17; 104:35). The unity of Psalm 139 can be seen in various ways. We begin by noting that verses 23, 24 function as an inclusion with verses 1, 2; this is seen as we observe the use of search, know, Yahweh/God, and thoughts in both places. Within verses 23, 24 we find a possible accusation by the enemies of the psalmist. The phrase “wicked way” in verse 24 can refer to idolatry; such an accusation can mean death if the accused cannot defend himself. Therefore, the psalmist submits to a divine judgment, with verses 1–18 describing the scrutiny that is requested in verses 23,24.

Thus, one must account for verses 19–24 and not dismiss them. The psalmist has encountered enemies who seek his harm, perhaps his life, if they can make the charge of idolatry stick. God can examine the accused in the most thorough manner because He is omniscient (“all knowing,” vs. 1–6), omnipresent (“present everywhere,” vs. 7–12), and omnipotent (“all powerful,” vs. 13–18).

Standing alongside these characteristics of God is the fact that we are always being known, accompanied, and fashioned by God. God knows us and cares for us. Indeed, He is fearfully wonderful! That is why we are dependent on Him and praise Him.

TODAY’S AIM

Facts: to show that God created us and thus knows everything about us.

Principle: to remind us that we can fully trust God's omniscient protection.

Application: to encourage recognition that there is nothing we can hide from God and that we should therefore trust Him unreservedly. Use verses 23,24 daily in prayer in the week ahead.

GOD'S KNOWLEDGE ABOUT US (Psalm 139:1-6)

1. What word did David use to describe God's knowledge of his inner spiritual condition (Psalm 139:1,2)?

David stated in Psalm 139 that the Lord had "searched" him. He used the word as a metaphor describing a spiritual, internal search by which God examined his heart and mind in order to know how he was thinking. God, then, knew things about David that no one else could see or know. He knew the inner motives behind all his actions.

David was encouraged by knowing that God had examined his heart and that God knew his every movement. His mention of sitting down and rising up (v. 2) is a merism (citing the extremes to include everything in between) referring to his every action. When the king of Assyria came against Judah, God said to him, "But I know thy abode, and thy going out, and thy coming in, and thy rage against me" (2 Kings 19:27). No human activity is unknown to God. Nor is any thought unknown to the God who "understandest my thought afar off" (Ps. 139:2).

Long before we think our thoughts, God knows them. This should be an encouragement for us to guard our thoughts carefully. Paul said we should bring "into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). Every unspoken word is clear to God. The fact that Christians believe this is seen in our practice of silent prayer. God hears every word of such unverbally prayers.

What Do You Think?

What comforts and convictions are yours because God understands your very thoughts?

Talking Points for Your Discussion:

- Comforts: issues of God's patience and provisions (2 Corinthians 1:3-7; 7:5-7).
- Convictions: issues of things I know I need to change or do (John 16:8; Jude 15).

2. What figure of speech did David use to refer to all his daily activities (vs. 3,4)?

The word "compasseth" means "to winnow," that is, to sift out the good from the bad. God was thoroughly acquainted with David's every daily activity, both noble and ignoble. This is an exceptionally complete

knowledge of a person's activities, and it serves as another challenge to us to live godly lives. Not a movement of one finger escapes God's attention. This knowledge is comforting to those who are right with God but scary to those who are not, for it is illustrative of the omniscience of God.

God's omniscience might be defined this way: God knows all things, both actual and possible. This includes everything past, present, and future and is such a perfect knowledge that it includes everything possible that never did or will take place. Because God's knowledge is perfect, none of it was or ever will be acquired by learning. All things are known equally well, and nothing will ever surprise or amaze God.

David then moved from God's knowledge of his every thought to His knowledge of his every word (v. 4). Just as God knows the thoughts we think long before we actually think them, so too He knows our words before we speak them. The Hebrew word translated "altogether" means "all," "any," or "every." Not a single word that comes off our tongue escapes God's attention. This should encourage every believer to examine his thought and speech patterns. If we want to have intimate fellowship with God, we need to be very careful in these areas.

3. How should we respond to the omniscience of God? How did David feel when he first thought about God's knowledge of all things (vs. 5,6)?

The word beset means "to encircle, barricade, lay siege to." It can be used as a word of judgment. In that sense, it would mean that the psalmist cannot escape, as if he were in a city besieged by an enemy (see Jeremiah 21:4, 9, where the same root word is used). It can also be used as a comfort word, where God surrounds and protects the psalmist. Both ideas of judgment and protection are also true for the second phrase: laid thine hand upon me.

Some may think that this reveals God's absolute control of a person's movements. A better idea is that it refers to God's abilities to know all and be everywhere. God surrounds all our habits and even has His hand on us—either in protection or in judgment.

Taking a bird's-eye view of verses 2-5, we notice that verse 2 is related to verse 4 in the sense of God's

ability to know our thoughts. Verse 3 is related to verse 5 by the common theme of God knowing our ways or our habits. If verse 1 is the theme of this section, then verse 6 (next) is a doxological (praise) conclusion as the psalmist exults on his contemplation of God's ability to know.

God's ability to know everything is too wonderful and high for the psalmist to grasp (v. 6). Even with all the extra knowledge we have today, this should still be our confession. We still have to struggle to understand even a little of what God knows.

The doxological use of wonderful is placed in the first position in the original Hebrew (literally, "wonderful knowledge above me; too high I am not able to it") to emphasize the amazement of the psalmist (see also v. 14, below). It is good to pause in wonderment over God's knowledge and ability to know. It is this attribute of God that makes possible an intimate, loving relationship with Him. The same attribute also makes God's justice absolutely fair. The righteous are comforted by that fact, while the wicked should be fearful.

Additional Resource: Don Stewart - Does God Know Everything? (Omniscient)

The Bible teaches that God is all-knowing or omniscient. The word "omniscient" comes from two Latin words *omnis* signifying all, and *scientia* signifying knowledge. When we say that God is omniscient it means that He has **perfect knowledge** of all things.

God:

- does not have to learn anything;
- has not forgotten anything;
- does not have to reason things out; and
- does not find out things, or learn them gradually

God knows everything that

- has happened;
- everything that will happen; and
- every **potential thing that might** happen.
- God even knows those things that humankind has yet to discover.

God's knowledge is absolute and unacquired. The omniscience of God means that He has:

- perfect knowledge;
- perfect understanding; and
- perfect wisdom to apply that knowledge.

https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/stewart_don/faq/does-god-know-everything/01-does-god-know-everything.cfm#:~:text=God%20does%20not%20have%20to%20reason%20things%20out%2C,those%20things%20that%20humankind%20has%20yet%20to%20discover.

To be continued...

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY Willie Ferrell
Jesus Is All Ministries

NOTES:

Handwriting practice lines on a page. The page features 20 horizontal lines spaced evenly down the page.



Sunday, November 5, 2023

Lesson 10 - "God Is All-Knowing" (Continued)

Lesson Text: Psalm 139:1–6, 13–16, 23, 24

Background Scripture: Psalm 139

Devotional Reading: Ecclesiastes 3:11

Psalm 139:1–6, 13–16, 23, 24

1 O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. 2 Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising; thou understandest my thought afar off. 3 Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. 4 For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. 5 Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. • 13 For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. 14 I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. 15 My substance was not hid from thee when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. 16 Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. • 23 Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: 24 And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

GOD'S FORMATION OF US (Psalm 139:13-16)

4. What event from human life did David use in defining the omnipotence of God (vs. 13,14)?

God is not only all-knowing, as we saw in the first six verses of this psalm, not only omnipresent, as is described in the next six verses, but also all-powerful, as described in these verses. As amazing as all of God's creation is, there is nothing more intricate and awesome than human beings. All of us

have taken our first look at a newborn baby and commented on the amazing fact that every organ and other necessary part of the human body is present and working in that tiny being.

David described the great power of God by referring to His formation of the fetus in the womb. In saying "Thou hast possessed my reins" (v. 13), he used a word we do not ordinarily use. The word "reins" means "kidneys," which were used to represent the seat of one's emotions and moral character. Since the concept is somewhat unfamiliar to us, some modern versions use the idea of "inmost being" or "inward parts." This conveys to us that while in the womb, when no one else could see us, our inner organs were individually formed by God.

When David said that God had covered him in his mother's womb, he used the verb *sakak*, which means "to hedge in." David was saying that God wove him together as He created a perfect object. What an impressive description of God's personal and individual concern about how we are made—and how different from those who try to tell us we are the result of an evolutionary process! There is nothing accidental or evolutionary in our creation. We are woven creations of almighty God!

No wonder David could no longer contain himself! He was compelled to write, "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well" (v. 14). The Liberty Bible Commentary says it this way: "The wonderfulness of the human body is so great that those who study the cells of the brain, the articulation of the limbs, or the smooth functioning of the body organs stand in awe at how wonderful this creation of God really is" (Falwell and Hindson, eds., Thomas Nelson).

The Lowly, Lovely Appendix

For years, the human appendix has been under attack by evolutionists. They have called it a functionless organ, a remnant from a more complete organ of our “animal” ancestors. Today, however, most scientists agree that the appendix serves useful functions. This specialized organ contributes to a healthy immune system. At its strategic location, the appendix provides a barrier of protection as it produces antibodies that act against bacteria that would be harmful if allowed to escape into the bloodstream. The appendix helps the body recognize that certain foods, bacteria, and enzymes need to be tolerated, not attacked, during early childhood. The list goes on.

Once again, the arrogance of human presumption is overturned. Again we realize how limited is human knowledge and how infinite is the wisdom of God. He carefully created even the small appendix to provide protection. How can we not marvel at the works of God? —C. J. F.

5. Why did David say that he was made in secret (v. 15)?

The word “substance” refers to the body and specifically to the bones of the skeleton. When David said he was made in secret, he meant that he was covered and thus unseen by human eyes. Today, doctors and scientists are able to observe the growth of an embryo into a fully formed baby. Often, expectant parents can see their unborn child on ultrasound. It is wonderful to see what God has always been able to see! “Curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth, “a poetic reference to the womb.”

A great artist will labor alone in his studio, and not suffer his work to be seen until it is finished; even so did the Lord fashion us when no eye beheld us, and the veil was not lifted till every member was complete” —Spurgeon. All of our veins, muscles, nerves” etc., were woven together by God, embroidered with great skill, before the world got its first look at us.

6. How did David describe the intricate way God registered him (v. 16)?

The Hebrew word that is behind the translation “substance” here is different from the Hebrew word behind substance in verse 15. The word at issue here is used only once in the Hebrew text, and it clearly means “embryo.” Thus the beginning stages of a living and growing embryo are within the realm of God’s knowledge and sight. This says something to all who believe that life does not begin until there is a birth, which is the rationale used to support abortion. Life begins at conception, and God knows it! See also Psalm 22:9, 10.

Scripture refers to God’s book as the heavenly record of the deeds of people. This book lists the names of those who will dwell in the heavenly city. This book is the book of life (see Exodus 32:32, 33; Psalm 56:8; 69:28; Revelation 3:5; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27). These images come from the fact that in the ancient world official registers are kept of citizens. When citizenship is forfeited for any reason, the name is blotted out of the register. The psalmist seems to be saying that even before his embryo is mature, his name is registered by God in His book. God knows what we will do and choose.

GOD’S SEARCH WITHIN (Psalm 139:23-24)

7. Why did David invite God to search and know him (v. 23)?

Verses 23, 24 directly follow the “hate” portion of the psalm (which is vs. 19–22, not in today’s text). Often these “hate texts” are left out of liturgical readings in many church groups. But they should not be. In verses 19–22, the psalmist rails against the wicked. Seen against this backdrop, verses 23, 24 is the psalmist’s request for God to see that he (the psalmist) is not one of the wicked.

Of the psalmist, Spurgeon says, that “he was a good hater, for he hated only those who hated good.” The psalmist could not remain neutral on the matter of those who hate God. In that light, the psalmist cries out for vindication. Thus, the invitation for God to search the psalmist’s heart, test his life, and know his thoughts to see if there is any “wicked way” in him (see the next verse). The innocent person has no problem asking God to do this (see Job 7:17, 18; Psalm 11:4–7; Jeremiah 17:10). The words in verse 23 function as inclusion with verse 1 of this psalm (see the Lesson Background).

8. Why should we submit to the leading of God? What implications does the omniscience of God have for our lives (v. 24)?

Whatever the charge—whether it is idolatry or some other kind of wickedness—the charge is not true of the psalmist. Thus he, asks the Lord to examine him to see if he has accurately represented his feelings toward the, omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence of God. “See if there be any wicked way, in me.” Test for secret sins. The end result of such testing for the psalmist will be, “lead me in the way everlasting” (lit., in the way that leadeth to everlasting life). How blessed it is for a man or woman to lead such a godly life that he or she can submit themselves to divine scrutiny and be confident that they are walking in the way of God.

Sometimes God may lead us in a path we would rather not take. That can be a fearful experience, and our instinct may be to flee or hide (compare the actions of Jonah). But ultimately the way everlasting can be found only in God. “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68).

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. God knows us better than we know ourselves; thus, He can be trusted to lead us (Psalm 139:1).
2. We are never alone, for God's knowledge of us reaches every place and activity (vs. 2-4).
3. We should praise God and seek His wisdom, for His knowledge is exhaustive (vs. 5,6).
4. God's wonderful design of human beings is cause for praise (vs. 13,14).
5. Our creation speaks of God's immense care for and concern about each of us (vs. 15,16).
6. If we truly want to know ourselves, we will seek to know God and His Word (vs. 23,24).

CONCLUSION - God Knows!

Are you convinced that “God knows”? I hope you are. But merely acknowledging that God knows us better than we know ourselves is not enough. We should go further: part of our conviction that “God knows” should involve inviting the Holy Spirit's

examination of our hearts and actions so that we might grow in sanctification. God created us and He cares. When we are innocent, He can and will vindicate us because of His fearfully wonderful abilities—His ability of knowledge, presence, and power.

Even if we find that our hearts condemn us, “God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things” (1 John 3:20). For the innocent, the thought of an all-knowing God is a comfort. For the wicked the thought should bring fear—real fear of judgment, if not now, then on Judgment Day. The intimacy we seek with God is possible because He knows us better than we know ourselves.

PRAYER

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any sinful way in me and lead me in the way everlasting. It is Jesus who makes that way possible. In His name we pray. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER - Know that God knows.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

Next week's lesson begins the theme "Assuring Hope." Study Isaiah 40:1-31 "Receiving Comfort and Strength" in preparation.

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY Willie Ferrell
Jesus Is All Ministries



Sunday, November 12, 2023

Lesson 11 - "Receiving Comfort & Strength"

Lesson Text: **Isaiah 40:1-5, 25-26, 29-31**

Background Scripture: **Isaiah 40:1-31**

Devotional Reading: **1 Chronicles 16:23-34**

Isaiah 40:1-5, 25-26, 29-31

1 Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.
2 Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins. 3 The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: 5 And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. ...25 To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. 26 Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth....29 He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. 30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: 31 But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

LESSON AIMS

Facts: to examine God's message of comfort to His people through Isaiah, His prophet.

Principle: to understand that our reliable source of comfort and strength in troubled times is God.

Application: to show that when we go through difficult times, we can turn to our God for strength and comfort; He will not fail us.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Time: about 700 – 695 B.C.

Place: Jerusalem

Isaiah was a prophet who lived about seven hundred years before Christ. It was during the reign of King Uzziah that Isaiah received a dramatic call from God in which he had a vision of the Lord seated upon His throne. During this critical time in Judah's history, God needed someone to take His word to a rebellious nation.

In spite of the fact that Isaiah faithfully preached God's word to the people of Judah, they refused to repent. Hearing God's message would actually harden the hearts of many (Isaiah 6:9,10). Isaiah nevertheless was still called upon to proclaim the word of the Lord to the bitter end, after which the people would finally be carried away as captives (v. 11).

The first half of Isaiah foretells judgment upon Judah because of her sins. The latter half, however, offers a message of comfort and hope. God would restore them to the land and send His Servant, the Messiah, to atone for sin (chap. 53). There were two captivities of Jerusalem. The first being the Assyrian captivity in 701 B.C. The second was the Babylonian captivity of 586 B.C.

GOD, OUR COMFORTER (Isaiah 40:1-5)

1. Why did Judah need to hear a message of comfort? (Isaiah 40:1,2)

When Isaiah wrote, both the fall of Jerusalem and the Babylonian Captivity were still in the future. Once these events occurred, though, the people would realize that all of this had been prophesied by Isaiah. This viewpoint is supported by Isaiah 44:28; 45:1,13, which predicts the role of Cyrus in this deliverance (compare Ezra 1:1-4).

"Anticipating the future Captivity and God's restoration, Isaiah wrote to encourage the Judahites

to live righteously in the present, despite forthcoming difficult circumstances" (Walvoord and Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Cook).

God, through Isaiah, repeated the word "comfort" (Isa. 40:1) to emphasize that He alone can bring comfort. Having rebuked sin during his long career as a prophet Isaiah was now called upon to speak "comfortably," or tenderly, to the people. The Hebrew word can be translated "to the heart." Previously, appeals to both head and heart had proved futile; the people were unwilling to listen to God's Word. After "her warfare is accomplished," the nation would be in a position to listen. The future years in exile would soften their hearts.

Research shows that people are more open to conversion when going through various life changes as opposed to those times when things are going smoothly. Of course, as Christians we must reach out to people at all times, but being aware of those times when people are more receptive should cause us to seize these opportunities to witness.

Once Judah repented of her sins, she could be pardoned. There is no forgiveness apart from the willingness to turn from sin (Isa. 55:6,7). God is willing to forgive, but man must be willing to repent (Psalm 51:17).

2. Why did Isaiah say that Jerusalem had received from the Lord "double for all her sins" (v. 2)?

"To receive double for all her sins does not mean to be punished beyond what she deserves but in keeping with what she deserves" (Walvoord and Zuck).

As a nation specially chosen to fulfill God's purposes, Israel had great responsibilities, not the least of which was to be "a light to the Gentiles" (Isa. 49:6). Now, however, the people were suffering because they had followed the Gentile gods instead of teaching the Gentiles about the true God. As Christ said, "'For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Luke 12:48). This is true for nations and individuals!

3. Who was the "voice" in the wilderness"? (v. 3)

Isaiah now looks ahead to the time when Jerusalem will be visited by the ultimate king, the Lord God himself. This is not to be a surprise visit. It is proclaimed by the voice crying in the wilderness in order for proper preparations to be made.

Ultimately, however, this verse points to the preparatory ministry of John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah (compare Malachi 3:1). Isaiah 40:3 is so important that it is quoted in all four Gospels in reference to John (Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23). In God's plan, John's purposes are to raise the expectations of the people for a Messiah (Luke 3:16, 17), to spur them to prepare their hearts (Luke 1:76–79), and to be God's designated revealer of Jesus as the Messiah at the proper time (John 1:29–34).

Of course, John's ministry literally was in the wilderness (cf. Matt. 3:1). He spent most of his life in the desert until he began preaching repentance (Luke 1:80; 3:1-5). John was, therefore, the voice crying in the wilderness to prepare the way for the Lord.

4. How was the way for the Lord prepared and His glory revealed? (vs. 4,5)

These verses continue the imagery of road construction activities. The reference to valley . . . mountain. . . rough places is to the spiritual as well as to the physical.

Both in Isaiah's day and in the time of Christ, "the glory of the Lord shall be revealed" (Isa. 40:5). In Isaiah's time, God's glory would be seen in the return of the captives from Babylon. In the time of John the Baptist, however, God's glory was revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word (John 1:14).

What Do You Think?

What are you doing to prepare the way for the Lord's return?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- In setting a proper example
- In being available to serve
- In willingness to speak
- In forsaking sin

Additional Resource: How do we prepare for the second coming of Christ?

John Piper, Founder & Teacher, desiringGod.org

Work faithfully for Christ

The impulse to be ready for the second coming is the impulse to be found faithful and vigilant in our particular callings. Over and over and over in the New Testament, we are told to be watchful, to be awake, to be ready. What does that mean? I think the parable of the ten virgins is a good illustration of what it means.

The kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. [So, this is a picture of being ready for the second coming, the return of the bridegroom.] Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed [that's Jesus' hint that there will be some distance of time], they all became drowsy and slept [all ten]. But at midnight there was a cry, "Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." But the wise answered, saying, "Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves." And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, "Lord, lord, open to us." But he answered, "Truly, I say to you, I do not know you." [And here's Jesus's conclusion:] Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. ([Matthew 25:1–13](#))

The conclusion of the whole parable is answering this question: How do you get ready? "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day or the hour." Now, what does that mean? Both the wise and the foolish virgins were asleep, and there was no criticism. That's not a problem. To watch, therefore, doesn't mean any kind of artificial getting up at night, looking out the window, paying a lot of attention to end-times conspiracy theories.

"The Master has given all of us assignments for while he's gone — gifts, resources, abilities, money, relationships."

To *watch* means to do your job really well for Christ's sake. They had an assignment: Have your lamps. Have your oil. Respond to the announcement when it's given. Light the way of the bridegroom in. And they did their job just the way they should, and they entered in. They were morally, spiritually, and, you might say, professionally awake. They did their job the way God meant for them to do it.

So, that's what you find all over the New Testament. The Master has given all of us assignments for while He's gone — gifts, resources, abilities, money, opportunities, relationships, and spiritual disciplines. All of those are spheres where we do our job with faithfulness and diligence.

<https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/how-do-we-prepare-for-the-second-coming>

To be continued...

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY Renee Little
Jesus Is All Ministries



Sunday, August 20, 2023

Lesson 12 - "Demonstrated in Action"

Lesson Text: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

Background Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

Devotional Reading: Hebrews 11:1-6

Isaiah 40:1-5, 25-26, 29-31

1 Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.
2 Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins. 3 The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain:
5 And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. ...25 To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. 26 Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth. ...29 He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. 30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: 31 But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

GOD, OUR CREATOR (Isaiah 40:25,26)

5. What questions does Isaiah pose to show that God cannot be compared to anyone or anything? (v. 25)

The final section of this marvelous chapter presents the Lord speaking more directly to us. He is "the Holy One," untainted by sin and perfect in

righteousness. He poses two rhetorical questions, two questions for which the answer is obvious.

First, who (or what) is a worthy object of comparison with the Lord? God might be called king, Father, or judge (see Psalm 5:2; 68:5). These are categories of human existence that are transcended by God in an absolute way. Thus, the answer to this first question must be "no one."

Second, we are queried as to who might be equal to the Lord. This question is parallel to the first, but with a twist. In the ancient world, it was common for a nation to be identified by its national god. For example, the national god of the Moabites was Chemosh, while Molech was the national deity of the Ammonites (see 1 Kings 11:7). The power and glory of these localized gods was judged by the success of their nations. The truth behind Isaiah's message, however, is that there is no real comparison in this area. Such fictitious gods are not in any way equal to the God of Israel, for He is the true God, the Creator of all things. The answer to this question is also "no one."

6. What are some differences between the idols worshiped by so many and the God revealed in the Bible? (v. 26)

We are now told why the God of Israel is beyond comparison: He, and He alone, is the one who created the host of the heavens. This is a reference to the stars and planets, which give witness to God's glory by their constant shining (Psalm 19:1). These heavenly bodies are completely subject to God, for he calleth them all by names. We are reminded of God's challenge to Job, asking if he is able to reposition the constellations of the Pleiades or Orion (Job 38:31).

Isaiah contrasted the true God with the false gods that had initially led Israel astray and into captivity. Concerning the idols worshiped by the heathen, they were merely the objects of human craftsmanship (Isa. 40:18-20). Since God is so high and holy, man is at a loss to find anything or anyone on earth to which to compare Him. God is beyond both description and comprehension. While something of God can be known from the creation (Ps. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:20), He is more clearly revealed in Scripture, particularly in the Person of Christ, "for in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9).

GOD, OUR CONFIDENCE (Isaiah 40:29-31)

7. Why can we, and should we rely on God as our source of strength? (vs. 29,30)

We move from the power required to fuel the stars to the power needed to empower a weak and falling people—"them that have no might." The point is that with God there is always a surplus of strength. He experiences no brownouts or empty fuel tanks. The same God who placed the blazing sun in our sky can restore our strength. We can draw on our inner resources only for so long, and then we are empty and spent. We are called to "lift up [our] eyes" to God, for He "made heaven and earth," and He has the power to remake us in our weakness (Psalm 121:1,2). We are called to look outside of ourselves for the necessary spiritual vigor to survive our times of trial.

The universal nature of this need for God's empowerment is stressed. Even the young, the healthy and athletic, will run out of strength at some point (Isaiah 40:30). Our refrigerators may run day and night for 20 years without failing. But even these most reliable of appliances require an outside power source to continue functioning. We may run without God or away from God for a long time, but eventually we will "utterly fall" if we do not allow Him to come into our lives in a powerful, healing way.

8. What does it mean to "wait upon the Lord" (v. 31)?

To "wait upon the Lord" is not to give up in complete passivity. "Waiting," in this biblical sense, is an act of faith, a move of trust. It is to change the focus of

our empowerment from ourselves to the Lord. When we run ahead of God and His plans, we are assuming that we know more than He does! Many of us have made quick decisions in the past only to discover that we must live with the consequences of those choices. When God's will is clear, we should act; but if we are unsure, we need to be patient and wait on the Lord.

For those who do wait on the Lord, God promises the renewal of strength. In the context of Isaiah's message to Judah, difficult days lay ahead for the nation. Judah would fall to her enemies, Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed, and the people would be carried off to Babylon. Indeed, the future appeared bleak. For both those listening to Isaiah's message and those who would hear it at a later time, this was a message of hope. Nevertheless, they must put their hope in God.

9. What benefits are there to waiting on God today?

Isaiah tells us that this commitment of faith is rewarded, using one of the most striking metaphors in all of Scripture: we are to be given "wings as eagles" (v. 31). We are blessed with the ability to soar above the daily troubles that beset and discourage us.

Furthermore, we become the tireless runner and ceaseless walker. When we yield to God's power and control in our lives, we may not immediately be a soaring spiritual eagle. We might not even be a relentless runner. But all of us can at least be a tireless walker, journeying with God in faith and assurance that we do not walk alone.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. God does discipline His people, but He greatly desires to mend their hurts (Isaiah 40:1,2).
2. Seeing the glory of God requires spiritual preparation (vs. 3-5).
3. Today individual believers can behold God's glory in Jesus, but all will see it when He returns to reign.
4. God is incomparable in every way and attribute (v. 25).
5. God's power is visually displayed in every night sky for all who wish to see (v. 26).
6. God gives enduring strength to those who seek Him and then wait upon Him (vs. 29-31).

CONCLUSION - Spiritual Eagles

The soaring eagle has been an inspiring sight since ancient times. They have enormous wingspans. This is combined with precision eyesight in their quest for food. Eagles may cover as much as 100 miles in this daily search, and some claim that they may reach an altitude of 10,000 feet. From this vantage point, they are able to see a wide territory, locate their prey, and quickly swoop down to seize it. Yet eagles do not attain these incredible heights merely by flapping their wings. They find updrafts in the atmospheric patterns, stretch their wings fully, and soar.

Our age of aircraft has taken away some of the wonder of soaring eagles, for many of us have looked out an airplane window at 30,000 feet. Yet we can still look at the soaring eagle with a sense of longing, a desire to use our personal wings to rise above the trees and buildings and roads. What freedom that would be! How exhilarating! How empowering!

Isaiah promises that if we trust in the Lord, we will soar like spiritual eagles. This will not come from laborious flapping of our spiritual wings, but by catching God's updraft and riding its power to new heights. Our perspective then will change. What seemed so big and intimidating on the ground will look tiny at 10,000 feet. We still must deal with the hard issues of life. But we can gain a little bit of God's perspective, the large view that He is in control and we draw on His strength.

The Messiah provides that strength. He is God's ultimate servant in bearing the sins of people as an

atonement sacrifice (Isaiah 53:5). This promise is for everyone. Even the dispossessed and "he that hath no money" can "come ..., buy, and eat" at the table of the Lord (55:1). When the time comes for us to enjoy the Christmas season, we should remember that the season is possible because of those who prepared the way for the king who has come. We remember Isaiah, who was given a glimpse of the Messiah's future glory. And we remember John the Baptist, who seized Isaiah's messages as a definition of his own ministry of preparing the way for the ministry of Jesus (see Matthew 3:3). What role will you play in preparing an unbeliever's heart to receive the Messiah?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, grant that we might take "the long view" of history. It is there we will find comfort because we realize that history will end when Your Son Jesus returns. In His name we pray, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER - Test your God-given spiritual wings!

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

In next week's lesson, "I Am Your God," we will see that God comforts us with His presence, showing us who He is and that He will never fail us. Study Isaiah 41:1 – 42:9.

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY Renee Little
Jesus Is All Ministries

NOTES:



Sunday, November 26, 2023 Lesson 13 - "I Am Your God"

Lesson Text: **Isaiah 41:8-10, 17-20**

Background Scripture: **Isaiah 41:1; 42:9**

Devotional Reading: **1 Peter 3:12**

Isaiah 41:8–10, 17–20

8 But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend. 9 Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the chief men thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away. 10 Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. •••17 When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. 18 I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. 19 I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together: 20 That they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the Lord hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it.

LESSON AIMS

Facts: to show that the God of the Bible, who reveals Himself to us and offers us comfort, is truly personal.

Principle: to teach that the God of the Bible is the God who comforts us.

Application: to know that when we need comfort, we can go to our God; He will never fail us.

INTRODUCTION - Unneeded Gifts

Buying gifts for friends and family can be an unwelcome chore. Why is this? At least one reason is that we dislike giving a gift that may end up being unappreciated. When a gift fails to please its recipient, we feel we have wasted our time, money, and effort. Worse, we may feel that rejection of a gift is, in a small way, a rejection of us. I have a tongue-

in-cheek personal rule for this: if I do not know what to get someone, I get something I like. That way, at least one person will like the gift! On the other side, we have all received unneeded gifts.

The Bible teaches that our God is a giving God, and His gifts are never unneeded. They might be unwanted or underappreciated, but not unneeded. God is the giver of all good and perfect gifts (James 1:17). If we do not want or appreciate what God gives us, the problem lies with us, not with the gift. In today's lesson, Isaiah presents this giving side of God in a twofold way. He sees God as the one who gives us a role, a task; in this, God gives purpose to our lives. Isaiah also sees God as the one who gives us the resources to fulfill our roles. He is both sustainer and provider for those who serve Him. He is our Lord and Master, the one whom we serve. But He is also our source, the rock that anchors and supports us (Psalm 18:2).

LESSON BACKGROUND

Time: about 700 – 695 B.C.

Place: Jerusalem

The Hebrew prophets were a diverse group. Some, like Amos, had no professional credentials—he was a herds-man and a gatherer of sycamore fruit (Amos 7:14,15). Others, like Isaiah, may have been of noble birth. Isaiah's, ministry lasted some fifty years,' preaching during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Tradition says he was sawed in half by King Manasseh (cf. Heb. 11:37).

While all prophets spoke the word of God, some did more than their share of foretelling the future. This included both the immediate future and events that would relate to the coming Saviour. Not only did Isaiah denounce the sins of his day; he also foresaw the return of the Jews from Babylon, the suffering of the Messiah (Isa. 53), and the promise of "new heavens and new earth" (65:17). Though the

prophets were to preach against the evils of their nation, they were also called upon to proclaim hope to those who were suffering. Hence, Isaiah continued to offer hope to those who would eventually return from the captivity.

THE CALL OF THE LORD (Isaiah 41:8,9)

1. Where did the name "Israel" originate (Isaiah 41:8)?

There are three names in this verse, each accompanied by a descriptive tag. But all apply to the people of Israel, Isaiah's people. Isaiah uses the national name Israel, the name given to Jacob after his wrestling experience (Genesis 32:28). The word Israel means "God prevails." This reminds us that the function of the nation of Israel was to be God's servant, empowered to do His will.

The people of Israel have been given a covenant with God and are intended to be a "light of the Gentiles" (Isaiah 42:6). This is God's purpose in choosing Israel as His people. God is not working to fulfill national ambitions or maintain traditions. Rather, He is protecting and enabling Israel so that it can be His servant, His instrument for making himself known to all peoples (see 49:6). For this reason, Isaiah 40–66 has frequent references to the Lord's "servant" (see 41:9; 49:3). In its ultimate sense, however, this concept is expanded and fulfilled not by the nation of Israel, but by the Messiah, Jesus (see Matthew 12:18).

Isaiah also describes his people as Jacob whom I have chosen. Genesis tells how Jacob was chosen over his older brother, Esau, to be the father of the nation of Israel. Likewise, the nation that came from Jacob did not earn a position of favor based on merit. Rather, they had been selected by the Lord out of all the nations to be an instrument for fulfilling God's plan for human redemption.

Finally, the people are called the seed of Abraham. This is a reminder of their heritage. The relationship between the Lord and Israel is not a business partnership or military alliance entered into by equals by mutual agreement. It is instead based on the plan, purpose, and affection of the sovereign God.

2. How did God go about His selection of Israel (v. 9)?

God's selection of Israel now receives fuller explanation. Israel has been chosen out of the vast field of all nations, for God has surveyed the ends of the earth. Furthermore, this people-group has been chosen after consideration of the finest earth has to offer: its chief men.

The words of God reinforce what is said in the previous verse: Israel was chosen by the Lord to serve Him. Now, however, a new detail is added, for God promises not to cast thee away. God's choice of Israel is not a short-term appointment. There are no qualifiers here. God simply promises never to abandon His commitment to Israel. Although it is not stated here, we know from history that there is a good reason for this: the Messiah is to be ushered into the world through Israel.

What Do You Think?

What responsibilities did you become aware of when you realized that God wanted you to do something?

• Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Regarding Christian service
- Regarding church involvement
- Regarding personal holiness

Called To Be Servants

The world has a long history of looking down on those who serve others. The phrase indentured servant describes a type of servanthood that goes back at least to Old Testament times. Such a servant was, in effect, a slave to the one to whom a debt was owed. The kind of slavery that was known in the Western world from the 1600s to the 1800s (and is still found in many parts of the world today) is especially dishonorable.

Jesus changed the outlook on servanthood when He came as God's ultimate servant. As a result, there are many organizations today that promote servanthood in the name of Christ. The focus may range from disaster relief to the problems brought on by poverty, warfare, or disease in many regions of the world. Other agencies offer humanitarian aid from a secular concern for education, sanitation, and medical advancement.

THE STRENGTH OF THE LORD (Isaiah 41:10)

3. What other Scriptures come to mind when we read, "Fear thou not" (v. 10)?

In spite of the fact that the people of Israel were facing an uncertain future, the Lord declared, "Fear thou not ...be not dismayed." The sense of dismay here is to look around with anxiousness. They are not to live in dread of the future, for they have the Lord, the master of the universe, as their God. Furthermore, Israel is promised that God will strengthen, help, and uphold them. God vows not to abandon them or to stand back and watch them flounder. God is present in their affairs. This is not an arbitrary display of power, however. It is the righteousness of God that drives these promises.

Hearing the words "Fear thou not" is a reminder of the many times when Jesus spoke similarly during His ministry. He often reassured others with similar words (Matt. 10:28, 31; Luke 5:10; 8:50; 12:7, 32; John 12:15). Isaiah's readers could take solace in the command not to be afraid because the Lord had said, "I am with thee" (Isa. 41:10). While God does not always deliver us from our troubles, He does promise to be with us through them. Among the last words Christ spoke to His disciples were these: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20).

What Do You Think?

What are some things you fear that you need to turn over to the Lord? How will you do that?

THE HAND OF THE LORD (Isaiah 41:17-20)

4. How can we be assured that God provides in our times of need (vs. 17,18)?

People have always faced water shortages. If weather patterns do not produce regular rain in a timely manner, a drought is the result. This is more of a problem in cultures that are not technologically advanced. Sometimes deep wells may be the only source of water. In times of extreme drought, it is not uncommon (even today) for people to walk miles each day for water. This is a life-and-death situation. Israel is assured that the Lord will hear them in a time of need. The people may be in distress, but they are not abandoned (compare Deuteronomy 8:15).

In verse 18 of today's lesson Isaiah pictures God's abundant provision of water in a paradoxical way. We usually expect rivers in the valleys but fountains (meaning "springs") in the mountains, not the other

way around. We don't expect open pools of water in the desert wilderness, and we anticipate no water sources at all in the dry land just by definition. God's provisions are surprising and generous. As He provides the needy with more water than they can use, His grace to Israel is beyond what they deserve or expect. So it is with God's people today.

What Do You Think?

What was a time when God has provided spiritual water in "a dry place" for you?

- **Talking Points for Your Discussion**

- During a severe illness
- During a family crisis
- When enticed by sin

5. Why did the Lord promise to plant trees in the wilderness (v. 19)?

The wilderness and desert regions of the Middle East are quite bleak compared to what many people experience in most populated regions of America. The wilderness there is known as a barren region (see Leviticus 16:22) and is generally defined by a lack of trees. Yet the Lord promises to plant the wilderness with a variety of prized trees. We are not sure of the exact identification of all of these trees, so there are differences in some of the translations of this verse. We can see two groups, though.

First is the grouping cedar, shittah (probably the acacia), myrtle, and oil tree (probably the olive tree). These are sometimes found in the wild, but often cultivated for wood, fruit, or both. Isaiah presents a future where such trees are not only found around the cities, but flourish in the wilderness.

The second set is a list of evergreen trees: fir, pine, and box (probably the cypress). These are normally found in the hills, not in the barren desert. This description contributes further to Isaiah's promise of God's overwhelming, unfettered, and unexpected provisioning in Israel's future.

6. What will Israel's realize about "the Holy One" (v. 20)?

God will do the things of verses 18, 19 in such a way that Israel cannot question their source. They will see (physically experience), know (come to a realization), consider (ponder and think through),

and understand (make sense of) these striking phenomena. The only possible conclusion will be that the Lord hath done this. Such acts are those in which the Creator of the universe has helped His chosen people in their distress in a mighty way.

We are reminded here of the ultimate fulfillment of this type of prophecy: God's provision for His people in a Savior, Jesus the Messiah. In Him, the grace of God is lavished on a sinful and needy people, people dying of spiritual thirst. He becomes the chief cornerstone of God's new spiritual temple, and those who observe Him must come to the inevitable conclusion that "this is the Lord's doing" (Psalm 118:23, quoted in Matthew 21:42).

Similarly, we are often able to look back on various life events and clearly see the imprint of God's hand. At the time of these events, however, we may see them as random, unconnected, even trivial. Later on we may see how all of these things fit together in God's plan for our lives, just as God was working out His plan for the nation of Israel. This does not mean that God causes bad things; rather, even bad things can be used in His larger plan for our present and future benefit as well as for His eternal glory.

What Do You Think?

How do we make sure we give God the credit when great things happen?

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. When God chooses a people, He remains loyal to them to the end (Isaiah 1:8).
2. God always keeps His promises and His people (Isa. 41:8-9; cf. Gen. 12:1-3; Deut. 7:6).
3. The answer to fear is to focus on the promises of God and not on our circumstances (Isa. 41:10).
4. God provides for all mankind but especially for those who recognize themselves as poor and needy (Isa. 41:17; Matt. 5:3).
5. Whatever we need, our omnipotent God can do (Isa. 41:18).
6. God's miraculous acts are meant to draw us to His glory and majesty (vs. 19,20).

CONCLUSION - Chosen to Serve

The ancient Israelites occupied a special place in God's plans. They were intended to provide the moral and religious foundation for God's revelation of His Messiah. The nation was to show the world that there is one God, not many. They were to be examples of service the one true God. The record in this regard was mixed. There were kings like Hezekiah who "did that which was right" (2 Kings 18:3), but there were many kings like Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, who "did that which was evil" (2 Kings 21:2). Kings in the latter category forgot the covenant that Israel had with God.

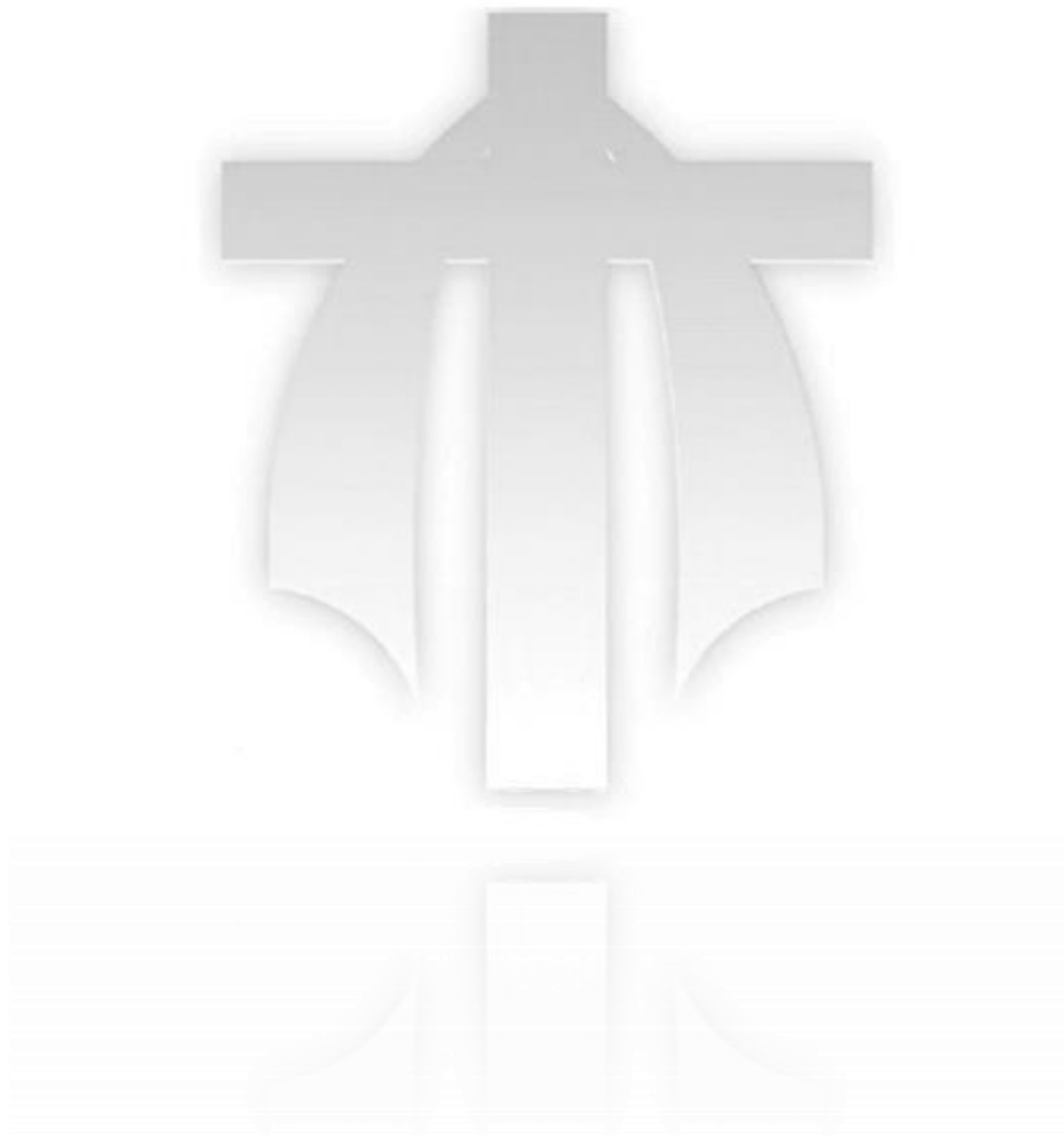
We, today, as the chosen people of God also have a covenant with Him. This is the new covenant of grace and salvation purchased by the blood of Jesus our Savior. He has promised to protect and empower His people. Our status should not be abused. It should result in yielding to God's will and serving Him.

PRAYER - Father, we marvel at Your grace, Your concern for us. We thank You for Your protection and provision and, most of all, for Your greatest gift: Jesus Your Son. We pray in His name. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER - You are called to serve the Lord God Almighty.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON – The next lesson comes from New and Old Testament scriptures. Isaiah 7:13- 17 foretells the virgin birth of Jesus, and Luke 1:30-38 tells how Jesus will extend David's dynasty. Luke also reveals the virgin birth of Jesus with the overshadowing of Mary by the Holy Spirit. During your study, seek to understand the relationship between the virgin birth and the incarnation.

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Free Access - Previous Lessons

<https://www.jesusisall.com/sunday-school.htm>

“Diligent study of these lessons will not only bless you spiritually, but also aid you in discovering God's plan for your own life.”

-John Alva Owston