

Psalm 78 – John Karmelich

1. I was debating on whether or not to take on more than one psalm this week. Then I saw this psalm was 72 verses and I thought, "I would be lucky just to get through this in one lesson". ☺
 - a) The interesting thing about this psalm is the more I read it, the easier it was to see.
 - b) God just "hit me" with the title: "Miracles are not enough". I'll explain that in a bit.
2. First, let me state the most common thing said about this psalm, and that is it is a historical psalm. That means it recites a portion part of Israel's ancient history. In particular, this psalm focuses on Israel's history from around the time they left Egypt until the time of King David.
 - a) So let me ask my favorite question here: Why should I care about the ancient history of Israel? After all, I've been reading my bible for a good while now and I already know some of the background of this story. How does recounting the history of Israel through this psalm help my life at this moment and all I am dealing with?
 - i) Yes I can state the expression: Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it. That is a true, but it avoids the question of why is it God wants us to know these specific details of Israel's history. The answer has to do with the title.
 - ii) The answer is about not repeating their biggest mistake: The Israelites discussed in this psalm got to see the greatest visible miracles in human history, and yet still doubted God's ability to work through their own lives.
3. OK, back to my title. Why is it miracles are not enough? Think of it this way: Why was the generation that saw all the plagues on Egypt and saw the parting of the Red Sea the same generation that was denied entrance into the Promised Land and had to die in the wilderness?
 - a) Before we say, "Oh poor them", let's turn the camera lens around and face it toward ourselves. We as Christians accept the idea of God's existence as well as they did.
 - i) We understand how God has worked great things in the lives of people and we have seen lives change by trusting in Him.
 - b) Yet, the first moment we don't sense His presence, what do we do? We look for other solutions and want to fix things ourselves. In other words, we at times go about our lives thinking that God is either not there or He doesn't care about the decisions we make.
 - i) To put it even another way, "We may give "this or that" part of our lives to God to deal with, but we still keep "this area" for ourselves to deal with.
 - ii) Lately I have been finding myself worrying about things that I realize are beyond my control. I battle sleepless nights at times. There are personal issues I have been trying to fix on my own. I forgot one of my own principals I teach that "my car has an engine". What I mean by that (for my newer readers) is that the God I trust in, has given us tremendous power if we are just willing to trust in that power and not try to "push our car" with our own strength.
 - iii) In other words, I find myself having to give up trying to control things I cannot control. All of my problems are God's concern that He wants to be in charge of.
 - c) Believe it or not, this does lead me back to Psalm 78. The main point here is about learning to trust God, especially in areas of our lives where we do not want to let go.
4. Let me get back to my title. So why are miracles not enough to keep us close to God?
 - a) The problem with miracles is we become dependant upon those miracles and not God's ability to work through us. If we keep waiting for God to do something, then we think there is no way we can handle whatever situation we have to face in life. We believe God can do anything, but we refuse to believe that God can work through us to do anything. That type of doubt of God working through us is the key point of this psalm and this message. If you want to read further, you are welcome. ☺
 - b) At this point it is probably best to actually start on Verse 1.

5. Psalm 78 title: *A maskil* of Asaph.
 - a) I won't explain any more about who is "Asaph", as I've discussed that pretty thoroughly in the past few lessons. For the newcomers, I'll just say that 1st Chronicles lists a man named Asaph who was in charge of worshipping God at the time of King David.
 - i) I'll also add that many bible scholars are convinced there is more than one Asaph as some of these psalms appear to be written in different times of Israel's history.
 - ii) Whether or not there is more than one Asaph, we'll just have to find out one day in heaven when we either meet "him" or "them". ☺
 - b) Let me also make a quick comment on the word "maskil". I believe that word simply means to "think about this" or contemplate what is being said. Think of this as a big riddle that needs to be contemplated in order to understand its meaning.
 - c) OK enough about the title. We have 72 verses to go through. Let's get moving.
6. Verse 1: O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth.
 - a) If there is one thing I can say about this psalm, it that the author is blunt in that he wants his readers not only read it, but also to think about what it teaches.
 - i) That is the essential point of this first verse.
7. Verse 2: I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old--³ what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us.
 - a) When the text says "open my mouth in parables" the author is stating he wants us to think about the underling points of this history lesson (that hasn't begun yet) and not just think about the stories being referred to in this "tale" that is about to begin.
8. Verse 4: We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done.
 - a) One thing that is emphasized heavily in the bible is the importance of passing on these stories to our children. Remember that bible as a single book did not exist until several centuries after Jesus and was not easily copied until the 18th century. For most of human history, having a bible scroll was an expensive thing to obtain. Therefore, it is up to parents to pass along key bible stories to the next generation. Even for those of us living in modern times, God does call on us to pass along the bible truths to the next generation.
9. Verse 5: He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children,⁶ so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children.
 - a) I quickly want to discuss the words "Jacob and Israel". Know that both words refer to the same person. This is the literal father of the 12 brothers that became the 12 tribes of Israel.
 - i) Jacob was the name he was born with and that name means "heal catcher".
 - ii) Israel is the name that God gives Jacob. It means, "Struggles with God".
 - a) The idea of the word "Israel" is that it means that those who learn to trust in God will also struggle in that relationship.
 - iii) The two words are also interesting in that whenever God uses the word "Jacob" to describe the nation of Israel, it seems to be implying they are not trusting in Him.
 - a) When the Old Testament uses the word "Israel" to describe the nation of Israel, it implies that the nation is trying to follow God but like all of us still have their (our) moments when we struggle in our relationship.
 - b) OK John, and what does the words Jacob and Israel have to do with these verses? The idea of "statues for Jacob" implies that God teaches us what is expected of us in order to follow God in the first place. Once we do that, we still struggle in our relationship with Him, which is why the next expression is given "the law in Israel".
 - i) In other words, the "law in Israel" as stated in Verse 5 refers to God's standards for right and wrong as taught in the bible. We as people struggle in obedience to what God desires for our lives. That is one reason why the descendants of Jacob are also referred to as "Israel", which again means, "struggles with God".

- c) Yes these verses are about passing on the importance of biblical principals to the next generation. These verses are not just for Israelites by birth, but for anyone and everyone that trusts in the God of the Bible. In that sense, Christians are like Israelites in that we believe in God, but still struggle at times in that relationship. That struggle too, is what must be past on to the next generation.
 - d) To put it another way, Psalm 78 is more than telling our children, "Here is what happened in this miracle and that miracle". It is more than telling our children "obey these rules". The point being made in these verses and through this psalm is that all of us struggle in our relationship with God and we must learn to trust Him through that struggle.
 - i) That is why I am explaining to all of us why the word "Israel" means to struggle with God. It is not so that we can learn Jewish history. It is so that we can learn that to struggle with God is part of our relationship with Him.
 - a) When I say "struggle" it is more than the concept of "God wants me to do this and I don't want to do it". It is about learning to trust God when we don't feel like it or want to trust in Him.
 - ii) Remember that in this psalm, we are beginning to study the history of the Israelites and in particular, the generation that saw God's greatest miracles. Yes they were amazed by what they saw, but they failed to learn from it. They believed that the God that led them could do great things. What they didn't get was the idea that He could do great things through them. That is where we struggle and that is also the key point of this lesson.
 - e) Speaking of this lesson, we have a lot of verses to go, so I better get moving along. ☺
10. Verse 7: Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands. ⁸ They would not be like their forefathers-- a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him.
- a) In these two verses, we finish the introduction to the psalm. The actual recounting of parts of the history of Israel begins in Verse 9, coming up next.
 - b) Before we do that, Asaph the author is reminding us of the importance of passing on what we learn to the next generation. One of the many reasons that God allowed a whole generation of Israelites to die in the wilderness is to teach and remind us of the importance of learning to trust God with our own lives and letting Him work through us.
 - i) In other words, "Those who fail to learn from history are destined to repeat it".
 - ii) The reason these first eight verses spend so much time emphasizing why it is so important to teach biblical principals to the next generation is in effect, "If we don't do it, who will?"
 - c) Changing the topics to American politics for the moment, I am convinced one of the greatest mistakes of the World War II generation was the failure (as a whole, lots of exceptions) to pass on the importance of trusting God to their children.
 - i) What I mean by that is in many ways I consider the baby boom generation, of which I am apart of, one of the worst generations in world history. This baby-boom generation as a group turned from biblical principals to try "everything and anything" that could bring us pleasure. At the same time, there was a great drop in the concept of learning to trust God with our individual lives.
 - a) What I also mean by that is people still believed in the power of God to work, but as a whole, they walked away from the idea of learning to trust in the power of the God of the bible to work through us in our lives.
 - ii) That whole example of fairly modern history is an example of the consequences of when people refuse to pass biblical principals on to the next generation.
 - d) I just reread these two verses to see if I missed anything, but I'm pretty sure I got the idea across of what they were trying to say. We can start the actual history lesson now, which begins in Verse 9.

11. Verse 9: The men of Ephraim, though armed with bows, turned back on the day of battle;¹⁰ they did not keep God's covenant and refused to live by his law. ¹¹ They forgot what he had done, the wonders he had shown them.
- a) Before I explain about these verses, first I need to explain who is "Ephraim". That word "Ephraim" refers to one of the 12 tribes of Israel. The man named Ephraim was actually a grandson of Jacob and was one of two boys born to Jacob's son Joseph in Egypt.
 - i) However, Jacob told his son Joseph "your two boys are now mine". (See Genesis 48:5.) What Jacob meant is that both of Joseph's children will count as my (Jacob's) own sons and they will be considered two more of your (Joseph's) brothers.
 - ii) As far as Jacob's son Joseph was concerned, he was not losing his two sons, but he was "doubling his inheritance" in that he (Joseph) would now get twice the blessings of his 11 brothers in that his two sons are "equal" with his own brothers.
 - iii) With Joseph's two sons now being counted as equals with his 11 brothers, that also mean there were now "13 tribes of Israel". God did it that way, as sometimes He did not want to count Levi as part of the 12 tribes. When God wanted to exclude Levi (for the priesthood), He could split Joseph into "two tribes" and thus God still has 12 tribes to work with. Sometimes God did want to count Levi as a tribe, and in those cases, Joseph, and not his two sons were counted as one tribe.
 - iv) So why was there such a big emphasis on the number 12? It appears that in the bible, the number 12 is associated with "completeness from God's perspective". That may be a reason why Jesus picked 12 apostles as His original disciples.
 - b) OK, now that we have reviewed our early history of the tribe of Ephraim, what is going on in this verse and my favorite question: Why should I care?
 - i) This verse is describing some unknown event in the early history of Israel where the tribe of Ephraim did not get involved in some battle that the rest of the Israelites apparently fought in. The big question is, "Why mention this?"
 - a) I think the purpose has nothing to do with the fact the tribe of Ephraim refused to fight in the battle. The reason this story is mentioned as this may have been the first time that one of the 12 tribes of Israel as a group refused to be obedient to what God commanded them to do.
 - ii) I also suspect that the reason this "unknown bible story" is mentioned is that it appeared as if the tribe of Ephraim was the first tribe to be blessed. Joshua himself was from that tribe. (See Numbers 13:8, and know that Hoshea is another name for Joshua.) When the tabernacle was first set up in the Promised Land the tabernacle was first set up in the tribal area of Ephraim before David eventually moved it to Jerusalem, which is in Judah's tribal area.
 - iii) My point is it appeared to the Israelites like God was blessing the tribe of Ephraim because the Israelite leader at that time (Joshua) was from there. Yet God points out through this verse that Ephraim was not the tribe that God choose to bring the Messiah through, as we will discover later in this psalm.
 - iv) OK, John and how is all of this relevant to my life? The point is about obedience. We will discover how this tribe (Ephraim) was rejected from leadership due to their own actions. The point is our actions or lack of actions can and does affect how God uses our lives. In other words, obedience to God is more than being saved. It is about how God desires to use us in our lives to make a difference for Him. A lack of obedience comes with consequences.
 - c) Finishing these three verses, the point is God punished that tribe through a lack of eternal leadership position due to the consequences that this tribe committed at this incident.
 - i) That lack of leadership had long term affects on that tribe.
 - ii) The point for us is that if we fail to do what God calls us to do, it can not only have bad affects on our lives, but also the lives of generations after us.

- d) Let me end this whole discussion with an interesting story that took place in the early 1700's. There was a famous American pastor back then named Jonathan Edwards. Someone did a study of all of his descendants for a good number of generations. Almost all of them turned out to be very successful in life. Many were college presidents and professors, many were successful in business and many were church pastors. There were almost no failures that came from the line of this man.
- i) There was also a man living at the same time, who didn't believe the gospel message and he regularly taunted Edwards. The same group did a study of his descendants. Most of his descendants led lives of crime and ended up in jail.
 - ii) (My gratitude to Jon Curson through whom I heard this historical story.)
 - iii) So John, are you saying that how I turn out affects how my descendants turn out? I am saying that how we live out our lives has consequences that go on for many generations. If you want a motivation to do what God wants us to do, start with the motivation that our actions will (big emphasis on "will") affect how our descendants will live out their lives.
- e) Meanwhile, God is still telling historical bad stories about the Israelites. ☺
12. Verse 12: He did miracles in the sight of their fathers in the land of Egypt, in the region of Zoan.
- a) The point here is while the Israelites were still living in Egypt, God performed miracles. In this particular verse, it is talking about the fact the fathers (ancestors) of the Israelites got to see the 10 plagues that fell upon the nation of Egypt.
 - b) I'll get to the purpose of this reference in a few verses.
13. Verse 13: He divided the sea and led them through; he made the water stand firm like a wall.
- a) In this verse, the psalmist makes reference to the actual crossing of the Red Sea.
14. Verse 14: He guided them with the cloud by day and with light from the fire all night.
- a) When the Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years, one of the reasons they could survive in that climate was that God acted as a cloud covering for them during the day and a fire to keep them warm at night.
 - b) Keep in mind that verses 12-17 are describing the same generation that saw these things.
15. Verse 15: He split the rocks in the desert and gave them water as abundant as the seas;¹⁶ he brought streams out of a rocky crag and made water flow down like rivers.
- a) The point here is how God provided the Israelites water as they traveled through this very hot "no man's land". The bible mentions the story of Moses striking a rock and water gushed out for the Israelites to drink. (See Exodus 17:6.)
 - i) Remember that there were well over a million people that this water provided for.
 - b) OK John, so one generation of Israelites all saw a bunch of great miracles. Most of us who know our bibles and are familiar with these stories. Why should I care?
 - i) The reason this history is stated comes back to my lesson introduction.
 - ii) The problem with miracles is that we can become dependant upon them. Instead of trusting that God is working through us, we look up in the sky for the next miracle to occur. That is the danger being taught here for us.
16. Verse 17: But they continued to sin against him, rebelling in the desert against the Most High.¹⁸ They willfully put God to the test by demanding the food they craved. ¹⁹ They spoke against God, saying, "Can God spread a table in the desert? ²⁰ When he struck the rock, water gushed out, and streams flowed abundantly. But can he also give us food? Can he supply meat for his people?"
- a) Let me explain what is going on here and then I'll explain how it is relevant to our lives. The Israelites who saw all of these great miracles were not busy thanking God for the miracles, but were complaining about other things and about "how do we survive now?"
 - i) The Israelites were complaining, "Yes God can provide us water out here, but what about food? Can God also supply us food out here?"

- b) There is an old biblical expression that applies well here: One of the worst punishments God can give us is when He gives us what we want instead of what He wants.
 - i) Let me put it this way: I am convinced one way God punishes adulterers is that He makes them live with the people they have affairs with.
 - ii) I am convinced the way God punishes murders and thieves is by making them live with the guilt of how they have hurt other people. Such people may or may not get punished, but they cannot escape the sense of guilt that God puts in with us. That is one reason why God set up the concept of confession of our sins.
- c) Getting back to the Israelites, instead of being grateful for what God has done and trusting that He will provide for their needs, they complained to God and He in turn gave them what they wanted instead of what God desired of them.
 - i) The danger is when we settle for what we desire in life instead of doing what God desires. How do we know the difference? I usually find God makes it obvious to us if we seek Him. Sometimes the answers just come by observing our lives and the decisions we make in our lives. It is usually more obvious in hindsight.
 - ii) Speaking of God's anger, I present the next two verses:
 - 17. Verse 21: When the LORD heard them, he was very angry; his fire broke out against Jacob, and his wrath rose against Israel, ²² for they did not believe in God or trust in his deliverance.
 - a) If you want proof that God didn't like their request for food, I present these two verses.
 - b) So if they were hungry, why was it so bad to ask God for food?
 - i) The problem wasn't that they weren't asking God. The problem was that they were demanding that God give it to them.
 - c) This gets back to my principal that the problems with miracles is that we then demand another miracle instead of trusting God to work through us to take care of our situation.
 - d) The proper way for the Israelites to ask should have been, "Dear God, I don't know how you want us to survive right now, but I just know we are dependant upon You. We need food and we ask that if it is Your will, that You provide it for us. If it is your desire that we die now, that is Your business. However, if it is Your desire that we move on, we ask that You somehow provide what we need to go on."
 - i) In the Exodus, God did have plans to miraculously provide food for them. The lesson for all of us is about trusting what God has planned for us instead of demanding that God do "this or that" in order for us to worship Him. That latter idea would be coming to God on our terms and not His.
 - e) Speaking of how God planned to feed over a million people in the desert, here is Verse 23.
 - 18. Verse 23: Yet he gave a command to the skies above and opened the doors of the heavens; ²⁴ he rained down manna for the people to eat, he gave them the grain of heaven. ²⁵ Men ate the bread of angels; he sent them all the food they could eat.
 - a) For the 40 years that the Israelites wandered in the desert, God rained down a flat flaky substance called "manna". That word literally means "What is it?" as in the Israelites did not know what else to call it. (Manna is discussed in Exodus 16 and in Numbers 11.)
 - i) Imagine if it rained this substance every night. What would we have to do to eat it? We would have to get on our knees (a visual picture of worship) to gather it off of the ground. There would be enough to meet everyone's needs by gathering it.
 - b) OK, what does this mean for you and me? I don't see food raining down from my sky.
 - i) It means to trust that the same God who loves us and cares for us will find a way to help us in our lives. God may not provide everything we want but I find that God makes a way for us to get what He wants us to have for our lives.
 - c) One more technical note before I move on. Verse 23 says "bread of angels". What I suspect it means is that God used angels to spread this stuff over where the Israelites were staying as they traveled through this land.
 - i) I could be wrong, but that is my best guess on that little issue.

19. Verse 26: He let loose the east wind from the heavens and led forth the south wind by his power. ²⁷ He rained meat down on them like dust, flying birds like sand on the seashore. ²⁸ He made them come down inside their camp, all around their tents. ²⁹ They ate till they had more than enough, for he had given them what they craved.

a) I can summarize these four verses with one thought: Be careful when God gives us what we desire instead of what He desires for our lives. I already discussed that danger when I talked about for example the consequences of adultery and the guilt we carry when we do sin against God.

b) The point as it relates to the history of the Israelites, is that they didn't want just manna. They craved meat as well. I've heard lots of jokes over the years how the Israelites got tired of eating manna burgers and manna pasta and they wanted more variety.

i) Yes we crave variety in our diet. That is not the issue. The issue is trusting in God as opposed to demanding that God do "this or that" for us.

ii) Somehow, miraculously, God caused enough birds to fly low so that the Israelites could kill them to the point they were literally stuffed from what they craved.

iii) The problem with cravings is that they are never satisfying. Cravings only leave one wanting more of the "next thing". God was trying to teach the Israelites and us not to be dependant upon cravings. Again, God knows we desire variety, but the danger has to do with not knowing the limits of cravings.

iv) This food (the birds) was giving the Israelites what they wanted as opposed to what God desired for their lives and that is always the danger.

c) As usual, I've jumped ahead of describing God's anger as stated in the next few verses.

20. Verse 30: But before they turned from the food they craved, even while it was still in their mouths, ³¹ God's anger rose against them; he put to death the sturdiest among them, cutting down the young men of Israel.

a) If there is a moral of this little story, it is "Don't mess with God". ☺

i) The Israelites made demands of God on the Israelites' timing. The demand was for meat. God gave in to their demands but it was not His desire for their lives.

b) After supplying this meat, the next thing we read of is God wiping out selected Israelites among those wandering in the desert. OK, if the Israelites deserve to be punished, why only select and sturdy men? (See Verse 31.) Why not destroy all of them?

i) The issue is not salvation, but about teaching us to trust God. By God making it obvious that certain healthy men had to die here, He was trying to teach the rest of the Israelites that He was serious. The rest of the Israelites had to trust Him or suffer the same sort of fatal consequences.

ii) If what they did was so bad, why didn't God just do something less dramatic? God wanted to make it obvious to all the Israelites of what they did wrong. How do you show over a million people what they did was wrong? By killing a group so that the rest of the large group can see the consequences of their actions.

c) The underlying point for you and me is about learning to trust God and do what He asks of us, no more or no less and on His timing. There are serious consequences for disobedience as the Israelites were learning at this moment in time.

i) These verses also show us how seriously God takes sin. The sin here was not asking for meat, the sin was demanding meat now on their timing. The sin was not trusting in God to provide and care for what we need for our lives.

d) OK John, we are not perfect and there are times we all doubt God. Does that mean He is going to wipe out members of our family for our disobedience? One thing to learn from the history of Israel is that God will always go to more and more extreme measures to get them (and us) to be obedient to Him. That is what the Israelites constantly had to learn the hard way about trusting in Him.

e) Speaking of history, it is time to get back to the history of the Israelites.

21. Verse 32: In spite of all this, they kept on sinning; in spite of his wonders, they did not believe.
- a) If you want one verse to take away from this lesson, this is the one. It is about learning from history so that we don't repeat the same mistakes. It is in effect a biblical principal.
22. Verse 33: So he ended their days in futility and their years in terror.
- a) The "he" in this verse is God. The point is God ended the days of the lives of those who came out of Egypt in "futility and terror". If you know your biblical history, you would know the generation that saw the miracles in Egypt and the parting of the Red Sea ended their lives dying in the wilderness while their children got to enter the Promised Land.
 - b) So why did God punish this group so bad? The group got to see God work in a way no other generation in history has, and yet they still didn't trust in God's ability to work through them. To add another classical biblical expression here, "To much is given, much is required". (A reference to a quote by Jesus said. See Luke 12:48.)
 - c) The lesson of course, is that trusting in God is just that. It is much more than believing God can do miracles. It is the belief that God can and does want to work through us to get His will done in our lives. The failure of that generation of Israelites to get that concept is why God let them die they way they did. The lesson for us in effect is "If we are not willing to trust in God to work through our lives, in effect, "He won't force us to do what we don't want to do in the first place."
 - i) The problem is that group as a whole refused to trust in God to work through them with their lives. There is group accountability with God. Not for salvation, but about the willingness to be used by God to make a difference for Him.
 - ii) Meanwhile the psalm writer is not done condemning this whole generation.
23. Verse 34: Whenever God slew them, they would seek him; they eagerly turned to him again.
³⁵They remembered that God was their Rock, that God Most High was their Redeemer.
- a) What do these two verses prove? Simply that by God orchestrating the death of some of the people of that generation, "it worked". For a short time, it got everyone else to repent.
 - b) Throughout the history of Israel, God has allowed the Israelites to suffer for years at the hands of their enemies and at times has allowed for the death of many Israelites at the hands of enemies. Does this mean that God hated those individuals? Of course not.
 - i) The issue is not salvation, but accountability.
 - ii) The related point is that "this method of really tough love" worked: It caused the rest of the Israelites to turn to God for help and redemption.
24. Verse 36: But then they would flatter him with their mouths, lying to him with their tongues;
³⁷their hearts were not loyal to him, they were not faithful to his covenant.
- a) To put these verses bluntly, there were many times in Israel's history where that nation as a whole would give God "lip service" instead of truly turning to Him.
 - i) Again, the Israelites believed that God can do great things. The problem is they lacked the faith that God could do great things through them. That in effect is the key point of this lesson that God wants us to learn.
 - b) To put it another way, they would go through the motions of "going to church" as we Christians would call it, but their hearts were not in it. I'm not talking about bad days when we go to church and our minds are elsewhere. I'm talking about those who only go to church in effect because it is good for business or their spouse or their family makes them go. Such people don't really believe what is taught. That is what is in view here.
 - c) Do you remember when Jesus, "many are called, but few are chosen." (See Matthew 20:16 and 22:14.) I think of that concept when I read verses like these. It reminds me that there are many people who go through the motions of seeking God, but their hearts are not in it. In terms of knowing "who is who", that is God's business. Our job is to focus on our own relationship with God and who is or is not actually saved is in effect God's problem and not ours. Our job is just to be a good witness for God in our lives.

25. Verse 38: Yet he was merciful; he forgave their iniquities and did not destroy them. Time after time he restrained his anger and did not stir up his full wrath. ³⁹ He remembered that they were but flesh, a passing breeze that does not return.
- a) The one expression in this whole psalm that makes me smile is, "Yet he was merciful".
 - i) That means that when the Israelites rebelled throughout their history, God did not wipe them all out and say, "I'll try this again with another group".
 - ii) It means when our hearts are not in it on any given day, God remembers that we too are "just flesh" and He is forgiving of our sins as well.
 - iii) Stop and think of all the sins we have committed. God could have wiped us out and be justified for doing so. However, He does have mercy on us, not because we are good people, but because He knows who is truly seeking Him.
 - b) Think of it this way: Even when we are not loyal to God, He is still loyal to us. Sometimes God has to go to harsh measures in order to get those of us who are called to serve Him back to Him, but He never gives up on those of us who He has called.
 - c) Meanwhile, the psalmist is still complaining about how bad all of us can be. ☺
26. Verse 40: How often they rebelled against him in the desert and grieved him in the wasteland! ⁴¹Again and again they put God to the test; they vexed the Holy One of Israel.
- a) The key to reading this psalm is not to think, "Oh those poor Israelites. How foolish they were for not getting it." What God does want us to see is how often we as believers put God to the test by not doing what He has called on us to do.
 - i) This gets back to the idea of learning to trust God with every aspect of our lives. It is about trusting God to work through us. The point is not just about knowing that God can do great things, but that He is willing to do great things through us.
 - b) These verses are a warning to get out of our own "wastelands": This can refer to any aspect of our lives that is not God's will for our lives. How do we know what they are?
 - i) For starters, it is about doing anything that is in contrast to biblical principals.
 - ii) God is more than able and willing to make it obvious to us what it is He wants of our lives if we are willing to seek Him. The key is to work on His timing and trust Him through what He wants of us at any given moment.
 - c) In the meantime, we have to get back to a group of Israelites, this time, back in Egypt:
27. Verse 42: They did not remember his power-- the day he redeemed them from the oppressor, ⁴³the day he displayed his miraculous signs in Egypt, his wonders in the region of Zoan. ⁴⁴ He turned their rivers to blood; they could not drink from their streams. ⁴⁵ He sent swarms of flies that devoured them, and frogs that devastated them. ⁴⁶ He gave their crops to the grasshopper, their produce to the locust. ⁴⁷ He destroyed their vines with hail and their sycamore-figs with sleet. ⁴⁸ He gave over their cattle to the hail, their livestock to bolts of lightning.
- a) These seven verses are all talking about one thing: They are all describing the miracles that God did in Egypt in the sight of all of these Israelites. If you are not familiar with these stories I recommend reading the first dozen or so chapters of Exodus.
 - b) OK, why list these miracles here? Most of us have read Exodus, or at least we have heard these stories about the plagues on Egypt since we were children. Why does God want us to focus on the Egyptian plagues and remember these events?
 - i) What we are seeing is more examples of "Watch what God is capable of doing to intervene in the lives of believers." If we believe God can do great miracles whenever He wants us, why do we fail to trust that God wants to help us through our situations and wants to work through our lives to make a difference for Him?
 - ii) I am not saying trusting God makes life easy. I am saying that letting God work through our lives is the greatest purpose one can have for living life.
 - c) The psalmist is recalling these miracles not for us to know history, but for us to know that God can and does work through the lives of those willing to trust in Him.
 - d) Meanwhile, we have to get back to God being ticked off at the Egyptians long ago. ☺

28. Verse 49: He unleashed against them his hot anger, his wrath, indignation and hostility-- a band of destroying angels. ⁵⁰ He prepared a path for his anger; he did not spare them from death but gave them over to the plague. ⁵¹ He struck down all the firstborn of Egypt, the firstfruits of manhood in the tents of Ham.
- a) These verses focus on the final plague in Egypt when the first-born son of every Egyptian was killed. Here's a question to consider: If the Egyptians were so bad, why not kill selected Egyptians as opposed to all of their first born sons? The point and the "word picture" is that God will not allow evil to continue forever through every generation.
 - b) Does this mean that God hated those Egyptians? No. It is not about God caring more about a group of Israelites than a group of Egyptians. The point is to know that there are very-bad consequences for those who harm people who do trust in God.
 - c) But John, didn't Exodus state that God hardened the heart of Pharaoh? (That is true, Exodus 9:12 and other verses in Exodus give support of that principal.)
 - i) The way I view it is God hardens those who have already turned against Him. It is like my "greasing the road" principal of when people decide to turn from God. He in turn makes it tougher to turn back to Him. That makes it more obvious to everyone watching who does and who does not have a heart for God.
29. Verse 52: But he brought his people out like a flock; he led them like sheep through the desert. ⁵³He guided them safely, so they were unafraid; but the sea engulfed their enemies. ⁵⁴ Thus he brought them to the border of his holy land, to the hill country his right hand had taken.
- a) These three verses are the "contrast" to the last group. While God did all of that damage to the Egyptians, essentially at the same time, God led the Israelites out of Egypt.
 - i) The lesson is that God never promises us a pain free life. The lesson is that if we are willing to follow God, He will lead us down the path He desires for us which is a far greater choice than choosing to live for our own pleasures and desires.
 - b) The related point is that the despite the great things that God did for this generation, the Israelites still refused to trust Him. Image seeing all of these miracles and still not trusting God with our lives. Why is that? It is because we believe God can do great things, but lack the faith He can do it through us. Again, that is the great lesson of this whole story.
30. Verse 55: He drove out nations before them and allotted their lands to them as an inheritance; he settled the tribes of Israel in their homes. ⁵⁶ But they put God to the test and rebelled against the Most High; they did not keep his statutes.
- a) This next set of verses focuses on the generation that came right after the generation that did come out of Egypt. The point here is that even the next generation saw God do great things, and they too failed to fully trust God with their lives.
 - b) Back to my main point: Why are miracles not enough? Why is it people can see God do great things and still not trust Him? Part of the answer is this life is appealing. Part of the answer is that we can physically see what this life has to offer while trusting in God can be harder than trusting in what we see. Miracles are not enough, because we are always waiting for the next miracle as opposed to doing what God wants us to do with our lives.
 - i) So what does God want of us on a daily basis? It varies for each believer, but the common points is about living the principals the bible teaches and trusting God to guide our lives on a daily basis. It is about learning to follow where God leads and trust that He is always there willing to guide us.
31. Verse 57: Like their fathers they were disloyal and faithless, as unreliable as a faulty bow. ⁵⁸They angered him with their high places; they aroused his jealousy with their idols. ⁵⁹ When God heard them, he was very angry; he rejected Israel completely.
- a) OK John isn't this psalm getting repetitive at this point? It is saying in effect the next generation had the same problems of the previous generation.
 - b) A point here is that it was not a unique problem of the first generation of Israelites. The same desire to turn from God was common through every generation of believers.

- c) So if God is perfect He knew the Israelites were imperfect people, why does the bible mention God was angry at times with them and in effect at times abandoned them?
 - i) God desires so much that we trust in Him, He goes to desperate measures to get our attention. Even if it means sorrow and death of some called to His salvation.
 - ii) God does not desire this relationship for His sake, but for ours. The point is that He wants all of us to have a loving relationship with Him and with each other. The only way to spread that love begins by trusting Him with our lives.
 - d) But John, the bible teaches the Israelites turned to "idols", which are other gods. I haven't done anything that bad. When we prefer to spend time with things instead of God, those things can be our idols. Let me explain:
 - i) When we turn from God those other things can become our false source of joy.
 - ii) Yes but those early cultures were far worse in that they offered children to these gods and literally worshipped things other than the true God.
 - iii) The point as it relates to these verses is that God is trying to teach us there are always consequences for turning against what He desires for each of our lives.
32. Verse 60: He abandoned the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent he had set up among men.
- a) There was a view among the early Israelites that as bad as they were, God would never abandon them because He needs them to be a witness to the rest of the world.
 - b) While God desire them and us to be a witness for Him, God is more than willing to "give up" on us in the sense that if we are not willing to live to make a difference for Him, He will look elsewhere. At the same time, God will show us how miserable life can be when we do choose to ignore Him and that includes the concept of taking away whatever ministry opportunities He has blessed us with. That is the underlying point when God in effect allowed the first tabernacle to be "abandoned" at times from His presence.
33. Verse 61: He sent the ark of his might into captivity, his splendor into the hands of the enemy.
- a) This verse is describing a specific point in time in the book of judges where the most important object in God's tabernacle, the "ark of the covenant" was captured by another nation. That "ark" is essentially a box that represents God's presence in their midst.
 - b) The underlying point is not that God leaves us forever. The point is that God is willing to turn from us in dramatic ways in order to get our attention to draw us back to Him.
34. Verse 62: He gave his people over to the sword; he was very angry with his inheritance. ⁶³ Fire consumed their young men, and their maidens had no wedding songs; ⁶⁴ their priests were put to the sword, and their widows could not weep.
- a) Verses 60-61 described bad things on a "religious scale". These 3 verses describe personal and physical pain. They describe Israelites being killed in battle with their enemies. They describe fire burning up relatively young people. They describe women not enjoying a wedding. They describe priests being put to death and their wives being killed so they could not even weep over their husbands' death.
 - b) OK, John, this is depressing. What is the point of all of this bad history? It is not for us to focus on their misery or even misery that is closer to our lives. The point is consequences do occur for turning from the God of the bible. Are you saying that all the bad things that happen to us or say, those around us come from turning from God?
 - i) I'm saying one has to consider it as a possibility. We don't always know why bad things occur in our lives. All we know is that we have to deal with that pain.
 - a) The point is there are consequences for turning from God.
 - b) The point is God is willing to go to extreme measures in order to draw us back close to Him. Think of how our society turns to God when things go bad and then goes back to their lives when things are good.
 - c) God is trying to teach us that regular time with Him can get us through some of the worst things that happen to people in this life.
 - c) The good news of these verses is the last eight verses get much better.

35. Verse 65: Then the Lord awoke as from sleep, as a man wakes from the stupor of wine. ⁶⁶ He beat back his enemies; he put them to everlasting shame.
- a) When the text says the "Lord awake as from sleep", it does not literally mean God was ignoring what was happening in their lives. It means that God often waits until a point where we are willing to truly trust in Him before He does help us. I have seen this over and over again in my own life as well as the lives of others.
 - b) Think of the word "enemies" in these verses as the consequences of sin we have to face in our lives. The only (big emphasis on only) way to get past those issues is with God's help.
 - c) Are you saying that trusting in God gives us automatic victories in life? No, I am saying that if we put the results of whatever we are dealing with in His hands, then the results of our situation are now His problem and not ours. In that sense, we cannot lose.
36. Verse 67: Then he rejected the tents of Joseph, he did not choose the tribe of Ephraim; ⁶⁸ but he chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion, which he loved.
- a) If you remember when this psalm started, there was a story about the tribe of Ephraim and how they messed up in some unknown battle. I also stated back then that there are long term consequences when we decide to turn from God. (Remember the whole story about the descendants of Jonathan Edwards? That in effect, is what is in play here because the initial blessings of the tribe of Ephraim were lost due to their own sins.)
 - b) Let me add the last four verses, which are related to this point and I'll wrap it up.
37. Verse 69: He built his sanctuary like the heights, like the earth that he established forever. ⁷⁰ He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens; ⁷¹ from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel his inheritance. ⁷² And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them.
- a) OK, did you think I would not make through the 72 verses in 12 pages? Neither did I. ☺
 - b) For these last four verses, I can state the obvious in that God choose the Messiah (Jesus) as a descendant of King David as the ultimate solution to the problem of continual rejection of God and how we can come to Him as eternally forgiven people.
 - c) With that said, I want all of us to see why God did pick David. What was so special about David that God choose him to be the first of many kings and eventually lead "the king" (Jesus) into our lives? In short, why did God pick David?
 - i) Since I'm quoting Pastor Jon Curson in this lesson, let me end this lesson with his explanation about why God picked David: Some Christians really enjoy praising God. Other Christians really enjoy "getting their hands dirty" in the sense they like to do things to make a difference for God in this world. David became the first great example of someone living in Israel who liked to do both. He loved to praise God and He loved to live his life to make a difference for God.
 - ii) That dual aspect of David's life is what God desires of all of us. I can't think of another person before David who truly enjoyed both aspects of "praise" to God. That is why David became the model of what the believer should become and that is why God gave him the privilege of being the direct ancestor of Jesus.
38. On that happy note, we made it through 78 verses and I'll wrap this up in my closing prayer. Dear God, help us to see the great works that You have done in this world, and may those great works drive us closer to You. May it get us to trust You with every aspect of our lives, praise You for what You are doing in our lives and finally, may the works that You do get us to make a difference for You with our lives. May we too, be like David, where we see You work, trust that You are guiding us, praise You for being there for us and live to make a difference for you. We ask this in Jesus' name Amen