

1. I have to admit, that I am not crazy at the moment about starting up the third book of the psalms.
  - a) I have already written roughly 25 lessons on the psalms, and technically, we are not actually at the halfway point. How much more can I possibly get out of this book?
  - b) Then God reminded me that if all He wanted me to learn was say the first 50 psalms, there would only be 50 psalms instead of 150. I get the feeling God wants me to press on, so like a good soldier, I press on. ☺
2. As I just said, we are starting the third of the five books of the psalms. It is shorter than the first two. We can know that because we are two psalms away from the half waypoint and we are just now starting "book three" of the psalms.
  - a) I have also stated a number of times in previous lessons that some scholars tie each of the five books of the psalms to the first five books of the bible. If that is true, then this third book of the psalms should tie to the third book of the bible, Leviticus. With that said, let me summarize Leviticus in one key word: Worship. That book is about how God desires to be worshipped. It also teaches us how God feels about sin, which is not good. ☺
    - i) It is important to state that Christians are not required to follow all of the rules in Leviticus in that Jesus fulfilled the requirements of the Old Testament Law for us.
    - ii) At the same time, Leviticus does give the Christians lots of good thoughts on how God desires to be worshipped, how He feels (to this day) about sin and how He wants us as believers to focus our lives.
    - iii) With that said, this is not a study of Leviticus, but a study of Psalms. However, even as I read the psalms in this lesson, I could already see the tie in to worship. We'll see if that focus continues as we go through these psalms.
3. With that speech out of my system, let me give the title for this lesson: It is "keep our eye on the ball". For my foreign readers, that is an old American expression used in baseball. The point is about keeping our focus on what is important in life. I state this because all of us want to have success in this lifetime. It is also easy to see the good things that many nonbelievers have in life and think, "I want that too". It is hard to understand why we as believers have to suffer while nonbelievers we know appear to having an easy time of life.
  - a) It may help here to give the key verse of this lesson, which is Psalm 73, Verse 17. It reads:
    - i) "Till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny."
      - a) If there is one line to memorize in this lesson, that would be it.
      - b) This lesson is about understanding the destiny of those who won't dedicate their lives to God. Despite the good things they have now, that is it.
  - b) So John, are you saying this whole lesson is a "keep your eye on the ball" analogy?
    - i) I'm saying it is easy in life to get our focus off of what God calls us to do. It is easy to see the success of nonbelievers and say, "I want that". It is easy to get our focus on things that won't matter for all of eternity.
  - c) Sometimes it is necessary to remind ourselves that we have an unknown amount of time in this world. Recently, I had an incident where I ended up in the emergency room for a day. I am fine and hopefully that is over. What it did remind me is that we don't know how long we have as humans to live. The point is not to feel sorry for ourselves, but to remind ourselves in effect that "life is short" and the greatest purpose in this life is to use our lives to make a difference for God in all that we do.
  - d) Which surprisingly, leads us back to the issue of worship. The great secret to living the Christian life is not about "trying harder", but about keeping our focus "on the ball", which in this case is God Himself. That act of regular worship keeps our focus on Him.

4. OK John, earlier, you gave the key line to Psalm 73. This lesson also covers Psalm 74 and 75. What is so special about those psalms, other than that they are next in line?
  - a) Psalm 74 focuses on the enemies of God. The way I put it is Psalm 73 talks about those who don't care about God in the first place. Psalm 74 focuses on those who have so much hatred of God they make an effort to destroy things and people associated with Him.
    - i) The point of Psalm 74 is that in order to combat such evil, again, the secret is not will-power, but our trust in God Himself to see us through such times.
  - b) Psalm 75 is a short psalm that says in effect, "Don't worry, God is in charge. Despite all of the bad things that are happening, God is still there and He will take care of all of the wrongs of this world on His timing.
  - c) In summary all three of these psalms are saying, "Don't worry about the lives of those who turn from God. We then let God deal with things that are beyond our control."
5. Before I actually start the psalms, I also need to say a few words about the author.
  - a) The author of all the psalms in this lesson, as well as the next few lessons is a man named Asaph. There was a leader of worship when David was king and that was Asaph.
    - i) We encountered him once earlier, as he was the author of Psalm 50.
  - b) Some bible scholars suspect there may have been more than one Asaph who wrote the psalms. That is because some of the psalm references tie to later dates in Jewish history.
  - c) OK John, what is special about Asaph? This man cared about pleasing God and like all of us, occasionally got his focus off of God. He struggled in understanding God and needed to remind himself of why we trust God and the benefit of that lifestyle.
    - i) What he teaches is that it is normal for the believer to struggle in our relationship with God and like Asaph, we must face that struggle as a believer.
  - d) OK enough of all of that, Psalm 73. ☺
6. Psalm 73, title: A psalm of Asaph.
  - a) All the title says is that Asaph wrote it, and it is a psalm. The idea of a psalm is that he understood that this was a prayer to God and contemplated how He works in our lives.
7. Verse 1: Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.
  - a) When Asaph wrote, "God is good to Israel". That requires a short explanation:
    - i) It does not mean every Israelite of that day or this time era goes to heaven.
    - ii) It only means that an Israelite was more blessed than a person of other countries because they had the opportunity to understand how God is to be worshipped.
    - iii) It would be like saying today, one is blessed for living in the United States as one has far more opportunities to get close to the true God. It is truer than if one is raised in a place where one is forced to worship "fill in the blank".
  - b) Further, the country of Israel was collectively blessed whenever that country as a whole sought the God of the bible. I believe that is as true today as it was then. This particular point is not about individual salvation, but about "corporate worship".
    - i) That same principal can apply to any country or even any church that corporately seeks the true God and at the same time, is willing to turn from sin in their lives. God will bless that group just as much as He wanted to bless Israel "then".
  - c) The verse also mentions "pure in heart". Does that mean God expects perfection?
    - i) No it means God expects us to be perfectly forgiven. It means to trust in the fact that if we have confessed our sins to God and are trusting in Him for the complete forgiveness of all of our sins.
    - ii) That last fact is not an excuse to be "lazy" about sin. God cares about our behavior. He wants all of us to turn from sin. That does not come from trying harder, but from letting God work through us to change us to be the type of person that He wants us to be. The idea is about confessing our sins as wrong, turning from sin and trusting in God to change us to be the type of person He wants us to be. That is the long-version of the phrase, "pure in heart".

8. Verse 2: But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold.
  - a) From Verses 2 through 16, we have one long speech by Asaph, essentially saying that he almost went down the wrong path in life. Let me explain it this way:
    - i) Do I believe Asaph is saved and trusted in God? Of course.
    - ii) Still, Asaph started looking at the lives of nonbelievers and was wondering why God was allowing them to be so successful in life.
    - iii) In other words, Asaph was normal. ☺
  - b) When the text says Asaph's feet almost slipped, and he almost lost his foothold, I suspect that he was considering the lives of nonbelievers and it was appealing to him.
    - i) If we see people enjoying their lives and becoming successful without God, it is easy to get our focus on that success as opposed to focusing on an invisible God.
  - c) So, John, are you saying that God blesses the nonbeliever because that is the only pleasure they will have for all eternity? No. The world is full of both prosperous unbelievers and poor unbelievers, just as God can allow some believers to be financially successful for some purpose that is strictly between God and themselves.
    - i) The issue is not what things the unbeliever has or doesn't have in this life. The issue is trusting in things other than God with one's life. It is easy to become comfortable in one's financial success or any other type of success for that matter.
9. Verse 3: For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
  - a) Asaph become envious when he saw how wicked people have prospered.
    - i) I admit I struggle with this myself at times. I work with some clients who have a tremendous amount of wealth and it is easy to get envious of such things.
  - b) As I read this verse, I stared thinking, "If only I would live my life this way, I would be more like them". That is "getting our eyes off the ball" to repeat my lesson title again.
    - i) The point is not that success is bad. It is just that God's idea of a successful life is a lot different from the world's idea of a successful life. If one can accept that God's idea of success is a lot different from the world's idea, then one has this psalm understood as well as the key point of this lesson.
    - ii) The rest as they say is the details. Speaking of details:
10. Verse 4: They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. <sup>5</sup> They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills.
  - a) These verses are saying that nonbelievers don't struggle with problems. They have strong and healthy bodies and they are not plagued by human ills.
  - b) OK, time to think about those last two verses for a moment: Do these verses mean that for example, rich people don't die of cancer like other people? Does this mean that successful people don't have to deal with relationship issues like everyone else?
  - c) There is an expression that fits here that I've always liked: It is, "Money does not buy happiness, but if used properly one can appreciate life with money more than without it."
    - i) I doubt Asaph had a lot of money. He probably had enough of a salary as the king's "chief of musical service" to survive. Now that I think about it, the vast majority of people I know in the professional ministry don't make a lot of money.
      - a) They make enough to live on (like Asaph), but not enough to enjoy what the "well to do" get, which is probably why Asaph thought about this.
    - ii) So if the "well to do" still have struggles in life like everyone else, why would Asaph write these things in Verses 4 and 5?
      - a) The problem is we don't see their struggles, only their wealth or their fame. It appears like such people have it all together.
      - b) Like "Hollywood" the problem is that perception is not reality. What we see is an image that such people want the rest of the world to see.

- d) The point is success may buy us "stuff", but it does not draw us any closer to God. I heard a great story from Jon Curson: He said, "A young man was asked what he wanted in life. He said he wanted to make a lot of money. An old man then asked him, "OK, then what?"
  - i) The young man said, "Then I can relax and enjoy my life".
  - ii) The old man responded, "OK, then what?"
  - iii) The young man thought about it and said, "I guess then I die and face judgment". At that point, the young man ran out of the room crying as he realized what a waste of a life that concept was. That young man changed his whole outlook about life once he simply considered the concept there is a judgment day coming.
  - iv) The point is not that God wants us to avoid enjoying life. The point is that the only way to really appreciate life and have joy is to live a God centered life.
  - v) That too, ties to our lesson theme of keeping our focus on the "ball" which is God.
- 11. Verse 6: Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence.
  - a) The word "pride" in the bible is associated with sin. The idea is about being proud of what we have accomplished without God's help and thinking highly of oneself.
    - i) If God accomplishes something great through us, or if we have achieved some great goal in life, there is nothing wrong with giving God the credit for getting us to that goal. The danger is when we think we did it without His help.
    - ii) OK, what about the person who doesn't thank God but has accomplished some great thing in life? That is the danger this psalm is describing. Such people do exist, but the danger is, they still face judgment one day.
  - b) OK John, what about "clothe themselves with violence"? Obviously it is not literal. The idea is that those who don't care about God don't care who they have to hurt in order for them to accomplish what they want to accomplish in life.
    - i) If you think that is bad, read further as Asaph is just warming up. ☺
- 12. Verse 7: From their callous hearts comes iniquity; the evil conceits of their minds know no limits.
  - a) The idea here is if one does not have a heart for pleasing God, there is no limit to what comes out of us. The verse mentions iniquity, which is another word for sin. Once we start down the path of not caring about God, it is amazing what we think and say.
  - b) Stop for a moment and remember why Asaph is writing all of this. He sees the success of nonbelievers. He sees the good health of nonbelievers. Yes, he sees how bad they act in life but Asaph is wondering why God allows such people to get away with what they do.
- 13. Verse 8: They scoff, and speak with malice; in their arrogance they threaten oppression. <sup>9</sup> Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth.
  - a) You can sense the growing anger of Asaph as he writes each line of this psalm. This verse focuses is on what such unbelievers might say to believers. The idea of "scoff" here is to speak badly of the lifestyle of believers.
  - b) Verse 9 says in effect that nonbelievers claim they are going to heaven. Most people believe they are saved, but they also refuse to submit their lives to God. They falsely believe their good deeds outweigh their bad deeds and that is enough to save them.
    - i) If I had to pick Satan's single greatest lie, it is the belief that God "grades on a curve" and He judges us based on our good deeds outweighing our bad deeds.
    - ii) The unsaved expect God to judge us with imperfect standards. Many say in effect, "I can't change they way I am." That statement is correct. However, God can change the way we are, which is why He desires we turn our lives over to Him.
    - iii) In effect, the single biggest difference between the saved and unsaved is that the unsaved refuse to look to God to change the way they are in life. That in effect is what Asaph meant in Verse 9 by "their tongues take possession of the earth".
    - iv) Remember that the word "earth" in Verse 9 represents any and all lifestyles that oppose God's will. The idea is in effect if we are not heavenly minded then our primary focus is only on the things this world has to offer.

14. Verse 10: Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance.
  - a) To understand Verse 10, remember that the land of Israel is mostly a desert and having enough water is always an issue there. Here in Verse 10, it says in effect that many people turn to these nonbelievers and drink up water as if there will always be plenty of water.
    - i) It is possible that Asaph is not being literal. The idea would be that people are interested in having their material needs met, and the ungodly have more than enough of what they want in order to satisfy themselves.
  - b) John, you seem to be implying that being rich and financially successful is of the devil.
    - i) No. What I am saying is that Satan uses financial gain to keep people from God in the sense that people trust in their abundance for their own happiness.
    - ii) I try to hold the view that money is neither good nor bad. (See Luke 16:13.) Money is just a tool to acquire things. If one has lots of money and only spends it on luxury, then one does not have a heart for God. That quote in Luke says we must choose between God and money. The idea is we can't serve both God and money. The idea of being focused on money is Asaph's point in this verse.
15. Verse 11: They say, "How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?"
  - a) This verse is easier to understand than the last one. One way to tell if a person doesn't have a heart for God is that such a person makes fun of the concept of God. They will make fun of the concept of a god that knows all things and intervenes in our lives.
  - b) Let's be honest, it is a tough thing to accept that a god we cannot see knows all things and is aware of all we do and see. This comes back to the concept of how would we rather go through life: Believing in a god that knows all things and judges us fairly or to believe that this life is all that there is and we might as well enjoy it as much as possible.
    - i) Asaph is aware that this life is unfair. He is aware that many ungodly people get all sorts of benefits in this life. He is also aware that such people don't really care about the existence of God. The hard part is to accept God's existence and judgment. The good news is that God goes to a lot of trouble to prove He is there.
16. Verse 12: This is what the wicked are like-- always carefree, they increase in wealth.
  - a) You can just sense the author's frustration about life. He sees those who don't care about God not having significant problems. Asaph is doubting the importance of trusting God.
17. Verse 13: Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence. <sup>14</sup> All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning.
  - a) It might be best here to share a story I heard from a pastor (Bob Davies) describing a woman in a situation similar to what Asaph is going through:
    - i) This woman is a strong Christian. She is complaining that her life is falling apart. She is on the verge of divorce, is raising three young children and has no way of supporting herself if she leaves her husband.
    - ii) At the same time, this woman sees some of her unbelieving friends have a happy marriage, and life in general appears to be going well. She in effect is suffering the same dilemma that Asaph has in this psalm.
    - iii) The one thing that pushes this woman on is the reality of the end of both lifestyles. It is her trust that God will get her through her problems and that God will judge her behavior that sustains her in times of doubt.
  - b) In effect, that is the point of this psalm. Life can be very difficult for those of us who are trusting in God and it appears those who are not, have life a whole lot easier. If it wasn't for our faith in the reality of a judgment day, living for God is not worth the effort.
    - i) Paul made a similar type of statement. He himself said in effect that if there is no judgment day, all of the suffering of being a Christian is a waste of time. (See 1st Corinthians 15:31.) My point is most Christians go through moments in life like Asaph felt. The reason this psalm is here and a reason the bible is here is to remind us of the reality that a judgment day is coming for all people.

18. Verse 15: If I had said, "I will speak thus," I would have betrayed your children.
- a) It may help here to remember that Asaph is talking to God. I say that because "your children" refers to those of us who are trusting in the God of the bible.
  - b) Asaph is saying that if he spoke out loud his thoughts of how the ungodly are enjoying a good life, he would be betraying his fellow believers in God. Therefore, Asaph is quiet about his feelings and is only pouring out his heart to God alone.
  - c) The solution of course, comes back to "keeping our eye on the ball", which is the reminder to remember what is important in life. In this case, it is the reminder of the reality of God's judgment coming for all of us.
19. Verse 16: When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me <sup>17</sup> till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.
- a) Verse 16 says that it was impossible to understand the dilemma of ungodly people having a good life. Verse 17 is the key to this whole psalm: Verse 17 says in effect once we get our focus back on God, we then remember the destiny of those who ignore Him.
    - i) Asaph is saying that the way we deal with the pain of living a difficult life especially in comparison to others at ease is to seek God and understand that the judgment day is (big emphasis on "is") coming for all people.
  - b) Let me apply a different concept to this issue: Suppose someone is religious but of a different religion. How do we apply their suffering for their "god" to this verse?
    - i) I believe that a fair God judges all people fairly based on what they know about Jesus and the life that they lived. The problem (for a lack of a better word) is we serve a perfect God. A perfect God cannot stand any sin whatsoever. Therefore, it is not a matter of someone being a good person. It is an issue of whether or not that person is trusting in God's perfect forgiveness of sin.
20. Verse 18: Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin.
- a) One can sense the change in tone from Verse 18 to the end of the psalm as Asaph reminds himself again, of the reality of God's judgment.
  - b) Here in this verse, Asaph says that those who don't seek God are on "slippery ground".
    - i) OK, what does that mean? I stated in other lessons the concept that God says to people in effect, "Don't go down that path in life. Again, I (God) am warning you don't go down that path." Then in effect God "greases the road" making it harder for people to turn back from their sinful choices in life. That picture of God greasing the road is in effect the same principal as "slippery ground".
  - c) Doesn't God want all people to repent? Why would God make it harder for those who have turned from Him to do so? Why "grease the road" as you call it John?
    - i) For starters, it makes it more obvious of the consequences of sin.
    - ii) It also makes it more obvious for the need of God in their lives.
    - iii) In effect, "slippery places" or "greases the road" is to show people who have turned to a sinful lifestyle of the consequences of making those choices.
21. Verse 19: How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors!
- a) I want to discuss the concept of "suddenly" for a moment. Those who are older in life will tell all of us how fast life goes by. None of us knows how long we will live, but I do guarantee that at the end, it will seem like we only had a short time to live.
    - i) That is what the writer means by "suddenly". It does not mean everyone's life will end today, but that the end will get here soon enough.
    - ii) For those who refuse to turn to the God of the bible, the reality of hell comes fast.
  - b) There is a woman at our church who became a Christian mainly because she works as a hospice. That is a person who takes care of someone near the very end of his or her life.
    - i) She said that she has seen Christians at their death with peace and joy in their lives. She also said she has seen too many non-Christians live in great fear as they approach death. That reality of seeing both eventually drove her to Christ.

22. Verse 20: They are like a dream when one awakes; when you arise, Lord, you will despise them as fantasies.
- a) This verse is again talking about "judgment day".
  - b) The verse says, "When you arise": That is a specific reference to our judgment day.
  - c) Is this verse saying that no one is judged until Jesus returns? "Well, yes and no. ☺
    - i) From our "stuck in time" perspective, I believe that is true. I equally believe that when we die we leave "time" as we know it. At that moment, we enter God's world where time does not exist. If God created all things, then He created time as well. That also means that God exists outside of time as we know it.
    - ii) I believe the point of this verse is that when the day of our death comes, we immediately are either in heaven or facing God's judgment for our sins.
    - iii) That is what the verse means by "like a dream when one awakes". The idea for the nonbeliever is that when death comes, then comes the reality of eternal death.
23. Verse 21: When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, <sup>22</sup> I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you.
- a) In effect, Asaph was confessing sin before God. The sin was doubting the goodness of God and doubting the purpose of living to please God. Like I have been saying through out this lesson, it is easy to get our focus off of God and onto what appears to be the easy life of those who don't trust in God. It is again about getting "our eyes off of the ball".
  - b) The question of Verse 21, is when we have such doubts about life, why confess it as sin?
    - i) The truth is, at that moment in time, we are no use to God. When we focus on the so called happy lives of unbelievers, we can't be out making a difference for God as we are focusing on how difficult it is to be a follower of God.
    - ii) In that sense, Asaph and most of us at times, are like a "brute beast" before God.
24. Verse 23: Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. <sup>24</sup> You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.
- a) These two verses are a reminder of what happens when we sin: Despite our doubts at any moment, God is still there guiding us. Just because we have our own doubts about God at any moment does not mean He gives up on us.
  - b) A fear any believer can have is that we can sin too much and then God abandons us. I am reminded of the expression, "If one is born-again, how does one ever become unborn?" It is not possible to be unborn just as it is not possible for God to ever give up on us.
  - c) With that said, the point of these two verses is that God is still there guiding us even during moments (however long that moment is) where we have our doubts about Him.
25. Verse 25: Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. <sup>26</sup> My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.
- a) At this point Asaph is realizing that in effect "God is all we have". That does not mean we can't have other things in life. It just means we realize that all the blessings we do have come from God and it is the goal of believers to desire nothing but Him.
    - i) So does that we mean we can't desire to have any "thing" in this lifetime? No. This is just another reminder that we are dependant upon God to have any and all things in life. I usually find that once we let go of a desire for something and say in effect, "God, if you want me to have this or that, it is up to You. I let go of that desire". Once we truly let it go, I find God often gives us what we desire once we realize it is up to Him and not us.
  - b) At the same time, Asaph realizes that this lifetime is relatively nothing compared to eternity. He realizes that his relationship with God goes on forever even though there is coming a day when our lives on earth will come to an end.
    - i) On that happy thought ☺ we can finish the psalm.

26. Verse 27: Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.  
<sup>28</sup>But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.
- a) The psalm ends with the reminder that despite the good things that ungodly may receive in this lifetime, we need to remember that for eternity such people will perish. This is a polite way of saying they will be in hell for turning down God's free gift of salvation.
  - b) So besides remembering that judgment day is coming, what should that cause us to do?
    - i) The answer is the last part of Verse 28: "I will tell of all of your wonderful deeds."
    - ii) The point is we are saved only by our trust in God. However, that salvation should cause us to want to do something about it: It is about sharing that good news with others. It is about us getting involved with the lives of other people. It is about helping other Christians growing in their faith and leading others to God.
    - iii) The reality of my lesson title of the "keeping our eye on the ball" should not only lead us to stick close to God, but also to share that His love with others around us.
  - c) On that truly happy thought, time for Psalm 74.
27. Psalm 74 Introduction: A *maskil* of Asaph.
- a) The psalm 73 title was a "psalm" of Asaph. Here we have a maskil. What's the difference?
    - i) Both of them are psalms if for no other reason, they are both in the bible.
    - ii) The "psalm" of Psalm 73 was about the reality of life between those who have and have not committed their lives to God.
    - iii) Maskil means "skillful song or a reflective poem". I believe the idea is simply that a maskil is something that God wants us to "think about".
28. Psalm 74, Verse 1: Why have you rejected us forever, O God? Why does your anger smolder against the sheep of your pasture?
- a) Whatever was happening to the nation of Israel at this time, it was not good. As I stated in the introduction, some scholars think the "Asaph" who wrote this psalm lived in a later time than David. They believe this is about when the Israelites were taken to Babylon.
29. Verse 2: Remember the people you purchased of old, the tribe of your inheritance, whom you redeemed-- Mount Zion, where you dwelt.
- a) Asking God to remember is a way of saying, "Hey God, you made a promise to the nation of Israel that You would never forsake us. At this moment when everything around us has fallen apart, it seems like You has abandoned us."
    - i) God never promises that life will be easy for the believer. He only promises to be there with us in tough times and somehow, He will guide us through such times.
  - b) Remember how I said that book three of the psalms ties to the concept of worship? Well, this psalm is about worshipping God when we don't want to. Just like the last psalm was about worshipping God when we see the prosperity of the nonbeliever, here God asks us to still seek Him even when we are in a bad mood and/or our lives are falling apart.
30. Verse 3: Turn your steps toward these everlasting ruins, all this destruction the enemy has brought on the sanctuary. <sup>4</sup> Your foes roared in the place where you met with us; they set up their standards as signs.
- a) I stated earlier that some scholars believe this refers to when the Babylonians conquered Israel. That is because this verse is describing when God's sanctuary was destroyed by enemies. The first temple wasn't destroyed until hundreds of years after David's time.
  - b) As usual, the point here is not to debate about how the psalm fits in ancient history, but to understand how this psalm affects our lives today.
    - i) We can feel at times, that everything we believe in has fallen apart. We could lose our lives (e.g., our jobs, our homes or our family) and feel like God let us down.
    - ii) We have to remember that God never promises us life will turn out like we expected it to. Trust in God, is just that, trust during good and bad times.
  - c) There is a solution coming, but in the meantime, Asaph has more misery to describe. ☺



31. Verse 5: They behaved like men wielding axes to cut through a thicket of trees. <sup>6</sup> They smashed all the carved paneling with their axes and hatchets. <sup>7</sup> They burned your sanctuary to the ground; they defiled the dwelling place of your Name.
  - a) I could spend time explaining how this literally came true at times in Israel's history, but again, that would get our focus on history, and not our lives today.
  - b) The point is the enemies of Israel used what weapons they had to destroy things that were dedicated to God. The point is not what we are doing about it, but what is God doing?
    - i) In other words, why isn't God working in a mighty way on our timing? God does right the wrongs of this world, but of course, He works His way, on His timing.
32. Verse 8: They said in their hearts, "We will crush them completely!" They burned every place where God was worshiped in the land.
  - a) Notice the effort being made to destroy anything associated with the God of Israel. This is just as true today, as it was several thousand years ago.
  - b) OK John, I know there are many extremist Muslims who want to spread Islam even if that means the death of millions of non-Muslims. What can I do about it? If God is going to rescue those who love Him on His timing, why should I worry or care?
    - i) God does not call on us to be on the "sideline" of His plans. He does call on us to pray for the peace of His people. The bible specifically tells us to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. (See Psalm 122:6).
  - c) As long as people are seeking God, there are going to be enemies of the God of the bible who want to destroy any place where He is worshipped. One should never take that lightly. Our trust is in God to rescue us through such a time.
33. Verse 9: We are given no miraculous signs; no prophets are left, and none of us knows how long this will be. <sup>10</sup> How long will the enemy mock you, O God? Will the foe revile your name forever? <sup>11</sup> Why do you hold back your hand, your right hand? Take it from the folds of your garment and destroy them!
  - a) The psalmist is complaining that at the moment he is writing, there are no miracles being performed, the enemies are winning and it appears like God is not doing anything.
  - b) The prayer of this psalm is in effect, "Why isn't God working now to help us?"
  - c) Here's the question to consider: Is it ok to ask God to work on our timing? Of course. We have to remember that the answer to any prayer request can be no. Yes God cares about us and yes He wants to help, but we have to let God work His way on His timing.
34. Verse 12: But you, O God, are my king from of old; you bring salvation upon the earth.
  - a) Here is where this psalm changes tone. The writer gets his mind off the problems of his world at that moment and remembers in effect "God is in charge of my life".
    - i) Yes we are back to "keep your eye on the ball", and in this case, the "ball" means that we wait for God to work His way and on His timing.
35. Verse 13: It was you who split open the sea by your power; you broke the heads of the monster in the waters. <sup>14</sup> It was you who crushed the heads of Leviathan and gave him as food to the creatures of the desert.
  - a) From Verses 13 through 17, Asaph is reminding himself and the readers how God has worked miracles in the past.
  - b) To explain Verses 13-14, we need a quick discussion of the word "Leviathan".
    - i) The word leviathan is translated a lot of different ways. It describes some sort of ferrous water creature that no longer exists. Others say it is a crocodile. Whatever it was, it was considered a monster, and God protected the Israelites from it. Some scholars argue that Isaiah 27:1 implies there is satanic power behind this creature.
  - c) Notice Verse 13 talks about "splitting the sea". That is a reference to great escape from the Egyptian army. OK, we all know about that one. Yet, there is no famous biblical story about rescuing the Israelites from the Leviathan, whatever that was.
  - d) The point is simply that God protected the Israelites from whatever Leviathan was.

36. Verse 15: It was you who opened up springs and streams; you dried up the ever flowing rivers. <sup>16</sup>The day is yours, and yours also the night; you established the sun and moon. <sup>17</sup> It was you who set all the boundaries of the earth; you made both summer and winter.
- a) The point here is that God is in control of the water "flows" of the world. Verse 16 is a reminder that God is the one who established days and nights. Verse 17 is the reminder that God created the four seasons, as we know them.
  - b) Gee John, this is all interesting. What does it have to do with this passage?
    - i) The point is if we can trust in a God that can rescue us from any situation and trust in a God has worked in a major way in the past (the point of Verse 13). We trust in a God that can defeat satanic forces (Verse 14). We trust in a God that is in control of the world as we know it, (Verses 15-17), then why are we worrying about the fact that God is not reacting in a visible way to our problems?
    - ii) The point is God can do whatever He wants and yes, He does want to protect those of us who trust in Him. Yes God does call on us to pray for Him to work now, but we must remember that action on how and when God works is up to Him, and not up to us.
37. Verse 18: Remember how the enemy has mocked you, O LORD, how foolish people have reviled your name. <sup>19</sup> Do not hand over the life of your dove to wild beasts; do not forget the lives of your afflicted people forever. <sup>20</sup> Have regard for your covenant, because haunts of violence fill the dark places of the land.
- a) If you haven't figured it out by now, this whole psalm is a prayer for God to work.
    - i) In Verse 18, the writer is reminding God how their enemies have mocked Him.
    - ii) In Verse 19, the writer is reminding God of the danger that His people are in.
    - iii) In Verse 20, the writer is reminding God of His promise to protect us.
  - b) Here's the question to consider: Isn't God already aware of all of these things? Why state these things if we believe in an all-knowing God that knows these things?
    - i) The answer is that God often wants us (collectively) to seek Him so that when we are rescued, we are focused on Him and He gets the credit.
    - ii) When God delays rescuing us out of some situation, it is not that He enjoys watching us suffer. The delay is usually because God has some bigger purpose for allowing such problems to happen in the first place. It may be for the enemies of God to see how He is capable of working. It may be for us "collectively" to come to Him for repentance. The point is God's will work on His timing, but it is also up to us to actually seek Him so He gets the credit when He does work.
38. Verse 21: Do not let the oppressed retreat in disgrace; may the poor and needy praise your name. <sup>22</sup> Rise up, O God, and defend your cause; remember how fools mock you all day long. <sup>23</sup> Do not ignore the clamor of your adversaries, the uproar of your enemies, which rises continually.
- a) What is interesting about this psalm is it doesn't end with God doing a big rescue mission. It just ends with more complaints that God is not working to help out the situation.
    - i) Our problems don't always magically go away just because we pray about them. This psalm is similar to that type of "give it to God and then wait" situation.
  - b) Let's step back and analyze this whole prayer quickly: The main point of this prayer is for people to complain that things are going badly and it does not appear God is working.
    - i) Why have this prayer (psalm) of complaining? It is to remind us that when things are going badly, God is still there working on His timing. This psalm is about trust. It does not end with God rescuing someone, but just in a trust that He will.
  - c) Remember that the third book of the psalms ties to worshipping God. One aspect of worshipping is trusting God will see us through all of our problems. We don't know how or when God will work, but we trust that He will, and that is the purpose of this psalm.
  - d) The good news is Psalm 75, is the response to this prayer request, which is why I believe it was placed right after Psalm 74. It is only 10 lines and it fits in well after this last psalm.

39. Psalm 75: For the director of music. To the tune of "Do Not Destroy." A psalm of Asaph. A song.
- In this title, we learn that Asaph wrote it to some long lost song called "Do Not Destroy" and that it was written to be given to the director of music at a worship service.
  - I believe the reason God wants us to know the title is "Do Not Destroy" is so that we can know that God does not destroy those who trust in Him. It means that either through death or through the end of a bad situation, we can count on God winning in the end.
40. Verse 1: We give thanks to you, O God, we give thanks, for your Name is near; men tell of your wonderful deeds.
- The idea here is those who trust in God do give praise to Him because He does work in our lives in great ways so that we can share the joy of how God works with others.
  - I said this is a gratitude psalm for how God does work, and let's read on to find out how.
41. Verse 2: You say, "I choose the appointed time; it is I who judge uprightly."
- This quote in Verse 2 goes all the way to Verse 5. We'll finish this quote in a moment.
  - The "You" in Verse 2 is God Himself. The point here is that God will judge people for the things they have done in this world. The point is God judges people "on His timing".
    - Again, think back to the bad things being described in the last psalm. The point here is that God is going to judge them but He is working on His timing.
  - OK John, if this response by God is a reaction to the bad events last psalm, why aren't they combined? The answer is the last psalm is about seeking God when things are going wrong in our lives. This psalm is about how God works to our request for His help.
42. Verse 3: When the earth and all its people quake, it is I who hold its pillars firm. *Selah*
- Translation: When things are falling apart around us, God is still there and still in charge.
  - We are reading about things going badly for the bad guys. The idea here is that when God does work in a mighty way, it may seem like the world around us is falling apart, but God is "steady" and still working His way on His timing.
  - In case you are either new to these studies or you have forgotten, the word "Selah" just means to pause and think about what was just said. I did that, so we can move on. ☺
43. Verse 4: To the arrogant I say, 'Boast no more,' and to the wicked, 'Do not lift up your horns. <sup>5</sup>Do not lift your horns against heaven; do not speak with outstretched neck.' "
- These two verses are speaking about those who fight against the God of the bible. The point is God is telling them in effect, "I've had enough of your false boasting".
  - It may help to remember the concept that if we love God, we are to love what He loves and hate what He hates. What God hates is the actions of those who refuse to trust in Him and in particular, the sin that comes about from that hatred.
    - The point is such "boasting" will not last forever.
  - OK John, good for Israel and good for God rescuing them. How does this help me with my problems? The point for us if we can trust in a God to rescue Israel because they are seeking Him, we can trust in God to rescue us out of His love for us.
44. Verse 6: No one from the east or the west or from the desert can exalt a man.
- Verse 6 is the reminder that our only help comes from God and there is no one on earth that we can turn to for our help. Enough said there.
  - Notice the expression "east from the west". If one travels north or south, one eventually has to stop because there is no more north or south. If one travels east or west, one goes on forever. The point is the bible is using that type of "no limit" illustration to point out that no one but God can truly exalt a person.
45. Verse 7: But it is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another.
- Why does God choose to help some people but not others? Why does God miraculously cure some people of cancer, but others who trust in Him have to suffer?
    - First of all we have to separate judgment from miracles. For some reason God chooses to do special miracles on some people and others who believe in Him, He wants them to trust Him through bad ordeals.

- ii) As for eternal judgment, God judges people based on our actions. In other words, it is not about being a good or bad person, but about whether or not we put our trust in Jesus for our salvation and our help through our lives.
  - b) But John, the text says that God is the one who brings down one and exalts another:
    - i) The point is only God determines who is and is not saved. Our job is obedience. It is God Himself who decides who gets to spend eternity with Him.
    - ii) To put it another way: From God's perspective, it appears as if He and He alone decides who is saved and who will spend eternity with Him. From our "we are stuck in time" perspective, it is our choice whether or not to trust in God.
46. Verse 8: In the hand of the LORD is a cup full of foaming wine mixed with spices; he pours it out, and all the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs.
- a) In the "meantime", the psalm writer has a few more bad things to say about those who refuse to trust in God.
  - b) There is a growing movement in some places to argue that God could not be so "unloving enough" to send people to hell for eternity. Yet verses like this make it pretty clear that God intends to punish badly those that refuse to trust in Him.
    - i) I put this dilemma this way: What is an appropriate punishment for those who refuse to trust in the God of the bible? God offers us free salvation simply by being willing to turn to Him and trust in Him daily? Still many people want to prove to God their "worthiness" or else simply ignore Him altogether.
    - ii) The answer is that people in effect want eternal separation from God. That is what hell is in effect, a place people willfully chose because they don't want to spend their lives now and spend eternity submitting to God's will.
    - iii) These people will spend eternity in hell not for their sins, but due to their refusal to turn their lives over to the God who created them in the first place. The sins they commit is simply the consequences of turning from God in the first place.
    - iv) The only reason we are saved is because we are willing to be completely forgiven of all of our sins (past, present and future) by trusting that God Himself has already paid the price for our sins by dying on our behalf.
  - c) OK John and what does all of this have to do with Verse 8? The verse is describing in colorful language that God will punish badly those who turn from Him.
47. Verse 9: As for me, I will declare this forever; I will sing praise to the God of Jacob.
- a) Verse 9 is saying that it is not our job to worry about the eternal fate of the unbeliever. The unbeliever willfully chooses to turn from God and He will take care of them. Our job is since we don't know who is and who is not saved, to pray and help all people. Our job as Christians includes the idea of praising God for choosing us, for guiding us through our lives and for Him keeping His focus on us despite all of the mistakes we make.
48. Verse 10: I will cut off the horns of all the wicked, but the horns of the righteous will be lifted up.
- a) The final point of this psalm is in effect "It is all up to God". He is the one who will cut off those who are wicked, and exalt all of us who are trusting in Him.
  - b) And the point for all of us? It comes back to my title of "Keep your eye on the ball". That "ball" in effect is God Himself. God Himself will take care of the wicked. While we may complain about the problems we are dealing with, the point is God will rescue us His way and on His timing. God will guide us to victory when we are trusting in Him. God will continue to work His way and on His timing, and our job is to focus on Him and not the problems of the world around us.
49. On that happy note, we can close in prayer. Father, we ask your help to keep our focus on You and not the situation around us. We ask that You deal with those who refuse to turn to You. Help such people to learn to trust in You and turn from their wicked ways. At the same time, help us to seek You and do Your will for our lives. Further, help us to live a life that makes a difference for You in all that we do. We ask this in Jesus' name Amen