

1. The main issue of this whole lesson has to do with trusting God. So what exactly does that mean and how do we practice what He expects of us? That should either scare you away from reading any further or get you to read the entire lesson. ☺
  - a) To answer that question, let's start with where we are in the psalms. In this lesson, we have the last three psalms written by someone (or more than one person) named Asaph. This author has been mentioned in the title of every psalm for the last few lessons. In this lesson, we wrap up the "Asaph psalms". OK John, as you like to say, "So what?"
    - i) If the purpose of all the psalms is to praise God and give us reasons to focus our prayers to Him, it is interesting to ponder, "Why did Asaph end with these three?"
    - ii) In that sense, these three psalms should be a wrap up of what is important to Asaph as a writer and what He wants us to focus upon as believers.
    - iii) Even if there is more than one Asaph, a similar but important question might be, why are these three psalms here in this order and what should I learn from them?
2. OK enough questions. Let me answer them by summarize each psalm in this lesson here:
  - a) Psalm 81 appears to be a direct response by God saying to us in effect, "OK, you people want to worship Me and follow Me? Great, here is what I expect of you."
    - i) Yes we are saved by faith alone. That faith should in turn cause us to want to listen to God and do what He tells us. We get illustrations here in this psalm of exactly what He expects of us as believers. The main point of Psalm 81 is all about the word "trust". In other words the psalm teaches us about how to trust God.
  - b) Psalm 82 then focuses on those appointed to leadership. Some argue it is just for the leaders of Israel (i.e., kings, judges, city leaders, military leaders, religious leaders etc.). Others say it applies to any and all leaders of the world.
    - i) The reason I see this psalm here is that God is saying in effect, "OK you (whoever "you" is) want to be in charge? Great. Here is what I expect of you as a leader.
    - ii) If God calls you or me to some sort of leadership role, there is accountability to Him for that role. If that scares you, it should. God wants "fairness and justice" in the world and in that sense He holds leaders to a higher standard than others. That is a New Testament principal as well. (See James 3:1 on this point.)
    - iii) Suppose I don't have any sort of leadership role. Then this psalm should help us to know how to pray for our leaders and help us to know how God wants to guide them. Remember that living the Christian life is all about God guiding our lives. He calls on us to pray for others. Therefore praying for our leaders should be part of the Christian life. Paul also taught this principal in Romans Chapter 13.
  - c) Psalm 83 then focuses on "the other guys". We may say or think, "Yes God I know I need to trust You for my life and the life of those who are over me, but what about those enemies over there? The point of this psalm is, "If we can focus on getting our own act right with God (Psalm 81) and focus on being proper leaders (Psalm 82), then God Himself will take care of those who want to do us harm. (Psalm 83)."
    - i) To put it another way, if we are pleasing God with our lives, then we don't have to worry about the problems caused by things outside of our control.
    - ii) Yes there are forces out there who don't want us to have a successful and joyful Christian relationship with God. However, if we focus on getting right with God and praying for our leaders, then He promises in turn to take care of the situations around us and guide us through what we have to deal with.
  - d) Now that I have summarized the three psalms in this lesson in terms of how they apply to our lives, I believe I can break down and actually start on the text.

3. Psalm 81, title: For the director of music. According to *gittith*. Of Asaph.
  - a) The title says it is for the director of music. That simply means the writer of this psalm (Asaph) intended it to be sung and assumedly played in a worship service of God.
  - b) The title mentions "According to gittith". OK, what is a gittith?
    - i) First of all, some English translations say "upon Gittith" as if it is a specific location like a city or a territory. Other scholars will say it is a musical instrument that came from that specific location.
    - ii) It appears to be some sort of comment on how this psalm is to be played as a song.
    - iii) I believe it is referenced because this psalm is a praise to God. Whatever "gittith" is, it was used as part of that praise to God. OK, enough on that issue. ☺
  - c) As to who is Asaph, I've beaten that issue to death the last few lessons. For the sake of the newcomers, Asaph was a psalm writer at the time of David and was probably involved in the ministry at that time. Most likely there was also a "family of Asaph's" that wrote under this same name. Many of the psalms in the past few lessons appear to be later in Israel's history than the time of King David.
4. Psalm 81, Verse 1: Sing for joy to God our strength; shout aloud to the God of Jacob!
  - a) Of this 16-verse psalm, the first five are a praise to God. The last 11 is in effect a response by God, saying, "You want to praise Me? Great, here is what I expect of you."
    - i) With that scary statement placed out there, ☺ let us just focus on Verse 1.
  - b) Bible scholars suspect that this psalm was written to be sung at one or more of the Jewish holidays. Whatever the occasion, the point is we should praise God.
    - i) Now that we are over half way through the psalms, I am amazed by how little text has been given to the simple idea of just praising God for who He is. Most of the psalms we have studied focus on what God wants us to do in our relationship with Him. Here, this psalm is starting off with straightforward praise. This verse is about being grateful that God is, well, our God.
  - c) Notice that this verse is not focused on God, as much as it is our actions. To put it another way, the psalm is telling us to sing for joy to God. It is telling us to shout aloud to God.
    - i) OK John, why should I be doing this? What is going on here? If we are grateful for the salvation God has given us, it should cause us every now and then to praise Him for what He has done for our lives.
      - a) That can be as straightforward as singing in church or even praising God safely as we are driving down the road.
    - ii) I keep thinking of Psalm 78 and the issue of why did God pick David to be so special. A point I made near the end of that psalm about David being special is that he enjoyed "getting his hands dirty" in terms of making a difference for God. David also enjoyed praising Him as well. Those two aspects should be the simple goal of all Christians: To praise God and make a difference for Him.
    - iii) OK John, what's the point in regular praise to God? The answer is not that God needs to hear it. The answer is that gratitude makes us appreciate all the more what He has done for us. Praising God gets our focus upon Him, which is part of that love relationship that God desires in order for us to have true joy in life.
  - d) On that happy note, I can break down and start Verse 2.
5. Verse 2: Begin the music, strike the tambourine, play the melodious harp and lyre.
  - a) As I alluded to earlier, this psalm appears to have been written for the purpose of public praise to God. Here the psalmist is saying in effect, "Let's get the music started".
  - b) This verse also shows us that God accepts praise through musical instruments.
  - c) So does this mean we should only praise God when there is music going? Of course not. It just reminds us that God encourages musical instruments as part of worship. If we care about God, then it should just naturally be a desire for us to want to praise Him.

6. Verse 3: Sound the ram's horn at the New Moon, and when the moon is full, on the day of our Feast; <sup>4</sup> this is a decree for Israel, an ordinance of the God of Jacob.
  - a) OK, time for a comment about Jewish feast days. The Jewish person of that day keep track of time by the phases of the moon. When the moon makes a complete cycle (28 days), they knew it is a new month. In order to keep the Israelites focuses on God, there would be a monthly time of praise and it would be based on a lunar cycle. (See Numbers 10:10.)
    - i) To call the Israelites to assembly, someone would blow a ram's horn.
    - ii) Again, all of this ritual is simply about getting the Israelites to focus on God.
  - b) OK John, you and I don't mark time by a lunar cycle. We don't listen for a ram's horn to know when it is time to go to church. How is this relevant to you and me?
    - i) I think the simple idea is to take regular time to praise God. Truthfully I don't mind rituals if those rituals just get us to focus on Him. God knows that we easily wander away from Him. Doing things to remind believers to assemble to worship Him is a good thing if it does just that, get our focus on Him.
7. Verse 5: He established it as a statute for Joseph when he went out against Egypt, where we heard a language we did not understand. <sup>6</sup> He says, "I removed the burden from their shoulders; their hands were set free from the basket."
  - a) Here in Verse 5, we get another biblical history lesson. The reference here is when the 12 tribes of Israel were first forced to live in Egypt (due to a famine in the land of Israel). This time period in effect is when the 400 years of captivity began in Egypt. The point is the Israelites had to live among a people (the Egyptians) that spoke a different language.
  - b) OK John, so what? The point is still about taking the time to praise God. One of the main reasons that God called the Israelites out of Egypt was so that they could learn to praise Him because He is leading them into a life of trusting Him with their lives.
    - i) If we are grateful that God guides our lives, then we in turn need to show our appreciation to God for just that. We don't do this because He needs to hear it, but to remind ourselves that He is there and He is guiding us.
  - c) Verse 6 focuses on the fact that the Israelites suffered a lot in Egypt. Yes this alludes to slavery. OK, John, assuming we are not Israelites, why is this relevant?
    - i) The point is a reminder that God has rescued us out of this world in order to serve Him. Before you and I were saved, we too, were under the "burden" of this world.
    - ii) To live for anything other than God, eventually becomes a burden to us. To understand what people live for, all we have to do is see how they spend their spare time or spend their earnings. I am convinced that God created us with a need to worship Him. When we suppress that need, it eventually comes out in other ways and we worship other things we may not realize we worship.
  - d) Let's put it this way: It amazes me how many ex-alcoholics, former prisoners and those who were literally wasting their lives away become Christians. It is often because such people see the ultimate futility of living for themselves. Those extreme examples teach and remind us of the burdens people have when we live for things other than God.
    - i) Trusting in God among other things, relieves us of the burden of trying to make ourselves happy based on our own efforts. It relieves us of worrying about everything from money to relationships and says in effect, "OK God, whatever happens here is Your problem, and not mine".
    - ii) All of this does come back to Verses 5 and 6. The point is before we discovered how living for God relieves us of the burden of trying to find happiness by our own (or based on our efforts). That is the idea behind these verses. The idea of God rescuing us removes the burden of trying to please Him based on our efforts. That relieves us of trying to solve life's problems without His help and relieves us of the worries of "what will become of us" in our eternal lives.

8. Verse 7: In your distress you called and I rescued you, I answered you out of a thundercloud; I tested you at the waters of Meribah. *Selah*
  - a) Here is where the psalm changes perspective. Notice that the psalm writer at this point is writing as if he is speaking on God's behalf.
  - b) This verse is saying in effect, "I (God) am aware of how much you as people are suffering in terms of trying to live a joyful life and not getting any satisfaction. I (God) want people to understand how much I (God) love you all and want the best for you. I (God) rescued you out of your slavery situation (think in terms of slavery to sin) and I want a wonderful relationship with people where you (that's us) learn to trust me with your lives.
    - i) That is what is meant by "I (God) answered you out of a thundercloud". When we think of thunder, we think of something powerful. The idea is that the power of God can and will guide us through our lives if we are willing to trust Him.
  - c) Next the verse mentions "the waters of Meribah" as some sort of test.
    - i) Ok time for another Israelite history lesson. Soon after the Israelites left Egypt where they were complaining that they were out of water. (See Exodus 15:23.) The test by God was in effect, "Do you people trust me or not?" Do you as a people believe that I (God) can provide for you? That was the test at Mirabah.
    - ii) To continue the history lesson, God made water come out of a rock. That water was enough to feed over one million people and take care of animals as well.
  - d) OK John, why is that story mentioned here and why should I care?
    - i) The idea of living a Christian life is much more than believing that God exists and the fact He can do miracles if and when He feels like it. The point is God wants to guide our lives and teach us that He will guide us if we are willing to trust Him.
    - ii) Does God test believers? Of course. The purpose of testing is in effect God asking us, "Do you (that's us) really trust Me (God)? The expression "walk by faith" is all about learning to trust God every day and believe that He is guiding our lives.
    - iii) So does this mean I should give up trying and just trust in Him? No. For all we know, our occupation or our situation may be how God is guiding us. I believe the point is we learn to trust Him in how He is guiding us and then He makes it obvious over time as to what He wants of us and how He wants to lead us.
  - e) To wrap up this verse, the point is that God does react to our suffering without Him. God desires to lead us down the path that He wants for our lives. While that may sound obvious to the veteran Christian, it is an important first step to grasp in order for us to worship God. For the veteran, it is the reminder that no matter what, He is still there and yes, He still wants to guide us down the path that He desires for our lives.
9. Verse 8: "Hear, O my people, and I will warn you-- if you would but listen to me, O Israel!
  - a) Meanwhile God is still lecturing the Israelites to listen to Him. ☺
  - b) Where the Israelites disobeyed to God after He rescued them out of Egypt? Yes they were and yes, so are we. The point here is that "trust in God, is just that, trust".
    - i) The problem with us as people is that it is easy to get our focus upon our problems and our issues and forget that God is there to guide us. We worry about how we are going to pay the bills or how we are going to deal with a specific illness or how we are dealing with a specific person.
  - c) God never promises us that we will live long and healthy lives and then die and go to heaven. God promises to rescue us out of this world and He does so on His timing.
    - i) Personally, I don't fear death as much as I fear pain. It is not dying I fear as a Christian but all the pain that usually comes before death. God is saying to us that if we learn to trust Him, He will even guide us through our painful moments and give us relief that this world could never offer.
    - ii) This does lead back to this verse. The warning is about learning to continually trust God no matter what is happening in our lives.

10. Verse 9: You shall have no foreign god among you; you shall not bow down to an alien god.
- a) At this point, God through the psalmist restates the first of the Ten Commandments. That command is in effect, we shall not worship any God but the true and living God.
  - b) So why is that so important to review here? Let's say you and I go to church regularly and don't worship foreign ("so called") gods. Why is it necessary to remind ourselves every now and then that we worship God and God only?
    - i) The older I get, the more I am convinced the danger is not so much turning to other religions (although that is a real danger for some people). The danger is it is difficult to keep our focus on a God we cannot see. The greatest competition that God faces in our lives is our own desires when they are not His will. In other words we want to do things our way as opposed to His way.
    - ii) Sometimes we want to jump ahead of God and do things based on our own strength as opposed to trusting God with every aspect of our lives. That is why we need to regularly remind ourselves to trust Him to lead us as opposed to just leading ourselves or trusting in something other than God Himself to lead us.
  - c) As a simple example, often I struggle in these lessons as to what to write next. It is often that I have to remind myself, that it is not up to "my power" to prepare these lessons, but to let God work through me. It is up to me to trust Him to let Him lead me, and then it never ceases to amaze me how much easier the words just seem to flow out of me.
    - i) That in effect, is what this verse reminds us to do. It is about the constant reminder that we have to trust in Him and Him alone to guide our lives.
11. Verse 10: I am the LORD your God, who brought you up out of Egypt. Open wide your mouth and I will fill it. <sup>1</sup> "But my people would not listen to me; Israel would not submit to me.
- a) When God says to us "open your mouths wide and I will fill it", does that mean we are to just sit still and trust that God will provide us food? Of course not, assuming we are not lying say in a hospital bed somewhere. The idea is that God wants to guide our lives and guide us to good things if we are willing to trust Him to lead us.
  - b) The sad part of these two verses is that statement of "Israel would not submit to me".
    - i) One thing I have been trying to get across this whole lesson is when we think of "Israel" in this psalm, we should not be thinking, "oh poor them". It is about thinking about our own lives and our own commitment to following God.
    - ii) Remember that all of the Israelites that came out of Egypt believed that God existed and could do great miracles. What they lacked was the faith that God was willing to work through them and be able to guide their lives.
    - iii) The mistake we make is we believe God exists and can do great things, but we see our problems right in front of us and we think that we have to solve them based on our own strength and God is not going to help us through those situations.
    - iv) That in effect is what the bible means by "Israel would not submit to me".
12. Verse 12: So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices.
- a) Sometimes, one of the worst punishments God can give us is when He lets us do what we want. Parents usually understand that giving our children what they want as opposed to what they should get is the worse thing for them. By letting our children do things their own way teaches them what they thought was right, was actually not the right decision at all. (That in effect is the story of the "Prodigal Son" in Luke 15:11-32.)
  - b) My point is God in effect will say to us, "OK, if that is what you want, I won't stop you. However, that is not what I want for your life, but I'll just let you (us) learn the hard way."
  - c) So how does that happen practically? When we violate some biblical principal for our lives, God is not standing there with a stick saying, don't do that. God will just let us suffer in our own misery for our bad decisions until we are willing to turn back to Him after we have made our mistakes. Sometimes it is just a matter of realizing that some aspect of our lives is not pleasing to Him and we turn that aspect over to Him.

13. Verse 13: "If my people would but listen to me, if Israel would follow my ways,<sup>14</sup> how quickly would I subdue their enemies and turn my hand against their foes!
- a) Again, the secret of reading this psalm is not to think about the nation of Israel many millenniums ago. The point as it relates to us is that if we are willing to do things "God's way" as opposed to our own way, how much better would our lives be. Verse 14 says that God will take care of our enemies if we are willing to trust in Him.
    - i) Yes there is literalness to that statement when people are threatening our lives.
    - ii) I believe it also refers to the principal that we don't have to worry about whatever enemies we face as long as we are trusting in God to take care of us.
    - iii) Who wins such battles is God's business. Our job is just to give the results to Him.
  - b) Back in my introduction to this lesson, I stated that Psalm 81 focuses on us getting right with God, Psalm 82 focuses on our leaders getting right with God and Psalm 83 then says "God will take care of our enemies if we are willing to trust in Him". In effect, Verses 13 and 14 are a summary of all three psalms. The point is if we are willing to trust in God in every (big emphasis on every) aspect of our lives, we don't have to worry about outside threats as God will protect us and guide us through such situations.
    - i) John, what about Christians living in predominantly Muslim countries that suffer from persecution? Are you saying they will be safe if they just trust in God? No. Again, God never promises us a pain-free life. If we do trust in Him, He will guide us down the path He desires for our lives. Somehow and somehow He will guide believers from those forces that want to destroy us as a collective society.
  - c) What if our enemies also believe in God? That is a separate issue. In such cases both parties should be willing to give up their own rights in order to have the peace that God desires for us. (If this is our case, that desire to let go of our rights should begin with us.)
14. Verse 15: Those who hate the LORD would cringe before him, and their punishment would last forever.<sup>16</sup> But you would be fed with the finest of wheat; with honey from the rock I would satisfy you."
- a) The final two verses state the fates of both believers and nonbelievers. These verses are the reminders that no matter how much nonbelievers appear to be winning in this lifetime that will be "all the victory" they will ever receive.
  - b) OK John, how do we know that the bible is true? If we have to suffer in this lifetime and there is eternal rewards and punishments based on trusting in the God of the bible, how can be we assured that our view is correct?
    - i) For starters, history has validated the bible stories as truth. Further, roughly 30% of the bible is predictions. Those predictions that have come true over time have helped to validate the bible as the word of God. Studying those predictions and seeing how they have come true long after the death of the one's making the predictions can help in times of doubt that the bible is truly the word of God.
  - c) Are these verses saying that the rewards and punishments come in this lifetime or the next lifetime? That answer is up to God and not us. I believe the point is that all believers can have joy in this lifetime despite whatever situation at the moment. "Joy" is based on perspective. If we can have the eternal perspective that God is watching over us and that He desires to guide our lives, then we can have the type of joy these verses are implying.
  - d) But John, the verses say we will be fed on the "finest of wheat" and "honey from a rock".
    - i) I believe there is some literalness to these verses. The idea is that if we are willing to trust in God, then somehow and somehow He will provide for us in ways that cannot be explained other than the fact that God intervenes in our lives.
  - e) Think about those two references this way: "Finest of wheat" is something that grows out of the ground. It means that God can and does provide what we think of as growing naturally. The idea of "honey from a rock" is not a natural thing. It means at times God can and does provide for us in ways that defy human explanation.

15. OK, time for Psalm 82: The title just says "A psalm of Asaph".
  - a) To remind all of us, the word "psalm" simply means that God wants us to contemplate what is being written and think about how it applies to our lives.
  - b) With that said, let us see what this eight verse psalm has to teach us.
16. Psalm 82, Verse 1: God presides in the great assembly; he gives judgment among the "gods":
  - a) Some scholars argue that this verse speaks of when God judges all people, and the focus here is on when He judges those who are in authority. Other scholars argue it is just for believers who have some sort of leadership role. Either way the focus is on leadership.
  - b) So why single out leaders in this psalm? I think the point is that God recognizes the need for leadership in society. It could apply to civil leadership as well as church leadership. The point is if any one of us are in charge, there needs to be accountability for that role.
    - i) If we are accountable, aren't we accountable to the group we are over? Yes that is true, but who will judge whether or not we are good leaders? The point here is that leaders are ultimately accountable to God in terms of how they rule.
  - c) So if leaders are accountable to God, what does that mean for us? Among other things, it means that God cares about the roles of leaders and that they do what is right. It means that if leaders are unfair in their roles as leaders, they have to ultimately deal with God.
    - i) Does this mean that we have unjust leaders in our society, we should not work to change the situation, but just wait for God to judge them? Of course not.
    - ii) There are situations where people can't stop unjust leaders and knowing that there is a God who will one day right the wrongs of the world gives us peace. In the meantime, if we as a society can stop corrupt leadership, we should do so.
  - d) Let me personalize this a bit more. Let's say you or I are a leader in our home. Let's say we are single and we "lead" ourselves. The point is the same. The point is we are ultimately accountable to God based on how we lead what we are called to lead.
    - i) This gets me back to my lesson title. The point is if we care about pleasing God, it starts with the reminder that He is in charge of our lives and He will judge us based on how we lived out our lives. That includes how we lead others.
17. Verse 2: "How long will you defend the unjust and show partiality to the wicked? *Selah*
  - a) The greatest fear that one can have of our leaders is when they are biased.
  - b) There is a wonderful expression associated with the United States justice system, and that is the expression, "it is blind". That means the courts should never show any favoritism based on anyone's background, but just judge based on the merit of the case or situation.
  - c) Let me try this verse another way: Why would someone show partiality to the wicked?
    - i) The implication is that somebody has bribed a judge in order to make an unfair decision. It can apply to making a law or any decision that shows favoritism to one person or shows favoritism to one group over another group.
    - ii) Even in a smaller setting the point is about not showing favoritism when we make a decision for any reason. It means in making judgment decisions, doing what is right and fair for all those who are involved.
  - d) While this verse may be logical to think about, it does not always work that way in practice. There are many leadership situations where laws or rules are passed that favor the oppressor over the oppressed. Again, the right idea is to have "blind justice" and simply to judge situations based on the merit.
  - e) Historically speaking, remember that ancient cities would have elders at the city gates that would judge disputes and even decide who could or could not come into that city. My point is judges being unfair could show bias to some for their own profit and that is the danger being described here in this verse.
  - f) In effect, it is our leaders who decide what we can and cannot do with our lives. It is our group leaders who rule over the lives within those groups. The point is while you and I have to accept their decisions, it is God who ultimately judges their roles.

18. Verse 3: Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. <sup>4</sup> Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.
- a) First, a little explanation. The term "weak" means either physically weak, or someone who does not have the financial means to defend false charges against them.
    - i) When the bible says "fatherless", it is referring to orphans.
    - ii) The main idea here is that there are people who can't defend their own causes due to a lack of resources or a lack of knowledge. The point is that when judges judge such cases involving those who are less advantaged, they should do so fairly.
  - b) The point of these verses is that they are asking God to help those who cannot help themselves by having judges (leaders) do what is right.
  - c) Remember that not all psalms to God are in effect, "prayers and thanks for His goodness". Sometimes psalms teach us what it is we should desire in our lives. Part of that concept is to desire that this world be as fair as possible in it's dealing with other people.
  - d) I was thinking about the world that Jesus and Paul lived in. The Romans dominated and oppressed that Jewish culture. Yet you never read of Jesus or Paul condemning Roman leadership. They did condemn church (Jewish) leadership because God holds church leaders to a higher standard in that they should know what is expected of Him.
    - i) So if God cares so much about good leadership, why does the bible never condemn say, the Roman government for bad leadership? The answer is in effect that Jesus and even Paul had "bigger fish to fry". That means they had more important things to focus on, which is about how to have peace in life despite whatever injustice is going on around them. Peace with God comes first, which is what trusting Him is all about. Dealing with bad people comes from God working through us in order to overcome the evil that exists around us.
19. Verse 5: "They know nothing, they understand nothing. They walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken.
- a) The point here is about corrupt judges. Some judges don't judge fairly because their judgment has become corrupt to a point of regular bad practice of judgment.
    - i) OK John, too bad for them. How does this affect me? The point for the rest of us is that God calls on us to pray for those in charge. It is a matter of praying for our leaders to do the right thing and praying for them to make good decisions.
    - ii) In effect, this psalm is a call to us to make a difference in our leaders. If we do have the opportunity to vote to change things (when our leaders are bad) we should. However, our greatest hope is for God to work through such situations and that is what we ask Him to guide our leaders.
  - b) We may not be able to change what our leaders do, but there is a God who rules over the world and such leaders are accountable to Him. That is the point here.
20. Verse 6: "I said, 'You are "gods"; you are all sons of the Most High.'
- a) The point of this line is simply that God allows people to be leaders. God allows judges to make decisions that affect the lives of others. God allows judges to send people to prison and yes, even to death in some cases. In that sense, some people are "little gods" in that they have been given the power to rule over the lives of other people.
  - b) Jesus himself used this verse as reference. He was accused by the Jewish leaders of calling Himself "God". (See John 10:34.) Jesus does a play on words by saying that the bible teaches that people are gods in that God allows some people to be judges over others.
    - i) The point of the Jewish religious leaders was that Jesus had no right to claim that He was a god. Jesus responded by saying in effect that the bible teaches that some people are gods in the sense that they are called to be judges over others. Jesus was saying that it is ok to call men gods, which simply means judges. Of course Jesus had a higher meaning by calling Himself God, but the point is Jesus wanted the religious leaders to realize that the bible teaches that people could be called gods.



21. Verse 7: But you will die like mere men; you will fall like every other ruler."
  - a) The point here is simply that such human judges will still die one day like every other person. Even those with great power and leadership still have to face God's judgment.
    - i) The point is such judges need to do what is right because they too are accountable to God for the roles they have been given in life. Even if such people don't fear losing their power, they should still fear judgment day.
  - b) OK John, leaders will be judged. How does this affect my life? I can't stop leaders from making bad decisions. The point for the rest of us is that we should willfully submit to our leaders as well as pray for them and the decisions they make.
    - i) Romans 13:1-5 tells us to submit our lives to human authorities (i.e., our leaders). Such leaders are there because God allowed them to be there. 1st Timothy 2:2 reminds us to pray for our leaders so that we may live peaceful lives.
22. Verse 8: Rise up, O God, judge the earth, for all the nations are your inheritance.
  - a) This psalm ends on the reminder that eventually God Himself will judge over the world. Yes, this is a reference to the Second Coming of Jesus. Some argue it simply refers to the idea that God will judge all individuals at "judgment day".
  - b) Most evangelical Protestants like myself argue that there is coming a day when Jesus will literally rule over the world and in effect He will be in charge of all judgment.
    - i) How would that work? How will one God judge simultaneously every situation in the world? The short answer is a God who is big enough to create the world is a God that is big enough to judge it one day as well. Personally, I have given up on the "how God works" question a long time ago. God called on me to study the "why question" (as to why He does things a certain way). The "how question" of how He is going to do things up to Him as in effect it is His business.
  - c) The point here and the point of this little psalm is that God does allow people to judge and there is also coming a day when God Himself will not only judge those leaders but will judge the world itself (i.e., He will judge the world based on how every person reacted to the knowledge of God revealed to us in our lives). It is hard enough to worry about how I will be judged than it is to worry about the judgment of all leaders. I just accept the idea that God has called upon me to pray over those in authority and I leave the "how" issue up to God.
  - d) Remember that my opening title for this lesson had to do with how God wants us to trust Him as we live out our lives for Him.
    - i) The answer is it affects our human leaders is that God calls on us to pray for them. The answer is that God Himself will judge them so in effect we don't have to worry about any and all bad decisions that they make. We may not like particular decisions our leaders make, but in effect that is God's problem and not ours.
    - ii) Our problem is in effect to live with the decisions of our leaders, to pray for their leadership and realize that there is a God who will judge how they ruled.
    - iii) With that happy thought stated ☺ I can move on to the final psalm of this lesson.
23. Psalm 83, title: A song. A psalm of Asaph.
  - a) Here we have the final psalm of "Asaph". The title says it is song to be sung. As I have beaten the point to death, the original music to these psalms has been long lost.
  - b) So why mention that it is a song if we can't sing it? We can sing it, but we must create our own music for this song. The better question is, why does God want us to sing it?
    - i) Part of the answer is we remember word of songs better than memorizing text.
    - ii) God wants us to remember that He is in charge. Remember the first psalm in this lesson was about what God expects from us in our relationship with Him. The last psalm was about what He expects of our leaders. Finally this psalm deals with the issue of how do we deal with our enemies. With that said, let's look at this psalm as it gives us the answers of how God wants us to deal with our enemies.

24. Verse 1: O God, do not keep silent; be not quiet, O God, be not still. <sup>2</sup> See how your enemies are astir, how your foes rear their heads. <sup>3</sup> With cunning they conspire against your people; they plot against those you cherish.
- a) This psalm starts off with a common cry (in the psalms) for God's help. This time the cry for help is again due to enemies hurting God's people.
    - i) OK, why do so many psalms spend so much time on this theme? Why do so many psalms keep saying in effect, how God's enemies are a problem?
    - ii) For starters, I find that problems don't magically go away after we pray about them. Even when we get through our problem of the moment, there is always another one down the road, which is why I suspect the psalms have this constant reference to dealing with enemies.
  - b) Whoever these enemies are, the text says they are "rearing their heads" and they are conspiring against God's people.
    - i) The reminder here is that whatever it is we have to face from outsiders. We don't win by trying harder to defeat them. Our help comes from trusting God to get us through our difficulties with outsiders. Once we put the results in God's hands, then it is a matter of giving it our best shot with whatever tools we do have.
    - ii) Think of this whole lesson as God helping us with three big issues. The first of the three is about trusting God to help us deal with our own issues. The second is helping us deal with issues of those who are over us as leaders. The final issue is asking for God's help to those outsiders who want to do us harm.
  - c) What I have also learned is that sometimes it is easy to tell who is on our side and who isn't. Other times, it takes time and discernment to learn who is for us and who is against us. I suspect another reason the psalms spend so much time dealing with enemies is that as we grow as believers we too must learn to discern who is beneficial for our lives and who is not. We cannot fix those who are against us, but we can take the problems of those difficult relationships and bring them to God. That is what we have here.
25. Verse 4: "Come," they say, "let us destroy them as a nation, that the name of Israel be remembered no more." <sup>5</sup> With one mind they plot together; they form an alliance against you-- <sup>6</sup>the tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites, of Moab and the Hagrites, <sup>7</sup> Gebal, Ammon and Amalek, Philistia, with the people of Tyre. <sup>8</sup> Even Assyria has joined them to lend strength to the descendants of Lot. *Selah*
- a) These five verses all go well together as they list the traditional enemies of Israel. It is as if every single group that lives in the vicinity of Israel is conspired against them.
    - i) I find it interesting that a lot of these groups listed are actually distant cousins to the Israelites as their ancestors are listed in the Book of Genesis. It is as if God gives the beginnings of these nations knowing that for many centuries these groups would become the enemies of Israel.
  - b) OK John, so the nations that surround Israel are all their enemies. That sounds a lot like the Israel of today as well. The question is, what is it God's people do that causes so much hatred by others around them and more importantly, what does that have to do with me?
    - i) Let's start with the issue of why does the nation of Israel live in a world where all of the nations surrounding them are in effect "out to get them?"
    - ii) I suspect part of the answer is jealousy. The relatively little land of Israel has flourished whenever the Israelites have lived there. In the many centuries over the last 2,000 years when other groups' predominately occupied the land of Israel, the land itself was not much of anything and didn't produce very much. Once the land became the homeland of the Jews again, it is amazing how it flourished in terms of its production and usefulness. If one studies the land of Israel in terms of its occupation it becomes obvious that God has blessed that land whenever "His people" are occupying it and, as a whole as doing His will.

- c) But John, that still doesn't explain all the hatred. What about all the nations surrounding Israel that wants them dead? What did they do that is so bad, that throughout history the nations that surround Israel, want them wiped out as a nation? Glad you asked. ☺
    - i) One has to accept the idea that part of that hatred is demonic. If Satan can keep "God's people" (Israelites) out of that land, it would delay the return of Jesus literally ruling over the world from Jerusalem. Back then the issue was for the Messiah to come to that land in the first place. The "second time" (now) is about preventing the Jewish Messiah from returning to rule over the world.
    - ii) Know that most of the world doesn't want a Jewish God ruling over their lives. Many people around the world don't want to accept the idea that the "God of the Jews" is also the God that rules over the world, and thus the hatred comes in.
      - a) There is a classical Christian expression that says, "The mistake the Jews make is that they don't see Jesus as God. The mistake that Christians make is that we forget that God is a "God of still the God of the Jewish people".
  - d) OK John, that explains Israel pretty well. Now tell me what does all of this have to do with my own life? How do all of these ancient enemies of Israel affect my life today?
    - i) In that sense, I wouldn't worry too much about all of the names of the nations that surround Israel. Yes one can do interesting studies of each of these groups and what they have done in their relationship with Israel over the millennia.
    - ii) The point for you and me is that if we do have a heart for God, then we have to expect opposition. Sometimes that opposition hates the fact that we have a heart for God in the first place. Other times our enemies can be those who believe in God but don't like our biblical interpretations of how He is to be worshipped.
    - iii) The point for you and me is simply to remember that such people who don't care for God do exist all around us and the only (big emphasis on only) way we can deal with such enemies all around us, is to trust God in His protection of us.
      - a) The same way we need God to guide our lives and let Him lead us down the path that He wants for us, is also the same God that wants to protect us from outsiders that want to do us harm (or don't want to see us succeed).
      - b) The point of this psalm is that we need to realize that we are not only dependant upon God to guide our lives, guide those who are over us as leaders, but also to protect us from those who want to do us harm.
26. Verse 9: Do to them as you did to Midian, as you did to Sisera and Jabin at the river Kishon, <sup>10</sup>who perished at Endor and became like refuse on the ground.
- a) Whenever we don't know what to do about enemies around us, it always helps to start by remembering how God has blatantly worked in the past to eliminate Israel's enemies.
  - b) My point is these two verses refer to specific stories in the bible in the book of Judges where God has worked to eliminate those who want to do Israel harm.
    - i) The defeat of Median refers to Judges Chapter 4 when God used two people named Deborah and Barak to defeat the Midianites. Sisera was the leader of that group that wanted to defeat Israel. Endor was where this victory occurred.
  - c) The point is not to know the details of this ancient battle, but to know that God does interfere in the lives of people. When we call upon God for protection from our enemies, there are times and ways in which God does work to protect those who trust in Him.
    - i) Stop and consider how modern Israel is still around despite all of the enemies they have around them. My point is trusting in the God of the bible does have its benefits and one of them is protection from enemies.
  - d) So how do I know God will protect me like He has those ancient Israelites? I can't explain all the ways God does and does not work in our lives. I just know that one way I do get through life is the realization that God is protecting me from whatever is "out there".
  - e) Meanwhile, the psalmist has another ancient example in Israel's history to give. ☺

27. Verse 11: Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb, all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna,<sup>12</sup> who said, "Let us take possession of the pasturelands of God."
- a) Verse 11 mentions two leaders of the enemies of Israel named Oreb and Zeeb. The bible mentions their defeat in Judges 7:25. The names "Zebah and Zalmunna" refer to people defeated and killed by a small Israelite army lead by Gideon in Judges Chapter 8.
  - b) OK, John, why is the psalmist bringing up these stories in the book of Judges?
    - i) Remember from the perspective of the time of King David, this is fairly recent history and it recalls how God has worked in their past for protection.
    - ii) In these stories, God used specific Israelites to lead that country to victory. Even though we let God lead, it is still up to us (like the Israelites) to follow that lead and do what it is He commands us to do in order to have those victories.
28. Verse 13: Make them like tumbleweed, O my God, like chaff before the wind.<sup>14</sup> As fire consumes the forest or a flame sets the mountains ablaze,<sup>15</sup> so pursue them with your tempest and terrify them with your storm.
- a) Whoever the psalm writer was talking about, he wanted the enemies at the time of his writing to be as "wasted" as a tumbleweed being blown away like the wind. The imagery is in effect, "Dear God, please eliminate these enemies to where they no longer exist".
  - b) So if the psalmist prayed for the destruction of these enemies and the nation of Israel then and today is still battling enemies, did this prayer go unanswered? No, in the sense I believe there is a judgment day that came or is coming for all people.
  - c) Eternal peace comes from knowing God will deal with those who want to do us harm.
  - d) The point for us as believers is that we can pray for people to repent of their sins, but for those who over a lifetime refuse to turn to the God of the bible, may they be sent to hell for the evil that they have done and their lack of trust in God. Remember that to love God means to love what He loves and hate what He hates. God hates those who refuse to trust in Him and want to do harm to those who believe in Him. That in effect is what this psalmist is praying for here in these verses and this psalm.
29. Verse 16: Cover their faces with shame so that men will seek your name, O LORD.<sup>17</sup> May they ever be ashamed and dismayed; may they perish in disgrace.<sup>18</sup> Let them know that you, whose name is the LORD-- that you alone are the Most High over all the earth.
- a) This psalm ends with a three-verse request for the enemies of God to be ashamed of what they have done. If you ask most residents of Israel what they want of their neighbors, it would be to simply be left in peace. However, there are too many enemies of Israel that are "hell bent" on the destruction of that nation. As I explained, I am convinced this is due to demonic hatred of the concept that a Jewish God is the God that rules over the world.
  - b) The point of these final verses is that the psalmist wants the enemies of God to see what it is they have done wrong and who it is they are fighting against. What this really comes down to is a request for God to rule over those who want to do His people harm. If that means a changed heart of God's enemies, so be it. If that means the death of those who refuse to trust in the God of the bible, so be it.
  - c) OK John, what does all of this mean for you and me? Yes we have to accept the fact that we have enemies who don't want to put their trust in the God of the bible and they don't want to feel any guilt that they ignore that God. If such enemies exist, be they human or demonic, the point is we can have victory over such enemies, not by building better weapons to defeat them, but by trusting God to lead us to victory over them.
30. In summary this whole lesson is about trusting in God to guide our lives, guide the lives of our leaders and to protect us from our enemies. Let me summarize all of this in my closing prayer: Father, we pray that You guide us as You desire us to live. We pray that You guide our leaders to make the right decisions and judge people fairly. Finally we trust in You to deal with those human and spiritual forces that desire to do us harm. Lead us to make a difference for You in this world as You desire for our lives. We ask this in Jesus' name Amen