

Lyrics of Life

Studies in the Psalms



Collegiate
Quarterly

October-December 1983
A North American Youth
Ministries Publication

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The 339-acre campus of the University College of Eastern Africa has taken on a new appearance as the three-storied men's residence nears completion. Each floor contains washrooms and simple laundry facilities. The building will house up to 208 men, as well as provide a roomy apartment for their dean. Several wings may be added to this structure when required in the future.

Pictured above, Dr. Ralph Bailey, Eastern Africa Division education director, shows the master plan for the development of the university. Below, stage one of the men's dormitory nears completion.

The Special Projects portion of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering you gave on March 28, 1981, contributed \$343,522.73 toward the establishment of this college. We thank you for your generous interest in our needs.

This quarter we present four projects for your further support: Sabbath School Picture Rolls developed in a three-year cycle for our division, a new headquarters for the Western Uganda Field, a men's dormitory for Kamagambo College, and a two-color Heidelberg printing press for the Africa Herald Publishing House in Kenya. Thank you for remembering your East African brothers and sisters on December 24.

Sincerely yours,

Bekele Heye
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Introduction to the Quarter

SONGS FOR THE SEASONS OF THE HEART

in writing articles for the quarterly it is quite easy to expound eloquently on theories of Christian pragmatics. It is however, just as easy, and perhaps even more so, to, after reading such theories, lay them aside and conveniently forget them. The difficulty lies in applying the theory to daily life.

Christian living. It's so easy to talk about, and yet, often times, so hard to do. When all the talking is over and alone you face the trials and perplexities of life, abstract ideas are not what you need to hear. Herein lies the beauty of the Psalms, for they are not pretentious theories but eloquent cries of the human soul. Though written centuries ago in a culture that is largely unfamiliar to us, the Psalms shed the same tears, experience the same joys, and voice the same needs we do today. They express the cries of the human heart to a God who hears and gives aid to all.

The theme of this quarter, in case you haven't guessed yet, is the book of Psalms. It is my hope that as you study these lessons that you go beyond reading the theory and apply what you learn to your daily life. As you try to do this it is of utmost importance that you read the Psalms in question before and during each week's study. If this is not done the lessons will appear confusing and pointless. Read the accompanying texts and ponder them until they become a part of you. Then the theory will no longer remain abstract.

This quarter, to take the place of Selene Peck, (now doing student mission service in the jungles of Indochina), Rod Colburn has joined our staff. He will be using his creative talents to write Logos articles, as well as watching for grammatical incongruities. Rod is presently a senior history and theology major at Union College.

Since becoming involved with the *Collegiate Quarterly* I have become more fully aware and increasingly appreciative of the contributions made by the scores of teachers, students, and others throughout North America who so freely give of their time and their talent to this publication. I would like to thank those who have helped in the writing and making of this quarter's lesson.

And now as you spend the next three months studying the Psalms may you learn to praise God in every season and in every mood. Whether your heart be in wintery frost or bright summer joy, God hears all cries and sees all the needs.

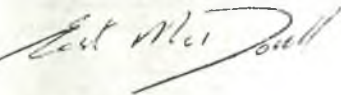
But I have trusted in thy steadfast love;

my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation.

I will sing to the Lord,

because he has dealt bountifully with me.

Psalms 13:3, 6, RSV.



Evert McDowell
Editor

1

An Overview of the Psalms

September 25-October 1



*"My heart overflows with a goodly theme;
I address my verses to the king;
My tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe"*
(Psalm 45:1, RSV).

Eternal Hits

INTRODUCTION

783 B.C. . . . Zebedee was in a hurry as he ducked through the crowded alley, skillfully dodging the lumbering ox-carts and heavily-laden donkeys competing for the cobblestone roadway. He hated to be late. Good seats in the temple square were hard enough to come by if one was early. And with the beautiful weather like this, the crowds would no doubt be huge. After all, no one wanted to miss *this* edition of the weekly Jewish Top Forty. The new hits they had on tap were supposed to be pretty awesome—really something special.

Zebedee rounded the last block—and sure enough—the square was packed. “What luck,” he muttered, “standing-room only!” Not one to give up easily, however, he battled his way through the crowd. Spying an opening, he squeezed his way onto a rocky perch between a burly shepherd and a wizened old merchant—just as the orchestra and chorus finished their first number.

“Boy, the first tune was all they cracked it up to be—and more! This new composer they hired to write for the Jerusalem Civic Chorus was some find. He surely knows how to write music. Alright! This song is really catchy!” **Shout with joy to God all the earth/ Sing to the glory of his name/ offer him glory and praise!** “It sounds like some of the stuff that Asaph guy writes. Now *he’s* had some real hits! He’s even got quite a few songs on the all-time greats list. When they will ultimately accept a total of one hundred and fifty *all-time*—

that’s impressive!

“. . . Wow! Listen to that percussion! Must be something by King David. That trumpet intro gives it away. David has got to be the greatest—it always seems like his songs just get better every time. The people back then certainly were lucky to have a great musician and an incomparable ruler all in the same man! Aren’t those lyrics heavenly though?” **The Lord is my rock/ my fortress and my deliverer/ my God is my rock/ in whom I take refuge. . . .²**

“. . . Oh, there’s the new smash hit by that writer up in Hebron which took only six weeks on the charts to climb all the way to number one. It is terrific—so calm and reassuring that people all over the city have been humming and whistling it for days!” **He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High/ will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.³**

. . . As the crowd melted out into the late-afternoon sun, Zebedee went too. But he didn’t feel the jostle, he didn’t hear the voices. He was thinking about the music—the timeless, awe-inspiring music. How fortunate he was to hear such music—what divine compositions! Even the choirs of heaven must stop and listen. Who could tell—maybe thousands of years later people would flock to enjoy the same brilliant masterpieces—and receive an equal blessing. He hoped so. But at least he could hear them again in only a week, though even that seemed like a long time. At any rate, one thing was certain—he wouldn’t be late next time.

L. R. C.

1. Psalm 66
2. Psalm 18
3. Psalm 91

The Psalms

LOGOS

The book of Psalms plays a unique role in Scripture as it covers the whole gamut of human emotions. The Psalms display attitudes ranging from abject sorrow to vibrant heavenly praises to quiet humility. Their tone is marked by a deep sense of spiritual commitment which is rooted in a personal experience of worshipping God. God, nature, sin, history, animals, and starry wonders all find their way into the worshipful expressions of the Psalms.

One prevalent theme in Psalms is the cry of a man in trouble and the relief that God gives. "For I am about to fall and my pain is ever with me. I am troubled for my sin. O Lord, do not forsake me; be not far from me, O my God" (Psalm 38:17, 18, 21, NIV). In Psalm 42 one can again see the despair. "My tears have been my food day and night while men say to me continually 'where is your God?' I say to God, my rock, 'why have you forsaken me?' " (vs. 3, 9, RSV). But though often deferred, a response to the cry can be counted on. "I waited patiently for the Lord, he turned to me and heard my cry" (Psalm 40:1, NIV).

Psalm 47 and 106 are examples of joyful praise. "Clap your hands, all peoples! Shout to God with loud songs of joy!" (Psalm 47:1, RSV). "Praise the Lord! O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!" (Psalm 106:1, RSV). Psalm 131 expresses an attitude of quiet humility. "O Lord, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high. . . . But I have quieted my soul. . . . O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth evermore" (vs. 1, 3, RSV).

The book of Psalms is divided into five sections, each of which ends with a doxology. (Psalm 41:13; 72:18, 19; 89:52; 106:48; 150). In each of these sections is found several types of psalms. These categories range from the personal penitence of Psalm 51, "Have mercy on me, O God . . . and cleanse me from my sin" (vs. 1, 2, NIV), to psalms of public worship: "O Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love" (Psalm 103:7, NIV). There are messianic psalms which express the hope of a coming messiah and predict the pain of His mission. "My God, my God, Why hast thou forsaken me? . . . they divide my garments among them, and for my raiment they cast lots" (Psalm 22:1, 18, RSV). There are the royal psalms which were used for the enthronement of Israel's kings. The meaning of these psalms goes beyond their original use and point to the time when Christ will be crowned king of the universe at the establishment of His everlasting kingdom. "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom" (Psalm 45:6, NIV). "Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is the King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty" (Psalm 24: 7, 8, NIV).

There are psalms to meet every mood and every need. Through them all God is exalted as the solution to all human problems. And in them He is seen as the ultimate source of hope, confidence and strength.

E. R. M.

Songs for a Changeful Life

Nearly half of the Psalms are attributed to David. As Ellen White points out in the following selections, David drew from the scenes which surrounded him and from the experiences of his life to write his poetry.

... Before him spread a landscape of rich and varied beauty. The vines, with their clustering fruit, brightened in the sunshine. The forest trees, with their green foliage, swayed in the breeze. He beheld the sun flooding the heavens with light, coming forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber and rejoicing as a strong man to run a race. There were the bold summits of the hills reaching toward the sky; in the faraway distance rose the barren cliffs of the mountain wall of Moab; above all spread the tender blue of the overarching heavens. And beyond was God. He could not see Him, but His works were full of His praise. The light of day, gilding forest and mountain, meadow and stream, carried the mind up to behold the Father of lights, the Author of every good and perfect gift. Daily revelations of the character and majesty of his Creator filled the young poet's heart with adoration and rejoicing.¹

Through song, David, amidst the vicissitudes of his changeful life, held communion with heaven. How sweetly are his experiences as a shepherd lad reflected in the words:

The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
He leadeth me beside the still waters. . . . (Psalm 23:1, 2)

In his manhood a hunted fugitive, finding refuge in the rocks and caves of the wilderness, he wrote:

O God, Thou art my God; early will I seek Thee:
My soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee,
In a dry and weary land, where no water is. . . .
Thou hast been my help,
And in the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice. (Psalm 63:1-7).

The same trust is breathed in the words written when, a dethroned and crownless king, David fled from Jerusalem at the rebellion of Absalom. Spent with grief and the weariness of his flight, he with his company had tarried beside the Jordan for a few hours' rest. He was awakened by the summons to immediate flight. In the darkness, the passage of the deep and swift-flowing stream must be made by that whole company of men, women, and little children; for hard after them were the forces of the traitor son.

In that hour of darkest trial, David sang:

I cried unto the Lord with my voice,
And He heard me out of His holy hill.
I laid me down and slept;
I awaked; for the Lord sustained me.
I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people,
That have set themselves against me round about. (Psalm 3:4-6).

After his great sin, in the anguish of remorse and self-abhorrence he still turned to God as his best friend:

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving-kindness:
According unto the multitudes of Thy tender mercies
blot out my transgressions. . . .²

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Psalm 3:4

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 641, 642.
2. *Education*, pp. 164, 165.

Poems, Prayers, and Promises

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Psalm 34

As preparation for a closer look at individual psalms in coming weeks, here are some insights from biblical scholarship on four areas crucial to an understanding of the Psalms.

1. The Nature of the Psalms

“. . . In the Psalms singing and praying (which later times became separated) were still united; psalms are sung prayers or prayed singing. As songs they are at the same time what we call poetry. To be sure, they are poetry in a different sense than our modern poetry, but for all of that they are still formulated (poetic!) language. Thus the Psalms still unite in themselves three separate types of word formulations which in the course of subsequent centuries have split apart. They are prayers (words directed to God in petition or praise), poetry (poetically formulated language), and song (they go beyond the mere speaking or even recital of a poem and become music).

“As a unity of prayer, poetry, and song, the Psalms belong to a world which is no longer our world, and we will never fully understand or appreciate much of that world. But precisely because of their remoteness they speak from that distance a language which possesses validity for every age and which can be heard anew in every age. The Psalms are inexhaustible. It is an often-noted fact that in the catastrophes of the last decades the Psalms were discovered anew at many different places by many very different people. All found in them something by which our often weak and anemic praying can be renewed: an immediacy or directness of speaking to God which connects reality in all of its vast extent, depth, and harshness with the God who is the God of both the righteous and the wicked, the God of the depths and the heights, the Lord of creation and the Lord of history.”

2. Parallelism in the Psalms

“. . . The basic characteristic of Hebrew poetry was . . . the rhythmic pattern usually called *parallelismus membrorum* (parallelism of members). This rhythmic pattern can be compared to the runners of a rocking chair. Two sentences are lined up parallel to one another. They are similar to each other, complement one another, or contrast one with another. These three kinds of parallelism are called (a) synonymous, (b) synthetic, and (c) antithetic.

(a) Ps. 103:1

“Bless the Lord, O my soul;
and all that is within me, bless his holy name!”

(b) Ps. 103:2

“Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits. . . .”

(c) Prov. 21:26

“All day long the wicked covets,
but the righteous gives and does not hold back.”

These are only the most important forms of the rhythmic pattern. Verses occur which place three phrases parallel to each other (to say nothing of still other types of parallelism). An especially artistic example is seen in Psalm 93, in which a climax is expressed by continued repetition of one phrase in each line:

The floods have lifted up, O lord,

“Psalms are
sung prayers
or prayed
singing.”

the floods have lifted up their voice,
the floods lift up their roaring (v. 3).¹²

3. Notations in the Psalms

The ancient compilers of the psalms added a number of odd-sounding notations such as *higgaion* and *shiggaion* and musical designations like *According to The Sheminith* and *According to the Hind of the Dawn* which can confuse the reader. Commentaries offer interesting conjectures on the meaning of these terms, but since scholars simply can't be certain about them, they do little to enlighten our understanding of the Psalms. The most frequent notation is *selah*, which is probably the signal for an interlude or change of musical accompaniment.

4. Historical Context and Usage of the Psalms

Early in this century, the German scholar Hermann Gunkel argued that the original setting of the Psalms was not particular historical events, but that they were composed specifically for the public worship and liturgy of ancient Israel. He identified five types of psalms: 1) hymns, including Zion songs; 2) congregational laments; 3) royal psalms; 4) individual laments; and 5) individual thanksgiving and mixed psalms.

The basic thrust of Gunkel's analysis has achieved a broad consensus among modern scholars, and it poses some problems for the traditional way of interpreting the psalms. As Brevard S. Childs explains, the "... traditional messianic psalms (2, 44, 72, 110, etc.) were now seen to be hymns of adoration, which were directed, not to the future, but to an existing, reigning monarch and patterned, both in form and content, after royal hymns of Egypt and Babylon where the form had originated in the setting of ancient Near Eastern divine kingship. The Davidic songs of Book 1 (3-41) emerged as mainly individual complaint psalms which were anchored in the cult and which reflected a variety of different circumstances including incubation rites, prayers for rain, and the exorcising of demons. Hitherto unknown festivals such as the enthronement of the king were thought to have provided a major force in the formation of the hymns. In the light of this development, it is hardly surprising that the traditional use of the Psalter by the synagogue and church appeared highly arbitrary and far removed from the original function within ancient Israel. With one stroke Gunkel appeared to have rendered all pre-critical exegesis of the Psalter invalid."³

Are we being faithful to the historical context, then, if we see messianic references in the psalms or if we apply them to settings in contemporary life which bear no correlation to their supposed original setting in the Israelite cult? One could respond on at least two levels. First, as Derek Kidner argues, there is no compelling reason that the psalms attributed to David, for example, could not have had a personal, historical original setting as suggested by the introductory notations added to the psalms by the compilers. They could then have been adapted later for use in Hebrew worship and thus fit into the types suggested by Gunkel and others, rather than originally being composed specifically for cultic use.⁴

A second response, propounded by Childs, is that the Psalms,

"Not an affection will anyone find in himself whose image is not reflected in this mirror."

originally the words of humans to God, became transformed into the word of God through acceptance as scripture in the believing community, and can thus legitimately be used in a variety of ways by modern readers.

“. . . The [psalm] material was far too rich and its established use far too diverse ever to allow a single function to subordinate all others. The Psalms were collected to be used for liturgy and for study, both by a corporate body and by individuals, to remind of the great redemptive acts of the past as well as to anticipate the hopes of the future. . . . The canonical shape of the Psalter offers the modern interpreter a warrant for breaking out of the single, narrowly conceived mode of exegesis which is represented by most modern critical commentaries.

“. . . With all due respect to Gunkel, the truly great expositors for probing to the theological heart of the Psalter remain Augustine, Kimchi, Luther, Calvin, the long forgotten Puritans buried in Spurgeon's *Treasury*, the haunting sermons of Donne, and the learned and pious reflections of de Muis, Francke and Geier. . . .

"John Calvin, in the preface of his commentary, described the Psalter as . . . 'the anatomy of all the parts of the soul, for not an affection will anyone find in himself whose image is not reflected in this mirror. All the griefs, sorrows, fears, misgivings, hopes, cares, anxieties, in short all the disquieting emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated, the Holy Spirit hath here pictured exactly.' The canonical shape of the Psalter assured the future generations of Israelites that this book spoke a word of God to each of them in their need. It was not only a record of the past, but a living voice speaking to the present human suffering. By taking seriously the canonical shape the reader is given an invaluable resource for the care of souls, as the synagogue and church have always understood the Psalter to be."⁵

5. Authorship of the Psalms

"The psalms are the inspired productions of a number of authors, the whole collection having been brought together in its final form possibly by Ezra, Nehemiah, or some of the scribes immediately following their period. . . . Our oldest indications regarding the origin of the Psalter are represented in the titles, or superscriptions, that appear at the beginning of two thirds of the psalms. . . .

"Seventy-three psalms carry in their superscription the phrase, 'of David'. . . . However, the expression *ledawid*, "of David," is not alone sufficient evidence for assigning authorship to David for the psalm in which the expression appears. The Hebrew preposition *le* expresses a number of relationships of which authorship is only one. At times *le* expresses the idea of "belonging to": hence, *ledawid* could mean "belonging to the collection of." Nevertheless other evidence combines to show that David wrote at least many of these psalms. . . ."⁶

The individual other than David most frequently credited in the superscriptions is Asaph (Psalms 50, 73-83). Levite, seer, composer, Asaph was one of David's choir leaders (see 1 Chron. 6:39; 2 Chron. 29:30; Neh. 12:46).

D. F. M.

1. Claus Westermann, *The Psalms* (Minneapolis: The Augsburg Publishing House, 1980), pp. 11, 12.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 21, 22.
3. Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 510.
4. Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), pp. 16-18.
5. Childs, pp. 522, 523.
6. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, pp. 615-617.

How to Study the Lessons and the Psalms

HOW TO

When studying this quarter's lessons it is imperative that at the beginning of the week's study, and if possible each daily study, you read the psalm or psalms in question. Without doing so the lesson will seem confusing and pointless. It would also be well to prayerfully and critically question the material in each day's lesson to determine the truth of the material for you. Do not immediately accept the concepts in here simply because it is the *Collegiate Quarterly* and because it has organizational approval. Make a personal investigation and then make a decision on the issues at hand.

As for studying the Psalms themselves, George A. F. Knight has these suggestions:

"(1) We are to remember that they have come out of a particular historical period, and are conditioned by the way that period expressed itself. Consequently we cannot really know what they are saying till we get a picture in our mind of ancient Jerusalem, of the walls of Zion, of the enthronement festival of a descendant of David, of the crowds clamouring to get through the gates of the city to worship in the temple courts, of cruel kings like Nebuchadnezzar, of Israelites as miserable displaced persons in far-off Babylon, longing to get home and live in fellowship again with the God who had chosen Jerusalem as his abode—and so on.

"(2) We are to remember that these poems were written by people who had already discovered the wonders of the goodness of God in his making covenant with them, a covenant of love and loyalty. The Psalms were not written by our pagan Anglo-Saxon or Teutonic or Slav or Celtic ancestors, but by People of God.

"(3) We are to remember that the Psalms, being part of the Word of God, are more than mere dead print. They are alive with the Spirit of God that leads us into all truth. So they are alive not only for us *forwards* in time to our day. The NT writers believe that Christ is the Word of God both forward and *backwards* in time, because he is the same yesterday, today and for ever. 'Before Abraham was, I am.' As we have noted above, the psalmists were aware that God had already redeemed them, just as we know that we have already been redeemed by the Cross of Christ. The psalmists naturally did not know *how* God had redeemed them, except that they had been given a sacramental sign of his redemptive act at the crossing of the Red Sea. So in this regard we can understand and perceive more than they could do in their day. Thus the Christian is justified in finding in these ancient poems more about the grace and loving purpose of God than their writers knew. In fact, reading the Psalms is no less than a glorious and exciting experience."

E. R. M.

1. G. A. F. Knight, *Psalms*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), pp. 13, 14.

The Secret of the Psalter

by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

OPINION

Key text:

Ephesians 5:19

The New Testament laid emphasis upon "speaking to yourselves in psalms" (Eph. 5:19) and "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms" (Col. 3:16). From ancient times in the Church a special significance has been attached to the common use of psalms. In many churches to this day the Psalter constitutes the beginning of every service of common worship. The custom has been largely lost and we must find our way back to its prayers. The Psalter occupies a unique place in the Holy Scriptures. It is God's Word and, with few exceptions, the prayer of men as well. How are we to understand this? How can God's Word be at the same time prayer to God?

This question brings with it an observation that is made by everybody who begins to use the psalms as prayers. First he tries to repeat the psalms personally as his own prayer. But soon he comes upon passages that he feels he cannot utter as his own personal petitions. We recall, for example, the psalms of innocence, the bitter, the imprecatory psalms, and also in part the psalms of the Passion. And yet these prayers are words of Holy Scripture which a believing Christian cannot simply dismiss as outworn and obsolete, as "early stages of religion." One may have no desire to carp at the Word of the Scriptures and yet he knows that he cannot pray these words. He can read and hear them as the prayer of another person, wonder about them, be offended by them, but he can neither pray them himself nor discard them from the Bible.

"The Psalter is the prayer book of Jesus Christ"

The practical expedient would be to say that any person in this situation should first stick to the psalms he can understand and repeat, and that in the case of the other psalms he should learn quite simply to let stand what is incomprehensible and difficult and turn back again and again to what is simple and understandable. Actually, however, this difficulty indicates the point at which we get our first glimpse of the secret of the Psalter. A psalm that we cannot utter as a prayer, that makes us falter and horrifies us, is a hint to us that here Someone else is praying, not we; that the One who is here protesting his innocence, who is invoking God's judgment, who has come to such infinite depths of suffering, is none other than Jesus Christ himself. He it is who is praying here, and not only here but in the whole Psalter.

This insight the New Testament and the Church have always recognized and declared. The *Man* Jesus Christ, to whom no affliction, no ill, no suffering is alien and who yet was the wholly innocent and righteous one, is praying in the Psalter through the mouth of his Church. The Psalter is the prayer book of Jesus Christ in the truest sense of the word. He prayed the Psalter and now it has become his prayer for all time. Now do we understand how the Psalter can be prayer to God and yet God's own Word, precisely because here we encounter the praying Christ? Jesus Christ prays through the Psalter in his congregation. His congregation prays too, the individual prays. But here he prays, in so far as Christ prays within him, not in his own name, but in the Name of Jesus Christ. He prays, not from the natural desires of his own heart; he prays out of the manhood put on by Christ; he prays on the basis of the prayer of the Man Jesus Christ. But when he so acts, his prayer falls within the promise that it will be

heard. Because Christ prays the prayer of the psalms with the individual and the congregation before the heavenly throne of God, or rather because those who pray the psalms are joining in with the prayer of Jesus Christ, their prayer reaches the ears of God. Christ has become their intercessor.

The Psalter is the vicarious prayer of Christ for his Church. Now that Christ is with the Father, the new humanity of Christ, the Body of Christ on earth, continues to pray his prayer to the end of time. This prayer belongs, not to the individual member, but to the whole Body of Christ. Only in the whole Christ does the whole Psalter become a reality, a whole which the individual can never fully comprehend and call his own. That is why the prayer of the psalms belongs in a peculiar way to the fellowship. Even if a verse of a psalm is not one's own prayer, it is nevertheless the prayer of another member of the fellowship; so it is quite certainly the prayer of the true Man Jesus Christ and his Body on earth.

In the Psalter we learn to pray on the basis of Christ's prayer. The Psalter is the great school of prayer.

Here we learn, first, what prayer means. It means praying according to the Word of God, on the basis of promises. Christian prayer takes its stand on the solid ground of the revealed Word and has nothing to do with vague, self-seeking vagaries. We pray on the basis of the prayer of the true Man Jesus Christ. This is what the Scripture means when it says that the Holy Spirit prays in and for us, that Christ prays for us, that we can pray aright to God only in the name of Jesus Christ.

Second, we learn from the prayer of the psalms what we should pray. Certain as it is that the scope of the prayer of the psalms ranges far beyond the experience of the individual, nevertheless the individual prays in faith the whole prayer of Christ, the prayer of him who was true Man and who alone possesses the full range of experiences expressed in this prayer.

Can we, then, pray the imprecatory psalms? In so far as we are sinners and express evil thoughts in a prayer of vengeance, we dare not do so. But in so far as Christ is in us, the Christ who took all the vengeance of God upon himself, who met God's vengeance in our stead, who thus—stricken by the wrath of God—and in no other way, could forgive his enemies, who himself suffered the wrath that his enemies might go free—we, too, as members of this Jesus Christ, can pray these psalms, through Jesus Christ, from the heart of Jesus Christ.

Can we, with the Psalmist, call ourselves innocent, devout, and righteous? We dare not do so in so far as we are ourselves. We cannot declare our virtue as a prayer of our own perverse heart. But we can and should do so as a prayer out of the heart of Jesus Christ that was sinless and clean, out of the innocence of Christ in which he has given us a share by faith. In so far as "Christ's blood and righteousness" has become "our beauty, our glorious dress," we can and we should pray the psalms of innocence as Christ's prayer for us and gift to us. These psalms, too, belong to us through him.

And how shall we pray those psalms of unspeakable misery and

"The more deeply we grow into the psalms, the more simple and rich will our prayer become."

suffering, the meaning of which we have hardly begun to sense even remotely? We can and we should pray the psalms of suffering, the psalms of the passion, not in order to generate in ourselves what our hearts do not know of their own experience, not to make our own laments, but because all this suffering was real and actual in Jesus Christ, because the Man Jesus Christ suffered sickness, pain, shame, and death, because in his suffering and death all flesh suffered and died. What happened to us on the Cross of Christ, the death of our old man, and what actually does happen and should happen to us ever since our baptism in the dying of our flesh, *this* is what gives us the right to pray these prayers. Through the Cross of Christ these psalms have been bestowed upon his Body on earth as prayers that issue from his heart. We cannot enlarge upon this theme. Our concern has been only to suggest the scope and the depth of the Psalter as the prayer of Christ. Here on earth we can only grow into its meaning gradually.

Third, the psalms teach us to pray as a fellowship. The Body of Christ is praying, and as an individual one acknowledges that his prayer is only a minute fragment of the whole prayer of the Church. He learns to pray the prayer of the Body of Christ. And that lifts him above his personal concerns and allows him to pray selflessly.

. . . Oetinger, in his exposition of the Psalms, brought out a profound truth when he arranged the whole Psalter according to the seven petitions of the Lord's Prayer. What he had discerned was that the whole sweep of the Book of Psalms was concerned with nothing more nor less than the brief petitions of the Lord's Prayer. In all our praying there remains only the prayer of Jesus Christ; this alone has the promise of fulfillment and frees us from the vain repetitions of the heathen. The more deeply we grow into the psalms and the more often we pray them as our own, the more simple and rich will our prayer become.

REACT
Lesson 1

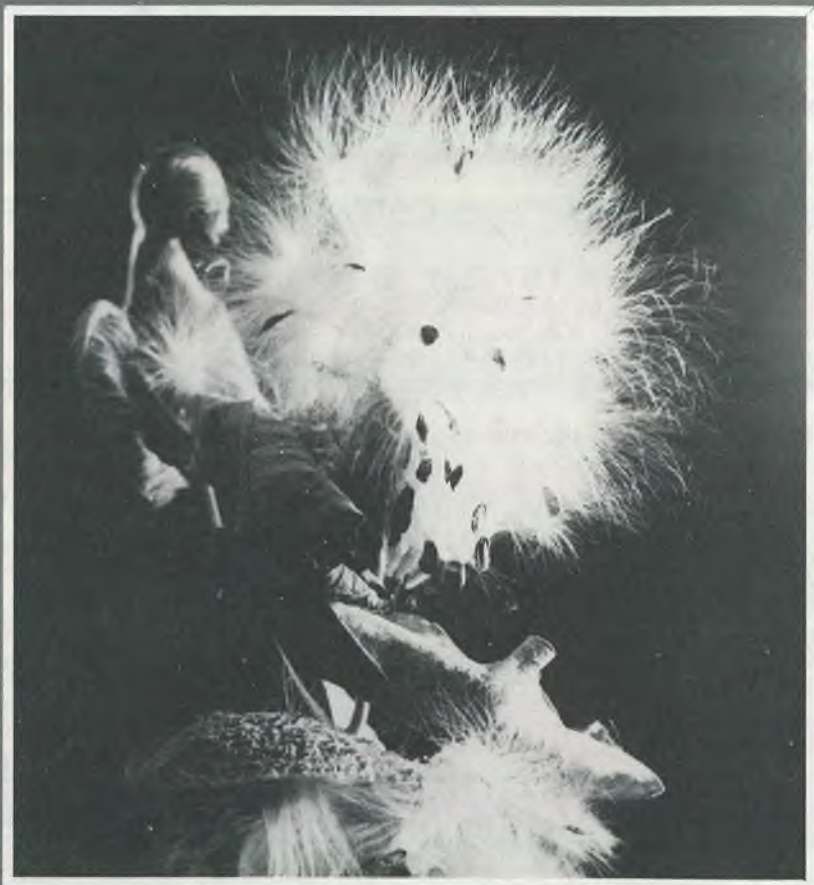
1. Claus Westermann points out (Evidence) that the psalms were a unity of prayer, poetry and song, and that subsequent generations have split apart these three types of word formulations. Is it possible for us to again combine these three in our modern use of the psalms? If so, now?
2. Do you agree with G. A. F. Knight (How To) that we can find in the psalms more about the grace and loving purpose of God than the writers knew? Explain why or why not.
3. What does Bonhoeffer (Opinion) mean in describing the Psalter as the prayer book of Jesus Christ? After reading this article, do you think you would find it meaningful to pray psalms of imprecation or innocence, even though they don't express your true feelings? Explain why or why not.
4. Nature provided the inspiration for many of the psalms (see Testimony). Does this indicate a need for us to be regularly exposed to nature in order to praise God properly? What can exposure to nature do for our perception of God?
5. What does the elaborate and intricate construction of many of the Psalms say about the quality of worship God requires? Are we too hurried and informal in our encounters with Him? Or do the exclamations and vibrant expressions in the Psalms (47:1 for example) suggest a need for greater openness and spontaneity?
6. What implications does the existence of the Psalms have for the use of written prayers in personal devotion and public worship?
7. Develop a set of objectives for your study of the Psalms this quarter. Do this for yourself and/or with your class. Refer to the objectives weekly.
 - 1)
 - 2)
 - 3)

2

Meaning in God's Majesty

Psalms 8 and 19

October 2-8



*"When I consider . . . the work of your
fingers . . . what is man . . . ?"*
(Psalm 8:3, NIV).

The Meaning of Life

"What is the meaning of human life, or, for that matter of the life of any creature? To know an answer to this question means to be religious. You ask: Does it make any sense, then, to pose this question? I answer: The man who regards his own life and that of his fellow creatures as meaningless is not merely unhappy but hardly fit for life. . . .

"The man of science . . . suffers a truly tragic fate. Striving in great sincerity for clarity and inner independence, he himself, through his sheer superhuman efforts, has fashioned the tools which are being used to make him a slave and to destroy him from within. He cannot escape being muzzled by those who have political power in their hands. As a soldier he is forced to sacrifice his own life and to destroy the lives of others even when he is convinced of the absurdity of such sacrifices. . . . The scientist's religious feeling takes the form of a rapturous amazement at the harmony of natural law, which reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, compared to it, all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection. . . ."

—Albert Einstein

Einstein's reflections are remarkably similar to those of David who, after contemplating the natural world, exclaimed, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him?" (Psalm 8:3). Yet because God allows us to participate in His glory, human life is not insignificant. A poem selected by one of this week's contributors, Helen G. Whitehead, expresses this key concept in our study of Psalms 8 and 19.

Oh Lord give unto me strength
like Your mighty granite mountain
weathering a harsh winter storm
Oh Lord give unto me light
so that I may see
my pathway like Your
sun in a darkening world
Oh Lord give unto me beauty
like You gave unto Your
fragrant spring flowers
Oh Lord give unto me life
like an eagle soaring
high into the lofty clouds
that I might see and praise
You for this magnificent creation
Then give to this soul
compassion—that I might truly love
This God has to be the
greatest creation given to all mankind
For because of this great
love You died and now
live again
Oh Lord may I live again.

—T. G. Wood

INTRO- DUCTION

1. From Albert Einstein's essay, "The Meaning of Life," in *Ideas and Opinions* (Crown Publishers, 1954).

God, Man, and Nature

LOGOS When an individual loses an accurate perspective on God, one of two results is inevitable. First as he looks at his own works, he can become proud and arrogant. Or second, as he looks at himself, with his vision of God destroyed, he sees his existence as futile and meaningless. He sees himself as unwanted, unloved, and worse yet, unneeded.

Fortunately, God's image has not been totally obliterated. Where humanity's footprints are still shallow His glory can still be seen. "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Psalm 19:1, NIV).

Man has sent himself to the moon and is continually making mind-boggling technological advancements. But God's glory, as seen in nature, puts all human achievements into perspective. "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him or the son of man that you care for him?" (Psalm 8:4, NIV). When confronted with the majestic realities of the universe which dwarf our puny efforts to exalt ourselves, one can only exclaim: "What is man . . . ?" God, revealed in nature, dissolves human arrogance.

The second possible result of a lost vision of God is one of insecurity and lack of self worth. These also fill the vacancy left by a God unseen and unknown. This is plainly evident today where people, in trying to give reason to life and to fill an inner emptiness, pursue pleasure, wealth, or power. Though the methods vary, the goal remains the same—meaning for a meaningless life. But the methods fail and the objects of pursuit are found to be empty too. Life seems hopeless.

Macbeth, in Shakespeare's play of the same name, eloquently expressed this attitude. In looking back over his life he comments:

Life is but a walking shadow; a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
signifying nothing.

But into our lives of chaos and despair, God comes, and we are humbled. And though God strips us of self-righteous glory, He doesn't leave us standing exposed. God replaces meaninglessness with meaning and hopelessness with hope. David expressed it this way: "You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands, you put everything under his feet" (Psalm 8:5, 6, NIV).

It is through God that life becomes more than a walking shadow. And it through Him that life signifies more than the ravings of an idiot. God comes into our lives and our souls are revived by the perfection of His law. We find security in the faithfulness of His statutes. In His precepts, we are given joy, and in keeping them, we find great meaning and great reward (Psalm 19:7-11).

"Oh Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" (Psalm 8:4, NIV).

E.R.M.

Works of the Master Artist

by Eric Engen

God's majesty and splendor, the theme of Psalms 8 and 19, is clearly exemplified in nature. When in nature, one can fully appreciate God's greatness in the vastness of an ocean, the solidness of a mountain, or the delicacy of a simple flower. In this setting, it is easier to meditate upon God's splendor and to listen to Him speak.

"All nature is alive. Through its varied forms of life it speaks to those who have ears to hear and hearts to understand of Him who is the source of all life. Nature reveals the wonderful working of the Master-Artist."¹ "How wonderfully, with what marvelous beauty, has everything in nature been fashioned. Everywhere we see the perfect works of the great Master Artist. The heavens declare His glory; and the earth, which is formed for the happiness of man, speaks to us of His matchless love."² "Nature and revelation alike testify of God's love. Our Father in heaven is the source of life, of wisdom, and of joy. Look at the wonderful and beautiful things of nature."³

"Many withdraw their minds from the beauties and glories of nature that our Creator has prepared for them to enjoy, and devote all the powers of their being to perfection of art; yet all these things are only imperfect copies from nature. Art can never attain the perfection seen in nature."⁴

"The poet and the naturalist have many things to say about nature, but it is the Christian who enjoys the beauty of the earth with the highest appreciation, because he recognizes his Father's handiwork and perceives His love in flower and shrub and tree. No one can fully appreciate the significance of hill and vale, river and sea, who does not look upon them as an expression of God's love to man."⁵

In contrast to this infinite display of power and wisdom, man seems insignificant. Yet God chose to give us honor and distinction. "God created man a superior being: he alone is formed in the image of God, and is capable of partaking of the divine nature, of co-operating with his Creator and executing His plans."⁶

God's glory and wisdom are also evident in His law. We are encouraged to meditate upon this law (see Psalms 1:2; 119:97), as it is the reflection of God Himself. In so doing, we strengthen both our relationship with our Lord and our own mental abilities. "There is nothing more calculated to strengthen the intellect than the study of the Scriptures. No other book is so potent to elevate the thoughts, to give vigor to the faculties, as the broad, ennobling truths of the Bible. If God's word were studied as it should be, men would have a breadth of mind, a nobility of character, and stability of purpose rarely seen in this day."⁷

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Psalm 104:24
(NIV)

"The Christian enjoys the beauty of the earth with the highest appreciation, because he recognizes his Father's handiwork."

1. *Medical Ministry*, p. 10.
2. *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 312.
3. *Steps to Christ*, p. 9.
4. *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 589.
5. *Steps to Christ*, p. 89.
6. *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 7.
7. *Steps to Christ*, p. 92.

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October 4
Tuesday

God's Sovereignty Reviewed

by Gregory Hovanic

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Exodus 3:13-15

Psalm 8 develops an understanding of the position of humanity in God's creative order. Humans alone were made in God's likeness and then were crowned with glory and honor by God (v. 5). Human-kind is the master over God's other creatures. High as this honor is, it is important to remember that we are still subject to God.

Psalm 8 also says something about God's freedom. I'm not referring to the freedom God gives us, but rather the freedom that He has to be God; in other words, His sovereignty.

The Bible opens by telling us that in the beginning, God was. He was not dependent upon anyone or anything. Yahweh was the creator, and the Hebrew mind understood God to be distinct from His creation. In comparison, the Babylonian concept of creation begins with watery chaos—a mixture of salt and fresh water. The salt water was personified as a mother god and the fresh water, a father god. Out of their union, all other Babylonian gods were born. This type of belief was so common among primitive people that the Hebrew concept of God was very radical.

Note that in Genesis 1:16 Moses uses the words *the greater light* to describe the sun and the *lesser light* to describe the moon. There are specific Hebrew words for the sun and the moon, but Moses chose not to use them. This was probably because he wanted to avoid any similarities to pagan belief.

Also, God's name reveals His characteristics. In middle eastern cultures, as well as in many others, a person's name is filled with mysterious power and great significance. There is always curiosity regarding another person's name. It is the first thing we want to know of a new acquaintance. In antiquity, this concept was taken further. There was the belief that if you knew the name of a god, the god would be in your possession and could be kept under magical control.

When Moses encountered Yahweh in the burning bush, he requested the name of the one to whom he was speaking. Moses asked this so that he could better explain to the Israelites the nature of the God who promised to deliver them from bondage. Here again we find Yahweh's uniqueness displayed. God revealed Himself by the name *I am who I am*. The Hebrew can also be translated *I will cause to be what I will cause to be*. This may seem a somewhat evasive answer, but God chose to make Himself known through the demand of His Lordship (see Ex. 3:13-15).

After the psalmist in Psalm 8 contemplates the position God has granted him, he concludes in the same fashion in which he opens. In awe he recognizes God's sovereignty: "O Lord our sovereign, how glorious is thy name in all the earth!" (v. 9, NEB).

Making Majesty Real

by Helen G. Whitehead

The sun rose over Takoma Park this morning from the east. I'm convinced that this evening it will set on the western horizon, and tomorrow it'll again peek over the treetops eastward. Our God is a remarkably ordered God, and it naturally follows that His creation will be the same. Can you imagine it any other way? What if the sun rose and set every day in a different place, or if gravity pulled only sometimes?

This week we're studying about God's majesty as revealed in our world, and how this adds meaning to our lives. We would agree, I'm sure, that nature well reflects the glory of God. The questions and differences of opinion come, however, when we discuss ways to make His majesty relevant in our lives.

As I read Psalm 8, I compiled a list of ways to make God's power more meaningful in one's life.

1. Spend time being amazed and awed by our Creator God who set the worlds spinning and painted the tiny field flowers. We must recognize God's power before it can give us meaning. It's easy to overlook the vast magnitude of the universe and feel arrogant and superior because we don't take time to look, but when we examine the wonder of a snowflake or the complexity of Orion, we seem quite small and insignificant.

2. Think about God's love for you. The fact that we, as little specks of matter in God's wide creation, can talk personally with our Maker is absolutely incredible. He has time to take a personal interest in us. That God is involved with us in a real, observable way should fill our hearts with praise.

3. Realize that with His love, we have everything. No longer are we like the 20th-century existentialist who feels himself in a dark, round room with no way out, wandering around and around in despair. We receive love from our God and our response is to return that love not only to God, who first loved us, but to people, all people. We can raise our eyes heavenward and sing praises. Love becomes the very essence, the core of our lives—our meaning.

4. Make your own list. List anything that's helpful to remind you of God's majesty and His love. Write down little things that make you realize God's personal interest in our life. Copy down an especially significant verse or paragraph and carry it in your wallet or purse. List the things that make you feel insignificant and the things that make you feel special. Keep your list personalized and look at it often.

God's majesty and His love for us is a subject that can never be exhausted. It's only through His love that our lives are full of meaning and purpose. The Psalmist beautifully explains his awe at the wonder of God's love. "When I look up into the night skies and see the work of your fingers—the moon and the stars you have made—I cannot understand how you can bother with mere, puny man to pay any attention to him! And yet you have made him only a little lower than the angels, and placed a crown of glory and honor upon his head" (Psalm 8:3-5, *Living Bible*).

HOW TO

Key text:

1 John 3:1, NIV

Experiential Majesty

by David M. Ritter

OPINION

Key text:
Psalm 8:3, 4

"There are two things that fill my soul with holy reverence and ever growing wonder," declared Immanuel Kant in *Dialectic of Pure and Practical Reason*, "the spectacle of the starry sky that virtually annihilates us as physical beings, and the moral law which raises us to infinite dignity as intelligent agents." His proposition would explain a phenomenon I have chosen to label "urban ethnocentrism." People, Christians and non-Christians alike, who live in major metropolitan areas seem to project a greater degree of arrogance vis-à-vis their world than do people living in rural areas. I don't claim originality for this idea, but my hypothesis for the cause of this phenomenon may be unique. Quite simply, urban dwellers can't see the stars at night (at least not many of them) and so without these daily reminders of their insignificance, the urban mind becomes arrogant.

On a typical "clear" evening, standing on the grassy commons at Columbia Union College just eight miles north of the U.S. Capitol and surrounded by vestiges of civilization's electric lighting, one can see less than 30 stars. On one ostensibly cloudless night, I could see only eight.

The psalmist wrote during a time when mercury-vapor streetlights were never diffused through the haze of hydrocarbon exhaust. Alone on the plains of Palestine, through air as clear as crystal, a billion billion stars seemed painted across a darkened dome, spreading from horizon to horizon. David the shepherd was compelled to exclaim, "the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handiwork" (Psalm 19:1).

"In becoming
man, Yahweh
'... crowned
him (man)
with glory
and honor' "

Once in the life of every city dweller he should dare to tempt the cosmos to declare God's praise. I experienced my disproportionately tiny world crumbling when I stood atop a small hill east of the Tetons in Wyoming. Minute pinpoints of light, staggering in their countlessness, filled the entire sky, even down to the very edge of the horizon where, looking parallel to the plain above which I stood, stars seemed to touch the earth itself.

"When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast established, what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him?" (Psalm 8:3, 4).

What is man? Who is man? A finite mind attempting to behold infinite Deity recoils in confusion, often rebounding instead to more finite "deities" of one's own creation. For the Christian, the realization of his own insignificance brings new meaning to the idea that the Being who designed the vast cosmos would voluntarily make Himself one with His creation, and become a speck to redeem specks. In becoming man, Yahweh "... crowned him (man) with glory and honor" (Psalm 8:5b). Not only is God mindful of the creatures of His creation, but He cares. And in God's caring, humanity receives dignity. The God who cares is not some lofty potentate, sitting on a distant throne—He is one with us: "He is our divine companion and our most precious friend. . . . The God of personal experience and the God of nature are the same God."¹

1. Charles L. Taylor, *Let The Psalms Speak* (New York: Seabury Press, 1961), pp. 73, 74.

1. What are the specific ways in which Psalms 8 and 19 suggest that God gives meaning to life? Is it possible for an agnostic or atheist to find meaning in life?
2. According to Psalms 8 and 19, what does nature reveal to us about God? Try to identify at least two or three major characteristics.
3. What is your reaction to David Ritter's argument (Opinion) that urban dwellers' inability to see the stars contributes to "arrogant ethnocentrism"? Does rural living necessarily lead to greater appreciation of God's glory?
4. What is the significance of the name by which God revealed Himself to Moses (see Evidence)? Does this shed any light on David's reference to God's name as "majestic" (Psalm 8:1)?
5. According to Psalm 19, the word of God . . .
 - a) revives the soul
 - b) makes wise the simple
 - c) gives joy to the heart
 - d) gives light to the eyes

How does God's word accomplish these things? Do you find them true in your own experience? Share ideas on how we might more fully experience these benefits from God's word.

6. What does Psalm 19:13 tell you about the biblical concept of perfection?
-

3

Prescription for Forgetfulness

Psalms 105 and 106

October 9-15



*"Praise the Lord! O give thanks to the
Lord . . . for his steadfast love endures forever!"
(Psalm 106:1, RSV).*

Prescription for Forgetfulness?

by G. Arthur Keough

When someone asked me to write this lesson, I promised I would. And then I forgot! That is, until he reminded me that we were well past the time for the material to be turned in.

Why did I forget, or what made me forget?

Psychologists tell us that we tend to forget those things we dislike. But I find myself forgetting things I really want to remember, such as my wife's birthday, or our wedding anniversary. Why do I have slips of mind in such matters?

Psychologists also tell us that we forget 90 percent of everything we learn. Perhaps that is why George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, said that education is what remains when we have forgotten all we have been taught. And another wit has defined memory as "what you forget with."¹

Obviously, it is important to remember some things. And equally true, it is important to forget some things. But what should we remember, and what may we safely forget? This is what our lesson is all about.

Have you noticed the title—"Prescription for Forgetfulness"? There is something intriguingly ambiguous about the wording of this title. Does it promise a prescription to increase our forgetfulness, or one to counteract it? I am inclined to believe that it is the latter meaning that is intended. Yet it may be of value to consider areas in which forgetfulness may be a virtue.

Time is a healer of many heartaches, many disappointments. It is a blessing that we are able to forget the bad

things in our lives. Thus our recollections of the past are usually pleasant. In our forgetfulness we long for the return of "the good old days."

As convenient as forgetting is, obviously there are some things we should always remember. In this, the Bible is explicit. For example, the Sabbath (Ex. 20:8) and Lot's wife (Luke 17:32). God continually called upon the children of Israel to remember events in their past. For the past is not only prologue, it is a lesson book from which we learn how to be wise in this generation.

In Psalm 103, David is very specific as to the areas which we should never forget. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits" (vs. 2). Then he proceeds to enumerate the things which God has done for us; the things we should ever keep in mind: He has forgiven our sins, healed our diseases, redeemed our lives from the Pit, and showered us with love and mercy. When you read the psalm, you will find every reason to be grateful, you will have an antidote for forgetfulness.

But our lesson this week probes the matter a little further. It draws a contrast between the consistent goodness of God, as presented in Psalm 105, and the equally persistent forgetfulness on the part of man, discussed in Psalm 106. Why should this be so? Will it ever continue to be the case? What does the prescription for forgetfulness entail?

INTRODUCTION

1. H. L. Gee, *Briefly* (London: The Epworth Press, 1964), p. 21.

G. Arthur Keough is chairman of the Department of Religion at Columbia Union College.

October 9
Sunday

A Remembering God

LOGOS Psalms 105 and 106 represent "the two contrasted strands of sacred history: the acts of God the unfailing [105], and the man of the intractable [106]."¹ When the two are read together, God's steadfast covenant love stands in bold contrast to the repeated failures of His people.

Verses 1-7 of Psalm 105 invite us to recall and proclaim the mighty ways the Lord has intervened in Israel's history. "Give thanks to the Lord, call on His name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts. . . . Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles and the judgments he pronounced" (vs. 1-3, 5, NIV). In order for a true concept of God, grounded in His saving deeds in history, to be maintained, such remembrance and rehearsal is essential. And, our seeking of the Lord in this manner should be consistent and sustained, rather than occasional. "Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always" (vs. 4, NIV).

The Psalmist then proceeds with a litany of events in Israel's history in which God acted. Recital of all these events, from Joseph, whose "neck was put in irons" as a slave in Egypt but then became master of Pharaoh's household (vs. 16-22), to a newly liberated tribe which was given "the lands of the nations" (vs. 44), elicits a succinct yet vibrant response—"Praise the Lord" (vs. 45).

The enduring, constant nature of God's covenant love is an important theme of Psalm 106 and is introduced in verse 1: "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever" (NIV). But in contrast to the repeated demonstration of God's faithful love in Psalm 105, Psalm 106 candidly records the repeated failure of the Lord's people to maintain their commitment to the covenant. Rejection of God's guidance through Moses and Aaron, prostituted loyalty evidenced by idol worship, grumbling, even human sacrifice are what stand out in the psalmist's mind about the performance of the chosen nation. The cause underlying these failures? "They forgot the God who saved them, who had done great things in Egypt" (Psalm 106:21, NIV, emphasis supplied).

It took trials and oppression to help the Israelites remember the Source of their salvation (vs. 40-43). But what stupendously good news for them, and for us, that despite such blatant, repeated failure, God "remembered his covenant, and out of his great love he relented" (vs. 44, 45, NIV).

Let us remember—not only what our God has accomplished for us, but that even when we forget, He remembers.

D. F. M./S. D. P.

1. Derek Kidner, *Psalms* 73-150 (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975), p. 323.

The Sin of Forgetfulness

by G. Arthur Keough

In referring to forgetfulness, Mrs. White does not mince any words: "Many feel that no blame should be attached to forgetfulness. This is a great mistake. Forgetfulness is sin. It leads to many blunders and to much disorder and many wrongs. Things that should be done ought not to be forgotten. The mind must be tasked; it must be disciplined until it will remember."¹

In another context she says: "Habits of negligence should be resolutely overcome. Many think it sufficient excuse for the grossest errors to plead forgetfulness. But do they not, as well as others, possess intellectual faculties? Then they should discipline their minds to be retentive. It is a sin to forget, a sin to be negligent. If you form a habit of negligence, you may neglect your own soul's salvation and at last find that you are unready for the kingdom of God."²

It is obvious that Mrs. White looks upon forgetfulness as a fault that can lead to greater negligence, and thus to greater loss, a loss that may be as great as one's own salvation. She sees in forgetfulness, not an innocent slip of the memory, but a deeper fault of attitude and direction. How easy it is to say that forgetfulness was the cause of the failure to do something, when perhaps there was no intention of doing it in the first place.

In describing how Nebuchadnezzar went wrong in setting up the image in the plain of Dura, Mrs. White points out three areas in which the king was forgetful:

1. He forgot the "remarkable providences connected with the dream of the great image."
2. He forgot "the significance of the image and the many lives that had been saved by Daniel's interpretation."
3. He forgot everything but a desire to establish his power and supremacy.

In this we can see how wrong forgetfulness can be. But thank God the story does not end there. Once again God in his mercy gives the king evidence of His power and authority, and the King accepts the evidence. Then we read that the King became a child of God.³ What a beautiful ending! It is an ending that shows us the love and mercy of God. It assures us that there is hope for the most forgetful among us, so long as we do not belittle our forgetfulness and take the proper measures to redress our faults.

What are the causes of forgetfulness? Overeating is one of them, says Mrs. White.⁴ Selfish interests can do the same.⁵

Finally this gem: "We have nothing to fear for the future except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and his teaching in our past history."⁶

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Deuteronomy
4:9

"We have nothing to fear for the future except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us . . ."

1. *Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 12.
2. *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 358, 359.
3. *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 504, 505, 521.
4. *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 138.
5. *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 522.
6. *Life Sketches*, p. 196.

G. Arthur Keough is chairman of the Department of Religion at Columbia Union College.

☐ October 11
Tuesday

God Has Never Failed

by G. Arthur Keough

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Psalm 96:2, 4

From the time that "he spake and it was done, he commanded and it stood fast" (Psalm 33:9), when the whole earth stood in its pristine glory, and He said, "Behold it was very good" (Gen. 1:31), God has ever been in control.

Was God in control even when Adam and Eve took of the fruit of the forbidden tree and lost their heritage of life? Yes, He already had a plan whereby man could be restored to the image of His Maker. Man might seek to cover his shame by fig leaves, but God had a better garment symbolized by the garments of skin (Gen. 3:21), obtained from a slain animal that represented the Saviour.

No event has ever taken God by surprise. He commissioned a man who "found grace" in His eyes (Gen. 6:8) to prepare for the flood by building an ark according to directions given to him. When the wicked were destroyed, God replenished the earth by giving the same command to Noah as he did to Adam and Eve: "Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth" (Gen. 9:1; 1:28).

Perhaps the tower of Babel was not what God had planned. But He knew how to meet the situation, and ever since, man's propensities to unite and rebel against God have been controlled by the multiplicity of languages. And when the time was to come when God's message should be given to every nation and tongue and people, a gift of tongues would be given to the church, so that everyone could hear the gospel in his own language (Acts 2:6).

The message of the whole Bible, even as the message of the two psalms that are the basis of our study this week, comes loud and clear: God has unfailingly pursued His purpose of saving man. He called a man out of Ur of the Chaldees, He called a people out of Egypt, He established a theocracy in Canaan, He sent His prophets, exercised discipline, sent a rebellious people into captivity, and in great mercy restored them to their land, and in the fulness of time He sent forth His Son (Gal. 4:4).

How could a people be so insensitive to His dealings with them? And, more importantly, if we had been in their place, would we have been any different, done any better? We like to think we would. But does our present behavior lead us to conclude that we would be any less forgetful of God's providences? How do we respond to God's providences today? To whom do we attribute our talents, our health and vigor, our successes? For whom do we expend our greatest energies? Is it for our personal advancement, or for the advancement of God's cause?

Our forefathers "remembered not" God's mercies (Ps. 106:7), and soon forgot "his works" (v. 13). Are we equally negligent?

Forgetfulness: Causes and Remedies

by G. Arthur Keough

HOW TO

Key text:

Romans 1:16

What are the deepest causes of forgetfulness?

1. **We become so totally immersed in the present that we cannot see anything beyond the horizon of our immediate involvement.** This may be a very natural situation for many of us. But we need to remind ourselves that this is the lowest form of life. As human beings, God has given us the capacity to look back and look ahead, and only when we do this can we place present activity in its right perspective. We must refuse to live our lives on the animal level. We must rise up to the level of freedom and understanding that God has provided for us.

2. **We are so busy with duties and responsibilities that we have no time to look up and around.** At least, that is what we say! The fact is, that we must not let our environment dictate to us what we shall do with our time, or determine our destiny. We must decide what we can and cannot do, what we ought to do and what we must lay aside. There are times when we will have to call a halt and take stock of our situation. Only then are we in control of our lives.

3. **We immerse ourselves in the present in order to avoid our responsibilities for the future.** Are we afraid to face reality? Are we afraid of failure? Do we feel all alone as we face life and its decisions? This is a terrible position to be in because often it leads to false solutions for our dilemmas, such as the use of drugs or alcohol. What is the only solution? To realize that we are not alone in this world. God is ready to help us. He is only a prayer away!

4. **We refuse to see what is obviously seen by others.** "None so blind as those who will not see," says the proverb. Some of us are born doubting Thomases! We take more than ordinary persuading. Unless we see things with our own eyes and touch them with our own fingers, we say we shall not believe. Thomas was fortunate in having the evidence of the resurrection brought to him. But Jesus said, "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:29). We have to be reasonable in our demands for proof. We must recognize that there are many aspects of life, even the existence of God, that are beyond proof. There will always be room for doubt in any situation, but trust in God must fill every gap. (Heb. 11:6).

Prescription for forgetfulness? Let your spirit soar to heights of achievement only possible to the one created in the image of God. Refuse to let the enemy of all good gain the victory over you. Place your hand in the hand of God, and let Him lead you day by day into avenues of ever greater joy as you remember His goodness and never forget all His benefits.

At the same time we must not forget that some things need to be forgotten—those things that are behind, which may hinder us in the race of life (Phil. 3:13). To forget does not necessarily mean to erase from one's memory; it means to put certain memories in limbo so that they do not deflect us from our present goals and purposes. When we forgive, we forget, so that the forgiveness can be perfect.

Salvation By Reminder

by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

OPINION

Key text:
1 Corinthians
15:1-5

Because the Scripture is a corpus, a living whole, the so-called *lectio continua* or consecutive reading must be adopted for Scripture reading in the family fellowship. Historical books, prophets, Gospels, Epistles, and Revelation are read and heard as God's Word in their context. They set the listening fellowship in the midst of the wonderful world of revelation of the people of Israel with its prophets, judges, kings, and priests, its wars, festivals, sacrifices, and sufferings. The fellowship of believers is woven into the Christmas story, the baptism, the miracles and teaching, the suffering, dying, and rising again of Jesus Christ. It participates in the very events that occurred on this earth for the salvation of the world, and in doing so receives salvation in Jesus Christ.

**"We become
a part of
what once
took place
for our
salvation."**

Consecutive reading of the Biblical books forces everyone who wants to hear to put himself, or to allow himself to be found, where God has acted once and for all for the salvation of men. We become a part of what once took place for our salvation. Forgetting and losing ourselves, we, too, pass through the Red Sea, through the desert, across the Jordan into the promised land. With Israel we fall into doubt and unbelief and through punishment and repentance experience again God's help and faithfulness. All this is not mere reverie but holy, godly reality. We are torn out of our own existence and set down in the midst of the holy history of God on earth. There God dealt with us, and there He still deals with us, our needs and our sins, in judgment and grace. It is not that God is the spectator and sharer of our present life, howsoever important that is; but rather that we are the reverent listeners and participants in God's action in the sacred story, the history of the Christ on earth. And only so far as we are *there*, is God with us today also.

A complete reversal occurs. It is not in our life that God's help and presence must still be proved, but rather God's presence and help have been demonstrated for us in the life of Jesus Christ. It is in fact more important for us to know what God did to Israel, to His Son Jesus Christ, than to seek what God intends for us today. The fact that Jesus Christ died is more important than the fact that I shall die, and the fact that Jesus Christ rose from the dead is the sole ground of my hope that I, too, shall be raised on the Last Day. Our salvation is "external to ourselves." I find no salvation in my life history, but only in the history of Jesus Christ. Only he who allows himself to be found in Jesus Christ, in his incarnation, his Cross, and his resurrection, is with God and God with him.

Excerpted from the book
Life Together by
Dietrich Bonhoeffer, pp.
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sion of Harper & Row.

October 14
Friday

32

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) was a Lutheran theologian who lost his life as a martyr under the Nazis in World War II.

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1. List below the things which, in our spiritual experiences, should be remembered and those which should be forgotten. What are the dangers of remembering and forgetting the wrong things?
- Remember* *Forget*
-

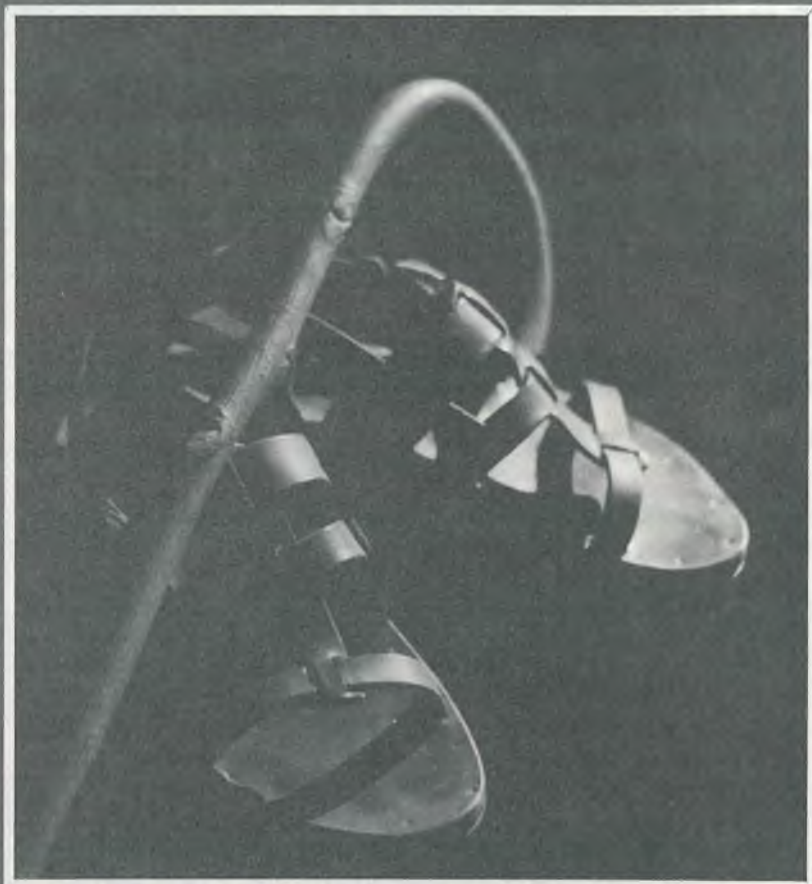
2. Is it really a blessing for us to be able to forget the bad things in our lives? Shouldn't we learn from our mistakes?
3. Did forgetfulness cause Israel's apostasy? Or was it willful disobedience? What are the implications of each?
4. Are all types of forgetfulness sin by Ellen White's definition (see Testimony)? Can forgetfulness be simply "an innocent slip of the memory"?
5. Can God forget? Does He? What about our confessed sins—does He truly forget them?
6. Do you agree with G. Arthur Keough's theory (How To) that memories can be put in limbo? Aren't events either remembered or forgotten?
7. What do you think Bonhoeffer (Opinion) means by saying it is "more important for us to know what God did to Israel, to His Son Jesus Christ, than to seek what God intends for us today"? Do you agree with him? Explain why or why not.
-

4

The Caring Shepherd

Psalm 23

October 16-22



*"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep
and my sheep know me"
(John 10:14, NIV).*

Jacuzzi Religion?

INTRODUCTION

I've never been in a jacuzzi, but word has it that they're wonderful. Even an erudite theologian like James Packer of Regent College in Vancouver says so. He coined rhyming additions to the vocabulary like "woozy, boozy, and floozie" to describe his first dip in a jacuzzi.

Packer goes on to say that what people want religion to do for their souls is something analogous to what jacuzzis do for the senses. We want "a warm choir with a schmaltzy swing; a warm back-scratching use of words in prayer and preaching; and a warm, cheerful afterglow" to give us a "total tickling relaxation, the sense of being at once soothed, supported and effortlessly invigorated: in short, jacuzzi religion."¹

The best known of psalms, the 23rd, seems to be a sublime expression of jacuzzi religion. David describes a relationship with God as bringing the satisfaction of wants, restoration, comfort, overflowing blessing, and so on. Would we be doing great violence to the meaning of the psalm if we modernized "He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside the still waters" to "He sets me down in the jacuzzi's gentle swirl"?

Pleasant as the jacuzzi experience may be, though, no one finds it feasible or even desirable to remain in one at all times. Similarly, jacuzzi religion can't be continually sustained under the stress of day-to-day living. Sure, a religion without some jacuzzi features would be spiritless and unap-

pealing. But the comfort of a jacuzzi religion is cheap when you're dying of cancer or when you're hopelessly alienated from those who mean the most to you.

What about Psalm 23, then? Is there nothing more here than the sweet comfort of jacuzzi religion? As we focus this week on the soothing benefits of a covenant relationship with God found in this psalm, keep in mind that in being guided in the paths of righteousness (vs. 3) we are led through, not around, the valley of the shadow of death (vs. 4). Note also that we are anointed with oil and given an overflowing cup *in the presence of our enemies* (vs. 5).

John the Revelator, with his vivid apocalyptic imagery, is perhaps expanding on Psalm 23:5 when he describes a black horse coming out of the scroll which only the Lamb of God can unseal: "Its rider was holding a pair of scales; and I seemed to hear a voice shout from among the four animals and say, 'A ration of corn for a day's wages, and three rations of barley for a day's wages but do not tamper with the oil and wine'" (Rev. 6:6, Jerusalem Bible, emphasis supplied).

In other words, God insures that we somehow receive the oil of His anointing and His wine that overflows our cups even in the setting of social and economic hardship, rather than just in the tranquilizing waters of jacuzzi religion. So perhaps Psalm 23 takes us beyond life's jacuzzi to life's journey.

D. F. M.

1. James Packer, "View From a Jacuzzi," *His*, May 1983, p. 32.

October 16
Sunday

An Old Psalm For Modern Sheep

LOGOS

Those of us who are diehard urbanists, living in our concrete jungles with all the noise, rush, and stress that such an environment entails, may find it difficult to appreciate the tranquil analogies of the shepherd psalm. And being unfamiliar with the art of shepherding, our vague and stereotyped conceptions give little assistance to full appreciation of the analogy.

Not only are we unfamiliar with its setting, but we've also heard it many times before; and with our nerves long since dulled by constant stimulation provided by our environment, it has become old and stale. However, despite our continual cravings for the new and exciting, the God-shepherd comparison still has deep meaning for us today.

"The Lord is my shepherd" (Psalm 23:1). In the context of this Psalm, being a shepherd involved giving constant, compassionate care. Understanding this removes some of the tarnish of overuse. In a society where individuals are too busy taking care of number one to notice the needs of others, the concept of *giving* care is truly refreshing.

"He makes me to lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul" (vs. 2, NIV). Our lifestyle of hustle and bustle brings with it pressures, demands, and stress, which all take their toll on our inner peace. In the Good Shepherd, we find the tranquility that restores the equilibrium of our souls.

"He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake" (vs. 3, RSV). In the confusion of daily living, with all the demands that pull in different directions, with different needs all screaming for our attention, He gives sure direction for our uncertain lives.

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me" (vs. 4, NIV). When faced with the pain and dilemmas of life, He is a source of strength and security. Though storms of adversity rage, there is no cause for alarm, for in Him there is peace. And though He does not lead around the valley, He does lead the way through it.

"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies" (vs. 5, NIV). There is no need for anxiety about daily needs or safety because both are in His hands.

"You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (vs. 6, NIV). Through Christ we are given a special position of honor and security, starting now and continuing into eternity. Through Him our joy is complete and we have need of nothing.

Themes such as these never grow old because to all there comes a time when compassionate care, a source of strength and a sense of security are needed. Though most of us "moderns" are not shepherds, we are still very much like sheep. This becomes the point of reference for appreciating the God-shepherd analogy. **"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way" (Isa. 53:6, NIV).** But in Christ we can be found. Therefore, we lack nothing and have the right to dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

E. R. M.

The Divine Shepherd

selected by John Fritz

"I am the Good Shepherd: the good shepherd giveth life for the sheep."

As an earthly shepherd knows his sheep, so does the divine Shepherd know His flock that are scattered throughout the world. . . .

Every soul is as fully known to Jesus as if he were the only one for whom the Saviour died. The distress of everyone touches His heart. The cry for aid reaches His ear. . . .

As the shepherd goes before his sheep, himself first encountering the perils of the way, so does Jesus with His people. . . . His feet have pressed down the cruel thorns, to make the pathway easier for us. Every burden that we are called to bear He Himself has borne. . . .

Through all our trials we have a never-failing Helper. He does not leave us alone to struggle with temptation, to battle with evil, and be finally crushed with burdens and sorrow. Though now He is hidden from mortal sight, the ear of faith can hear His voice saying, Fear not; I am with you. "I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive forevermore" (Rev. 1:18). I have endured your sorrows, experienced your struggles, encountered your temptations. I know your tears; I also have wept. The griefs that lie too deep to be breathed into any human ear, I know. Think not that you are desolate and forsaken. Though your pain touch no responsive chord in any heart on earth, look unto Me, and live. . . .

However much a shepherd may love his sheep, he loves his sons and daughters more. Jesus is not only our shepherd; He is our "everlasting Father." And He says, "I know mine own, and Mine own know Me, even as the Father knoweth Me, and I know the Father" (John 10:14, 15, R.V.). What a statement is this!—the only-begotten Son, He who is in the bosom of the Father, He whom God has declared to the "the Man that is My fellow" (Zech. 13:7),—the communion between Him and the eternal God is taken to represent the communion between Christ and His children on earth!

. . . He could have withstood the advances of death, and refused to come under its dominion; but voluntarily He laid down His life, that He might bring life and immortality to light. He bore the sin of the world, endured its curse, yielded up His life as a sacrifice, that men might not eternally die. "Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. . . . He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." (Isa. 53:4-6).

TESTIMONY

Key text:
John 10:10-14

"The griefs that lie too deep to be breathed into any human ear, I know."

Excerpted from *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 476-484.

John Fritz is an English and business management major at Columbia Union College.

October 18
Tuesday

The Shepherd Knows Me Intimately

by Phillip Keller

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Psalm 139

The relationship between the shepherd and his sheep, between Christ and those whom he calls, is one of personal, profound *knowing*; for he knows me intimately, he knows me by name.

During the years when my family and I lived among the Masai people of East Africa I was deeply moved by the intense devotion and affection shown by the owners for their stock. . . .

Some of these sheep had literally grown up as members of the family household. From their earliest days they had been cuddled, hugged, fed, and loved like one of the owner's own children. Every minute detail of their lives was well known and fully understood. . . .

When in the process of time an individual opens the sheepfold of his life to Christ, he may feel he is inviting a stranger to enter. Yet the truth is that he who enters is not a stranger at all but the One who has in fact known us from before birth.

This discovery is really double-pronged. It is at the same time both reassuring, yet also alarming. It is wonderful to realize that at last there is someone who does know and understand me. If I have been the type of person who has played games with others and pulled the wool over their eyes, I will find I can't do it with God.

The hypocrisy has to end. I must begin to be open and honest with him who knows me through and through—who calls me by name.

In calling to his sheep, the shepherd desires to lead them out of the sheepfold. Sheepfolds, especially in the East, are not pretty places. . . .

Within the enclosing walls of stone, timber, bricks, or brush there is a continual build-up of dirt, debris, and dung. Not a blade of grass survives the eternal tramping of a thousand hooves. . . .

The good shepherd is up early at break of day to fling open the gate and lead his sheep out into fresh pastures and green grasslands. He will not allow his flock to linger within the corral for an hour longer than is necessary. . . .

Gently the shepherd stands at the gate and calls to his own to come outside. As each animal passes him he calls it by name, examines it with his knowing eye, and, if necessary, searches with knowing hands beneath its coat, to see if all is well. It is a moving interlude at the dawn of each new day: a time of close and intimate contact between the owner and his flock.

Our great Good Shepherd calls us to come out of the restricted, petty round of our cramped lives. He wishes to lead us out into fresh new pastures and broad fields, perhaps to new places we have never been before.

Many of us are not aware of just how drab, soiled, and dusty with accumulated debris our lives really are. We keep milling about in our same little circle. We are totally preoccupied with our self-centered interests. We go around and around, sometimes stirring up quite a dust, but never really accomplishing anything worthwhile. Our lives are cramped, selfish, and plagued with petty pursuits.

The intentions he has for us are all good. His desires and aspirations for us are enormous, full of potential for unimagined benefit to us and others. Because the thoughts he thinks toward us are thoughts of peace and blessing, let us not hold back!

"His desires . . . for us are enormous, full of potential for unimagined benefits. . . ."

Excerpted from Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at The Good Shepherd and His Sheep*. Copyright © 1978 by W. Phillip Keller. Used by permission.

☐ October 19
Wednesday

38

Phillip Keller has been a shepherd in East Africa, a ranch manager in Canada, and a pastor in Australia.

Show That You Care

by Robin M. Cowdrick

Have you ever found yourself in a situation (such as a funeral home viewing) where you didn't know what to say, and what you nervously blurted out sounded empty and trite? Have you, during an experience with cancer or the death of a loved one, been hurt by the words of well-meaning friends and relatives? I didn't realize the importance of "grief work" and didn't know what to say to someone who was hurting until I took a course called "Coping With Loss," where poetry therapy and Guided Confrontation Therapy techniques were discussed.

Poetry therapy is a technique used by chaplains, nurses and counselors to help their patients deal with emotional pain, grief and loss. Using scripture and poetry, these professionals work in support groups or on a one-to-one basis with individuals who are experiencing a personal crisis. Often these individuals cannot identify their own feelings, or do not know how to express them, but can use poetic images to talk about what they're going through.

In a society where big boys don't cry and nice girls don't scream, resolving grief is especially necessary. Even non-professionals can use the suggestions that follow to help a loved one, oneself, or a stranger to increase self-awareness and express emotion.

1. **Read poetry aloud with a friend or patient.** Psalm 23, Tennyson's poem "Crossing the Bar" (the words to number 678 in the *Church Hymnal*) and stories for children such as *The Little Prince* and *The Velveteen Rabbit* work well.

2. **Leave a selected poem to be read in private.** Choose poems that provoke thoughts and feelings, teach a lesson, or are inspirational. Avoid anything that's overly depressing and keep it short. Say, "I found this the other day, and I think you might enjoy it. If you'd like, we can talk about it tomorrow."

3. **Encourage the writing of one's own poetry, or the keeping of a journal or diary.** It's often easier to write out one's feelings than to share them verbally. The poetry doesn't have to rhyme; try free verse, write a letter or compose a prayer. Don't hesitate to express your anger, write what you feel.

4. **Listen and talk, but don't force.** Let the person you're working with talk when he or she is ready. Be attentive. Interaction is the key to resolving grief. Honest communication will bring about healing.

If you'd like to know more about using these techniques, the book *Living With Loss*, by Dr. Ronald W. Ramsay and Rene Noorbergen (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1981) and the magazine article "Breaking the Ice" in the February issue of *Nursing '81* are recommended.

HOW TO
Key text:
Isaiah 61:1-3

The Valley of the Shadow

by Martin E. Marty

OPINION

Key text:
Psalm 23:4

The psalms regularly beckon the pilgrim to a world in which shadows threaten. The shadow, in biblical contexts, implies a drama of contrasts. In the sun is safety, but one does not welcome the promise of safety when there is no need for trust. Trust comes when the enemy lurks in ravines and crevasses of a valley that is nothing but shadow because it is a valley of death. One of the best known lines of all the psalms speaks to this: "Even though I walk through a valley dark as death I fear no evil, for thou art with me, thy staff and thy crook are my comfort" (23:4).

. . . Death symbolizes all the evils of ravined life, all the perils of the earthly journey. In the psalm that speaks of guidance through the valley, one who prays is compared to a sheep. Modern urbanites are supposed to have rejected this likeness long ago. The world of pasture and lambs is alien to city experience. It belongs to primitive rural recall. Yet highly sophisticated sufferers who must turn to the wall in the hospital and come to terms with their destiny are as likely to request this psalm from the lips of those who read to the dying as any other text. In the drama of contrast between life and death, the shadows are all gone. The victim is ready to be likened to dumb animals who trust the staff and crook because they have no choice except to trust the one who holds the tools.

When there is still health and vigor, people can show bravado in the face of peril. In the times when one can display macho and some good-natured swagger, they can still invert the meaning of the verse. Now and then on the office wall of someone at midlife and in good health, you will chance to see a wall plaque, Gothic-lettered and apparently overlookable as a too-familiar scripture. You read it casually, until its twist hits you. "Yea, thou I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for I am the meanest bastard in the valley." No offense. The overly pious, the pious, and the impious have their differing reactions, none of them necessarily memorable. . . .

The authors of psalms know who is the meanest bastard in the valley: the letterer, the hanger of the plaque, and the reader all vie for the appellation. Meanness came by choice, bastardy by fate, and together they represent human complicity in problems of violence and the world of shadows. Yet the psalmist knew that if mean bastardy was responsible for getting one into the valley, it was no instrument for swashbuckling one's way through it. The psalmic realism went even further. Not being mean or being a born legitimate did not exempt one from having to pass through the valley of the shadow of death. Yet there, only there, where all the muscle and swords were too weak for the forces of threat and attack, there is where the birth of trust came to those who waited in patience.

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A Cry of Absence by
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October 21
Friday
40

Martin E. Marty is a Professor of the History of Modern Christianity at the University of Chicago and Associate Editor of *The Christian Century*.

1. In the Introduction, what is meant by “jacuzzi religion”? Is this something to be avoided—or does it have its place in the Christian life? Is Psalm 23 “jacuzzi religion”?
2. Identify and discuss the ways in which the shepherd metaphor describes how God relates to us. Which are most meaningful to you? Are there ways in which God is *not* like a shepherd?
3. Phillip Keller (Evidence) compares the detailed knowledge the shepherds of eastern Africa have of each sheep with God’s personal, intimate knowledge of us. Does this knowledge comfort you or frighten you? Or both? Explain why.
4. What spiritual significance do you see in the early morning encounter of the shepherd with the sheep that Keller describes?
5. This week’s How To recommends the use of Psalm 23 and similar poetry as a means of helping others cope with grief. Share your reactions to this concept. Could a passage like Psalm 23 be misused in such a setting?
6. Martin Marty (Opinion) suggests that it is in the valley of the shadow of death that trust is born. Do you agree? Are there other or better ways of learning trust?

5

Love Abounding

Psalms 91 and 103

October 23-29



*"Man lasts . . . no longer than a wild
flower . . . yet Yahweh's love for those who fear him
lasts from all eternity and forever"
(Psalms 103:15-17, Jerusalem Bible).*

It Sounds Preposterous

by Dawn Currie

INTRODUCTION

Suppose you saw a worm, ugly as they come, with veins of undulating, lumpy flesh and slow, sliming motions, squirming in the polluted sewers of New York City. Would you care to get close enough to hear a tiny, frantic call for help? And let's suppose our little worm friend was quickly being sucked down into a drainage ditch; would you, could you, (you in your beautiful Sabbath dress or suit) go near?

Not many of us could, but let's just say you were especially curious. After all, it's not every day you hear a worm talk! So, you decide to step into all that gook and help out that pitiful, little, haggard worm. You take him home and in spite of his looks, you become very fond of him. You nurse him back to health and invite him to stay. Wouldn't you want to help him live a cleaner, happier life, give him a refuge from danger, love and nurture him? No doubt after laboring so carefully and lovingly with him, you would find yourself attached in a parental way. And even though you know he could not possibly comprehend it, you try to tell him of the great things there are to do and see in your world.

If you really found a way, some benevolent way to love this sewage-caked abhorrence you had pulled from certain death, wouldn't you expect him ever to be humbly grateful for your overwhelming kindness?

But what if he said, "No, I don't want your love any more," and only begged and screamed at you to leave him

alone? What if he ran away every chance he could, to enter that sewer and be ultimately sucked up by death—choked by the waste he somehow loved? Wouldn't you be angry and broken-hearted? Would you listen the next time he cried out? Would you even go near that street again?

How would you regard this stupid, backstabbing, unrealizing, insignificant creature who only thinks of himself—with pride no less! You sought to give him everything—to show him the world—and he spit it back in your face. Could you hold back the sarcastic laugh that might come when you think of how you could end this ingrate's life, his race, indeed his whole world with just one step?

Even more, could you die for this worm? It sounds preposterous, I know, much as it must have seemed preposterous to the other worlds and creatures who loved Jesus so.

You and I are that sewage-caked worm that our God, highest of all Kings, Ruler of all dominions, eternal and unsurpassable, broke His heart over. He did not regret one act of love, did not threaten, did not demand that we realize who He is. He did not sneer and remind us that we should be grateful that He even stops to listen to us. No, He just gave and gave all the kindness, the benevolence, the abounding love of His own heart. He became a loathsome worm, entered into a sewer and submitted even unto death. Praise our God, for great things He has done.

Consumed by His Anger, Crowned by His Mercy

by Claus
Westermann

LOGOS

"Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits" (Psalm 103:1, 2).

These two calls ("bless the Lord" and "forget not") both have the same meaning. Why did the psalmist express the need to praise God personally? Otherwise all God's benefits might be forgotten. The coordination of "bless" and "forget not" expresses a profound truth: only those who praise do not forget. One may indeed speak in God's presence, and still have forgotten God long ago. One may engage in meditation about God, and still have long since forgotten God. Forgetting God and turning away from God always begins when praise has been silenced. The secret of praise is its ability to make contact with God; through praise one remains with God. The capacity of praise to make contact with God is what enables it to propel the summons of Psalm 103 through the centuries and into the presence of those living today. . . .

Therefore the call at the beginning of Psalm 103 takes on new meaning, placing it at the center of our life today with its problems. The call not to forget God's benefits reminds us of the nexus of realities which integrate our lives and give them meaning. The summons to praise God offers us participation in that which alone is steadfast, which alone can fit into a unified whole the many individual moments that change so rapidly and restlessly. This summons accomplished the same purpose for the one who first uttered it long ago in a world far different from our own.

Praise of God affirms joyfully, thankfully, and with a sense of relief the great power who unites and spans the heights and depths of human existence, "who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy" (vv. 3-4).

The Psalms busily embrace these great contrasts. In never-ending and yet ever-new ways they always circle about one center: all that human existence entails in its mighty, terrifying, and glorious rhythm of loss and rescue, cries for help and shouts of exultation, in victory, capture and release, laughter and weeping. Even more profound and more comprehensive than such contrasts are those of being near to God and far from God. Turning away, revolting, and being indifferent to God can all be restored and healed by the one "who forgives all your iniquity." In a mighty image that needs no further explanation, this psalm magnifies the mystery of the power that integrates the contrasts and disjunctions of human life. Without assistance it encompasses such tremendous dimensions that in its presence those contrasts in human existence which are most jarring become small and insignificant:

"For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us" (vv. 11-12).

. . . The God whom the Psalms praise is not the God of religious conceptualizations but the Lord of the great universe, the Commander of cosmic dimensions. This Lord is by nature able to give meaning and integration to both the high and low points in the lives

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5-10, 123-126. Copy-
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☐ October 24
Monday

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of individuals. . . .

"For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust (v. 14)."

God remembers that we are only dust. God does not forget who we are and what we are. God's great goodness transcends all dimensions and turns to these specks of dust. God considers us tiny, insignificant people worthy of forgiveness, but at the same time does not forget who we are who receive this goodness: perishing human beings.

At this point the summons of the psalm first receives its basic tonality. "You infinitesimally small human, do not forget who unites your little life with the mighty dimension of eternity. Praise, praise with all your being the eternal God for sending fatherly goodness into your little life; for somewhere and in some way your life participates in something which is in sharp contrast with human frailty: the steadfast love of the Lord."

"But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon those who hear him, and his righteousness to children's children" (v. 17).

All this should strike us more forcefully than any previous generation in view of the forces we have learned to unleash and control and the potentially rapid development of the technological masters and servants, promises and threats. The praise of the eternal God, who from dimensions far beyond us pours fatherly goodness into our limited existence, is something which corresponds to the categories in which our generation has learned to think and move. The call not to forget is what gives meaning and direction to the complicated structures of organization, achievement, and failure in which we live. Oh how much our age needs this! And how it secretly waits for it!

. . . We put Psalm 103, with its praise of God's goodness, at the beginning of our study. At the heart of Psalm 90, by contrast stands the statement, ". . . we are consumed by thy anger; by thy wrath we are overwhelmed" (v. 7).

. . . Von Rad has rightly placed this psalm as a neighbor of the book of Ecclesiastes and has drawn attention to the fact that in this psalm the history of salvation has been silenced almost completely. This is something which was more or less part of the whole in community laments, as God's past aid was reviewed. On the basis of the same experience Israel's wisdom must have found its way into the closest proximity to skepticism. The burden of a history in which God seemingly no longer helped his people for centuries at a stretch was a burden too heavy to bear. Nothing of God's goodness was any longer apparent and therefore these people pleaded with God, "Let thy work be manifest to thy servants, and thy glorious power to their children" (v. 16). But just for that reason the first statement of this psalm becomes all the more significant: "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations."

At least this one statement at the beginning reminds us that God became the refuge of his people generation after generation (cf. Ps. 22:3-5). And it is only from the perspective of this introduction that all of Psalm 90 can really be understood. Even if the late generation which expressed its experience of reality in the psalm was far, far

removed from the deed which God once did for the salvation of his people, it also had to see, without making any reservations, that its own reality was characterized by complete instability in the presence of God. "For we are consumed by thy anger. . ." (v. 7).

The fact that this view of reality was still brought before God in worship, the fact that people who could no longer recognize anything of God's activity or of his glory in their world nevertheless pleaded with this angry God who was hidden to them—that fact is based on only one thing, namely that these people still stood in the chain of a tradition in which it was said generation after generation that God could be depended on.

If the contrast in this psalm were only between the *thought* of human instability and *thought* of God's eternity, then these thoughts also would be part of the grass which soon withers. But what is crucial in Psalm 90 is the fact that people with an extremely sober recognition of the transitory nature of human existence . . . called, in the midst of these facts of their own history, on the God who in his anger and wrath stood behind these realities. They continued to plead, "Turn again, Oh Lord, unto us." The venturesomeness of this pleading with the God of wrath, however, was based on the contact which, despite everything, still remained intact, and which this later generation still possessed: the contact with earlier generations and their praise of God.

Thus Psalm 90, with its affirmation of God at the uttermost limits of existence and its extreme restraint, is very far removed from the exuberant praise of God's goodness in Psalm 103; but both "musical modes" make up the genuine tonality of the Psalms. Psalm 90, with its plea for reversal at the verge of *rigor mortis*, stretches out toward a deed of God which might finally make God's words and glory visible. This is one of the statements on the edge of the Old Testament which calls for something entirely new.

In the contrast of Psalms 103 and 90 . . . [there is] the polarity of lament and praise that corresponds to the polarity of God's anger and mercy. The cry to God in the Psalms lives from the fact that the God who sits enthroned high in the heavens looks down into the depths:

**Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.
Before the mountains were brought forth
or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world,
from everlasting to everlasting thou art God (vv. 1-2).**

The Mercy of Jehovah

by Clay Peck

"The psalms of David pass through the whole range of experience, from the depths of conscious guilt and self-condemnation to the loftiest faith and the most exalted communing with God. His life record declares that sin can bring only shame and woe, but that God's love and mercy can reach to the deepest depths, that faith will lift up the repenting soul to share the adoption of the sons of God. Of all the assurance which His word contains, it is one of the strongest testimonies to the faithfulness, the justice, and the covenant mercy of God.

"Man 'fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not,' 'but the word of our God shall stand forever.' 'The mercy of Jehovah is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him, and His righteousness unto children's children; to such as keep His covenant, and to those that remember His commandments to do them.' (Job 14:2; Isa. 40:8; Ps. 103:17, 18)."¹

When we, like David, having experienced the guilt and shame of sin, come to God for forgiveness and realize the "the mercy of Jehovah is from everlasting to everlasting," our response should be, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits; who pardons all your iniquities; who heals all your diseases; who redeems your life from the pit; who crowns you with loving kindness and compassion" (Psalm 103:2-4, NASB).

"What sins are too great for His pardon? He is merciful, and as such is infinitely more ready and more pleased to pardon, than to condemn. He is gracious, not looking for wrong in us; He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are but dust. In His boundless compassion and mercy, He heals all our backsliding, loving us freely while we are yet sinners. . . ."²

"Have you fallen into sin? Then without delay seek God for mercy and pardon. . . . Mercy is still extended to the sinner. The Lord is calling to us in all our wanderings: 'Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings.' The blessing of God may be ours if we will heed the pleading of His Spirit."³

"The mercies of God surround you every moment. . . . Let the precious blessings of God awaken gratitude in you. You cannot number the blessings of God, the constant loving-kindness expressed to you, for they are as numerous as the refreshing drops of rain. Clouds of mercy are hanging over you, ready to drop on you. If you will appreciate the valuable gift of salvation, you will be sensible to the daily refreshment of the protection and love of Jesus; you will be guided in the way of peace."⁴

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Isaiah 40:8;
Job 14:2

"He is infinitely more pleased to pardon, than to condemn."

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 754.
2. *Selected Messages*, Book 2, p. 231.
3. *Testimonies*, Vol. 5, p. 177.
4. *Messages to Young People*, p. 409, 410.

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October 25
Tuesday

A Reason for Hope

by Rodney Vance

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Hosea 1:2, 3;
3:1-3

A popular song contains the lyrics "Nothing to Live for, nothing to die for; we're lost in the middle of a hopeless world." There was once a young man who sensed the hopelessness of the world around him and determined to do something about it. Acting on impulse, he went to the red light district downtown, met a prostitute, and married her. Together they had three children and then she decided she had had enough. The young man found her back in the red light district where she had resumed her former trade.

Perhaps foolishly, he decided to forgive her and brought her back home. It wasn't long until the young man was back downtown looking for his wife. This happened repeatedly until the wife became too old to ply her trade successfully and stayed home. The young man never gave up on her, never stopped accepting her back.

Sound incredible? Yes. But the Bible tells a story like that. The prostitute's name was Gomer and the young man's name was Hosea. Their story is a parable of God's continued love and acceptance of us despite our repeated unfaithfulness to him.

John 3:16 also tells of God's love for us and His desire to have a relationship with us. But there is more to the story. In 1 John the writer makes it clear what part two is. If God so loves us, He loves all of us. When we believe that God loves us we will also believe that He loves everyone else. This gives other people dignity no matter how they behave or what they look or smell like. If we don't love our brother we don't really believe God loves him either and probably wonder whether He even loves us, sinners that we are.

"The young man never stopped accepting her back."

What does it mean to love my brother? "He has shown thee O man what is good. And what doth the Lord require of thee; but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God" (Micah 6:8). We are to work toward justice for our neighbor as we require justice for ourselves. We are to exercise compassion and mercy toward another's sins even as God is merciful to us. We must share hope with the hopeless around us even as God has given us hope.

When we think of God's acceptance for us as illustrated in the simple story of Hosea we are overwhelmed with the inadequacy of our love to our brother and the completeness, the perfection of God's love for us. It is then we can say with the psalmist,

Bless the Lord, O my soul:

and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

Bless the Lord, O my soul,

and forget not all his benefits:

Who forgiveth all thine iniquities;

who healeth all thy diseases;

Who redeemeth thy life from destruction;

who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies.

—Psalm 103:1-4

What We Deserve and What We Get

by John L. Conway

Psalms 90 and 103 paint a picture in which the chasm between God and humanity forms the background. We see mountains being made, thousands of years passing like single days, and swirling smoke from God's wrath. Humans become frail blades of grass in a vast field where their coming and going are nothing. But shining through is a bright light that illuminates a scene so wide we cannot see either end, a scene so tall we cannot see the top. The closer we examine it, the more intricate and beautiful it becomes, until we are overwhelmed. It is God's love for man and the benefits we receive. What can we learn from some of the details in this picture?

1. Take a close look at the cause for the chasm. The chasm is caused by sin so terrible it caused alienation between God and a world He created out of love; sin that has wracked this world with evil so deeply we cannot imagine its reaches; sin that has deceived men so completely that a right concept of their Maker is (nearly) hidden in a confusion of theories; sin so awful that it broke the Saviour's heart and caused a separation between Him and His Father that no other ever experienced.

2. Then look at what God has done. Through that nearly opaque barrier of sin, He reveals Himself to each of us according to our own unique needs. Keep searching! You will find Him in a way meant only for you.

3. Now dig deep into the story of our redemption. What did Jesus give up when He voluntarily came into this world? What were the forces He encountered during His mission to us? What was the result of His taking on human nature?

When we take the time to examine the answers to these questions we begin to discover the magnitude of His gift. Still limited by sinful nature, only through Him can our minds grasp themes in His life clearly. As this process continues, love grows, our faith strengthens, our dependence on Him increases, and suddenly God is not as far away and inaccessible as we thought.

HOW TO
Key text:
Romans 5:15-21

Numbering Our Days Aright

OPINION

Key text:
Psalm 90:12

Apparently the author of Psalm 90 wasn't aware of the importance of building self-esteem. He's not interested in making us feel good about ourselves. In contrast to a majestic and eternal God we are merely dust that returns to dust (vs. 3), or blades of grass that spring up in the morning only to have the sun scorch us into oblivion by evening (vs. 5, 6). Worse yet, our corruption places us under the terrifying wrath of this holy God, whose light exposes everything about us (vs. 7-9).

The psalmist views such candid self-assessment as valuable rather than destructive. For only if we "number our days aright"—only if we see our ephemeral, sin-ridden existence for what it is—will we "gain a heart of wisdom" (vs. 12, NIV).

But there is more to this wisdom than acknowledging the gap between the sinful mortality of humanity and the righteous immortality of divinity. Psalm 103 also compares us to dust and grass (vs. 14, 15), but then adds that "from everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear him . . . with those who keep his covenant" (vs. 17, 18, NIV). When we enter the covenant with God our ephemeral lives take on a new cosmic significance grounded in God's eternity. As Derek Kidner observes, God's eternity "is the answer, not simply the antithesis, to our homelessness and brevity of life."¹

We become linked to an everlasting reality—God's covenantal love, and the depressing picture of who we are in the 90th Psalm is countered by a wondrously beautiful picture of what this covenantal love involves. It involves forgiveness—God doesn't treat us as our sins deserve (vs. 3, 10). It involves compassion—He knows our frailties (vs. 4, 14). It involves healing (vs. 3), redemption (vs. 4) and renewal (vs. 5).

So, numbering our days aright means viewing our existence in the perspective of God's eternity and His character. Perhaps, then, the wisdom that comes from numbering our days aright means that we now assess the value of what takes place in our *present* mortal existence in terms of the ways in which eternity impinges upon us, not in terms of chronological duration, accomplishments, acquisition or gratification.

With this wisdom, nourishing relationships with people becomes more important than the frenetic striving to achieve, to get, and to win that makes life a blur. Taking time to encourage a lonely friend may become more important than getting the top grade on the exam. Including the "jerk" in a social event may become more important than having the greatest time possible. Speaking out on a controversial social issue like nuclear weapons or pollution may become more important than ease or security. Responding to the demands of the everlasting covenant, enacting in our lives God's eternal characteristics of compassion, healing, patience, forgiveness and love become the centralities of life.

If we do not number our days aright, then the plight expressed by the ephemeral on the Moulin Joly bush in Benjamin Franklin's essay is ours:

I cannot expect to live above seven or eight minutes longer. What now avails all my toil and labor, in amassing honeydew on this leaf, which I can-

1. Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975), p. 328.
2. Benjamin Franklin, "The Ephemera" in *A Benjamin Franklin Reader* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1945), pp. 728, 729.

not live to enjoy! What the political struggles I have been engaged in. . . . My friends would comfort me with the idea of a name, they say I shall leave behind me. . . . But what will fame be to an ephemera who no longer exists? And what will become of all history in the eighteenth hour, when the world itself, even the whole Moulin Joly, shall come to its end, and be buried in universal ruin?²

D. F. M.

REACT Lesson 5

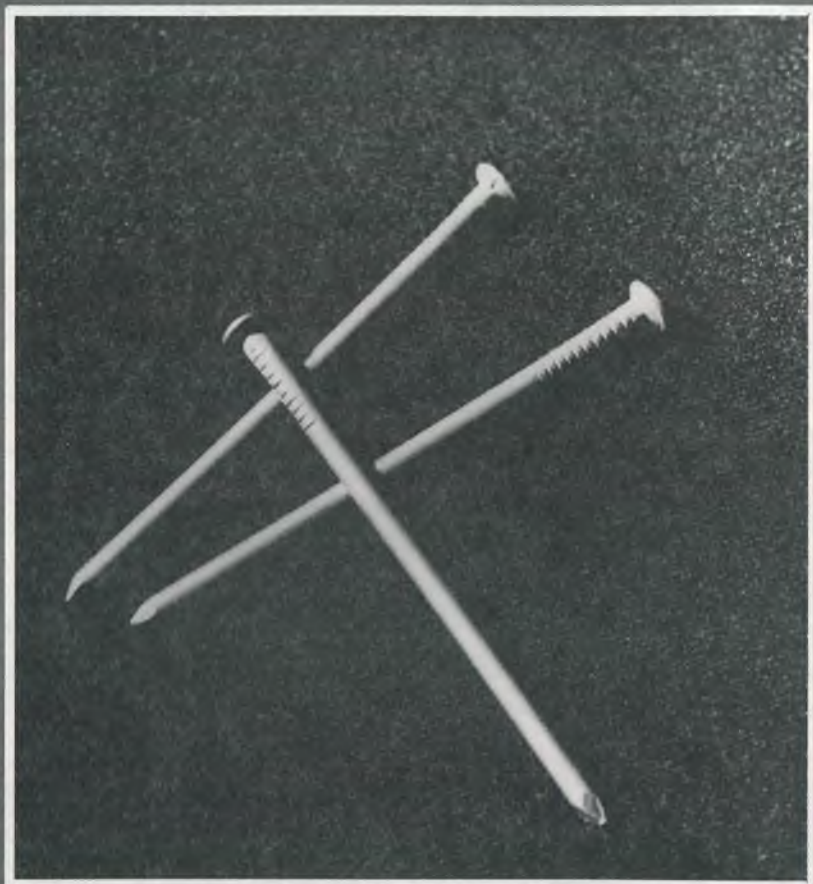
1. Is the "worm analogy" in the Introduction an accurate representation of our relationship to God? Should we think of ourselves as worms? Why or why not?
2. How would you describe the tone or attitude of Psalm 90? How does it compare with the tone of Psalm 103?
3. Does Psalm 90 disturb you in any way? How do you interpret phrases like "we are consumed by thy anger" (vs. 6) and "all our days pass away under thy wrath, our years come to an end like a sigh" (vs. 9)? See Logos for some ideas.
4. Discuss Claus Westermann's comments (Logos) on the value of praise. In what other ways is praise valuable? In what ways might we as Adventists better express praise to God?
5. Identify the "benefits" of the Lord expressed in Psalm 103. Discuss what each means to you. Can you add benefits from your experience to David's list?
6. What parallels do you see between the way Hosea related to his wife (see Evidence) and the way God relates to us according to Psalm 103:8-18?
7. The Opinion author suggests that a proper understanding of life in the light of Psalm 90 and 103 should lead us to a reassessment of values. Do you agree or disagree with the examples he suggests? Are there other common values that need to be rethought in view of these psalms?

6

Psalm of Christ's Suffering

Psalm 22

October 30-November 5



*"My God, my God, why have you
forsaken me?"
(Psalm 22:1, NIV).*

by Barry Casey

His Agony Remains

INTRODUCTION

The mad Roman emperor Caligula, in Albert Camus' play of the same name mutters despairingly that "men die, and they are not happy." Thousands of years ago the Buddha awoke to the truth that all existence is suffering, and the secret of life is found in the recognition that misery governs all our movements. Filled with heartache at the sudden death of his daughter, Sigmund Freud wrote to a friend that "The undisguised brutality of our time weighs heavily on us."¹ Crushed beneath his pain, humiliation, and loneliness, Jesus bar-Joseph, a Galilean carpenter and lay teacher, cried out from a Roman crucifix, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Suffering smashes us in the face every day. There is no escaping it. To close one's eyes to the suffering in the world is virtually to blind oneself. How are we to respond? Should we try to ignore it, or should we resist evil and suffering with all our strength? Is it more "Christian" to suffer silently or to cry out against the suffering?

Christians have always seen in the death of Jesus Christ the paradigm of love in all its fullness. They have ventured to say, when they have had the courage, that the way of the cross is the way of discipleship.

I see the face of Jesus, twisted and contorted in agony, long before He is nailed to the cross, yes, farther back, at the tomb of Lazarus. He stares at the cold stone, trembling, His fingertips brushing its roughness, but

He is not seeing stone. He is staring into the face of Death and calling upon His Father for strength to stare it down. His heart breaks for the suffering of His friends and He fights against the evil of death.

Why does He not struggle against His own suffering, then? Why does He remain there on the cross? He remains because He knows that none of us can evade our own suffering; we must meet it and render it impotent by absorbing its heaviest blows. When Jesus cries out in anguish and loneliness from the cross, He is not begging to be let down—He is meeting evil alone, without any friend. Not even God can help Him, for He is to overcome Death by willingly taking Death upon Himself.

What are we to do in the face of evil? In following the way of Jesus we are to protest mightily against the suffering inflicted on others. We are to resist evil and try in every way to thwart it, limit it, deflect it. But when we are ourselves faced with suffering how will we respond?

We will find the courage to meet our suffering when we remember that because Jesus had to be forsaken by God we are never forsaken. We may feel forsaken in the moment, we may plumb the depths of our loneliness, but we may still trust that when death and despair grind us down, God's triumph in Christ's resurrection guarantees our triumph. Our suffering is not simply our own—it is Christ's also. Our death is not our end, for our resurrection and hope is in Christ.

1. Quoted in S. Paul Schilling, *God and Human Anguish*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1977), p. 17.

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☐ October 30
Sunday

Never Abandoned

LOGOS

As a child, one of my greatest fears was that of being abandoned by my father. This groundless phobia was simply the result of an overactive childish imagination. My father often assured me of this, but upon his leaving me alone in the car to get some small item from the store that chilling fear would come rushing back. My fearful mind would stretch seconds into hours and in my distress I would begin to wonder: "Is he ever going to come back? Has he left me?" Fountains of tears were shed before my little heart was assured that Daddy always came back and that he never would abandon me.

Hanging on the cross, abandoned and alone, Christ was for the first time in His existence separated from His Father. In all the eons of past eternity, He and His Father had been as one. But now He was alone. As fear tore at His heart He cried out: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46, NIV).

In uttering these words from Psalm 22 Christ was not so much fulfilling prophecy as He was giving expression to the anguish of His soul caused by His acceptance of the full result of human degradation—separation from God. In so doing, Christ identified Himself with the human condition, took upon Himself more than we will ever have to endure. To all there comes a time when it seems that God is far away, and that He has forsaken us. Yet, "the crucified victim was the *only* forsaken one, the true derelict. The rest of us die in company, in *his* company. God certified his gift and his act and 'raised him up.' Never again is aloneness to be so stark for others."¹

But through all this, the excruciating pain of His wounds, the agonizing guilt of the sins of all humanity and the black pain of being separated from His Father, Christ never allowed despair to take complete control. This He was able to do because He gave more thought to the needs of others than to His own. While hanging on the cross Christ made provision for His mother, gave comfort to a criminal, and in the prayer, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34), he sought mercy for His persecutors.

Though Christ could no longer sense His Father's presence, He didn't forget His Father's past faithfulness. He remembered that "In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted you and you delivered them. They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not disappointed" (Psalm 22:4, 5, NIV). Thus, as He died, He was able to call out in faith, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46, NIV).

In times of lonely despair we may feel like David, who said, "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death" (Psalm 22:14, 15, NIV). But we can take comfort because in the example of Christ and in God's past faithfulness we can see that "he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help" (Psalm 22:24, NIV). Our hearts can be assured; we will never be abandoned.

E. R. M.

1. Martin E. Marty, *A Cry of Absence*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1983), pp. 139.

The Supreme Anguish

by Leonard A. Hawley

Christ Suffers

"And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified Him."

"That He might sanctify the people with His own blood," Christ "suffered without the gate" (Heb. 13:12). For transgression of the law of God, Adam and Eve were banished from Eden. Christ, our substitute, was to suffer without the boundaries of Jerusalem. . . . Full of significance are the words, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13).¹

Upon Christ as our substitute and surety was laid the iniquity of us all. He was counted a transgressor, that He might redeem us from the condemnation of the law. . . . The withdrawal of the divine countenance from the Saviour in this hour of supreme anguish pierced His heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man.²

Then "Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" "My God, My God, why has Thou forsaken Me?" As the outer gloom settled about the Saviour, many voices exclaimed: The vengeance of heaven is upon Him."³

The enemies of Jesus vented their rage upon Him as He hung upon the cross. Priests, rulers, and scribes joined with the mob in mocking the dying Saviour. . . . Alone He suffered abuse and mockery from wicked men.⁴

In the sufferings of Christ upon the cross prophecy was fulfilled. Centuries before the crucifixion, the Saviour had foretold the treatment He was to receive. He said, "Dogs have compassed Me: the assembly of the wicked have enclosed Me: they pierced My hands and My feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon Me. They part My garments among them, and cast lots for My vesture" (Ps. 22:16-18).⁵

Christ Understands

He who took humanity upon Himself knows how to sympathize with the sufferings of humanity. Not only does Christ know every soul, and the peculiar needs and trials of that soul, but He knows all the circumstances that chafe and perplex the spirit. His hand is outstretched in pitying tenderness to every suffering child, those who suffer most have most of his sympathy and pity. He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and He desires us to lay our perplexities and troubles at His feet and leave them there.⁶

By His life and His death, Christ proved that God's justice did not destroy His mercy, but that sin could be forgiven, and that the law is righteous, and can be perfectly obeyed. Satan's charges were refuted. God had given man unmistakable evidence of His love.⁷

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Hebrews 2:9, 10

"... those who suffer most have most of his sympathy and pity."

1. *Desire of Ages*, p. 741.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 753.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 754.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 746.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ministry of Healing*, p. 249.

7. *Desire of Ages*, p. 762.

A Schizophrenic Psalmist?

by Roy Benton

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Matthew
27:35-46

The 22nd Psalm seems at first to be the work of a split personality. The tortured author of the first half (vs. 1-21) cries out bitterly to God for not rescuing him from a lonely persecution. Using the Hebrew couplet form in which each line is rephrased for emphasis, he moans:

O my God, I cry in the day-time but thou dost not answer,
in the night I cry but get no respite (vs. 1, 2, NEB).

Further, the psalmist complains, God's good reputation is undeserved; God has left him to languish helplessly as if surrounded by wild animals or hunters (vs. 10-21). His physical imagery is searing, and aches with the agony of self-pity and defeat:

My strength drains away like water
and all my bones are loose.

My heart has turned to wax and melts within me (vs. 14, NEB).

Then abruptly, and without any apparent response from God to warrant a change in attitude, the opposite personality emerges. The psalmist of vs. 22-31, far from sitting alone and brooding over human misery and blaming God for ignoring it, is actually leading a congregational hymn of praise to a deserving God who looks after those who suffer:

Stand in awe of him, all sons of Israel.

For he has not scorned the downtrodden . . .

but gave heed to him when he cried out (vs. 23, 24, NEB).

**"Who has
never felt
a desperate
spiritual
loneliness?"**

Though some literary critics have supposed that the two halves were composed in different moods or even by different authors, the psalm as a unit appears in early manuscripts and was apparently used that way in Hebrew liturgical services. At least someone, therefore, must have found the two personalities more meaningful when put together.

A unifying explanation that I prefer begins with the fact that the gospel writers clearly identify Jesus' sufferings with those of the psalmist. Matthew and Mark record that Jesus, in His most anguished throes of physical and mental torment, uttered the psalmist's opening words of desperate isolation: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34). All four gospels mention that Jesus was fastened to a cross, and cite the detail that Jesus' clothes were divided; John, in fact, quotes directly from Psalm 22 (see Psalm 22:16-18; Matt. 27:35, 36; Mark 15:23, 24; Luke 23:33-35; John 19:17, 23, 24). In these verses, I see the gospels as first emphasizing Jesus' utter humanity. Who of us, like the psalmist, has not felt "like a worm, not a man" (vs. 6) after we have been cast off by a close friend or lover, cut to ribbons by a teacher in front of our peers, or been the victim of a cruel joke? Who has never felt a desperate spiritual loneliness or, during painful passages, that God "helped people back in Bible times," but doesn't seem to care anymore?

But the story doesn't stop there. This same Jesus, gaunt and frail on Friday, burst suddenly from the tomb on Sunday. Though there were not reassuring words from the Father during the hour of torment, the mighty act of the resurrection renders them unnecessary, and proves that the psalmist's dark night of the spirit can, with legitimate swiftness, break forth unannounced in the divine light of morning.

When We Also Suffer

by David M. Ritter

Why have you forsaken me, my God? Why do you seem so far away? Why don't you hear the words I groan? I'm crying out to you . . . why don't you answer?

Every Christian at times has cried out, if only silently, in words like these. As God's presence becomes more unreal or less certain, we flounder, grasping to find meaning—or a reason—for this supposed separation. Consider, if you will, a few ideas to put our "separation problem" in perspective.

1. **"Why?" is a question that God has never promised to answer.** You will find a great scarcity of scriptural instances where the Lord responds to questions about His unsearchable providences. God's decision-making criteria are not entirely accessible to our understanding, and we must accept the fact that, this side of the Kingdom, "why?" is the wrong theme for prayer.

2. **When we are at the end of our rope we are closer to God than at any other time.** At the end of *my* rope is the point where I am finally able to learn that my strength is not sufficient—that I really cannot save myself. This kind of insight rarely comes to us in times of relative comfort. Only in adversity are we inescapably reminded of our need for Jesus and our helplessness to make ourselves find Him.

3. **We must look higher than ourselves.** If I will stop floundering in my own despair, which would only serve to drag me further down, I can reach out to the Rock that is higher than me. Looking for it, and believing He is there, is an essential step in finding deliverance.

4. **Recall how the Lord has led you, and others, in the past.** Dwell on the victories the Lord has given you, on those times He has answered your prayers. Open your Bible and find examples of others who were delivered through the Lord's response to their prayer. Visualize the victory, and believe that the Lord is able to see you through.

Finally, when Job demanded to know the meaning of his misfortunes, the Lord "answered" him without answering him. This "answer" in Job 38 through 41 might be summarized this way:

5. **"There are things you will never understand. Trust Me anyway. Have faith that I love you, and that I hear when you call upon My name."**

HOW TO

Key text:
2 Corinthians
12:7-10

Following the Crucified One

by Ken Mulzac

OPINION

Key text:
Isaiah 53:5, 12

The tone of the twenty-second Psalm is messianic. It boldly portrays Christ as the core of its experience. The song falls into two parts. The first is of terrible agony and utter despair. It depicts Christ in the dreaded darkness of His suffering and desolation. The forces of evil shut out the light of God and wrung from his broken heart the bitter cry of anguish, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" (Psalm 22:1; Matt. 27:46). It paints a picture of the scorn and derision of a blood-thirsty mob, of the agony of His emaciated and tortured frame, of the crude execution which involved the piercing of hands and feet.

Yet there is no confession of sin, no word of remorse from the Sufferer. Certainly, if words of such deep distress and lament were descriptive of David's own sorrows, there would have been some confession of sin. Such grief, without contrition, can be appropriate only of the Man of Sorrows.

The second part of the psalm assumes a new theme, a sweeter, higher-sounding melody. We feel the glory and triumph: the consequences of the Sufferer's woes and deliverance. We are moved as we realize the entire congregation of Israel is to learn more of God through the Sufferer's situation. Indeed, the Psalmist's vision includes all lands and ages as he declares that through such sufferings "all the ends of the earth shall remember and turn unto the Lord" (Psalm 22:27).

Clearly, such universal and eternal consequences can follow one life only. However, to understand this psalm we must remember that "He was wounded for *our* transgressions, He was bruised for *our* iniquities" and that "He poured out His soul unto death (Isa. 53:5, 12)." If we are truly to understand the treasures of this psalm, we must follow the leading of the Crucified One.

But *how* do we follow? Is it as simple as "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved"? Yes, but there is more.

First, Jeremiah promises that we shall find the Lord if we search with committed hearts (Jer. 29:13), and if we do not turn back.

Second, Jesus promised that "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Following Christ is an active pursuit, rather than a passive involvement. In the process of understanding Jesus to be "The Truth" (John 14:6), we shall indeed be made free.

Finally, Jesus promised that we would be sanctified through the truth (John 17:17). Since Jesus *is* the visible Word of God, and since we grasp who Jesus is through the diligent study of the Scriptures (John 5:39), we should not become discouraged in our pursuit of the Crucified One, but seek to become people "rightly trained, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).

1. How should the suffering of others evoke in us a different reaction than our own suffering? Why or why not? What does Christ's example teach us about this?
2. Do you think Psalm 22 was primarily a prophecy about Jesus, or was it mainly an expression of the psalmist's experience, which Jesus and the gospel writers later applied to Calvary (see Matt. 27:35-46)? Could both be true? See the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, pp. 37, 38 and F. F. Bruce, *New Testament Development of Old Testament Themes*, pp. 17-21 for further study.
3. How do you explain the abrupt transition from abandonment and complaint to praise and assurance in Psalm 22? Discuss Roy Benton's view that a "unifying explanation" is found in the death and resurrection of Christ (see Evidence). What does Benton mean and what is your reaction?
4. In what ways are the emotions expressed in Psalm 22 similar and dissimilar to your spiritual experience?
5. Is it sinful to feel abandonment and despair? Does looking to God always bring an immediate solution to such feelings?
6. This week's How To says that "why" is the wrong theme for prayer since we never know all the answers anyway. Do you agree or disagree? Explain. Were the "whys" of the psalmist and Jesus ever answered? If so, how?

7

How Love Responds

Psalms 50 and 51

November 6-12



*"Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow"
(Psalm 51:7, NIV).*

Reactions to the Prophetic Word

by Derris Krause

INTRODUCTION

Psalm 50 is the beginning of a prophetic message that has lasted hundreds of years. God, in speaking of temple sacrifices, says that they are becoming ritualistic with little devotion. He requests sacrifices of the people, but in the same breath He reminds Israel that He doesn't need the sacrifices for Himself.

"I have no need of a bull . . . or of goats from your pens . . .

Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?" (vs. 9, 13, NIV).

He then continues, suggesting that there is more to religion and spirituality than empty form. It is meaningless, He says, to repeat the law and keep on stealing, to recite the covenant and then commit adultery, and for the liar to offer a sacrifice. God says the sacrifice is not complete until the person offering the sacrifice opens himself to salvation.

Using the voice of the prophets, God would make the message of Psalm 50 His theme until the Jewish nation went into exile. As the centuries passed, the sacrifices became even less meaningful and more perverted. God's words on the subject became strong and harsh:

"Will you steal, murder, commit adultery and perjury . . . and then come stand before me in this house which bears my name . . . ?

Go ahead, add your burnt offerings to your other sacrifices and eat the meat yourselves!" (Jer. 7:9, 21, NIV)

Prophets won few friends speaking these words. Their message from God was not appreciated. Lives were lost for such condemnations. Uriah, for example, was killed by the king of Judah himself, with the aid of princes and warriors (see Jer. 26:20-23).

Psalm 51 is David's response to God's strong (and harsh) message carried by Nathan, the prophet. Nathan delivered the stern rebuke while David was struggling through a messy and illicit affair with Bathsheba. The message was only slightly different than the words God spoke in Psalm 50. God told David that he cannot lust, murder, steal, covet, and lie and at the same time build a righteous nation. Realizing that the words of the prophet were God's words of warning and correction, David repented. His response was ideal.

He made no attempt to escape the message or silence the messenger. Rather, he fell on his face and opened himself to God's salvation. His prayer is recorded in Psalm 51:

"Have mercy on me, O God . . .

Against you, you only have I sinned . . .

Cleanse me . . .

Wash me . . .

Create in me a pure heart . . .

Then there will be righteous sacrifices,
Whole burnt offerings to delight you" (vs. 1, 4, 7, 10, 19, NIV).

God's messengers can still be heard. Their voices still proclaim His will. Our future depends on how we respond.

Sacrifice of the Heart

LOGOS

God's response of love is most strikingly revealed in the contrast between the 50th and 51st Psalms. In the former, God presents Himself as the demanding judge decrying the quality of homage offered Him. The latter reveals a merciful and understanding father-figure. This dual perception is essential to the understanding of God as Judge in Psalms.

In Psalm 50 God deplores the spirit in which the Israelites performed their sacrificial responsibilities. When God first instituted the sacrificial system, He intended that it should be representative of a heart sacrifice. But His people had turned it into a ritual of animal slaughter. They had adopted the pagan attitude of the need for constant appeasement of a vengeful God. But the Divine Judge was not pleased with this misapplication of His ordinances and demands an explanation: "Hear, O my people, and I will speak, O Israel, and I will testify against you: I am God, your God . . . I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it. Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?" (Psalm 50:7, 9-13, NIV). Here God shows that He is more interested in internal motives than in external actions.

However, this manifestation of the demanding Judge is only a part of the whole. It is tempered by David's perception of God in the next chapter. After the awful implications of his sin with Bathsheba struck home, David was consumed with anguish and guilt. His pleading to God the *merciful* judge found expression in Psalm 51. "Have mercy on me, O God," he cried, "according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgression. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin" (Psalm 51:1, 2, NIV).

David knew that he had sinned against God; this caused him deep remorse. But his knowledge of the merciful qualities of the Divine Judge drove him to beg for forgiveness. So he prayed, "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. . . . You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart . . ." (Psalm 51:10-12, 16, 17, NIV). David truly understood the dual nature of his Judge—uncompromising requirements balanced by uncompromising love. He learned first-hand that sacrifice alone is a tainted and corrupt offering, but sacrifice of the heart yields complete acquittal at the judgment bar of God.

S. D. P./L. R. C.

Repentance: Gift or Achievement?

by Albert Frederico

Is sorrow for sin, and turning away from it, something we actively do or passively receive? Or both?

Sometimes it sounds as though the effort is ours: "Heed the counsel of the True Witness. Buy gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich, white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and eyesalve that thou mayest see. Make some effort. These precious treasures will not drop upon us without some exertion on our part. We must buy,—'be zealous and repent' of our lukewarm state. We must be awake to see our wrongs, to search for our sins, and to zealously repent of them."¹

At other times we understand that repentance is a gift to receive. Ellen White, quoting Psalm 51:1-14, cites David's experience as one of true repentance, and says of it: "A repentance such as this is beyond the reach of our own power to accomplish; it is obtained only from Christ who ascended up on high and has given gifts unto men."²

She further pictures the sinner as a recipient of repentance in these words: "The sinner may resist this love, may refuse to be drawn to Christ; but if he does not resist he will be drawn to Jesus; a knowledge of the plan of salvation will lead him to the foot of the cross in repentance for his sins, which have caused the sufferings of God's dear Son."³

For the most part, though, Ellen White takes the position that we both receive repentance and repent. Note the care she takes to give a balanced view: "Without the divine working, man could do no good thing. God calls every man to repentance, yet man cannot even repent unless the Holy Spirit works upon his heart. But the Lord wants no man to wait until he thinks that he has repented before he takes steps toward Jesus. The Saviour is continually drawing men to repentance; they need only to submit to be drawn, and their hearts will be melted in penitence.

"Man is allotted a part in this great struggle for everlasting life; he must respond to the working of the Holy Spirit. It will require a struggle to break through the powers of darkness, and the Spirit works in him to accomplish this. But man is no passive being, to be saved in indolence. He is called upon to strain every muscle and exercise every faculty in the struggle for immortality; yet it is God that supplies the efficiency. No human being can be saved in indolence."⁴

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Psalm 32: 3-5

"The Lord wants no man to wait until he thinks that he has repented before he takes steps toward Jesus."

1. *Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 142.
2. *Steps to Christ*, p. 25.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
4. *Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 64, 65.

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November 8
Tuesday

Heart Response

by Greg Prout

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Proverbs 23:26

Forgetting who God is engenders all kinds of deception within man, and invites judgment. Such is the case in Psalm 50 where a judgment scene is described for two classes of God's people: (1) the religious (vs. 7-15) and (2) the reprobate (vs. 16-21). Both have forgotten God (vs. 22), both are called to judgment by God Himself (vs. 6).

The first group, His "godly ones" (NASB, vs. 5), think the essence of a religious experience lies in rites and ceremonies, and the frequency of this exercise. In vs. 8-11, God clearly points out He doesn't need such religious exercise. Ritual has an uncanny way of producing a kind of pseudo-peace, a feeling of well-being that because you've done something "religious" everything's okay, safe, secure. Sacrifices and other religious calisthenics are only vehicles to lead us to God—not ends in themselves. The religion of the ancient Hebrews, not unlike our own, at times degenerated into a beguiling process of salvation by works. God's not in the marketplace for a repertoire of religious exercises, well meaning as they might be, but He does want our hearts (Prov. 23:26).

The second group (vs. 16-21) is deluded by the idea that God thinks as they do (vs. 21), that He dismisses the ugly nature of sin, and excuses unlawful, pernicious behavior (vs. 17-20). This group apparently feels it doesn't matter how they live, and God doesn't really care either, since they don't.

These two classes of God's people have forgotten the character and nature of their Creator, and that's never profitable. It inevitably affects the way we respond to Him, either by shaping our response in error, or leading us not to respond at all.

What's significant for the reader is the way God addressed these errant Hebrews. The NASB (50:1) describes God as "the Mighty One, God, the Lord. . . ." In the Hebrew (English transliteration) these are (1) *EI*, the all-powerful, omnipotent One, (2) *Elohim*, which emphasizes God as the creating, unified Godhead, and (3) *Yahweh* or *Jehovah*, the "One who is," the self-existent One, or "the Being." Underlined here is God's timelessness and underived life. He addresses His children as the complete God, all-powerful, the One in whom their being originates. He comes to them in His fullness to awaken them from their deception, which seeks to destroy them.

The response God longs to have from His offspring is thanksgiving (50:14, 23). Thanksgiving must emanate from the heart. As we encounter God in His fullness and understand that He seeks not our destruction, but our fellowship, thanksgiving takes root in our beings. We see the development of this kind of heart-response so vividly in Psalm 51. There David, liar, adulterer, murderer, responds to God knowing that He is gracious, loving, kind, compassionate—capable of forgiving and cleansing from sin (vs. 1, 2). He understands that all sin is against God (vs. 4), and within this framework of honesty and soul-confession, thanksgiving and praise are born (vs. 15). David knows God does not want empty religious form or slain bullocks, but a heart freely given from a life where sin is broken and where nothing is desired but the Lord Himself.

"Ritual has an uncanny way of producing a kind of pseudo-peace . . ."

Respond to Me

I want a response from you. Be hot or cold. This secure, insipid complacency of yours grieves Me. You give Me offerings and tithes, you come to church, you sing, you pray, but I want you the other days as well—when you are skiing, studying anthropology, or programming your computer. Think of Me while you choose your cat-sup, invest your money and chat with friends. I want to be your life!

I am a terrible God with power as a “devouring fire” and a “mighty tempest;” but I have given you choice, thus I am limited. I want you. I love you, but I can do nothing without a “broken spirit,” a willingness to sacrifice all, not just one day, or one sin, but your will to govern yourself. I have made you strong, but I have also made you in My image. The closer relationship you have with Me, the more you become what you were meant to be from the beginning. This does not mean you will become a puppet, only that your true self will shine forth—the way I created you—loving, joyful, content. Are things so good now that you cannot give them up for this, for Me?

The forms and the traditions are fine because they remind you of Me; you must remember though, that it is not these that please Me, but the attitude behind the practice. Rules and regulations only act as guides to a better relationship, they are not the means. It is not bad actions that take you away from Me, but the attitude that you are in when you do them. Your willingness, your sacrifice of self, your humble, contrite spirit are the actual way of allowing Me in.

Take an example from David. His penitent prayer for an action that lead him away from Me went through phases of godly grief, apology, changing that action, realization that he is forgiven, and coming again into a close relationship with Me and rejoicing in that. His joy over unconditional acceptance led him to share My grace with others.¹

If you pray for a change in your life, I will help you do the rest. Your past is behind and you are new. I can change tendencies, habits and even heredity.² I will blot out your iniquities and create in you a clean heart.³ It is your choice.

Look for Me. The stars shine, the sun sets and rises in beauty. In these my righteousness is declared. I am God, your God.⁴ I love you. Love me. Respond . . . to Me.

HOW TO
Key text:
Zechariah 4:6

1. Harold Lindsell, *Harper Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1965), p. 821.
2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 671.
3. Psalm 51:9, 10.
4. Psalm 50:6, 7.

Zion Grows Up

by RosAnne Tetz

OPINION

Key text:
Psalm 51:10-12

Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development makes sense to me. By understanding and applying his theories, teachers can help their students mature in moral reasoning. There are three levels, each divided into two stages. At Level One moral situations are interpreted in terms of punishment and reward, with deference to authority. Those at the second level make decisions based on a desire to please others and because of a desire to maintain the social order. Those few who reach the third level recognize that laws are often arbitrary and may need to be changed. They then can become capable of independent moral judgments in terms of general principles and personal conscience.

Kohlberg has found that an individual advances through these stages in sequence and that some never progress beyond the first level. A person will not be able to comprehend moral reasoning more than one stage above their own. He will, however, be attracted to the stage immediately beyond his own, and will move to the next stage when he sees that his is inadequate. In addition, he tends to disdain the reasoning of the stages below his own. This explains why you might be horrified at the summer camp type of story where a boy goes swimming on Sabbath and is immediately bitten by hundreds of water moccasins. To a nine-year-old who is reasoning at Stage One and thinking of good and bad in terms of physical consequences, the story makes perfect sense. In turn, if you tried to teach this nine-year-old about righteousness by faith you might be able to train him to mouth the correct response, but he will probably not comprehend the concept.

God, of course, figured all this in before Kohlberg thought of it. In Psalms 50 and 51 He speaks to everyone, no matter what moral level they have reached. And as a good Teacher, He tries to help His students move up to successive stages. Psalm 50:22, 23 says, in effect, "Disobey and I'll tear you to pieces. Obey and receive salvation." Easy to understand. But God wants more than blind obedience. He wants to affect our entire way of life. So He tries to nudge us up the ladder of moral thinking. In chapter 50 He appears as a Judge, an appealing figure to those at Level Two who see law and order as the only way to maintain society. "What right have you to recite my laws," He asks, "You who hate correction?" (vs. 16, 17, RSV).

Finally, God creates cognitive dissonance for those at Levels One and Two by introducing ideas of abstract thinking. This dissonance may cause them to want to move up to the next stage. In Chapter 51 we hear from David, a mature, principled thinker who understands the deeper significance of a true offering: "My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit" (vs. 17, RSV). With the concepts of mercy, restoration and forgiveness firmly in his grasp, he seeks a radically changed life: "Create in me a clean heart, O God." David's prayer for a right spirit is the prayer of every man who, while moving through the levels of moral thinking, finds the Father drawing him closer.

Suggested Reading:
Biehler, Robert F., *Psychology Applied to Teaching*, 3rd ed., Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978, pp. 378, 379.

Duska, Ronald and Mariellen Whelan, *Moral Development: A Guide to Piaget and Kohlberg*, New York: Paulist Press, 1975.

☐ November 11
Friday

RosAnne Tetz is a teacher living in Glendale, Calif.

1. In Psalm 50:9-13 God emphatically disavows his need for animal sacrifices. Does this imply that the sacrificial ritual was a rather primitive form of religion which God wanted His people to progress beyond? Explain.
 2. Do we accomplish repentance through our effort or do we receive it passively (see Testimony)?
 3. Is repentance a prerequisite to coming to Christ (see Testimony)?
 4. Identify and discuss the characteristics of true repentance found in Psalm 51.
 5. What do you think Greg Prout (Evidence) means by stating, "Ritual has an uncanny way of producing a kind of pseudo-peace." Do you agree? Can you give examples from your own religious life to support this statement?
 6. Are there positive aspects to ritual? If so, what are they?
 7. The Opinion author suggests the following correlation between Psalms 50 and 51 and Kohlberg's theory of moral development.

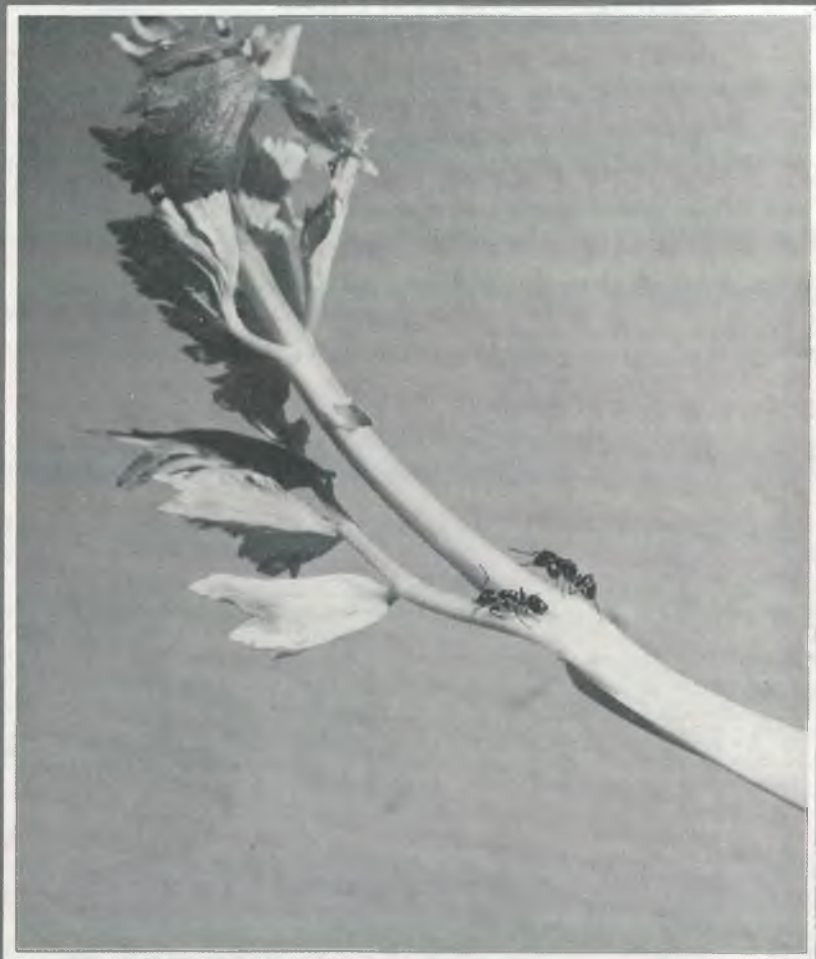
Level One (reward/punishment)	—	Psalm 50:22, 23
Level Two (maintain social order)	—	Psalm 50:16-18
Level Three (principled, independent moral judgment)	—	Psalm 51:10-12, 15-17

 - a) Discuss your reaction to this analysis, noting the specific examples. Might these passages simply be revealing different aspects of God's character?
 - b) Why would God use reasoning based on Level One if His desire is constantly to move us up the moral ladder?
 - c) In reasoning with others and in teaching children, how do we know when to appeal to them on the basis of the level they are at and when to try to move them up to a higher level?
-

8

The Two Ways

Psalms 1 and 73
November 13-19



*"For lo, those who are far from thee shall perish. . .
But for me it is good to be near God"
(Psalm 73:27, 28, RSV).*

Autobiographical Theology

by Warren Dale

Why is it that the "bad" guys seem to get all the goodies? As a Christian I am presented with a unique dilemma. I claim that I have the secrets for "the good life." I hear talk of the joys of the faith and I sing of the rewards. Unfortunately I have a problem. It's hard for me to remember what is going to happen "over there" when there is so much happening here and now. And somehow what is happening here and now gets in the way of my Christian experience.

Matters are made worse by the glaring illusion that things are going much better for those who are not even trying to follow Christ. Life seems so much simpler when you aren't bothered with a higher calling.

I am reminded of a sign in a colleague's office which says, "When you're up to your neck in alligators it's hard to remember that the reason you came into the pond was to drain it." If my relationship with God is to survive, I must have a clear understanding of that relationship. It was easy at first to give simple answers. But as I matured, the issues be-

came more complex. The alligators became more cunning and strong. If I am going to remain apart from the alligators, I must understand these issues.

This week's lessons talk bottom line. It talks about where two lifestyles will take me, long-term and short-term.

But the author of Psalm 73 (Asaph) recognizes that in the short-term, those apart from God often seem better off. Just hearing the words from him makes me feel better. I guess I wasn't so wrong after all in wondering if it is all worth it. If the psalmist can ask questions, so can we. Let's spend time looking inside ourselves. Let's consider our position. Have our inconveniences been worthwhile?

This week we are studying the psalmists' reasons for following God. Let's contrast their reasons with ours. Let's clarify and develop our concepts. They talk of their misery and confusion. We each have experienced similar frustrations. They talk of his approach to resolve this dilemma. Maybe there is something for us in their experience. . . .

INTRO- DUCTION

Why Do the Partyers Prosper?

LOGOS

In the oratorio *Elijah* by Felix Mendelssohn, a soloist sings a beautiful aria with words taken from Psalm 37. "O rest in the Lord, wait patiently for Him and He will give thee thy heart's desires." It's all very nice, but there's just one problem. I've been dreaming of owning a bright red Ferrari 308 GTS. In fact my heart has been desiring one for about six years. The problem lies in the fact that my foul-mouthed, beer-drinking neighbor from down the hall boastfully parks his Porsche 928 right in front of the dorm for all to see. I, however, have to hide the rusty family Ford in some dark corner in order to retain any semblance of self respect. So it is quite easy for me to empathize with the psalmist when he says, "But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, and my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked" (Psalm 73:2, 3, RSV).

It becomes even easier for me to identify with his dilemma when he goes on to say, "For they [the wicked] have no pangs; their bodies are sound and sleek. . . . Therefore the people turn and praise them; and find no fault in them" (Psalm 73:4, 109, RSV). My physique certainly can't hold a burnt matchstick, much less a candle, to the standards set by today's television "private investigator" types. And my job has absolutely nothing to do with running around white sandy beaches aiding gorgeous women in distress.

Now I'm not advertising for people's sympathies but questions do arise when the immoral lifestyles of those who are "more fortunate" are compared to this text. "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, . . . In all that he does he prospers. . . . But the way of the wicked shall perish" (Psalm 1:1, 3, 6, RSV).

The questions, however, start to cut a little sharper when you read "Praise the Lord. . . . He raises the poor from the dust . . . to make them sit with princes", but "the wicked are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away" (Psalms 113:7; 1:4, RSV), and then you see the hollow, desperate faces of unfortunate children from third world countries who probably won't live long enough to learn what wrong is.

The psalmist commented, "When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me" (Psalm 73:16, NIV). But this was only "until I entered the sanctuary of God, then I understood their final destiny" (Psalm 73:16, NIV). It is in the presence of God that a correct understanding of His punishment and reward is grasped. In the presence of God the righteous realize that they are not blessed by the abundance of the things they possess or by a life of ease. The righteous are blessed, raised from the dust, and made to prosper in that, no matter what the circumstances, God is with them. Thus, in all situations, it can be seen that, "you guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory" (Psalm 73:24, NIV).

In the same context it becomes evident that the wicked are not cursed by becoming impoverished or by some other overt action of God (Matt. 5:45). The wicked become cursed because God is not with them. So no matter what their social standing, wealth, or fame may be, it all amounts to nothing. Therefore, like the psalmist, in the face of sorrow or joy, we may say, "But for me it is good to be near God" (Psalm 73:28, RSV).

E. R. M.

Different Priorities, Different Ends

by Donald Brown

The psalmist sees the distinctiveness of the two ways—righteousness and wickedness. He and Ellen White recognize the power of influence and caution the righteous to avoid the counsel and close friendship of the ungodly.

"It is natural to seek companionship. Everyone will find companions or make them. And just in proportion to the strength of the friendship, will be the amount of influence which friends will exert over one another for good or for evil. . . .

"The link is a mysterious one which binds human hearts together, so that the feelings, tastes, and principles of two individuals are closely blended."¹

"God is dishonored and the gospel is betrayed when His servants depend on the counsel of men who are not under the guidance of the Holy Spirit."²

The righteous life is described as a "tree planted by rivers of water." Priorities of the godly will not be the same as those of the ungodly, therefore fruit produced by each will not be the same. Success in this life for each will not be measured by the same criteria.

"The fruit we bear is the only test of the character of the tree before the world. This is the proof of our discipleship. If our works are of such a character that as branches of the living Vine we bear rich clusters of precious fruit, then we wear before the world God's own badge as His sons and daughters."³

"The fruit Christ claims, after the patient care bestowed upon His church, is faith, patience, love, forbearance, heavenly-mindedness, meekness. These are the clusters of fruit which mature amid storm and cloud and darkness, as well as in the sunshine."⁴

"Many seek to make a heaven for themselves by obtaining riches and power. They 'speak wickedly concerning oppression, they speak loftily,' trampling upon human rights, and disregarding divine authority. . . ." But in the end the actions of the wicked are shown by their fruits. "The proud may be for a time in great power, and may see success in all that they undertake; but in the end they will find only disappointment and wretchedness."⁵

"Against every evildoer God's law utters condemnation. He may disregard that voice, he may seek to drown its warning, but in vain. It follows him. It makes itself heard. It destroys his peace. If unheeded, it pursues him to the grave."⁶

After evaluating the final rewards of the righteous and the wicked following the judgment of God, perhaps it could be said the righteous are better long range planners.

"Human language is inadequate to describe the reward of the righteous. It will be known only to those who behold it. No finite mind can comprehend the glory of the Paradise of God."⁷

"There [heaven] the grandest enterprises may be carried forward, the loftiest aspirations reached, the highest ambitions realized; and still there will arise new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects to call forth the powers of mind and soul and body."⁸

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Matthew
13:24-30

"There . . .
the grandest
enterprises
may be carried
forward,
the loftiest
aspirations
reached . . ."

1. *Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 587.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 354.

3. *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 348.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

5. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 124.

6. *Education*, p. 144.

7. *The Great Controversy*, p. 675.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 677.

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November 15
Tuesday

Faith Through Doubt

by J. J. Stewart Perowne,
selected by Stuart Morgan.

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Habakkuk 1:2-4
2:2-4

"But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked" (Psalm 73:2, 3, RSV).

There are some questions which never lose their interest, some problems of which it may be said, that they are ever old and yet ever new. Not the least anxious of such questions are those which deal with God's moral government of the world. They lie close to man's heart, and are ever asking and pressing for solution. Perhaps no man ever looked thoughtfully on the world as it is without seeing much that was hard to reconcile with a belief in the love and wisdom of God.

Why should good men suffer, and bad men prosper? This difficulty was aggravated . . . by what seemed to be the manifest contradiction between the express teaching of his [the Jew's] Law, and the observed facts of human experience. The Law told him that God was a righteous Judge, meting out to men in this world the due recompense of their deeds. The course of the world, where those who had cast off the fear of God were rich and powerful, made him ready to question this truth, and was a serious stumbling block to his faith. . . .

When he [the Psalmist] was tempted to envy their [the ungodly] lot, when he had all but yielded to the sophistry of those who would have persuaded him to be even as they, the temptation was subdued by the reflection that such prosperity came to an end as sudden as it was terrible. But he does not place over against this, on the other side, an earthly portion of honour and happiness for the just. Their portion is in God. He is the stay and the satisfaction of their hearts now. He will take them to Himself and to glory hereafter. This conviction it is which finally chases away the shadows of doubt. . . .

"Unbelief does not doubt, faith doubts."

But the Psalm [73] teaches us also a lesson of forbearance towards the doubter. It is a lesson perhaps just now peculiarly needed. Christian sympathy is felt, Christian charity is extended toward every form of misery, whether mental or bodily, except toward that which is often the acutest of all, the anguish of doubt. Here it seems as if coldness, suspicion, even denunciation, were justifiable. And yet doubt, even to the verge of scepticism, as is plain from this Psalm, may be no proof of a bad and corrupt heart; it may rather be the evidence of an honest one. Doubt may spring from the very depth and earnestness of a man's faith. In the case of the Psalmist, as in the case of Job, that which lay at the bottom of the doubt, that which made it a thing so full of anguish, was a deep-rooted conviction of the righteousness of God. Unbelief does not doubt, faith doubts. And God permits the doubt in His truest and noblest servants, as our Lord did in the case of Thomas, that He may thereby plant their feet the more firmly on the rock of His own everlasting truth. There is, perhaps, no Psalm in which faith asserts itself so triumphantly, cleaves to God with such words of lofty hope and affection, and that precisely because in no other instance has the fire been so searching, the test of faith so severe. It may be well to remember this when we see a noble soul compassed about with darkness, yet struggling to the light, lest we 'vex one whom God has smitten, and tell of the pain of His wounded ones' (Psalm lxxix. 26).

Excerpted from J. J. Stewart Perowne, D. D., *The Book of Psalms: A New Translation*, volume 2, (London: George Bell and Sons, 1893), pp. 2-7.

November 16
Wednesday

72

J. J. Stewart Perowne, D.D., was Lord Bishop of Worcester. Stuart Morgan teaches grades 7-8 at Simi Valley SDA Elementary, Simi Valley, Calif.

How To Prosper

The author of Psalm 73 seems to contradict himself. At the beginning of the psalm he says: "Truly God is good to the upright, to those who are pure in heart" (Psalm 73:1, RSV). Then immediately he goes on to say: "For I was envious of the arrogant, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked" (vs. 3, RSV). The psalmist is not the only one who experienced such ambivalence, though. At some time or another all Christians, whether they feel that they should be more prosperous, or when they wonder at the abject poverty, disease, and suffering of those in the third world question why a good God allows such circumstances. So how can the promises of God's goodness toward the righteous be reconciled to the reality of everyday living, where the fulfillment of these promises is not always evident? Here are a few suggestions:

1. **Set your priorities.** Don't make the pursuit of wealth or pleasure the central theme of your life. Rather, make your life's theme to be more concerned about your relationship with Christ than anything else. In this context the wicked are never prosperous; they have nothing for you to envy.

2. **Learn to recognize true value.** The whole point of Psalm 73 is not, "the wicked are prospering more than me but I'll still trust God's promises of future blessings." The point is that true value is not found in material wealth. The prosperity of the wicked, their fine garments, their large bank accounts, and their sound, sleek bodies, without God, are empty. "They are like a dream when one awakes, on awakening you despise their phantoms" (Psalm 73:20, RSV). God's goodness runs deeper than elusive dreams. His blessings are to be realized now, in the present. The blessings of God do not lie in wealth but in guidance, security, inner peace, and unfailing love. "Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is nothing upon earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. . . . But for me it is good to be near God" (Psalm 73:25-28, RSV).

3. **Work to increase the prosperity of others and not your own.** The object here is not to increase material wealth but rather to fulfill the needs of others through unselfish service, whether their needs be money, shelter, food, clothing, friendship, or a personal relationship with Christ. "Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Phil. 2:3, 4, RSV). In this the righteous prosper.

E. R. M.

HOW TO

Key text:
Philippians 2:3, 4

Justice Versus Fairness

by Irene Duncan

OPINION

Key text:
Psalm 92:5-7,
12, 15

The unfair distribution of suffering and prosperity in the world is a problem to everyone who wants to believe in a just and fair world, and ultimately a just and fair God.

Like the Psalmist, we may look at lives around us and decide that the wicked are enjoying a decided advantage in what they have acquired materially and we envy their apparent prosperity.

In the 92nd Psalm we find the wicked compared to grass and the righteous to a palm tree or cedar. If a grass seed and a palm tree seed were planted on the same day, their rate of growth would be very dissimilar. The grass sprouts in a matter of days and it might be predicted that the grass would grow taller and stronger than the palm tree. Time, however, would see the grass wither and die whereas the tree would continue to grow slowly but surely, taller and stronger than the grass.

In drawing a parallel we see that although a dishonest person may find that unscrupulous dealings may give him a head start over his ethical counterpart, divine justice will eventually intervene and the "ungodly way of the ungodly man leads to peril and punishment.¹ On the other hand the godly man ultimately succeeds in his endeavors, he flourishes like the cedar.

"Can we say
logically
that an
all-powerful
God *must*
be fair?"

In considering the subject of fairness and justice Rabbi Harold Kushner philosophizes that, "God may *choose* to be fair and give a person what he deserves, punishing the wicked and rewarding the righteous. But can we say logically that an all-powerful God *must* be fair? Would He still be all-powerful if we, by living righteously could compel Him to protect and reward us? Or would He then be reduced to a kind of cosmic vending machine into which we insert the right tokens and from which we get what we want with the option of kicking and cursing the machine if it doesn't give us what we paid for?"²

Job certainly must have agonized over God's seeming injustice, so perhaps we should study his conclusion. In reading Job 42:1-5 we find that "Job's experience has taught him the meaning of faith. His vision of God has enabled him to surrender to divine will. His commitment to God is now unaffected by his circumstances. He no longer expects temporal blessings."³

From this perspective we can ask God for things He can do to help us instead of persisting in unrealistic expectations. We can turn to God not for reward or punishment but for strength, protection and comfort. Like the psalmist we can confidently trust and praise Him.

1. Robert Alsén, *Psalms. Vol. 1, Songs of Devotion*, (Moody Press, 1974), p. 9.

2. Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, (Avon Books, 1983), p. 40.

3. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 610.

REACT
Lesson 8

1. Is it possible for one who is apart from God to enjoy truly greater prosperity than the believer? Explain why or why not.
2. Didn't Christ promise to give his followers life "more abundantly"? Then shouldn't Christians be the happiest, most contented people around? Could the lack of such contentment indicate a merely superficial relationship with God?
3. Do the envious glances we direct at "successful" sinners indicate a problem with our priorities? Why or why not? Can we blame our Christian principles for our poverty or failure?
4. How Christian is the Protestant work ethic? What is the Christian's responsibility to those who do not prosper?
5. List the criteria by which you measure prosperity.

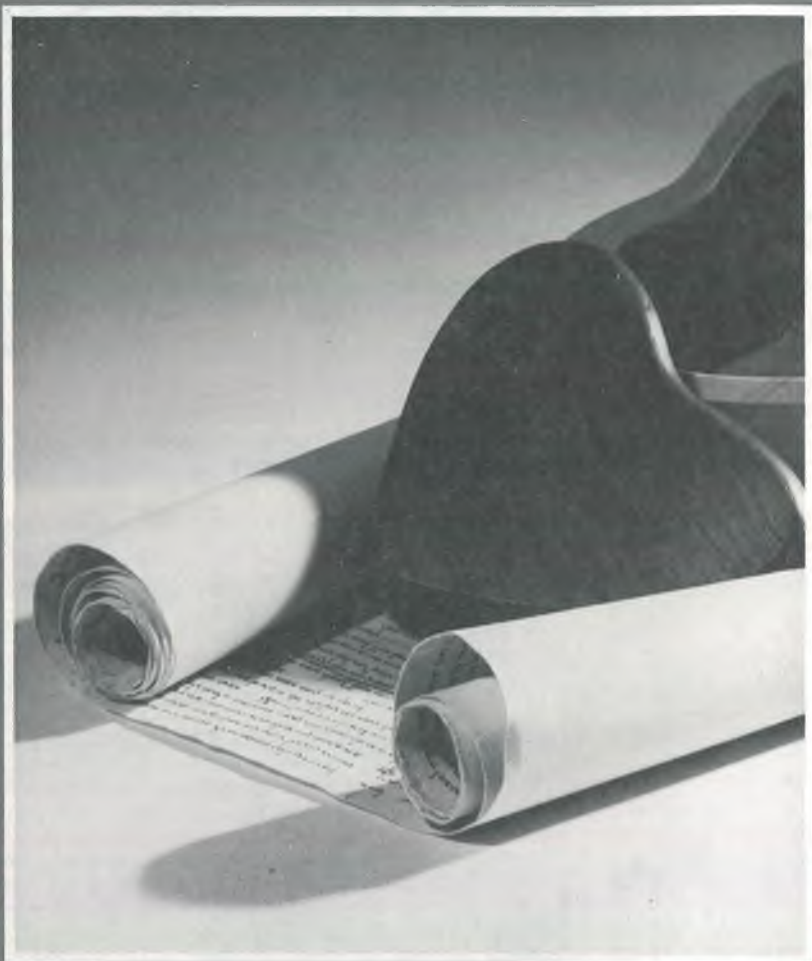
How can prosperity based on these criteria be increased?

6. Is the crucial distinction between the righteous and the wicked that the righteous are better long-range planners? In other words, does the Christian life primarily mean exchanging short-term benefits for long-term benefits? Explain why or why not.
 7. The author of Evidence asserts that "unbelief does not doubt, faith doubts." What do you think he means? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
-

9

A Law to Love

Psalm 119
November 20-26



*"Your statutes are my delight; they are my
counselors"*
(Psalm 119:24, NIV).

by Victor Czerkasij

The Love Law

INTRODUCTION

The news commentator gave the opening welcome and then began with the day's top stories. "In a rare, unanimous vote, both Houses have passed the Enforced Love Bill. This bill, when made law, will require every American to love each other. The President is expected to sign his approval tomorrow. In other news. . . ." I sat stunned.

"How can they make me love those people next door?" I hissed. "I'll never love anyone if I don't want to. They can't make me. They just can't." Angrily, I changed channels. Ahh, the Love Boat. . . .

An unlikely occurrence? Of course. Obviously there is no "Love Bill." But here is an actual law to love—it's on the books. Not here on earth, but in the great Halls of Peace in Heaven. For eons the angels lived an existence marked by pure joy, peace, and freedom. Their freedom dictated that they could do whatever they desired, and they chose to love God and His Goodness. Then, after a countless passing of years, Lucifer stood up to His Creator. "Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness" (Ezek. 28:17). And the

consequences of this action? Hate, heartache, a loss of our true home, and God becoming man.

Since then, mortals hear two voices. God tenderly woos us. "My child, for you I died. Come home and receive My love for you. Enter into a relationship with Me." Yet the rancorous voice of hell screeches "Love is for losers! Laws were made for breaking!"

Jesus Christ's life on earth proved that the law of love was the ideal. What does this law consist of? It is "homage that springs from an intelligent appreciation of His character. He takes no pleasure in forced allegiance, and to all He grants freedom of will, that they may render Him voluntary service."¹ Freedom. Freedom in such abundance that Satan chose to imprison it.

The writer of Psalm 119 is peerless in his grasp of the believer's freedom and joy in the law of love. This eloquent expression of firsthand knowledge proves God right: His claim that His law is perfect love is justified, spoken or sung by the very creatures His Infinite character would die for.

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 493.

Victor Czerkasij, theology graduate of Southern College, is associate director in the Voice of Hope Ukrainian Broadcasts in Mountain View, Calif.

☐ November 20
Sunday

Decrees of Delight

LOGOS

The ordeal of the American hostages in Iran several years ago had at least one positive effect. It instilled in Americans a stubborn determination never to abandon their incarcerated countrymen until they were free once again. And when realization replaced hope with the hostages' homecoming, they were given a hero's welcome unmatched in exuberance and enthusiasm.

David felt a similar determination when he wrote, "**Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart**" (Psalm 119:2, NIV). If only God was sought with the same perseverance and received with the same jubilation accorded the hostages! What a marked effect could be traced in modern society. But for most of the world, the fog of apathy obscures God's character and makes his law ignored.

God's character and law are both immutable and inseparable, for one grows out of the other and both are the essence of eternal principles. A lawless God would mean chaos, with hate and fear displacing all the nobility and goodness still evident in God's creation. David, recognizing this fact, exclaimed "**Righteous are you, O Lord, and your laws are right. . . . Those who devise wicked schemes are near, but they are far from your law**" (vs. 137, 150, NIV).

The obvious question then is, "How can we emulate God's character?" Or as David put it, "**How can a young man keep his way pure?**" (vs. 9, NIV). The answer is confidently supplied: "**By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands, I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you**" (vs. 10, 11, NIV). But this is only the beginning. David testifies that the study of God and His law yields ever deeper and richer rewards. "**Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law**" (vs. 18, NIV). Diligent study reveals new insights, which in turn motivate yet deeper contemplation of the things of God. And, it should be noted that the term translated "law" in Psalm 119 means more than the Ten Commandments or other legal statutes. The term is "torah" in the original, meaning the instruction of God, the entire revelation of His truth.

David does not view God's statutes as restrictive bands that diminish his freedom. Instead, he considers them "decrees of delight." "**I delight in your decrees,**" he says: "**I will not neglect your word. . . . Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors**" (vs. 16, 14, NIV). Unlike many civil laws, God's laws are the very expression of freedom, not bondage. They bring that elusive peace that is the desire of every mortal. "**I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free. . . . I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out your precepts. . . . Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble**" (vs. 32, 44, 165, NIV).

David understood God's law and thus he loved it. The law enabled him to live at peace with himself. The same opportunity is open to us, if we truly seek to understand God's law. Our present and future happiness is insured if we will sincerely say with the Psalmist, "**I long for your salvation, O Lord, and your law is my delight. Let me live that I may praise you, and may your laws sustain me**" (vs. 174, 175, NIV).

S. D. P./L. R. C.

Hiding the Word

We often think that a Christian must always "expose the word" to fulfill the commission of Christ. But David's words in Psalm 119 point out a different twist for victorious living. "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."

"Hiding the Word", as we shall call it, carries some crucial and fundamental significance for personal benefits and victories in one's everyday existence with Christ. For example, the sanctified heart is given power that involves the ability to change into the image of those things on which it dwells. True, there is something natural about this, like my son and his sports heroes. But the principle also applies to spiritual things: "The heart preoccupied with the word of God is fortified against Satan. . . . By looking unto Jesus they will become assimilated to His image. By beholding they become changed to the divine pattern; their character is softened, refined, and ennobled for the heavenly kingdom."¹

"Hiding the Word" also gives strength for witness. As a matter of fact it is the Word that gives structure and content to one's witness. The Word's warning and encouragement gives direction to one's life and brings one into contact with light. "The Sun of Righteousness sends its light and healing beams into his soul, irradiating rays of light to all around him."²

"Hiding the Word" enlarges the natural powers as well. The principle actually involves supernatural powers working with natural law. There is an authority in God's Word that goes beyond simple natural law. It is not the power of the mind such as the psychology of positive thinking, but a spiritual power working on the mind in the Word. The very life of God is in His Word: "There is nothing more calculated to energize the mind and strengthen the intellect than the study of the word of God. . . . If God's word were studied as it should be men would have breadth of mind, a nobility of character, and a stability of purpose that are rarely seen in these times. . . . The very life of God, which gives life to the world, is in His word."³

Since God's Word is dynamic, "hiding the Word" results in an existential integration of truth. Truth becomes more than something to be attempted or talked about, lectured upon or thought about, as important as these quests are. "Hiding the Word" brings an accompanying demonstration of truth—an enfleshment. "When the law of God is written in the heart it will be exhibited in a pure and holy life. . . . It is now the duty of God's commandment keeping people to watch and pray, to search the Scriptures diligently, to hide the word of God in the heart."⁴ God's Word will captivate the mind and bring the life into line with the divine will.

This living witness to God's power in the life becomes a fortress built to meet the onslaught of evil. "Hiding the Word" is a barricade against temptation. "Temptations often appear irresistible because, through the neglect of prayer and the study of the Bible, the tempted one can not readily remember God's promises and meet Satan with the Scripture weapons."⁵ To know that God in Christ has promised to deliver one from even the worst of such onslaughts brings a stability and an assurance that the Christian may count on.

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Psalm 119:11

"The heart preoccupied with the word of God is fortified against Satan."

1. *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 616.
2. *My Life Today*, p. 160.
3. *Gospel Workers*, pp. 249, 250.
4. *Review and Herald*, May 17, 1887.
5. *Review and Herald*, January 10, 1907.

Psalm 119 and Romans 7 Compared

by Norman R. Gulley

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Psalm 119:72;
Romans 7:8

David, in Psalm 119, directs his words to God. The whole Psalm is theocentric (God-centered). Every verse is a prayer to God except verse 115. Every verse, including 115, mentions God. By contrast, Romans 7 is anthropo-centric (man-centered). Paul speaks of the human predicament. Both chapters include a cry for deliverance (Psalm 119:134, 154, 170; Rom. 7:24), but the psalmist's cry is for deliverance from external enemies (Psalm 119:134, cf. 154 and 157), whereas the man of Romans 7 pleads for deliverance from an internal enemy—the law of sin (Romans 7:4-24). Thus the orientation of Psalm 119 is to God and external enemies, while Romans 7 looks within to an internal enemy.

Yet both men claim to delight (Psalm 119:16, 24, 35, 70, 77, 92, 143, 174; Romans 7:22) in the law and both say it is good (Psalm 119:39; Romans 7:16). David says more about the law than Paul (Psalms 119:97, 113, 127, 163, 104). Although Paul calls the law "spiritual" (Romans 7:14), the psalmist himself is seen as spiritual in Psalm 119. He loves God, and thus His law, with his whole heart (Psalm 119:10; cf. vs. 2, vs. 69). Is the deepest distinction between the two chapters a wholeheartedness in Psalm 119 compared to a half-heartedness in Romans 7?

The problem of Romans 7 is "the law of sin" (Romans 7:25) and the solution is given in Romans 8:2, "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." Life in the Spirit is the key to unlocking Romans 7. Many contemporary scholars are coming to see the Holy Spirit, rather than righteousness by faith, to be the key to Pauline theology.¹

In Romans 7 we find the Christian struggling. He hates what he does (v. 15), knows the law is good (v. 16), wills to do good (v. 18), and even delights in the law (v. 22). Only a Christian could say such things. But being a Christian is not enough. The law of sin still lurks within, and is getting the upper hand. Further proof that the passage here speaks of the Christian experience comes from examining the Greek verb tenses. Romans 7:1-13 contain nine aorist indicative verbs that point to one event in the past—the moment of conversion.²

The problem of Romans 7 is that of many a professed, genuinely converted Christian who has slipped back into mediocrity. The only way to overcome the struggle of Romans 7 is for the floundering Christian to have the full infilling of the Spirit described in Romans 8. The Lordship of the Holy Spirit makes the difference. C. F. H. Henry was right when he said of Romans 7, "The carnal man of 1 Corinthians 3, the wretched man of Romans 7, is the believer, unfilled by the Spirit. To know Christ in His fullness and to be filled with the Spirit are correlative themes, since the Spirit brings believers under Christ's control."³

Every Christian is either the free spirit of Psalm 119 or the failure of Romans 7. We live either a God-centered life of freedom or a self-centered life of failure. Both lifestyles know the law to be good, but David also knows that God is really the One who is good. Relationship with Him makes the decisive difference between the peace (vs. 165) of Psalm 119 and the struggle of Romans 7 (vs. 15-23).

"Is the deepest distinction a wholeheartedness in Psalm 119 compared to a halfheartedness in Romans 7?"

1. e.g., Schweitzer, Whitley, Kasemann and Stendahl.

2. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, pp. 553-555.

3. *Christian Personal Ethics* (Michigan, 1957), p. 455.

Going Into the Cold to Get the Wood

by Ray Hefferlin

Love the law? It seems that we don't! We take air and noise pollution equipment off of our machines. We evade taxes by not reporting cash income. We break speed limits (and help each other do so with headlight signals and CB messages). We take into our minds and bodies that which is demonstrably harmful. We reject all restraint when "in love." We disrespect parents, teachers, pastors and government officials—and all in the name of freedom and self-expression! If we continue, our society will be chaos, and we will be enslaved by our own lusts.

Others of us consider people who do such things to be fools (Matt. 5:22). We also snub the kid with the foreign ways (Matt. 15:21-28), and we are harsh to those who fail to join our group (Luke 9:49-55). We shun the person with "moral problems" (Matt. 18:21, 22; John 8:3-11). We initiate and/or pass on harmful rumors (James 3:8-12)—and all of this in the name of truth, or defending the church! Our dealings with others are as much *law* as tithing herbs (Matt. 23:23). If we continue in our evasion of true law, we will see, rising into the blue sky, the crosses of those who dared to see a slightly different interpretation of a scientific, political or religious concept.

We hate the law. We sin in violating its letter (1 John 3:4) and its "spirit" (Rom. 13:8-10; 8:7, 8).

Love the law? Jesus Christ loved the law (Psalm 40:7, 8). He was perfect in the details of life. He also had a perfect relationship with the Father, and with others, and with nature.

Love the law? According to Jer. 31:31-33 (Heb. 8:8-10), God will change me so that I not only fulfill the letter of the law, but also do it with the right attitude. God's requirements become like the pleasant obligations of my marriage. To deny my love for my wife would grate against my very being; at the same time I recognize that love is not just the warm feeling, but also going into the cold to get the wood (John 14:15).

HOW TO
Key text:
Psalm 85:10

Suggested Reading:
The Desire of Ages, pp.
761-764.

Ray Hefferlin has taught and researched for 28 years in the Department of Physics at Southern College.

November 24
Thursday

Aleph, Beth, Gimel, . . .

by J. Bruce Ashton

OPINION

Key text:
James 1:25

Alas for him who undertakes to write an acrostic psalm!
Before him lie perplexities diverse and possibly unforeseen.
Carefully he selects, from the narrow list, a word.
"Does this one say it best, or would another shade of meaning,
another sentence structure, be clearer?"
Every line, its initial letter capitalized, invites scrutiny, consideration, rejection.
Frustrations abound; and for what purpose?
God never required that expressions of praise or contemplation to be so rigidly structured.
Has such a self-imposed limitation any benefit for the ambitious writer? Any instruction for the perceptive reader?

Imagine, if you can, the ecstasy and the horror of total freedom.
Just what you wish, you may do or have—no limitation, no contradiction, no "no-no's."
Keeping your head, your sense of purpose or direction, is virtually impossible in such a vacuum.
Like the youngster left to direct his own life for a day, after a while you decide, "I don't want to do what I want to do."
"Make me some rules—help me decide—allow me some freedom, but within practical guidelines."
Never was man supposed to operate without any strictures, for the constraining love of God is itself a merciful boundary.
Overly-curious man, though, yielded to a rebellious angel's offer: "Try evil, too—why be deprived?"
Practically, however, this asserting of the right to be bad obliterated the hope of being good.
Questions like "To obey or not to obey?" became academic, for the power to implement the former was gone.
Right and wrong themselves even became muddled in the mind.
Sin would not be hated or avoided until defined, concisely and unambiguously, in the context of infinite right-ness.
To instruct us again in successful, enjoyable, fulfilling holy living, God gave us rules, directives, commandments—a law.
Understood as descriptions of God's original purpose, these appear as liberating principles, displayed in His flawless life.
Victory, won by His total dependence and incredible sacrifice, can be ours by faith in His matchless grace.

Whither will God's law lead, if we accept its sovereignty over us?
Xerox copies of the mass Christian? or even of divine personality?
You needn't worry; for as the poet's sensitivity to meaning is sharpened by choosing from fewer words, so the Christian's commitment lets him focus on individual depths of satisfaction in goodness, without needing to even consider evil.
Zealous love for God's liberating law, then, as sung in David's well-chosen lines, befits us all.

Selah.

1. Today laws are frequently seen as negative and restrictive. But David viewed God's law as "decrees of delight." From Psalm 119, identify at least four major reasons why David took delight in God's law.

- | | |
|----|----|
| 1. | 3. |
| 2. | 4. |

Does God's law fulfill these same functions in you? Discuss why or why not.

2. Which attitude toward the law can you most fully identify with—David's in Psalm 119 or Paul's in Romans 7? Why?

3. Norman Gulley (Evidence) suggests that the liberating power of the Spirit discussed in Romans 8 lifts the believer above the guilt and frustration of Romans 7. But can the sensitive believer ever fully leave behind the experience of Romans 7?

4. Ray Hefferlin didn't begin referring to Bible texts until the second paragraph of his How To article. Do you see any significance to that fact?

5. Is it possible to be "zealous for the law" and escape the intolerance that Hefferlin views as an evasion of true law? Explain.

6. Discuss "the ecstasy and horror of total freedom." Are either (or both) of these terms too strong?

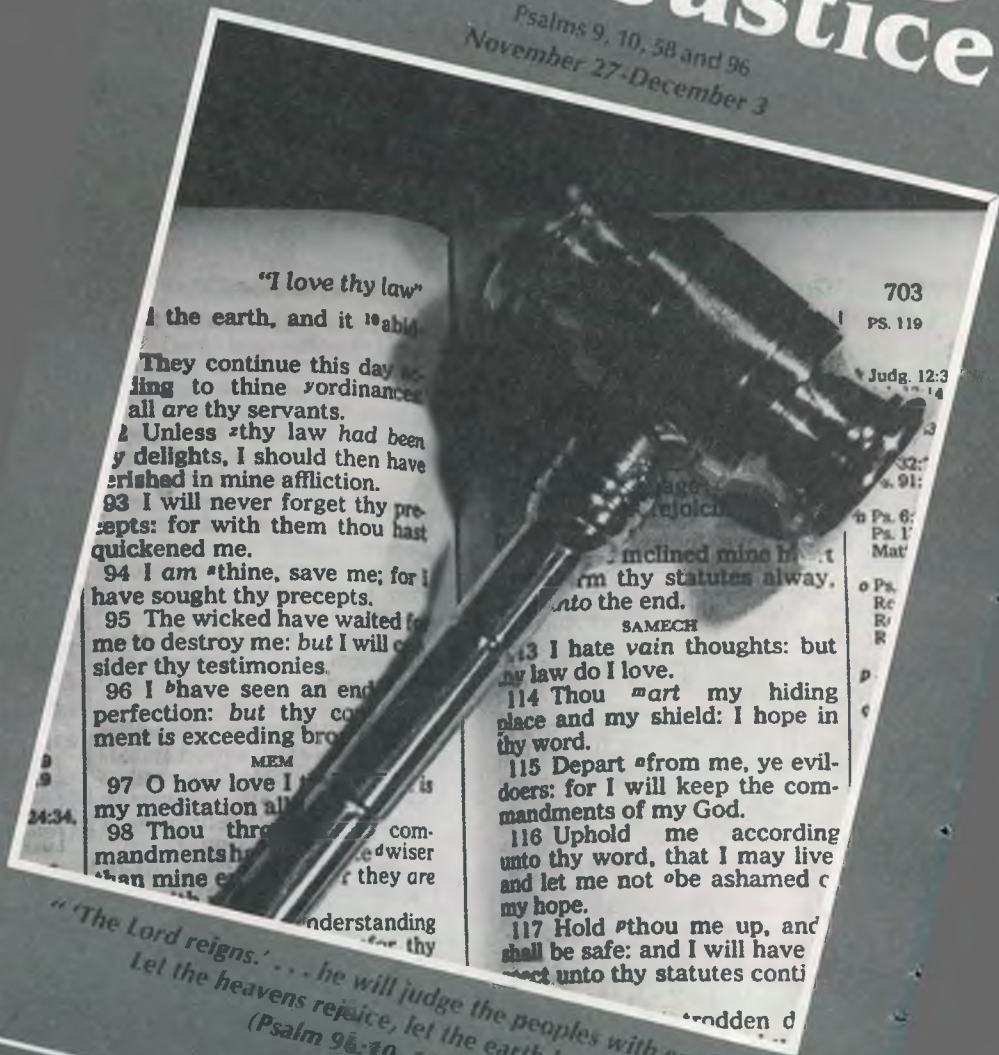
7. Is it possible for two beings, existing in the same time frame and spatial boundaries, to both enjoy complete freedom? Are there attractive trade-offs which compensate for the loss of some freedom that occurs when persons join together into a community?

8. Does the form of expression J. Bruce Ashton chose for his Opinion article enhance in any way his point? Explain.

9. Do we become "Xerox copies of the mass Christian" when we follow God's law? Why or why not?

10 Celebrating God's Justice

Psalms 9, 10, 58 and 96
November 27-December 3



"I love thy law"

of the earth, and it is able

They continue this day
singing to thine ordinances
all are thy servants.

Unless thy law had been
my delights, I should then have
perished in mine affliction.

93 I will never forget thy pre-
cepts: for with them thou hast
quickenened me.

94 I am ^athine, save me; for I
have sought thy precepts.

95 The wicked have waited for
me to destroy me: but I will con-
sider thy testimonies.

96 I ^bhave seen an end of
perfection: but thy com-
mandment is exceeding broad.

MEM
97 O how love I thy ^cis
my meditation all the day.

98 Thou through ^dcom-
mandments have made me ^ewiser
than mine enemies: for they are
deceitful.

99 My heart is understanding
of thy ^ffor thy

703

PS. 119

Judg. 12:3

14

3

32:

91:

Pa. 6:

Ps. 1

Mat

o Ps.

Re

Rv

R

P

C

inclined mine heart
to thy statutes always,
and I will not depart
from the end.

SAMECH

113 I hate vain thoughts: but
thy law do I love.

114 Thou ^aart my hiding
place and my shield: I hope in
thy word.

115 Depart ^bfrom me, ye evil-
doers: for I will keep the com-
mandments of my God.

116 Uphold me according
unto thy word, that I may live
and let me not ^cbe ashamed of
my hope.

117 Hold ^dthou me up, and
I shall be safe: and I will have
respect unto thy statutes conti-

...dden d

"The Lord reigns: . . . he will judge the peoples with equity.
Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad"
(Psalm 96:10, 11, NIV).

Justice Has a Place

by Rick Esterline

INTRO- DUCTION

In he came. He looked, walked, and talked the part. This was Mr. Cool. He sauntered cockily past the mess hall waiting line of G.I.'s to stand defiantly next to a friend near the front of the line. He and his friend seemed oblivious to the sharp looks and occasional grumbling of the slighted soldiers who had dutifully taken a place at the end of the line as they entered.

The closer the animated pair moved to the stack of waiting food trays, the more frustrated the regimented ones became. Just as he selected his silverware, someone tapped him on the shoulder and said, "Excuse me, but I think you're in the wrong place." It was not until he turned to laugh the tapper into oblivion that he realized that the one tapping was me, the most heartless sergeant in the company. He was shocked, chagrined, and enraged all at once. I pointed down the long line and said, "Your place is back there at the end."

Mr. Cool soon lost his jaunty air as he turned, dejected, to walk to the end of the now elated line of men, who broke into a cheer, applauding, laughing, and proclaiming Sergeant Heartless the hero of the day.

Not every social engineer, however, is quite so fortunate. Sometimes there are those who take their revolutionary ideas seriously, as did the aviators in Vietnam one hot summer day. The fellows from the engineering unit had decided to check out some of their favorite haunts in the village. As they sat swapping tall tales, sipping cool ones, and telling their favorite jokes, the conversation shifted to derision of the aviation unit. Finally one of them decided to liven things up. "Hey, watch this," he said as he jumped up on one of the tables. "I think all the aviators are chicken!" he shouted. "Cluck, cluck, cluck!" Silence reigned for a moment as everyone waited expectantly for some response. Noticeably encouraged by the silence of the numerous patrons and the chuckling of his companions, Mouth led the entourage of puppet rowdies from club to club, yelling, sneering and cackling as they were met with pacifistic silence at each establishment.

Returning together to their starting point, they complimented each other on the successful pilgrimage and began to disperse in order to spread the good news, leaving only Mouth and his side-kick. Then without announcement, six men glided in the front door, moving quickly, resolutely to block all exits. With growing apprehension Mouth surveyed the exits, each blocked by two men holding three-foot lengths of heavy-duty rubber hose. After a brief moment of tense silence the spokesman began, "Yes, Mouth, you guessed it. We're all aviators. We have a message for you. We are not chicken. We also have something you won't forget." The spokesman then began to put his instrument of pain to use upon Mouth. After becoming satisfied that justice had been served, the aviators turned, moving out as quickly and quietly as they had come.

How is God's justice like these examples of human justice? How is it different?

Rick Esterline was a staff sergeant for eight years in the U.S. Army and recently graduated with a degree in Theology from Southern College.

☐ November 27
Sunday

A Passion for Justice

LOGOS

“Break the teeth in their mouths, O God; tear out, O Lord, the fangs of the lions! Let them vanish like water that flows away; when they draw the bow, let their arrows be blunted. Like a slug melting away as it moves along, like a stillborn child, may they not see the sun” (Psalm 58:6-8, NIV).

Was this the type of prayer Jesus had in mind when He taught us to pray for those who persecute us (Matt. 5:44)? One hardly thinks so, and thus the curses or imprecations found frequently in the Psalms raise disturbing questions. Are we to join with the psalmist in wishing such graphic violence on our enemies? Or, should we write off the imprecations as barbaric leftovers from a bloody, pre-Christian era?

A. A. Anderson's observation that the increasing intensity in the above series of curses "may be a stylistic feature, rather than a blueprint for God's retribution"¹ is helpful. Beyond that, however, the imprecations very strikingly highlight something central to the Old Testament: a passion for justice. The imprecations are not pampered whines for personal revenge. Rather, they are pleas that the injustice and violence of the earth's oppressors not go unchecked.

“In your heart,” says David to oppressive rulers, **“you devise injustice and your hands mete out violence on the earth” (Psalm 58:2, NIV).** It is in response to such “calculated ruthlessness, thought out and meted out . . . with businesslike efficiency”² that David utters his curses, longing for the day when it will be openly demonstrated that **“surely there is a God who judges the earth” (58:11, NIV).**

God's concern for the oppressed and afflicted and his execution of justice on their behalf is the theme of Psalms 9 and 10. Originally, these two psalms probably constituted a single “acrostic” poem, the stanzas of which begin with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. George A. F. Knight suggests that the poem was structured this way so it could be easily memorized by school children.³ The most fundamental lesson in the poem is that Yahweh stands for justice (9:7-9, 16). Oppressing, arrogant individuals and nations may thrive for a time (9:13; 10:1-11), but **“the needy will not always be forgotten, nor the hope of the afflicted ever perish,”** for **“The Lord is known by his justice” (9:18, 16, NIV).**

The passion for justice in the Psalms suggests at least two things to modern Christians. First, we should share in that passion. If we fail to speak out for justice in society and fail to commit ourselves to the cause of the oppressed, we fail in our mission to demonstrate to the world God's will and character. Second, it assures us that one day the cry “How long” (Psalm 74:10; Dan. 8:13; Rev. 6:10) will cease and that a renewed, just society will be established by God.

Our efforts for justice in this age can only hope for relative, partial success. But we are sustained by the psalmist's vision of the day when God **“will judge the peoples with equity”** and we will say **“Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; they will sing before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth” (Psalm 96:10-13, NIV).**

D. F. M.

1. A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms, Volume 1, The New Century Bible Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), p. 432.

2. Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, (Downers Grove IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975), p. 208.

3. George A. F. Knight, *Psalms, Volume 1, Daily Study Bible Series*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982), p. 48.

A Judge On Our Side

God has laid the work of judgment upon Christ because He is the Son of man. He was made in all points like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest. He was to become acquainted with the weakness of every human being. He could do this only by taking upon himself human nature. He must be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, that at the judgment of the great day none might question the justice of the decisions made. Our High Priest has been over ground which we must pass, He is acquainted with the circumstances of every case. He sees not as man sees, and judges not as man judges. He judges righteously. He has shown His love for men and women by giving His own life to ransom them from the penalty that must fall upon the transgressors of God's law. He knows the value of human souls. He will not close the door of heaven against any one unless, for the safety of heaven, it is necessary to do so. . . .

As soon as there was sin, there was a Saviour. Christ knew what He would have to suffer, yet He became man's substitute. As soon as Adam sinned, the Son of God presented himself as surety for the human race, with just as much power to avert the doom pronounced upon the guilty as when He died upon the cross of Calvary.

As our Mediator, Christ works incessantly. Whether men receive or reject Him, He works earnestly for them. He grants them life and light, striving by His Spirit to win them from Satan's service. And while the Saviour works, Satan also works, with all deceivableness of unrighteousness, and with unflagging energy. But victory will never be his.

It was because of the issues at stake that the inhabitants of the unfallen worlds watched with such intense interest the struggle between the Prince of life and the prince of darkness. Those who had not sinned needed not the application of Christ's blood, but they did need to be made secure from Satan's power. The result of the conflict had a bearing on the future of all the worlds, and every step that Christ took in the path of humiliation was watched by them with the deepest interest.

Christ overcame the enemy for every created intelligence. Thus He has secured the salvation of all who will accept the provision made. None who will accept Him need be vanquished. Around all is thrown the protection of His mediation.

By personal experience Christ is acquainted with the warfare which, since Adam's fall, has been constantly going on. How appropriate, then, for Him to be the judge. To Jesus, the Son of man, is committed all judgment. There is one mediator between God and men. Only by Him can we enter the kingdom of heaven. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. From His decision there is no appeal. He is the Rock of Ages, a rock rent on purpose that every tried, tempted soul may find a sure hiding place.

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Psalm 9:8

"Our High Priest has been over ground which we must pass."

Excerpted from "Lessons from the Christ-Life," *Review and Herald*, March 12, 1901.

November 29
Tuesday

When Your Case Has Not Been Heard

by R. M. Springett

EVIDENCE,
Part 1
Key text:
Psalm 27:12, 13

In the vast majority of the Psalms which are laments against injustice, it is useful to note that the writers see themselves as wronged without cause. They are victims of hatred, tyranny, or oppression, e.g. Psalm 7:3-4; 9:4, 9, 18. Yet many of these writers begin on a very confident note, as in Psalm 9, so that judgment seems to them an event of joyful anticipation. Observing this phenomenon, C. S. Lewis suggests that, "The reason for this soon becomes very plain. The ancient Jews, like ourselves, think of God's judgment in terms of an earthly court of justice. The difference is that the Christian pictures the case to be tried as a criminal case with himself in the dock; the Jew pictures it as a civil case with himself as the plaintiff. The one hopes for acquittal, or rather for pardon; the other hopes for a resounding triumph with heavy damages."¹

The problem of these psalmists is not that they received a faulty or crooked judgment, but that their case was never heard at all. Like the importunate widow in Luke 18:1-5, who constantly appeals to the unjust judge, the psalmist appears to be getting nowhere and takes his appeal to God. Again, C. S. Lewis: "Behind this lies an age-old and almost world-wide experience which we have been spared. In most places and times it has been very difficult for the 'small man' to get his case heard. The judge (and doubtless, one or two underlings) has to be bribed. If you can't afford to 'oil his palm' your case will never reach court. Our judges do not receive bribes. (We probably take this blessing too much for granted; it will not remain with us automatically.) We need not be surprised, therefore, if the Psalms, and the Prophets, are full of longing for judgment, and regard the announcement that judgment is coming as good news. Hundreds of thousands of people who have been stripped of all they possess and who have right entirely on their side will at last be heard. Of course, they are not afraid of judgment. They know their case is unanswerable—if only it could be heard. When God comes to judge at last, it will."²

"The Psalms regard the announcement that judgment is coming as good news."

The psalmist longs for justice to be done quickly and he has a certain understanding of what constitutes the perfect justice of God. Concerning the wicked, he states, "He makes a pit digging it out, and falls into the hole which he has made . . . and on his own pate his violence descends" (Psalm 7:15-17, RSV). This concept of swift and equal justice is found in the Psalms and throughout Scripture, (see Psalm 9:15, 16; 35:7, 8; 57:6; Prov. 26:27; 28:10; Eccl. 10:8; Esther 7:9, 10; 2 Sam. 12:5, 6, cf.; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 727; Matt. 7:1, 2; 12:37; Gal. 6:7, etc.)

The psalmist well knew, however, that in this life such swift and equal justice was not always forthcoming. David himself could testify that "I have seen a wicked man overbearing, and towering like a Cedar of Lebanon" (Psalm 37:35, RSV). What had happened in such a case? Had the justice of God miscarried for some reason? The faithful Israelite could never impugn the justice of God (Job 8:3; Rom. 3:5, 6). If justice was not done now it would be done later and God's justice would not simply be just, it would be seen to be just. Under the circumstances, all the oppressed can do now is to fulminate against their oppressors and curse their tormentors in vitriolic language and

November 30
Wednesday

R. M. Springett is an associate professor of religion at Southern College.

righteous indignation. Such wicked men have no respect for humanity, God's law, nor a universe governed by moral law, and in the Psalms they are told in no uncertain terms where to go. Such undisguised hatred is the inevitable consequence of injuring a human being. We may not think it is nice to read but we cannot pretend that it is not there. "It is monstrously simple-minded to read the cursings in the Psalms with no feeling except one of horror at the uncharity of the poets. But we must also think of those who made them so. Their hatreds are the reaction to something. Such hatreds are the kind of thing that cruelty and injustice, by a sort of natural law, produce. This among other things is what wrongdoing means. Take from a man his freedom or his goods and you may have taken his innocence, almost his humanity, as well. Not all the victims go and hang themselves like Mr. Pilgrim; they may live and hate."³

It should be remembered that it is not merely Israelites who are expressing indignation in the Psalms, as opposed to a pagan, but it is indeed the conscientious and faithful Israelite whose vehemence is manifested here and who has ". . . a confident expectation of an answer to his prayer as a vindication of God's moral government."⁴ "Arise, O Yahweh, in your wrath, rise up against the arrogance of my adversaries," (Psalm 7:6).⁵ The absence of anger and indignation against this background could be a more alarming symptom than its presence. The psalmist reflects God's implacable hatred of sin though in his distraught and agonizing outcries, he frequently does not make the fine theoretical distinction between the sin and the sinner. "If a Jew cursed more bitterly than the Pagans this was, I think, at least in part because they took right and wrong more seriously. For, if we look at their railings, we find they are usually angry not simply because things have been done to them but because these things are manifestly wrong, are hateful to God as well as to the victim."⁶

The psalmist's last word is always an optimism borne of unflagging faith, "Then shall all the trees of the wood sing for joy before the Lord, for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with his truth" (Psalm 96:12, 13, RSV).

1. C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1958), p. 10.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

4. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 645.

5. Translation by M. Dahood, *The Anchor Bible*, Psalms 1-50, Introduction, translation and notes, (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1966), p. 43.

6. Lewis, p. 30.

Justice and Resurrection

by Ronald J. Sider

EVIDENCE
Part 2
Key text:
Romans 6:4

What does God's concern for justice, revealed in the Psalms, mean for the way we relate to injustice today? Ron Sider argues below that the resurrection anchors the Christian approach to social justice.

Since the crucified carpenter is now the Risen Lord of the Universe, the Christian will submit every area of his or her life—including economics and politics—to his Lordship. . . . Since the Risen Lord is the one who revealed most fully the fact that God is on the side of the poor and oppressed, the Christian will work for a radical restructuring of the present unjust relationships between scarred inner city and pleasant suburb, between blacks and whites, between rich and poor nations. Since the resurrection is a sure sign that the new messianic age has invaded this old aeon, the Christian will exhibit a holy dissatisfaction with every evil and injustice of every status quo. And, since the resurrection has confirmed the fact that Jesus' nonviolent way of loving enemies is not naive utopianism but a realistic modeling of the *shalom* of the coming kingdom, the Christian will engage in a costly confrontation with systemic injustice which is as radically persistent in its demand for change as it is gently loving in its approach to oppressors. . . .

"Nothing can more securely anchor a doggedly persistent commitment to the struggle for justice than the revolutionary regenerating presence of the Risen Jesus in one's life."

The resurrected Lord Jesus offers both inner strength for the weary struggle now and also a secure foundation for our hope of ultimate transformation. The rapid disappearance of student activism at the end of the sixties and the hasty rush to join the establishment underlines the need for something more than an ephemeral social mood as the foundation for commitment to fundamental social change. Nothing can more securely anchor a doggedly persistent commitment to the struggle for justice than the revolutionary regenerating presence of the Risen Jesus in one's life. Paul says that Christians die to their old selves and are raised to a new life in Christ (Rom. 6:1ff.). The same supernatural power of God that raised Jesus from the dead now blows through our formerly timid, fearful personalities. It is in the power of the resurrection that we go forth boldly to join the oppressed of the earth in their costly confrontation with the oppressor.

The resurrection also anchors our hope. Repeatedly, the New Testament promises that what happened to Jesus at his resurrection will also happen to those who believe in him at the final resurrection (Phil. 3:20, 21; 1 Jn. 3:2). Nor is this merely an individualistic hope. Paul also indicates that, just as the individual Christian will experience the resurrection of the body, so the whole creation will be purged of evil and decay and injustice and will experience total transformation (Rom. 8:18-25). . . .

So we work for justice and peace now, not with a naive optimism that forgets that faithfulness involves the cross, but with the solid assurance that the final word is resurrection. We have a secure faith anchored in the reality of Jesus' resurrection and a solid hope fixed on the Resurrected One's ultimate restoration of the broken beauty of creation. Anchored by that faith and hope and swept along by the pulsating power of the Risen Lord Jesus in our lives, we dare to submit ourselves to the Risen One who calls us to costly struggle for peace through justice. . . .

Excerpted from Ronald J. Sider, "An Evangelical Approach to Social Justice," *College People*, (May, 1982), pp. 38-42.

November 30
Wednesday

Ronald J. Sider has authored several books, including *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*.

When the Grasshoppers Don't Leap

by Wilma McClarty

HOW TO

Key text:
Revelation 15:3b

His voice sarcastic, his legalism threatened by the church's increasing emphasis on righteousness by faith, my friend leaned toward me and declared, "We'll just see how effective this relationship-with-Jesus thing is. I bet the young people don't act any better." Eternity will answer his assertion, but as to the here and now, no one will build a relationship with anyone they distrust. Consequently, those who don't think of God as a friend find it easier to obey Him than to trust Him. And one of the major causes of this lack of trust is the inability on the part of many Christians to come to terms with God's justice. Many sincere seekers for truth simply cannot with conviction exclaim, "Just and true are thy ways, thou King of Kings" (Rev. 15:3b). And because they cannot believe completely, they cannot trust completely.

The following are some points to consider when formulating your own understanding of and hence relationship to God's justice.

1. **Realize that you're in impressive company** if you cannot at all times understand, explain, cope with, or even accept life's traumas. The same David who could at one time lament, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Psalm 22:1) could under different circumstances proclaim "thou art the God of my salvation" (Psalm 25:5).

2. **Do not feel guilty about questioning God**, thus compounding the problem with spiritually crippling remorse. Doubt unresolved, doubt unmitigated by periods of trust, doubt for the pseudo-intellectual thrill of doubting—these varieties are dangerous, even lethal. But a prayerful searching for answers is a quest God can reward.

3. **Remember that the night of spiritual struggle itself can bring victory**, a mental wrestling with the angel toward the morning of truth, acceptance, and hence trust. For example, had Job not suffered personal tragedies second only, it seems, to those of Jesus Himself, he could not have proclaimed, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15).

4. **Be reminded that coping with life's injustices links you with the human race.** Poets, song writers, philosophers, theologians—all have expressed ideas on the plight of humanity burdened by a million and one daily injustices: C. S. Lewis and his *Problem of Pain*; the musician's asking, "Does Jesus care when I've said good-bye"; King David's almost losing his way because of the prosperity of the wicked; Rabbi Harold Kushner's current best seller, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*.

5. **Remember that many charges laid against the account of God's justice have been incorrectly billed.** Satan should be the one picking up the tab. After all, the problem of injustice is really the problem of sin.

6. **And most of all, accept the fact that no one will ever figure out all the ways of God**, some of which are indeed beyond understanding. Children often get the idea that all prayers are answered: all lost puppies will come home, if prayed for; all sick mommies will be healed, if prayed for; all the grasshoppers will leap across the Christian farmer's crops and dine elsewhere, if prayed about. But what if the grasshoppers don't leap? To withhold complete trust in God until the reason for every injustice in life is understood is to withhold yourself from God.

Wilma McClarty is a professor of English at Southern College.

December 1
Thursday

Celebrate— Your Fine Is Paid

by Jerry Morgan

OPINION Key text: Psalm 96:13

I've only had occasion to go before a judge three times; once as a witness and twice for minor traffic violations. Each time I went I had ample time to watch other defendants go before the court as their turns came and was amazed to notice how different the "live" courtroom was from those I had seen on television. Without the melodramatic music, close-up shots of the suspects and that moment of suspense as the defense attorney springs his surprise witness on an unsuspecting D.A., the live court seemed . . . well—boring.

There is, however, one area in which TV's courts and real courts seem identical. Whether the defendant is before the judge for an illegal left-hand turn or on trial for first-degree murder, the attitude is the same. The judge demands justice. The accused may have repeatedly broken laws and in so doing openly violated the rights of others, but when he gets his day in court every loophole of the law is available to him—at the state's expense—to insure that justice is served. If, in spite of all this, he is found guilty he can then stretch his definition of justice to include plea-bargaining, a probationary sentence, countless appeals to higher courts, and failing all this, an early parole for good behavior.

The story is told that early in his political career, when Mayor LaGuardia was a judge in New York City, a man was brought before him for committing a misdemeanor. He had stolen a loaf of bread from a grocery store. The defendant had no previous criminal record and by all appearances was not the "criminal type." In pleading guilty he explained to the judge that he was out of work and had only stolen the bread to feed his family. It would have been easy for LaGuardia to dismiss the case and say, "Go and sin no more," but the law had been violated and despite the circumstances, sentence had to be pronounced. He also recognized that a man who could not afford to buy bread could not afford to pay even the minimum fine required by law.

Addressing the man, LaGuardia said, "I have no choice but to fine you \$25.00 for your crime." Then, turning to the people in the courtroom, he continued, "and I fine each of you \$1.00 for allowing this situation to exist in America."

The money was collected, the fine was paid, and the defendant given his freedom.

I like to think that this is how we may celebrate God's justice in our behalf.

"He shall judge the world with righteousness and his people with truth."

REACT
Lesson 10

1. Is God's judgment in any sense good news? Bad news?
2. Is hatred toward those who wrong us justified under any circumstance? Don't the psalms of imprecation establish a precedent, since they are divinely inspired? If not, what purpose do they serve for us?

What is your reaction to C. S. Lewis' comments on the psalms of imprecation (see Evidence)? Do his views raise any problems in regard to biblical inspiration?

3. Do you find it difficult to confidently affirm God's justice? Why? What is your reaction to the suggestions in the How To article?

The How To author suggests that we should completely trust God to be just, even if we don't fully understand the justice of His ways. Is this possible? What is the basis for trust if it is not understanding?

4. Why do you think God often defers responding to the plea for justice?
 5. Do you think Ronald J. Sider has rightly interpreted the Bible in his challenge to involvement in the struggle for justice (Evidence)? Are Christians called to work for change in social, economic and political structures? If ultimate justice will be established only by God at the end of the age, what would be the point of trying to establish justice on earth now?
 6. How would you compare the examples of justice in the introduction to God's way of executing justice?
-

11

In Time of Trouble

Psalm 91
December 4-10



*"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most
High . . . will not fear the terror of night nor the
arrow that flies by day"
(Psalm 91:1, S. NIV).*

The Peacekeeper

INTRODUCTION

Ronald Reagan, in a nationally televised news conference last December, made the following statement: "Our children should not grow up frightened. They should not fear the future." He then proceeded to explain his solution for this anxiety—a \$26 billion system of 100 huge MX intercontinental ballistics missiles contained in a so-called "Dense Pack" cluster in Wyoming. The new missile was even dubbed "The Peacekeeper."¹

It is not my intention to discuss the pros and cons of the nuclear arms race. I mention this proposal by the President as only one example of a very common human instinct—the instinct to look to ourselves for our ultimate defense and protection. We live in a society in which muscle, physical or otherwise, often determines who comes out on top. This idea can even come into play in our spiritual battles.

This week we are studying a different source of refuge and security. It is not found in man or in any of his destructive inventions. The Source of this protection is the Almighty God. This refuge is available to everyone who chooses to love and trust Him, in any and all circumstances. God's strength

will never fail us, unless we choose not to use it.

David was a man who was very familiar with the divine refuge. He faced the mighty giant Goliath on the battlefield. For many years he was hunted like an animal by jealous Saul. He experienced the terrible remorse of sin. In these and countless other experiences he learned that the only way for him to find true peace and security was to flee to the Rock of Ages. David was a man of great natural talent, but he learned that he must look outside of himself for his strength.

The Psalm we will examine in detail this week talks about the constant refuge David found in God, the same refuge we can find as well. Paul writes in Ephesians 6:12: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (NIV). In this kind of day-to-day struggle against evil we can find the precious place of security David found in God. We can trust in nothing less.

As we prayerfully study this week, may we find anew the ultimate "Peacekeeper."

1. *Time*, December 6, 1982, p. 12.

Individualized Invincibility

LOGOS

It is impossible to completely express the magnitude and meaning of God's protection. It is the sort of thing that is fully appreciated only in its absence. A chillingly graphic example of the absence of God's protection develops throughout the epic film on the Vietnam War, *Apocalypse Now*. The protagonist and his companions exist in a constant state of terror as they journey through the hostile jungles of Indochina. Death lurks all around. It strikes without warning—at any time, from any place, in any form. Life itself becomes a horror.

In utter contrast to this hellish scene is the theme of the 91st Psalm: the marvelous protection enjoyed by those who trust in an all-powerful God. This psalm has become universally known for its soothing phrases of trust and reassurance. One commentator states that Psalm 91 "has become for the congregation of all times, in a thousand hard situations and in all kinds of peril, the faithful companion of those in sore trial."

In this psalm the protection God gives His people seems to be divided into three basic categories. One type exhibited is a versatile, omnipresent protection that defends against a variety of sudden and unseen dangers. "Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday" (Psalm 91:3-6, NIV). God's care is complete—it provides for every circumstance. The divine defenses are multi-faceted: they combine the warm protectiveness of a parent bird's feathers with the hard, unyielding strength of armor; the small, mobile protection of the shield is coupled with the large, static deterrent of the rampart. No attack can be so innovative or unexpected as to penetrate God's perimeter.

This versatility is enhanced by the miraculous nature of God's protection. "For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone" (Psalm 91:11, 12, NIV). Even supernatural agencies are employed for the protection of God's people. Angels of light battle messengers of darkness—and there can be no doubt about the outcome. God holds His children in the very palm of His hand—no harm can come to them against His will.

The third and best facet of God's defense lies in the fact that it is not impersonal, corporate protection, but rather individual, caring protection. God's people are each specific objects of His loving concern. "A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. . . . If you make the Most High your dwelling—even the Lord, who is my refuge—then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent" (Psalm 91:7, 9, 10, NIV). You is emphatic and personal—singular, not plural. Each one of God's children receives his own special set of God's myriad defenses—none is unworthy of individualized invincibility.

L. R. C.

Some Wisdom For Daily Living

by Edwin Zackrison

As beautiful as the literary structure and poetic excellence Psalm 91 may be, it also brings deep experimental wisdom to the person who is the subject of intense temptation to pursue an evil course. In the second temptation of Christ the tempter introduced this Psalm in an effort to bring our Lord under his dominion. Some lessons are drawn from this incident in the writings of Ellen White.

1. **The Psalm is for believers.** Often one tends to overlook the fact that God's promises are made to believers and that the contextual setting of the promise must be appreciated. This Psalm makes grand promises but notice to whom they are given: "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High" (vs. 1); he "who abides in the shadow of the Almighty" (vs. 1); "you (who) have made the Lord your refuge" (vs. 9); "He (who) cleaves to me in love" (vs. 14); "when he calls to me" (vs. 14). This qualification identifies the recipient of these gifts.

Here is assurance for those living in the last days: "In the time of trouble just before the coming of Christ, the righteous will be preserved through the ministration of heavenly angels; but there will be no security for the transgressor of God's law. Angels cannot protect those who are disregarding one of the divine precepts."¹ Hence, for those who wish to see the presence of God in "times of troubles," Psalm 91 should be read often, perhaps even memorized.²

2. **Satan comes as an "angel of light."** When Satan tempted Christ he quoted this Psalm. Why? In approaching believers you must use their literature or their forms of worship. He comes as "an angel of light," that is to say, he appeals to the innate desires in man to want what is good. To promise skid row, endless marital problems, or intolerable arrogance would meet no corresponding cords in the human heart. Rather, Satan promises superior wisdom and wonderful freedom, declaring that it is possible to receive these without God. "He shall give His angels charge concerning thee," regardless of where thou goest, or what thou doest. This is his unlikely promise.

"Satan now supposes that he has met Jesus on His own ground. The wily foe himself presents words that proceeded from the mouth of God. He still appears as an angel of light, and he makes it evident that he is acquainted with the Scriptures, and understands the import of what is written. . . . When Satan quoted the promise (Matthew 4:6) . . . he omitted the words, 'to keep Thee in all Thy ways;' that is, in all the ways of God's choosing. . . . Jesus declared to Satan, 'It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.'"³

The importance of knowing the Word and its contextual setting is underscored here. Jesus recognized the organic unity of Scripture and perceived that here was an imposter who was distorting the instruction of God. Hence Christ unmasked the deceiver and avoided deviation from the path of obedience.

3. **Satan does not have authority to compel a believer to sin.** Satan has his limits and Psalm 91 gives the believer assurance of those limits through the employment of God's daily grace.

"The tempter thought to take advantage of Christ's humanity, and urge Him to presumption. But while Satan can solicit, he cannot compel to sin. He said to Jesus, 'Cast Thyself down,' knowing that he could not cast Him down; for God would interpose to deliver Him.

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Matthew 4:6

"The tempter
can never
compel us
to do evil."

Nor could Satan force Jesus to cast Himself down. Unless Christ should consent to temptation, He could not be overcome. Not all the power of earth or hell could force Him in the slightest degree to depart from the will of His Father. The tempter can never compel us to do evil. He cannot control minds unless they are yielded to his control. The will must consent, faith must let go its hold upon Christ, before Satan can exercise his power upon us."⁴

Without God even the believer is no match for the oldest sinner alive. But through the power of God, testified to in the promises of this Psalm, one can experience actual power over the domination of evil in one's life today.

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 256.
2. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1142.
3. *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 124, 125.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

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Poise In a Precarious World

by Jerry Gladson

Before Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932) wrote his first work on the Psalms, *Ausgewahlte Psalmen* ("Selected Psalms"), in 1904, interest in the psalter had mainly been centered in the faith or background of its author. In sharp contrast, Gunkel identified the Psalms with the living religion of Israel, particularly the religion celebrated at the Temple. Just as one can learn a great deal about Seventh-day Adventist life and faith by studying the *Church Hymnal*, so much can be discovered about Hebrew devotion by the study of the great psalms comprising its "hymnal."

Gunkel separated the psalms into categories according to their liturgical use. Thus he identified four or five main types of psalms; hymns, community and individual laments, individual songs of thanksgiving, and royal psalms. He also found various sub-types, such as wisdom poems, Torah liturgies, pilgrimage psalms, and other liturgies. His trend-setting approach to the Psalms, although superseded in some respects, has basically withstood the test of time and continues to be a source of fruitful study, for it enables the student to focus upon the real essential of the Psalms: The pattern of Hebrew devotion.

If we, with Gunkel, look past the historical events behind Psalm 91 to its setting in worship, we come away enriched. Psalm 91, unfortunately, resists easy classification into any single category. Many, including Gunkel himself, have seen this Psalm as a wisdom, or didactic poem. If it belongs with wisdom, it derives from the circle of those reverent Hebrew intellectuals who preserved for us the books of Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes.

More likely, however, Psalm 91 represents a psalm of trust or confidence. Not only does its content—serene trust in God—indicate this, but several other clues stand out as well. A worshiper at the temple, seeking protection and assurance of God's presence, no doubt received the words of this psalm as an assuring word from a priest. In the Hebrew, for instance, in both vs. 2 and vs. 9, the personal pronoun shifts from second to first person. At these junctures, the worshiper apparently made a profession of faith in response to the calm assurance given him by the psalm itself (vs. 1, 3-8, 9b-16). The entire psalm found a place in the worship life of the individual Israelite. It represents both the act of devotion and the reassuring word of God central to that worship.

Interestingly, the Psalm concludes with a first person word from God: "Because he cleaves to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name . . ." (vs. 14, RSV).

Psalm 91 displays life's insecurity, its vulnerability to evil powers, both human and demonic. Over against these chaotic forces, this psalm resolutely plants the reality of God, which alone gives assurance in a precarious world.

EVIDENCE
Key text:
Psalm 91:14-16

Surviving the Time of Trouble

by James Herman

HOW TO
Key text:
Revelation
7:14-17

Many Christians fear the time of trouble. I was made painfully aware of this when one of my daughters nightly prayers included the phrase, "help us not to have to flee," referring to the time of trouble. I have also witnessed the fear in older Christians. I have seen this fear manifested in sophisticated ways such as exotic training sessions for learning wilderness survival and all sorts of mountaineering feats for the specific purpose of evading an enemy. In a survey conducted by the Institute of Church Ministry, survival in the time of trouble was the second highest concern of Adventist youth.

The familiar prophecy of Daniel 12:1 states that "there will be a time of troubles, the worst since the nations first came into existence. When that time comes all the people of your nation whose names are written in God's book will be saved" (GNB). This gives a biblical setting for the time of trouble to end all troubles, and coincides with the longed-for proclamation given in Revelation 22:11, 12 "whoever is evil must go on doing evil, and whoever is filthy must go on being filthy, and whoever is good must go on doing good, and whoever is holy must go on being holy" (GNB).

Many Christians have a natural fear of a time of trouble. A misunderstanding of the doctrine of assurance is one cause of this fear. Some cringe at the very term "close of probation." But why is it that we think of the close of probation as a time of fear? When probation closes the test is over.

The phrase "living without a mediator" also invokes feelings of apprehension. If we would just look at our own judicial system, however, we realize that the only time a mediator is needed is when court is in session. Our advocate, Jesus Christ, pleads in our behalf. But when God says it is finished, when the gavel comes down, when the verdict "not guilty" is given, it is settled. We no longer need a mediator (Rev. 22:11, 12). Our salvation is not dependent on the outcome of the time of trouble, for the test is over. The time of trouble then becomes a privilege for God's people.

How do I survive the time of trouble? Let's look at examples of God's people throughout the ages who faced times of trouble. At the crossing of the Red Sea, did Moses call for the Red Cross to give the people swimming lessons; did he call the shipyards and order a flotilla of boats? No, none of that was needed. God provided a way of escape. There were the times when King Saul sought shelter in the same cave as David, when Elijah was starving in the wilderness, and many others. In every instance, God provided the way of escape.

So, the key to surviving the time of trouble is preparation. I'm not referring to storing up food, as one well known church organization encourages its members to do. It is not learning how to climb rocks; it is not knowing all the edible plant life. It is knowing and claiming the promises of protection and deliverance such as found in Psalm 91. It is knowing Jesus Christ, "whom to know is eternal life" (John 17:3). It is trusting in His righteousness. It is growing in the knowledge of Jesus Christ our Saviour (2 Peter 3:13, 14). This type of preparation is the key for surviving the time of trouble.

Other Dimensions

Contrary to some people's thinking, Psalm 91 is not a ticket to a Christian "Love Boat" or a boarding pass to a SDA-10 promising us a smooth flight to paradise. Neither is this psalm a travel insurance policy, with an extended coverage to protect against present and future tragedies. We seem to forget that the collective psalms of David don't always span the coverage we envision, nor do the gospels. And we fail to remember also that believers have had their share of life's tragedies together with unbelievers. These factors indicate that the Psalm 91 insurance coverage is not as extended as we sometimes assume. Nevertheless, this psalm does tell us something about our relationship with God that we urgently need to know.

First of all, the collective songs of David reflect the entire spectrum of Christian experience "from the depths of conscious guilt and self-condemnation to the loftiest faith and the most exalted communing with God."¹ On the one hand, David is sincerely thankful for God's protection in his past life and says so; he then proceeds to claim this same protection for his future, as in Psalm 91. On the other hand, for years David fled from Saul with the death penalty on his head while his spirit cried out in pain, "Why standest thou afar off, O Lord? why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble?" (Psalm 10:1). Where was God when he needed Him? Though David didn't lose his life, dodging Saul's javelin and constantly running as a fugitive was not exactly pleasant.

Furthermore, nowhere do the gospels promise us an uneventful ride through earth's war zone either. Even Jesus' claim to God's protection was extended to Him only as far as Calvary. At that point He was alone. As John Drane points out, Jesus never designed to comfort Himself or His disciples by suggesting that they will automatically and painlessly triumph over their enemies. "Quite the opposite is the case," says Drane, "for Jesus makes His teaching on the future an occasion to challenge His disciples' attitude to life, and He makes it clear that, when God intervenes in human affairs, it is a time of judgment for those who are His disciples as much as for everyone else."²

Thirdly, how would you tell a child caught in the Holocaust about God's protection in Psalm 91 as he's ripped from his parent's arms and sees them pried apart and herded with others into the "showers" to be gassed? Surely we cannot dismiss such questions by suggesting that Jews are less deserving of God's mercy than we.

Furthermore, there were Christians in such camps as well. Why were they forced to work at the point of a Nazi gun until they collapsed and were carried out to die? Was that young girl who didn't appear in the work camp line-up the next morning "unrighteous"? Or what do you say to the German Adventist bride-to-be when the invading enemy troops strip and rape her repeatedly in her own home in the presence of her parents? Is Psalm 91 for believers? If so, where was David's God when this girl needed Him?

Can we honestly talk about the promises and the devotional value of Psalm 91 to others and conclude that it will automatically bring peace of mind to those who need it? What about the disillusioned quadriplegic Vietnam vet? Will our exegesis help him? Will it answer his questions about the validity of God's promises? What of the

OPINION

Key text:

Matthew 5:11, 12

"Psalm 91 is not a boarding pass to a SDA-10 promising us a smooth flight to paradise."

young mother who suddenly finds herself a single parent and thrust into the role of Super-Mom which she can barely cope with. Or the youthful divorcee who married on the rebound only to blow it again. What about the recent theology graduate who is diagnosed as having terminal cancer and within a few months is dead?

How do you answer these people? How do you tell them about Psalm 91? What do you say? Will future pie-in-the-sky promises be enough? I hardly think so. What they want to know is, where is God now? If He can't help me today, when I need Him, how can I know He'll help me tomorrow? Without His help now where does that leave me?

Such questions as these are real. And though they touch on the larger question of suffering they cannot be set aside. We all need to be able to answer them in some way or another if we want to understand Psalm 91 better. Sometimes the answers are much more easily arrived at than others—such as when we're enjoying the comfort of financial security, while living among Christian friends, when we have boundless energy, and while enjoying religious freedom. But life itself seems to give Psalm 91 a deeper meaning than we usually give it. A wise lady with lots of experience once wrote "Of all the assurances which His word contains, it [David's life] is one of these strongest testimonies to the faithfulness, the justice, and the covenant mercy of God."³

**"Will our
exegesis
help the
quadriplegic
Vietnam vet?"**

In other words, the question about God and His promises is not whether He will avert the hurts that threaten us, although He is able to do this, but whether He will be with us when they do touch us. The question of Psalm 91 is, Will He leave us alone?

When one's spirit is touched by the finger of God and is awakened to the reality of Gods' promised presence and to its own potential and destiny, it is then enabled to triumph over pain, tragedy, trauma, paralysis, plagues, death-marches, and live on! What touches the body, though not insignificant, is no longer the issue. Neither is physical survival the question in point. A person touched by unmerited grace knows God is able to avert the storm because he knows the kind of God God is! No evil can touch his soul or break his relationship with his Maker. He commits his life to God with total confidence in his eventual resurrection. It is the believers' spirit that triumphs, not in an attitude of defiant or passionate survival, as would be the case with a secular man, but in the joy of a Christian who knows in Whom he believes.

I see in Psalm 91 not so much the promise of an extended insurance coverage against discomfort or pain, but an affirmation by David of his total confidence in God. His confidence was not in himself, but in who God is, what He can do, and what He will do if He sees fit to do it. No wonder David sang, "I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God, in him will I trust" (Psalm 91:2).

1. Ellen White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 754.

2. John Drane, *Jesus and the Four Gospels*, Harper and Row, 1979, p. 24.

3. White, *Loc. cit.*

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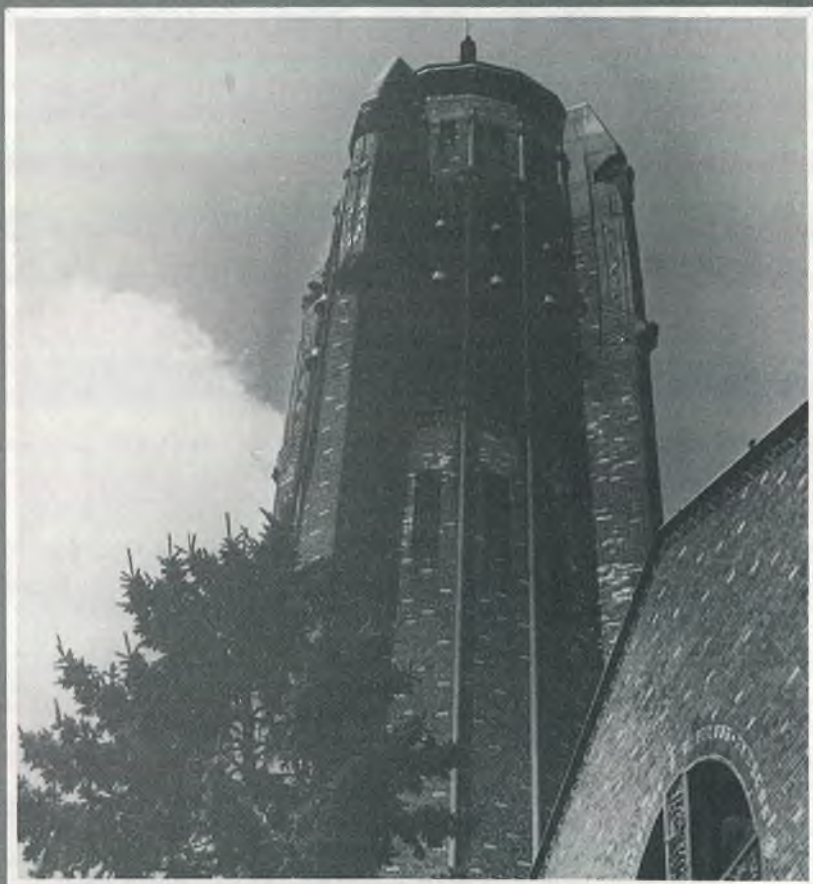
REACT
Lesson 11

1. Since God is our refuge and strength, what is our responsibility towards national defense? Are we to not fear the arrow that flies by day because we have bigger arrows? Or is our security based on something else? Explain.
2. To what extent are we to trust in God's protection and to what extent are we to trust in our own ability to protect ourselves. Is violent resistance ever a legitimate form of self-protection for the Christian?
3. Jack Blanco (Opinion) maintains that Psalm 91 is not "insurance coverage" against tragedy and pain. If this is true, what does God's protection involve? Does God's deliverance include both the physical and spiritual realms?
4. Did Psalms 91 not apply to the victims of the Holocaust? Explain.
5. Should the final "time of trouble" hold any fear for us at all? Do you think the spiritual preparation recommended by the How To author is adequate, or is more needed?

12 The King of Glory

Psalms 2, 24, 110 and 149

December 11-17



*"Let Israel rejoice in their Maker;
let the people of Zion be glad in
their King"*

(Psalm 149:2, RSV).

Welcoming Home the Victor

by Jenine Fryling

This is the day that I have been anxiously looking forward to. Chills run up and down my spine. Today he comes home! It seems so long ago since he left and so much has happened to him during that time. But away with unpleasant thoughts because today he comes home!

My friends are just as excited as I am. Before he left, he was not only our leader but our friend. He treated each one of us as a special, individual person. Sometimes it was hard to believe that such a "big-shot" would care about us. But he did. Besides thrilling us with his talks at our assemblies, he always kept us on our toes in choir and orchestra rehearsals, constantly motivating us to do our best. Since he's been gone, we have missed him terribly.

When he left on his mission we knew he would come back. We were so sure of it that we planned a royal welcome for his return. We chose some of the most difficult and beautiful music to perform for him and worked on it arduously so we could welcome him properly.

It was not until a few weeks ago that we realized that he might never come home. The conditions on the front were much worse than we had imagined, and we were horrified as we watched the battle on our screens. The struggle was so intense that our entire city was nearly paralyzed. We could not fathom such awful treatment being given to our friend. We were so moved and so full of sorrow that no music

could find its way out of our mouths or instruments. But he won! And we could hardly contain our joy. He *would* come home!

The final preparations for the joyous homecoming have filled our city with bustle and activity. All of us want him to know how proud we are of him and how glad we are to have him home again.

The cleaners have been working overtime because all of us have had our choir robes dry-cleaned for the occasion. My friends on the grounds crew have been grooming the shrubbery and trees and decorating the streets with banners and flags.

Oh, I see some choir members beginning to assemble near the city gate. It's still a bit early but after changing into my robe and checking my hair I think I will join them.

* * *

The crowd begins to gather rapidly. There is not a gloomy face present. In the distance trumpets herald the approaching company and soon we can hear the escorting choir sing:

"Lift up your heads, O ye gates; . . .
and the King of glory shall come in."

With song bursting from our beings we ask, "Who is this King of glory?"

The answer is one we love to hear:

The Lord strong and mighty,
The Lord mighty in battle!
Lift up your heads, O ye gates; . . .
And the King of glory shall come in."

INTRO- DUCTION

The Royal Psalms

LOGOS

Occasions of royal pomp and pageantry have inspired some of the greatest music ever composed. The majestic splendor of coronations, royal weddings, and other royal occasions has been augmented by musical grandeur. George Frederic Handel wrote the "Water Music" for a royal boating excursion on the river Thames. Just recently William Mathias wrote "Let the People Rejoice" for the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer. Anthems of praise such as "I Was Glad" by C. Hubert Parry and "Coronation Te Deum" by William Walton were composed specifically for coronation ceremonies.

Many of the psalms were inspired by similar pageantry, and were written for use in royal events. These psalms are grouped together under the title of "The Royal Psalms." Psalm 2 is the first of this group. It begins with a picture of agitated commotion. "Why do the nations rage, and the people plot in vain? The Kings of the earth take their stand against the Lord" (Psalm 2:1, 2, NIV). Moving from this picture of chaos, the psalm goes on to depict God's appointment of a victorious King or "Son" and to express a quiet confidence in God. "He said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father.' . . . Blessed are all who take refuge in him" (Psalm 2:7, 12, NIV).

This Psalm, read at enthronement ceremonies, fulfilled two purposes. The first was to instill confidence in the new king. And second, it presented a promise for the future that some day the true Son would come, who could rightfully say to God "My Father" (Psalm 2:7).

Psalm 110 was also used in enthronement ceremonies. And it too pointed beyond the king to the coming Messiah. "The Lord says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand'" (Psalm 110:1, NIV). Christ, realizing the deeper meaning of these words, used them to confront the Pharisees (Matt. 22:41-45). The author of the book of Hebrews further delineated the messianic implications of this psalm. He quoted verse 4, "You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek" to indicate Christ's mission: "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 6:19, 20, NIV).

Psalm 24, another royal psalm, was used to celebrate Yahweh's kingship. "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it" (Psalm 24:1, NIV). The next few verses give the conditions for entry into God's kingdom. "Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false" (Psalm 24:3, 4, NIV). Note that the qualifications are not, "He who has perfectly kept the law" or "He who has performed the required amount of sacrifices." The requirements have more to do with a person's will, an attitude from within (pure heart) demonstrated without (clean hands).

As you study the royal psalms this week, and as you get a new picture of God, "rejoice in this honor and sing for joy. . . ." "For the Lord takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with salvation. . . ." (Psalm 149:5, 4, NIV).

E. R. M.

God's Camelot

by Edwin Zackrisson

Each evening from December to December
before you drift to sleep upon your cot,
Think back on all the tales that you'll remember of Camelot.
Ask every person if he's heard the story
and tell it strong and clear if he has not,

That once there was a fleeting wisp of glory called Camelot.¹

Once upon a time God's kingdom was Camelot. It's not important whether there was a legal limit to the snow there or whether July and August could not be too hot. If winter was forbidden until December and summer lingered on until September is beside the point. Whether rain never fell until after sundown or by 8:00 a.m. the morning fog had disappeared is unimportant. And should the snow be allowed to slush upon the hillsides or by 9:00 p.m. the moonlight be required to appear is extraneous to the truth about this Camelot of God.

In that kingdom there was security and righteousness. The territory was unchallenged, nothing lived unto itself, all lived to serve the other.² There was simply not a more congenial spot for happily-ever-aftering than God's Camelot.

But just as in the popular play, a triangle messed it up. The perverse affair was a love-filing with self—something that logically can't work, and experientially hasn't. The glorious kingdom of God, for shining moments of eternity the idyllic fulfillment of purposeful existence, where the climate was perfect all the year, found itself inundated with a credibility challenge and terrible rumors.

Scripture views God's kingdom from the standpoint of *authority* more than *power*. If *power* were the issue in the great controversy the fight between good and evil would have been over long ago. As Camelot ran on natural laws so did God's kingdom. But God's realm also included moral laws which must be obeyed *voluntarily* for the king to realize the full weight of his kingship. Affairs with self interfere with that freedom for they set up contrary allegiances and result in disaster. Thus the Greek word, *basileia*, or kingdom, is better translated "kingship." One cannot enter God's kingdom (kingship) unless one is born again, i.e. comes voluntarily to recognize the Kingship of God in his life.

So there is a Camelot future as well as the principles of God's Camelot working battle with evil in this life: "As used in the Bible the expression "kingdom of God" is employed to designate both the kingdom of grace and the kingdom of glory. . . . The kingdom of glory . . . is yet future. It is not to be set up until the second advent of Christ. The kingdom of grace was instituted immediately after the fall of man, when a plan was devised for the redemption of the guilty race. It then existed in the purpose and by the Promise of God; and through faith, men could become its subjects."³

One who becomes part of the eternal kingdom abides the principles of its government in his heart. Unlike the play, God's Camelot is not one brief, shining moment, destined only to be a fleeting wisp of glory. Sin is not glorified. Rather, intelligent subjects see its destructive nature and call on the King finally to remove it. Thus the perverse love affair with self does not ride off as a hero on a white steed to

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Revelation
19:6, 7

"If power were the issue in the great controversy the fight between good and evil would have been over long ago."

□ December 13
Tuesday

elévate sin to the position of normality.

Instead God is victorious, right wins out, the triangle is seen as perverse, and Camelot becomes God's eternal kingdom of glory never to abide such rude interruptions again. The final act of God's play ends, not with melancholy reprise about what had been or could have been, but with the glorious peals of praise:

"Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.

Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory!" (Revelation 19: 6, 7, RSV).

1. Lerner and Lowe, "Camelot" Reprise.
2. *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 20, 21.
3. *The Great Controversy*, p. 347.

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The King of Glory

by Helmut Ott

The starting point of our study this week is a special group of psalms generally known as the "Royal Psalms." Opinions as to how many and exactly which Psalms belong to this category vary. But there seems to be general agreement that at least Psalms 2, 24, 110 and 149 belong in this group. Due to the limitations of space, only some of their outstanding features will be considered here. They will be discussed from both the historical and the prophetic perspectives.

1. The historical dimension.

These psalms are called "royal" because their central theme is the king, not as a person necessarily, but as the holder of an office under God and over His people. They were used as part of coronation ceremonies and/or at special festivities held on occasion of the anniversary of these coronations.

In the royal psalms, God is presented as the true and sovereign King. He is "the King of glory" (24:2-10), the "Maker" of Israel and King of the "people of Zion" (149:2). God is "the One enthroned in heaven" (2:4) who "owns the earth" He created (24:1, 2) and grants rulership to the king in "Zion" (2:6, 7). The "kings of the earth" refuse to accept God's authority and "take their stand . . . against the Lord and against His Anointed One" (2:2, 3). But they "plop in vain" (2:1). God will "crush kings," "judge the nations" and put them under the rulership of his "Son" (110:1, 2, 3, 6; 2:7, 9).

The Son-King (2:6, 7), is "a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek" (110:4). God's promise to Him is, "I will make the nations your inheritance, and the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule over them. . . ." (Psalm 2:8, 9, NIV). That is why the "kings" and "rulers of the earth" are counseled to "be wise" and "serve the Lord," to "kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way" (Psalm 2:10-12, NIV).

Those "who take refuge" in God, (2:12), who are upright and have "a pure heart", who do not pursue the worthless or speak falsehood but "seek the Lord," will receive blessing and vindication from God (their) Savior" (24:4-6). They "rejoice in their Maker," they are "glad in their King." They "praise his name . . . for the Lord takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with salvation" (Psalm 149:2-4, NIV).

2. The Prophetic or Messianic dimension.

When the royal psalms are studied from the New Testament perspective, it can be seen that, besides being poetic descriptions of the human kings ruling under God in Jerusalem, they also are—perhaps primarily—prophetic expressions of the messianic work of Jesus Christ. The New Testament writers saw in Jesus God's Priest-King whose redemptive work would bring about the eventual extinction of sin and sinners, and the establishment of God's eternal kingdom of glory (Matt. 22:41-46; Heb. 7:25; Rev. 20:14, 15; 2 Peter 3:13).

At His first coming, Jesus introduced God's spiritual kingdom of grace (Mark 1:14, 15; Matt. 12:28). Those who accept Him as their personal Savior become faith-participants of this kingdom. They are adopted as "sons of God" and made "heirs according to promise," (Eph. 2:18, 19; Gal. 3:26, 29; 4:4-7). God "has delivered [them] from

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Psalm 2:7, 8, NIV

"Those who take refuge in God will receive blessing and vindication from God."

the dominion of darkness and transferred [them] to the kingdom of his beloved Son;" they have "passed from death to life," (Col. 1:13, RSV; John 5:24; cf. Eph. 2:5, 6; Col. 3:1-4; 1 John 5:11, 12).

God's eternal kingdom, however, will become a concrete reality only at the Second Coming. Therefore, all the believer is and all that he has as a son of God, he is and has only because and for as long as he remains in Christ by faith. Jesus is his "righteousness, holiness and redemption," his "life," his "hope," his "all," (1 Cor. 1:30; Col. 3:4, 11; 1 Tim. 1:1). He is "the reality," (Col. 2:17), of which the believer partakes by faith.

Should the believer separate himself from Christ, he would revert to the state of lostness in which he was before his reconciliation took place, (Eph. 2:12; 1 Cor. 15:1, 2; Heb. 10:19, 35-39). It is, therefore, essential that he remain in his faith-relationship with Christ to the very end. As Paul has said, Christ has "reconciled" you, and He will "present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before Him, provided that you continue in the faith stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel." (Col. 1:22, 23 RSV; cf. Heb. 3:6, 12, 14; 1 John 2:28). If he remains "in Christ" to the end, the believer will inherit God's eternal kingdom of glory regardless of whether he tasted death or not (1 Thess. 4:16, 17; 5:10; John 6:40).

Our God Reigns

The Seventh-day Adventist church grew out of a movement that focused on the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Over the years we have maintained that focus. But perhaps we have lost sight of what really happened at the first coming. The New Testament writers felt free to apply the royal psalms to Jesus—His messianic reign over the universe began with His ascension into heaven (cf. Phil. 2:5-11; 1 Cor. 15:25). It is possible that while using the prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27 to point to the baptism of Jesus and establish 1844 roots, one can lose sight of the fact that Jesus is really reigning today.

Why is it that every year hundreds of Adventist youth leave the church fellowship? What has caused the television to win out so often over evangelism, prayer meetings, and other church-related functions? In all honesty we might have to admit that a contributing factor for many of the ills in the church is that we lack cognizance of the "Messiah." A recapturing the notion that even though Jesus is not personally reigning (visibly) on earth He still reigns over the affairs of earth and the hearts of His people, may bring about a revelation of godliness never before seen in this church.

Our minds can be educated to rejoice in Jesus as we see his reigning power in our lives. We forget that Jesus Christ means Jesus the Messiah—the One anointed to save us from sin! Our Lord is the Messiah that David talks about, and His kingdom has already entered our world.

Obviously, not every aspect of the messianic kingdom has been visibly realized. Wars continue, famines, floods, and tragedies are all around, crime escalates, and it could be easy to forget that Jesus is in control. However, the Christian relates to this by remembering that the Messiahship of Jesus means two things:

First, it guarantees that the negatives of this life will ultimately work out for His glory. Even in the Christian's life this is true. When Paul says in Romans that "all things work together for good to them that love God" (Romans 8:28) he is not just being optimistic. He is reminding us that Satan is a defeated foe (cf. John 12:31). God's work in our lives will reveal that no encroaching evil can frustrate His purposes. So rejoice! Even in adversity, our God reigns.

Second, the Messiahship of Jesus means that our eternal salvation is secure in Him. We often look at our sins and our mistakes, and feel as though we are overcome with evil. We wonder how we will ever "make it to heaven." The fact is that in Christ we have (Ephesians 2:6). The Bible speaks about passing out of darkness into the light (1 Peter 2:9). When Jesus comes again those of us who have been living in His Light will continue to do so, while those who have been rejected it will be destroyed by the light that was meant to save them. We need not worry about that future when we are in Christ. Rather, we should be concerned with today.

Our God reigns. He is King over our hearts if we are in Christ. He will not leave us, He will not voluntarily abdicate His throne of our hearts. Our God reigns now! Rejoice!

HOW TO
Key text:
Psalm 2:6

God—a King?

by Melvin Campbell

OPINION

It strikes me as being a bit strange that this lesson, or more specifically the Psalms, explains the God of heaven in terms of kings, warriors, sovereigns, two-edged swords, anointed ones, thrones, rulers, sceptres, power, and majesty. Or that the triumphal return of Jesus is couched in language of this kind, resplendent in every detail. Wasn't it but a few years before these Psalms were written that the Creator-God had spoken firmly but apparently not finally against Israel having a king? Now, Israel has a king and God is allowing Himself to be explained in terms of an earthly political system.

Current monarchies are not to be confused with ancient kingdoms. The kings and queens of England and the kings of David's time are related in name only. Today, most have warm feelings toward the Queen of England. In ancient times, however, few monarchies created a response of love. Although there were some potentates of Israel who received love and respect, these were in the minority. Even the best of them could manipulate people in a high-handed manner—just ask Uriah the Hittite! Yet David at his worst was probably a tower of moral excellence compared to the pagan kings.

“Rather than telling us what He is actually like, God uses metaphors.”

So why try to understand God in terms of monarchy—a one-time forbidden system? God tried to have himself understood through the sanctuary service. The sanctuary was only a partially successful attempt to have a spiritually deprived nation learn of Him. Israel was not content to have a God in their midst—it had to be a king. The Creator-God can only begin with the known to help understand the unknown—Himself. It seems as if this is the only way fallen man can learn.

Rather than telling us what He is actually like, God uses analogies and metaphors. Even if the plain facts of God were laid before us, we just could not understand.

Just how do you go about explaining a God who by definition is unexplainable? Let's try kings, priests, warriors, two-edged swords, rulers, sceptres, majesty, etc. Others prefer sheep, lions, water, bread, oil, fire, vines, trees. If the scriptures were to be written today would God be likened to a board chairman, president, or prime minister? The ultimate stroke of genius (if God can be referred to by such a trite word) was for God to become man!

This God-man, Jesus, brings forgiveness, love, peace, and eternal life. I am more willing to have a king like that!

1. How does the portrait of God as royal sovereign in the psalms affect
 - 1) your personal relationship to Him?
 - 2) your attitude toward Him?
 - 3) your behavior in church?
 2. Ellen White states that the kingdom of grace has been a reality since the fall, while the kingdom of glory will be established at the Second Coming (see Testimony). But is there a sense in which the kingdom of God was established in a new way through the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus (see Evidence)? If so, what are the practical implications of this fact?
 3. Are you comfortable with the concept of God as "king"? Is this metaphor from the culture of Bible times still significant in modern democratic societies? Explain.
 4. Can one relate to God as an awe-inspiring monarch and at the same time as a close friend or father?
 5. How appropriate do you think the following are as metaphors for God?
 - board chairman
 - president
 - prime ministerCan you think of other roles or titles from modern society that could be applied to God?
-

13 In Praise of Zion

Psalms 48 and 122
December 18-24



*"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! May they prosper who love you! Peace be within your walls, and security within your towers!"
(Psalm 122: 6, 7, RSV).*

by Terry Cantrell

The City of God

"Sacred to three religions, the Harem Ash-Sharif—Jerusalem's ancient temple mount, now dominated by the Dome of the Rock—is one of the most fiercely contested pieces of real estate in the world. For nearly two thousand years, Jews, Christians, and Moslems have slaughtered one another for possession of the Harem. Their cataclysmic clashes have stained the ancient site with the blood of countless holy warriors.

"In the first millennium B.C., the Harem was capped by Solomon's resplendent temple. [It was] demolished by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. and rebuilt by King Herod five centuries later. . . . In a brutal attempt to bring the [Jewish] rebels to heel, Rome mounted a repressive campaign against them that culminated in the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D.

"Subsequently, a fanatically dedicated Moslem force seized the Harem in the name of Allah and erected a golden shrine, known as the Dome of

the Rock.

"In June of 1967, at the height of the . . . Six Day War, a jubilant Jewish army stormed and captured Old Jerusalem. For the first time since the Roman sack of Jerusalem some nineteen centuries earlier, the ancient temple Mount was in Jewish hands.

"Once again the shrines of the Holy City were accessible to all three religions."¹

But the fighting isn't over. You can look at almost any newspaper and find a story on the conflicts in the Middle East which involve Jerusalem. The Psalms give several descriptions of the city. "On the holy mount stands the city he founded; the Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God" (Psalm 87:1-3, RSV).

What a paradox! This "city of God" has been flowing with blood for over 20 centuries, including the death of Christ. Why?

INTRODUCTION

1. Jerry M. Landay, *Dome of the Rock: Three Faiths of Jerusalem* (S. Arthur Dambner, 1972).

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□ December 18
Sunday

Zion, Zaphon, and Us

LOGOS "The Lord in Zion reigneth"—perhaps you've felt a sense of exultation from joining with other worshipers in singing that triumphant affirmation. Reflection on the phrase, however, raises at least four questions: What is Zion? Why is it important? How should I relate to it? And who belong there?

Zion is another name for that Palestinian city now sacred to three religions and embroiled in endless conflict—Jerusalem. But the Psalms and other portions of scripture make broader use of the term "Zion." George A. F. Knight points out that "(a) Zion was where the temple and the royal palace stood. . . . (b) Later on, Zion became a poetic name for the people of Israel themselves. (c) Still later, after they were driven from Jerusalem in 587 B.C. by the Babylonian conquerors, Zion became the theological name even for the whole land of Israel. (d) Amongst Christians the name Zion came to be used of the whole People of God. (e) Sometimes the name was used even for the little local church building which one attended. . . . (f) But in the Church's liturgy Zion came to be used as the name of even the heavenly city!"¹

Perhaps Zion could best be summed up as "the community of God"—the community of ancient Israel, the Christian community of today, and the future community of those forever redeemed.

Why is Zion important? "Like the utmost heights of Zaphon is Mount Zion, the city of our God" (Psalm 48:2, NIV). Zaphon was a mythological mountain believed by the ancients to exist far to the north. It was "a divine mountain; it was so lofty that it passed right into the heavens, right up to the residence of those divinities who dwell above it there in the bright blue sky."² So the Psalmist is making the bold assertion that Jerusalem, with its unimpressive elevation of 2,250 feet, is the true divine mountain. Zion is important because "God is in her citadels" (vs. 3, NIV).

Furthermore, Zion is important because within its walls one finds unassailable security. God "has shown himself to be her fortress" and He "makes her secure forever" (vs. 3, 8, NIV).

A third reason for Zion's importance is that in it God's characteristics of unfailing love and justice are revealed and celebrated. "Within your temple, O God, we meditate on your unfailing love. . . . Your right hand is filled with righteousness. Mount Zion rejoices, the villages of Judah are glad because of your judgments" (vs. 9-11, NIV).

A final reason why Zion is important is that the God who dwells there has pledged to be our eternal source of direction. Outside of Zion priorities become hazy and meanings shrouded. But the God of Zion "will be our guide even to the end" (vs. 14, NIV).

Psalm 122 answers the question of how to relate to Zion. It is one of the "Songs of Ascents"—songs for pilgrims making their way towards Zion. Arrival in Jerusalem is a joyful event for the psalmist. "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord'" (Psalm 122:1, RSV). He then declares the unity of Zion: "Jerusalem restored! The city, one united whole! Here tribes come up, the tribes of Yahweh" (vs. 3, 4, Jerusalem Bible). Thus, we should ever seek to foster the unity of today's Zion, the church. However, the "unity was never meant to be uniform; Israel was a family of tribes, each with its

well-marked character (cf. Gn. 49; Dt. 33).¹³ A united Zion encompasses a healthy diversity.

The peace of Zion is another high priority concern. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. . . . May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels. For the sake of my brothers and friends, I will say, 'Peace be within you' " (vs. 6-8, NIV). This peace involves prevention of physical conflict, the kind that batters "walls" and "citadels." And, it involves harmonious relationships between "brothers and friends." If our lives are oriented toward Zion, they will be dedicated to such peace.

Finally, who belongs to Zion? The non-Jew might have found the lavish claims that the psalm writers made for their capital city rather arrogant. A thorough study of the psalms, however, shows that access to Zion was never meant to be reserved for one racial or national group. The Lord says, "I will record Rahab and Babylon among those who acknowledge me—Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush—and I will say, 'This one was born in Zion' " (Psalm 87:4, NIV).

In the New Testament, a new, inclusive Zion clearly emerges. This new community is composed of "living stones . . . being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5, NIV). This new Zion is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone" (Eph. 2:20, NIV). In it the alienation that divides social groups is removed and all have free access to God through Christ (Eph. 2:14-18). The new Zion also has a dimension that transcends the earthly community of believers. The writer of Hebrews addresses us as those who "have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven" (Heb. 12:22, 23, NIV). By entering Christ's church, we become citizens of the heavenly Zion now. And one day, this transcendent Zion, into which believers have already been incorporated, will become an empirical reality. John testifies, "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them' " (Rev. 21:2, 3, NIV).

D. F. M.

1. George A. F. Knight, *Psalms, Volume 1*, Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982), p. 228.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary series (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975), p. 433.

Praise—an “Everybody Wins” Activity

by Robert R. Morrison

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Psalm 48:9-11

This lesson deals with the theme of praise to Zion—Zion beheld in its past splendor; Zion glimpsed in its glorious future. Psalm 48 blesses us with a sharper view of God’s righteous judgments, final triumph, and eternal love; Psalm 122 gladdens us with foretastes of the great journey toward the sea of glass.

What, however, can we do about praise in the little time remaining on this earth? Should we merely assume that praise is one of those things we shall have time for in heaven, but need not be concerned with now? Have we come to feel, perhaps unconsciously, that praise is akin to flattery, and therefore less than completely honest? Do we consider praise at best an inefficient use of our precious time?

We have seriously underestimated the value of praise. That value is so great that it appears in three important manifestations.

1. Praise is a means of fulfilling our mission.

“If we truly love Christ, we shall glorify Him by our words. Unbelievers are often convicted as they listen to pure words of praise and gratitude to God.”¹ “The greatest praise that men can bring to God is to become consecrated channels through whom He can work.”² We are urged to see that our neighbors are “encouraged and strengthened by all the aid it is in our power to bestow.”³ The reason? “All who are partakers of this great salvation have something to do to help those who are hanging on the skirts of Zion.”⁴ Helping our neighbors may even be so all-encompassing as to involve their very salvation: “Not all professed Christians are Christians at heart. There are sinners in Zion now, as there were anciently. . . . The people of God are unready for the fearful, trying scenes before us, unready to stand pure from evil and lust amid the perils and corruption of this degenerate age.”⁵ Notice this sequence of thought, from the same passage: “Many are not obeying the commandments of God; yet they profess to do so. If they would be faithful to obey all the statutes of God, they would have a power which would carry conviction to the hearts of the unbelieving.”

2. Praise is one of our duties toward God.

“We are to show to the world and to all the heavenly intelligences that we appreciate the wonderful love of God for fallen humanity.”⁶ Our praise gladdens the hearts of heaven as often as we sadden those hearts, should we hesitate to offer something so readily within our power as praise? “The praise and thanksgiving from the worshippers below is taken up in the heavenly anthem, and praise and rejoicing sound through the heavenly courts because Christ has not died in vain for the fallen sons of Adam.”⁷ Such praise is a personal matter: “God desires that our praise shall ascend to Him, marked with our own individuality. These precious acknowledgements to the praise of the glory of His grace, when supported by a Christlike life, have an irresistible power, that works for the salvation of souls.”⁸

3. Praise works for our own personal benefit.

“Nothing tends more to promote health of body and of soul than does a spirit of gratitude and praise.”⁹ “If the loving kindness of God called forth more thanksgiving and praise, we would have far more power in prayer.”¹⁰ “If there was much more praising the Lord, and far less doleful recitation of discouragements, many more victories would be achieved.”¹¹

“Nothing tends more to promote health of body and soul than does a spirit of praise.”

1. *Messages to Young People*, p. 424.
2. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 566.
3. *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 77.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 76, 77.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 446, 447.
6. *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 299.
7. *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 366.
8. *Ministry of Healing*, p. 100.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 251.
10. *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 317.
11. *Evangelism*, p. 499.

December 20
Tuesday

Robert R. Morrison is Professor of Modern Languages and Chairman of the Division of Arts and Letters at Southern College

Who Is a True Israelite?

by Walter F. Specht

The basis of salvation is not natural descent, but faith in Jesus Christ. Salvation is not national, but personal. Anyone of any nation or race who accepts Christ in faith will be saved (Rom. 10:13). That faith makes him also a child of Abraham, who through faith became righteous.

Thus the true Israelite is not necessarily a physical descendant of Abraham. "For he is not a real Jew who is one outwardly. . . . He is a Jew who is one inwardly" (chap. 2:28, 29). John the Baptist declared that God was capable of raising up children to Abraham from stones (Matt. 3:9). The true descendants of Abraham are those who have the faith of Abraham.

The new Israel, thus constituted, appropriated the promises and titles anciently given to the Hebrews. This is most clearly shown in 1 Peter 2:9, 10, which applies designations drawn from Exodus 19:5, 6, to Christians. They are "a chosen race," an elect people, chosen by God as truly as was ancient Israel. They are also a "royal priesthood," a designation corresponding to the "kingdom of priests" in Exodus 19:6. As the Hebrews were to comprise a kingdom consisting of priests, so the church constitutes a body of priests, each of whom has a direct access to God. Like Israel of old (Deut. 7:6; 14:2), Christians comprise a "holy" nation. They are a holy people because God has separated them from all other people to be dedicated to Him. They are therefore "God's own people" or, in the words of the K.J.V., "a peculiar people," "peculiar" in the sense of belonging exclusively to God as His special treasure. Recalling the message in the names of Hosea's children (Hosea 1:6-11), Peter adds, "Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy."

Why has God called a new Israel as His special people? Peter answers, "That you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). It is the function of the church to witness to the excellencies of God. God has not called the church to privilege only but to a weighty responsibility. Every Christian is to testify to God's grace and love in leading him out of darkness into the light of truth.

Jesus Christ, as Paul expressed it, "gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds" (Titus 2:14). The risen Christ gave His church the task of making disciples of all nations and of teaching them to obey our Lord's commands (Matt. 28:19, 20). The church is to display the manifold wisdom, and power, and love of God to the world (Eph. 3:10).

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Romans 2:28, 29

Songs of Ascents

by David C. Smith

HOW TO Key text: Psalm 126

The jet returning the Southern College Die Meistersinger male chorus from their Russia-Rumanian tour suddenly broke through the oppressive overcast. Down below, the friendly U.S. landscape welcomed the weary group back home. With spontaneous and joyful expression, the male chorus, joined by the other passengers, sang *The Star-Spangled Banner*. The phrase "O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave" rocked the plane just as it touched down at Kennedy International Airport. How grateful all were to be back in the U.S., to once again enjoy the freedoms, the culture, the lifestyles, and friends in their homeland.

Returning home after a long trip away usually triggers a zestful song in the heart of a weary traveler. The Die Meistersinger chorus had been, in effect, singing songs of *descent* as the plane brought them safely back home. But the songs portrayed in Psalms 120-134 are songs of *ascents*, sung by pilgrims ascending to Zion.

The Christian is a weary traveler, not quite at home in this world, yet living in it. He is continually ascending toward Zion, and that thought sparks a responsive chord of praise and hope in his heart. Here are some practical suggestions for any pilgrim, destined for Zion, who wants to experience a melody of heavenly peace and joy while traveling the straight and narrow path to the city of God:

1. **Learn to enjoy the freedom from self which God offers you.** Zion is a place where one participates in the full joy of selfless service, yet one can taste this joy here on earth. According to 1 Corinthians 15:31, the apostle Paul died to self everyday, and the Christian pilgrim must do the same to experience heavenly music in his heart.

2. **Cultivate friendships with those who enjoy a Christ-centered lifestyle.** Proverbs 17:17 emphasizes the key supportive roles friends can play. Don't be exclusive in your relationships, but the strength of your songs of ascents will often be proportionate to the Christian compatibility of your friends.

3. **Know Jesus as your best friend.** According to John 14:3-6, Christ is the only way to get to Zion, and He is certainly the best reason to sing while on your way there.

4. **Don't be of the world, though in it.** As Luke 12:34 reminds, our hearts will be where our treasures are. And it is our treasure which sparks our personal song. Place your personal treasure, your material gains, your talents and abilities, your all, at the feet of Jesus, and your songs of ascents will ascend forever and ever, even unto Zion, the beautiful city of God.

Zion—Solution For Homelessness

by Richard Quebedeaux

Biblically speaking, community is to be found in the church as the extended family of God, a concept that the institutional church in America has tried to model—without success—and one that any kind of “invisible” religion, by its very nature, is *incapable* of modeling. In secular society, in a world of increasing modernity, where homelessness is the norm, the *only* way religion can really be “successful” is to provide a home for the homeless—a family that includes not just *my* kind of people, but God’s kind of people, who love him with everything they have, and who love their neighbor (rich or poor, left or right, appealing or unattractive, sophisticated or ordinary) as much as they love themselves. The church, therefore, does need to become God’s ideal family, both in word and in deed. And its leaders will *have* to be heroic leaders who really live and exemplify the life they preach and teach, whose authority is recognized in their nobility, in their concrete modeling of the love of God, the only force that can save and transform a world plagued with the consequences of sin. . . .

From the perspective of biblical faith, and of *agape*, the order originally intended for creation was unity. At the foundation of this unity was to be the family, in which love is the unifying force, the power that binds individuals together in a common purpose. The family, then, was to have been the model by which society as a whole could be organized on the basis of unconditional love and mutual caring for one another. But unity and modernity, in the family itself and in all social relations, are at war with each other.

For all their nineteenth-century flavor, Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud still dominate American culture today. Their thought and the reaction against it are pivotal to the contemporary understanding of life, shaped by modernity in general and science in particular. In common, they teach a doctrine of competition and hostility that defeats the very pursuit of unity—epitomized in the biblical ideal of the family centered on God—that would save us. Darwin saw humanity as the end of a ruthless “survival of the fittest” formula. Marx saw society as iron-ribbed, bloody class warfare. Freud thought that the strongest part of the mind was a seething cauldron of powerfully repressed hostility, terror, and aggression.

The theories of Darwin, Marx, and Freud are a judgment on the failure of love in Christianity. Popular religion in America has mentalized love. But love is really an activist principle, and *service* is the way love is enacted, the concrete way it matures. The best evidence of the lack of love in modern American society is the lack of service—*real* service—among its citizens. . . .

Erich Fromm tells us that authentic love is possible only if two persons communicate with each other from the *center* of their being, hence each one of them experiences himself from the center of his existence. Only in this “central experience” is human reality, only here is aliveness, only here is the true basis for love. Love, experienced thus, is a constant challenge; it is never a resting place, but a moving, growing, working together; even whether there is harmony or conflict, joy or sadness, is secondary to the fundamental fact that two people experience themselves from the essence of their exist-

OPINION

Key text:
Ephesians
2:11-18

“The *only* way religion can really be ‘successful’ is to provide a home for the homeless.”

tence, that they are one with each other by being one with themselves, rather than by fleeing from themselves. There is only one proof for the presence of love—the *depth* of the relationship, and the aliveness and strength in each person concerned. This is the fruit by which love is recognized and the evidence that the superficial “love” purveyed by the leaders of popular religion in America isn’t really love at all. When superficial relationships are the norm, love is an illusion.

Love isn’t love until you give it away. Authentic love is infectious; it demands continuance; it is, ultimately, irresistible. Viktor Frankl describes this infectious quality of love, and in so doing indicates exactly *how* love is transmitted and how it can grow in community. We cannot become fully aware of the essence of other human beings unless we love them, he insists. By the spiritual act of love one is enabled to see the essential traits and features in the beloved; and even more, one sees that which is potential in *oneself*, that which is not yet actualized but yet ought to be actualized. Furthermore, by one’s love—in one’s *giving* to the beloved—the loving person enables the beloved to actualize these potentialities. This is why authentic “dialogue” between two opposing parties, motivated by love and concretized in service—despite *whatever* the disagreement—leads, ultimately, to unity. When I give you love from the center of my being, from my heart, and you receive it, you’ll want to return it. In the process of dialogue you become more like me and I become more like you. The *real* evangel, the good news of the gospel, is not a list of right doctrines or moral do’s and don’ts. It is the love of God conveyed by one person to another *unconditionally*. This love transforms the receiver, and all the more so when he doesn’t expect it and feels unworthy of it. By loving people unconditionally, we assure them that they have value, that they deserve to be loved. The devil has no weapon against unconditional love. . . .

What America—and the rest of the world—needs, then, is godly leaders, who, by the discipline they impose on themselves and their followers, produce saints. If Christianity wishes to have a positive and transformative influence in America—to speak again with authority—its leaders will have to provide the one thing all modern Americans need most of all: a loving family and a home. . . .

**“The devil
has no weapon
against
unconditional
love.”**

Excerpted from the book
By What Authority by
Richard Quebedeaux,
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Richard Quebedeaux has written several recent books on American religion, including *The New Charismatics* and *The Worldly Evangelicals*.

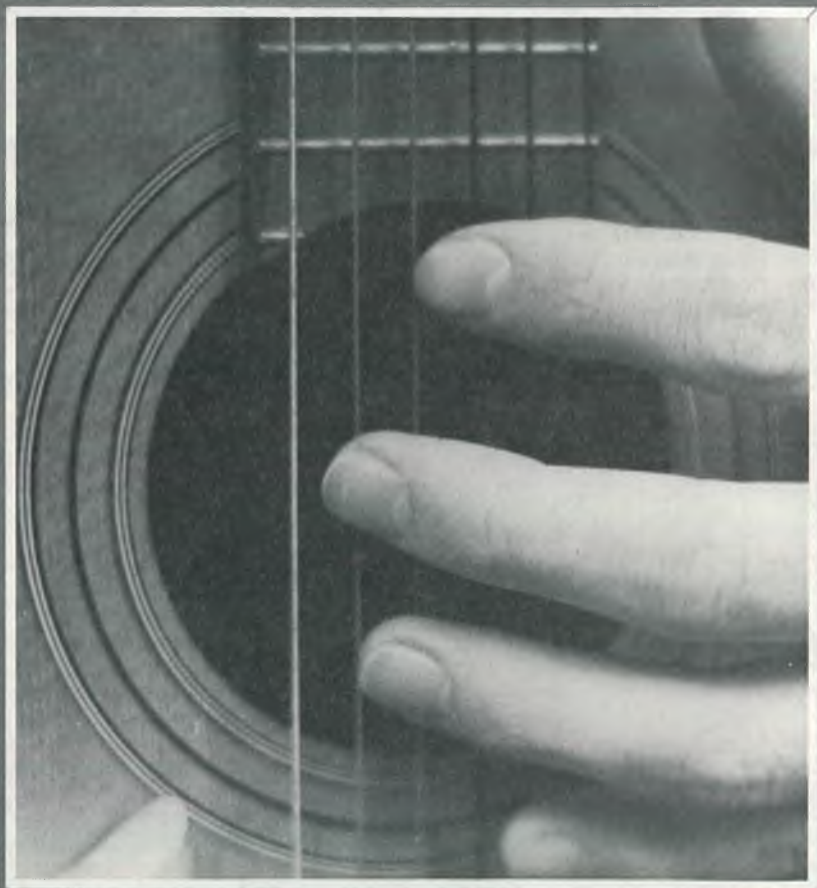
1. Why do you think the city of Jerusalem has been the center of such intense conflict through the centuries (see Introduction)?
2. Why do you think the inspired writers chose a city (Jerusalem) as a dominant symbol for the people of God?
3. Does the church, as modern Zion, fulfill all the functions of Zion mentioned in Psalm 48? Should it? If so, how can it accomplish these things?
4. Psalm 122 describes Jerusalem as unified. What are the essentials for unity in the church today when it comes to
 - a) lifestyle
 - b) cultural values
 - c) belief
5. Are modern Jews in any sense still God's special people (see Evidence; Gal. 3:28; Rom. 11:25-32)?
6. Share your reactions to the following statements by Richard Quebedeaux (Opinion).

"In a world where homelessness is the norm, the *only* way religion can really be successful is to provide a home."
"The good news of the gospel, is not a list of right doctrines or moral do's and don'ts. It is the love of God conveyed by one person to another *unconditionally*."

14 Worship the Lord!

Psalms 5, 96, 100 and 150

December 25-31



*"Serve the Lord with gladness; come before
him with joyful songs"
(Psalm 100:2, NIV).*

by Jodi Vande Vere

Mindless Worship?

INTRO- DUCTION

Long ago there lived a good solid Jew named Eliakim. From the time he was twelve, Eliakim had participated in the Passover, the sacrificial system, and the other feasts that had been a part of his heritage long before he could remember.

But all was not well. True, if someone asked Eliakim outright what all the ceremonies stood for, he would be able to reach back in his mind for the explanations, seldom thought of now, but well-ingrained in childhood. However, he himself occasionally wondered if it wasn't just a little cruel, not to mention wasteful, to slaughter so many fine animals for sacrifices. And he grew weary of trying to follow the rules that the Pharisees insisted were so important. He felt uncomfortable with the rumors that hinted that the priests were open to bribes and often less than honest when dealing with the people. Eliakim still went to synagogue regularly. But eventually, the services did not touch his heart, he chanted psalms without hearing the words, he listened to prayers without praying himself. In short, his worship became mechanical, without meaning for his everyday life.

* * *

Not quite so long ago there lived a good solid Seventh-day Adventist named David. From the time he was a boy, David had participated in communion, watched the deacons col-

lect offerings, sung the Doxology, and listened to the choirs. The church service had not changed as far back as he could remember.

But all was not well. True, if someone had asked David outright what baptism, communion, and the Sabbath stood for, he would be able to reach back in his memory for explanations, seldom thought of now, but well-ingrained in childhood. He himself, however, occasionally wondered if it wasn't just a little wasteful to spend so much money on a new church organ. And he grew weary of trying to follow the rules that the preachers insisted were so important. He felt uncomfortable at the rumors that some church leaders were less than honest when dealing with the people.

David still went to church regularly. But eventually, the services did not touch his heart, he sang hymns without hearing the words, he listened to prayers without praying himself. In short, his worship became mechanical, without meaning for his everyday life.

* * *

Worship. The dictionary defines it as religious reverence and homage, an act or ceremony to show adoration, to pay divine honors to, to attend church. But can there be more? This week, we will be looking in the Psalms to discover ideas for making worship a meaningful part of our lives.

Jodi Vande Vere was a senior English and nursing student at Southern College at the time of this writing.

☐ December 25
Sunday

What Is True Worship?

LOGOS

Having traveled large portions of the world, I've had an opportunity to see many forms of worship. When in Rome some years ago I was awed by the grandeur of the magnificent cathedrals and by the devotion of the worshipers in them. I will never forget the long lines of people waiting to kiss the foot of a statue of St. Peter or the old woman who painfully struggled up Pilate's Staircase on her knees, saying a prayer on each step. I was also impressed by the solemn, reverent atmosphere of each of the churches I visited. The officiating priests, however, were no doubt not impressed with this small, irreverent boy who, when ever he was bored, would amuse himself by sailing imaginary boats in the basins of holy water.

While traveling in Israel, a few years later, I was again intrigued by the various styles of worship I saw there. I can still see the orthodox Jew standing at the Wailing Wall, rocking his body back and forth, as he read aloud from his prayer book, and then stopping to look at his watch to see how much time was left before his ritual would be completed.

Down in the grotto of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, I was horrified by the hypocrisy of the ceremony being performed in honor of the Prince of Peace. As the priests were waving their incense and chanting their prayers, upstairs, in the main sanctuary, Moslem guards were required forcibly to keep the peace between the hot tempers of the three rival "Christian" groups represented there, in the one church.

In Jerusalem, somewhere near the Tower of Antonio, I went down the steps, below ground, to the stone pavement on which Jesus had stood as Pilate shouted to the raving mob, "Behold the man!" There, in silent awe of the history that these stones had witnessed, I rounded a corner and saw a small group of tourists singing of the wonderful love of their Savior who had suffered so much for them. Tears of gratitude were streaming down their cheeks, and I was crying too.

What is worship? From the above experiences I can't say it is blind devotion, praying for a certain length of time, or taking part in a service that is performed for its own sake and has no effect on daily life.

David declared to the Lord, "**But I, by your great mercy, will come into your house**" (Psalm 5:7, NIV). David is saying that I can come into God's presence and be assured of a welcome there, not because of any thing that I have done, or any ritual that I have performed, but because of God's unconditional mercy. This leaves no room for haughty pride, only deep awe and reverence. "**In reverence will I bow down toward your holy temple**" (Psalm 5:7, NIV).

Awe and reverence, however, do not just mean solemn silence. "**Make a joyful noise to the Lord all you lands! Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!**" "**Sing to the Lord a new song.**" "**Praise the Lord!**" (Psalms 100:1, 2; 96:1; 147:1, RSV).

Thus in the Psalms we find the context of true worship to be: A contrite heart (Psalm 51:17), an understanding of true self worth (Psalm 5:7), an attitude of praise (Psalm 147), and joyful celebration (Psalm 100). "**Praise the Lord! O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!**" (Psalm 106:1, RSV). E. R. M.

Joyful, Living Worship

by Carol Smith

The essence of all worship is a deep and living experience with Jesus Christ. The psalms are "permeated with the consciousness of a vital, personal relationship to a living God."¹ In Psalm 103, David expresses praise to God and describes all the benefits of God's loving character. David and the other believers knew God so intimately that they could testify of His love and goodness. This sharing communion between human and divine reaches forth into the worshiping fellowship of the congregation.

An attitude of reverence is essential for proper worship. "True reverence for God is inspired by a sense of infinite greatness and realization of His presence. With this sense of the Unseen every heart should be deeply impressed. The hour and place of prayer are sacred, because God is there, and as reverence is manifested in attitude and demeanor, the feeling that inspires will be deepened."² The Psalmist declares, "Holy and awesome is His name" (Psalm 111:9, RSV).

God's spirit and truth are essential for true worship. During His ministry, "Jesus desired to lift the thoughts of His hearer above matters of form and ceremony, and questions of controversy."³ "Not by seeking a holy mountain or a sacred temple are men brought into communion with heaven. Religion is not to be confined to external forms and ceremonies. The religion that comes from God is the only religion that will lead to God. In order to serve Him aright, we must be born of the Spirit. This will purify the heart and renew the mind, giving us a new capacity for knowing and loving God. It will give us a willing obedience to all His requirements. This is true worship. It is the fruit of the working of the Holy Spirit. By the Spirit every sincere prayer is indited, and such prayer is acceptable to God. Wherever a soul reaches out after God, there the Spirit's working is manifest, and God will reveal Himself to that soul. For such worshippers He is seeking. He waits to receive them, and to make them His sons and daughters."⁴

Worship is a natural response of gratitude for the beauty of life that we experience in Jesus Christ. The exquisite wonders of nature provide a perfect place and time for worship. Ellen White describes her visit to Multnomah Falls in Oregon as a season of praise. "It was a lovely sight. As the water descends it breaks upon the jutting rocks, scattering off in widespread, beautiful sprays."⁵ I remember those double falls well—for it was there that my husband proposed to me. The grand fall is 900 feet high and it is called the Bridal Veil.

In Psalm 148, all of creation is called upon to praise the Lord in thanksgiving. "Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise Him in the heights! Praise Him sun, moon, all you shining stars. . . . Praise the Lord from the earth . . . you sea monsters and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy winds fulfilling His command" (vs. 1-8, RSV). "All these agencies of God in nature are summoned to bring tribute of praise to the Most High. And who among God's creatures will be silent when every star as it transverses its course, every breeze as it sweeps the earth, and every cloud that darkens the firmament, every shower of rain and every ray of sunshine—all are showing forth the praise of God who reigneth in the heavens?"⁶

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Psalm 148

**"Wherever
a soul
reaches out
God will
reveal Himself
to that soul."**

1. Elmer A. Leslie, *The Psalms*, (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1949), p. 17.

2. *Gospel Workers*, p. 178.

3. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 189.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 189.

5. Manuscript 9, June 20, 1884.

6. *Ibid.*

Carol Smith was a senior theology major and president of the Student Ministerial Association at Southern College at the time of this writing.

December 27
Tuesday

The Majesty of Worship

by Jerry Gladson

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Psalm 107:22

What matters most in worship? The answer to this question lies buried beneath understanding of what worship means. Worship recognizes an ultimate Reality beyond us calling for acknowledgment. It represents humble submission to God, the adoration of the Creator by means of corporate speech and act. Psalm 95 voices the true spirit of worship: "Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise. For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods" (vs. 2, 3, RSV).

Rudolph Otto's classic analysis of religious experience singles out the dynamics at work in worship. Confronted with the mystery of God, man reacts with an awe and dread akin to natural fear, a response Otto termed *tremendum*. This *tremendum*, impressed with the majesty and energy of the numinous, is also attracted, charmed and fascinated, impelling humans to worship, to seek God's presence, Otto calls this attraction the *fascinosum*. God, thus, is the *mysterium, tremendum* and *fascinosum*. His presence evokes both a sensation of personal nothingness, as well as exaltation and ecstasy.¹ Attracted to a burning bush in the Sinai, Moses curiously drew near. Then his fascination gave way to awe. "Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God" (Ex. 3:6, RSV).

"Christian worship must find its touchstone in recalling God's redeeming acts."

What is the inner core of such worship?

Perhaps a clue is found in that which motivated the Hebrew people to develop the synagogal form of worship. Deprived of the Temple, the promised land, the very trappings of their faith, they faced the grim prospect of national and religious extinction. "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" poignantly lamented one of her psalmists (Psalm 137:4, RSV). The answer came with the development of the synagogue. This corporate assembly became a "survival agency." In it the community remembered the acts of God which called it into existence. Corporately re-presented, these acts meant that "Judah could survive through worship, though countless other kingdoms perished completely. Worship could overcome even fire and sword."² The synagogue has outlasted all temples.

The remembering of God's salvific acts through recitation and reflection constituted the core of synagogal worship. Christian worship, patterned after the synagogue, must likewise find its touchstone in recalling God's redeeming acts, especially the Christ-event. Although writing of the synagogue, White's comment stands true for the church:

Through worship, people could relive for themselves the whole history of salvation. Individual lives were changed by sharing in the recital of common memories, just as an adolescent is helped to discover his or her identity as the family together recalls past experiences by looking through their photograph album.³

To remember God in action during ancient special revelatory moments thus affirms His presence now—in worship and in life. His numinous presence, recalled in the memory of salvation history, sends us reverently to our knees in true worship.

1. Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, Tran. John Harvey, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford, 1923; reprint ed., 1950.)

2. James F. White, *Christian Worship in Transition* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), pp. 11, 12.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Let Every Thing That Hath Breath . . .

by Don C. Runyan

C. S. Lewis in his book, *Reflections on the Psalms*, expresses initial bewilderment at God's many exhortations demanding praise and adoration from man. Dozens of psalms contain the phrase "Praise God" and Lewis suggests that this attitude might be out of character for the God who gave man free choice. Lewis does not leave us in this disquieting dilemma but shows us the purpose God has in making such demands.

He brings our attention to David's dancing before the ark as an expression of spontaneous joy in the manifestation of God's presence among His people. David did not care that some thought he might be making a fool of himself—he was rejoicing in the Lord.¹ People spontaneously praise whatever they value and enjoy and they urge others to join them in their praise. For exactly the same reason God invites us to enjoy Him. It is imperative to the act of worship that we understand the joy God wishes to share with us in our assembling together to worship Him. How to worship, however, poses a problem with no easy solution.

What the Temple and Mount Zion were to the Israelites the church of God is for us—the church where God always dwells with His people in word and sacrament. God has promised to be present in the worship of the congregation. Thus the congregation conducts its worship according to God's order. For us there remains only the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving in prayers, hymns, and in a life lived according to God's commands. Finding God's order for worship is not as elusive a search as you might think. Using some of the key words from the scripture outline given at the beginning of the lesson we can arrive at some very helpful suggestions to worship.

"Come into Thy House and bow low . . . Praise the Lord in His holy place . . . Holy is his name inspiring awe . . . his name is great and terrible . . . How good it is to sing psalms to our God . . . pleasant to praise him . . . sing a new song . . . sing all men . . . proclaim his triumph day by day . . . enter His presence with songs of exultation." His service exacts both reverence and joy, pomp and piety, spontaneity and sobriety. What a sad documentary most of our church services give to this outline. The Adventist Church could do much to bring about a revitalization of its services by daring to follow the suggestions of the Psalmist and risking, at least to a degree, a liturgical format.

Except for the quarterly services our worship is almost entirely a non-liturgical one. "Rather than being restricted by a liturgy a great source of creativity and diversity can come together in the worship service. Many times church members are almost challenged to find any connection between the reading of the word of God, the praise of Him for what has been read, and the exposition of it . . . the anthems when not chosen as commentaries on the lessons tend to become interludes of entertainment. We are not free to disregard how things function in worship."²

Let us accept the challenges for worship set forth in the Psalms by daring to enhance, modify, and alter our order of service by employing imagination in the areas of architecture, music, drama and liturgy.

HOW TO
Key text:
Psalm 100:4

1. C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1958), pp. 44, 45.

2. James F. White, *Christian Worship in Transition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976), p. 16.

Don Runyan is an associate professor of music at Southern College.

☐ December 29
Thursday

Worship As Performance

by Ben Patterson

OPINION

Key text:
Revelation
5:9, 10

What is worship? Our English word comes from the Anglo-Saxon *weorthscipe*, which means, "to honor" or "to ascribe worth." It is interesting that, in this regard, the *Book of Common Prayer*, 1662, includes within the vows for the solemnization of matrimony: "with my body I thee worship." That is a fairly succinct statement of the biblical understanding of sexuality.

The Old Testament Hebrew word used for worship means "a bowing down." Keep this in mind. For the Hebrews, worship was a verb, something you did. The same idea is behind the New Testament Greek word for worship which means "to serve." In anticipation of what I will be saying later, let me suggest this to you: the difference between a biblical and a pagan understanding of worship lies in the difference between a verb and a noun. For the person of the Bible, worship is something you do. For the pagan, worship is a state of being.

What is it, then, we do when we ascribe worth to God and bow down and serve him . . . ? I believe we engage in a ritual drama. By ritual, I mean that we use certain fixed forms of words, i.e., sermons, prayers, hymns. By drama, I mean that the telling of a story is woven throughout those rituals: the story of God's mighty acts of salvation in Jesus Christ. . . .

"In Christian
worship
God is the
audience."

The Bible is filled with ritual drama. Revelation 5:9, 10 is a good case in point. The multitudes of heaven are gathered around the throne of God. At his right hand stands the Lamb who has just been declared worthy to take the scroll in God's right hand and open it up. The scroll is of immense importance because it contains the decrees of God for the future of the planet Earth. The occasion is one of great joy for the congregation of heaven, so they break into a service of worship of the Lamb singing: "Worthy art thou to take the scroll and open its seals for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth."

Ritual drama: that is what we are witnessing in this spectacular heavenly worship service. The story of salvation is in some way retold and its values upheld, all as the worshipers offer thanks and praise.

A pivotal question must be asked here, the answer to which takes us to the heart of what happens in truly Christian worship. In this ritual drama, who is the audience and who is the performer? Clearly, the answer is that God is the audience and the congregation is the performer. As Soren Kierkegaard put it, in Christian worship God is the audience, the congregation is the performer, and the minister, choir, and other leaders are the prompters.

If just this one fundamental truth were to sink into the consciousness of Christians, worship would be transformed. The overwhelming majority of Christian congregations have the roles reversed. The congregation regards itself as the audience, while regarding the prompters and God, I suspect, as the performers. The congregation comes to have a "worship experience." That is not only idolatrous in its reversal of worship roles, but pagan in its understanding of worship itself. Worship then becomes a noun, a state of being, an experi-

ence induced by God or the choir or the pastor. Biblically, however, worship is a verb, something the congregation or performer does.

At least three implications flow out of this understanding of worship as ritual drama. The first has to do with history. God is the God of history: of the past, the present, and the future. The Lamb was slain, and has made us free and we shall reign, say the words of the hymn in the Revelation passage.

Christian worship is essentially an act of remembrance. That is what the Lord's Supper does. It remembers the Lord's death, even as it celebrates his resurrection presence and looks forward to his return. There they are again: past, present, and future.

One of the fallacies and conceits of our time is that God has done little or nothing since the death of the last apostle until right now. We place great stock in the New Testament and first century church, and in our own. In my congregation there are those who want to sing only the new songs and those who want to sing only the old songs. What is funny about all this is that the "old songs," at their oldest, may date back to nineteenth-century revivalism.

The God of past, present, and future whom we worship in ritual drama was just as active in the fourth, eleventh, or seventeenth centuries as he is now. Our songs, prayers, sermons, and confessions should recognize this in worship. Besides making us a more biblical people, it would give us a perspective on ourselves and relieve us of a bit of our conceit.

The second implication has to do with preparation. Because we are the performers, we must come to worship prepared. Can you imagine your chagrin if you paid twenty dollars to hear a performance of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony and the orchestra came into the concert hall late? What if the director stood before the audience and said something like this: "Wow! Have we had a busy month! Lots of travel, several recording sessions, and now here we are, and we haven't had a chance to rehearse tonight's concert. Listen, I have a great idea. Everyone here is an accomplished musician. What do you say we just have a jam session for the next ninety minutes? Just let it flow. Be spontaneous!"

You would be angry if the orchestra arrived late and unprepared because you paid a lot of money for the performance. What did God pay for our performance? The blood of his own Son. What does this mean pragmatically? It means things like a good night's sleep before going to church. It means things like arriving on time. I believe church tardiness is a theological issue. It means things like prayer and Bible study on the days leading up to the church service. Howard Rice has said that reformation worship assumed of the congregation that its individual members had spent an hour a day through the week in Bible reading and prayer!

All of this contradicts what Tom Howard calls the "myth of spontaneity." It is a very appealing myth. It says we would all be free, direct, and spontaneous if we could just dismantle tradition, structures, and conventions. Unfortunately this contradicts everything else we know in human experience. It was hard work, austerity, and discipline that produced the *Dialogues* of Plato, the B Minor Mass, and the Theory

"Christ is at the center of Christian worship, not us and our experience."

of Relativity. Should it be any different in our relationship to God? Just as not much that is worthy, substantial, and noteworthy proceeds from mere spontaneity in other forms of human endeavor, so it is in Christian worship. I believe God is, at the very least, unimpressed with merely spontaneous worshipers.

A good metaphor for the true freedom of disciplined Christian worship can be found in the dancer's art. Nothing looks more free and spontaneous than a great dancer performing. But beneath all of that freedom and spontaneity are years of drills, repetition, sweat, strain, and more drills.

Worship is to the rest of our lives what cultivation is to garden. We weed, prune, water, and feed to the end that the garden may be beautiful—spontaneous gardens are not; disciplined gardens are.

The last implication has to do with focus. And with this I close, because it sums up everything. Christ is at the center of Christian worship, not us and our experience. We are not there to get, but to give. The question we should be asking ourselves on the way home from church is not, "What did I get out of it?" but rather, "How did I do?" For when all the sermons have been preached, all the anthems sung, all the worship renewal workshops conducted, and all our innovations come and gone, that is all that will have mattered: that we said with our whole being, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"

1. Excerpted from *Leadership*, Summer, 1981, pp. 49-52. Copyright © Leadership Journal, 1981. Used by permission.

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1. What is worship? Are there any prerequisites to be accomplished before one can worship? Explain.
 2. List some ingredients of true worship suggested by this week's psalms.
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.
 3. This week's Evidence article points out that remembering God's saving deeds in history is the core of worship. But the Introduction illustrates the danger of worship that becomes merely a mechanized ritual from the past. Do you think reciting and reflecting on God's deeds is really that central to worship today? Why or why not?
 4. If a high level of structure and ritual is employed in worship, as both the How To and Opinion authors suggest, how can services avoid becoming perfunctory?
 5. The Opinion author quotes Kierkegaard in saying that in worship, "God is the audience and the congregation is the performer." Do you agree? Why or why not?
 6. What does the Opinion author mean by calling worship "ritual drama." Do you agree with his definition?
 7. Rate the worship you currently engage in on a scale of 1 to 10 in terms of the following:
 - meaningful
 - motivating
 - reverent
 - personal involvement/participationDoes this week's lesson give you any ideas for improvement in yourself and your church when it comes to worship?
-

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