

The Psalms, the Apostles, and the Christ



WRITTEN BY TOM KELBY

The Psalms, the Apostles, and the Christ

A STUDY OF PSALM 2, 8, 22, 40, 110, 118, AND 1

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Ned, thank you for always picking up the phone. – Tom

*I dedicate this book to my incredible wife, Kelley. Your
passion for the old testament scriptures is infectious.*

Thank you for sharing your life with me.

I love you. – Mark

ABOUT THE COVER

Blessed is the man

who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,

nor stands in the way of sinners,

nor sits in the seat of scoffers;

but his delight is in the law of the Lord,

and on his law he meditates day and night.

He is like a tree

planted by streams of water... - Psalm 1:1-3

The illustration on the cover is of “the” tree planted by streams of water from Psalm 1. When Tom and I started talking about the cover image for this study of Psalms we discussed multiple options. In the end we felt that the tree spoken of in Psalm 1 would make for a very intriguing composition.

Imagine a tree growing and flourishing in a desert wasteland. Truly growing against all the odds. How did this tree get here? A seed from another tree didn’t just fall onto the dry ground and begin growing. Even if a seed did blow in from a distant land it would never take root. The hard ground wouldn’t accommodate that. Apart from someone, like a gardener, assisting this tree - that seed would not make it. This tree was purposely planted in this spot by a gardener. The location of the stream, too, is no accident. It didn’t just “happen” to be flowing by the tree. Rather, the stream was hand dug by the same gardener. It is an irrigation canal, always flowing with water because the gardener cares about the tree. It never rains here so the existence of this tree depends on that stream that was so purposefully dug by the gardner. It’s obviously working - this tree is growing strong and will soon bear fruit.

This study makes the argument that the tree spoken of in Psalm 1 is, ultimately, Christ (and those who are in him). May you find great joy as you consider him and his fruitfulness!

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink that reads "MARK". The letters are bold and slightly slanted, with a small flourish at the end of the "K".

Mark Yaeger

INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on seven Psalms. But it does so (at least it attempts to do so) from the perspective of the Apostles. How did they read the Psalms? It's a question of massive importance because Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would teach the Apostles all things and would remind them of everything that he said (see John 14:25-26). The Apostles, then, are to be seen as utterly trustworthy guides to understanding the meaning of Scripture.

The Apostles have a way of reading the Psalms which sometimes seems surprising. Their interpretations of passages can seem strained, almost as if they are trying to "force" them to apply to Jesus and the gospel event.

In Acts 1, Peter takes a Psalm (69:25) and applies it to Judas. The Psalm, at first glance, doesn't appear to have anything to do with Judas. He then takes another Psalm and says that it demonstrates that there is a need to appoint another Apostle in place of Judas (109:8). This Psalm, also, appears to be used in a strange manner.

It's interesting that no one corrected Peter. Neither his original audience (the 120 believers waiting in Jerusalem for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit) nor the writer of Acts (Luke) saw anything wrong with the way Peter handled these Psalms. Quite to the contrary, they heartily approved of, we are led to believe, Peter's use of the Psalms. But I think many of us, if we were there, would have cringed at Peter's connection of these Psalms to this specific situation.

But if we think the way the Apostles used the Psalms is often strange, we must know that it is possible the Apostles would consider our way of reading the Psalms (and the entire Old Testament) to be quite strange as well. Christ and the gospel is notably absent from many of our interpretations. The Apostles would be saddened, I'm afraid, by some of the applications I have made from the Psalms (and from the rest of the Old Testament). They would think that I've missed the point.

I don't want to miss the point. I would like to see all there is to see in the Psalms (and in the Old Testament). But how can I, when I'm not an Apostle, learn to think like the Apostles?

Fortunately, there is a way forward. The Apostles frequently used the Psalms. You'll find references to the Psalms throughout their writings. We can look at how they used them. The Apostles, as we will consider in our first week's lesson, are sure guides forward.

In this study we will consider seven Psalms. Six of the Psalms are referred to by the Apostles (or by an author of a New Testament book), one Psalm—the last Psalm we will consider—is not. My prayer is that we will be able to, by watching how the Apostles interpret the Psalms that are quoted in the New Testament, learn how to read and interpret the Psalms that aren't quoted in the New Testament in a way in which the Apostles would approve. In other words, can we, based on what we see from the Apostles, interpret a Psalm in an Apostolic manner?

There are 150 Psalms in our Bibles. Only a fraction of them are directly referred to in the New Testament. Surely, we are intended to use all of them. Just as surely, we are intended to use them in a way in which the Apostles would approve.



Tom Kelby
November 21, 2012

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

There are four parts to this eight-week study: Scripture reading, study questions to answer, study notes to read, and a weekly journal to record insights the Holy Spirit has taught you. All four are important. You will not get nearly as much out of this study if you skip any of the four. Here's how I would recommend using this book:

On day one of each week, read the verses in the Psalm we have printed in the book. We have printed the actual verses from each Psalm in this study book for two main reasons. First, we believe you will be able to more freely write notes and questions in the margins, which is something you may not be comfortable doing in your "everyday" Bible. Second, many Bibles include study notes. These are helpful, but they can keep you from "wrestling" with the passage yourself.

Read the passage slowly. Once you have read through the passage, read it through a second time. God has a great deal he would like to show you in his word. As you read, ask the Lord for wisdom. Why is this passage significant? What is the truth the writer is trying to get across in this passage? How do the thoughts in this passage relate to those in the verses before it? We have printed the passages with enough spacing so that you have the room necessary to write your thoughts and questions regarding the passage, however, do no writing your first time through the passage. Simply read the passage slowly. Your second read-through of the passage should be different. This time, pay close attention to the themes the writer is developing. Circle repeated words or phrases. Underline major themes. Much of the Psalms are poetry. This will demand close attention. Avoid the use of a Bible commentary or the notes in a study Bible at this point. Do the work yourself. The Lord will give you wisdom.

On days two through five, answer the study questions. The questions will often bring you to other passages that will further illuminate the verses you are studying.

On day six, read the study notes. These notes will give you my perspective on the passage. Sometimes in the notes you will find verses referred to, but not printed. These verses are important. Please take the time to look these verses up. It will help you in your overall understanding of Scripture.

Finally, after you've read the notes, write down any truths the Holy Spirit has taught you over the previous week.

Week One

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

1. What do you know of the Psalms? How would you describe them to someone who had never read a Psalm? What is their purpose?

Luke 24:25-27

Luke 24:44-47

John 5:39-47

3. Based on the verses you have just considered, how would you expect Jesus to have answered question number one?

DAY TWO

4. What do you know of the Apostles? How would you describe them to someone who had never read the Bible? How would you describe their usefulness to Christ and their reliability? What would you say is their purpose?

5. Who were the Apostles? *Matthew 10:1-4, Mark 3:13-19, Luke 6:12-16*

WEEK ONE

Introduction

6. According to Peter, what was one of the purposes of the Apostles? *Acts 1:21-22*

7. What role did Jesus say that the Apostles would one day fill? *Matthew 19:27-28*

8. What role did Paul say that the Apostles (and he counted himself as an Apostle) filled? *Ephesians 2:19-21*

9. How are the New Testament books connected to the Apostles?

10. How will the Apostles relate to the architecture of the New Jerusalem?
Revelation 21:10-14

11. Based on the verses you have just considered, how would you expect Jesus or one of the Apostles or a member of the early church to have answered question number four?

DAY THREE

12. The following verses outline specific things which, according to Jesus, the Holy Spirit was to do in the lives of the Apostles. What were they?

John 14:26

John 16:12-15

13. What evidence do you see of the Holy Spirit doing this in the following passages?

Acts 1:15-26

Acts 2:14-41

14. As readers, how do we know that Peter interpreted these passages from the Psalms correctly?

DAY FOUR

15. Acts 2:42 indicates that the early church “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching”. Based on the verses you have just considered, why should the church have done this?

WEEK ONE

Introduction

16. Is this something we can and should do today? If so, how?

17. What, if anything, is the danger if we do not do this today?

18. Based on the verses we have considered about the Apostles, how would you answer someone who said that the Apostles' words are of less importance to the Christian than Christ's words?

DAY FIVE

19. Consider the verses from the previous days and complete the following sentence: *The teachings of the Apostles ...*

20. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week, the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

Introduction

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WEEK ONE

Introduction

“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.” John 5:39-40

“Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words.” John 5:45-47

Jesus insisted that he is the subject of the entire Old Testament. The stories, prophecies, and poems all relate, in one way or another, to the Christ.

Some would say that seeing Christ as the grand theme of the Psalms is reading something into the Psalms that the authors of the Psalms never intended to put there. This is false for at least three reasons: first, Christ, as we have already seen, said that the Psalms were about him (see particularly Luke 24:44-47 above), second, the real author of Scripture is God,² and he has known all along about the Christ and the plan of salvation, therefore we cannot say that THE author didn't know about the Christ, and third, the (human) authors admittedly wrote about things that they did not fully understand. They knew, as the Apostle Peter makes clear, that they were writing of the Christ, but that there were things about him (such as his identity and the time of his coming) that went beyond their wisdom and knowledge. They longed to look into these things. They knew that they were “serving not themselves but you” when they wrote these words.

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look. 1 Peter 1:10-12

The message of the Psalms, just like the message of the entire Old Testament, is the message of the Christ. This does not mean, of course, that all the Psalms are about him in the same way. It does mean, however, that if we can read the Psalms and the necessity of Christ, the nature and beauty of the gospel event, the priestly ministry of Christ, or the eternal reign of Christ does not somehow enter into our minds, we must know that we have not thoroughly understood their intended meaning.

2. Christ's understanding of the Apostles

Who were the Apostles? The easy answer is that they were 12 men chosen by Jesus for a specific task (the last one in the following list, Judas Iscariot, was replaced by a man named Matthias).

² See 2 Timothy 3:14-17.

And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction. The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. Matthew 10:1-4

These men were certainly not chosen for their giftedness, intelligence, or holiness. On the contrary, they are purposely portrayed by the New Testament authors as very ordinary men.

Nor were these men chosen because they were of such great help to Jesus in his earthly ministry. They seem to have been a great hindrance a good deal of the time. They were constantly doing the opposite of what Jesus wanted: they argued about which of them was the greatest (many times), they tried to keep the children from coming to him when he wanted to bless them, they tried to keep him from being crucified, they didn't listen well, they asked strange questions, they lacked faith, they wanted to burn unbelieving Samaritans alive, they slept when they were told to pray, they ran away, they denied him, they doubted his resurrection, etc., etc., etc..

This is not to say that they did nothing during Jesus' earthly ministry. They were sent out to preach to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel".³ The things they did ("Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons") were clearly beyond the scope of ordinary humans.⁴ But effective ministry was not the norm for these men. For everything that they did right, they seem to have done more that was wrong. They are presented as being in a perpetual state of confusion. But all of that changed after Jesus' resurrection and ascension.

At that point, these weak and ordinary men became the most influential people on the earth. Their preaching brought change to nations throughout the Roman Empire. They performed extraordinary miracles. They defied religious and political leaders. And they wrote Scripture.

How did this happen? How were the once fearful disciples so suddenly transformed into fearless Apostles? A partial answer is that, as a consequence of the gospel event (the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ), these men were changed and filled with the Holy Spirit.

Here is how Jesus described the change the Holy Spirit would bring to these men:

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Acts 1:8

Christ himself, after he ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of the Father, is the one who poured out the Holy Spirit on the Apostles.

"This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing." Acts 2:32-33

³ See Matthew 10:6.

⁴ See Matthew 10:8.

WEEK ONE

Introduction

But the Apostles weren't the only ones upon whom the Spirit was poured. Others were filled, but they were still different from the Apostles. What set these men apart from the other believers?

The Apostles were different because they were designated by Christ to be his witnesses. Gifting was given to them that wasn't given to others within the church. Promises were made to them that weren't made to others in the church. They were to be the foundation upon which the church would be built.⁵

Notice how Jesus speaks to these men on the night of the Last Supper.

“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” John 14:25-26

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” John 16:13-15

The Apostles are told, by none other than Jesus, that the Holy Spirit would teach them “all things”. The men who seemed, at times, to know nothing, are told that they will, by the Holy Spirit's help, know everything. This certainly doesn't mean that they became all knowing. Rather, it means that the Holy Spirit taught them everything they needed to know. All the church needed to know was made known to the Apostles. The Apostles were then, as the foundation of the church, to pass this knowledge on to those who would believe through them.

Jesus was with these men for three years. His teaching to them would have filled volumes.⁶ Between the time of his resurrection and his ascension he was “appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). These conversations surely formed the basis of their understanding of the gospel event and of the Old Testament Scriptures and their relation to the Christ.

But how can we trust that the Apostles accurately remembered Jesus' teaching? We're not trusting their memories! We're trusting in Jesus' promise to them. He told them that the Holy Spirit would “bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you”. We can have confidence that the Apostles perfectly remembered Jesus' teaching because our Lord promised it would be so. We are trusting in Christ's promise and in the efficacy of the Holy Spirit's teaching. We believe that the Holy Spirit perfectly did his job.

But what about the things that Jesus didn't teach the Apostles? Even those things, Jesus said, would be made known to the Apostles.

⁵ Consider Jesus' words to Peter in Matthew 16:13-19.

⁶ See John 21:25.

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.”

John 16:12-13

We can be confident, based on this, that the Apostles taught accurately about, for instance, the inclusion of Gentiles into the church. We can be confident, based on this, that the book of Revelation is accurate—as accurate as anything Jesus himself uttered.

As we consider the Apostles, it’s worth considering, briefly, why Jesus chose 12 of them. It is significant that there were also 12 tribes of Israel. It appears that Jesus chose the 12 Apostles because Jesus is presented as Israel itself in the New Testament, and the 12 Apostles are presented as the 12 tribes through which Israel is to be populated.

Consider, as I noted in my study on Hosea, the parallels between Jesus and the nation of Israel:

It is striking to consider the parallels between the nation of Israel (in the Old Testament) and Jesus. These are not coincidental. Jesus’ life purposely echoes Israel’s history. For instance, Israel is called God’s son—a name which was rescinded in Hosea 1:9. Jesus was called God’s Son (Mark 1:11)—a name which will never be rescinded. Israel’s male babies are targeted for slaughter by Pharaoh and are delivered. Jesus is targeted for slaughter by Herod and is delivered. Isaiah prophesies that nations will come to Israel and bring her gifts of gold and frankincense (Isaiah 60:1-6). The wise men fulfill this prophecy, recognizing the glory of Jesus and bringing gold and frankincense to him (Matthew 2:1-12). God calls Israel out of Egypt. God calls Jesus out of Egypt (Matthew 2:13-15/Hosea 11:1). Immediately after passing through the Red Sea (used in the New Testament as a picture of baptism), Israel is led into the wilderness where it is tempted for 40 years. Immediately after Jesus is baptized in the Jordan River, he is led into the wilderness where he is tempted for 40 days. Jesus, it should be noted, responds to all of Satan’s temptations with quotations from Deuteronomy, thus accenting the comparison between his wilderness experience and that of the nation of Israel under Moses. Israel is comprised of 12 tribes. Jesus—the new “Israel”—designates 12 apostles. Israel is referred to by Yahweh—in a negative sense—as a vine that bears poor fruit. Jesus refers to himself as the true vine (John 15). He alone bears good fruit.

Jesus is clearly presented by the New Testament authors as Israel. We might even say that the first Israel was a picture of the true Israel who was to come. Their actions were divinely intended to prepare people to recognize the true Israel. But Jesus, unlike the Israel in the Old Testament, perfectly keeps God’s commands and walks in his covenant. He always does what pleases his Father. All the covenant promises to Israel justly come to pass in Jesus because he perfectly keeps the covenant. Since all the promises find their fulfillment in him alone, only those who are counted as “in him” may be recipients of God’s promises. Those in him are counted as his co-heirs. His obedience to the covenant is counted as their obedience to the covenant.⁷

7 Tom Kelby, *The Gospel in Hosea* (Webster, Wisc.: Hands to the Plow, 2010), 41.

WEEK ONE

Introduction

This isn't just a New Testament teaching. The Christ is also presented as Israel in the Old Testament. Isaiah specifically refers to the Servant (i.e., Christ) in one of his Servant Songs as Israel:

And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified." Isaiah 49:3

Christ is the true Israel. The Apostles are the 12 "tribes" through which the true Israel is being populated.

This explains why it was so important for the Apostles to designate a replacement for Judas Iscariot. Notice the following verses describing Matthias's selection (the Apostles did this based on a passage from the Psalms!):

"For it is written in the Book of Psalms,

*"May his camp become desolate,
and let there be no one to dwell in it";*

and

"Let another take his office.'

So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection." And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles. Acts 1:20-26

The Apostles knew that they needed to fill out their number. They needed a full 12 Apostles. The fact that Matthias is never mentioned by name again in the New Testament demonstrates that his "individual" ministry is not what is significant. He is significant because he is one of the 12—one of the "tribes" through whom the true Israel—Christ—was to be populated.

Notice how Jesus speaks of the Apostles:

Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Matthew 19:28

Notice how Paul speaks of the Apostles:

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. Ephesians 2:19-21

The prophets in the Old Testament and the Apostles in the New Testament both were trustworthy spokesmen for God. Their words were to be seen as the foundation of the church. Their words were to be obeyed. Their interpretations were to be seen as correct.

The significance of the Apostles is seen in the way the early church responded to them:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching ... Acts 2:42

We do not need to mourn that we were not present for the teaching of the Apostles. We do have their teachings. We can be devoted to them, for we have their writings.

The significance of the Apostles is seen in the way the New Jerusalem is described:

It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed—on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. Revelation 21:12-14

Notice the correlation between the 12 tribes in the Old Testament (the “tribes” through whom Israel was populated before Christ came) and the 12 Apostles of the Lamb (the “tribes” through whom Israel was populated after Christ came). The fact that both of these groups of 12 appear together in the very walls of the New Jerusalem stresses the continuity between the Old and New Testaments and the unity of Old and New Testament saints. This same connection between the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 Apostles of the Lamb is probably also presented in John’s vision of the 24 elders who are seated around the throne.

Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads. Revelation 4:4

But what about Paul? Paul was not one of the “twelve apostles of the Lamb”. He was, however, “called to be an apostle”, and he stresses his Apostolic calling repeatedly. Most of his letters begin with a statement that he is an Apostle. He expects to be listened to because he is an Apostle. What is true of the 12 Apostles regarding the trustworthiness of their teaching is also true of Paul. We know this is the case because of the way Peter, one of the 12, speaks of Paul:

And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. 2 Peter 3:15-16

Peter calls Paul’s writings “Scriptures”. He says that Paul speaks with “the wisdom given him”. Thus, we should accept Paul’s writings in the same way we would accept the writings of any of the 12 Apostles.

WEEK ONE

Introduction

The importance of the Apostles was not lost on the early church. In fact, when the church was formally recognizing the documents that were to comprise the “canon” (the accepted list of New Testament Scriptures), they understood that only those books that were, in some way, connected to an Apostle were to be included.

This introduction to the Apostles is meant to demonstrate that their interpretation of the Psalms should, because of their unique calling and the way the Holy Spirit helped them to perfectly interpret Scripture and to remember Christ’s words and deeds, be seen as the correct interpretation of the Psalms. They did not twist Psalms to mean things that they were never meant to mean. Rather, they are to be seen as trustworthy interpreters of the Scriptures. Their words are to be trusted to the same degree that we would trust the words of Christ himself.

Week Two

PSALM 2

WEEK TWO

Psalm 2

DAY ONE

1. Read the introduction to Hebrew poetry found in our *The Gospel in Hosea* study (free download from handstotheplow.org). Go to handstotheplow.org and select our Hosea study. When the next page opens, you'll see a section titled "Downloads". Select "This Book" to read the Hosea study. The introduction to poetry is found on pages 46-50.

2. After reading the introduction to Hebrew poetry, complete the following:

Hebrew poetry is distinguished by ...

DAY TWO

3. Read and interact with Psalm 2. Remember, this is not narrative. It is poetry. Think in pictures. Try to visualize what is being said here. In the margins and in the poem itself make any notations that help you grasp the way this poem is working.

PSALM 2

1. Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?
2. The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together,
against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying,
3. "Let us burst their bonds apart
and cast away their cords from us."
4. He who sits in the heavens laughs;
the Lord holds them in derision.
5. Then he will speak to them in his wrath,
and terrify them in his fury, saying,
6. "As for me, I have set my King
on Zion, my holy hill."
7. I will tell of the decree:

The LORD said to me, "You are my Son;
today I have begotten you.

8. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,
and the ends of the earth your possession.
9. You shall break them with a rod of iron
and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

10. Now therefore, O kings, be wise;
be warned, O rulers of the earth.
11. Serve the LORD with fear,
and rejoice with trembling.
12. Kiss the Son,
lest he be angry, and you perish in the way,
for his wrath is quickly kindled.
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

4. Draw a picture or pictures of Psalm 2.

DAY THREE

5. Read Acts 4:1-31. How is Psalm 2 used by the Apostles in this passage? Whom do they consider the King to be? Whom do they identify as the King's enemies?

6. Based on these verses, what is the subject of this Psalm?

WEEK TWO

Psalm 2

7. Why would this particular Psalm have been a comfort to the Apostles in the situation they were facing?

8. How does Paul use this Psalm in his preaching recorded in Acts 13:26-43?

9. How does the author of Hebrews use this Psalm in Hebrews 1:5 and 5:4-6?

10. What links do you find between Jesus and the throne in the following passages?

Matthew 2:1-12

Luke 1:26-33

John 18:33-40

John 19:1-22

Acts 2:22-36

11. When was Jesus declared to be the “Son of God in power”? *Romans 1:4*

DAY FOUR

12. Based on Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14 (a prophecy about the Christ), to what does the title “Son of God” point? In other words, when people call Jesus the “Son of God”, what are they saying about him?

13. How might this Psalm be used to speak to the world today?

14. How might this Psalm be used to speak to the church today?

WEEK TWO

Psalm 2

DAY FIVE

15. Reread Psalm 2 and complete the following: *Because God has set his King in place ...*

16. How would you preach the gospel through this Psalm?

DAY SIX

17. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week, the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

Jesus Christ is—right now—reigning as King. The apostles proclaimed this truth thoroughly and joyfully throughout the New Testament. But the reign of Christ is not a truth proclaimed by the New Testament alone. It is proclaimed throughout the Old Testament.

Many Old Testament passages provide insight into the reign of Christ. Two of the foremost are Genesis 49:8-12 (the passage first naming the tribe from which the Christ would arise and outlining the worldwide nature of his reign and the stunning prosperity he will bring), and 2 Samuel 7:4-17 (the passage promising David an heir who would reign forever). Psalm 2 is another extremely significant Old Testament passage because it lets us into the conflict of the ages regarding the Christ and into the inner counsels of the Trinity regarding the Christ's reign. We hear God the Father and God the Son talk about Christ's reign as King. It's no wonder the Apostles found this to be a Psalm worth quoting again and again.

1. Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?

The Psalm begins with a question. David asks,⁸ with heavy sarcasm, why the “nations” are raging and the “peoples” (the poetic parallel to “nations”) are plotting. The peoples of the earth—and this refers to all people except the people of God—are “in tumult or commotion”⁹ about some situation and they are gathering to make plans so that they might change that situation.

The author is not thinking about the sort of commotion where everyone is confused and wondering what is going on. This is not an innocent commotion. Rather, this is the sort of commotion that is driven by rage (which is the word used by the Septuagint). The peoples of the earth are in a boiling rage about some situation (which the poet has not yet disclosed), and they will not stand for it. This raging mob makes plans to change the situation. However, we already know that the plans of those who are raging will fail, for David tells us that these plans are “in vain”. The situation, whatever it is, will not be changed by the raging throng.

At this point, it is worth taking a closer look at the first verb in this line of poetry. The ESV translates the first verb in verse one as an action that the nations are doing: they are raging.¹⁰ This is not how the Apostles quote this verse in Acts 4. They, quoting from the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament), say:

*“Why did the Gentiles rage,
and the peoples plot in vain?” Acts 4:25*

The Apostles, when they think of this Psalm, are thinking in terms of a rage that has been completed, not a rage that is ongoing. More will be said about this shortly.¹¹

⁸ David is the author of this Psalm. See Acts 4:25.

⁹ F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007), 921.

¹⁰ Other English translations translate this similarly.

¹¹ More could be said about the differences between the MT (the abbreviation for the Hebrew OT used in modern English Bibles) and the LXX (the abbreviation for the Septuagint) here, for this is a subject that is worth much thought, however, suffice it to say that we must see the Acts 4:25 rendering of this passage as God-breathed.

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Psalm 2

Before we move on to the second verse of this poem, it is important to note that the verb the ESV has translated as “plot” in verse one—“the peoples *plot* in vain”—is the same verb used in Psalm 1 regarding the blessed man who “meditates” on God’s law day and night. Thus, while the blessed man is defined by his ongoing meditation on God’s law, the wicked (and, based on passages like Romans 3:10-18, this should be seen as all who are not “in Christ”) are defined by their ongoing meditation on rebellion. The righteous love God’s rule and want to live in subjection to it. The wicked hate God’s rule which, as we’ll see in the rest of this Psalm, is known through his Christ. They want to throw this rule off and to live in subjection only to themselves.

2. The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying,

This verse explains how the raging and plotting described in verse one took place. The “kings of the earth” took a stand and made plans to rebel against Yahweh and against his “Anointed”.

It is important to know that the word translated “Anointed” here is the Hebrew word transliterated into English as “Messiah”. In the Septuagint (again, the Greek translation of the Old Testament), this word is transliterated into English as “Christ”. Therefore, this raging—and futile—rebellion is against Yahweh and against his Christ.

Yahweh is the covenant name for God. But who is the Christ?¹² Readers of the New Testament will quickly, and quite rightly, say that it is Jesus. But, in the context of this Psalm, the Christ is not named. He is the King who, by Yahweh’s pleasure and command, is anointed to reign over the people of God and to rule over all the nations.

David, the writer of this Psalm, may truly be called Yahweh’s Anointed King because, while he was writing this Psalm, he was the Anointed King over God’s people. However, the things spoken in this Psalm demonstrate that the Christ being referred to here is greater than David ever was. While David (and his descendants who followed him) ruled, at times, over a few neighboring countries, they never ruled over all peoples. And while David and Solomon and all the kings who followed them eventually left the throne, the Old Testament promises an Anointed King who will never come off the throne.

Here is the promise that was given by Yahweh to David regarding one of David’s descendants. Notice the length of the reign promised to David’s descendant.

*“When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers,
I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your
body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for
my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”*
2 Samuel 7:12-13

David is promised a descendant who would never come off the throne! That descendant is THE Anointed King—THE Christ—spoken of in the Old Testament promises.

¹² Or, as in the Hebrew, the Messiah.

Imagine living in Old Testament times and seeing a new king—one of David’s descendants—rise to power. You would wonder, I would guess, if he might be THE Christ. The king would reign for a few years and would do some good and some bad and would eventually die. This was the pattern for several hundred years. None of the kings qualified as THE Christ.

Readers of the Old Testament, while not living through the disappointing reigns of these kings, can feel some of the pain of the people who lived in the days of the kings as they read through 1 and 2 Kings. Again and again, the text tells us that the king ruled for a few years and died. None of the kings ruled forever. None of them should have ruled forever. All of them, as the text makes clear, had flaws.¹³ Here’s just one example:

In the second year of Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, Jotham the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, began to reign. He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Jerusha the daughter of Zadok. And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that his father Uzziah had done. Nevertheless, the high places were not removed. The people still sacrificed and made offerings on the high places. He built the upper gate of the house of the LORD. Now the rest of the acts of Jotham and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah? In those days the LORD began to send Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah against Judah. Jotham slept with his fathers and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father, and Ahaz his son reigned in his place. 2 King 15:32-38

The Old Testament ends with God’s people still waiting for the arrival of THE Christ who would never leave the throne.

While the New Testament doesn’t use the word “Messiah” (which is not surprising, for the New Testament wasn’t written in Hebrew), the word “Christ”, the Greek word that is used to refer to Yahweh’s Anointed King, appears over 500 times. Not only that, the New Testament specifies the identity of the Christ.

Here are Peter’s words on the day of Pentecost,

“Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”
Acts 2:36

Can you imagine the shock Peter’s words would have brought to the people of Israel? When they crucified Jesus, whom they considered to be just a man, they actually killed the One anointed by Yahweh to save them! They killed their Promised King!

The identity of the Christ is one of the main things Paul proclaimed as he preached in synagogues throughout the known world:

“This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.” Acts 17:3

When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus.
Acts 18:5

¹³ Even Josiah, of whom nothing negative is spoken, had a serious flaw. In spite of all the changes he made in Israel, he could only change things outwardly. He could not bring about a heart-felt repentance among the people.

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Psalm 2

... for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus. Acts 18:28

New Testament writers don't just call Jesus "the Christ". 136 times they call him "Jesus Christ". Another 84 times he is called "Christ Jesus". In other words, the title "God's Anointed King" is seen to so thoroughly fit this one man that the word "Christ" simply becomes part of his name! Notice the first verse of the New Testament:

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Matthew 1:1

Knowing that Psalm 2 is referring to Yahweh's Anointed King (again, "Messiah" in Hebrew or "Christ" in Greek), it is not difficult to guess what the Apostles thought about when they read this Psalm or listened to it as it was read in public worship. They saw it as a Psalm about Jesus. More than this, they saw it as a Psalm describing the actions the rulers (Jews and Gentiles) had recently taken to defy Yahweh and to keep Jesus from ruling in power.

Here, again, is how the Apostles quote this Psalm.

*"Why did the Gentiles rage,
and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers were gathered together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed ..." Acts 4:25-26*

After the Apostles quote Psalm 2, they go on to explain its meaning.

"... for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place." Acts 4:27-28

The Apostles read this Psalm as a prophecy of Christ's rejection by both Jews and Gentiles! The "rage" of the Gentiles was carried out by Pilate and the Roman soldiers under his command. The peoples who "plotted" in vain were the Jewish leaders who planned Jesus' arrest and orchestrated his trial before the Sanhedrin and before Pilate.

It is important to know that the Apostles were not taking these verses out of context and bending them so that what was meant to apply solely to King David or to another king was made to apply to Jesus.¹⁴ Jesus designated the Apostles as his spokesmen. They would be led into truth, he tells us, by the Holy Spirit himself, and they would, by extension, lead the church into truth. We are to, as followers of Christ, listen carefully to the Apostles because they have, in the New Testament, proclaimed the truth they learned from the Holy Spirit.

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things" John 14:26a

¹⁴ Again, David was, at the time of this writing, Yahweh's Anointed King. Yahweh chose him to shepherd his people Israel. However, the words David uses here go far beyond what was real in David's life. While they apply in some measure to David, they perfectly apply to Christ.

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” John 16:13-15

The fact, then, that the Apostles use this Psalm as if is ultimately about Christ should be of great significance to those in the Church. Their understanding of this Psalm must be seen as the correct understanding of this Psalm. We are to follow their lead.

3. “Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.”

In this line we actually hear the counsel of the wicked. They do not want Yahweh and his Christ to hinder them. Their plan is to throw his bonds from them and to live apart from his rule. Note the defiance here. The rebels, if all goes according to their plan, will not be perpetually struggling against Yahweh and his Anointed King. They will, instead, forever throw off their rule.

As the Apostles read these words, they thought of the secret plans laid by the Jewish leaders. The leaders refused to submit to Christ. They planned, once for all, to do away with God’s Anointed King and his rule over them.

It is clear that the Apostles are not reading this Psalm and thinking of an ongoing struggle between Yahweh and the rebels. Rather, they are (with Christ’s death and resurrection very fresh in their memories) reading this Psalm as a struggle that has been recently completed ... a struggle in which the Christ—their King—has emerged victorious.

The disciples knew that, while the major battle had been won, smaller battles would be fought until Christ returned to enforce his rule. These smaller battles, like mop-up operations in WWII after victory had already been declared, did not cause the disciples to fear that the ultimate victory of Christ was in question. For them, that question had already been answered by his death and resurrection.

4. He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.

While the peoples are planning a rebellion that will finally free them from Yahweh and his Christ, Yahweh is laughing. He is mocking the rebels because they cannot do what they plan to do for he has already set his King in place.

The name given to Yahweh here is significant. He is “the one who is sitting in the heavens”. How could kings and rulers on the earth possibly think that their plans to rebel would succeed against the one sitting in the heavens?

5. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying,

Yahweh is furious about the rebellion of the kings and their refusal to bow to his Anointed King. He will, with smoke pouring from his flaring nostrils,¹⁵ declare his final word regarding his Anointed King to the rebels.

¹⁵ The Hebrew word for anger also means nose. Imagine an angry horse with nostrils flaring and you get the picture.

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Psalm 2

6. “As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.”

Here we have the final word from the one sitting in the heavens. Yahweh says, quite emphatically, that he has already set his King in place. The phrase translated, “As for me, I have set my King ...” (ESV), could also be rendered “And I, I set my King ...”. Notice the repetition of the word “I” here. The way Yahweh speaks here emphasizes himself. Yahweh is making sure that the rebels know that he—the one sitting in the heavens—has decisively done this thing and that they—the ones on earth—can do nothing about it. This is why he mocks them.

Echoes of this strong proclamation of Christ’s rule by God may be seen throughout the Bible:

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
Philippians 2:9-11

But what does it mean that Yahweh has established his King in “Zion”? What is Zion? The name, initially, is used to refer to a city that David conquered. This is the city where he placed his throne. For this reason, Zion became known as “the city of David”.

And the king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, who said to David, “You will not come here, but the blind and the lame will ward you off”—thinking, “David cannot come here.” Nevertheless, David took the stronghold of Zion, that is, the city of David. 2 Samuel 5:6-7

It is interesting (and certainly not coincidental) that the attitude of the Jebusites mirrors the attitude of the kings of the earth in Psalm 2. The Jebusites said, to Yahweh’s Anointed King (David), “You will not come here”. They, like the kings of the earth in Psalm 2, refused to acknowledge Yahweh’s Anointed King and to submit to his rule. They attempted to keep him from Zion. Their refusal, however, did not hinder David from taking his seat in Zion because Yahweh was with him.

The name Zion is rarely used in narrative texts in the Old Testament (i.e., stories), but is often used in Hebrew poetry. This is not surprising, for the idea of Zion is rich with poetic potential.

It is the name of the place where, by Yahweh’s choice, Yahweh’s Anointed King rules.

*He rejected the tent of Joseph;
he did not choose the tribe of
Ephraim,
but he chose the tribe of Judah,
Mount Zion, which he loves. Psalm 78:67-68*

Because the Anointed King is there, it is fitting that Yahweh be worshipped there.

*Praise is due to you, O God, in
Zion,
and to you shall vows be
performed.
O you who hear prayer,
to you shall all flesh come.
Psalm 65:1-2*

Zion actually comes to refer to the dwelling place of Yahweh.

*For the LORD has chosen Zion;
he has desired it for his dwelling place:
“This is my resting place forever;
here I will dwell, for I have
desired it.
I will abundantly bless her
provisions;
I will satisfy her poor with bread.
Her priests I will clothe with
salvation,
and her saints will shout for joy.
There I will make a horn to sprout
for David;
I have prepared a lamp for my anointed.
His enemies I will clothe with shame,
but on him his crown will shine.” Psalm 132:13-18*

As the dwelling place of Yahweh’s Anointed King and of Yahweh himself, Zion should be seen as the place where people find God.

*Blessed are those whose strength is
in you,
in whose heart are the highways to
Zion.
As they go through the valley of
Baca
they make it a place of springs;
the early rain also covers it with
pools.
They go from strength to strength;
each one appears before God in Zion. Psalm 84:5-7*

Because Yahweh and his Anointed King are there, Zion is seen as a place—THE place—of great joy for all the earth.

*Great is the LORD and greatly to be
praised
in the city of our God!
His holy mountain, beautiful in
elevation,
is the joy of all the earth,
Mount Zion, in the far north,
the city of the great King. Psalm 48:1-2*

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Psalm 2

As the place of Yahweh's Anointed King and the place of Yahweh's dwelling, Zion should be seen as the place from where his blessings flow.

*May the LORD bless you from Zion,
he who made heaven and earth! Psalm 134:3*

And because Zion is where Yahweh has set his affections, it is no surprise that it is permanent. Zion cannot, because of its inhabitants (Yahweh's King and Yahweh himself), be shaken. For this reason, the people of Zion, like Zion itself, cannot be shaken. All within Zion are completely safe.

*Those who trust in the LORD
are like Mount Zion,
which cannot be moved, but
abides forever.
As the mountains surround
Jerusalem,
so the LORD surrounds his people,
from this time forth and
forevermore. Psalm 125:1-2*

Much more could be said about Zion and its use in Hebrew poetry. But the word isn't just used in the Old Testament. There is great value in comparing how the word is used in the Old Testament with how this word is used in the New Testament. Consider, for instance, the following passage.

*But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God,
the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering,
and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to
God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,
and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled
blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.
Hebrews 12:22-24*

As followers of Christ, we have, as the author of Hebrews says, "come to Mount Zion". Our King is established in Zion. We are, because we are in Zion, completely safe. We can, because we are in Zion, worship, for God and his King are there.

7. I will tell of the decree:

**The LORD said to me, "You are my Son;
today I have begotten you.**

In this verse Yahweh is no longer speaking. Instead, we hear from the King himself. So not only do we have Yahweh's words declaring the King's rule in verse 6 of this poem, we have the Anointed King's words declaring his own rule in verses 7, 8, and 9.¹⁶

¹⁶ Old Testament law states that legal matters must be established by the mouth of two or three witnesses (Deut. 17:6 and 19:15). This requirement is referred to in Matt. 18:16, Jn. 8:16-17, 2 Cor. 13:1, 1 Tim. 5:19, and Heb. 10:28. In this Psalm, we have two strong witnesses to Christ's rule: witness one is Yahweh, witness two is Yahweh's Anointed King.

The King recounts Yahweh's words to him when he was anointed King: "You are my Son; today I have begotten you". We mustn't let these words about begetting throw us off. The Psalmist hasn't changed subjects here. This Psalm is not about the King's conception or birth. Rather, it is about his right to rule. However, as with a conception and birth, which marks the beginning of a person's life, so here, this begetting marks the beginning of the King's reign.

The idea here is that the one who is able to rule is the King's son. In a monarchy, the son is the only one whom the people recognize as the person with the legal right to rule as king. The Anointed King in this Psalm affirms that Yahweh himself has declared him to be God's Son. In other words, as the legal Son, he alone has the legal right to rule God's kingdom!

The Son of God, then, in context, is not a declaration that the King is Yahweh's child. Rather, it is a declaration that he is the one whom Yahweh recognizes as the rightful King of his kingdom.

With this in mind, carefully consider how Matthew describes Jesus' baptism:

And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." Matthew 3:16-17

In Old Testament times, oil was poured on the Anointed King's head. This was a symbol of the Holy Spirit, demonstrating that God's Spirit was on the new king to help him rule. The connection between oil and the Holy Spirit is easily seen in the verse detailing David's anointing by the prophet Samuel.

Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward. 1 Samuel 16:13

In the Old Testament, prophets anointed the kings and made declarations regarding the kings because the prophets were God's spokesmen.

In Matthew, however, God the Father doesn't use a prophet to pour out oil or to act as his spokesman. To make it perfectly clear that Jesus is THE Anointed King, no mediator is involved in Jesus' anointing. The Father himself pours out the Holy Spirit on Jesus, and he, without the aid of a spokesman, says, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased".

It is quite significant that David was anointed as king long before the people recognized him as king. While it is true that a few recognized David as king after Samuel anointed him, it's also true that the rulers in Israel rejected his rule and tried to keep him from the throne.

David's life is a dim picture of Jesus' life. Jesus was anointed, not by a prophet, but by God himself. Even after he was anointed by the Father and declared to be THE "Son", people rejected his rule. While a small number of people saw him as the Anointed King, he lived as a throne-less king for three years. The rulers, as they did with David, sought to kill him. However, and this is where Christ's history diverges from David's history, they succeeded in killing Christ.

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Psalm 2

And when did Jesus take his throne? Consider carefully the following passages. Notice how the Apostle Paul refers to Jesus' ascension to the throne:

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord ... Romans 1:1-4

Did you see it? Paul says that Jesus was declared to be "the Son of God in power" by his "resurrection from the dead". In other words, Paul recognizes that Jesus' resurrection was the event that led to his designation as the Son of God *in power*.

Here is what Paul spoke in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia:

"And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm,

*"You are my Son,
today I have begotten you." Acts 13:32-33*

Again, we see that Jesus' resurrection is the fulfillment of what is spoken in Psalm 2.

Here is how the author of Hebrews refers to this event:

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

For to which of the angels did God ever say,

*"You are my Son,
today I have begotten you"?*

Or again,

*"I will be to him a father,
and he shall be to me a son"?*

And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says,

"Let all God's angels worship him."

Of the angels he says,

*“He makes his angels winds,
and his ministers a flame of fire.”*

But of the Son he says,

*“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever,
the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.”*

Hebrews 1:3-8¹⁷

Again, we see Jesus’ right to rule being based on God’s declarations to him and on his resurrection from the dead.

What’s the conclusion here? It is that God has told Jesus that he is the King. He publicly announced that Jesus was the King when Jesus was baptized. He anointed him for the task at that time. Jesus took the throne when he rose from the dead. At that time, the “today” spoken of in Psalm 2 came to pass. He is currently ruling!

To refuse Christ is to refuse God. To reject Christ’s rule is to reject the rule of God, for he rules via the Christ.

**8. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,
and the ends of the earth your possession.**

While much of this Psalm could be spoken of in regard to David (again, he is a dim picture of Jesus), this line can only apply to Jesus. As the Son of God, the Anointed One’s Kingdom is greater than any other kingdom.

Jesus asked God the Father for all the nations of the earth. He did this at the Father’s request. This is why the gospel must be preached to all the nations. He can leave no nations out because none fall outside of his reign. To leave a part of the world un-evangelized would be an affront to Christ’s rule. It would demonstrate that he could not rule all nations. But he is ruling all the nations.

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁷ See also Hebrews 5:5-6.

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Psalm 2

The church must bring the news of his rule to the ends of the earth, because this is the method by which his rule is established in the nations. This should give great confidence to those preaching the gospel. The gospel must bear fruit because the dignity of the King is at stake. We should not be surprised that people in every nation are bowing before the King!

Notice how John describes the people who count themselves as this King's subjects.

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" Revelation 7:9-10

Jesus is King of the nations. All, no matter who they might worship, are under his rule. He—quite rightfully—considers every plot of land to be his.

9. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

The Anointed One is charged, by none other than Yahweh himself, with bringing the nations into order. All must bow in subjection to him. This, as we will see in Psalm 8, is a fulfillment of Genesis 1:26-28. This "breaking with a rod" image is not the image most have of Christ. They view Jesus as a kind man. He recycles and uses crosswalks and would never hurt anyone because that would go against his nature. They do not view him as the one who will "break" those who refuse to bow before him with "a rod of iron" and who will "dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel". This breaking and smashing, after all, seems positively barbaric.

But if we cannot see the righteousness of the King's actions here, perhaps we are the ones who are barbaric. If we deny Christ the right to enforce his rule, we are saying that we want rebels to run free, that we do not want the King to rule and to bring his peace, and that we want, instead, anarchy to reign.

We are not to feel sorry for those who are broken by the Christ. They deserve this to happen because they have rebelled against Christ's rule. To rebel against the rule of Christ is to rebel against Yahweh himself.

10. Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth.

What is the point of this Psalm? It depends on who is reading it! While this Psalm is, for the Christian, a Psalm of great comfort and hope leading to courage (this is how the Apostles use it in Acts 4), for the rebel it must be seen as a call to repentance.

Rulers of the earth, if they are wise, will bow before the ruler who is greater than themselves. They will not continue in their rebellion. They will heed Yahweh's gracious warning and submit to Christ's rule before it is too late.

The Anointed King has been established. Earthly kings and rulers (and all the rest of the peoples) have been warned. The wise would say, "God's true King has already taken the throne, I must bow before him."

**11. Serve the LORD with fear,
and rejoice with trembling.**

All must serve Yahweh. How are they to do this? With fear. He is over all. He will punish those who do not serve him. It is important to note that, in the context of this Psalm, serving Yahweh is obeying Yahweh's Christ. If we reject the Christ we are not serving Yahweh.

But note the second verset of this line of poetry. Serving Yahweh by recognizing the reign of the Christ is not terrible. "Serve" is paired with the word "rejoice". We are commanded to rejoice in our service to Yahweh! Our service to Yahweh which is expressed in our allegiance to his King should be, to us, a source of great joy!

The rebel would say that true joy is found in rebellion against the King. This is hardly the case. Rebellion leads to breaking. Serving the King leads to joy.

**12. Kiss the Son,
lest he be angry, and you perish in the way,
for his wrath is quickly kindled.
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.**

The King will, at Yahweh's command, break all who do not serve him and acknowledge him. This is not an empty threat. In the same way that the stone in Daniel crushed all the kingdoms that came before it, so Christ will crush all who oppose him.¹⁸

How are rebels saved from being broken by Yahweh's Anointed King? The only answer is to "Kiss the Son". Remember, this is poetry. This isn't describing a romantic kiss. This is describing the sort of kiss a subject would give to a king. If we think of something like, "Kiss his ring" we are probably not far off from the meaning.

¹⁸ See Daniel 2.

WEEK TWO

Psalm 2

Those who do not “Kiss the Son” will perish. The King is angered by all who do not bow to his rule and he will pour out his wrath against them. I wonder how many Christians truly understand this. We need to know that Jesus is the King, that he recognizes that he is King, and that he takes his position very seriously. Again, the Great Commission is based upon his rule as King.

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” Matthew 28:18

The great sin talked about in Psalm 2 is the sin of refusing to acknowledge Yahweh’s King. Could there be a greater crime?

But there are some who do acknowledge Christ as King. Notice that this Psalm ends by talking about the blessedness of those who take refuge in Yahweh’s Anointed King (the Christ). The blessing of Yahweh rests on every person who seeks protection “in him” (Paul greatly develops the “in Christ” theme in his epistles).

May you, by God’s grace, kiss the Son, and may you, by his grace, be found taking refuge in him.

Week Three

PSALM 8

WEEK THREE

Psalm 8

DAY ONE

1. Read and interact with Psalm 8. Remember, this is not narrative. It is poetry. Think in pictures. Try to visualize what is being said here. In the margins and in the poem itself make any notations that help you grasp the way this poem is working. Connect corresponding words within the individual lines.

PSALM 8

TO THE CHOIRMASTER: ACCORDING TO THE GITTITH. A PSALM OF DAVID.

1. O LORD, our Lord,
 how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.
2. Out of the mouth of babies and infants,
you have established strength because of your foes,
 to still the enemy and the avenger.
3. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
 the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
4. what is man that you are mindful of him,
 and the son of man that you care for him?
5. Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
 and crowned him with glory and honor.
6. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;
 you have put all things under his feet,
7. all sheep and oxen,
 and also the beasts of the field,
8. the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea,
 whatever passes along the paths of the seas.
9. O LORD, our Lord,
 how majestic is your name in all the earth!

2. Draw a picture or pictures of Psalm 8.

DAY TWO

3. The first and last sentences of the Psalm are identical. The fact that they're repeated tells the reader that they are the theme of this Psalm. What is this theme?

4. What does verse 2 have to do with this theme? In other words, how do the "babies and infants" in verse 2 contribute to the fulfillment of verses 1 and 9?

5. Remember, this is poetry. Based on the rest of the poem, why does David use the words "babies and infants" here? Is he describing literal babies and infants? If not, what do these words symbolize?

6. Jesus quotes verse 2 (from the Septuagint) in Matthew 21:14-16. How does Jesus use this verse? What does his use of the verse say about him?

7. What does his use of this passage say about the chief priests and scribes who were speaking with him?

WEEK THREE

Psalm 8

WEEK THREE

Psalm 8

DAY THREE

8. What is the question David asks in Psalm 8:3-4? What prompts him to ask this question?

9. Based on the theme of this Psalm (from verses 1 and 9), what is the answer to David's question? Why would God do this?

10. In verses 5-8, David considers the exalted place of mankind. How does he describe man's position in these verses?

11. David is clearly thinking of Genesis 1:26-31 as he writes these words. Read these verses and write out verses 26 and 27 in the space below.

12. Mankind was to fill the earth with God's image. How would this accomplish Psalm 8:1 and 9?

13. Man never did this. Instead, the first man chose to disobey God (see Genesis 2:15-17 and Genesis 3), and, because of this, man in general fell from his exalted position. How is man described in the following passages:

Romans 3:10-20, 23

Ephesians 2:1-3

Mark 10:17-18

DAY FOUR

14. In Hebrews 2:5-8, the author of Hebrews quotes Psalm 8 to describe mankind. Based on the second half of verse 8, does the author see these things as being presently true of mankind?

15. The author, however, does see the description of man in Psalm 8 as true of one man. Of whom does he consider these things to be true? **Hebrews 2:9**

WEEK THREE

Psalm 8

16. In Hebrews 2:7 we read of God doing two things to man. What are they?

1.

2.

17. How does the author of Hebrews see these two things happening to Jesus?

1.

2.

18. Christ's death and resurrection impacts far more than just Christ alone. How does Christ's death and resurrection impact those who are "in him"?

Ephesians 2:1-10

19. Based on these verses, how can mankind fulfill Psalm 8 (and Genesis 1:26-31)?

20. The phrases "in Christ" or "in him" are frequently used in the New Testament. What would these phrases have to do with mankind fulfilling what is written in Psalm 8?

DAY FIVE

21. Reread Psalm 8. How would you preach the gospel through this Psalm?

DAY SIX

22. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week, the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

PSALM 8

We have considered a Psalm (Psalm 2) exalting Christ as Yahweh's Anointed King. Psalm 8, while it clearly points to the reign of Christ, does so in an unexpected way—by focusing on Genesis 1 and God's purpose for man in general.

**1. O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.**

The theme of this Psalm is the greatness of Yahweh's name "in all the earth". The theme is plain to see because, in what is known as an envelope (or an "inclusio"), the beginning and end of the Psalm perfectly match. Everything between these two matched pairs of statements should be seen as an elaboration of the theme they proclaim.

Knowing that this Psalm is about the greatness of Yahweh's name in the earth, it is perhaps surprising, as we'll consider shortly, that the Psalm is about the exalted place of man within Yahweh's creation. How does a Psalm about the greatness of man within creation result in praise to Yahweh in all the earth?

WEEK THREE

Psalm 8

WEEK THREE

Psalm 8

2. Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger.

This verse seems to be something of a summary of the rest of the Psalm. Beyond this, it seems to be a summary of the gospel. This verse demonstrates that Yahweh's enemies are defeated by "babies and infants" (which may be a poetic way of saying "very ordinary people") who love and trust Yahweh and are not afraid to speak his praises.¹⁹

Adam was to do this. God knew that an enemy would come. Adam was commanded to "keep" the garden (see Genesis 2:15). This "keeping" included far more than "tending" the garden. It included the idea of protecting the garden from evil.²⁰ God's place—the place where man was to worship him—was to be protected by man. How was Adam—a mere baby in comparison to the strength of Satan—to do this? He should have used words of praise to Yahweh to defeat Satan. Adam's words of praise in response to Satan's questioning of God's goodness would have silenced Satan. But Adam didn't do this. Yahweh's enemies, because they were not stilled by the praises of man, remained at large.

But Adam's disobedience didn't invalidate the purpose for man. Yahweh created man to praise him. This praise is the means by which Yahweh has chosen to defeat his enemies.

This verse is quoted in Matthew 21:16. Jesus, in what should be seen as a highly symbolic act,²¹ heals the blind and lame in the temple. Children, upon seeing the signs, cry out, "Hosanna to the Son of David!"—a clear reference to the Christ (we'll focus on these words further when we consider Psalm 118). They see Jesus as God's Anointed King and they love what they see.²²

The chief priests and scribes find their shouting blasphemous. They don't see Jesus' actions as a fulfillment of prophecy and as a sign of the coming of the Christ to deliver his people. They ignore the sign of the healings, but they can't ignore the shouting of the children. They want the praise stopped. Jesus doesn't stop it. Rather, he reminds the Jewish leaders of these words in Psalm 8.

And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant, and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise'?" Matthew 21:14-16

19 The word translated "strength" here is translated "praise" in the LXX. "Strength" and "praise" are not as different as they might seem, for the idea is of "strength" proceeding from the mouths of "babies and infants". In other words, they are speaking forth strength.

20 The word translated "keep" in Genesis 2:15 is the same word used of the Cherubim when they were placed in the garden "to guard the way to the tree of life" (Genesis 3:24).

21 See, for instance, Malachi 3:1: "And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple".

22 These words should remind the reader of Psalm 2 and 2 Samuel 7.

When Jesus asks if the Jewish leaders have read the Psalm he quotes, he is not really wondering if they have read it. His question assumes that they have read the Psalm and know it quite well. He reminds the Jewish leaders of a quotation from this Psalm: “have you never read, ‘Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise’”? Jesus doesn’t quote any more of the Psalm, but the leaders know what comes next—the statement that praise from infants and nursing babies destroys Yahweh’s enemies.

For the children to be declaring Jesus to be the Son of David must be seen as praise directed to God, for the children in the temple were rejoicing in the King whom God had anointed! They loved what God had done in sending the Christ. Beyond this, the children’s praise was the very means by which God was destroying his foes. The praise of the children (and the praises of other weak and insignificant people like them) led the Jewish leaders to do the very thing that would bring about their defeat (and the defeat of all God’s enemies). The crucifixion of Christ was fueled, in part, by the praises of “infants and nursing babies”.

What was true in the first century is still true today. The church is now, as Ephesians 3:8-10 proclaims, doing this. In this passage, Paul says that “through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places”. God’s enemies hear of God’s great wisdom through those who love him. He is still using the praises of the very ordinary (or, more poetically, “infants and nursing babies”) to shut the mouths of his enemies.

**3. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,**

After this summary statement of man’s purpose, the Psalmist draws his reader’s attention to the Creation. There are clear echoes here of Genesis 1. The Psalmist thinks about creation and its wonders and, because man is the crown jewel of creation, cannot help but turn his thoughts to man.

**4. what is man that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?**

The Psalmist marvels that Yahweh would consider man. Yahweh is so great—his glory is so far above the heavens (see v. 1)—that it must be seen as simply stunning that he even thinks about mankind.

The Psalmist is writing about mankind in general. He is writing about mankind as he reads of it in Genesis 1—the mankind that has been proclaimed to be “very good”.

But consider how the Apostles must have read this Psalm. When they saw a Psalm talking about the exalted place of man and when they read of man being described with the words “son of man”, their thoughts would have immediately turned to one man—Jesus.

WEEK THREE

Psalm 8

The phrase “son of man”, in its Old Testament usage, often applies to mankind in general (see, especially, the book of Ezekiel). For the Apostles, however, “son of man” was a title reserved for Christ. “Son of Man” is used 86 times in the New Testament. All of the uses of this phrase, with the exception of Hebrews 2:6 (which refers to Psalm 8 and which we will discuss shortly), refer to Jesus alone and not to mankind in general. Jesus uses the title in reference to himself 30 times in Matthew. Thus, the phrase “son of man” was loaded, by Christ himself, with a great deal of Christological freight.

When Jesus uses “Son of Man” in reference to himself, he wants his listeners to think of more than just the fact that he is a human. He wants his listeners to connect “Son of Man” with its usage in the Old Testament. Particularly, I believe, he wants his listeners to think of passages like Psalm 8 and Daniel 7.

*“I saw in the night visions,
and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man,
and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.
And to him was given dominion
and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed.” Daniel 7:13-14*

Do you see the reference to the son of man here? He is the one to whom “the Ancient of Days” (i.e., God the Father) gives “dominion and glory and a kingdom”. He does this so that “all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him”. The son of man, at least in this passage in Daniel, is no ordinary human! While other humans (i.e., Ezekiel) may be called “son of man”, the one described in Daniel 7 is the “son of man” par excellence. There are no other humans like him. To him alone, “the Ancient of Days” gives all authority so that all might “serve him”.

The Apostles, when they saw this phrase used in Psalm 8, surely considered it to be a reference to Christ. This is clear based on how Paul uses this Psalm in 1 Corinthians 15:27-28 (again, the usage in Hebrews 2 will be discussed shortly).

*For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who puts all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.
1 Corinthians 15:27-28*

Unfortunately, several modern English translations do not use the phrase “son of man” in their translations of Psalm 8:4. Consider the following translations. Note the words printed in bold:

... what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them? **NIV** (bold added)

... what are mere mortals that you should think about them,
human beings that you should care for them? **NLT** (bold added)

Of what importance is the human race, that you should notice them?

Of what importance is **mankind**, that you should pay attention to them... **NET** (bold added)

Instead of “son of man”, we find “human beings” and “mankind”. While these word choices may appear to offer some advantages over “son of man”,²³ the decision to replace “son of man” obscures what would have jumped out to the Apostles.

This is not the only change that obscures what would have been clear to the Apostles. Notice how these translations have changed singular male pronouns to plural pronouns which are unmarked in regard to gender (i.e., the end of the first verset in the ESV concludes with “him”, but the NIV, NLT, and NET all use the word “them”). Again, this change may appear to have some advantages, but the advantages do come at a heavy cost. The spotlight in these translations has moved from man (which could be singular or plural) to human beings (which is always plural). This obscures the truth that Jesus is THE man (representing all people) of whom these words are true. It is only “in him” that these words may be considered to be true of other human beings.

5. Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.

Consider how man is described in Genesis 1, for this is what the Psalmist was considering as he wrote these words in Psalm 8:

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

*So God created man in his own image,
 in the image of God he created him;
 male and female he created them.*

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so.
 Genesis 1:26-30

Adam was created in God’s image. He was “crowned ... with glory and honor”. We are meant to see him as the king of the earth. Everything, in Genesis 1, is in subjection to him. He exists to showcase God. He exists to display God’s image everywhere.

²³ Advantages may be that we don’t use the phrase “son of man” in ordinary speech, and that the singular “son of man” tends to obscure the fact that the Psalmist was thinking about mankind in general.

WEEK THREE

Psalm 8

However, and this is critical to our understanding of Psalm 8, Adam lost that glory and honor when he chose to reject God's word and to listen to Satan. This loss of glory and honor was foreshadowed when Yahweh told Adam: "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:17).

The Psalmist doesn't describe the fall of man in Psalm 8. Rather, he describes man as he was created to be. In other words, he is writing about the Ideal Man who has never fallen.

Notice how this Psalm is referred to in Hebrews 2 (the writer quotes from the LXX). The quotation of the Psalm and the writer's subsequent explanation of the quote from Psalm 8 demand careful consideration.

Now it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. It has been testified somewhere,

*"What is man, that you are mindful of him,
or the son of man, that you care for him?
You made him for a little while lower than the angels;
you have crowned him with glory and honor,
putting everything in subjection under his feet."*

Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. Hebrews 2:5-8

Notice the last sentence of verse eight: "At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him". In other words, the author of Hebrews is saying that the Psalm is not currently true of man. While it was true of man in general at one point (i.e., these things were true when God created Adam), it was not true of man in general any longer.

However, immediately after the words, "At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him", we read the following:

But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. Hebrews 2:9

Do you see how the author of Hebrews is interpreting Psalm 8? He sees this Psalm as referring to the original purpose of man and to Christ being THE MAN in whom that purpose is fulfilled. The Psalmist's words, then, are not true of all human beings. They are true of one man—THE Son of Man, Jesus Christ. And because the Psalmist's words are true of Christ, they are also true of those who are "in him".

Jesus' crowning of glory and honor took place "because of the suffering of death". He didn't suffer and die for his own sins. Rather, he did this so that "he might taste death for everyone". His death is the only way that mankind can be brought back to the place described in Psalm 8!

Did you notice the statement “You made him **for a little while** lower than the angels” in Hebrews 2:7? This reading is based on the Greek translation of Psalm 8 (LXX). The “little while” statement leads to thoughts of a change in position regarding man and the angels. In other words, the LXX, because it speaks of being made lower than angels “for a little while” alludes to a time when man will not be lower than the angels. The author of Hebrews seizes this thought and describes the resurrection and exaltation of Christ:

But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.
Hebrews 2:9

The author of Hebrews read this Psalm and saw it describing not only the position of Christ in the universe but also the resurrection as the means by which he attained that position. What a great deal is packed into this short Psalm!

- 6. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet,**
- 7. all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,**
- 8. the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.**

The final verses of this Psalm outline the scope of the dominion given to man. Man—and, because of what we have considered, we must qualify this by saying that this refers to Christ—is over “all things”. The Psalmist then outlines some of the things man is over. This shouldn’t be seen as a random list. Rather, it seems to be an echo of Genesis 1:

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” Genesis 1:28

Genesis 1 refers to man being over “every living thing that moves on the earth”. The Psalmist writes of “sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field”. Genesis 1 refers to man being over “the birds of the heavens”. The Psalmist uses the same language. Genesis 1 refers to man being over “the fish of the sea”. The Psalmist uses the same language.

But notice the last item in the list: “whatever passes along the paths of the seas”. This does not appear in Genesis. This verset may, of course, be a poetic restatement of “fish of the sea”. However, it is possible that this thing that “passes along the paths of the seas” is a reference to something that wasn’t disclosed in Genesis 1. This may be a poetic way of saying that man is over, in addition to the things described in Genesis 1, the terrible sea monster that rules the sea and brings terror to man. This raging sea monster, which wasn’t present in Genesis 1 because the curse had not yet come, would be a fitting symbol of death itself.²⁴

²⁴ Revelation 21:1 refers to a time when the sea is no more. This does not mean there will be no beaches or water in which to swim or play in the New Jerusalem. Rather, as the sea is the home of the sea monster (i.e., chaos and death), this thought should bring great comfort to God’s people. God’s enemies have no more places to hide.

WEEK THREE

Psalm 8

It would be impossible to prove that a sea monster (and, hence, death) is what “whatever passes along the paths of the sea” refers to (although the idea of a sea monster raging against God and his people is present in many Psalms). However, as the Apostle Paul makes clear in the passage below (a passage which, again, alludes to Psalm 8), death is one of the things man (Christ) is over. In fact, death is the “last enemy” to be destroyed.

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all. 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

Paul uses this passage in Psalm 8 to say that Christ (THE man) must reign until we finally see all things, including death itself, in subjection to him. Paul then uses this Psalm to outline a hierarchy of position (but not of value!) within the Trinity. After all things are subjected to Christ—in other words, after he destroys “every rule and every authority and power”, doing all that man was originally called to do—he will deliver “the kingdom to God the Father”.

Paul sees an end goal of man’s (i.e., Christ’s) reign. His reign will bring all into proper order. When all is properly ordered, Christ will hand the “keys of the kingdom” back to his Father, saying, in essence, “It’s done. Everything you asked of man has been accomplished.” At that time, all eyes will turn to God. At that time, God’s name will truly be seen as majestic in all the earth.

9. O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

And this, with all eyes on God, is where the Psalm ends. The greatness of God is seen in the way he uses man (the man Christ and, because of his death and resurrection, all who are in him) to bring about his purpose. His purpose is that all the earth—through the praise of man—would know the majesty of his name.

Christ is the man, as the author of Hebrews makes clear, who brings this about!

Week Four

PSALM 22

WEEK FOUR

Psalm 22

DAY ONE

1. Read and interact with Psalm 22. Remember, this is not narrative. It is poetry. Think in pictures. Try to visualize what is being said here. In the margins and in the poem itself make any notations that help you grasp the way this poem is working. Connect corresponding words within the individual lines.

PSALM 22

TO THE CHOIRMASTER: ACCORDING TO THE DOE OF THE DAWN. A PSALM OF DAVID.

1. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?
2. O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer,
and by night, but I find no rest.
3. Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.
4. In you our fathers trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.
5. To you they cried and were rescued;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.
6. But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by mankind and despised by the people.
7. All who see me mock me;
they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;
8. "He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him;
let him rescue him, for he delights in him!"
9. Yet you are he who took me from the womb;
you made me trust you at my mother's breasts.
10. On you was I cast from my birth,
and from my mother's womb you have been my God.
11. Be not far from me,
for trouble is near,
and there is none to help.
12. Many bulls encompass me;
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;
13. they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and roaring lion.
14. I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;
15. my strength is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.
16. For dogs encompass me;
a company of evildoers encircles me;
they have pierced my hands and feet—
17. I can count all my bones—
they stare and gloat over me;
18. they divide my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots.

19. But you, O LORD, do not be far off!
O you my help, come quickly to my aid!
20. Deliver my soul from the sword,
my precious life from the power of the dog!
21. Save me from the mouth of the lion!
You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen!
22. I will tell of your name to my brothers;
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:
23. You who fear the LORD, praise him!
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him,
and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!
24. For he has not despised or abhorred
the affliction of the afflicted,
and he has not hidden his face from him,
but has heard, when he cried to him.
25. From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
my vows I will perform before those who fear him.
26. The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the LORD!
May your hearts live forever!
27. All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before you.
28. For kingship belongs to the LORD,
and he rules over the nations.
29. All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship;
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,
even the one who could not keep himself alive.
30. Posterity shall serve him;
it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation;
31. they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn,
that he has done it.

2. Draw a picture or pictures of Psalm 22.

WEEK FOUR

Psalm 22

DAY TWO

3. Who is speaking in this Psalm? What does the speaker say about his own innocence or guilt?

4. To whom is he speaking?

5. This Psalm is divided into two parts (the “hinge” in this Psalm is in verse 21). Summarize each of these two parts.

Verses 1-21a

Verses 21b-31

DAY THREE

6. What evidence is there that Matthew had this Psalm in mind as he recounts Christ's crucifixion? *Matthew 27:32-56*

7. What evidence do you have that Jesus, also, was thinking of this Psalm as he was crucified? *Matthew 27:46*

8. Is it true that God forsook Jesus? If so, why did he do it? *Isaiah 53:4-6*

9. What encouragement would Jesus have found in meditating on this Psalm? *Psalm 22:21-31*

WEEK FOUR

Psalm 22

WEEK FOUR

Psalm 22

DAY FOUR

10. In what ways do you see the actions of the one who has suffered and overcome impacting many others? In other words, what specific things happen as a result of the suffering and deliverance of the Christ? *Psalm 22:22-31*

11. What encouragement should Jesus' followers find as they meditate on this Psalm?

DAY FIVE

12. Reread Psalm 22. How would you preach the gospel through this Psalm?

DAY SIX

13. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week, the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

WEEK FOUR

Psalm 22

PSALM 22

This poem records the words of an innocent one who is suffering. This innocent one (and the fact that he is innocent is vitally important to understanding the Psalm) is a man who has trusted in God from birth. He prays to God about his sufferings, crying out to him for deliverance. God hears his prayers and delivers him, and the deliverance of this innocent man impacts many other people beyond himself.

But this is far more than a poem about an innocent one who is suffering and the effects of his suffering and deliverance.²⁵ These are the words of THE Innocent One as he suffered on the cross. These are the words of the Innocent One who was delivered and whose deliverance impacts the whole world.

Jesus was reflecting on this poem as he was crucified. It is clear that he was meditating on this particular Psalm as he was dying because, in the only words that Matthew records him saying from the cross, he quotes Psalm 22:1.

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Matthew 27:46

To quote the first verse of the Psalm almost certainly indicates that Jesus was meditating on the entire Psalm. He was not only asking a question of God. He was also telling the people—both those who were present then and those who read these words now—how to think about his crucifixion.

In the same way that Jesus was thinking about this Psalm as he was crucified, the Apostle Matthew was clearly reflecting on this poem as he wrote of the crucifixion. This is clear because of the word choices Matthew makes in his description of this event in Matthew 27. Throughout his description of the event, Matthew borrows words and pictures from Psalm 22.

²⁵ The New Testament tells us that, apart from Christ, there are no innocent ones. Christ’s words to the rich young man demand close attention: “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone” (Mark 10:18). Mankind, apart from Christ (who is God and who is, therefore, good), is not good. See Romans 3:10-18.

WEEK FOUR

Psalm 22

THE INNOCENT ONE CRIES OUT TO GOD.

1. **My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**

Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?

These are the exact words Jesus cries out in Matthew 27:46. Jesus is crying out to God because God has “forsaken” him. His groans, which might be called roars of anguish (the word in the Hebrew text is sometimes used of the roaring of lions), are falling on deaf ears. God has turned his back on Jesus.

2. **O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.**

For the first time in his earthly life, Jesus is disconnected from heaven. Instead of mercy, God’s wrath pours out upon Christ in an endless cascade.

The poem doesn’t expressly say that the Innocent One is under God’s wrath. In verse 15, however, it does say that God has laid him in “the dust of death”. In other words, God is the one doing this to the Innocent One. He is not just permitting the affliction of the Innocent One; he is actively causing it. What this poem says implicitly, many other passages say explicitly: God poured his wrath out upon Christ—wrath that we deserved. We are the reason this wrath was poured out on Jesus.

Jesus sees no end to this wrath. It just keeps coming. Both in the light and in the darkness (this is poetry, so the poet can talk about something as if it took days and days, even if it took a few hours)²⁶ Christ remains under heaven’s heavy hand. How long will this continue?

THE INNOCENT ONE REMEMBERS GOD’S HELP TO ISRAEL IN THE PAST.

3. **Yet you are holy,**

enthroned on the praises of Israel.

4. **In you our fathers trusted;**

they trusted, and you delivered them.

5. **To you they cried and were rescued;**

in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

But Jesus’ separation from the Father hasn’t separated him from faith. His anguish hasn’t caused him to curse God. Instead, even as he bears God’s wrath, Jesus thinks about God’s character. He knows that he is holy. He thinks about God’s acts of deliverance in the past. He knows that God delivers those who trust in him. He did this for the saints of old. They cried to God and were rescued.

THE INNOCENT ONE CONSIDERS HIMSELF.

6. **But I am a worm and not a man,**

scorned by mankind and despised by the people.

7. **All who see me mock me;**

they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;

²⁶ It is worth noting that Christ did suffer in the light and in the darkness. The sky turned black when Christ was crucified.

But as Jesus considers God's deliverance in the past, he considers himself. He is, at least at this point, nothing. God saves men, but he is a grub—a worm. The people despise him (notice the connection to Isaiah 53:3 here: "He was despised and rejected by men"). They also, and this is one of the places where Matthew deliberately borrows the language of Psalm 22, "wag their heads" at him.

And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads ...
Matthew 27:39

**8. "He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him;
let him rescue him, for he delights in him!"**

Again, Matthew echoes these words, following the exact order we see in Psalm 22. First, we read of people wagging their heads. Then we read what the wagging-headed people say (little did they know that they were quoting Psalm 22!):

"He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" Matthew 27:43

The premise of the people is that God would deliver Jesus "now" (i.e., take him off of the cross) if God truly delighted in him. They see Jesus' suffering on the cross as proof that God doesn't delight in him.

However, the wagging-headed people are very wrong about God. While he doesn't deliver his Son "now", that doesn't mean that he doesn't delight in him. On the contrary, all of God's delight is in him. God's delight in Christ is precisely what causes God to keep him on the cross, for the cross is Christ's path to glory (as we have seen in Psalm 2).

If God had delivered Christ from the cross, it would be clear that he didn't delight in him, for, by doing this, God would be keeping him from the glory that came to him because of the cross. The cross, then, is a showcase of God's delight for his Son.

THE INNOCENT ONE REMEMBERS GOD'S HELP IN THE PAST.

- 9. Yet you are he who took me from the womb;
you made me trust you at my mother's breasts.**
- 10. On you was I cast from my birth,
and from my mother's womb you have been my God.**

We turn from the wagging heads to the Christ. He demonstrates that he truly is innocent. He, and this is unlike any other man who has even lived,²⁷ has trusted God all of his days ("you made me trust you at my mother's breasts"). From birth—and this was clearly portrayed in Matthew's and Luke's accounts of the birth of Christ, Jesus was devoted to God. He never lived one moment without all of his attention focused on the Father.

The gospel message is spilling out from this poem. Do you see it? This one who is suffering at the hands of God isn't suffering because of his own sins. He has been, from the moment of his birth, righteous.

²⁷ Again, see Romans 3:10-18.

WEEK FOUR

Psalm 22

THE INNOCENT ONE PLEADS FOR GOD'S HELP IN THE PRESENT.

**11. Be not far from me,
for trouble is near,
and there is none to help.**

Even in his suffering, Christ doesn't turn from God (who has, at this moment, turned from him!). Instead, he keeps his eyes on the one who has put him on the cross. He sees God as the only one who can help him.

THE INNOCENT ONE COUNTS HIS AFFLICTIONS.

**12. Many bulls encompass me;
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;**

Remember, we're reading poetry here. We need not look for real bulls in the crucifixion account. Rather, the poem is painting a picture in our minds. At this moment, the wagging-headed people are no longer people. They are raging bulls with eyes bulging and nostrils flaring.²⁸ These bulls have one intent: the total destruction of the Innocent One.

**13. they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and roaring lion.**

Now the bulls are crazed lions, roaring in Christ's face, their yellow teeth just inches from their goal.

**14. I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;**

**15. my strength is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.**

Christ has no strength left in him. Like water poured out on the dry ground, there is nothing left. He can't fight back, for his body wouldn't respond even if he tried—all his bones are out of joint. Even if he had the strength, he still couldn't stand against his enemies, for his heart "is like wax". He has no capacity to do anything. He is like a broken piece of pottery. Absolutely useless. He can't even cry out for help, for his tongue, as he says, "sticks to my jaws".

With enemies closing in and no strength to stand against them, the Innocent One makes an amazing statement: "you lay me in the dust of death". "You" is none other than God. The Innocent One is saying that God—not the raging bulls—is killing him! God is using the raging beasts to kill the Innocent One who has trusted in him all his days! Why would he do this?

**16. For dogs encompass me;
a company of evildoers encircles me;
they have pierced my hands and feet—**

²⁸ Bashan, an area located east of the Jordan, was noted for its livestock.

Now it is dogs who are surrounding the Innocent One. These are not pets. They are wild dogs, sly and mangy creatures desperately looking to kill and to eat. All of these animals—the bulls, the lions, the dogs—are representations of the “evildoers” who are surrounding Christ.

The evildoers have “pierced my hands and feet”. The Apostles would have made an immediate connection between these words and Jesus’ crucifixion, because the act of crucifixion required piercing of Jesus’ hands and feet.

Notice Jesus’ words to his Apostles (and the others who were with them) on the day he rose from the dead. Notice, particularly, his reference to his hands and his feet:

And he said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. Luke 24:38-40

**17. I can count all my bones—
they stare and gloat over me;**

But it is not just the hands and feet of the Innocent One that have been pierced. Pain racks his entire body. It is as if every bone is screaming out. No one, however, cares about the Innocent One’s pain. The evildoers watch in pleasure, enjoying the suffering.

**18. they divide my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots.**

The suffering of the Innocent One has become a game. His possessions—and all he has are his clothes—are stripped from him and have become prizes in a sort of parlor game.

This, of course, literally happened when Jesus died.

And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. Matthew 27:35

But, even though this actually happened, we must resist the urge to read this poem as if it were a newspaper account of the crucifixion. The Psalmist is not a journalist or a historian. He is a poet.

As a poet, the Psalmist is painting pictures—the most horrible of pictures—in our minds. This one, the picture of people gambling over the Innocent One’s clothing, is particularly bad. We have probably thought of the soldiers gambling for Jesus’ clothes so many times that this picture has lost some of its impact. We see it as one more thing that happened when Jesus died. That’s not what the poet has in mind. He is wanting us to feel the pain of the Innocent One in the very deepest way.

WEEK FOUR

Psalm 22

Imagine lying in a hospital bed and the doctors and nurses, who have been staring at you for hours and openly laughing about your suffering and impending death, begin ripping your clothes from your body. Imagine a doctor, noticing your watch, breaking its strap as he wrenches it from your wrist. Imagine a nurse, upon seeing your wedding ring, spitting on your finger so she can more easily pull it over your knuckle.

You can't even cover yourself, for, in their frenzy, even the sheets have been stripped from the bed. You lie naked and exposed to all. And what do the doctors and nurses do with the things they've ripped from your body? One of them takes the role of an auctioneer and the rest begin bidding for your items. Raucous laughter and mocking cries of delight fill the room as each successive item is produced and bid upon.

How do you feel as your items are fought over? That is what the poet wants us to feel.

The poet is painting pictures of the incredible suffering of the Innocent One and the absolute callousness of those who see—and delight in—his suffering. He is not (in the manner of a photograph) painting an exact replica of the crucifixion of the Christ. That is not his intention. Rather, he is (in the manner of Picasso) painting a wildly impressionistic picture meant to unearth, in ways a photograph never could, the true nature of the sufferings of the Christ.

With that said, we must consider the fact that several of the poet's wild images actually took place at the crucifixion. If we are not meant to see this Psalm as a literal depiction of Jesus' crucifixion, what do we do with the things described in this Psalm that actually took place on that day?

I would suggest that the events at the crucifixion that exactly mirror this Psalm (i.e., the wagging of the peoples' heads, the words spoken by the wagging-headed people, the piercing of the hands and the feet, the gambling for the clothes, Jesus' quotation of Psalm 22:1, etc.) should be seen as "divine markers" ensuring that we do not miss the link between the crucifixion and Psalm 22.

In other words, the matching of poetic pictures with actual events is the Holy Spirit's way of telling us that Psalm 22 is absolutely about the Son of God and the gospel event. We do not have to wonder if we are reading this Psalm correctly.

The poem is to be read as a poem. But God has ensured, by the careful recording of events that took place at the crucifixion, that we cannot interpret this poem in any way we choose. He has given us very explicit markers that are meant to guide our interpretation of this poem. Heaven has not left the interpretation of this poem to chance.

THE INNOCENT ONE CALLS FOR GOD'S HELP AND SEES GOD'S DELIVERANCE.

- 19. But you, O LORD, do not be far off!**
O you my help, come quickly to my aid!
- 20. Deliver my soul from the sword,**
my precious life from the power of the dog!
- 21. Save me from the mouth of the lion!**
You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen!

In spite of his incredible suffering—suffering that he knows comes from the hand of God, the Innocent One still clings to God as his only hope. He begs that Yahweh would rush to his aid. It is significant that the Innocent One addresses God as Yahweh here—the name God gives to his covenant people. The Innocent One is appealing to God's promises to his people. Will God listen to him?

Things don't look good. We see four different images of the forces arrayed against the Innocent One here. The sword is plunging, the dogs are snarling, the lion is moving in for the kill, and the wild oxen are swinging their horns. In the midst of this, the Innocent One is crying out, "Yahweh, help me!"

But ... notice the second half of verse 21. A major shift in the poem takes place here. The Innocent One recognizes that God has rescued him. The sword, dogs, lion, and oxen have not triumphed. The Innocent One has been delivered by Yahweh!

This is a picture of Christ's resurrection. His enemies (even death itself!) did not triumph over him. God raised him from the dead.

THE INNOCENT ONE ENVISIONS PRAISING GOD WITH HIS BROTHERS.

- 22. I will tell of your name to my brothers;**
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:
- 23. You who fear the LORD, praise him!**
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him,
and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!
- 24. For he has not despised or abhorred**
the affliction of the afflicted,
and he has not hidden his face from him,
but has heard, when he cried to him.

The Innocent One rejoices in Yahweh's deliverance. But he doesn't do this alone. This entire Psalm we have seen the Innocent One bearing suffering alone. Here, however, he is suddenly surrounded by a host of people. What the Psalm doesn't say explicitly, let me say explicitly. The suffering of the Innocent One has created this host of people.

WEEK FOUR

Psalm 22

WEEK FOUR

Psalm 22

The Innocent One rejoices in Yahweh's deliverance before his "brothers". The phrase "I will tell of your name to my brothers" indicates that the Innocent One will, because of his salvation from death, make Yahweh's character known to those whom he considers to be brothers.

Notice Jesus' first instructions after rising from the dead.

Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me." Matthew 28:10

Jesus, it appears, is still drawing our attention back to this Psalm! The first thing he does after being rescued is to speak of his brothers. This is exactly what we see in this Psalm.

In Psalm 22, the Innocent One says that he will praise Yahweh before "the congregation" (i.e., the brothers). But the Innocent One isn't the only one who is to praise Yahweh. Rather, all who "fear Yahweh" are to praise him because of this deliverance. The praises of the many are connected to the deliverance of the One.

We see here three names for those whom the Innocent One considers to be brothers: "You who fear Yahweh", "All you offspring of Jacob", and "all you offspring of Israel". These are all names for the same people. These people, the ones the Innocent One considers to be brothers, are to "stand in awe" of Yahweh because of the deliverance he has brought to his Innocent One.

Do you see the gospel here? I hope so. Do you see yourself? Again, I hope so. Do you see what you are to be doing? You are to be praising Yahweh because of the deliverance of the Christ. You, with a host of others, are to be in awe of Yahweh because of the work he has done in raising Christ.

**25. From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
my vows I will perform before those who fear him.**

**26. The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the LORD!
May your hearts live forever!**

Here, the Innocent One speaks of "vows" that he "will perform" because of his deliverance. He will do everything he has sworn to do. What does this mean for the people of Yahweh? The fact that the Innocent One will perform his vows means that they will "eat and be satisfied" and that "those who seek him shall praise Yahweh". The vows seem to have to do with the care and provision and worship of Yahweh's people. Again, the actions of the One are impacting the many.

THE INNOCENT ONE SEES HIS DELIVERANCE BRINGING CHANGE TO THE WHOLE EARTH.

**27. All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before you.**

**28. For kingship belongs to the LORD,
and he rules over the nations.**

**29. All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship;
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,
even the one who could not keep himself alive.**

The Innocent One doesn't see his deliverance impacting just a small group of people. Rather, he states that his deliverance will impact the entire world: "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to Yahweh". He tells Yahweh that "all the families of the nations shall worship before you". It is clear that the Innocent One sees this act—his deliverance by Yahweh—as the one act that will cause the world to worship Yahweh. Every knee will bow before Yahweh because of this act.

Can you see how the Apostles would have used this to frame their thinking about the significance of Christ's death and resurrection? Can you hear echoes of Paul's words to the Philippians here? He writes of every knee bowing to Christ and of every tongue confessing him as Lord (see Philippians 2:10-11). Can you hear echoes of John's words in Revelation? He writes of a "great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9). The Psalmist writes of these very things! The poetry of the Psalms is the gospel of the New Testament!

**30. Posterity shall serve him;
it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation;
31. they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn,
that he has done it.**

This act will not be forgotten. Rather, the peoples who haven't been born will hear of the Innocent One's deliverance by Yahweh. The "coming generation"—and that includes us!—will hear of this act and celebrate Yahweh's righteousness. This—the fact that Christ's deliverance is about Yahweh's righteousness—is worth much thought. Normally we talk about the gospel event being about our righteousness. Here, however, we see that it is also about Yahweh's righteousness. This event doesn't make him righteous. Rather, it *displays* his righteousness. This is exactly what Paul says in Romans 3.

... whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Romans 3:25-26²⁹

I love the end of this poem. The four English words "he has done it" are just one word in Hebrew. What a stunning summary of the gospel. One word emphasizing that he did it!

Upon reflection, I think that Psalm 22 is not meant, primarily, to send the reader forward to Matthew 27. Rather, I would argue that Matthew 27 is meant to send the reader backward to Psalm 22. The crucifixion account is to lead us to this Psalm.

29 See also Romans 1:17.

WEEK FIVE

Psalm 40

As believers in the Lord Jesus, we are to rejoice in what we see here. Faith is built as we see that the gospel event was spoken of 1,000 years before it took place. Our hearts are encouraged as we see the victory brought about by the death and resurrection of the Christ. We are encouraged as we see that the gospel event has always been God's plan. This Psalm wasn't, as Peter makes clear, written, primarily, to benefit those who lived in the time before Christ's death and resurrection. It was written, primarily, to benefit those who live on this side of Christ's victory.

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look. 1 Peter 1:10-12

Week Five

PSALM 40

WEEK FIVE

Psalm 40

DAY ONE

1. Read and interact with Psalm 40. Remember, this is not narrative. It is poetry. Think in pictures. Try to visualize what is being said here. In the margins and in the poem itself make any notations that help you grasp the way this poem is working. Connect corresponding words within the individual lines.

PSALM 40

TO THE CHOIRMASTER. A PSALM OF DAVID.

1. I waited patiently for the LORD;
he inclined to me and heard my cry.
2. He drew me up from the pit of destruction,
out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock,
making my steps secure.
3. He put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear,
and put their trust in the LORD.
4. Blessed is the man who makes
the LORD his trust,
who does not turn to the proud,
to those who go astray after a lie!
5. You have multiplied, O LORD my God,
your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us;
none can compare with you!
I will proclaim and tell of them,
yet they are more than can be told.
6. In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted,
but you have given me an open ear.
Burnt offering and sin offering
you have not required.
7. Then I said, "Behold, I have come;
in the scroll of the book it is written of me:
8. I delight to do your will, O my God;
your law is within my heart."
9. I have told the glad news of deliverance
in the great congregation;
behold, I have not restrained my lips,
as you know, O LORD.
10. I have not hidden your deliverance within my heart;
I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation;
I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness
from the great congregation.
11. As for you, O LORD, you will not restrain
your mercy from me;
your steadfast love and your faithfulness will
ever preserve me!
12. For evils have encompassed me
beyond number;
my iniquities have overtaken me,
and I cannot see;

they are more than the hairs of my head;
my heart fails me.

13. Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me!
O LORD, make haste to help me!

14. Let those be put to shame and disappointed altogether
who seek to snatch away my life;
let those be turned back and brought to dishonor
who delight in my hurt!

15. Let those be appalled because of their shame
who say to me, "Aha, Aha!"

16. But may all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who love your salvation
say continually, "Great is the LORD!"

17. As for me, I am poor and needy,
but the Lord takes thought for me.
You are my help and my deliverer;
do not delay, O my God!

2. Draw a picture or pictures of Psalm 40.

DAY TWO

3. King David wrote this Psalm. Thus, the narrator is writing from the perspective of the anointed king. How should this impact how a person who is not God's anointed king reads and applies this Psalm?

4. In verses 1-3a, several things happen to the anointed king. What are they?

WEEK FIVE

Psalm 40

5. The things that have happened to the king impact many others beyond the king. What do the “many” do in response to the things that have happened to the king?

Psalm 40:3b

6. How do you see the gospel event summarized in these verses?

DAY THREE

7. In verses 6-8, we read that Yahweh hasn’t delighted in “sacrifice and offering”. Yahweh required these things, but why didn’t he “delight” in them? The author of Hebrews, who writes about this Psalm, provides an answer. *Hebrews 10:1-4*

8. What, instead of delighting in sacrifice and offering, has God done? *Psalm 40:6*

9. Verse 8 explains the meaning of “you have given me an open ear”. What does “an open ear” mean?

10. Why did the king of God's people need to have an "open ear"?

11. What does Deuteronomy 17:14-20 say about how the king of God's people was to relate to the law of Yahweh?

12. Based on what you know of Israel's history, did any of the kings perfectly live in this manner?

13. How did Christ demonstrate that he had an open ear to God?

Luke 4:1-13

John 4:34

John 8:29

John 14:30-31

14. How do we know that Christ, unlike any of the kings before him, did this perfectly?

Matthew 3:16-17

WEEK FIVE

Psalm 40

Matthew 12:15-21

Matthew 17:1-5

DAY FOUR

15. Verses 6-8 relate to Yahweh's actions regarding the king alone. What does the king do as a consequence of these actions? *Psalm 40:9-10*

16. How does the author of Hebrews use this Psalm to talk about Christ and the gospel event? *Hebrews 10:1-10*

17. In verse 8 the king says, “I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart”, yet in verse 12 the king says, “my iniquities have overtaken me”. In other words, the king is portrayed as innocent and guilty at the same time. How does Christ fulfill this? *Isaiah 53:4-6, 11*

DAY FIVE

18. Reread Psalm 40. How would you preach the gospel through this Psalm?

DAY SIX

19. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week, the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

By now, we should be getting a feel for how the Apostles read the Psalms. At least in the Psalms we have considered, Christ has been at the forefront of everything. This shouldn't surprise us. Remember, he saw himself as the theme of all Scripture. Again, this doesn't mean that he is the theme of all Scripture in the exact same way. But we shouldn't be able to look at Scripture—any Scripture—without seeing a legitimate path to Christ and the gospel event.

In Psalm 8 we saw how David wrote of the “ideal” man—a man that, because of the sin of Adam, didn't exist anywhere (except in Jesus Christ). Thus, while he was technically writing of all men, what he said was true of only one man, Jesus Christ.

In Psalm 40, we see something similar happening. Here, David writes of the “ideal” king. He talks about the “ideal” king's role as the leader of his people and how his suffering (and deliverance from suffering) has brought about great good for the people of Yahweh. They, because of the deliverance of the king, rejoice in Yahweh. As with Psalm 8, the things David says here, while they are to be true of all of the kings of God's people, are only ultimately true of the final KING of God's people—Jesus Christ.

**1. I waited patiently for the LORD;
he inclined to me and heard my cry.**

The Psalm begins with the king recounting a time when he cried out to Yahweh. He “waited patiently” for his deliverance, but he was heard!

**2. He drew me up from the pit of destruction,
out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock,
making my steps secure.**

The king was raised up “from the pit of destruction”. He had been, and we're not told how this happened to him, desperately struggling in a “miry bog” which would have destroyed him. But, as the king says, “He drew me up ... and set my feet upon a rock”. This rescue of the king means that he can now walk securely.

The king's ability to walk securely in light of Yahweh's deliverance should be a great comfort to all those who are trusting in the king. God's people need their king to walk securely. After all, how can he lead them if he is sinking in a pit of destruction? How can they walk securely if their king is being destroyed?

The need for God's people to have a godly king over them is the main message of the book of Judges: “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). The anointed king is not like the rest of God's people. Their lives hinge on his life.

**3. He put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear,
and put their trust in the LORD.**

What has the rescue of the king from the miry bog accomplished? It has caused the king to praise Yahweh with “a new song”. The rescue of the king has dramatically altered things. That's why the king is singing a new song.

Beyond this, the rescue of the king has been witnessed by multitudes of people. This action causes “many” to “see and fear”. This rescue of the king has caused them to “put their trust” in Yahweh.

**4. Blessed is the man who makes
the LORD his trust,
who does not turn to the proud,
to those who go astray after a lie!**

It is significant to note the connection between verses three and four here. Trust in Yahweh in verse four is, in context, trust in Yahweh because of Yahweh’s deliverance of the king. The king notes that God’s blessing rests on those people who have, because they have seen his rescue by Yahweh, put their faith in Yahweh. God is for those people!

**5. You have multiplied, O LORD my God,
your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us;
none can compare with you!
I will proclaim and tell of them,
yet they are more than can be told.**

The king marvels at the abundance of the things Yahweh has planned and done, not only for the king (whom he has rescued), but also toward “us” (the king and the people who have benefited from the rescue of the king). It is significant to see that the king is including himself in a company of people (his subjects)!

The king declares that he will tell of all of God’s “wondrous deeds and thoughts” towards his people. The mission of the anointed king, then, is to make Yahweh known.

**6. In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted,
but you have given me an open ear.
Burnt offering and sin offering
you have not required.**
**7. Then I said, “Behold, I have come;
in the scroll of the book it is written of me:
8. I delight to do your will, O my God;
your law is within my heart.”**

At this point, the king begins talking about how Yahweh has “wired” him. Yahweh has given him “an open ear”. An open ear is contrasted with “sacrifice and offering”. Those things didn’t delight Yahweh. But an open ear does delight him.

What is an open ear? This seems to be a poetic way of saying that Yahweh’s delight is found in the king’s perfect hearing of and obedience to his Law. The king notes that Yahweh “pierced” his ears so that he can hear and obey. Imagine an ear canal that has been blocked being opened and you get the picture.

As he writes, the king seems to be reflecting on what was written about kings in Deuteronomy 17. When he says “in the scroll of the book it is written of me” he is probably reflecting on the following set of verses which pertain particularly to the anointed king of God’s people.

WEEK FIVE

Psalm 40

“When you come to the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you possess it and dwell in it and then say, ‘I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me,’ you may indeed set a king over you whom the LORD your God will choose. One from among your brothers you shall set as king over you. You may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. Only he must not acquire many horses for himself or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the LORD has said to you, ‘You shall never return that way again.’ And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold.

“And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel.”
Deuteronomy 17:14-20

The king of God’s people is required to “write for himself” a copy of “this law” (i.e., Deuteronomy). The priests are then required to check his work, making sure that he is not changing or forgetting any of Yahweh’s laws! The anointed king is commanded to “read in it all the days of his life”. The reason he is to do this is so that he might “learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes”. The law is to be in his heart! The king is to be constantly thinking about it. It is the key to the longevity of his kingdom and to the welfare of his people.

These verses in Psalm 40 are where it becomes evident that the writer is writing of the “ideal” king—a king that has never (again, apart from Christ) existed.

Adam (who seems to be presented as the first king of the earth and, therefore, the first king of God’s people), did not have open ears. He did not listen to the Law of Yahweh (even when that Law was just one commandment!). Consequently, all the people suffered.

Saul, Israel’s first anointed king, did not have open ears. Here is how Samuel spoke to him when Saul disobeyed.³⁰

*“Has the LORD as great delight in
burnt offerings and sacrifices,
as in obeying the voice of the LORD?
Behold to obey is better than sacrifice,
and to listen than the fat of rams.
For rebellion is as the sin of divination,
and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry.
Because you have rejected the word of the LORD,
he has also rejected you from being king.”* 1 Samuel 15:22-23³¹

³⁰ The fact that Samuel’s words are presented as poetry is worth much thought. The writer of 1 Samuel, it seems, draws attention to especially significant thoughts through his use of poetry. With the exception of 1 Samuel 2:1-10 (a highly significant chapter about the exaltation of Yahweh’s anointed) and a brief poem (song) in 1 Samuel 18:7 recounting David’s superiority to Saul (repeated in 21:11 and 29:5), no other poems appear in 1 Samuel.

³¹ The connection between this poem and Psalm 40 would be worth further study. There are many connections between the two.

David's ears, while he is presented as one whose ears were open to Yahweh (and this is significant, for he is a picture of Christ), were clearly not perfectly open to him. The writer of 1 and 2 Samuel is careful to chronicle David's failings. Why? Is it because Yahweh loves embarrassing his chosen ones? Does he, like a magazine focused on celebrities and British royalty, love airing out the dirty laundry of his saints? Or is it because we, as God's people, need to know about David's failings?

We need to know that, for as great a king as David was, we require a better king than David. We require a king whose ears are perfectly open to Yahweh, for, if they are not, we will surely fall. Our fate is tied to the ears of the king (again, remember the message of the book of Judges).

Later kings were, for the most part, far worse than David. Indeed, there comes a point when the book of Deuteronomy itself (the very book the kings were supposed to copy and to study!) was lost.

And Hilkiyah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD." And Hilkiyah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it. And Shaphan the secretary came to the king, and reported to the king, "Your servants have emptied out the money that was found in the house and have delivered it into the hand of the workmen who have the oversight of the house of the LORD." Then Shaphan the secretary told the king, "Hilkiyah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read it before the king.

When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his clothes. And the king commanded Hilkiyah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Micaiah, and Shaphan the secretary, and Asaiah the king's servant, saying, "Go, inquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found. For great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us." 2 Kings 22:8-13

Could there be a worse indictment of the kings of God's people than this? They lost the very Law they were commanded to copy, read, and keep!

Thus, while Psalm 40 can talk about the king's "open ears" in a general sort of way (there were kings with "relatively" open ears), we know that the Psalm can only be talking about one king. There is only one king of whom "open ears" are a fitting description—Jesus. Christ alone has open ears. He alone perfectly hears the Father's voice and obeys what he hears.

Christ's delight in God's will and Law is carefully proclaimed throughout the gospels. When Jesus was twelve he was found in the Temple "sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions" (Luke 2:46). Surely this story is recorded not to give us a cute story about Jesus' childhood (notice, we are told no other stories of Jesus' adolescence), but to demonstrate his love for his "Father's house" and his Father's Law. In the wilderness temptation (see Luke 4), Jesus demonstrated that he wasn't driven by his own appetite. Instead, he proved that he lived by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. On the night of the Last Supper, Jesus said that he was going to the cross in obedience to the Father: "I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that

WEEK FIVE

Psalm 40

I love the Father” (John 14:31a). Is it any wonder that the Father said, in regard to Jesus, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22)? God’s delight is clearly in his obedient Son—the Son with the wide open ears!

If portions of this Psalm were to be quoted in the New Testament, these verses about the king’s “open ears” would certainly seem to be prime candidates! And that’s exactly what the author of Hebrews does. He uses these verses from Psalm 40 to talk about the greatness of Christ.

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, “Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’”

When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law), then he added, “Behold, I have come to do your will.” He does away with the first in order to establish the second. And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Hebrews 10:1-10

The author of Hebrews demonstrates that this Psalm is, ultimately, about the Christ. He alone is the Open-Eared King. He alone does what God desired (and desires).

Notice how the author of Hebrews takes us from these verses in Psalm 40³² straight to the gospel. He uses this Psalm to talk about the weakness of other “burnt offerings and sin offerings”. He uses these verses to talk about the once-for-all-time sacrifice of the king that results in the sanctification of God’s people: “by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all”.

**9. I have told the glad news of deliverance
in the great congregation;
behold, I have not restrained my lips,
as you know, O LORD.**

**10. I have not hidden your deliverance within my heart;
I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation;
I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness
from the great congregation.**

The king's message is the greatness of Yahweh. The king, rather than magnifying himself, magnifies Yahweh.

We must know, as readers of the New Testament, that this is exactly what Christ does. He perfectly makes the Father known to us:

No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. John 1:18³³

**11. As for you, O LORD, you will not restrain
your mercy from me;
your steadfast love and your faithfulness will
ever preserve me!**

At this point, a new note appears in the Psalm. The king with the open ears should be safe from all troubles. However, he is in deep distress. He knows that Yahweh is for him and that his “steadfast love” and “faithfulness” will “preserve” him. Something, however, is troubling the king.

**12. For evils have encompassed me
beyond number;
my iniquities have overtaken me,
and I cannot see;
they are more than the hairs of my head;
my heart fails me.**

The king's deep distress is caused by “evils ... beyond number”. These evils are the king's own iniquities! This is strange. Just verses earlier we read about the king's open ears. Here, we see the king talking about his iniquities. How is it possible for the king, the one with open ears, to be overtaken by iniquities?

Let's first consider David. His ears were, as we considered earlier, generally open to Yahweh. As a picture of Christ, he did do what Yahweh asked of him. But he was, like the rest of the world, a sinner. Thus, even while he was partially obedient to Yahweh, he was also partially disobedient to him. His sins truly did overtake him. He needed deliverance from his sins.

But how could Christ talk about his iniquities overtaking him, for he never sinned? While his ears were always perfectly open to Yahweh,³⁴ as the one in whom God's people find their help and deliverance, we must know that he did take the sins of God's people upon himself. The sins of the people of God became his iniquities. Once again, consider how Isaiah writes of the Servant (Christ) taking the iniquities of his people:

*Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
But he was wounded for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his stripes we are healed.*

³³ See also John 14:6-14.

³⁴ See Jesus' words in John 8:29: “I always do the things that are pleasing to him.”

WEEK SIX

Psalm 110

*All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.* Isaiah 53:4-6

Yahweh laid our iniquities on Christ. They were counted as Christ's iniquities! He was required, by Yahweh, to bear the sins of the people. Because of his "open ears", Christ perfectly obeyed.

**13. Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me!
O LORD, make haste to help me!**

Do you see why the king is crying out to Yahweh here? He is heavily burdened with iniquities, and, apart from Yahweh's deliverance, he will be destroyed. The king knows that only Yahweh can save him.

**14. Let those be put to shame and disappointed altogether
who seek to snatch away my life;
let those be turned back and brought to dishonor
who delight in my hurt!**

**15. Let those be appalled because of their shame
who say to me, "Aha, Aha!"**

The king does not just want deliverance. He wants to see the defeat of his enemies. The wrathful king is, of course, not consistent with how the world sees the Christ. They see him as one who would never hurt anyone. The Psalms present, consistently, that the Christ will destroy his enemies. It would diminish his glory for them to remain. It would diminish God the Father's glory—the one who set Christ in place—for them to remain in defiance of him.

**16. But may all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who love your salvation
say continually, "Great is the LORD!"**

But the king's eyes aren't just on his enemies. He loves his people. He asks that those who "seek" Yahweh rejoice and be glad. Again, we should see this rejoicing and being glad in Yahweh as connected to the king's deliverance. We are able to rejoice in God because Christ has borne our iniquities and we have been freed from God's wrath.

**17. As for me, I am poor and needy,
but the Lord takes thought for me.
You are my help and my deliverer;
do not delay, O my God!**

In this last verse, the king's thoughts turn to himself. He has not, as of yet, been delivered from his distress. He needs Yahweh's help. He trusts him alone for his deliverance.

As readers of the New Testament, we know that he was heard!

Week Six

PSALM 110

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Psalm 110

DAY ONE

1. Read and interact with Psalm 110. Remember, this is not narrative. It is poetry. Think in pictures. Try to visualize what is being said here. In the margins and in the poem itself make any notations that help you grasp the way this poem is working. Connect corresponding words within the individual lines.

PSALM 110

A PSALM OF DAVID.

1. The LORD says to my Lord:
 “Sit at my right hand,
 until I make your enemies your footstool.”
 2. The LORD sends forth from Zion
 your mighty scepter.
 Rule in the midst of your enemies!
 3. Your people will offer themselves freely
 on the day of your power,
 in holy garments;
 from the womb of the morning,
 the dew of your youth will be yours.
 4. The LORD has sworn
 and will not change his mind,
 “You are a priest forever
 after the order of Melchizedek.”
 5. The Lord is at your right hand;
 he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath.
 6. He will execute judgment among the nations,
 filling them with corpses;
 he will shatter chiefs
 over the wide earth.
 7. He will drink from the brook by the way;
 therefore he will lift up his head.
2. Draw a picture or pictures of Psalm 110.

DAY TWO

3. In Psalm 110:1, David records the command of Yahweh (“The LORD”) given to a person whom David calls “my Lord”. What is this command?

4. Jesus refers to the first verse of this Psalm in the following passages. Why would Jesus use this Psalm? What, according to Jesus, does this Psalm prove? *Matthew 22:41-46, Mark 12:35-37, Luke 20:41-44*

5. What does the second half of Psalm 110:2 tell you about the nature of the king’s reign?

6. What do the people of the Christ do in response to their king’s reign?
Psalm 110:3a

7. Why are they described as wearing “holy garments”? What does this say about Christ’s people? Based on what you know of Christ, what qualifies his people (who, like all people, were born sinners) to be wearing “holy garments”?
Acts 2:38, 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

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Psalm 110

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Psalm 110

8. Peter refers to verse one in Acts 2:34-35. What is the point Peter is making (see verse 36)? *See also Hebrews 1:13*

DAY THREE

9. In verse 4, we learn that the Christ is more than just a king. What else is he?

10. What is the significance of Christ being a high priest? *Hebrews 5*

11. Who was Melchizedek? *Genesis 14:17-20*

12. What is the significance of Christ being a priest “after the order of Melchizedek”? *Hebrews 7*

13. What, according to the author of Hebrews, is the significance of Yahweh taking an oath regarding the king being a priest in the order of Melchizedek? What benefit does this oath bring to God's people? *Hebrews 6:13-20*

DAY FOUR

14. What does the King do to his enemies? *Psalm 110:5-6*

15. How do the following passages describe the same event?

Genesis 49:8-10

Numbers 24:15-19

Psalm 2:8-12

Daniel 2:31-45

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

2 Thessalonians 1:5-12

Revelation 6:12-17

Revelation 19:11-21

WEEK SIX

Psalm 110

16. The world does not normally think of Jesus in this way. Why must this truth be part of our preaching of the gospel?

DAY FIVE

17. Reread Psalm 110. How would you preach the gospel through this Psalm?

DAY SIX

18. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week, the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

PSALM 110

This Psalm goes from zero to full throttle in its very first line. From the moment we begin reading, we see the Christ reigning in power. There is no suffering pictured here (except by the enemies of the Christ!). There is no rest until the last verse of the Psalm.

This Psalm is quoted throughout the New Testament. Jesus quotes it. Peter quotes it. The author of Hebrews quotes it. Here, we learn things about the Messiah that we do not learn elsewhere.

1. The LORD says to my Lord:

“Sit at my right hand,
until I make your enemies your footstool.”

This is a Psalm of David. In this first verse, we see David speaking of two individuals: Yahweh (signified in English translations by the all capitalized word LORD) and “my Lord”. This second individual (“my Lord”), according to Jesus (and we must take his understanding to be correct), is the Christ.

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.” He said to them, “How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying,

*“The Lord said to my Lord,
“Sit at my right hand,
until I put your enemies under your feet”?*

If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?” Matthew 22:41-45

In this first verse, David recounts Yahweh’s declaration to the Christ. He tells him to sit at his right hand (i.e., rule) until all his enemies are defeated. In the same way that Joseph, at Pharaoh’s command, ruled over all of Egypt (with the exception, of course, of Pharaoh), so the Christ will rule over everything (with the exception, of course, of God the Father).

It is imperative that all of Christ’s enemies be defeated, because if any were to remain it would be a sign of weakness in the Christ and in God the Father. For enemies to remain would prove that Christ is not King of kings and Lord of lords, for other kings would remain over him. For enemies to remain would prove that God is untrustworthy and less than all-powerful. It would demonstrate that he cannot accomplish what he has said he will do.

The Apostle Paul uses these verses (and Psalm 8!) to refer to Christ’s reign and to the last of the enemies that will be put under Christ’s feet.

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all. 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

As we have seen earlier, Paul ties Christ’s reign to his resurrection from the dead. He began reigning when he rose from the dead and he must continue reigning until Yahweh puts all of Christ’s enemies under his feet. These verses demonstrate that the Christ will be ruling while there are still enemies who are not under

WEEK SIX

Psalm 110

his feet. We live in this time period now. He is King over all, but all do not yet acknowledge his reign. We can have great confidence in his reign because Yahweh has promised to put all his enemies under his feet. Even when it appears that the enemies have the upper hand, we know that they cannot win. They must be defeated.

2. The LORD sends forth from Zion

your mighty scepter.

Rule in the midst of your enemies!

Yahweh is behind the rule of the Christ. He commands him, “Rule in the midst of your enemies”. The Christ, then, must not tolerate rebellion. His enemies, who appear to be many, must be brought into subjection.

3. Your people will offer themselves freely

on the day of your power,

in holy garments;

from the womb of the morning,

the dew of your youth will be yours.

But while Christ’s rule is opposed by many, there are people who consider the Christ to be their king. These people will “offer themselves freely” to Christ when he takes the throne. They will not, like the Israelites in the Old Testament, fight against him and his purposes. Instead, they will, gladly and willingly, give themselves fully to the furtherance of his kingdom. In the day of his power they will, clothed in “holy garments”, fight for him. The holy garments point to the fact that Christ’s followers are more than just warriors. They are also priests (see 1 Peter 2:5 and 9).

The Great Commission should be seen in this light. The King is telling his willing subjects (the fighting priests!) his battle plans. His plan relies heavily on the preaching of the gospel.

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
Matthew 28:18-20

But while the first half of verse three is clear, the second half of verse three is difficult.

*... from the womb of the morning,
the dew of your youth will be yours. ESV*

What does “the dew of your youth” mean? It’s hard to know. A quick look at other English translations (which are based on the Hebrew text) demonstrates that scholars struggle with this phrase. Perhaps the LXX is a help here—it very well may be the better reading here. The LXX renders the second half of verse three as follows: “from the womb before the dawn I have begotten you”. In other words,

this line of poetry is talking about Yahweh “begetting” the Christ from before time began (i.e., before creation). This should immediately remind the reader of the Psalms of Psalm 2.³⁵

*I will tell of the decree:
The LORD said to me, “You are my Son;
today I have begotten you.” Psalm 2:7*

From before time began, Yahweh’s plan has been that the Christ would rule. But that, as verse four indicates, is not his only plan for the Christ.

**4. The LORD has sworn
and will not change his mind,
“You are a priest forever
after the order of Melchizedek.”**

At this point, the Psalm takes several surprising turns. The first surprising turn is that the conquering Christ is declared, by none other than Yahweh himself, to be a priest. This is surprising because the kings of Israel were not priests and the priests of Israel were not kings. Here, we see that the Christ will be both (which explains why his people, who are connected to him, can be portrayed as priests in verse three).³⁶

A second surprising turn is that the Christ is declared to be a priest “forever”. His priestly ministry will have no end. The Christ is not going to die! He will forever be serving as a priest. But the author of Hebrews, relying on this passage, makes clear that the Christ is more than just a priest. He is a high priest. Thus, God’s people can take comfort that their high priest will never die. He will always live to serve them.

A third surprising turn is that the Christ will be a high priest “after the order of Melchizedek”. Israel’s priests were from the tribe of Levi. Nothing in the Jewish Law was said about an ongoing order of priests connected to Melchizedek.

This is the second time Melchizedek’s name appears in the Old Testament. The only other time we encounter this name in the Old Testament is in Genesis 14, when Abraham (who was then known as Abram) returns from a stunning victory in battle.

After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley). And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) And he blessed him and said,

*“Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
Possessor of heaven and earth;
and blessed be God Most High,
who has delivered your enemies into your hand!”*

And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. Genesis 14:17-20

³⁵ For further explanation of this difficult verse, see Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?* (Nashville, Tenn.: B & H Publishing Group, 2010), 174-175.

³⁶ Here we see Christ fulfilling two of the “offices” (priest and king) seen in the Old Testament. Christ fulfills all three “offices” (prophet, priest, and king) seen in the Old Testament. Thus, he is the priest par excellence. The same may be said for the other offices.

WEEK SIX

Psalm 110

A great deal is packed into these few verses. For starters, Melchizedek is the first priest mentioned in the Bible. This is significant because the first use of a word in the text often explains the primary meaning of that word throughout the rest of the text.³⁷ Here, the first use of the word priest in the Bible is related to a priest who is also a king (of Jerusalem, no less!) who isn't related to Levi!

Unlike other significant characters in the Old Testament, no genealogy is mentioned in relation to Melchizedek. The text says nothing about his mother or father. In other words, the text doesn't tie his priesthood to his lineage. We're not told why he is a priest. He simply is a priest.

We're not told when he was born, and we are not told when he died. This is significant, for his priestly ministry isn't portrayed as having an end. It just is. Thus, even while the Levitical priesthood was in place in Israel, one could not say, with certainty, that Melchizedek's priestly order had ended. The text just said nothing about it.

While priests in the order of Levi served at the tabernacle and temple (and priests in Melchizedek's order did not), the text doesn't lead us to conclude that this was because the Levitical priesthood was superior to the priesthood in the order of Melchizedek. Rather, close examination of Genesis 14 demonstrates that the Levitical priesthood was inferior to Melchizedek's priesthood. This is evident for two reasons: one, Melchizedek pronounced a blessing on Abraham, and two, because Abraham paid a tithe to Melchizedek. The blessing demonstrates that Melchizedek considered himself to be greater than Abraham. Tithing to Melchizedek demonstrates that Abraham considered Melchizedek to be greater than himself. Abraham's tithing relates to Levi (from whom the Jewish priests who served at the temple came) because Levi descended from Abraham. Thus, in a very real way, Levi tithed to Melchizedek through Abraham. These two factors demonstrate that Levi's priesthood was inferior to the priesthood of Melchizedek.

So we have this mysterious priesthood that pre-dates the Levitical priesthood by more than 400 years. It is superior to the Levitical priesthood, yet, unlike the Levitical priesthood, it seems to have no purpose in regard to the people of God under the first covenant. No one knows much about this priesthood at all ... until David writes these words in Psalm 110.

**The LORD has sworn
and will not change his mind,
“You are a priest forever
after the order of Melchizedek.”**

The words David writes here are stunning. They could not be stronger. Yahweh takes an oath about this matter! This doesn't happen many times in the Scriptures. Every time it does happen (see, for instance, Genesis 22:15-18) the reader should pay close attention.

We make oaths (i.e., “I swear on my mother's grave that I will ...”) because our word isn't sure and the oath is meant to show how serious we are about keeping our word. The oath is meant to end any discussion about what we will or will not do. But why would Yahweh ever need to take an oath about anything? His word, without an oath, is sure. What is the purpose, then, of Yahweh taking an oath?

37 For instance, the first use of the word “love” in the Old Testament is in Genesis 22. It relates to a father's love for his only son whom he is about to sacrifice. The connections to the love of God the Father should be immediately clear.

He does this, the author of Hebrews insists, for our benefit. He does this when he wants to demonstrate, in as convincing a way as possible, that something absolutely will happen. The oath is meant to be something upon which we can rest our faith.

The author of the letter to the Hebrews wants his readers to think carefully about why God takes oaths. He begins by talking about the oath God took when he made his promise to Abraham in Genesis 22. He then compares this to the oath God took when he designated Jesus “a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek”.

For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, “Surely I will bless you and multiply you.” And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. Hebrews 6:13-20

Yahweh’s oath regarding the eternal high priesthood of Christ is meant to serve “as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul”. It demonstrates that Christ’s high priestly ministry will continue forever and that we need not fear this ministry ending. He will always live to serve his people. If he didn’t, Yahweh’s oath would be broken and that cannot happen.

Elsewhere, the author of Hebrews says that this oath “makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant” (Hebrews 7:22). In other words, the oath serves to prove the everlasting nature of the New Covenant. Christ will always serve as high priest. Therefore, the New Covenant will always be functioning. God’s people have God’s oath upon which to set their faith. It’s an anchor that should give us great comfort!

- 5. The Lord is at your right hand;
he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath.**
- 6. He will execute judgment among the nations,
filling them with corpses;
he will shatter chiefs
over the wide earth.**

What will the Christ do? He will do exactly what he was commanded to do in verses one and two. He will rule until all enemies are under his feet. He will shatter kings (think of Psalm 2). He will execute judgment (think of Psalm 1). His wrath will be terrible ... and wonderful. We must not think that this wrath is wicked. The writer wants us to see that the wrath of the Christ is righteous. If he didn’t rule, he would be disobeying the Father. He must rule. He must crush his enemies.

WEEK SIX

Psalm 110

This filling-of-the-nations-with-corpses and shattering-of-chiefs on the “day of his wrath” should remind readers of passages regarding the rule of the Christ throughout the Bible. Here are just four of them:

*“Judah, your brothers shall praise you;
your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;
your father’s sons shall bow down before you.
Judah is a lion’s cub;
from the prey, my son, you have gone up.
He stooped down; he crouched as a lion
and as a lioness; who dares rouse him?
The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet,
until tribute comes to him;
and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.”* Genesis 49:8-10

And he took up his discourse and said,

*“The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor,
the oracle of the man whose eye is opened,
the oracle of him who hears the words of God,
and knows the knowledge of the Most High,
who sees the vision of the Almighty,
falling down with his eyes uncovered:
I see him, but not now;
I behold him, but not near:
a star shall come out of Jacob,
and a scepter shall rise out of Israel;
it shall crush the forehead of Moab
and break down all the sons of Sheth.
Edom shall be dispossessed;
Seir also, his enemies, shall be dispossessed.
Israel is doing valiantly.
And one from Jacob shall exercise dominion
and destroy the survivors of cities!”* Numbers 24:15-19

“You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

“This was the dream. Now we will tell the king its interpretation. You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory, and into whose hand he has given, wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all—you are the head of gold. Another kingdom inferior to you shall arise after you, and yet a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things. And like iron that crushes, it shall break and crush all these. And as you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter’s clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom, but some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the soft clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle. As you saw the iron mixed with soft clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay. And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.” Daniel 2:31-45

When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” Revelation 6:12-17

Passages like these abound in the Scriptures. They must find a place in our understanding of the Christ. The image of Joseph and Mary fleeing with Jesus from the wrath of Herod is a part of the story of the Christ. But it is not the whole story. The tables will turn ... and heads, many of them, will roll.

WEEK SEVEN

Psalm 118

7. He will drink from the brook by the way; therefore he will lift up his head.

This last line of poetry pictures the King at rest. When a football player comes to the sideline after scoring a touchdown, he takes a drink. He doesn't take a drink while he is playing. Here, we see the Christ, after successfully pursuing and defeating his enemies, taking a drink and lifting up his head. He, with the help of his people, has done all that he needed to do. He can now rest.

This is the counterpart to the first verse in the Psalm. There, the Christ is commanded to reign until every enemy is under his feet. In this last verse, the poet paints us a picture of the victorious King taking a drink and looking with satisfaction at the devastation that he has caused. His last enemy has been destroyed. The Christ has, like the touchdown-scoring football player, walked to the sidelines! No enemies remain. He lifts up his head as victor.

For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.
1 Corinthians 15:25

Week Seven

PSALM 118

WEEK SEVEN

Psalm 118

DAY ONE

1. Read and interact with Psalm 118. Remember, this is not narrative. It is poetry. Think in pictures. Try to visualize what is being said here. In the margins and in the poem itself make any notations that help you grasp the way this poem is working. Connect corresponding words within the individual lines.

PSALM 118

1. Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever!
2. Let Israel say,
“His steadfast love endures forever.”
3. Let the house of Aaron say,
“His steadfast love endures forever.”
4. Let those who fear the LORD say,
“His steadfast love endures forever.”
5. Out of my distress I called on the LORD;
the LORD answered me and set me free.
6. The LORD is on my side; I will not fear.
What can man do to me?
7. The LORD is on my side as my helper;
I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.
8. It is better to take refuge in the LORD
than to trust in man.
9. It is better to take refuge in the LORD
than to trust in princes.
10. All nations surrounded me;
in the name of the LORD I cut them off!
11. They surrounded me, surrounded me on every side;
in the name of the LORD I cut them off!
12. They surrounded me like bees;
they went out like a fire among thorns;
in the name of the LORD I cut them off!
13. I was pushed hard, so that I was falling,
but the LORD helped me.
14. The LORD is my strength and my song;
he has become my salvation.
15. Glad songs of salvation
are in the tents of the righteous:
“The right hand of the LORD does valiantly,
16. the right hand of the LORD exalts,
the right hand of the LORD does valiantly!”
17. I shall not die, but I shall live,
and recount the deeds of the LORD.
18. The LORD has disciplined me severely,
but he has not given me over to death.
19. Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them
and give thanks to the LORD.
20. This is the gate of the LORD;
the righteous shall enter through it.

21. I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.
22. The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone.
23. This is the LORD's doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.
24. This is the day that the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.
25. Save us, we pray, O LORD!
O LORD, we pray, give us success!
26. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!
We bless you from the house of the LORD.
27. The LORD is God,
and he has made his light to shine upon us.
Bind the festal sacrifice with cords,
up to the horns of the altar!
28. You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;
you are my God; I will extol you.
29. Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever!

2. Draw a picture or pictures of Psalm 118.

DAY TWO

3. Read verses 1-4 and 29. What is the theme of this Psalm?

WEEK SEVEN

Psalm 118

4. Based on this, what would you expect the middle portion of this Psalm to explain?

5. What, then, is one of the main ways God's people should use this Psalm?

6. Read the entire Psalm. What happens to the individual (the New Testament tells us that this is the Christ) referred to in this Psalm?

7. How do the things that happen to this individual (again, the Christ) impact all of God's people?

DAY THREE

8. In verses 5-14 we read of the Christ being in great distress and of "All nations" surrounding him. When did this happen to the Christ?

9. How is the Christ delivered?

10. How do God's people respond to the deliverance experienced by the Christ?

Psalm 118:15-16

11. Read verses 17-18 carefully. Who is behind the suffering of the Christ? Do you find any indication in this Psalm that the Christ is being disciplined for his own sins?

12. Based on what you know of the gospel message, why has Yahweh disciplined the Christ "severely"? *Isaiah 53:4-6, 2 Corinthians 5:21*

13. How do you see the resurrection pictured in verse 18?

14. What does the Christ say after coming through the discipline of Yahweh?

Psalm 118:19

15. Verse 20 reads, "This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it." To what does the "This" refer? In other words, what, based on verses 17-21, is the "gate of the LORD" through which the righteous enter?

WEEK SEVEN

Psalm 118

16. How is this confirmed in the following passages?

John 11:25-26

John 14:6

Acts 4:12

1 John 5:11-12

17. What does this say about other “gates” someone might want to pass through in order to worship God?

DAY FOUR

18. In verses 22-24 the imagery in the poem changes. What is the image being used here? Why would this be a fitting image of the Christ?

19. How are verses 22-24 used in the following passages?

Matthew 21:33-46

Mark 12:1-12

Luke 20:9-18

20. How does Paul use verses 22-24 in Ephesians 2:11-22?

21. How does Peter use this passage in 1 Peter 2:4-10?

22. According to both Paul and Peter, how do the people of God relate to this stone? *Ephesians 2:19-22, 1 Peter 2:5*

23. In both Luke 20:18 and 1 Peter 2:4-8, we see Psalm 118:22-24 being used in combination with Isaiah 8:14-15. What will happen to those who reject this stone?

24. Peter also uses Isaiah 28:16 in conjunction with this passage. What does Peter's use of multiple "cornerstone" passages tell you about the nature of the Scriptures?

25. Based on Psalm 118:22-23, what is the "day" referred to in verse 24? Based on this Psalm, has that day come yet?

WEEK SEVEN

Psalm 118

DAY FIVE

26. How are verses 25-26 used by the people in Matthew 21:9-15?

27. How is verse 26 used by Jesus in Matthew 23:37-39? Based on Jesus' use of this verse, who is the "he who comes in the name of the LORD" referred to here?

28. Verse 27 refers to the people sacrificing to God. Based on this Psalm, what needs to happen before the people can worship God in this way?

29. Reread Psalm 118. How would you preach the gospel through this Psalm?

DAY SIX

30. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week, the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

PSALM 118

This is a marvelous Psalm. It is a call to God's people to celebrate. It is not difficult to see what the people of God are to celebrate.

**1. Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever!**

The first verse announces the theme of the celebration: Yahweh's eternally enduring "steadfast love". The next three verses command specific persons to celebrate this steadfast love. The people of Yahweh are to recognize this steadfast love and to thank Yahweh for it.

**2. Let Israel say,
"His steadfast love endures forever."**

**3. Let the house of Aaron say,
"His steadfast love endures forever."**

**4. Let those who fear the LORD say,
"His steadfast love endures forever."**

Before we consider the body of the Psalm, let's look at the last verse of the Psalm. Here we see another call to praise Yahweh for his steadfast love.

**29. Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever!**

The Psalmist's envelope (as we've seen previously, the same theme at the start and finish of the Psalm) tells the reader that this Psalm is a celebration of Yahweh's eternally enduring "steadfast love". The body of the Psalm should be seen as an explanation of how Yahweh's eternally enduring steadfast love is made known to his people.

His steadfast love toward the people of God is made known, and we shouldn't be surprised by this, through the affliction, deliverance, and exaltation of one person. Readers of the Psalms (and the rest of the Old Testament) should immediately assume that this one person is the Christ—Yahweh's anointed King. Thus, based on this Psalm, a fair definition of "steadfast love" is as follows: *it is the ever enduring love of God for his people which is based upon the affliction, deliverance, and exaltation of the Christ.*

The Old Testament Scriptures consistently testify that Yahweh "abounds" in steadfast love.

The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."
Exodus 34:6-7

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Psalm 118

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Psalm 118

“The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but he will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, to the third and the fourth generation.’ Please pardon the iniquity of this people, according to the greatness of your steadfast love, just as you have forgiven this people, from Egypt until now.” Numbers 14:18-19

If not for Yahweh’s steadfast love, there would be no people of Yahweh. His people must recognize—and rejoice in—this love.

... but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

The middle portion of this Psalm demonstrates how this love is made known to the people of God.

- 5. Out of my distress I called on the LORD;
the LORD answered me and set me free.**
- 6. The LORD is on my side; I will not fear.
What can man do to me?**
- 7. The LORD is on my side as my helper;
I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.**
- 8. It is better to take refuge in the LORD
than to trust in man.**
- 9. It is better to take refuge in the LORD
than to trust in princes.**

As we’ve seen many times in other Psalms, notice how the Psalmist turns from focusing on all of the people of Yahweh in verse four to focusing on just one person in verse five (and following). As those who trust in the Lord Jesus, this should not surprise us. We should have been expecting this.

The afflicted one (again, as we’ve seen earlier, the reader should assume that this is the Christ) recounts that he was in “distress” but that Yahweh delivered him. Yahweh delivered him because Yahweh is on the afflicted one’s side. Notice, the afflicted one will defeat his enemies: “I shall look in triumph on those who hate me”.

The victory of the Christ is celebrated throughout the Psalms (i.e., Psalms 2 and 110). He must be victorious, because if enemies were to remain this would show weakness in his rule and in the rule of Yahweh. It would also demonstrate that Yahweh is okay with people resisting his word and the rule of the Christ.

- 10. All nations surrounded me;
in the name of the LORD I cut them off!**
- 11. They surrounded me, surrounded me on every side;
in the name of the LORD I cut them off!**
- 12. They surrounded me like bees;
they went out like a fire among thorns;
in the name of the LORD I cut them off!**
- 13. I was pushed hard, so that I was falling,
but the LORD helped me.**

The way the Psalm is written demonstrates that the afflicted one is not an average person undergoing the kinds of trials suffered by all people. Rather, this is a person against whom *all* the nations of the earth are arrayed. “All nations” want to destroy this one person.

Like angry bees swarming a person, like fire blazing through dry thorns, the nations attacked the afflicted one. How did he survive the attack? We find the same answer repeated three times: “in the name of Yahweh I cut them off”.

**14. The LORD is my strength and my song;
he has become my salvation.**

This verse is somewhat of a hinge. No longer is the theme the attack against the afflicted one. Rather, the afflicted one has triumphed. He rejoices in Yahweh’s strength (which is now his strength). He sings with joy because Yahweh has saved him.

**15. Glad songs of salvation
are in the tents of the righteous:
“The right hand of the LORD does valiantly,
16. the right hand of the LORD exalts,
the right hand of the LORD does valiantly!”**

As we have seen in other Psalms, the deliverance of the afflicted one results in the praises of the many. The righteous joyfully celebrate Yahweh’s power (poetically referred to by “the right hand of the LORD”) in delivering the afflicted one. The afflicted one’s deliverance from the nations has resulted in joy coming to the tents of the righteous because, we must assume, they have been delivered with him. His deliverance has resulted in their deliverance.

**17. I shall not die, but I shall live,
and recount the deeds of the LORD.
18. The LORD has disciplined me severely,
but he has not given me over to death.**

It appeared that the afflicted one would die, but he did not die. As a consequence, his life, he says, is dedicated to the praise of Yahweh.

Verse 18 is significant. The afflicted one, we learn here, was severely disciplined by Yahweh, but Yahweh didn’t allow death to gain the victory over him. This discipline of the Christ from Yahweh is, on the one hand, surprising. What did he do to deserve discipline? The Psalm gives no indication that the afflicted one has done wrong.

On the other hand, the discipline of the Christ shouldn’t be surprising (we’ve seen something similar in several other Psalms). We have been told about Yahweh disciplining the Christ in another very significant passage pertaining to the coming Christ. The following is a quotation from 2 Samuel 7—the passage where Yahweh promises to David that he will establish the kingdom of one of David’s descendants (the Christ). Notice, particularly, the underlined words below.

WEEK SEVEN

Psalm 118

“When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.” 2 Samuel 7:12-16

Some have argued that this passage cannot, at least in the “iniquity” part, be talking about the Christ, because he never sinned. They would say that this passage must be talking about Solomon here. Thus, they would employ a “dual-fulfillment” view of this passage: Christ fulfills the main part of the passage, but Solomon fulfills the other part.

This “dual-fulfillment” view of this passage is unnecessary. The passage—including the portion about committing iniquity—is true of the Christ. While Christ never sinned, we must know that the sin of God’s people was charged to him. In this sense, he did commit sin. He was punished for sins that God counted as belonging to him.

Consider the following verses in Isaiah 53. Here, we read of the sins of God’s people being laid on the Christ. The sins of God’s people were truly counted as the sins of the Christ.

*Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all. Isaiah 53:4-6*

Isaiah repeats the truth about the Christ bearing the iniquities of the people later in the same chapter.

*Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him;
he has put him to grief;
when his soul makes an offering for guilt,
he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days;
the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.
Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied;
by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,
make many to be accounted righteous,
and he shall bear their iniquities. Isaiah 53:10-11*

The afflicted one was disciplined by Yahweh. But Yahweh did not allow death to triumph over him! The afflicted one is triumphant over death! He has absorbed the discipline of Yahweh and has lived to tell about it!

**19. Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them
and give thanks to the LORD.**

Because of his victory over death, the afflicted one asks to be let into the presence of Yahweh. Poetically speaking, we see him standing at the gates of the Temple. He wants to enter the temple and to praise Yahweh for bringing about his deliverance.

**20. This is the gate of the LORD;
the righteous shall enter through it.**

**21. I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.**

The gate through which the afflicted one passes is the gate through which all of Yahweh's people must enter. They follow him through the gates into Yahweh's presence. There is no other path to Yahweh except through the gate through which the afflicted one enters.

**22. The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone.**

**23. This is the LORD's doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.**

Poetically, we see a shift in images here. We move from references of a person entering into the temple so that he might worship to that of a person being referred to as a stone to be used in the building of the temple.

The afflicted one is a "stone" that has been presented to the builders for use in the building of the temple. The "builders" of the temple (the New Testament writers tell us that these builders were the Jewish leaders) didn't see this stone as fit to be used in the temple. They rejected it. Yahweh, however, accepted this stone. He took the same stone that the builders considered and rejected and made it the cornerstone of the temple. The entire temple depends on this one stone! Every other stone in the temple is laid upon this stone. The people of Yahweh see this and delight in it. They find great joy in the cornerstone of the temple.

We don't need to imagine how the apostles might have used this passage in their preaching and writing. Notice how Peter uses this Psalm—and two other "stone" passages (Isaiah 28:16 and 8:14)—in his first epistle. Notice how he makes a connection between the stone and Christ. Notice, also, his declaration that the people of God are also stones.

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture:

*"Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious,*

WEEK EIGHT

Psalm 1

and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,

*“The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,”*

and

*“A stone of stumbling,
and a rock of offense.”*

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. 1 Peter 2:4-8

**24. This is the day that the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.**

The “day that the LORD has made” is, in the context of this Psalm, a specific “day”. It is the “day” (i.e., the age) of the exaltation of the stone that the builders rejected. It is the day of the rejected stone becoming the cornerstone.

The people recognize that Yahweh is the one who has done this. A new day has come about because of Yahweh’s acceptance of the stone that was rejected by the builders. The people take great joy in this new day in which they find themselves living. Their joy—and this should be our joy—is in the Christ!

**25. Save us, we pray, O LORD!
O LORD, we pray, give us success!**

**26. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!
We bless you from the house of the LORD.**

**27. The LORD is God,
and he has made his light to shine upon us.
Bind the festal sacrifice with cords,
up to the horns of the altar!**

**28. You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;
you are my God; I will extol you.**

Now the imagery changes again. It is not of the cornerstone being laid in the temple. Rather, it is of the worshippers rejoicing in one who is coming to them in Yahweh’s name. The one who is coming—and in the context of the Psalm, we must see him as the Christ—should be seen as Yahweh’s answer to the people’s prayers for salvation and success. More than that, the one who is coming is the light that Yahweh has caused to shine upon them. The Christ is “his light”.

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. John 1:4-5

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” John 8:12

Because of his coming, true worship takes place. The people, because the Christ has come, call for a sacrifice to be made: “Bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar!”

With all of this as background, consider how this Psalm is used during the days before Jesus’ death. This is Matthew’s account of the Triumphal Entry:

They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, “Who is this?” And the crowds said, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.” Matthew 21:7-11

“Hosanna” comes from Psalm 118:25. It’s a Hebrew word meaning “Save us!”. They then cry, echoing Psalm 118:26, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”. Clearly, Matthew wants us to see that Jesus is the fulfillment of this Psalm. He wants his readers to read Psalm 118 and to relate it to Christ.

Just a few verses further in Matthew we read the following:

But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” they were indignant ... Matthew 21:15

While the people love what they see Jesus doing, the “chief priests and the scribes” (i.e., the builders) see the “stone” and they reject it. To them, Jesus is not worthy of the praise he is receiving. Again, Matthew, by using these quotes, is demonstrating who Jesus is and how we are to understand this Psalm.

The passage is also referred to by Jesus when he addresses the “Scribes and Pharisees” (again, they should be seen as the builders who rejected the stone). Notice the last statement he makes—a statement that comes from Psalm 118:26:

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’” Matthew 23:37-39

Jesus is telling these builders (referred to as Jerusalem here) that he is the one to whom this Psalm refers. He is also telling them that they have considered him and rejected him (in the same way that have consistently rejected the prophets who came before him). Because of this, their “house” (i.e., place of worship) is desolate. Worship no longer will be centered in the temple. Rather, it will be centered in the temple of which he is the cornerstone. They will not, however, benefit from his coming. The builders will not enjoy worship of Yahweh apart from joyfully welcoming the Christ.

WEEK EIGHT

Psalm 1

**29. Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever!**

The Psalm ends as it began, with a command to give thanks to Yahweh for his eternally enduring steadfast love. This eternally enduring steadfast love, we have seen, has been made known to us through the affliction, deliverance, and exaltation of the Christ.

May we be those who rejoice at his coming and gladly say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”

Week Eight

PSALM 1

WEEK EIGHT

Psalm 1

DAY ONE

1. Read and interact with Psalm 1. Remember, this is not narrative. It is poetry. Think in pictures. Try to visualize what is being said here. In the margins and in the poem itself make any notations that help you grasp the way this poem is working. Connect corresponding words within the individual lines.

PSALM 1

1. Blessed is the man
 who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
 nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
 2. but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
 and on his law he meditates day and night.
 3. He is like a tree
 planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
 and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.
 4. The wicked are not so,
 but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
 5. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
 nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
 6. for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
 but the way of the wicked will perish.
2. Draw a picture or pictures of Psalm 1.

DAY TWO

3. What distinguishes the “blessed” man?

4. What distinguishes the man who is not blessed?

5. What does this tell you about the importance Yahweh places on obedience to his law?

6. All three sections of the Old Testament (the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings) begin with a focus on the importance of obeying God’s Law. How do you see this emphasized in the following passages:

Genesis 2:15-17

Joshua 1:6-9

Psalms 1

7. The New Testament doesn’t portray man as delighting in the law of Yahweh. How, instead, is man portrayed?

Romans 3:10-20

Romans 5:12

Ephesians 2:1-3

WEEK EIGHT

Psalms 1

WEEK EIGHT

Psalm 1

8. What, based on this Psalm, do all men deserve to receive because of their disobedience to God's law?

DAY THREE

9. How do the following verses demonstrate that Jesus differs from the rest of mankind when it comes to "delighting in the law of Yahweh"?

Luke 2:41-52

Matthew 4:1-11

Matthew 5:17-20

John 4:34

John 8:48-59

10. What confirmation do we find that heaven's favor rests on Jesus?

Matthew 3:16-17

11. To whom, then, do verses 1-2 in Psalm 1 most truly apply?

DAY FOUR

12. The blessed man is “like a tree planted by streams of water”. Two things are worth noting here. First, the tree didn’t just happen to grow. It was planted. And second, the “streams of water” referred to here are not rivers. They are irrigation ditches. How do these two facts change/impact how you see this tree and the fruit produced by this tree?

13. This Psalm applies to Christ. He alone is the one who perfectly delights in Yahweh’s law. But it also, because the believer is “baptized into Christ”, applies to the believer. What is true of him is counted to be true of those who are in him. How do the following verses describe the way in which good fruit is produced by the believer?

Ezekiel 36:25-27

John 15:1-11

Romans 7:4-6

Romans 8:1-4

Galatians 5:22-23

14. Based on this Psalm, how would you respond to someone who said, “I’m doing pretty good. I think God will be satisfied with me.” What should this person expect God’s response to be?

WEEK EIGHT

Psalm 1

WEEK EIGHT

Psalm 1

DAY FIVE

15. Reread Psalm 1. How would you preach the gospel through this Psalm?

DAY SIX

16. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week, the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

PSALM 1

The book of Psalms is divided into five different “books”: Psalm 1-41, 42-72, 73-89, 90-106, and 107-150. The Psalms at the leading “edges” of these books (i.e., the first Psalms of each book) seem to be of particular significance because they set the tone for that particular book. Of even greater significance are the first Psalms in the entire Psalter. They serve, it appears, to introduce all of the Psalms.³⁸

This week we will be considering Psalm 1. We have already considered Psalm 2. These Psalms set the tone for the entire Psalter. These Psalms should not only be considered alone. They should also be considered together, as there is much that indicates that an editor purposely put these Psalms next to each other. At the conclusion of these notes we will briefly consider connections between these two Psalms.

**1. Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;**

Who is the blessed man or woman?³⁹ Who is the one upon whom heaven smiles? This is a question that should be of the utmost importance to all people. To be favored by Yahweh is a gift beyond all comprehension. But to be counted a rebel by the one who holds the keys to hell is the worst thing that could happen to a person.

Thus, this Psalm answers the question all people should be asking: “What is the identity of the blessed one?” What distinguishes the one who is favored by Yahweh from those who are scorned by him?

Like all good poets, the author of Psalm 1 is in no hurry to convey his message. He could have simply said, “Blessed is the man who delights in the law of the Lord”. He doesn’t do this. Instead, he draws things out, starting with what doesn’t characterize the blessed man—“Blessed is the man who walks not ... nor stands ... nor sits”.

Why start with the negatives and leave the reader waiting for the answer? One reason is that the negatives serve to place more emphasis on the positive. Giving the reader the wrong answers increases the reader’s appetite for the right answer.

The wicked are described with three different words here (wicked, sinners, and scoffers). This is not because the author is thinking of three different groups of evildoers. Rather, he is more fully describing one group of people—rebellious sinners who hate Yahweh.

When we hear this, we are apt to think of a terrible group of people committing horrendous crimes—people in the category of Cain, Nero, Hitler, and Stalin. But we need to know that the Old and New Testaments categorize all people as wicked rebels. Consider the following passages:

... we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written:

“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless, no one does good, not even one.” Romans 3:9b-12⁴⁰

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. Ephesians 2:1-3

³⁹ These verses highlight a weakness of translations like the NLT. In that translation, the singular masculine noun (man) has been turned into a demonstrative plural pronoun (those). While this may seem to solve one problem (it demonstrates that God’s blessing isn’t just for men but for men and women) it leads to many other problems. Notably, changing singulars to plurals can cause one to miss the real connection being made to the one man—Christ. The same must be said for translations like the NIV 2011 that change the word “man” to “one”. This change may obscure something the author wanted to make clear—namely, there is a *man* who is blessed. As readers of the New Testament, we know the identity of that man—Christ.

⁴⁰ Here, Paul is quoting from the Old Testament. The Old Testament, therefore, proclaims the same message regarding mankind as the New Testament.

WEEK EIGHT

Psalm 1

Jesus puts it more succinctly.

And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.” Mark 10:18

If no one is good but God, then all, apart from God, are bad.⁴¹ The description of the rebellious sinners in Psalm 1, then, is a description of all people—all people, that is, apart from the one upon whom heaven’s blessing rests.

Notice the progression in verse one from walking to standing to sitting. The wicked—and again, that is all people apart from the one who is blessed—are always, in all of their activities, doing what is evil. Whether they are sitting down, standing up, or moving about, they are always opposing Yahweh.

The person who receives God’s blessing, however, does the opposite.

2. but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

Finally, we receive the answer to the question this Psalm has caused us to ask. The blessed man is the one who delights in Yahweh’s law. Notice the simplicity of the blessed man’s life. While the wicked are walking in evil, standing in evil, and sitting in evil, the blessed man is pondering “the law of the LORD” day and night. He is always asking, “What has Yahweh said? How can I please him?”

But this is impossible. Based on the verses we have just considered, no man does this. The first Adam didn’t. His delight wasn’t in Yahweh’s law. It was, instead, in doing precisely what had been forbidden. Adam’s rebellion against the law of Yahweh impacted more than just one life. Instead, it cemented rebelliousness within the human race. All people from that time forward became sharers in Adam’s rebellious nature. All of them were, and are, born with hard hearts that love rebellion and do not delight in the laws of Yahweh.

Who is the one, then, who delights in the law of Yahweh? Who is the one who lets Yahweh’s words guide him in all of his actions?

It is the one whom we see, as a twelve-year-old, quizzing the teachers of the law in the temple about the words of Yahweh.

After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.
Luke 2:46-47

It is the one who, when he was tempted while in the wilderness, said that he lived “by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

It is the one upon whom God the Father proclaims, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17).

Jesus alone is the blessed man in Psalm 1 who delights in the law of Yahweh and meditates on it day and night.

⁴¹ Jesus was not saying that he is bad. He is God. Therefore, he is good.

It is significant that all three sections of the Hebrew Scriptures (the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings)⁴² begin with a focus on the word of God and, more than that, on mankind's response to God's word.

Genesis 1—the first chapter in the first book of the Law—is built around the phrase, “And God said”. We are led, as readers, to see that God's word matters. Our world would not exist apart from God's word. By his word he creates. By his word he sustains. By his word he sets things in motion. More than that, by his word he defines and declares what is good. We are led, as readers, to see that God's word is to frame all life. His word regarding good is absolute. What he declares to be good is good. And his word regarding evil is also absolute. What he declares to be evil is evil. It is significant that Adam's sin, recorded in Genesis 3, is in regard to God's word. He disobeys God's words and, instead, chooses to listen to Satan's rebellious words. As a consequence of rejecting God's word, he is forced to leave God's land.

Joshua 1—the first chapter in the first book of the Prophets—begins with a command for Joshua to meditate on and to obey the Book of the Law. Obedience will lead to God's blessing.

“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your ways prosperous, and then you will have good success.” Joshua 1:8

It is probably significant that the last book of the Prophets—Malachi—ends with an admonition to “Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel” (Malachi 4:4). Thus, the Prophets are bookended by commands to obey Yahweh's law.

The commands to Israel, however, were never obeyed.

Israel, like Adam, didn't, from the moment it entered the land, obey the law of Yahweh (remember Achan in Joshua 7?). They, like Adam, disobeyed God's words and, instead, chose to listen to Satan's rebellious words. They, like Adam, were also forced to leave God's good land.

Who, the reader wonders, can keep these words? For if only God's words could be kept by a people, all would be well for that people. Those people—the ones who obeyed God's words—would be able to stay in God's land. The obedient people would live under his care.

Psalms 1—the first chapter in the first book of the Writings—begins with a declaration that the blessed man is the one who meditates on the law of Yahweh day and night. The promise is that, if he does so, he will remain in the land. We have already seen that Adam didn't fulfill this. Israel, too, failed to fulfill this. Jesus is the only one who, because of his perfect obedience, has the right to stay in God's place. He is the Adam who, instead of listening to the serpent, trusted in God's good word. He is the Israel who, instead of grumbling in the desert, trusted in God to provide for him. He is the Israel who, instead of worshiping Baal, loved and obeyed the true God. He is the one—the only one—who ever fulfilled the command to perfectly obey and delight in the Law of Yahweh.

42 See Jesus' words in Luke 24:44.

WEEK EIGHT

Psalm 1

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” Matthew 5:17

I realize that at this point some of you may be saying, “But what about those who are in Christ? Surely these verses apply to them as well, don’t they?” They do apply to those in Christ! But they apply to them only because they are in Christ. He must be seen as the “Blessed one who meditates on God’s law day and night”.

**3. He is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.**

As I read these words, I have to fight the image that naturally comes to my mind: a wild apple tree growing by a river—the kind of river we have in Wisconsin. This is not what the writer has in mind. He is not thinking about a meandering river and a wild growing fruit tree in a relatively well-watered northern forest. He is thinking about an irrigation canal and a purposely planted and carefully pruned fruit tree in a rain-starved landscape. A man-made ditch is not as picturesque as a wild and clear river. But it says something different. An irrigation canal and a hand-planted and hand-pruned fruit tree draw attention to the fact that there is a gardener caring for this tree. Someone purposely dug this ditch and planted this tree because that someone is expecting fruit.

Christians read these words and instantly (and quite rightly) think of John 15 and themselves. They think of the fruit that they bear in Christ. But the plural (i.e., “this verse is talking about Christians!”) is only true because the singular is true (i.e., “this verse is talking about Christ!”). Apart from Christ we can bear no fruit. He is the fruitful one first. We are fruitful only because we are in him.

*“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”
John 15:4-5*

Christ is the fruitful one. As the fruitful one, he constantly draws from God the Father and bears good fruit through those who are in him. Christ cannot fail to bear fruit because the gardener’s care ensures he will bear fruit. This should give Christians great confidence. We are not to overly consider (and, thus, put our faith in) our own weakness or the weakness of the church. Rather, we are to glory in our gardener and in the tree he planted by his irrigation ditch. We have confidence that we are in Christ and that his “leaf does not wither” and “In all that he does, he prospers”. In him all will be well.

**4. The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.**

We turn from Christ and the fruit he bears to the wicked. Take a moment and compare verse three with verse four. While the righteous receive line after line of description, the wicked are just described as “not so”. It’s as if they warrant no comments. They are almost an afterthought. Like the worthless husk that comes off grain, they are blown away by the wind and no one thinks of them again.

**5. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;**

Here, metaphors are replaced with real life. Fruit trees and chaff are replaced with the judgment. The wicked, it turns out, are not totally like chaff. Chaff is blown away and forgotten. The wicked and their deeds, however, are not forgotten. They are going together to the judgment.

One must safely pass through God's judgment in order to be counted as a member of "the congregation of the righteous". The judgment was not an idea conjured up by ignorant people in the dark ages. It is a reality demanded by a just God. God cannot, if he is just, sweep sin under the rug of the universe. If he did not judge sin, how could we call him just? We wouldn't stand for a local judge who overlooked crime. He wouldn't be considered worthy of honor. Why would we think that the God of the universe, who is perfectly holy, would behave in a manner worse than we would demand from our own judges? All sin must be judged. Justice demands that it be accounted for. Justice is just as much a part of God's character as is kindness or love.

Returning to Psalm 1, we see that the wicked do not rise in the judgment. The judgment is, presumably, in regard to whether one's "way" is righteous or not. The wicked are not able to rise because their way is wicked. For this reason, they are not counted as members of the "congregation of the righteous". They are guilty and will suffer the wrath of God. Far better to be blown away like chaff and forgotten than to fall into the hands of furious Yahweh.

**6. for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.**

Up to this point, we have been considering the blessed one and his fate and the fate of the wicked. The Psalm has been dealing with individuals. In this line, however, the Psalmist is talking about more than just the righteous and wicked as individuals. He is talking about their ways.

Let's start with the wicked. As individuals, they already, remember, have been judged and found wanting. In this line, the Psalmist wants us to think about "the way of the wicked" in general. The behavior of the wicked—all their walking, standing, and sitting in opposition to Yahweh—even if it appears to be flourishing right now, will perish (remember this when you read Psalm 2).

This should give great comfort to a people desperately hanging on to Yahweh and his promises. The way of the wicked, it sometimes seems, always prospers (the seeming prosperity of the wicked is one of the themes of the Psalms). Good is called evil and evil is celebrated as good. Sin triumphs over righteousness. The way of the wicked is strong and powerful. The way of the righteous is weak and despised. The way of the wicked is bold. The way of the righteous is often barely noticeable. But a day is coming when the way of the wicked will perish. This should give great joy to the righteous.

By emphasizing that the way of the wicked will perish, the Psalmist is also saying that the way of the righteous will not perish. In other words, it will continue without end.

WEEK EIGHT

Psalm 1

Why will the way of the righteous continue without end? It continues because of Yahweh and his approval. He “knows” the way of the righteous. He approves of their way.

And what is the way of the righteous? It is, as we saw in verse two, the way of attentive listening to God’s law and perfect obedience to what he has said. It is the way of loving God’s words and doing them. Jesus alone has done this. Thus, the way of the righteous refers, ultimately, to the way lived by just one—Jesus. God loves Jesus’ way.

We know that God “knows” and approves of the way of Jesus because, as we have already considered, the Father said, regarding Jesus, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). The Father, looking down from heaven, considered Jesus’ whole being and way of life and called it well pleasing. Jesus perfectly lived out—and lives out—“the way of the righteous”. Heaven smiles upon his way of life. But heaven’s smile doesn’t just shine on Jesus alone. It shines on all those who are in him. His righteousness is counted as their righteousness.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 2 Corinthians 5:17

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20

By faith we—those who formerly walked, stood, and sat in the way of the wicked—are counted as “in Christ”. His perfect listening and obeying is counted as our perfect listening and obeying. Those who are in Christ are watched over with care and concern and are counted as members of the congregation of the righteous. In other words, who is the Blessed One? Christ is ... and because of that, I am.

PSALM 1 AND 2 AS A UNIT

Now that we’ve looked at both Psalm 1 and 2 individually, let’s take a few moments and look at them together.

Psalm 1 begins by talking about the *blessedness* of the man who doesn’t walk/stand/sit with the wicked but, instead, delights in the law of Yahweh. Psalm 2 ends by talking about the *blessedness* (same word in Hebrew) of the one who is found taking refuge in the Anointed King. This pairing of words is intentional. The editor who paired these Psalms together seems to be drawing attention to blessedness and where it is to be found. We see the same thing with the word *meditate*. In Psalm 1, the blessed one *meditates* on the law of Yahweh. In Psalm 2, the people *meditate* on throwing off his rule. Again, this should be seen as a deliberate pairing.

Psalm 1 describes the blessedness of Christ. He is the blessed one who always attends to the law of Yahweh. Do you see why Jesus is anointed as King by Yahweh (Psalm 2)? Yahweh trusts him! Yahweh knows that Jesus will do all that is right because Jesus meditates on Yahweh’s laws day and night (Psalm 1). Unlike the first “Anointed King” (Adam) who disobeyed Yahweh’s commands, this Anointed King always and only obeys. That is why all his actions are blessed and why all those who are in him are also blessed.

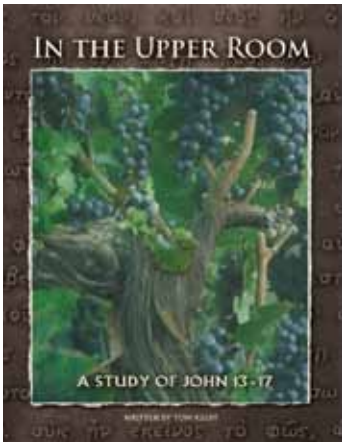
But blessing is not the only theme of these two Psalms. We also see cursing. Psalm 1 refers to the utter destruction of the wicked. They “are like chaff that the wind drives away”. Psalm 2 refers to how this destruction of the wicked will take place: “You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel” (2:9). The Christ (God’s Anointed King), we learn here, is the one who turns the wicked into chaff.

Psalm 1 talks generically about sinners not standing in the judgment. Psalm 2 refers to the criteria by which this judgment will be made: whether the Son (Yahweh’s Anointed King) is rightly honored. The only ones standing in the judgment (Psalm 1) will be those who have “kissed the Son” (Psalm 2). The ones who have done this (Psalm 2) are numbered with the “congregation of the righteous” (Psalm 1).

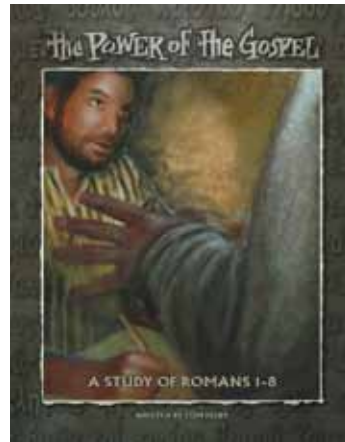
May you and I be found in that number.

Additional Bible Study Resources

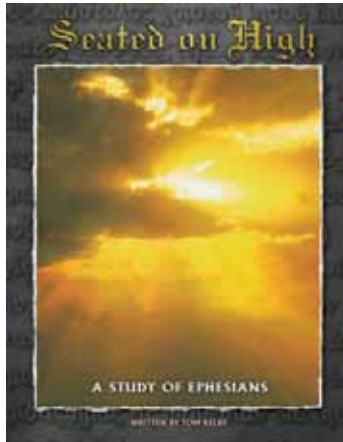
FROM HANDS TO THE PLOW MINISTRIES



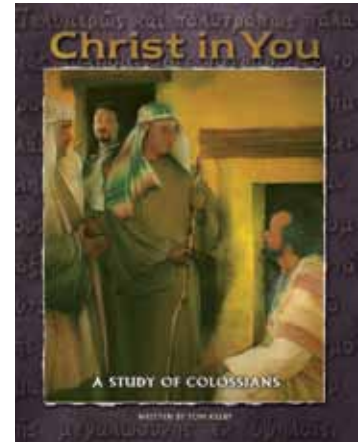
A study of John



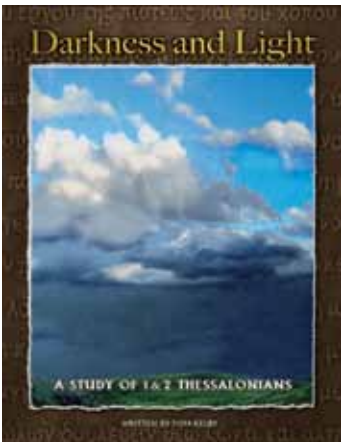
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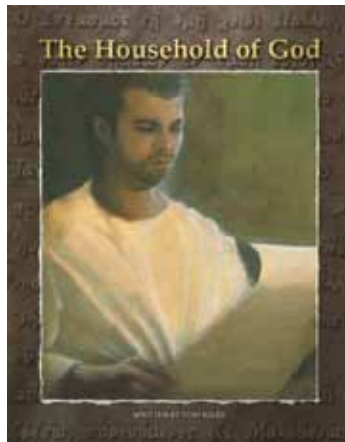
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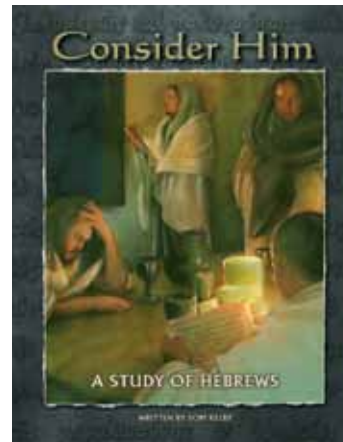
A study of Colossians



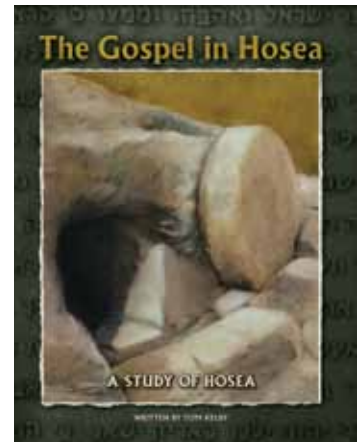
A study of 1 and 2 Thessalonians



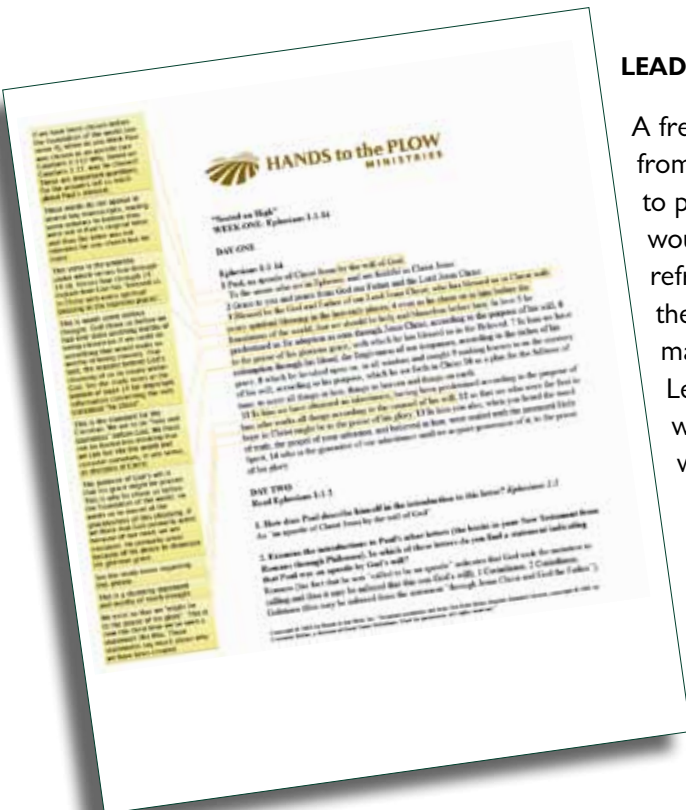
A study of 1 Timothy



A study of Hebrews



A study of Hosea



LEADER'S GUIDE

A free leader's guide for this study may be downloaded from handstotheplow.org. This leader's guide is designed to provide additional help for those leading the study. We would encourage those who are not leading a study to refrain from using the leader's guide and to wrestle through the text and the questions on their own. Other studies may be ordered or downloaded from the website as well. Leader's guides are also available for these studies. The website also includes audio files of Tom Kelby's sermons which may prove helpful as you study this book.

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