**Psalms Commentary**

**Psalms Chapter 1**

Psa 1:1

**“Blessed is the person.”** There are different kinds of psalms in Psalms. For example, a number of psalms are almost exclusively praise to God (Ps. 8, 19, 23, 33, 47, 67, 84, 93, 96, 100, 111, 113, 117, 150).

**“who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked.”** At first blush, it might seem easy not to “walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand on the road of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers,” but often people get in that position because of pressure from family, friends, or work associates. The lifestyle of a truly godly person usually means they stand out from the crowd and are spotted and often mocked, ridiculed, criticized, or outright persecuted. It takes great strength of character to be a person who does not “walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand on the road of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers,” but it will be worth it on Judgment Day.

Psa 1:2

**“law.”** Psalms, the first book of the “Writings” in the Hebrew Bible, begins by pointing the reader back to Torah. Studying the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, is essential to learn how to think and reason the way God does. In a similar fashion, the book of Joshua, the first book of the “Prophets” in the Hebrew Bible, begins with a reminder to be anchored in the Torah (Josh. 1:7).

[For more on the meaning of “law,” Torah, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

**“meditates.”** The translation “meditates” is okay, but not a perfect match, and can lead to misunderstanding. The Hebrew word is *hagah* (#01897 הָגָה), and when used of humans its basic meaning is to utter a sound. Thus, it can mean to mutter, moan, utter, speak. It can mean to read out loud in an undertone. Its extended or applied meanings can include to recite, muse, imagine. In any case, what it does not mean is to think about in silence, like the silent monks. God wants us to read, recite, think about, and dwell on His Word and works, especially out loud. The idea is to memorize it, if not word for word, to certainly get to the point we know what God’s Torah says and means. *Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible* tries to capture the sense with the translation that in God’s law the man talks with himself day and night.

Psa 1:3

**“planted.”** The Hebrew word is *shathal* (#08362 שָׁתַל), and it means “to plant” or “to transplant.” The proximity of a tree to water is a matter of life or death. If it has a constant flow of water, it will flourish. This is what God promises to the person who delights in, and meditates on, God’s Torah—he will flourish. Notice that the verse does not say, “He will be like a tree growing by the stream” as if the tree grew there by itself and by chance. No, this tree in Psalm 1:3 was specifically “planted” (or transplanted) there beside the stream. In the same way, if we are going to flourish in this life and the next, we have to “plant ourselves” in the Torah and in God’s Word. We humans will not think and act in a truly godly manner if we just act out of our natural impulses and desires. It takes a deliberate effort to be “transformed” (Rom. 12:2) and have a godly heart and mind. Notice, however, that the Psalmist regards this behavior as the appropriate activity of the righteous without any hint of legalism—it flows from a heart of love and devotion.

Psa 1:4

**“they are like the chaff.”** The point that this Psalm is making is that there is a Day of Judgment coming, and on that day the unrighteous people, the unsaved people, will be like the chaff after winnowing: they will be gone. To best understand the simile that the wicked are like the chaff that the wind blows away, it is helpful to understand ancient farming practices.

In biblical times the ripe grain was harvested by hand. The grain stalk was cut off close to the ground with a sickle or knife of some kind. When a person had cut too many stalks to easily hold, he or she wrapped them in a bundle (usually by wrapping some of the stalks around the rest) and left them on the ground so they could be easily seen and gathered. Once all the grain in the field had been cut, all the bundles were gathered up and carried to a threshing floor. At that point, the grain was still on the stalk.

The threshing floor was a large flat area of rock or very hard ground. It was usually on top of a hill so the breeze would blow across it. “Threshing” was the process of separating the grains of wheat from the stalk, and various methods were used to do that. The most primitive method was simply to beat the wheat—or whatever grain was being harvested, such as barley or millet—with a stick over and over to knock the grain off the stalk (Judg. 6:11).

Another method of threshing was to have some cows or oxen walk back and forth over the pile of grain. Their hoofs would cut up the wheat stalk and knock the grain off the stalk. As the cattle walked over the grain, it was against the Mosaic Law to keep them from eating it (Deut. 25:4). A more efficient way of threshing was done with a “threshing sled,” which was a flat-bottomed sled with metal or stone teeth set into the bottom. When the ox pulled the sled back and forth over the grain, the teeth on the bottom of the sled would cut up the stalk and also separate the grain from the stalk (Isa. 41:15; Amos 1:3).

After the grain was threshed, there was a large pile of broken stalks, chaff, and grain all mixed together on the threshing floor. The chaff was the very small pieces of stalk, while the broken grain stalks were the larger pieces. To separate the grain from the broken shafts and the chaff, the farmer would wait for a breeze and then winnow the pile with a winnowing fork. The winnowing fork (sometimes called a winnowing shovel), was a tool much like a pitchfork but with flat wooden tines. The farmer would thrust the winnowing fork into the pile and toss it as high as he could into the air. The breeze would catch the wheat shafts and chaff, which were very light, and blow them to the side. The grains of wheat, which were heavier and oval-shaped, would fall almost straight back down to the threshing floor.

After a number of hours of winnowing, the wheat would be left on the threshing floor, the larger pieces of the shafts would be blown off to the side not too far away, and the much smaller chaff would be blown even further away or blown away completely. At that point, the grain could be taken to the granary or storehouse, while the wheat shafts and chaff were used in other ways. Sometimes the large pieces of the shaft were used in making bricks, which is why the Bible speaks of making bricks with “straw,” which was the grain shafts (Exod. 5:7-18). Sometimes the shafts and chaff were burned as fuel in the ovens because it burned quickly and very hot, and it heated up the clay ovens very rapidly (Matt. 3:12).

Sometimes, however, the winnowing breeze was hard enough that the chaff simply blew away and could not be found. That is the illustration in this Psalm: on Judgment Day the wicked will not be left standing in the assembly of the righteous. They will be gone like the chaff in the wind. Therefore, chaff is a good illustration for the unsaved people because just like the chaff is often taken and burned up, the unrighteous chaff-people will be thrown into the Lake of Fire and will be consumed there.

[For more on the harvesting and sifting of grain, see commentary on Amos 9:9. For more on annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire. There are many good books on biblical manners and customs that describe the processes used in harvesting grain.]

Psa 1:5

**“assembly of the righteous.”** After the Day of Judgment, the “righteous,” the ones who are saved, will be left on earth with no wicked among them. That is the meaning of “assembly (or “gathering”) of the righteous” here in Psalm 1:5.

Psa 1:6

**”Yahweh knows.”** Yahweh does “know” the road of the righteous, but He does so much more than just “know” it. He supports it, cares for it, and oversees it. The righteous people are the ones who love God and obey Him. The word “know” can mean to know or experience, but it can also have an idiomatic or pregnant sense and mean “to care about,” “to act lovingly toward.” Thus, Psalm 144:3 (YLT 1862/87/98) says, “what is man that Thou knowest him,” while the NIV(2011) translates that in a way that recognizes the idiom: “what are human beings that you care for them?” Similarly, Proverbs 12:10 (YLT) says, “The righteous man knoweth the life of his beast,” while the NIV(2011) has, “The righteous care for the needs of their animals.” Also, “know” is used idiomatically for sexual intercourse because when a man has sexual intercourse with a woman it involves knowing her experientially, and often deeply intellectually as well (see commentary on Matt. 1:25).

[For more on “know” see commentary on Gen. 3:22.]

**“perish.”** On Judgment Day the wicked will be thrown into the Lake of Fire, where they will eventually burn up and be annihilated. This statement in Psalm 1:6 stands at odds with the popular belief that the wicked will burn in “hell” forever. The Bible teaches that the wicked will eventually perish, that is, cease to exist.

[For more on annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

**Psalms Chapter 2**

Psa 2:1

**“Why do the nations rage.”** Although it is not immediately obvious, Psalm 2 continues a theme that began in Psalm 1: the conflict between good and evil, between obedience and rebellion, between godliness and ungodliness. Both Psalms show good versus evil; Psalm 1 is on a personal level, while Psalm 2 is on a national level (but it nuances to a personal ending). So the Psalms begin with the most important theme in all existence: are you going to die, or live forever? In Psalm 1, the righteous flourish like a tree planted by water whereas the wicked will dry up and blow away like chaff and will perish. In Psalm 2, the rebellious unbelievers band together against Yahweh and the anointed king that He set up in Zion. But even banded together, their plans are futile and they end up broken in pieces like a smashed clay pot. Psalm 2 fittingly ends with an exhortation to people to pay homage to the Son. Those who refuse will perish while those who do will be blessed.

**“a vain thing.”** The unbelieving and rebellious peoples plot against God, which is futile. Despite the boasting of ungodly people, in reality they, and all humans, are quite powerless. The unbelievers plot “a vain thing” (ASV, NASB, NKJV); they are “devising plots that will fail” (NET); they “waste their time with futile plans” (NLT); and/or they “plot in vain” (CSB, ESV). Humans cannot control their own destiny, indeed, they cannot even determine the day of their death. So when humans plot against God they are planning in vain and their plans will come to nothing. The only way to be truly successful in this life (and the next) is to love and obey God.

Psa 2:2

**“his Anointed.”** God’s anointed is the reigning king, and ultimately, the Messiah Jesus Christ. Psalm 2 has two levels of meaning. One is that it is an exaltation of the Davidic kings who reigned in Jerusalem. Psalm 2 was included in the Psalms that were recited (or sung) at the coronation of Judah’s king. For example, God called Solomon a “son” in 2 Sam. 7:14. God chose David from among his brothers and worked behind the scenes to give him the position of king. He then made a covenant that the Messiah would reign upon David’s throne, and the Messiah is called “the son of David.” In typical hyperbolic fashion, the Davidic king is exalted and grandiose things are said about him, such as that he would rule to the ends of the earth.

On another level, however, we see that the Davidic king is only a shadow of the real subject of the Psalm, the Messiah. The Jewish rabbis took it that way.[[1]](#footnote-16019) The New Testament shows us that the primary and intended subject of the psalm was the Messiah (Acts 4:25-26; 13:33; Heb. 1:5; 5:5). Furthermore, only the Messiah will actually fulfill the text of the psalm and reign over the whole earth and all the nations. No other king of Israel did anything close to that. James Mays writes: “The second psalm is a poetic speech by the Messiah. It is the only text in the Old Testament that speaks of God’s king, Messiah, and son in one place, the titles so important for the presentation of Jesus in the Gospels.”[[2]](#footnote-23196)

Mays also points out that Psalm 2 is a psalm that deals with the question of power: “Where does power to control the powers at work in world history ultimately reside?” In Psalm 2 we see that ultimate power resides with Yahweh, and He then delegates that power to the Messiah.

Psalm 2 is one of the great sections of Scripture that points out how magnanimous God is and how great His Messiah is. God elevated His Messiah, Jesus Christ, to be His king, reigning on the earth; and Jesus Christ lived a sinless life in obedience to God and deserves his elevated position as God’s king, along with all the authority and adoration we give him.

Psalm 2 is also one of the many sections of Scripture that gives evidence that the doctrine of the Trinity is not correct. The Messiah is portrayed as being Yahweh’s choice and under Yahweh’s control and direction. The Messiah is “Yahweh’s Anointed” (Ps. 2:2), Yahweh’s king (Ps. 2:6), and “today” begotten of Yahweh, which means he is not eternal like Yahweh is.

[For more on “anointed one,” see commentary on 1 Sam. 12:3. For more on Jesus Christ being the Son of God, not God the Son, and there being no Trinity, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

Psa 2:4

**“He who sits in the heavens.”** The use of the word “sits” here is culturally important. In the ancient world, a king “sat” while others stood before him.

**“laughs.”** This verse is not saying that God laughs at wicked people who defy him as if He had contempt for them and could not wait to destroy them. Many verses show how much it hurts God’s heart when people reject Him. In Ezekiel 33:11 God says, “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but *desire* that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?”

God does not laugh at people’s rejection of him, but He laughs at their efforts to defeat Him—meaning He finds their efforts futile and foolish. He created the universe from nothing, and no power can prevail against Him. He laughs at the foolishness of anyone thinking they can somehow defeat God.

Psa 2:6

**“my king.”** Here the Messiah is being shown to be God’s king, ruling under His authority. Furthermore, the Messiah will rule on God’s holy mountain, which is Mount Zion. We learn from Ezekiel 40:2 that the city of Jerusalem where Christ will reign as king will be on the south side of Mount Zion. The Temple will be on the top of the mountain. That same layout is implied in Psalm 110, in which God says to the Messiah, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” The ancient biblical world was oriented to the east, so if the Temple is on the top of Mount Zion, and the city of Jerusalem is on the south side of Mount Zion, then the Messiah sits on his throne on the “right hand” (south side) of Yahweh, who is in the Temple. That God installed the king shows that God, not the king, is the true owner of the earth (Exod. 9:29; Ps. 24:1; 1 Cor. 10:26). See commentary on Psalm 2:2.

Psa 2:7

**“today.”** Although commentators argue about which day “today” refers to, one thing that is clear by this statement is that the Messiah was begotten at a specific time in history. This is in direct contrast to the Trinitarian doctrine that the Messiah is “eternally begotten.” See commentary on Psalm 2:2.

Psa 2:8

**“and the uttermost parts of the earth for your possession.”** In the future, Christ will come back to earth, fight the battle of Armageddon, and conquer the earth. Then he will set up his kingdom and rule over the whole earth, just as Psalm 2:8 says. It is because Christ’s Kingdom will be on earth and fill the earth that in the Sermon on the Mount Christ said, “Blessed are the humble, for they will inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5) and that Revelation says God’s people will “reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:10). There are a number of verses that say Christ’s kingdom will fill the earth and be over all the peoples and nations (cf. Ps. 2:8; 72:8-11; Dan. 2:35; 7:14; Mic. 5:4; Zech. 9:9-10).

[For more on the coming Kingdom of Christ on earth, the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Psa 2:9

**“You will break them with a rod of iron.”** The word “break” is “shepherd” in the Septuagint. That Jesus will conquer the earth and rule with a rod of iron is a well-established prophecy and occurs four times in Scripture (Ps. 2:9; Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15). In this context, the ones who will be broken and dashed to pieces will be those who stand against God and His Christ (Ps. 2:2).

[For more detail on Jesus ruling with a rod of iron, see commentary on Rev. 2:27.]

Psa 2:11

**“fear.”** Although the Hebrew word for “fear” has a wide semantic range and can mean “respect” or “awe,” and those meanings apply in this verse to some degree, even that respect is based in healthy fear. Here in Psalm 2, the context of “fear” is God’s fearsome power and God’s judgment of His enemies, and that God is not to be trifled with. For more on “fear” and fearing God, see commentary on Proverbs 1:7.

**“trembling.”** Although some commentators assert that the “trembling” in this verse is trembling with joy and excitement at serving God, that does not fit with the context. “Fear” and “trembling” are healthy responses to being close to the Most High God. But they do not refer to the torturous kind of fear and trembling, such as being “frozen” with fear; in this context, they refer to the healthy kind of fear and trembling that accompany the realization of the power and authority of God, and accompany the realization that we are His created beings and He expects certain things from us, such as love and obedience.

Psa 2:12

**“Kiss the Son.”** Although the word “son” can refer to someone who is in a mentoring relationship with an older, more experienced mentor or even to someone who is in a loving relationship with an elder person, in this context conservative Christian scholars agree that the ultimate meaning here refers to the Son of God, the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

This phrase has been the subject of much scholarly speculation for various reasons. One is that the word translated “son” is Aramaic, not Hebrew, and another is that the Septuagint reading is different. However, considering that God wanted all people, including foreign kings, not just the Jews, to pay homage to the Son, the Aramaic makes sense.[[3]](#footnote-15668) Kissing, usually done on the cheek, could signify different things depending on the social context. Among family and friends, kissing on the cheek was a sign of friendship and loyalty. In this context of kissing the Son, it was a sign of homage, loyalty, and recognition of the higher position of the one being kissed. Also, in this case, kissing the “Son” meant also kissing the One who sent him, i.e., God Himself. God is the creator of the heavens and the earth, and He makes the rules. He decided to save people based on their relation to His Son, and here He makes clear the choice before all people: honor the Son or “perish.” This is the same basic message as in John 3:16. People cannot save themselves or give themselves everlasting life. That gift comes from God, and to receive it we must do things God’s way. Humble people pay homage to the Son and live forever; prideful people ignore or reject the Son and perish as a result.

**“for his wrath will suddenly be kindled.”** The Hebrew word translated “suddenly” is *meat* (#04592 מְעַט, pronounced “may-at”), and it can mean “suddenly” or “soon.” Here in Psalm 2:12, and at this time in history, “suddenly” is the better translation and the better way to understand the text. Although it was known that God’s day of vengeance upon the wicked would someday come, it was not known that it would come “soon,” and of course, it did not come soon. In fact, Ecclesiastes 12:5, written after Psalm 2, refers to a person’s grave as his age-long home, indicating that the wrath of God on His enemies and His deliverance of His saved people was a long way in the future, which has turned out to be true. It will be the case that when the wrath of God is poured out upon His enemies, it will happen “suddenly,” and that is expressed in other scriptures as well (cf. Mal. 3:1-2; 1 Thess. 5:3; ).

**Psalms Chapter 3**

Psa 3:2

**“salvation.”** Coming from the enemies of the psalmist, this means “deliverance” in this life; in other words, the psalmist would not be able to escape his enemies (cf. “save me” in Ps. 3:7).

Psa 3:3

**“my glory.”** The Hebrew word translated “glory” here could also be translated “honor.” The psalmist is saying that Yahweh is his source of glory or honor, that He is the one who gives him honor in the eyes of other people. Although some scholars believe that the text is saying that the psalmist is honoring God, the context is about what God is doing for the psalmist, and so this verse is saying that God gives honor and glory to the psalmist, and similarly, He does that for all believers.

Psa 3:7

**“strike all of my enemies on the cheek.”** In the biblical culture, striking someone on the cheek was an insult that disgraced them. It was not a deadly attack. In this context, the Psalmist wishes that Yahweh would insult and disgrace his enemies, and also disempower them.

[For more on the custom of striking someone on the cheek, see commentary on Luke 6:29.]

**“shatter the teeth.”** Besides wishing God would strike his enemies on the cheek, the psalmist wishes God would “shatter the teeth of the wicked.” Breaking someone’s teeth will not kill them, but it makes them powerless and harmless. The Psalmist is weary of being attacked by his enemies, and he wishes God would insult them, shame them, and make them powerless.

**Psalms Chapter 4**

Psa 4:2

**“reputation.”** The Hebrew word means “glory, honor, reputation.”

Psa 4:6

**“Who will show us good.”** This is not “Who will show us something good,” as if someone could show something—a “thing”—that was good and people would be satisfied. This is “good” in the sense of good that will satisfy the soul. Humans crave happiness, but although people scrap and fight over material things, in the end, those things do not satisfy and do not make people happy. Humans fight for material things because we intrinsically know there is nothing inside us that can make us happy, and so we turn to things outside ourselves that seem like they would satisfy us; material things. Nevertheless, material things never satisfy the soul—they never have and they never will, and one would think humans would know that by now. “Our intellectual nature craves the true. Our moral nature craves the right. Our sympathetic nature calls for love. Our conscious weakness and dependence call for strength from another.”[[4]](#footnote-31376) But people who are driven by their animal nature and desires cannot bring themselves to humbly come to God and follow His ways and actually experience the good—His good. So they continue to cry out, ‘Who will show us good” while ignoring the good from God that is within their grasp. The Psalmist knows the answer: “O Yahweh, lift up upon us the light of your face.”

**“lift up upon us the light of your face.”** An idiom meaning “let your face shine upon us,” or “smile upon us,” that is, show us your favor. This is a similar blessing to the one Moses spoke over Aaron and his sons in Numbers 6:25-26: “Yahweh make his face to shine on you, and be gracious to you. Yahweh lift up his face toward you, and give you peace.” The ancients were very sensitive to how a person’s face looked, in part because it was often the only part of the person that was not covered by clothing. They understood that when a person was happy, their face shone, and that is reflected in the blessing.

**Psalms Chapter 5**

Psa 5:1

**“Give ear.”** This follows the introductory line, “a Psalm of David.” Although the Hebrew preposition “לְ” can mean “by David” (i.e., authored by David), it is grammatically ambiguous and could equally mean “for David” (i.e., dedicated to David) or even “about David” (a psalm about his life and example). Although ancient tradition assigns this psalm to David, since it talks about entering the Jerusalem Temple (Psalm 5:7) which was not built until after David’s death, it is unlikely that the title serves to denote Davidic authorship. It is more likely that someone after David’s death composed it dedicated to David and his noteworthy prayer life. Many commentators doubt David was the author.[[5]](#footnote-10128)

Psa 5:3

**“I will make preparations for you.”** The Hebrew verb about making preparations was used about making preparations for sacrifices, but it was also used for making verbal preparations; in this case, it would be preparing words to speak to God. In any case, the fact that Psalm 5:1-2 are about praying and crying out to God, and this verse, Psalm 5:3, begins with “you will hear my voice” and ends with “and will carefully watch” indicates that the psalmist is speaking of making preparations to petition God in what he says, whether or not his petition was accompanied by a sacrifice. The psalmist would prepare his petition to God and then would carefully watch for an answer.

There are some wonderful lessons in what the psalmist does here. For one thing, he starts preparing to approach God “in the morning.” He understands that it is important to magnify God, recognize Him for who He is, and ask for His help as the day starts. The psalmist does not ignore God, forget Him, or “put Him on a back burner” until later in the day “when I have time for Him.” Also, the fact that the psalmist prepared to approach God shows that his prayer or petition was deliberate and well thought through. He knew what he was asking God for, and why. This was not a “memorized prayer” that he had said hundreds of times before and could say in his sleep. The Psalmist had some specific requests and genuinely wanted and expected God’s help.

We also see that the psalmist trusts that God would hear and answer his prayer, because after praying, the psalmist “will carefully watch” to see what God’s answer is and what God does. Too many people pray to God but do not expect an answer and do not even watch to see if and how God answers their prayer. This psalmist prayed to God first thing, prayed a deliberate and well-thought-through prayer, and then watched for God’s answer. That is a wonderful example of how to pray.

Psa 5:6

**“bloodguilt.”** That is, the one who had killed innocent blood, the murderer.

Psa 5:7

**“bow down.”** The word translated “bow down,” *shachah* (#07812 שָׁחָה), is the same Hebrew word as “worship.”

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

Psa 5:9

**“nothing trustworthy in their mouth.”** Evil people are very good liars and deceivers for a number of reasons, and so it is important when determining what kind of person someone is to look at the fruit of their lives. Jesus taught us this, and said we will know people by their fruit (Matt. 7:16-20). Sadly, many people are good liars and smooth talkers and they convince naïve people of their evil ideas in spite of the evil fruit their lives bear.

The Hebrew Masoretic text reads “his mouth,” but that could be a corruption because the Septuagint reads the plural and there is some Hebrew manuscript evidence for the plural; and furthermore, the plural reading makes sense.

Psa 5:10

“**Let them fall by their own plans.”** It is a consistent theme throughout Scripture that evil people bring evil upon themselves (see commentary on Prov. 1:18).

**Psalms Chapter 6**

Psa 6:3

**“But you, O Yahweh, how long...?”** This is the figure of speech aposiopesis, “sudden silence.” When a person stops speaking in the middle of a sentence due to emotion or for effect, it is the figure aposiopesis, and it is used in English and in the Bible. Here in Psalm 6:3, the psalmist is troubled, and too emotional to finish his thought. He simply says, “O Yahweh, how long…,” rather than finishing his thought and saying something like “O Yahweh, how long before you put an end to my troubles?”

[For more on aposiopesis, see commentary on Luke 19:42.]

Psa 6:5

**“in death no one remembers you.”** This is one of the many clear verses that teaches that dead people are fully dead; they are not alive in any form or fashion. The orthodox Christian belief is that the dead are not really dead because the person’s “soul” (or “spirit”) goes on living. But that belief did not come from the Bible, it came from the Greek belief in the immortality of the soul. There is no “immortal soul” in the Bible. When a person dies they are dead in every way and awaiting the resurrection of their body and the Judgment.

In this context, “remember” is literal, no one who is dead has any knowledge, and thus no memory of God or anything else. However, in this context, “remember” also has the idiomatic meaning of “remembering” in the sense of blessing, praising, or remembering God in meaningful ways (see commentary on Gen. 8:1, “remember”).

Another thing we learn from this psalm and the Hebrew parallelism it employs, where the first and second lines in Hebrew poetry often state the same truth in different ways, is that Sheol, which refers to the state of being dead, is like death itself in that no one is alive in Sheol. That is why no one in Sheol, in the state of death, can praise God.

[For more on dead people being fully dead, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.”]

**Psalms Chapter 7**

Psa 7:2

**“they tear.”** The Hebrew shifts from plural to singular (lit. “he”), which is common in Hebrew idiom.

Psa 7:5

**“lay my glory in the dust.”** That is, bring the person to a state of poverty, humiliation, degradation, and shame (see commentary on Isa. 52:2).

Psa 7:9

**“hearts.”** In the Bible, the “heart” generally refers to a person’s thought life, not their emotional life.

**“kidneys.”** The Word of God points to the fact that our kidneys, bowels, and belly (or womb) are part of our mental/emotional life, not “just physical organs.” Our “gut,” including our intestines, bowels, kidneys, and stomach contain as many nerve cells as our brain, and studies are now showing that our “gut” contributes significantly to our emotional life and health.

[For more on the heart referring to the thought life, see commentary on Prov. 15:21. For more on kidneys referring to the emotional life, see commentary on Rev. 2:23, “kidneys.”]

Psa 7:10

**“is borne by God.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “is upon God,” but the meaning is that God is carrying the believer’s shield so it is God who ultimately protects the believer.

Psa 7:11

**“and *he is* a God who has indignation every day.”** Wicked and disobedient people fill the earth, and God is angry about that. The wicked need to know that their thoughts and actions are being noticed and have consequences, the most severe of which will be on Judgment Day.

Psa 7:14

**“the *unrepentant person*.”** The Hebrew text simply reads “he,” but that is so jarring in the context that many versions nuance the text to make the English easier to read and understand (cf. CJB, HCSB, ESV, NLT; cf. NET, NIV). However, the reader should be aware that the Bible has many such places where the subject changes abruptly and without an easy transition. The unrepentant person is being referenced from Psalm 7:12.

Psa 7:15

**“digs.”** The verbs in this verse are past tense, “has dug…has hollowed…has fallen,” but the past tense is often used for emphasis—what will happen—rather than to accurately represent time, which explains why many English versions do not use the past tense in this verse (cf. CJB, ESV, NAB, NET, NIV, NLT, NRSV). In this case, the point is that that person who does evil by digging a pit (physically or metaphorically) to trap others will himself be trapped.

**“he falls into the pit that he made.”** It is a consistent theme throughout Scripture that evil people bring evil upon themselves (see commentary on Prov. 1:18).

Psa 7:16

**“The trouble he causes will return to his own head.”** It is stated many times in the Bible that people who cause trouble for others will end up caught up in their own trouble; evildoers will be caught up in evil (see commentary on Prov. 1:18).

**Psalms Chapter 8**

Psa 8:1

**“our Lord.”** The Hebrew for “lord” is a grammatical plural, Adonainu, a title also used of David (1 Kings 1:43, 47). The “grammatical plural” is often referred to by scholars as a “plural of majesty,” a “plural of emphasis,” or a “plural of excellence,” because the plural adds emphasis and/or majesty to an individual, it is not a plural of number, as if there was more than one individual being referred to.

**“how majestic is your name in all the earth.”** Psalm 8 is one of the psalms that is all praise. There are nine verses, and none of them are asking for anything in prayer or recounting biblical history; the whole psalm is about the greatness of God and what He has done. There are a number of psalms that are like Psalm 8 in that they focus almost exclusively on praise: Psalm 8, 19, 23, 33, 47, 67, 84, 93, 96, 100, 111, 113, 117, 150. One of the great values in these psalms is that reading them over and over helps us with our personal praise of God. Modern culture does not praise a lot, or for that matter even say “Thank you” very much, and so reading and reciting praise psalms helps people understand and vocalize praise.

Psa 8:2

**“From the mouths of babes and infants you have established strength.”** The Septuagint version of this verse is quoted in Matthew 21:16. It seems that the early translators quoted the Septuagint in Matthew because the meaning of the Hebrew text is unclear.

**“to silence the enemy.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “to cause to cease” an enemy. This can be to “silence” them, or perhaps it even has eschatological implications pertaining to Judgment Day, and “put an end to” (NET) is also part of the meaning. Although the meaning is not explained, it likely has to do with innocent and honest people praising and supporting God against His enemies, who have a demonic agenda.

Psa 8:4

**“that you visit him.”** In this context, God “visits” by blessings and support.

[For more on God “visiting,” see commentary on Exod. 20:5.]

Psa 8:5

**“a little lower than God.”** The Hebrew word translated “God” is Elohim, the standard word for “God,” although it can refer to representatives of God including angels and even human judges. The Septuagint has “angels,” and that is the source of the quotation in Hebrews 2:7, which reads “angels” in the Greek text, and likely the motivation for many English translations that read “angels.” But if the psalmist had wanted to say “angels” he could have, because there is a specific word that means “angels,” and the fact that he did not use that word but used Elohim indicates that he at least intended to include God. Elohim can also be taken as a plural since it is a plural noun, and thus can mean “gods,” that is, God and those heavenly beings he created to assist Him. Since God said to angels, “let us make humankind in our image,” it is possible that Psalm 8:5 is using Elohim in that plural sense (the NET Bible says, “the heavenly beings). Adam and Eve knew that they were “lower” than God and the angels, which is why Satan could tempt them and say that if they ate of the fruit in the middle of the Garden of Eden they would be “like God” (Gen. 3:5).

**“and crowned him with glory.”** In Isaiah 48:11, God says, “I will not give my glory to another.” However, He will give humans their own glory.

Psa 8:9

**“our lord.”** The Hebrew for “lord” is a grammatical plural (also Psalm 8:1), Adonaynu, a title also used of David (1 Kings 1:43, 47).

**Psalms Chapter 9**

Psa 9:5

**“You have rebuked the nations.”** The psalmist is recounting the great acts of God, such as His destruction of the Egyptians and the enemies in Canaan, and so his prayers and requests for help and deliverance are not without basis. God has delivered in the past, He can do so now and in the future.

Psa 9:6

**“desolation.”** The Hebrew text, using the plural of emphasis, makes “desolation” a plural for emphasis (see commentary on Gen. 4:10).

Psa 9:7

**“But Yahweh will sit *as king* forever.”** In contrast to the enemy who has perished (Ps. 9:6), Yahweh will sit as king forever.

Psa 9:9

**“a high tower.”** In the ancient world, when arrows and sling stones were common offensive weapons, a strong high tower was almost unassailable. Today, guns have made them much less important for defense.

Psa 9:12

**“he who avenges blood.”** In this context, God is the avenger of blood. In Old Testament times there was no police force; it was up to families to protect themselves, and if someone killed a member of the family, one of the family members would kill the murderer. That family member was known as “the avenger of blood.” In this verse, God assures the weak and downtrodden that the injustices they have suffered at the hands of wicked people will be avenged. Similarly, Romans 12:19 tells the Christian not to take personal revenge, for God will avenge those who are treated unrighteously.

Psa 9:13

**“God who lifts me up from the gates of death.”** There is no escape from death except by being raised from the dead by God, and because of that, death is compared to a prison that has “gates” from which no one can escape without God’s help. These “gates” are referred to as the “gates of Sheol” (Job 17:16; Isa. 38:10) and “the gates of death” (Job 38:17; Ps. 9:13; 107:18). Jesus Christ referred to the gates in Matthew 16:18 where in many versions they are translated as “the gates of hell.”

Here the psalmist is using “gates of death” to refer to being close to death. When the psalmist thinks it might be the end for him, God rescues him from death.

[For more on the gates of death, see commentary on Matt. 16:18. For more on Sheol, see Word Study: “Hades.” For more on dead people being dead, lifeless in every way, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.”]

Psa 9:14

**“Daughter Zion.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic for Zion itself, i.e., Jerusalem (see commentary on Isa. 1:8). Although “Daughter Zion” occurs often in the prophets, this is its only use in Psalms.

Psa 9:15

**“in the pit that they made.”** It is a consistent theme throughout Scripture that evil people bring evil upon themselves (see commentary on Prov. 1:18). Although this applies to individuals, it also applies to a great extent to nations. Especially if the leaders of a nation act in such a way that wickedness thrives and godliness is stifled and subverted, demons gain access to the nation and through the influence of demons and evil people the nation is greatly harmed and in some cases totally ruined.

Psa 9:17

**“The wicked will return to Sheol.”** It is likely that the psalmist had in mind only that the wicked would return to Sheol (or be “turned back” to Sheol), in contrast to himself, who was lifted away from the gate of death. But the Hebrew text also presents an important eschatological truth, i.e., that the wicked do in fact “return” to Sheol. They live and die, going to Sheol, the state of death. But then in the Second Resurrection, they are judged unrighteous and thrown into the Lake of Fire and die there, returning to Sheol a second time (cf. Rev. 20:11-15).

[For more on the wicked dying in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

**Psalms Chapter 10**

Psa 10:2

**“They will be caught in the schemes that they devised.”** It is a consistent theme throughout Scripture that evil people bring evil upon themselves (see commentary on Prov. 1:18).

Psa 10:5

**“firm.”** In some contexts, the word “firm” can refer to being successful or prosperous, and some English translations go that way: “His ways prosper at all times” (RSV). The wicked and arrogant often succeed in this life, especially given the help of Satan, the god of this age (see commentary on Jer. 12:1). Wickedness may seem to give people an advantage in this life, but this life is short. The wicked will weep and wail on Judgment Day.

**Psalms Chapter 11**

Psa 11:6

**“the portion of their cup.”** This Hebrew idiom is based on the custom of someone being passed a cup to drink from at mealtime. Drinking at meals in biblical times was generally not done as it is today, when every person gets their own cup to drink from. Usually, there was just a common cup and it was passed around. Indeed, it was not until recent times that cups could be made cheaply enough for everyone to have one. In fact, the English word “cupboard,” which now refers to a kind of storage closet for dishes, was originally a “cup board,” a board or shelf close to the dining table upon which the cup with the common drink was set during the meal. Then, when someone wanted a drink, the cup was taken from the “cup board” and passed to them.

We see the common cup at a meal at the Last Supper, when Jesus took a cup of wine, drank from it, and passed it around. We also see this alluded to when Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane and said, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me.” Jesus was asking that he be allowed to not partake of the “cup” that God was passing to him.

Here in Psalm 11:6, the psalmist points out that when the Lord of the table passes the cup to the wicked, the portion of their cup will be blazing coals; fire, sulfur, and scorching wind. They will burn up in the Lake of Fire.

[For more on annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

Psa 11:7

**“The upright person will see his face.”** The “upright” person is a person who loves and obeys God; who keeps His commandments and follows His ways. The phrase that the upright person will see God’s face is somewhat idiomatic now, and reflects the fact that the upright person will “see” (understand) God and know His ways. However, the phrase is also eschatological and absolutely true. In the new heaven and earth of Revelation 21-22, God will personally be with people and “will live with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them, *and be* their God” (Rev. 21:3). God appears to some people now, but in the future, He will be visible to everyone.

[For more on God appearing now, see commentary on Gen. 18:1 and Acts 7:55.]

**Psalms Chapter 12**

Psa 12:5

**“Because of the devastation of the afflicted.”** The speaker suddenly shifts from the psalmist to Yahweh. A sudden shift in who is speaking occurs quite frequently in the Old Testament, and readers must be aware that this occurs so that they can best understand what the Bible is saying.

Psa 12:6

**“*like* silver refined in a clay furnace.”** Psalm 12:6 is quite similar in meaning to Proverbs 30:5 (see commentary on Prov. 30:5).

**Psalms Chapter 13**

**Psalms Chapter 14**

**Psalms Chapter 15**

Psa 15:2

**“He who walks blamelessly.”** Psalm 15:2-5 is one of the many sections of Scripture that gives some details about what it means to live righteously in the sight of God (cf. commentary on Mic. 6:8).

Psa 15:4

**“who looks upon a vile person with contempt.”** This is more literally, “in whose eyes a vile person is contemptible.” Most versions use the word “despised,” but in modern English “despise” means to intensely hate, and the godly person does not actively hate evil people but looks upon them with contempt, and rejects and avoids them.

**Psalms Chapter 16**

Psa 16:4

**“offer their drink offerings.”** That is, the godly person will not offer drink offerings to other gods.

Psa 16:7

**“kidneys.”** The Word of God points to the fact that our kidneys, bowels, and belly (or womb) are part of our mental/emotional life, not “just physical organs.” Our “gut,” including our intestines, bowels, kidneys, and stomach contain as many nerve cells as our brain, and studies are now showing that our “gut” contributes significantly to our emotional life and health. In the Hebrew text the word “kidney” is singular, but it is a collective singular for both kidneys. When the Bible mentions “heart” and “kidneys” it refers to the thought life (“heart”) and emotional life (“kidneys”).

[For more on the heart referring to the thought life, see commentary on Prov. 15:21. For more on kidneys referring to the emotional life, see commentary on Rev. 2:23, “kidneys.”]

Psa 16:10

**“see the pit.”** The word translated “pit” is *shachath* (#07845 שַׁחַת), and it means “pit,” which was used for the grave; being dead (e.g., Job 17:14; 33:18; Ps. 30:9; 103:4; Isa. 51:14; Ezek. 28:8; Jon. 2:6). The translation “corruption” is in some versions because the same Hebrew root word means “ruin.”

Allen Ross writes: “But if the noun is from the verb ‘to ruin,’ a meaning ‘destruction’ would be more likely, as in Job 33:18, 22, 30. The Greek text translated the word with *diaphthoran*, which means ‘destruction.’ The idea of the line is being abandoned to the grave where the body would be gradually destroyed, but the word in the text seems to be related to ‘to sink down,’ and not ‘to destroy.’”[[6]](#footnote-13473)

Although we can see with 20/20 hindsight that this verse could be applied to the Messiah, there is no ancient evidence that it was until the death and resurrection of Christ. For one thing, nothing in the context points to the Messiah; it is a psalm of David. There is no mention of the Messiah in the psalm. Furthermore, we can tell that the people at the time of Christ did not apply this psalm to the Messiah because they did not think he was going to die (cf. Matt. 16:21-22; Luke 18:31-34; 24:19-21, 44-46; John 12:34; 20:9). There are many Scriptures in the Old Testament that speak of the Christ coming, killing the wicked, and setting up his kingdom on earth as if they were going to happen at the same time, and that is what the vast majority of Jews at the time of Christ believed (cf. Isa. 9:6-7; 11:1-9; 61:1-3; Mic. 5:2; Zech. 9:9-10; Mal. 3:1-3; 4:1-3).

**Psalms Chapter 17**

Psa 17:3

**“You have visited *me* in the night.”** In this context, God “visits” by blessings and support.

[For more on God “visiting,” see commentary on Exod. 20:5.]

**Psalms Chapter 18**

Psa 18:10

**“He rode on a cherub and flew.”** This is most likely a way of expressing that God rode on His cherubim-powered chariot-throne, as He did when He came to talk to Ezekiel in Ezekiel chapter 1. It is not likely that God rode piggyback style on a cherub.

[For more on God’s cherubim-powered chariot-throne, see commentary on Ezek. 1:26. For a more complete understanding of cherubim, see commentaries on Ezek. 1:5 and 1:10.]

Psa 18:12

**“thick clouds passed by with hail and coals of fire.”** The wrath of God is often portrayed in Scripture as a powerful storm (e.g., Ps. 18:12-14; 77:17-18; 83:15; Isa. 28:17; 30:30; Jer. 23:19; 30:23; Ezek. 13:11; see commentary on Ezek. 13:11).

Psa 18:31

**“For who is God, except Yahweh?”** The Bible has many verses that say there is only one God, “Yahweh.”

[For more on Yahweh being the only God, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son,” point 11, and commentary on Deut. 6:4.]

Psa 18:36

**“feet.”** Literally “ankles.” But customarily the ankle was thought of as part of the foot.

Psa 18:42

**“threw them out.”** The Masoretic text reads “emptied them out” or “threw them out,” but there are other Hebrew manuscripts that read “stamped on them.”

**Psalms Chapter 19**

Psa 19:11

**“In keeping them there is great reward.”** The use of “reward” in the Old Testament usually refers to being rewarded or repaid in this life, but occasionally, such as here, it means that, but it also refers to the rewards one would receive in the next life. That people would be judged for the life they lived at a final judgment was well-known in Old Testament times (Eccl. 12:14), and people would be rewarded for the things they had done for God (see commentaries on 2 Cor. 5:10 and Eccl. 12:14).

**Psalms Chapter 20**

**Psalms Chapter 21**

Psa 21:8

**“Your hand will find all of your enemies.”** God’s hand (His authority and power) will “find” all His enemies, that is, “find” them in the sense of grabbing them and dealing with them. The use of “find” in the idiomatic sense of “find and take hold of” is why some versions say “seize” (cf. CSB, NIV, NLT).

**Psalms Chapter 22**

Psa 22:1

**“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** Jesus quoted Psalm 22:1 on the cross (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34).

This was a psalm of David, but much of it is only literally applicable to Jesus Christ. It was likely written, and is applicable to David, during the time he was running from Saul, and likely had been running and hiding for years and was a low point emotionally. The title it was known by, “The Doe of the Morning,” fit perfectly with David’s emotional state and fits even more perfectly with Christ. David perceives himself as a morning doe, beautiful and innocent, yet hunted and hounded by the hunter, Saul, who seeks his life. But Jesus was the true one who was beautiful and truly innocent who was hunted from his birth when Herod sent soldiers to kill him. The evil hunters finally got their way when the religious leaders lied about him and framed him, and even the Roman governor Pilate, who knew Jesus was innocent, thought of himself first, before the life of this innocent man, and agreed to have him crucified.

Since David wrote this psalm by revelation (2 Tim. 3:16), and since it is more literally applicable to Jesus than to David, it seems clear that God had this written to help prepare Jesus Christ for what he would have to endure to redeem humankind from sin and death.

Psa 22:3

**“But you are holy.”** This verse could almost seem strange to some, coming as it does after such deep cries of anguish. But the true believer recognizes that no matter what they are going through, God is holy and deserves praise. Even when we do not understand the “whats” and “whys” of life, the true believer does not blame God but cries out for help to Him.

Psa 22:5

**“disappointed.”** The Hebrew word relates to shame and could be translated as “ashamed” or “put to shame,” but in this context, that translation would give the wrong impression. “Disappointed” carries the meaning much better here.

Psa 22:6

**“But I am a worm and not a man.”** The humble heart is not vengeful or puffed up, but perceives itself as less than it really is and thoughtfully reflects on the circumstances and opinions of others. In this case, the circumstances of life are reflected by the psalmist, who sees himself as being thought of and treated like a worm and not a man.

The Hebrew word for “worm” also can mean scarlet or red (Exod. 25:4), and the particular worm in question was used in making red dye for clothing. The psalmist sees himself as being like a worm and not a man, but it also portrayed that before and at his crucifixion, Jesus Christ would be covered in blood, and that same imagery was likely behind the Red Heifer as well (Num. 19:2).

Psa 22:7

**“They insult me with their lips.”** This happened to Jesus (Matt. 27:39)

Psa 22:8

**“He trusts in Yahweh, *so* let him deliver him.”** The priests said this about Jesus (cf. Matt. 27:43).

Psa 22:9

**“You made me trust *even* at my mother’s breasts.”** The Hebrew can mean something like “you made me safe (secure) at my mother’s breasts,” but the normal meaning of the Hebrew is “trust,” and humans learn to trust early in life. Children develop a worldview very early in life, during their first couple of years. If they are loved and diligently cared for, fed when hungry, and held when scared or lonely, etc., they learn that the world is a safe, good place; if they are neglected as a baby they learn that the world is a hard unsafe place, and those deep inner feelings usually go with them throughout their life. That is a major reason that diligent mothering is so important.

Psa 22:11

**“For there is no one to help.”** In David’s case, no one could seem to change Saul’s mind and make David’s life safe. In Jesus’ case, the disciples had fled (Matt. 26:56).

Psa 22:12

**“Many bulls have surrounded me.”** Here the enemies of David and Jesus are described as bulls. The bull was a powerful and potentially dangerous animal and Bashan was an area in the Transjordan where the largest bulls in Israel were raised. The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh did not want to cross the Jordan and go into the Promised Land after they had conquered the Transjordan because that area was so good for cattle and livestock (Num. 32:1-5). The enemies of David and Jesus are referred to as “bulls” (Ps. 22:12); “lions” (Ps. 22:13, 21); “dogs” (Ps. 22:16); “wild oxen” (Ps. 22:21), and these enemies are all around (Ps. 22:12, 16). They could be in a position to help, but they do not help, they just harass and stare (Ps. 22:17).

Psa 22:15

**“And my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth.”** This certainly literally applied to Jesus. It is very likely that Jesus was so dehydrated that his tongue had swollen and he could not talk well. He had been arrested on Monday night and it was now Wednesday morning, and besides that, he would have bled a lot from the beatings and being whipped and being nailed to a cross. This was likely why when he said “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” (Matt. 27:46), that the people mistook him for calling for Elijah instead of God (Matt. 27:47). It is also why he said, “I am thirsty” (John 19:28).

[For more on the events of Jesus’ last week, including his arrest on Monday night through his crucifixion Wednesday morning, see commentary on John 18:13.]

**“you lay me in the dust of death.”** The verb “lay” is in the imperfect in the Hebrew text, indicating that the action was then occurring. The Psalmist was not yet dead, which we can tell because he is still speaking. We know that Christ did die, and was in the process of dying while he was on the cross. In contrast, David did not die, but would have felt he was in the process of dying because of being hounded and pursued by Saul. The Psalm could be taken to imply that the psalmist died, but that is not explicitly stated (see [NET text note](https://classic.net.bible.org/verse.php?book=Psa&chapter=22&verse=15&tab=commentaries)).[[7]](#footnote-16677) Thus, the Jews never got from Psalm 22 that the Messiah would die.

Psa 22:16

**“For dogs have surrounded me.”** In the biblical world, dogs were scavengers that traveled in packs and could be dangerous. It was one reason travelers usually had a walking staff with them (cf. 1 Sam. 17:43). David considered his enemies as dogs. The phrase is actually more applicable to Jesus than David because the Jewish enemies of Jesus could be considered like a pack of fierce dogs, but more than that, the Jews considered Gentiles “dogs,” and indeed, Jesus was surrounded by Gentile enemies as well as Jewish enemies.

**“They have pierced my hands and feet.”** The specificity and succinctness of this biblical prophecy can be seen in that Roman-style crucifixion had not been invented at the time that David lived, which was almost 1,000 BC. The sentence must be taken as metaphorical of David, that his hands that he worked with and his feet that he walked with were not effective against Saul, but because the Bible is “God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16), it is also possible that even David himself wondered at what these words that came to him from God and were poured out in the psalm really meant. Of course, we now know that these God-given words were a prophecy of the Christ, and Jesus certainly knew that, which was one reason he was certain his death would be by crucifixion (cf. John 8:28; 12:32-33. Also see commentary on Zech. 3:9).

The fact that Psalm 22:16 would point to the crucifixion of Christ was, and still continues to be, very disturbing to the Jews and other detractors who rejected the Lord and his death on the cross to pay for the sins of humankind. Thus, it is no surprise that Psalm 22:16 would be miscopied and be a lightning rod for debate on both textual and historical grounds. At some point, as attested by early manuscripts including the Septuagint, the Hebrew verb (which can mean “pierced”) was changed to the noun “lion.” That point, and the exact wording of the original text, is still debated today, but the ancient evidence is clear enough, and so is the fact that Psalm 22 is not only explanatory of the life of David but predictive of the last days of Jesus Christ.

Allen Ross writes that the reading of the common Masoretic Hebrew text, “like a lion my hands and my feet” does not make any sense. Ross writes, “All the ancient versions, and the early Jewish sources as well, have a verb instead of ‘like a lion.’ Some of the Masoretic manuscripts also have verbs…So on the one side (‘like a lion’) we have the standard Masoretic reading in the Hebrew Bible, but on the other side (a verb) we have two manuscripts in the Masoretic Hebrew tradition that do not go with the reading of ‘like a lion’…and the ancient Greek, Arabic, Syriac, and Latin versions have verb forms. They read something like ‘they pierced, they dug, they bored through.’ The later Greek revisions have different verbs, but still verbs nonetheless. …All the external evidence, the manuscripts and the versions, supports the presence of a verb in the verse, probably with the meaning ‘they pierced.’ The text, then, was changed to avoid the reading in favor of ‘like a lion.’”[[8]](#footnote-21786)

Derek Kidner agrees with the translation “they have pierced,” and writes: “they have pierced, or, simply, ‘piercing,’ is the most likely translation of a problematic Hebrew word. The strong argument in favor is that the LXX [the Septuagint], compiled two centuries before the crucifixion, and therefore an unbiased witness, understood it so. All the major translations reject the Masoretic vowels (added to the written text in the Christian era) as yielding little sense here (see margin of RV, RSV, NEB), and the majority in fact agree with the LXX. The chief alternatives (e.g., ‘bound’ or ‘hacked off’) solve no linguistic difficulties which ‘pierced’ does not solve, but avoid the apparent prediction of the cross by exchanging a common Hebrew verb (dig, bore, pierce) for hypothetical ones, attested only in Akkadian, Syriac, and Arabic, not in biblical Hebrew.”[[9]](#footnote-11204)

Franz Delitzsch, after a long and detailed examination of the verse, writes, “the fulfillment in the nailing of the hands and (at least, the binding fast) of the feet of the Crucified One to the cross is clear. This is not the only passage in which it is predicated that the future Christ shall be murderously pierced; but it is the same in Isaiah 53:5 where He is said to be pierced on account of our sins, and in Zech. 12:10….”[[10]](#footnote-22504)

Psa 22:17

**“They look, they stare at me.”** These enemies could be in a position to help, but they do not help, they just harass and stare. The word translated as “stare” can also mean “consider,” and so it is likely that the enemies are more than just “staring,” they are also gloating (cf. CJB, ESV, JPS, NAB, NET).

Psa 22:18

**“They divide my garments among them. They cast lots for my clothing.”** This happened to Jesus, and the Septuagint version of Psalm 22:18 is quoted in John 19:24 (cf. Matt. 27:35; Mark 15:24).

Psa 22:20

**“my only *life*.”** The Hebrew text reads, “Deliver my soul from the sword, my only one from the power of the dog.” Scholars correctly assert that “my only one” refers to the only life that David (and prophetically Jesus) had, so most English versions have “life” instead of “one” for clarity. However, the text makes a strong point. People only have one life, and if it is gone, the person comes to an end and is gone. That is why God must rescue people from the power of the grave. Jesus asked, “For what does it profit a person to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?” (Mark 8:36). Indeed, if a person dies, they have nothing at all.

Psa 22:21

**“you have answered me.”** The verb “answered” in the perfect tense shows the Psalmist’s confidence that God would answer and deliver him.

Psa 22:27

**“bow down.”** The word translated “bow down,” *shachah* (#07812 שָׁחָה), is the same Hebrew word as “worship.”

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

Psa 22:29

**“All those who go down to the dust.”** When people die they return to dust and await the resurrection from the dead. Note that it is the people themselves, not just the flesh body, who “go down to the dust.” Although many people believe a person’s “soul” goes on living after they die, that is not what the Bible teaches. As this verse states, no one can keep himself, literally, “his soul” alive. The soul dies when the body dies.

[For more information on dead people being dead in every way, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.” For more information on the soul, see Word Study: “Psuchē.”]

**Psalms Chapter 23**

**Psalms Chapter 24**

Psa 24:1

**“and all it contains.”** The Hebrew is very succinct, “and its fullness,” that is, “and everything that fills it,” or more clearly in English, “everything it contains” (cf. NASB, NET, NJB). The earth and everything in it ultimately belong to Yahweh. That we humans actually own anything is a hoax, a mirage. Ecclesiastes 5:15 and 1 Timothy 6:7 say that we did not bring anything into the world when we were born and we cannot take anything with us when we die. Everything we have on earth is borrowed from God. That is why wise believers obey God on earth and build rewards that will be given to them in the next life.

[For more on rewards in the future Kingdom of Christ on earth, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.”]

**Psalms Chapter 25**

Psa 25:1

**“lift up my soul.”** An idiom for earnestly praying.

**Psalms Chapter 26**

Psa 26:2

**“kidney.”** The Word of God points to the fact that our kidneys, bowels, and belly (or womb) are part of our mental/emotional life, not “just physical organs.” Our “gut,” including our intestines, bowels, kidneys, and stomach contain as many nerve cells as our brain, and studies are now showing that our “gut” contributes significantly to our emotional life and health.

[For more on the heart referring to the thought life, see commentary on Prov. 15:21. For more on kidneys referring to the emotional life, see commentary on Rev. 2:23, “kidneys.”]

**Psalms Chapter 27**

**Psalms Chapter 28**

Psa 28:2

**“when I lift up my hands toward your most holy place.”** It was customary among the Jews to pray toward Jerusalem (see commentary on 1 Kings 8:30).

**Psalms Chapter 29**

Psa 29:2

**“in holy attire.”** The Hebrew word translated “attire” is *hadarah* (#01927 הֲדָרָה), which *HALOT*[[11]](#footnote-26236) defines as “holy adornment,” while the Holladay[[12]](#footnote-32224) has “attire.” The NET version has “holy attire,” and the NET text note reads, “That is, properly dressed for the occasion.” This is a reference to the public worship of God in attire that is befitting who He is. We are to worship God all the time, and this verse is certainly not saying that we should live day and night in clothes fit for public worship. However, when we engage in public worship, we should dress in a way that honors God.

The phrase translated “holy attire” appears five times in the Hebrew Old Testament, and four of those times are very similar (1 Chron. 16:29; 2 Chron. 20:21; Ps. 29:2 and Ps. 96:9). The use in 2 Chronicles 20:21 seems to clearly set the meaning, so much so that the ESV, which went with a translation influenced by the Ugaritic language here in Psalm 29:2, used “holy attire” in 2 Chronicles. But there does not seem to be any good reason that the meaning of the Hebrew phrase would change in the four verses that are so similar. There seems to be no good reason that “holy attire” would not be the meaning of the phrase in the four similar verses if it was the meaning in 2 Chronicles 20:21.

It also fits with the scope of Scripture that the Bible would speak of being appropriately dressed when worshiping God. Appropriate dress is certainly mentioned in other places in the Bible, such as Ezekiel 44:18 and 1 Timothy 2:9. We must be careful, however, not to read our modern way of life back into this verse and expect people to have a set of special clothing for public worship. In biblical times it was common that a person would only have one cloak (see commentary on Exod. 22:27). In that case, appropriate dress would be making sure that the garment you were wearing was presentable in public; for example, that it was not covered in mud or had animal blood on it from an animal that you had just killed and dressed out. In that light, it is noteworthy that the garments of the holy people coming with Christ to the Battle of Armageddon are white and “clean” (Rev. 19:14).

Due to evidence from the Ugaritic language, some modern versions read something like worship Yahweh “in the splendor of holiness” (ESV). But although that translation has the possibility of being correct (or could be a meaning that is an undertone), it does not seem to catch the meaning of the verse as well as “holy attire.” For one thing, Yahweh always has splendor and holiness, and also, Psalm 29:1-2 says to “ascribe” to Yahweh glory, the glory due his name. One way we could ascribe to Yahweh the glory due Him would be that when we enter holy places we show our respect to Him by dressing appropriately. A number of translations support the translation “holy attire” (cf. BBE, NASB, NET, Rotherham, Moffatt Bible).

It is also worth noting that our modern culture promotes a “love me like I am” attitude, no matter what the “I am” is. Thus, in many “seeker-friendly” churches today, people come to church dressed in every sort of garb without any thought to the fact that we serve a holy God who we are supposed to please by our words and actions. While that may help people come to Christ, it should not be the norm for mature Christians. Yes, our worship benefits us, but the whole point is that we worship God because HE deserves it; so does He not also deserve that the way we appear before Him and appear in public worship is important? In the Old Testament, the person who approached God had to bring an offering; the fact that “they came at all,” a common modern sentiment, was not good enough. There is grace today, and people can come to public worship dressed any way they wish, but should they? The evidence of the text is “No.” There is a value to wearing “holy attire” even if that only means you thought about it and it is “clean.”

Psa 29:3

**“Yahweh’s voice is on the waters.”** The “waters” are the waters of chaos, and God has victory over them (see commentary on Isa. 51:9).

Psa 29:6

**“Sirion.”** This is another name for Mount Hermon.

**Psalms Chapter 30**

Psa 30:9

**“blood.”** In this context, “blood” is put by metonymy for death, the word “blood” usually referring to a violent death of some sort instead of dying from disease. A number of English versions make the shift and have “in my death” or a similar phrase rather than the literal “in my blood” (e.g., CJB, CSB, ESV, JPS, NJB, NLT, NRSV, RSV).

**Psalms Chapter 31**

Psa 31:6

**“worthless idols.”** The literal text is more like “worthless vanities” or “lying vanities,” but the word “vanities” in this context refers to idols. Douglas Stuart translates the phrase “empty nothings.”[[13]](#footnote-31449)

Psa 31:10

**“because of my iniquity.”** Like everyone, David had sin, and he may have felt that some of what he was suffering was due to that sin. However, it is possible that the Septuagint, the Syriac, and the Samaritan Pentateuch read “affliction,” which could have been the original reading.

Psa 31:18

**“arrogantly.”** The Hebrew has “arrogance,” a noun form.

**Psalms Chapter 32**

**Psalms Chapter 33**

**Psalms Chapter 34**

Psa 34:1

The superscript, or heading, for this Psalm is:

*Of David;  
when he altered his senses before Abimelech,  
who drove him away, and he departed.*

Concerning the mention of Abimelech, according to 1 Samuel 21:10-15, David pretended to be insane before the Philistine king, “Achish,” king of Gath, not Abimelech. The apparent contradiction can be cleared up by understanding that the name “Abimelech” means “My father is king,” and it was apparently a dynastic title for kings of that line. That explains why “Abimelech” dealt with Abraham (Gen. 20:2) and with Isaac (Gen. 26:1). The title was still being used in the area even during David’s time.

Psa 34:8

**“the person.”** The Hebrew word refers to a strong man, and is masculine singular. The NAB tries to get the nuance by its translation “stalwart man” (cf. Psa. 40:4; 94:12; 127:5).

Psa 34:12

**“Who is the person who desires life….”** Psalm 34:12-16 is roughly quoted in 1 Peter 3:10-12.

**“Who is the person who desires life, loving *many* days to see good?”** In this context, “life” refers to everlasting life. The person who desires everlasting life also is “loving” (wanting, desiring) many days to “see good,” i.e., experience good. The verse definitely implies that everlasting life will be a “good” life, but beyond that, “seeing good” may well imply having rewards that make that future life a true joy. When Christ returns, conquers the earth, and sets up his kingdom on earth, there will be different rewards passed out to people. People who have made a diligent effort to obey God will get great rewards, while people who have made no effort to be godly or obey God may end up with no rewards (cf. 1 Cor. 3:14-15. See commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10). The idea of rewards is more clearly present in Peter than it is here in the Psalms.

**“loving *many* days.”** The word “many” is implied by the plural “days.”

Psa 34:15

**“Yahweh’s eyes are toward the righteous. Yes, his ears *listen* to their cry for help.”** Psalm 34:15-16 is quoted in the New Testament (1 Pet. 3:12)

Psa 34:16

**“Yahweh’s face is against those who do evil.”** Psalm 34:15-16 is quoted in the New Testament (1 Pet. 3:12)

**Psalms Chapter 35**

Psa 35:8

**“let his own net that he has hidden capture him.”** It is a consistent theme throughout Scripture that evil people bring evil upon themselves (see commentary on Prov. 1:18). Here the afflicted and imperiled psalmist prays that what God so often said about the wicked being caught in their own wickedness will happen to his enemy.

**Psalms Chapter 36**

Psa 36:1

**“There is no fear of God before his eyes.”** This verse is quoted in Romans 3:18. Different English versions divide the beginning verses of Psalm 36 differently. In some versions, this sentence is in Psalm 36:1 (ASV, ESV, KJV), while in other versions it is in Psalm 36:2 (CJB, JPS, NAB).

**Psalms Chapter 37**

Psa 37:6

**“your vindication.”** The text is speaking about the justice or vindication that the godly person will receive.

Psa 37:7

**“Do not be agitated because of the person who makes his road prosper,”** The clear implication in the text is that the person who “makes his road prosper” does so by immoral and illegal ways—the person who is carrying out evil plans.

Psa 37:11

**“But the humble will inherit the land.”** Jesus Christ basically quoted this verse when he taught, “the meek will inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5).

Psa 37:29

**“the land.”** In this context, “the land” likely refers to the land God promised Abraham and Israel. However, the Hebrew word *ʾeretz* (#0776 אֶרֶץ) can mean “land,” “territory,” “region,” or “earth.” Since we know that the Messiah’s kingdom will cover the whole earth, the meaning of the verse can be expanded to refer to the earth. Thus, the sentence can have the expanded meaning of “The righteous will inherit the earth and live on it forever.” This is what Jesus taught (Matt. 5:5). In Jesus’ teaching, the “humble” are those who are humble enough to obey God and thus are righteous in His sight.

Psa 37:31

**“law.”** The Hebrew word is “Torah.” In this case, the “Torah” refers to the law and instructions given by God.

[For more on the meaning of “law,” *Torah*, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

Psa 37:33

**“Yahweh will not leave the righteous in his hand.”** The Hebrew text is more literally, “Yahweh will not leave him in his hand,” but “him” has been replaced by “the righteous” from the context for clarity in English. Other English versions have seen the advantage of doing that as well (cf. CEB and NET; and other versions have cleared up the ambiguity in other ways).

**Psalms Chapter 38**

**Psalms Chapter 39**

Psa 39:2

**“I was mute and quiet.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “I was mute with silence,” but we would not speak that way, we would say “I was mute and silent.”

**“I kept silent, even from good.”** The majority of scholars think that this is the proper meaning of the text, but the text could also be understood as the NET does, that it was out of the goodness of the psalmist that he did not speak. “I held back the urge to speak” (NET).

**“but my pain was stirred up.”** The Psalmist’s pain grew worse even though he was silent.

Psa 39:5

**“*a few* handbreadths.”** The NET text comment is accurate: “The ‘handbreadth’ (equivalent to the width of four fingers) was one of the smallest measures used by ancient Israelites.” The psalmist is speaking about how short life is.

**Psalms Chapter 40**

Psa 40:6

**“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire.”** Sacrifices and offerings do not buy God’s acceptance. No one can be evil and unrepentant and then do an offering and be accepted. In fact, the offerings and even the prayers of the wicked are not accepted by God. Humility and obedience always come first and are what God is looking for.

[For more on God being more concerned with love and obedience than sacrifices, see commentary on Matt. 5:24. For more on God not speaking much about sacrifices when Israel came out of Egypt, see commentary on Jer. 7:22.]

**Psalms Chapter 41**

Psa 41:1

**“considers the weak.”** The Hebrew word translated “weak” can also be understood as meaning, “poor, helpless, wretched,” etc. Also, the word “considers” is used in the wider sense of considering and then acting, so some translations have “takes care of” the weak.

Psa 41:3

**“you restore.”** In this stanza, the psalmist suddenly changes from addressing God in the third person (“Yahweh will keep watch…He will bless…Yahweh will support”) to addressing God in the second person, “you restore….” This is unusual in English, but quite common in the poetic sections of the Bible. In this stanza the psalmist expresses his confidence in God, and that He will restore the sick. It is good to have that kind of confidence in God even though there are times when the sick are not healed in this life. But every saved person will be totally healed in the resurrection, so future healing is always assured.

Psa 41:9

**“Even my close friend.”** This “close friend” is not identified in the Psalm. A number of commentators think that this refers to David’s close friend Ahithophel, but that cannot be substantiated. The fact is that being betrayed by a close friend is such a common occurrence that it is more of a universal truth than a specific event, even though David may have had a specific friend in mind. David was betrayed by a close friend, and Psalm 41:9 not only applied to David, but to the Greater David, the Lord Jesus Christ, who quoted it at the Last Supper (John 13:18), and in that context, it referred to Judas Iscariot.

**“has lifted up his heel against me.”** The phrase “lifted up his heel” is an idiom for turning against someone and betraying them. Jesus referred to this psalm at the Last Supper in reference to Judas Iscariot (John 13:18).

**Psalms Chapter 42**

Psa 42:3

**“the people.”** The Hebrew is literally “they,” but it refers to the people around.

**Psalms Chapter 43**

**Psalms Chapter 44**

Psa 44:25

**“For our soul is bowed down to the dust.”** A state of humiliation, degradation, and poverty (cf. Isa. 52:2).

**“Our body clings to the earth.”** Defeat, frustration, and humiliation have often been expressed by idioms having to do with being on the ground. God told the Devil he would “crawl on his belly,” (Gen. 3:14), and true to the curse, the Devil has been defeated and humiliated ever since.

**Psalms Chapter 45**

Psa 45:2

**“the most beautiful.”** Although the Hebrew can refer to outward beauty, that is not the meaning here. In this case, “beauty” refers to the whole being in every way: his imposing figure and presence, and the beauty of his life. He is blessed by God and has grace on his lips.

Psa 45:5

**“*piercing* the heart of the king’s enemies.”** When the Messiah, Jesus Christ, comes back to earth and conquers it, he will kill the wicked people on earth as Psalm 45:5 says. That is one of the reasons that the next life will be so wonderful—no wicked people will be there.

[For more on the wicked being killed by Christ, see commentary on Isa. 11:4. For more on the death penalty, see commentary on Exod. 21:12. For more on evil people’s eventual annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 3: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

Psa 45:6

**“Your throne is God forever and ever.”** This verse is quoted in Hebrews 1:8. Another similar and strong possibility for the translation is “Your throne is from God,” or “Your throne is *a throne of* God.”[[14]](#footnote-20329)

“Your throne is God forever” means that God is the authority, the “throne” of the king, and the king reigns with the authority of God. This king, and by extension the Messiah, the true king of Israel, has been graced and blessed by God (Ps. 45:2). In that light, it is appropriate that this king recognizes that God is the source of his kingly authority, which is the point of Psalm 45:9. Psalm 45 is a royal wedding psalm for a Davidic king, perhaps even Solomon, and by extension, some of it applies to the Messiah. He is called “the king” and “Solomon” in this commentary entry for ease of understanding, but another Davidic king may be in mind (see commentary on Ps. 45:9, “the queen”).

The Hebrew text of Psalm 45:6 is open to a number of different interpretations and translations. Allen Ross writes: “…there are at least five plausible interpretations.”[[15]](#footnote-22599) Given the possible translations, we may never be able to say, “This is the single correct interpretation,” but we can give evidence for what seems to be the most viable translation and interpretation.

To understand Psalm 45:6, we must first learn some facts about it. For example, the speaker is the psalmist, not God. The psalmist speaks about God in the third person, for example, “God has blessed you forever” (Ps. 45:2), and “God has anointed you” (Ps. 45:7). Some people think God is the speaker, but the text argues against that. Also, the psalm is a “dual prophecy” psalm. The subject of the psalm is the king of Israel, both the Davidic king who reigns on David’s throne (likely Solomon), who marries and has children (see commentary on Ps. 45:9), and also the Messiah, the “greater David” who will eventually inherit the throne forever. Thus, some verses in the psalm more clearly point to the Messiah while others more clearly point to the Davidic king, such as the ones about him having a queen, being married, and having sons.

Scriptures that have dual fulfillments occur in a number of places in the Bible. For example, God’s promise to David about his throne applies most immediately to Solomon but also applies to the Messiah (2 Sam. 7:11-14). Isaiah gave a prophecy that was fulfilled in the time of Ahaz but also applied to the Messiah (Isa. 7:14). Hosea 11:1 applied both to Israel and Jesus.

Trinitarians generally claim that Psalm 45:6 (and Heb. 1:8 where it is quoted) is one of the stronger verses in the Bible showing that Jesus is God, but the evidence does not support their claim. However, since many English versions translate the verse in a way that supports Trinitarian doctrine, it is fitting to address that idea first. It is worth pointing out that Psalm 45 was God’s revelation to the Jews to inform them about their king, and the Jews read the Psalm for centuries and knew it was ultimately about their Messiah, but never concluded that the Messiah was “God in the flesh” or part of a Triune God. That the Jews knew that Psalm 45 ultimately referred to their Messiah is preserved in their writing. For example, the Targum (an Aramaic commentary on the Old Testament) interprets Psalm 45:2 as, “Thy beauty, O king Messiah, is greater than that of the sons of men.”[[16]](#footnote-24915) So if God gave the revelation to His people to tell them the Messiah would be God, His effort was an epic failure, and that is good evidence that the psalm is not saying the Messiah was God in the flesh.

Most Trinitarians say that God is the speaker in Psalm 45:6, and the verse should be translated as, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.” In doing that they assert that God (assumed to be the Father) is addressing the Messiah and referring to him as “God” (assumed to be “God the Son”). But that interpretation does not fit the theology of the Old Testament or the Bible as a whole, and it does not fit the internal evidence in the psalm itself.

As we saw above, the speaker of the psalm is not God, but the psalmist. So this verse is not “God the Father” speaking to “God the Son.” Also, the Old Testament says in many places the Messiah would be a man, the servant of God (cf. the “servant songs” in Isaiah), and there are a number of statements in Psalm 45 that show that the king in the psalm is not God, but is a human being. For example, Psalm 45:2 says, “You are the most beautiful of the sons of men,” thus identifying him as a human by using the common idiom for a human, “son of man,” and then going on to say, “God has blessed you forever.” In saying that this “son of man” (human being) has been blessed by God, the psalm gives even more evidence that the king being referred to is not God. There is no evidence in Scripture for God being blessed by God, and there does not seem to be a reason or need for that, but humans do need to be blessed by God and are often so blessed in Scripture.

Furthermore, since Psalm 45 contains dual prophecies (as we saw above), and Psalm 45:6-7 apply both to Solomon and the Messiah, if the verse is calling the king “God,” then that would make both Solomon and the Messiah God, which is untenable, and there is no internal reason to apply Psalm 45:6 to the Messiah without verse 7 applying to the same king. That would be eisegesis, reading into the verse to make it fit one’s theology. If the psalm is calling the Messiah “God,” then the Davidic king is also God. Robert Alter translates Psalm 45:7 as “Your throne of God is forevermore,” and he writes in the commentary, “Some construe the Hebrew here to mean, ‘Your throne, O God,” but it would be anomalous to have an address to God in the middle of the poem because the entire psalm is directed the king or to his bride.”[[17]](#footnote-27053)

More evidence that the psalm is speaking of a human king is in Psalm 45:7, which says, “You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of exultation above your peers.” That the text calls God, “your God,” i.e., the king’s God, shows that the king is inferior to God. “God” does not have a God.

Furthermore, the king’s God “anointed” him, setting him above his “peers.” This is evidence against a Trinitarian interpretation of the verse for a number of reasons. One is that “God” does not have any peers to be set above, whereas the human king of Israel, including the Messiah, does have peers. The Messiah, Jesus Christ, did have peers because he was completely human and not a God-man as Trinitarian theology asserts. Also, Psalm 45:7 says this king loved righteousness and hated wickedness, and “therefore” God anointed him. This makes perfect sense if the king is human, but if this king is “God,” was he really anointed because he loved righteousness? It makes no sense that “God” needed to be anointed at all (and if the Second Person of the Trinity needed to be anointed, would not all three Persons need to be anointed?) and neither does it make sense that God was anointed because he “loved righteousness.” Since by definition God is righteous and loves righteousness, it makes no sense to say God was anointed because He loved righteousness. In summary, Psalm 45 is not God speaking to God. It is the psalmist speaking, and the subject is a human king.

Although Biblical Unitarians do not accept the Trinitarian translation or explanation of Psalm 45, many Biblical Unitarians accept a translation of Psalm 45:6 that is very similar to the common Trinitarian translation. However, they recognize that “Elohim” (“God” or “god”) can refer to a human being, and in this case, they apply it to a human king and human Messiah. A common Biblical Unitarian translation is: “Your throne, O god, is forever and ever.”

Biblical Unitarians acknowledge that the speaker is not God, but many assert that in the psalm the Messiah is being addressed as “god.” While the translation, “Your throne, O god, is forever and ever” is certainly grammatically viable, nevertheless, there is evidence that it is not the way the author meant the text to be understood. It is, however, legitimate to refer to the Messiah as a “god” when it is understood that other human representatives of God are also called “god” in the Bible. A strong argument against the translation “Your throne, O god, is forever and ever,” is the fact that although divine beings and even human representatives were sometimes referred to as gods, at no time in the Old Testament (and arguably the NT as well, see commentary on John 20:28) is any given being actually directly addressed as “god.” In that sense, then, Psalm 45:6 would be unique and seemingly unlikely.

The English language makes a clear distinction between “God” and “god” by the use of uppercase and lowercase letters (using the capital “G” and the small “g”). However, Hebrew and Aramaic cannot make the distinction between “God” and “god” because they only have capital letters, no lowercase letters. Thus, in Hebrew and Aramaic, every word is spelled in all capital letters, for example, “GOD.” Furthermore, although the Greek language has both uppercase and lowercase letters, the early Greek manuscripts were all written in uppercase letters, so all the ancient Greek manuscripts read “GOD” just as the Hebrew and Aramaic manuscripts did.

Also, the biblical languages, including Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Latin, used the word “GOD” with a much broader meaning than we do today. In the ancient world, “GOD” was a descriptive title applied to a range of authorities, including God, angels, demons, pagan gods, great people, rulers, and people acting with God’s authority—all of those were referred to as “GOD.” For example, Jesus pointed out that people to whom the Word of God came were called “gods” (John 10:34-35, cf. 2 Cor. 4:4; Acts 12:22).

The flexible use of “GOD” in the ancient texts meant that every time GOD appeared in the text, the reader had to read the context very carefully to determine what it meant. Biblical Unitarians understand that the king being addressed in Psalm 45 is a human king for the reasons cited above, and so many of them opt for the translation, “Your throne, O god.”

There is, however, good evidence that the correct translation of Psalm 45:6 is represented by versions such as the REV: “God is your throne forever and ever.” As Allen Ross points out in his commentary,[[18]](#footnote-10650) this is an acceptable translation of the Hebrew, and there are some solid reasons to believe that it is the interpretation that was in the mind of the author.

There is a very good reason for believing that the correct translation of Psalm 45:6 is “God is your throne,” or some other translation (some are given below) that takes “God” as referring to the Most High God and not a human “god.” If Psalm 45:6 is translated, “Your throne, O god…,” then Psalm 45:6 would be the only verse in the whole Bible in which a human being is directly and personally addressed as “god.” There are times when humans are referred to as God, as Jesus said (John 10:33-34), but nowhere else in the Bible is a human being personally addressed as “god,” and then asked or told something. Added to that evidence is the fact that “Elohim” occurs four times in the psalm (Ps. 45:2, 6, and 45:7 (twice)), and three of them clearly refer to God, so it fits the psalm that the fourth use does too. Another reason for thinking that Psalm 45 would not be calling the king “god,” is that in pagan cultures the kings were often thought of as a god, a manifestation of god, or in some way divine. But the Bible made it clear that the kings of Israel were human and were not to be seen as somehow divine but were subject to the laws of God as everyone else was (cf. Deut. 17:14-20). That is not to say that human leaders were not referred to as “Elohim,” because they were, but there is no biblical evidence they were ever directly addressed that way.

The main argument against the translation “Your throne is God,” is that the phrase does not make sense to some people. But we must understand that the verse is not using “throne” as a seat, a chair, but as it is often used in the Bible, as a source of authority. In fact, if “throne” is understood to be a chair then the verse does not make sense: the “throne” is the source of authority. In essence, the verse is saying, “your source of authority is God.”

The word “throne” is often used to mean the authority of the throne and not the physical throne itself. For example, God told David via the prophet Nathan: “Your throne will be established forever” (2 Sam. 7:16) and concerning David’s son, starting with Solomon, “I [God] will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (2 Sam. 7:13). In that kind of communication, the “throne” does not mean the physical seat, but the authority to rule. The wording is important. We might think the prophet Nathan should have said, “I [God] will establish David’s kingdom,” but the text is, “I will establish the throne of his kingdom,” with the throne standing for the kingly authority. Even when David was fleeing from Absalom and had left Jerusalem and his physical throne behind, his “throne,” his authority as king, was still intact.

When David chose Solomon to be king, one of David’s top men, Benaiah said to David, “…may he [Yahweh] be with Solomon and make his throne greater than the throne of my lord king David” (1 Kings 1:37). In speaking of Solomon’s “throne” being greater than David’s, Benaiah was saying that Solomon would have more authority and dominion than David did, which came to pass. When the text says that “Solomon sat on the throne of Yahweh as king” (1 Chron. 29:23; cf. 2 Chron. 9:8), it is not talking about Solomon sitting on a physical seat, but was an idiomatic way of saying that Yahweh was the true authority in the kingdom, and Solomon was exercising authority as God’s representative. Pharaoh also used the word “throne” to represent his kingly authority. When he elevated Joseph to second in command in the kingdom, he said to Joseph, “according to your word will all my people be ruled; only in the throne will I be greater than you,” meaning, “only in my authority as king will I be greater than you.”

The use of “throne” referring to the authority that the throne represents also occurs in the New Testament. When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, he told her she would give birth to the Messiah and he said, “the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David” (Luke 1:32). In saying that Mary’s son would have the “throne” of David, he meant the authority that the throne represented. That authority went all the way back to God’s promise to David that his “throne” would endure forever, which is why Gabriel then said, “...he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:33). Also, in Colossians 1:16, the word “thrones” is not literally used, but is used of spiritual beings who had some amount of kingly authority. So given the way “throne” is used in the Bible, it is easy to see that “God is your throne” is a way of saying “God is your kingly authority” or even, “God is the source of your authority as king.”

A number of translators were uncomfortable with a vocative translation, “Your throne, O god...,” and handle the text in ways that do not involve a vocative. Thus, the CEB reads, “Your divine throne is eternal” (cf. RSV, TNK). The JPS translation reads, “Thy throne given of God is for ever.” The NJB reads, “Your throne is from God.” The NEB reads, “Your throne is like God’s throne.” The text note in the NRSV reads, “Your throne is a throne of God.” Robert Alter’s translation is, “Your throne of God is forevermore,”[[19]](#footnote-18285) and Peter Craigie’s translation is, “The eternal and everlasting God has enthroned you.”[[20]](#footnote-30588)

Although some of the translations above expand the Hebrew phrase for ease of English reading, the simple Hebrew text, which has two nouns in construct with an implied “is” between them, is a fairly common Hebrew construction. For example, Psalm 73:26 has ,וְחֶלְקִ֗י אֱלֹהִ֥ים which is quite literally, “my portion Elohim,” which we put in English as “my portion is Elohim.” In Psalm 45:6, the text reads, כִּסְאֲךָ֣ אֱ֭לֹהִים, literally, “your throne God,” which is brought into English as “your throne is God,” which makes perfect sense when we realize that the “throne” is a reference to kingly authority. The Bible calls God a number of different things to import specific information about Him into the text, such as calling God “my high ridge…fortress…rock…shield…horn of salvation” and “high tower” (Ps. 18:2). So in the context of all the things that represent God such as “rock” and “high tower,” speaking to the king and referring to God as “your throne” (your source of kingly authority) is very understandable.

Psalm 45 calls the king “beautiful,” “blessed,” and “mighty one,” and speaks of his splendor and majesty and of him being a mighty warrior, so it is appropriate that this mighty king would be reminded that “God,” his God, the Most High God, was the power behind his throne. Thus, the psalmist, speaking to the king and ultimately to the Messiah, says, “Your throne [your kingly authority] is Elohim forever and ever.”

[For more information on the flexible use of the words translated “God,” such as *Elohim* and *Theos*, see commentary on John 20:28. For more information on Jesus not being God, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

Psa 45:7

**“Therefore God, your God, has anointed you.”** In English Bibles, an “anointed one” is a translation of the Hebrew word *mashiyach* (#04899 מָשִׁיחַ), which gets transliterated into English as “Messiah,” and also *mashiyach* gets translated into Greek as *christos* (#5547 Χριστός) which comes into English as “Christ.” The term “anointed one” is used of many different people, and so throughout the Bible, many people were “anointed ones” (thus messiahs or christs). For example, Leviticus 4:5 mentions the priest that is “anointed,” which is *mashiyach* (Messiah) in the Hebrew text and *christos* (christ) in the Septuagint. So the priest was a “messiah” or “christ” (cf. Lev. 4:16; 6:22). In 1 Samuel 2:10, the king is called a messiah or christ (1 Sam. 12:3, 5). In 1 Samuel 16:6, when Samuel saw Jesse’s son Eliab, he thought he was the messiah, the christ (not “the Messiah,” the savior, but the messiah the next king). In 1 Samuel 24:6 (and other verses as well), David refers to King Saul as God’s messiah or christ (God’s anointed one). In 2 Samuel 19:21, Abishai called David the messiah, or christ. The Bible even says the pagan Persian king Cyrus is a messiah, a christ, because he did God’s work (Isa. 45:1).

No one thought that these different messiahs were THE Messiah or Christ that God promised who would bring salvation to the world. The people who lived in the biblical culture and spoke the biblical languages understood that God anointed many different people for many different tasks. That is why when the angels appeared to the shepherds at Jesus’ birth, they made themselves clear by saying this baby was the “Savior,” “Christ” and “Lord,” not just a “christ.”

The average Christian does not know that priests, kings, and people commissioned to do God’s work were called “Messiah” or “Christ” because when *mashiyach* (messiah) appears in the Hebrew text (and *christos* in the Septuagint) in reference to kings and priests, those words are not transliterated as “messiah” or “christ,” but are instead typically translated as “anointed” or “anointed one.” For example, David, speaking of himself, prayed to God, “do not turn away the face of your anointed” (2 Chron. 6:42; cf. 2 Sam. 22:51; 23:1). The word “anointed” is *mashiyach*, “messiah,” and David used it of himself. That *mashiyach* gets translated as “anointed” and not transliterated as “messiah” means that the average Christian never sees that there are many messiahs, or christs, in the Bible. However, once we know that there were many “messiahs” in the Bible, we are in a better position to understand why Psalm 45:7 could say the king was anointed by God without making him “the” Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Psa 45:9

**“daughters of kings.”** The Davidic king had many women in his court. Traditional Christianity sees this as referring to Christian women being with Christ, but that is only assumed because the Psalm is traditionally believed to be only about Jesus, who did not have women and was not married.

**“the queen.”** The Davidic king would have a queen, and the couple will have sons (Ps. 45:16). Tradition says the queen is the Church, but the ancients would not have read the psalm that way, and the Church is nowhere else referred to as a queen. But when the meaning of the psalm is misapplied and is said to only be about Christ, then interpretations are invented to make what the psalm says fit theology. If the queen is the Church, then there are serious problems with Psalm 45:10, which directs her to forget her “own people” (which would be fellow Christians) and her “father’s house” (which would be the house of God).

The chronology of the psalm can be confusing at first but is understandable. Here in Psalm 45:9 the royal couple are already married, and then Psalm 45:10-14 gives details of some of what happened before the marriage. This kind of “conclusion, then details” happens all the time in life. For example, if there is a car wreck the driver of a car might say, “I was in a wreck but nobody was hurt. I was driving down the road when…,” and thus the driver starts with the finished event and then fills in details of how things happened.

The queen is said to be a woman of foreign descent, possibly from Tyre (Ps. 45:12) who was told to forget her own people and father’s house (Ps. 45:10), and she and her husband have an ivory house (Ps. 45:8). Those facts have led some commentators to suggest that this psalm is referring to the marriage of the Phoenician princess Jezebel to King Ahab, who had an ivory palace (1 Kings 22:39). But that is untenable since Ahab does not fit the characteristics of a godly king that are so prominent in the psalm. Solomon, who also married foreign women and lived in luxury, is a much more likely candidate.

Psa 45:11

**“bow down.”** The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body to the earth.

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

Psa 45:13

**“within *her chambers*.”** The Hebrew text just says “within,” which is unclear to the modern reader but perfectly understood by the ancients. In biblical society, a woman’s world and sphere of authority was “within” the house and within her female quarters. Although in many circumstances women did come out and interact with family, usually not with men outside the family circle. Notice that when Yahweh visited Abraham, Sarah listened from inside the tent (Gen. 18:9). Although there were women who did interact with men outside the family unit, that was not the norm, and was usually, like in the case of Ruth, done of necessity.

**Psalms Chapter 46**

**Psalms Chapter 47**

Psa 47:5

**“shofar.”** The ram’s horn trumpet, not the metal trumpet.

**Psalms Chapter 48**

Psa 48:1

**“His holy mountain.”** This phrase at the end of Psalm 48:1 fits best as the start of Psalm 48:2. The sentence would then read, “His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of the whole earth.” There are several English versions that divide Psalm 48:1 in a way that directly connects Psalm 48:1 with Psalm 48:2 (e.g., CEB, CSB, ESV, JPS, NAB, NJB, NRSV, RSV).

God has a holy mountain in heaven (Ezek. 28:14) and several mountains on earth that are known to be holy to Him. Mount Zaphon, mentioned in Psalm 48:2 seems to be one, Mount Zion is another (Ps. 48:1-2; Dan. 9:16, 20) and Mount Sinai is another (Exod. 3:1; 18:5; 24:13).

Psa 48:2

**“is the joy of the whole earth.”** Mount Zion is the joy of the whole earth because that is where God’s Temple is and where God dwells. God could have chosen any place on earth to put His Temple, but He had it built on Mount Zion.

**“the heights of *Mount* Zaphon.”** The modern name of Mount Zaphon is Jebel Aqra. “Mount Zaphon” is an imposing mountain located near the mouth of the Orantes River on the Mediterranean Sea. Mount Zaphon is over 5, 600 feet tall, and has a long history of being a sacred mountain, It was widely believed that the gods, including and especially the storm god Baal, ruled from Mount Zaphon. This adds support to “El Shaddai” meaning “God, the One of the Mountain” (see commentary on Gen. 17:1). Calling Mount Zion “Zaphon” would give credence to the spiritual world being ruled by “the One on the Mountain,” i.e., Yahweh.

Here in Psalm 48:2, Mount Zion is equated with Mount Zaphon, which is a comparison and even likely an antonomasia (“name change”). The figure of speech antonomasia is generally used when the attributes of one person or place are assigned to a different person or place by changing the name of that different person or place. Thus, for example, when Judah was sinning, especially sexual sin, God called it “Sodom” (e.g., Isa. 1:10). By calling Judah “Sodom,” God implied that Judah was behaving just like the people of Sodom had behaved. Because many people believed gods ruled from Mount Zaphon, here in Psalm 48:2, God refers to Mount Zion as Mount “Zaphon,” thus implying that Mount Zion is the real mountain from which God, and the spirits allied with Him, rule the world. God could have chosen to put his house, His temple, anywhere on earth, or even not on earth at all, but He chose Mount Zion.

Almost all English versions translate the Hebrew word *zaphon* as “north.” However, some translate it as “Zaphon,” the actual name of the mountain (e.g., BSB, CSB, JPS, NAB, NET, NIV, Dead Sea Scrolls Bible), and given the religion of the ancient Near East, “Zaphon” is often the better translation and clearly seems to be the better translation here in Psalm 48:2.

Because Mount Zaphon was so far north of Israel, *zaphon* came to be used in Hebrew as a word for “north.” Richard Clifford writes: “Since the mountain Zaphon was north of Palestine, the direction ‘north’ was derived from the name of the mountain, [just] as the direction ‘west’ was derived from [the Hebrew word] *yam*, ‘sea,’ and ‘south,’ from *negeb*, ‘dry land.’”[[21]](#footnote-23373) Today, when reading the Bible the reader must decide whether the text is referring to Mount Zaphon or using *zaphon* as a word for “north.”

[For more on Mount Zaphon, Baal ruling on Mount Zaphon, and the name El Shaddai, see commentary on Isa. 14:13 and Gen. 17:1.]

Psa 48:3

**“in her citadels.”** The “her” refers to the city (Ps. 48:1). Cities were often spoken of as being feminine.

Psa 48:9

**“in the midst of your Temple.”** In this context, the “Temple” is the entire Temple complex. Only the priests were allowed in the inner Temple, however, there were outer courts where people could gather.

**Psalms Chapter 49**

Psa 49:5

**“of those who deceive me.”** The Masoretic Hebrew text reads, “of my heels,” which can be understood in a few different ways. The word “heel” can be understood as “supplanter” (as with “Jacob,” the supplanter, the “heel grabber”).[[22]](#footnote-27748) Or it can refer to those “at the heels,” those seeking to trip the psalmist up in various ways. Or the Hebrew might have not been copied correctly and a slight emendation would yield readings such as “those who deceive me.” Most critical commentaries on Psalms cover the options in some detail.

Psa 49:7

**“nor give God a ransom for him.”** The scholars debate whether this second stanza is saying the same thing as the first (cf. CJB, CSB, NIV) or whether the second “him” should be “himself” (cf. NAB, NJB, NRSV, Rotherham). Even if the second stanza refers to the same person as the first stanza, it is still true that a person cannot pay to ransom himself from death. There has to be a redeemer who can pay, and that redeemer is Jesus Christ.

Psa 49:8

**“life.”** The Hebrew word is *nephesh* (#05315 נֶפֶשׁ), often translated “soul,” and here it refers to human life. The redemption payment for a human life is costly. So costly in fact that no sinful human can pay it, it had to be paid for by the innocent blood of Jesus Christ, God’s only begotten Son, the second Adam.

[For more on the meaning of “*nephesh*,” see Word Study: “Psuchē.”]

Psa 49:9

**“see the pit.”** That is, experience death and being dead, lifeless, “in Sheol.” This is an example of the word “see” meaning “experience.”

[For more on the dead being dead see Appendix 3: “The Dead Are Dead.”]

Psa 49:12

**“riches.”** The Hebrew word is more literally “honor,” but in this context, the “honor” comes from being wealthy and powerful. Nevertheless, as Psalm 49:12 says, there is no amount of money and no amount of power and authority that will keep a person from dying, and after death comes God’s judgment (Heb. 9:27; Eccl. 12:14; 2 Cor. 5:10).

Psa 49:14

**“Death will be their shepherd.”** This sentence is not speaking of physical death in this life because every person, no matter how godly or ungodly, will die in this life (Heb. 9:27), with the exception of Christians who are alive when the Rapture occurs (1 Cor. 15:51; 1 Thess. 4:15-17). “Death,” everlasting annihilation in the Lake of Fire, is the destiny of those people who reject God (Rev. 20:11-15).

**“The upright will have dominion over them in the morning.”** This is a reference to the fact that when this “present evil age” (Gal. 1:4) is over, the wicked will no longer rule the godly, but the godly will have their day of vengeance and dominion. The ungodly will be resurrected and judged, and then will be condemned to the Lake of Fire and everlasting death. Thus, as the Psalm says, the ungodly are appointed for Sheol, the state of being dead, because that is their eternal destiny.

[For information on the dead being dead until the resurrection, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.” For more on “Sheol” referring to the state of being dead, see Word Study: “Hades.” For more on the resurrections, see commentary on Acts 24:15. For more on the soul not being immortal but dying when the person dies, see Word Study: “Psuchē.”]

Psa 49:15

**“the power of Sheol.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic, literally, “the hand of Sheol,” where the “hand” of Sheol stands for the power of Sheol.

**“soul.”** The Hebrew word “soul” is *nephesh* (#05315 נֶפֶשׁ), and here it refers either to the human life or to the person himself. The verse can legitimately be translated either as “redeem me from the power of Sheol” (CJB, ISV, NIV), or “redeem my life from the power of Sheol” (HCSB, NAB, NET). In the mind of the Psalmist, “redeem my *nephesh* from the power of Sheol” referred to the living person being redeemed from the power of Sheol, so both “me” and “my life” referred to the same basic thing. This is a very good verse that shows that when a person dies, his life force, his “soul,” does not “go to heaven or to hell,” but is in Sheol. Sheol is the state of being dead. When a person dies, he is “in Sheol” and is dead in every way: body, soul, and spirit, and is awaiting the resurrection from the dead.

[For more on the dead being dead and not alive in any way or form, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.” For more on the meaning of “soul,” see Word Study: “Psuchē.” For information about the translations “hell” and “Hades,” see Word Study: “Hades.” For information on people being annihilated in the Lake of Fire and not burning forever, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.” For more on what happens to “spirit” when a person dies, see Word Study: “Pneuma.”]

Psa 49:20

**“is like the animals that perish.”** The Bible teaches that when a person dies, they are dead in every way and are in “Sheol” (the state of being dead) until they are raised from the dead by Jesus Christ at the Rapture or one of the resurrections. When people die, they do not go to heaven or “hell” as is commonly taught, but are dead in the ground and will be there until they are raised by the Lord. Furthermore, unsaved people, when they are raised from the dead on the Day of Judgment, are not thrown into “hell” where they burn forever, but are thrown into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:11-15) where they burn up and are annihilated. Thus, the unsaved are like animals that perish: they don’t live forever at all—not even in a bad place—they “perish” (cf. John 3:16; Rom. 6:23).

[For more on death being the total absence of life, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.” For more on people not burning forever but being annihilated, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

**Psalms Chapter 50**

Psa 50:14

**“Sacrifice to God thanksgiving.”** This powerful word picture expresses that God has no need of animal sacrifices, but wants to have love and thanksgiving from His people. God made it clear in Psalm 50 that He does not need bulls or goats (Ps. 50:8, 9, 10, 13). In fact, God owns the cattle on 1,000 hills (Ps. 50:10). What God desires is thanksgiving. If we want to “sacrifice” something to God, let us sacrifice thanksgiving. When animal sacrifices were burned on the altar, the smoke went up to God as a sweet-smelling aroma, and so too, when we offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving, it goes up to God as a sweet smell that is very precious to Him.

The idea of sacrificing “thanksgiving” to God is an unusual one, and so some English versions avoid it, saying things like, “Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving” (ESV), but that waters down the powerful word picture in the verse. There are a number of English versions that communicate the meaning of the verse very accurately, and some very clearly, for example, “Offer thanksgiving as your sacrifice to God” (CJB), or, “Let thanksgiving be your sacrifice to God” (NJB).

Psalm 50:14 is timeless. There is no time when thanksgiving to God is not an appropriate sacrifice to give Him. And just as animal sacrifices cost people time and money, being thankful can cost us time and energy. When life gets difficult and it seems like there is little to be thankful for, taking the time and energy to get quiet and reflect on the goodness of God, and then give genuine thanks to God—and there are always things to be thankful for—is a very appropriate sacrifice to make. God has purchased everlasting life for us at the cost of His only Son, so He certainly deserves our thankfulness. God tells us, “The one who sacrifices thanksgiving honors me” (Ps. 50:23).

**Psalms Chapter 51**

Psa 51:4

**“justified.”** The Hebrew word can also be translated as “righteous.”

**“so that you may be justified when you speak and pure when you judge.”** Psalm 51:4 is quoted in Romans 3:4, but Romans quotes the Septuagint, not the Masoretic Hebrew text.

Psa 51:13

**“your ways.”** The word translated as “ways” could also be translated as “roads,” God lays before us His roads that we should walk down, but sadly most people ignore God’s roads, His ways, and walk their own path, a path or “road” that leads to death (cf. Prov. 7:27; 12:28; 16:25; Jer. 21:8).

Psa 51:16

**“do not delight in sacrifice.”** David understood the heart of God. Sacrifices and offerings do not buy God’s acceptance. In fact, when God initiated the Old Covenant with Israel, He barely mentioned sacrifices at all. Sacrifices and offerings that are acceptable to God are actually given “after the fact,” that is, after the person has humbled himself and repented. Sacrifices and offerings were never designed to make a person with an evil heart acceptable in the sight of God. An evil and arrogant person who has no real intention of obeying God cannot simply do a sacrifice, make an offering, or pray to God, and then be accepted by God. God is much more interested in obedience and a humble heart than in a person’s making sacrifices (1 Sam. 15:22; Ps. 40:6-8; 51:16-17; Jer. 7:22-23; Hos. 6:6 [quoted in Matt. 9:13 and 12:7]; Mic. 6:6-8).

The Bible says that when a person is evil and unrepentant, the sacrifices and offerings he makes, including prayers, are simply rejected by God. God’s favor is not for sale (cf. Prov. 15:8; 21:27; 28:9; Isa. 1:11-15; 58:1-8; Jer. 6:20; 14:10-12; Hos. 5:5-6; Amos 5:21-23; Mal. 1:10; 2:13-14; James 4:6. Verses that specifically mention prayer include: Job 35:12-13; Prov. 15:29; Isa. 59:1-2; Ezek. 8:17-18; Mic. 3:4; Zech. 7:12-13; James 4:3).

Sadly, often in religion, the true heart of God is ignored. People who sin are told to do certain things like pray or make donations but are not told that without being combined with true repentance, the act is of little or no value. David made it clear that God did not “delight” or “take pleasure in” dead animals, but that He was very pleased with a humble and repentant heart.

[For more on God being more concerned with love and obedience than sacrifices, see commentary on Matt. 5:24. For more on God not speaking much about sacrifices when Israel came out of Egypt, see commentary on Jer. 7:22.]

Psa 51:17

**“My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit.”** When a person sins, that sin or those sins are forgiven when the person repents and begins to live righteously. God says that many times in the Bible (cf. Jer. 18:7-10; 36:3; Ezek. 3:17-21; 18:21-24; 33:12-16).

**Psalms Chapter 52**

**Psalms Chapter 53**

**Psalms Chapter 54**

**Psalms Chapter 55**

**Psalms Chapter 56**

Psa 56:4

**“flesh.”** This refers to people, who are flesh, as we can see from when it is quoted in Hebrews 13:6. Jesus taught us not to fear what people can do to us, even if they kill us, because God will raise His believers from the dead. In contrast, Jesus said to fear God, who really could kill us forever (Matt. 10:28). Believers need to take this verse to heart because the Devil has used fear of death to keep people in bondage (Heb. 2:15).

Psa 56:8

**“You put my tears into your bottle.”** “Tear bottles” have been found in some ancient tombs. The tear bottles are usually made of glass or clay and have a flat bottom and a long narrow neck to reduce evaporation. Although the rituals and beliefs about tear bottles are not clearly known, one thing that seems to be clear is that often the tears of mourners were collected and put into a tear bottle as a testimony about how much the deceased meant to people. Bishop K. C. Pillai said, “Eastern people keep tear bottles in their home. Any time the person weeps or cries or something to do with God or the spiritual vein, then they put the tears in this bottle, and preserve them. They believe that every tear that is shed for the glory of God will give them a reward.”[[23]](#footnote-25345)[[24]](#footnote-19516)

**“Are they not in your scroll?”** The “scroll” (or “book”) being spoken of here is the scroll that God’s angel scribes write that is a record of what each person does in life so that on Judgment Day each person can be righteously judged. These scrolls of what people do in life are also mentioned in Malachi 3:16 (see commentary on Mal. 3:16).

**Psalms Chapter 57**

Psa 57:6

**“they fall into its middle themselves.”** It is a consistent theme throughout Scripture that evil people bring evil upon themselves (see commentary on Prov. 1:18). People may set a trap for someone, but eventually they themselves will be trapped.

**Psalms Chapter 58**

Psa 58:1

**“O gods.”** The Hebrew of this verse is very difficult and has been considered miscopied, and different attempts have been made to restore it, thus the widely differing translations. Here, the “gods” are the men who rule, supposedly with God’s approval and authority, but they are in fact, the “sons of men,” i.e., mere men.

Psa 58:6

**“Break out the young lion’s fangs.”** In this context, the “young lion” refers to wicked people, especially wicked leaders and officials—people with power in society. Those people are often referred to as powerful animals like lions by the figure of speech hypocatastasis (a comparison by implication, see commentary on Rev. 20:2).

**Psalms Chapter 59**

Psa 59:5

**“punish the nations.”** The text could perhaps more literally be translated, “visit” the nations, with this being the use of God “visiting” to bring justice and vengeance. However, the translation “visit” in this verse could easily be misunderstood by many English speakers.

[For more on God “visiting,” see commentary on Exod. 20:5.]

**Psalms Chapter 60**

Psa 60:9

**“Who will lead me.”** Although the Masoretic Hebrew text has “who has led me,” many Hebrew scholars propose a future reading of the text to agree with the first part of the verse and also be more historically accurate.

**Psalms Chapter 61**

Psa 61:7

**“Appoint your covenant faithfulness.”** God’s covenant faithfulness in this context is an expression and fulfillment of what God promised to David about his inheritance and the coming of the Messiah that would thus continue his throne forever. As this happened, “grace and truth” came through Jesus Christ.

**Psalms Chapter 62**

Psa 62:9

**“In the balances they will go up.”** People often think of themselves as being very weighty, very important, but from God’s perspective, people are lightweights. We need to trust and obey God because it is He who will repay people in accordance with what they have done (Ps. 62:12). Job thought he would be found innocent if he were weighed in a balance (Job 31:6).

[For more on the allusion to being in a balance, see commentary on Prov. 11:1.]

Psa 62:12

**“for you will repay a person according to his work.”** The teaching that on Judgment Day people will get what they deserve, good or bad, based on what they have done in their life is taught many times in Scripture (e.g., Job. 34:11; Ps. 62:12; Prov. 24:12; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Ezek. 33:20; Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 1 Cor. 3:8; 2 Cor. 5:10; Col. 3:23-25). For example, the essence of this phrase is repeated in Romans 2:6 and 2 Timothy 4:14. God is righteous, and the Day of Judgment is not a “pop quiz,” designed to catch people by surprise. God’s intention is that people would read these verses and believe them, and adjust their behavior so that they could receive a wonderful reward on Judgment Day. The book of Ecclesiastes closes with, “This is the end of the matter. All has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole *purpose* of humankind. For God will bring everything we do into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or whether it is evil” (Eccl. 12:13-14). Jesus made sure his disciples knew this truth, and taught it to them (Matt. 16:27).

[For more on rewards and people receiving what they deserve, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.”]

**Psalms Chapter 63**

Psa 63:5

**“will be satisfied as with marrow and fat.”** Although this blessing is primarily meant for this life, there are many people who are hungry, and so the ultimate fulfillment of this verse will occur in the next life, in the Millennial Kingdom, in which there will be an abundance of food (cf. Isa. 25:6).

[For more on the “ideal promises” in the Bible that are meant to be true on earth but often are not, see commentary on Prov. 19:5. For more on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**Psalms Chapter 64**

**Psalms Chapter 65**

Psa 65:9

**“You visit the earth.”** The word “visit” is used of God’s intervening for blessing or punishment, and in this case, it refers to God’s active role in blessing the earth.

[For more on God “visiting,” see commentary on Exod. 20:5.]

**Psalms Chapter 66**

Psa 66:4

**“worship you.”** Or, “bow down to you.” The Hebrew word translated “worship,” *shachah* (#07812 שָׁחָה), is the same Hebrew word as “bow down.”

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

**Psalms Chapter 67**

Psa 67:4

**“for you will judge the peoples with equity.”** At some future point in time, there will be a Day of Judgment, when God will judge the people of earth. They will be resurrected and judged, and will either be granted everlasting life or everlasting death.

**Psalms Chapter 68**

Psa 68:1

**“hate.”** This is the expansive use of the word “hate.” It means “hate,” but it also includes the idea of those who ignore God or have other gods who they think are more important than Yahweh (cf. commentary on Prov. 1:22, “hate”).

Psa 68:6

**“God causes the lonely to live in a household.”** The word “household” (or “house”) implies a family. There were no “one-person houses” in the biblical world like there are today, with just one person living alone. In the biblical world, families were generally large and lived together and elderly people did not become “empty nesters,” they were part of the extended family of someone else. Loneliness is a horrible thing, and thankfully at some point in the future, all loneliness will come to an end.

Psa 68:14

**“Shaddai.”** One of the titles of God.

Psa 68:15

**“A mountain of God is the mountain of Bashan.”** Although Bashan is hilly, the prominent mountain in Bashan is Mount Hermon, which rises over 10,000 feet and is actually a range with many peaks. The snow never melts on the highest peaks of Hermon. For it to be envious of Mount Zion, which is roughly only 2,500 feet high, shows that there is something special about Mount Zion, and indeed there is! God Himself dwells on Mount Zion in His Temple there.

Psa 68:18

**“You have ascended on high.”** Psalm 68:18 is quoted in a modified form by Paul in Ephesians 4:8. Here, the ascending on high refers to the ark of God (and thus God Himself who goes where the ark goes) ascending the hill of Mount Zion and dwelling there, which He did early on in David’s reign over Jerusalem when David pitched a tent in Jerusalem for the ark of the covenant and for Yahweh to dwell in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:15-17; 1 Chron. 16:1).

Psalm 68 is a psalm of triumph. Yahweh (referred to in its shorter form, Yah, in Psalm 68:4, 18) brings the people (the “prisoners”) out of Egypt and into the land of Israel (Ps. 68:6). He led them through the wilderness (Ps. 68:7). Yahweh was the God at Mount Sinai (Ps. 68:8, 17), and he scattered enemy kings in His advance into the land (Ps. 68:14). The mountains of Bashan, the area east and northeast of the Sea of Galilee, looked on Mount Zion with envy because God chose to dwell on Mount Zion (Ps. 68:15-16). The ark was brought into Jerusalem and onto Mount Zion with music and singing (Ps. 68:24-25; cf. 2 Sam. 6:14-15; 1 Chron. 15:25-28). The Temple is at Jerusalem (Ps. 68:29). At the time of David it was a tent but due to the worship there it could be referred to as a temple. People and foreigners will bring gifts to Jerusalem (Ps. 68:29, 31).

In Ephesians 4:8, Paul takes this psalm of triumph about God ascending to Mount Zion and establishing His Temple there and receiving gifts from people, and modifies it to the triumph of Christ ascending into heaven and giving gifts to people. The modification and the contrast between Psalm 68:18 and Ephesians 4:8 highlight the fact that God reigned over Israel and the people of earth from the earth, in Jerusalem and was honored there, while Christ reigns from heaven over his heavenly people, the Church, and gives gifts to them so they are equipped to help him with his work on earth of reconciling people to God.

Psa 68:27

**“There is Benjamin, the youngest, ruling them.”** The Temple of God was on Mount Zion, which is in the tribal territory of Benjamin. So God lives in Benjamin, even though he was the youngest son of Jacob.

Psa 68:31

**“quickly lift up her hands to God *with tribute*.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “Ethiopia will cause her hands to run,” that is, run to give tribute to God, which comes from the culture and the context. Someone giving tribute to a ruler would usually kneel or bow low before them and stretch out their hands to present the tribute or gift. “Ethiopia” here is presented in the figure of speech personification. This is not a metonymy, with “Ethiopia” being put for the people of Ethiopia because the pronoun is singular.

[For more on the figure personification, see commentary on Prov. 1:20, “Wisdom.”]

Psa 68:34

**“yes, his strength is in the clouds.”** After just saying that God’s majesty is over Israel, saying that His strength is in the clouds means that God’s strength covers the earth and sky; it has no bounds. God rules over the earth and rides on the heaven of heavens (Ps. 68:33). This is also a challenge to the various sky-gods such as Baal the storm god of Canaan, because it is Yahweh who is strong on both earth and sky, not gods like Baal.

Psa 68:35

**“sanctuary.”** Although this could refer to the Temple, it more likely refers to the courts surrounding the Temple or a more complete meaning of the Temple and its surrounding courts. The Hebrew is not the common word for “temple” (see commentary on Jer. 51:51).

**Psalms Chapter 69**

**Psalms Chapter 70**

**Psalms Chapter 71**

Psa 71:20

**“you will bring me up again from the depths of the earth.”** The Psalmist believed in the resurrection from the dead and everlasting life. The Old Testament has a number of verses about God raising the dead in the future (cf. Deut. 32:39; Job. 19:25-27; Ps. 71:20; Isa. 26:19; 66:14; Ezek. 37:12-14; Dan. 12:2, 13; and Hos. 13:14).

**Psalms Chapter 72**

Psa 72:2

**“He will judge.”** Most English versions translate the Hebrew text as if it were a jussive form of the verb, i.e., “May he judge,” or “Let him judge.” But the NET text note points out, “The prefixed verbal form appears to be an imperfect, not a jussive.” Quite a few English Bibles translate many of the verses in Psalm 72 as if the verbs were imperfects, such as “He will judge” (cf. ASV, DBY, RV, GNV, KJV, NET, NIV84, NKJV) and some English versions go back and forth, translating some verbs as jussive and others as imperfects.

Translators who believe the verbs are meant to be jussive (“May the king...”) say that the Psalm is a prayer or wish, and the psalmist is uttering a wish about God’s chosen king, who in this context would be Solomon. Although it may be true that the psalm was to apply to Solomon or another son of David in some sense, the greater truth is that the rabbis and early Christians understood Psalm 72 to be about the Messiah, Jesus Christ, and given what the psalm itself says, that is true. Many things in the Psalm that are true of Jesus would not have been true for Solomon under any circumstance, such as him having dominion over the whole earth (Psalm 72:8). Those verses could be considered hyperbole if applied to Solomon, but they are literal if applied to the Messiah. If people understood that this psalm was ultimately about the Messiah, then understanding the verbs as imperfects (“The king will...”) makes sense. It is worth noting that the Septuagint translates the verbs as future, letting us know that the translators took these Hebrew verbs as imperfects, not as jussives.

There are jussives in the psalm (cf. Ps. 72:15-17), but not all the verbs are jussive.

Psalm 72 is one of the great places in Scripture that describes to the Messiah himself, and to others, some of what the Messiah would accomplish.

**“with righteousness and your poor with justice.”** That the Messiah was to judge with justice and righteousness is found in other prophecies as well (e.g. Isa. 9:7; 11:3-5; 16:5).

Psa 72:3

**“prosperity.”** The Hebrew word *shalom* is usually translated as “peace,” but it actually refers more wholistically to well-being, prosperity, and peace. When Christ reigns on earth the land will be healed and will become a source of blessing and prosperity (cf. Isa. 32:15; 35:1, 2, 7; 51:3; Joel 3:18).

Also, potentially buried in the meaning is that “mountain” is sometimes used to refer to the powerful and influential people in a kingdom (e.g., Zech. 4:7). Throughout most of history those powerful people oppressed the poor and needy, but in Christ’s kingdom the leaders will be a blessing to the people.

[For more on the land being healed, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Psa 72:4

**“he will crush the oppressive person.”** When Christ returns as judge and king, he will crush people who through their lives crushed others (Ps. 94:5).

Psa 72:6

**“He will come down like rain on the mown grass.”** There will be actual rain in its proper season when Christ rules the earth, in fulfillment of Deuteronomy 11:14. However, this verse is saying that when the Messiah comes he will bring refreshment and blessings.

Psa 72:8

**“from sea to sea.”** This is likely from the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea (cf. Exod. 23:31 and Amos 8:12).

Psa 72:9

**“his enemies will lick the dust.”** The posture of bowing before someone involves putting your face right to the ground. Thus, saying that the Messiah’s enemies will bow before him and lick the dust are two ways of saying the same thing.

Psa 72:11

**“bow down.”** Or, “worship him.” The word translated “bow down,” *shachah* (#07812 שָׁחָה), is the same Hebrew word as “worship.”

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

**“All nations will serve him.”** That the Messiah would rule the earth and all nations would serve him is stated in different ways throughout the Bible.

Psa 72:15

**“And may prayer be made for him continually.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “And let him pray for him,” but the Hebrew is not clear as to who is praying for whom. Most scholars favor that it is the people who are praying for the king.

Psa 72:16

**“fruits.”** This may be referring to the yield of grain (cf. “crops” HCSB) or to the fruit trees (cf. NET).

Psa 72:17

**“flourish.”** The Hebrew word has to do with flourishing and increasing; and as a blessing over the Davidic dynasty, it has something to do with producing descendants.

**“May people be blessed through him.”** The Hebrew can also be reflexive, as some English versions have: “May people bless themselves through him.”

**Psalms Chapter 73**

Psa 73:3

**“when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.”** The wicked often prosper on earth, and Job complained about it 1,000 years before Asaph the psalmist (see commentary on Job 21:7).

Psa 73:4

**“For there are no pains in their death.”** This seems out of place at this point, and some scholars have suggested that an emendation be made to the Hebrew text. But there may be no need for an emendation. As the NET text note points out, an Aramaic inscription was found at Nerab (a site south-east of Aleppo, Syria) “which views a painful death as a curse and a nonpainful death in one’s old age as a sign of divine favor.” Death can be extremely painful, and many people who are close to death in our modern world are on some kind of painkiller. The psalmist is pointing out that the wicked are blessed in this life, and having a pain-free death was considered a blessing from God.

Psa 73:5

**“humans.”** The Hebrew text is singular, but it is a collective singular and refers to mankind, but the Hebrew *ʾenosh* (#00582 אֱנוֹשׁ) is not simply “man,” it generally refers to humans in a weakened, sinful, or fallen state.

Psa 73:6

**“A garment of violence covers them.”** The wicked are habitually involved with violence; they wear it daily like a garment.

Psa 73:7

**“Their eyes bulge out because of *their* fatness.”** The people are so fat that their eyes seem sunken in their heads. Also, perhaps, these “fat” (prosperous) people stare out from their prosperity and see things from a perverted perspective (a point we can see by reading the whole verse).

Psa 73:9

**“against the heavens.”** This is one way of interpreting the verse. Other scholars see it as saying that they “set their mouth in the heavens,” meaning that they speak as if they rule in heaven, and also (per the last stanza in the verse), speak as if they rule the earth. There is truth in both interpretations.

**“their tongue walks through the earth.”** These wealthy, arrogant, sinful people speak as if they rule the earth (and they no doubt think that they do).

Psa 73:10

**“Therefore *God’s* people turn to them here.”** This is a fact, and a warning. It often happens that God’s people mistake abundance for the blessing of God and leave the strict adherence to the Word of God and follow after the rich and prosperous wicked people.

**“and slurp up waters of abundance.”** The fooled and foolish people slurp up the “abundance” that is portrayed and promised by the wicked prosperous people. Sadly, some Christians who do not have a clear hope or who don’t cling fast to it, leave the truth of God for the “abundance” of the ungodly.

Psa 73:13

**“Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure.”** This statement is not true, but it is a true expression of how oppressed people sometimes feel when they work so hard to be honest and godly and see the ungodly and arrogant getting money, power, and fame. As the psalm develops, we see that only by keeping our eyes on the Hope and having an understanding of the future can we maintain our confident attitude about God and ourselves. Christ said, “In the world you will have hardships” (John 16:33), and he was not lying. Life can be difficult, but the next life will be worth the pain (Rom. 8:18).

Psa 73:16

**“to me.”** The literal Hebrew is an idiom: “it *was* troubling in my eyes.”

**“troubling.”** The versions vary greatly on exactly how to translate this verb in this context. The word means “labor, toil,” but it does not seem that the psalmist is saying that it was too much work to figure the situation out, but rather that the task was troubling, painful, oppressive, difficult, etc. Life is hard and unfair, and trying to figure out the “whys” of life can be very troubling, difficult, oppressive, and wearisome.

Psa 73:17

**“sanctuary.”** In this context, the “sanctuary” is the Temple courts; the Temple precincts (see commentary on Jer. 51:51). Someone who was not a priest or Levite could not enter the Temple proper.

Psa 73:19

**“they will perish.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “they have perished.” This is the prophetic perfect idiom; they will perish. They have not perished yet, but they will.

[For more on the prophetic perfect, see commentary on Eph. 2:6.]

**“by terrible *events*.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “by terrors,” but “terrors” is being put by metonymy for things which cause terror, such as disasters or terrible events.

Psa 73:20

**“*They will be* like a dream when one wakes up.”** When a person wakes up they realize that they were dreaming and the dream is not reality. When the person wakes up, the dream is gone and nothing is left of it but memories, if even that. When the End Times come and the Lord “wakes up” and judges humankind, the wicked will be like a dream—they will be gone and nothing will be left of their existence but some memories of them. There is no real substance to the wicked. When Yahweh awakes, there will be nothing to them and they will disappear.

[For more on the dead ceasing to exist, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

**“when you arouse yourself.”** Much of the time it seems as if God is asleep. The wicked prosper and the righteous suffer. But when God does arouse himself—and He will—all the dreams and aspirations of the wicked will be seen to be just fantasies, and they will be gone like a dream is gone in the morning.

**“have contempt for.”** The Hebrew word translated as “have contempt for” is bazah (#00959 בָּזָה), and it can mean “despise” or “have contempt for.” In this case, the standard English meaning for “despise,” which is an active and aggressive hatred, is too strong. God has contempt for the wicked, and will not rescue them on the Day of Judgment. They rejected Him and so He has contempt for them.

Psa 73:21

**“heart...kidneys.”** In the biblical world, the “heart” refers to the thoughts, not the emotions. The Word of God points to the fact that our kidneys, bowels, and belly (or womb) are part of our mental/emotional life, not “just physical organs.” Our “gut,” including our intestines, bowels, kidneys, and stomach contain as many nerve cells as our brain, and studies are now showing that our “gut” contributes significantly to our emotional life and health. When the Bible mentions “heart” and “kidneys” it refers to the thought life (“heart”) and emotional life (“kidneys”).

[For more on the heart referring to the thought life, see commentary on Prov. 15:21. For more on kidneys referring to the emotional life, see commentary on Rev. 2:23, “kidneys.”]

**“felt pierced.”** The Hebrew word is an imperfect form, indicating a feeling that continued (for the translation “felt pierced,” see *HALOT*.[[25]](#footnote-18669)

Psa 73:22

**“I was stupid and ignorant.”** When we let our emotions get the better of us and we act on those emotions we do things that are not well thought out and sometimes downright stupid. No wonder the Bible says “A fool lets out all of his emotions, but a wise person keeps them calm within.(Prov. 29:11; cf. Prov. 25:28).

Psa 73:27

**“You will destroy.”** The Hebrew text is more literally, “You have destroyed,” which is the idiom referred to as the “prophetic perfect,” expressing a future event in the past tense to emphasize the certainty of it. Those who abandon God will “perish” (cf. John 3:16); they will be destroyed.

[For more on the prophetic perfect, see commentary on Eph. 2:6.]

**“who act like a prostitute toward you.”** In this context, the idea of a “prostitute” is a woman who is in a marriage covenant relationship with her husband, who rejects and abandons him to go after other men and worldly pleasures. The Israelites were in a covenant relationship with God, and yet many of them rejected and abandoned God and went after idol gods and worldly pleasures. Those people will be destroyed—annihilated—in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:11-15).

[For more on annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

Psa 73:28

**“the nearness of God is good for me.”** This verse has been interpreted two different ways: “the nearness of God is good for me” (NASB2020), and “it is good for me to draw near to God” (KJV). In the Hebrew text, the verse is “grammatically ambiguous…‘nearness of God’ can mean that God approaches or is near (= subjective genitive), or that one approaches God or is close to God (= objective genitive).”[[26]](#footnote-27496)

The English versions and the scholars are divided as to the meaning of the verse, and both sides put forth arguments in their favor. However, since both translations are valid and both reveal an important truth, there is every reason to believe that the Author had the text worded the way He did to set forth both positions: it is good that God is near to us, and it is also good to draw close to God. When a statement in the text can legitimately be taken two different ways, and if both of those ways express truth, and there are no good reasons to favor one translation over the other, then we are likely dealing with the figure of speech amphibologia, where one thing is said but two things are meant (cf. E. W. Bullinger’s important work, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, under “amphibologia”).

Knowing that God is near, and is a help in times of trouble is a huge help in living a godly life. On the other hand, one must not just know that fact intellectually, but each person must act on that knowledge and then make the effort to draw near to God by obeying and worshiping Him.

**“now I recount all your works.”** The Hebrew text can be interpreted at least three different ways. One is “I have made the Lord Yahweh my refuge so that I can recount all your works.” Another is “I have made the Lord Yahweh my refuge, with the result that I can recount all your works.” A third is “I have made the Lord Yahweh my refuge; now I recount all your works.” The third option seems to be the intent of the psalmist. He did not make Yahweh his refuge just so he could tell His good works, and although it could be that he made Yahweh his refuge and that resulted in his being able to tell of Yahweh’s good works, it seems that the psalmist made God his refuge, and now, having done that, he tells of Yahweh’s good works.

**Psalms Chapter 74**

Psa 74:13

**“You broke the heads of the sea monsters in the waters.”** The “sea monsters in the waters” refers to the known mythology (and the kernel of truth that they portray) about the ancient war between God and the “gods” (God’s created spirit beings like Satan) over God’s created order and who will rule creation. The “waters” and “sea” became symbolic of the chaos that surrounded these gods, and the Bible states that God had victory over them (see commentary on Isa. 27:1 and 51:9).

Psa 74:22

**“Remember.”** This is the idiomatic or “pregnant” sense of “remember,” meaning remember, pay attention, and do something about the situation. “Do not forget” in Psalm 74:23 has the same meaning.

[For more on the idiomatic sense of remember, see commentary on Luke 23:42.]

**Psalms Chapter 75**

Psa 75:2

**“When I choose the appointed time, I will judge with equity.”** Here in Psalm 75:2-3, the speaker suddenly shifts from the psalmist to God, and God speaks of judging, that is, judging the people of earth. From other scriptures we learn that God will judge through his appointed judge, Jesus Christ (Acts 10:38-42; 17:31; John 5:25-30; see commentary on Acts 17:31).

Psa 75:3

**“it is I who firmly hold its pillars.”** The earth has much evil, and people quake at the prospect of God’s judgment, but God is firmly holding the earth and His created order in place and people who love God should have no fear of God’s coming judgment for themselves or for the earth.

Psa 75:5

**“your horn.”** The psalmist compares the boastful people to a wild ox that lifts up its horn against heaven and stretches its neck out in arrogance. This is the figure hypocatastasis, where the comparison between the boastful people is implied, but not stated. The idea of the verse is, don’t be so proud that you would challenge heaven, and don’t be so arrogant.

[For more on the figure hypocatastasis, see commentary on Rev. 20:2.]

**“an arrogant neck.”** The Hebrew, “a neck of arrogance,” means a stiff, hardened neck that will not turn direction and thus is not humble or reasonable.

Psa 75:9

**“But I will declare *it* forever.”** The context is God’s righteous judgment, which the psalmist will declare to others.

**Psalms Chapter 76**

Psa 76:2

**“his lair..his den.”** It seems that God is being compared to a lion (cf. Ps. 76:4).

Psa 76:10

**“For your wrath against humankind will bring you praise.”** The Hebrew text is more literally, “For the wrath of humankind will praise you,” but the idea is that God’s anger against sinful humanity brings Him praise because He is just and deals justly with human sin, and in so doing makes life joyful for those righteous people who love him. Thus, the “of humanity” is an objective genitive and in this context means “against *sinful* humanity.” The NET reads, “Certainly your angry judgment upon men will bring you praise.” The NIV reads, “Surely your wrath against mankind brings you praise.” It is also possible that the idea of the text is that “the wrath of humankind will praise you” in the sense that people’s sin and wrath will eventually result in God’s being praised for His patience, love, and justice, but that interpretation seems less likely.

**Psalms Chapter 77**

Psa 77:4

**“You held my eyelids *open*.”** The psalmist is so agitated and upset that he cannot sleep.

Psa 77:6

**“my spirit diligently searches.”** This is the use of “spirit” (Hebrew: *ruach* #07307 רוּחַ) that refers to the activities of the mind: the thoughts, attitudes, and emotions. In this case, the “spirit” most directly refers to the thoughts, which are focused on the future as is indicated in the next verse, Psalm 77:7.

[For more on the uses of “spirit,” see Word Study: “Pneuma.” Usage #13 concerns thoughts and emotions.]

Psa 77:17

**“The clouds poured out water.”** The wrath of God is often portrayed metaphorically in Scripture as a powerful storm (e.g., Ps. 18:12-14; 77:17-18; 83:15; Isa. 28:17; 30:30; Jer. 23:19; 30:23; Ezek. 13:11; see commentary on Ezek. 13:11).

**Psalms Chapter 78**

Psa 78:1

**“instruction.”** The Hebrew word is “Torah.” In this case, the “Torah” refers to the law and instructions given by God.

[For more on the meaning of “law,” *Torah*, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

Psa 78:2

**“I will open my mouth in a proverb.”** Psalm 78:2 is quoted with changes in Matthew 13:35.

Psa 78:5

**“law.”** The Hebrew word is “Torah.” In this case, the “Torah” refers to the law and instructions given by God.

[For more on the meaning of “law,” *Torah*, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

Psa 78:10

**“law.”** The Hebrew word is “Torah.” In this case, the “Torah” refers to the law and instructions given by God.

[For more on the meaning of “law,” *Torah*, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

Psa 78:13

**“like a heap.”** Cf. Exodus 15:8; Joshua 3:13.

Psa 78:58

**“made him angry.”** The worship of false gods made God angry. Although many English versions use the word “provoke,” in everyday English the word “provoke” refers to intentionally acting to upset someone, and the Israelites did not worship idols to intentionally upset God, they did it because they were self-centered.

**“*pagan* shrines.”** The Hebrew word “shrines” is *bamot*, which referred to a place that was leveled and built up and on which were placed various idols and objects of worship. The context indicates these shrines were pagan in nature (cf. NLT, “pagan shrines”). Many of the towns had such shrines (see commentary on Num. 33:52).

**Psalms Chapter 79**

**Psalms Chapter 80**

Psa 80:1

**“who sits *enthroned between* the cherubim.”** The Hebrew text is more literally “sits of the cherubim,” but it was the custom for kings to sit on thrones, not just regular chairs, so translating according to the culture of the day, “enthroned” is a good translation and adopted by many English versions (CEB, CSB, ESV, NAB, NASB, NET, NIV, NJB, NRSV). That Yahweh sat “between” the cherubim is understood from Numbers 7:89, which says that Yahweh sits over the atonement-cover (traditionally “mercy seat”) and between the cherubim.

Psa 80:8

**“You uprooted a vine out of Egypt.”** Here in Psalm 80:8, Israel is called a “vine” by the figure of comparison, hypocatastasis, a comparison by implication (see commentary on Rev. 20:2). Israel was called a vine because of the importance of the vine to Israel. The grapevine, along with the fig and olive tree, were some of the most important plants for Israel. The grapevine produced grapes that were juiced and fermented into wine, but also it produced grape syrup and raisins, which were important sources of sugar. Israel is compared to a grapevine also in Isaiah 5:1-7.

**Psalms Chapter 81**

Psa 81:3

**“shofar.”** The ram’s horn trumpet, not the metal trumpet.

Psa 81:6

**“I removed.”** Here the speaker suddenly shifts from the psalmist to Yahweh Himself.

Psa 81:9

**“bow down.”** The word translated “bow down,” *shachah* (#07812 שָׁחָה), is the same Hebrew word as “worship.”

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

**Psalms Chapter 82**

Psa 82:8

**“Arise, O God, judge the earth!”** It was common knowledge among God’s people that there would be a Day of Judgment when the wicked would be done away with and the righteous would flourish (see commentary on Acts 17:31).

**Psalms Chapter 83**

Psa 83:13

**“stubble before the wind.”** The stubble was the dry and usually broken pieces of grain, grass, or briars that were gathered and used to start fires (cf. Isa. 5:24; Obad. 1:18; Matt. 6:30). Isaiah 40:24 speaks of stubble being blown by the wind.

Psa 83:15

**“you will terrify them with your storm.”** The wrath of God is often portrayed metaphorically in Scripture as a powerful storm (e.g., Ps. 18:12-14; 77:17-18; 83:15; Isa. 28:17; 30:30; Jer. 23:19; 30:23; Ezek. 13:11; see commentary on Ezek. 13:11).

**Psalms Chapter 84**

Psa 84:6

**“Valley of Baka.”** This is possibly the Valley of Rephaim (cf. 2 Sam. 5:22-24).

**Psalms Chapter 85**

**Psalms Chapter 86**

Psa 86:9

**“bow down.”** The word translated “bow down,” *shachah* (#07812 שָׁחָה), is the same Hebrew word as “worship.”

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

Psa 86:10

**“You alone are God.”** The Bible has many verses that say there is only one God, “Yahweh.”

[For more on Yahweh being the only God, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son,” and commentary on Deut. 6:4.]

**Psalms Chapter 87**

**Psalms Chapter 88**

Psa 88:3

**“my life is on the brink of Sheol.”** That is, on the brink of death. Sheol is the state of being dead.

[For more on Sheol, see commentary on Prov. 1:12 and Acts 2:27. Also see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.”]

Psa 88:4

**“the pit.”** This was one of the idioms for the grave.

Psa 88:12

**“forgetfulness.”** The Hebrew word is *neshiyah* (#05388 נְשִׁיָּה), “forgetfulness” (the noun only occurs here, and is derived from the verbal root, “to forget,” so forgetfulness seems an appropriate translation). Although some modern lexicons and translations have “oblivion,” that seems more of a nuance than a literal translation.

Many commentators say that the “land of forgetfulness” is the land that is forgotten by God; that is, once a person dies, God forgets him. But God does not forget us in the grave, even though it may seem that way. He remembers us and will bring us up from the grave at the Rapture or one of the resurrections. The “land of forgetfulness” is the grave, and the phrase refers to the fact that when people are dead, they have no memory or thoughts (Ps. 6:5; 115:17; Eccl. 9:5-6, 10; Isa. 38:18-19).

People do not go to heaven, “hell,” or Paradise when they die. They die and are dead in every sense of the word. They are in the earth awaiting the Rapture or one of the resurrections.

[For more on *Sheol*, see Word Study: “Hades.” For more on dead people being dead, lifeless in every way, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.” For more on what the “soul” is, and that it does not live on after a person dies, see Word Study: “Psuchē.”]

Psa 88:15

**“close to death.”** The Hebrew verb *gava* (#01478 גָּוַע) refers to dying and is fundamentally synonymous with the verb “die,” *muth* (#04191 מָוֹת), although *gava* can imply a violent death (see commentary on Gen. 25:8, “breathed his last”). In this case, however, it refers to being close to death, not actually “dying.”

**Psalms Chapter 89**

Psa 89:3

**“I have.”** The speaker abruptly changes to God in verses three and four, then changes back to the psalmist.

Psa 89:5

**“The heavens praise.”** In this verse, as the context reveals, “the heavens” is a metonymy for the spirit beings who dwell in heaven and who can praise God. The planets, stars, and galaxies show the glory and power of God, but they do not “praise” Him.

**“assembly of the holy ones.”** This seems to refer to the larger assemblies of spirit beings that God sometimes holds. God’s inner council is mentioned in Psalm 89:7.

[For more on God’s divine council, see commentary on Gen. 1:26. For more on God’s presiding over a large general assembly of spirit beings, see commentary on Job 1:6.]

Psa 89:7

**“the council of the holy ones.”** The word “council” is translated from the Hebrew word *sōd* (#05475 סוֹד) and it refers to a “council, secret council, intimate council, circle of familiar friends, assembly.” In this context, it refers to God’s intimate divine council, in contrast to larger general assemblies of spirit beings such as we see in Job 1:6 and 1 Kings 22:19, and which is mentioned in Psalm 89:5

[For more on God’s divine council, see commentary on Gen. 1:26. For more on God’s presiding over a large general assembly of spirit beings, see commentary on Job 1:6.]

Psa 89:10

**“crushed Rahab.”** In this context and in the ancient biblical culture, “Rahab” is another name for Egypt (cf. Isa. 30:7; Ps. 87:4). However, to understand the fullness of what is happening, we have to ask why Egypt would be called “Rahab.” We get some of our answer from Isaiah, who is pulling information from ancient and well-known myths about struggles between gods to make his point that Yahweh is the Most High God. So while “Rahab” refers to Egypt, the terminology used also points to the ancient spiritual struggle between God and the gods as to who is the Creator and real ruler of the universe (see commentary on Isa. 51:9).

Psa 89:30

**“law.”** The Hebrew word is “Torah.” In this case, the “Torah” refers to the law and instructions given by God.

[For more on the meaning of “law,” *Torah*, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

Psa 89:32

**“visit.”** When God “visited” someone, He intervened in their life, and He could intervene for their blessing or to bring deserved consequences or punishment. God is a righteous God, and He holds people accountable for their actions. Here in Psalm 89:32, He will “visit” them with a rod because of their sin.

[For more on God “visiting,” see commentary on Exod. 20:5.]

Psa 89:38

**“your anointed one.”** See commentary on 1 Sam. 12:3.

**Psalms Chapter 90**

Psa 90:10

**“for it is gone quickly and we fly away.”** No person knows, or can control, the day of their death (cf. Eccl. 8:8). So we should learn to obey God and walk in wisdom.

**Psalms Chapter 91**

Psa 91:11

**“For he will command his angels concerning you.”** Psalm 91:11 is quoted in Matthew 4:6 and Luke 4:10-11.

Psa 91:13

**“You will tread on the lion and cobra.”** In this context, the “lion” and the cobra refer to wicked people, especially wicked leaders and officials; people with power in society. Those people are often referred to as powerful animals like lions by the figure of speech hypocatastasis (a comparison by implication, see commentary on Rev. 20:2).

**Psalms Chapter 92**

**Psalms Chapter 93**

Psa 93:3

“**the *great* deep.**” The “deep,” (the “depths”) are not literal, but represent the Gentile nations who disobey God; they defy or ignore Him (see commentary on Rev. 17:15).

Psa 93:4

**“*more than* the mighty surfs of the sea, Yahweh on high is mighty.”** Obviously, God is more powerful than the oceans so that is not what this verse is speaking about. The “waters” and “sea” are the waters of chaos, and God has victory over them (see commentary on Isa. 51:9).

**Psalms Chapter 94**

Psa 94:6

**“foreigner.”** The Hebrew word translated as “foreigner” is *toshav* (#08453, spelled תּוֹשָׁב or תֹּשָׁב), and it has a range of meanings but generally refers to a temporary resident or a resident alien. It is most often translated as “sojourner” in the REV, but “foreigner” seems to fit better here in Psalm 94:6 because the meaning of the text is that the evil men kill anyone not from where they live (for more on sojourner, see commentary on Gen. 23:4).

Psa 94:7

**“pay attention.”** The Hebrew verb means to “understand,” but in this context, the wicked think He does not understand because He does not care or pay attention.

Psa 94:11

**“pointless.”** See Ecclesiastes 1:2. The Hebrew word is the same. Human thoughts perish and do not make a lasting impact.

Psa 94:12

**“law.”** The Hebrew word is “Torah.” In this case, the “Torah” refers to the law and instructions given by God.

[For more on the meaning of “law,” *Torah*, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

Psa 94:17

**“dwelt in silence.”** Psalm 94:17 refers to a person who is dead living in “silence.” They are dead and they are silent and in silence. Dead people are not alive in any form or in any place, they are dead, and so there is no activity or noise in the grave. Other verses speak of death being “silence” as well (cf. Ps. 115:17). If a person were alive in some form after they died, whether it was heaven, “hell,” or some other place, there would be noise. But there is no noise in death because dead people are dead, lifeless, in every way.

[For more on dead people being dead and in *Sheol*, the state of being dead, see Word Study: “Hades.” For more on dead people being lifeless in every way, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.” For more on what the “soul” is, and that it does not live on after a person dies, see Word Study: “Psuchē.”]

Psa 94:23

**“He will return their wickedness upon them.”** It is a consistent theme throughout Scripture that evil people bring evil upon themselves (see commentary on Prov. 1:18).

**Psalms Chapter 95**

Psa 95:6

**“bow down.”** The word translated “bow down,” *shachah* (#07812 שָׁחָה), is the same Hebrew word as “worship.” What is set forth in Psalm 95:6 is deep and reverential worship.

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

**Psalms Chapter 96**

Psa 96:1

**“Sing to Yahweh.”** This psalm closely parallels 1 Chronicles 16:23-33.

Psa 96:5

**“idols.”** The Hebrew text has the word *'eliyl* (#0457 אֱלִיל), more literally “Worthless Ones” or “worthless things,” a sarcastic name for “idols” (see commentary on Hab. 2:18, “Worthless Ones”).

Psa 96:9

**“in holy attire.”** See commentary on Psalms 29:2.

Psa 96:13

**“for he is coming to judge the earth.”** Psalm 96 is very similar to 1 Chronicles 16:23-33, and Psalm 96:13 is similar to 1 Chronicles 16:33 (see commentary on 1 Chron. 16:8).

Scripture makes clear that there is a Day of Judgment coming, and each person who has ever lived will stand before God’s appointed judge, Jesus Christ, and be judged for what they have done. “God” will judge the people of the earth, but He will do it through His appointed ruler and judge, the Lord Jesus Christ (see commentary on Acts 17:31).

**Psalms Chapter 97**

Psa 97:1

**“Let the many islands be glad!”** From Israel looking west, the Gentile lands were out in the ocean (the Mediterranean Sea) so the word “islands” is applied to them, even though we do not think of the parts west of Israel as islands.

Psa 97:7

**“idols.”** The Hebrew text has the word *'eliyl* (#0457 אֱלִיל), more literally “Worthless Ones” or “worthless things,” a sarcastic name for “idols” (see commentary on Hab. 2:18, “Worthless Ones”).

**“bow down.”** The word translated “bowed down,” *shachah* (#07812 שָׁחָה), is the same Hebrew word as “worship.” The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body and face to the earth. “Bow down to him” is bowing down to Yahweh God.

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

**Psalms Chapter 98**

Psa 98:6

**“shofar.”** The ram’s horn trumpet, not the metal trumpet.

**Psalms Chapter 99**

Psa 99:1

**“sitting *enthroned between* the cherubim.”** The Hebrew text is more literally “sits of the cherubim,” but it was the custom for kings to sit on thrones, not just regular chairs, so translating according to the culture of the day, “enthroned” is a good translation and adopted by many English versions (CEB, CSB, ESV, NAB, NASB, NET, NIV, NJB, NRSV). That Yahweh sat “between” the cherubim is understood from Numbers 7:89, which says that Yahweh sits over the atonement-cover (traditionally “mercy seat”) and between the cherubim.

Psa 99:5

**“worship.”** Or, “bow down at his footstool.” The Hebrew word translated “worship,” *shachah* (#07812 שָׁחָה), is the same Hebrew word as “bow down.”

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

**Psalms Chapter 100**

**Psalms Chapter 101**

**Psalms Chapter 102**

**Psalms Chapter 103**

Psa 103:1

**“Bless Yahweh, O my soul.”** To properly understand Psalm 103:1-5, we must notice that the psalmist is talking to himself. Thus, the “you” and “your” in Psalm 103:3-5 refer to the psalmist himself, not people in general or every person.

Psa 103:3

**“forgives your every iniquity.”** In Psalm 103:3-5 the psalmist is speaking to himself. Thus, the “your” or “you” in those verses do not refer to everyone, but to the psalmist himself, who in this case is King David who penned the psalm. The opening two verses, Psalm 103:1-2, show this, saying, “Bless Yahweh, O my soul.” Leslie Allen correctly catches the sense of the Hebrew and translates it, “Bless Yahweh, I tell myself...Bless Yahweh, I tell myself.”[[27]](#footnote-21834) Another way we know that the psalmist, David, is speaking to himself is that the “you” and “your” are singular in the Hebrew text. If the psalm was addressing the people of God in general, then the “you” and “your” would be plural.

What is happening in Psalm 103 is that we readers are getting a look into the “self-talk” going on inside David’s head, and David is setting a good example for us about how we should talk to ourselves and remind ourselves of all the great things God has done for us. David had plenty of trouble, including trouble he made for himself by his bad decisions. Yet here he is talking to himself and reminding himself of the goodness of God. We can almost hear him lecturing himself and saying, “Now David, bless Yahweh because he forgives your sins, heals your sicknesses, and gets you out of mortal danger.” Wise Christians learn to imitate David and develop positive self-talk that results in a thankful heart and a good attitude.

So Psalm 103 gives us a good example of how a person after God’s own heart talks to themself so that they become thankful and praise God. But more than that, we also know that the things God did for David He will do for anyone who loves Him and makes an effort to live a godly life, so we can rely on the fact that God will forgive us, heal us, and deliver us from danger, including “the pit,” Sheol itself. Life is difficult, but we will be a lot better off personally if we learn to be thankful and maintain a positive attitude.

Psa 103:4

**“the pit.”** That is, death.

Psa 103:7

**“declared his ways.”** The word “ways” can also be “roads,” that is, that God has paths or “roads” that are godly and are ways to live, and He declared those to Moses.

Psa 103:15

**“As a flower of the field.”** The flowers in the field do not last long. They come out with the spring rains and are gone in a couple of months. A person’s natural life is not very long.

**Psalms Chapter 104**

Psa 104:4

This verse is quoted in Hebrews 1:7, but the book of Hebrews almost exactly quotes the Septuagint, not the Hebrew text. The Hebrew text and the Septuagint text are somewhat different.

**“who makes the winds his messengers, flaming fires his ministers.”** The Hebrew text of this verse has been understood in a couple of very different ways. One is that just as God is thought of as wrapping Himself in light, making his house in the clouds, and using the clouds as his chariot, so His messengers, His angels, are like winds and like flaming fire and go about doing His will.[[28]](#footnote-17027)

The other meaning the verse may have is that the winds are His messengers and His servants are “flames of fire,” that is, lightning, and those things are the servants of Yahweh displaying His power and doing His will. It is possible that both meanings are true. Both God and the Devil demonstrate their power through what happens in nature.

Psa 104:29

**“breath.”** The Hebrew is *ruach*, “spirit,” here used of the animal life of the body.

**“die.”** The Hebrew verb *gava* (#01478 גָּוַע) refers to dying and is fundamentally synonymous with the verb “die,” *muth* (#04191 מָוֹת), although *gava* can imply a violent death (see commentary on Gen. 25:8, “breathed his last”).

Psa 104:30

**“You send forth your spirit.”** In this context, “spirit” refers to God’s power in action, and some scholars recognize that and so different English versions translate Psalm 104:30 differently. For example, some Bibles have “breath” (cf. CJB, CSB, NLT), and some, like the REV, translate “spirit” with a lowercase “s” (cf. JPS, KJV, NRSV). God exercised His power and things were created and/or renewed.

In using the phrase, “send forth your spirit,” God is employing the figure of speech personification, in which something is given human characteristics for emphasis. In this context, the personification emphasizes the power of God’s “spirit” to accomplish God’s desire—the spirit is sent forth and the work God wanted done gets done. Personification is a very common figure of speech in the Bible and occurs in many verses. For example, the Psalmist writes “Send out your light and your truth. Let them lead me” (Ps. 43:3). Here, light and truth are given human characteristics just as “spirit” was in Psalm 104:30, and they were sent out as if they were servants going forth to do the Master’s work. They are sent out by God and can lead the psalmist. Psalm 85:10 is another good example of personification. It says, “Covenant faithfulness and truth have met together. Righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” In that Psalm, “covenant faithfulness” and “truth” meet together as if they were people, and righteousness and peace kiss each other—the kiss of friendship—as if they were friends. Another personification occurs in Psalm 23:6, which says, “Surely goodness and covenant faithfulness will pursue me all the days of my life.” In this psalm, “goodness” and “covenant faithfulness” are spoken of in human terms, and they are pursuing the psalmist (for more on the figure of speech personification, see commentary on Prov. 1:20).

**Psalms Chapter 105**

Psa 105:9

**“which he cut with Abraham.”** Psalm 105:8-11 and 1 Chronicles 16:15-18 both speak of the covenant that God made (literally “cut”) with Abraham and the oath that He made with Isaac and confirmed with Jacob. The covenant with Abraham is recorded in Genesis 15:8-21; 17:4-14. God said he would establish the covenant with Isaac (Gen. 17:19) and spoke of the oath to him (Gen. 26:2-5), and the promise was confirmed to Jacob (Gen. 28:12-15; 35:9-12).

Psa 105:16

**“staff of bread.”** “Bread” was a common idiom for food. “Bread” came to be used by metonymy for food in general because bread was the main food in the culture and a staple of life. Bread was indeed the staff upon which the people leaned for food, and in literature it is sometimes referred to as the “staff of life.” Here “the whole staff of bread” is the whole supply of food upon which the people leaned and depended. The whole food supply was broken (cf. Lev. 26:26; Ezek. 4:16; 5:16).

Psa 105:45

**“law.”** The Hebrew word is “Torah.” In this case, the “Torah” refers to the law and instructions given by God.

[For more on the meaning of “law,” *Torah*, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

**Psalms Chapter 106**

Psa 106:4

**“visit.”** When God “visited” someone, He intervened in their life, and He could intervene for their blessing or to bring deserved consequences or punishment. Here in Psalm 106:4, the psalmist is asking for God to “visit” with the blessing of deliverance.

[For more on God “visiting,” see commentary on Exod. 20:5.]

Psa 106:16

**“Aaron, *who was* the holy one of Yahweh.”** Aaron is referred to here in Psalm 106:16 as the “holy one of Yahweh” because he, not Moses, was the High Priest.

Psa 106:19

**“bowed down.”** The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body and face to the earth. The word translated “bowed down,” *shachah* (#07812 שָׁחָה), is the same Hebrew word as “worship.”

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

Psa 106:20

**“their Glory.”** In this context, scholarly consensus is that “Glory” is being used as an appellative (or metonymy) for God Himself. There is some evidence that the original text said “my glory,” referring to the praise and honor due God, but that does not seem to fit as well with the last part of the verse. It makes more sense that the people exchanged God for an ox idol than exchanged God’s praise for an ox idol.

[See Word Study: “Metonymy.”]

Psa 106:22

**“in the land of Ham.”** The Egyptians were descendants of Noah’s son Ham.

Psa 106:28

**“yoked.”** This Hebrew word only occurs here and Numbers 25:3 about the same incident (see commentary on Num. 25:3).

Psa 106:37

**“demons.”** The Hebrew word is *shed* (#07700 שֵׁד), and means “demons.” The Greeks who translated the Septuagint understood that and translated *shed* into Greek as *daimonion* (#1140 δαιμόνιον), “demon,” an evil spirit being. The BDB Hebrew lexicon says that *shed* is a loanword from the Assyrian *šêdu*, a protecting spirit, and that Psalm 106:37, which says the people sacrificed their sons and daughters to demons, is referring to human sacrifice. Putting Psalm 106:36-37 together leads us to conclude that the “idols” people worshiped were actually demons, and that is also what Paul said in 1 Cor. 10:20.

The ancient peoples understood there were many types of demons. Leviticus 17:7 mentions “goat demons.”

Psa 106:45

**“he relented.”** The Hebrew word translated “relented” is *nacham* (#05162 נָחַם), and here it refers to God backing off of punishment for evil that had already begun. For more on *nacham* and “relented,” see commentary on Jeremiah 18:8.

Psa 106:47

**“Save us, O Yahweh our God.”** Psalm 106:47-48 is very similar to 1 Chronicles 16:35-36 (see commentary on 1 Chron. 16:8).

**Psalms Chapter 107**

Psa 107:16

**“bars.”** The “bars” were strong wooden beams that were placed behind the doors so they could not be opened and could withstand pounding from the outside without giving way. Those bars were the origin of the shout “Bar the doors!” when an enemy would approach. No city would have a bar of iron; that would be a hyperbolic way of saying that God was unstoppable.

Psa 107:18

**“the gates of death.”** There is no escape from death except by being raised from the dead by God, and because of that, death is compared to a prison that has “gates” from which no one can escape without God’s help. These “gates” are referred to as the “gates of Sheol” (Job 17:16; Isa. 38:10) and “the gates of death” (Job 38:17; Ps. 9:13; 107:18). Jesus Christ referred to the gates in Matthew 16:18 where in many versions they are translated as “the gates of hell.”

[For more on the gates of death, see commentary on Matt. 16:18. For more on *Sheol*, see Word Study: “Hades.” For more on dead people being dead, lifeless in every way, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.”]

Psa 107:34

**“because of the wickedness of those who dwell in it​.”** One of the great lessons of the Bible is that the behavior of people affects the land that they live on. This lesson is throughout the Old Testament (cf. Deut. 11:13-17; 28:1, 12, 15, 22-25, 38-40; Lev. 18:24-25; Ps. 107:33-34; Jer. 3:2-3; 12:4; 23:10; Amos 4:6-10). (See commentary on Lev. 18:25).

**Psalms Chapter 108**

**Psalms Chapter 109**

Psa 109:18

**“like water and like oil into his bones.”** The allusion that the psalmist is drawing upon is not known. Some commentators have made suggestions but the fact is no one really knows. We do know that the bones are the core of the body, and so now the curses this wicked person has spoken to others will come back upon him to his very core.

**Psalms Chapter 110**

Psa 110:1

**“Yahweh’s declaration to my lord.”** Trinitarian commentators frequently assert that “my Lord” in this verse is the Hebrew word *adonai*, another name for God, and is therefore proof of the divinity of the Messiah. But not only is this not a valid argument, this verse is actually one of the great proofs of the complete humanity of the promised Messiah. The Hebrew word translated “my lord” is *adoni* (pronounced “Adon-nee.” Adonai is pronounced “Adon-eye,” because the “ai” sounds like “eye.” Adoni is pronounced “Adon-nee” because the final “i” is pronounced like a long “e.”) in the standard Hebrew texts. *Adoni* is always used in Scripture to describe human masters and lords, but *never* God. Unfortunately, most Hebrew concordances and lexicons give only root words, not the word that actually occurs in the Hebrew text. This is one reason why biblical research done by people using only tools such as *Strong’s Concordance* will often be limited. People wanting to study this for themselves will need to be able to work with the Hebrew text itself and not just the root words. While studying from the root word and not the actual word in the text does not usually affect the interpretation of the text, sometimes it makes a great deal of difference, such as in Psalm 110:1. *Focus on the Kingdom* reports:

The Bible in Psalm 110:1 actually gives the Messiah the title that *never describes God*. The word is *adoni* and in all of its 195 occurrences in the Old Testament it means a superior who is human (or occasionally angelic), created and not God. So Psalm 110:1 presents the clearest evidence that the Messiah is not God, but a supremely exalted man.[[29]](#footnote-11868) (We found 198 uses of *adoni*, but in a personal conversation with Mr. Buzzard he stated that his figure of 195 could understate the situation slightly.)

In the above definition, *adoni* and *adonai* have the same root, *adon*, which is the word listed in the concordances and most lexicons. However, the exact words used are different. *Adoni*, the word used in Psalm 110:1, is never used of God. It is always used of a human or angelic superior. The fact that the Hebrew text uses the word *adoni* of the Messiah in Psalm 110 is very strong proof that he is not God. If the Messiah was to be God, then the word *adonai* would have been used. This distinction between *adoni* (a lord) and *adonai* (the Lord, God) holds even when God shows up in human form. In Genesis 18:3, Abraham addresses God who was “disguised” as a human, but the text uses *adonai*.

Students of Hebrew know that the original text was written in an “unpointed” form, i.e., without the dots, dashes, and marks that are now the written vowels. Thus, some scholars may point out that since the vowel points of the Hebrew text were added later, the rabbis could have been mistaken. It should be pointed out, however, that the two Hebrew words, *adonai* and *adoni*, even though written the same in unpointed text, sound different when pronounced. This is not unusual in a language. “Read” and “read” are spelled the same, but one can be pronounced “red,” as in “I read the book yesterday,” while the other is pronounced “reed,” as in “Please read the book to me.” The correct way to place the vowels in the text would have been preserved in the oral tradition of the Jews. Thus, when the text was finally written with the vowels, it would have been written as it was always pronounced.

Further evidence that the Jews always thought that the word in Psalm 110:1 referred to a human Messiah and not God come to earth is given in the Greek text, both in the Septuagint and in quotations in the New Testament. It is important to remember that the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, was made about 250 BC, long before the Trinitarian debates started. Yet the Septuagint translation is clearly supportive of Psalm 110:1 referring to a human lord, not God. It translates *adoni* as *ho kurios mou* “My lord” instead of “the Lord.”

The translators of the LXX [the Septuagint] in the 3rd century BC attest to a careful distinction between the forms of *adon* used for divine and human reference by translating *adoni* as *ho kurios mou*, “my lord.”[[30]](#footnote-24287)

When Psalm 110:1 is quoted in the New Testament, the same truth about the human lordship of the Messiah is preserved:

The New Testament, when it quotes Psalm 110:1, renders *l’adoni* as “to my lord” (*to kurio mou*). But it renders *adonai* ([Psalm 110] v. 5 and very often elsewhere) as “the Lord” (*kurios*). This proves that the difference between *adonai* and *adoni* was recognized and reported in Greek long before the Masoretic vowel points fixed the ancient, oral tradition permanently in writing.[[31]](#footnote-11086)

Sadly, many scholars have not paid close attention to the Hebrew text of Psalm 110:1, and incorrectly say that the second “Lord” in the verse is the Hebrew word *adōnai* (or *adōnay*) and thus means “God,” not recognizing that *adōnai* is not the actual Hebrew word in the verse. One such source is *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* edited by Walvoord and Zuck, Victor Books, 1985, p. 873. Another is Herbert Lockyer, *All the Divine Names and Titles in the Bible*, Zondervan, 1975, p. 15. A third is Alfred Plummer, *Gospel According to S. Luke* [ICC]; Edinburgh; T&T Clark, 1913, p. 472.

The well-known Smith’s Bible Dictionary contains an article entitled “Son of God” written by Ezra Abbot. He writes:

Accordingly we find that, after the Ascension, the Apostles labored to bring the Jews to acknowledge that Jesus was not only the *Christ*, but was *also* a *Divine* Person, even the *Lord* Jehovah. Thus, for example, St. Peter… [Abbot goes on to say how Peter said that God had made Jesus “both Lord and Christ.”][[32]](#footnote-20495)

We believe Abbot’s conclusion is faulty because he did not pay attention to the exact wording of the Hebrew text. Even scholars who contributed to Smith’s Dictionary of the Bible apparently agree, because there is a footnote after the above quotation that corrects it. The footnote states:

In ascribing to St. Peter the remarkable proposition that “God hath made Jesus JEHOVAH,” the writer of the article appears to have overlooked the fact that *kurion* (“Lord”) in Acts 2:36 refers to to *kurio mou* (“my Lord”) in verse 34, quoted from Ps. 110:1, where the Hebrew correspondent is not Jehovah but *adon*, the common word for “lord” or “master.” St. Peter’s meaning here may be illustrated by his language elsewhere; see Acts 5:31 [where Peter calls Jesus a “prince,” *etc.*].

The footnote is quite correct, for the word in Psalm 110 is the word for a “lord” or “master” and not God. Thus, Psalm 110:1 gives us very clear evidence that the expected Messiah of God was not going to be God himself, but a created being. The Jews listening to Peter on the Day of Pentecost would clearly see the correlation in Peter’s teaching that Jesus was a “man approved of God” (Acts 2:22 in KJV), and a created being, the “my lord” of Psalm 110:1 which Peter quoted just shortly thereafter (Acts 2:34). The use of *adoni* in the first verse of Psalm 110:1 makes it very clear that the Messiah was not God, but a human “lord.”

Psalm 110 is a Messianic and prophetic psalm in which God gave David a vision of the future, when God and the Messiah speak about what the Messiah will accomplish. The fact that David does not call both God and the Messiah his “Lord,” but carefully words what he says such that Yahweh maintains His elevated position while the Messiah, God’s “right-hand man,” is seen as David’s “lord.” If God and Christ were both God and were co-equal and co-eternal, as the Trinity states, then Psalm 110:1 fails to recognize that equality, or even that Yahweh and the Messiah are both God. Quite the opposite! The Messiah, David’s *adōni*, is seen to be distinct from, and lesser than, Yahweh.

For more information on the Hebrew word *adonai*, see Word Study: “Lord.”

[For more information on Jesus being the fully human Son of God and not being “God the Son,” see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” For more on “the Holy Spirit” being one of the designations for God the Father and “the holy spirit” being the gift of God’s nature, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

**“Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”** When we look at the geography and positioning of the Temple and the royal palace dating back to the time of Solomon, the Temple was always north of the palace. That means that in the geography of the Ancient Near East, the palace of the king is “at the right hand” of Yahweh, who dwells in the Temple. Biblically, maps were oriented to the east (modern Western maps are oriented “north”), and the Temple faced east, the sunrise. In the Millennial Kingdom, the Temple will be on top of Mount Zion and the city of Jerusalem where the palace of the Messiah is, is south of the Temple, and thus on the “right hand” of the Temple (Ezek. 40-44, esp. 40:2).

Psa 110:2

**“your mighty scepter.”** Ps. 110:2 is addressed to the one at Yahweh’s right hand, as we see in the phrase, “Yahweh will stretch forth your mighty scepter,” with the “your” being God’s “right-hand man,” the Messiah. The first stanza in Psalm 110:2 would have been spoken by the psalmist, while the second stanza would be spoken by Yahweh (or direct prophecy from Yahweh to the psalmist). Psalm 110:3 and 110:4 continue with the address to the Messiah and thus continue to use the second-person pronouns, “you,” and “your.”

**“from Zion.”** The Messiah will rule the earth from Jerusalem on Mount Zion. Psalm 110:2 is a prophecy of the future, something we can see from the fact that the Messiah, who is Jesus Christ, never ruled at all in his first life on earth, and certainly not from Zion (the permanent residence and place of rulership of the Roman governor during the ministry of Jesus was at Caesarea, not Jerusalem). However, when Jesus comes back from heaven to earth and fights the Battle of Armageddon and conquers the earth, then he, the king over the earth, will rule from Jerusalem.

Psa 110:3

**“on the day of your power.”** That is, the day you wield your power. Psalm 110:2 refers to the day when Jesus Christ, the Messiah, will rule. He will rule from Mount Zion, a holy mountain (cf. Ps. 48:2; Isa. 2:3; 24:23; Jer. 31:6, 12; Joel 3:16-17).

Psa 110:4

**“he will not change his mind.”** God does on occasion change His mind, but not about some things, and that the Messiah would also be a priest is one of those things.

[For more on God changing His mind, see commentary on Jer. 18:8.]

Psa 110:5

**“O Lord.”** The context supports that this is to be translated as a vocative, “O Adonai,” and is addressed to Yahweh (cf. NET and Rotherham, who both translate it as a vocative). The psalmist, David, is speaking (David is the psalmist, cf. Matt. 22:43-45). This is the third Hebrew word in this Psalm that is translated “Lord” in most English versions. “Yahweh” and “Adoni” are in Ps. 110:1, and here in verse 5 is “Adonai,” which is from the same root as Adoni, but is a different word with a different meaning.

**“at your right hand.”** This is addressed to Yahweh; “your right hand” is Yahweh’s right hand, as was already stated in Psalm 110:1, that the Lord (Messiah) would sit at Yahweh’s right hand.

The Hebrew text can also be “by your right hand,” meaning that it is by Yahweh’s power the Messiah will shatter his enemies. In that sense, the Messiah would be understood to be the “right hand” of God (Exod. 15:6). However, it is perhaps better to see the Hebrew as saying “at” your right hand, based on verse 1 of the Psalm. The Septuagint agrees with this meaning of the verse and is “Lord, out from (*ek*) your right hand he crushes kings in the day of his anger.” Thus, in the Greek text also there is a clear distinction between the “Lord” and “he” who crushes kings.

**“is he *who* will shatter kings in the day of his wrath.”** In Psalm 110:5 there is a shift to the third person, “he” and “his.” Psalm 110:2-4 used the second person “your” referring to the one at Yahweh’s right hand (the Lord, the Messiah). Now the third person, “he” and “his,” refers to the Messiah. The verse starts with a direct address to Yahweh. It was well-known that at some time in the future there would be a day of God’s wrath when God would take vengeance on His enemies (cf. Ps. 2:12).

Psa 110:7

**“He will drink of the brook by the road.”** The meaning of Psalm 110:7 is debated by scholars and admittedly is not particularly clear. The meaning seems to be that the king will be thirsty during his hard fight, but will not stop long to take a break. That the brook by the road was even flowing—most brooks only flowed during the rainy season—likely also indicates the blessing of God on the land as the Messiah fights for victory. It seems he drinks and is refreshed, and returns to the battle and wins. That he is victorious seems to be the meaning of “lift up his head.”

**Psalms Chapter 111**

**Psalms Chapter 112**

**Psalms Chapter 113**

**Psalms Chapter 114**

Psa 114:7

**“Dance.”** The Hebrew word translated “dance” is *chul* (#02342 חוּל), and it has a number of meanings that, in this context, can seem contradictory. Its basic meaning is to twist or writhe, and so it means twist, writhe, tremble (from fear or pain), and travail (also used of women in labor). However, *chul* also means to twist from excitement or joy and thus also means “whirl, dance, twist (from joy).”[[33]](#footnote-13254) We see the meaning “dance” in Judges 21:21, 23.

But since *chul* can mean either “tremble” (in fear) or “dance” (with joy), which meaning does it have here in Psalm 114:7? The best answer seems to be “both.” The context seems to be unhelpful in determining a single meaning, because it too seems contradictory. But the scholars disagree with each other and take sides, For example, the *Hermeneia* commentary examines both “tremble” and “dance” and concludes, “…it seems better to translate the imperative ח֣וּלִי in v. 7 not as “tremble,” but as “dance,” because it also fits the context better.”[[34]](#footnote-24336) But the context does seem to go both ways. Before verse 7, when the sea fled, the Jordan River turned back, and the mountains and hills skipped, the word “tremble” seems to fit best. But after verse 7, in Psalm 114:8, the context is about blessings, because God brought forth water in the wilderness, which was a blessing to Israel and a blessing to the wilderness itself.

Psalm 114:7 is one of the verses for which the scope of Scripture points the way to properly understanding it. What happens on earth at the presence of Yahweh? How does the earth, and the people who live on it, respond? That depends on whether they have served God (or want to), or whether they have rebelled against him.

Much in creation will rejoice when Yahweh finally reigns through His Messiah, Jesus Christ. Romans speaks about earth’s situation today: “the whole creation has been groaning together and suffering birth pains up to the present time” (Rom. 8:22), and the whole creation is waiting expectantly for deliverance from its bondage to decay (Rom. 8:19-21). Much of the earth will rejoice when Yahweh delivers the earth through His Messiah.

Isaiah writes about the time of Yahweh’s deliverance: “the mountains and the hills will break forth into singing before you, and all the trees of the fields will clap their hands” (Isa. 55:12). He also writes: “The wilderness and the dry land will be glad. The desert will rejoice and blossom like a rose. The burning sand will become a pool, and thirsty ground will become springs of water” (Isa. 35:1, 7). The Psalmist also writes of the time of God’s salvation: “Let the rivers clap their hands. Let the mountains shout together for joy in the presence of Yahweh, for he is coming to judge the earth” (Ps. 98:8-9).

But in contrast with the earth and the obedient people, who will rejoice when the Messiah reigns, rebellious things will tremble because their end has come. For example, thorns and thistles, which are a result of Adam’s sin and the Fall, and which have been so ubiquitous and painful in every area of the world, will disappear. Isaiah writes: “Instead of the thorn will come up the fir tree, and instead of the briar will come up the myrtle tree” (Isa. 55:13). Similarly, wicked and rebellious people will be destroyed. The Psalmist writes, “there is a future for a person of peace,” but then he goes on to say, “But those who rebel, they will be destroyed together. The future of the wicked will be cut off” (Ps. 37:37-38).

Of the two possible translations, the REV has “dance” instead of “tremble” because even though there are a lot of things that will tremble when the Lord comes, there will also be much that will rejoice and dance, and it was always God’s intention that His creation dances in His presence, since He loves it so much and showers it with blessings.

So, how will things respond at the presence of Yahweh and when the Messiah reigns on earth? Some things will dance and be joyful. Other things will tremble with fear. Unlike most of creation, we humans are in a unique position to determine which response we will have when the Messiah comes. We can live rebellious and ungodly lives and then tremble in fear when Jesus comes back because we know we have no future, or we can obey God and rejoice when Jesus comes back because we know we have a wonderful and everlasting future.

**Psalms Chapter 115**

Psa 115:17

**“who go down into silence.”** Dead people are not alive in any form or in any place, they are dead, and so there is no activity or noise in the grave. That is why being dead is referred to as being in “silence.” Other verses speak of death being “silence” as well (see commentary on Ps. 94:17).

[For more on dead people being dead and in *Sheol*, the state of being dead, see Word Study: “Hades.” For more on dead people being lifeless in every way, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.” For more on what “soul” is, and that it does not live on after a person dies, see Word Study: “Psuchē.”]

**Psalms Chapter 116**

Psa 116:1

**“I love, because Yahweh hears my voice.”** This is one of the possible constructions of the Hebrew text. Most English versions read, “I love Yahweh because he hears my voice.” Robert Alter writes: “The Hebrew syntax is a little odd because ‘the Lord,’ YHWH, comes at the end of the verset.”[[35]](#footnote-25437) The fact that “Yahweh” comes at the end of the phrase (not the verse) means that the Hebrew text opens with “I love because,” which in fact it does. The flexibility of the Hebrew language allows for either the reading in the REV and some other English versions (cf. Douay-Rheims, YLT, Septuagint) or the reading found in most of the English translations. The fact is that both readings are true. However, it seems to be more profound and in keeping with the teachings of the New Testament that we love because God shows His love to us first (1 John 4:19).

It may not be the best thing to love God because He answers prayer, although that is a reason that some people love God. Thankfully, lots of people who do not seem to get many prayers answered love God anyway because of who He is and what he has done in history and will provide in the future.

Psa 116:15

**“Costly.”** The Hebrew word means “heavy,” “weighty,” “rare,” and “precious,” and it can be used to mean “valuable” or “costly.” The exact meaning of the word must be determined from the context. For example, when it is used in 1 Samuel 3:1, it means “rare” and therefore “precious” in the sense of highly valued. In contrast, here in Psalm 116:15, the greater emphasis is on “costly,” because a dead person cannot praise God (Ps. 115:17; Eccl. 9:5, 6, 10). It costs God something when a wonderful believer dies; it is “precious” in the sense of “costly.” The Psalmist had escaped death (Ps. 116:3, 8). He had called out to God and God had helped him and rescued him (Ps. 116:4-7). God had helped him when he was close to death and called out to God, and so the Psalmist confidently states that the life of a believer is precious in God’s eyes, because if it were not, then God would have let him die.

There are people who believe that God kills people or at least stands by and lets His people be killed, and they sometimes use Psalm 116:15 to support their belief. But that is not at all what the verse is saying. Besides the REV, other versions make it clear that the death of a believer is tragic, and expensive in God’s eyes. For example, Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible reads, “Costly in the eyes of Yahweh, is, death, for his men of lovingkindness.” The CJB reads, “From *ADONAI’*s point of view, the death of those faithful to him is costly.” *The Koren Tanakh* translates the verse: “The Lord grieves at the death of His devoted ones.”[[36]](#footnote-28598) Artur Weiser translates the verse: “It is too hard in the eyes of the Lord when his godly ones die and are no more.”[[37]](#footnote-20249) Leslie Allen translates the verse: “Yahweh counts too costly the death of his lieges.”[[38]](#footnote-32472) The NET text note reads: “The point is not that God delights in or finds satisfaction in the death of his followers! The psalmist, who has been delivered from death, affirms that the life-threatening experiences of God’s followers get God’s attention, just as a precious or rare object would attract someone’s eye.”

**Psalms Chapter 117**

**Psalms Chapter 118**

Psa 118:6

**“What can man do to me?”** The Hebrew is a rhetorical question that assumes the answer, “Nothing.” Of course, there are things that people can do to believers, but only to our mortal body, not to our resurrected body. Believers have everlasting life, and the next life will be more glorious than words can describe. Sadly, however, some believers become so afraid of giving up things in this life—including this mortal life itself—that they compromise who they are and what they believe and try to avoid persecution. But that is being afraid of the wrong thing! Jesus said, “And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul. But rather fear him [God] who is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna” (Matt. 10:28). Christians are guaranteed everlasting life and do not need to worry about Gehenna, but we can get to the kingdom and have no rewards there, which would be a terrible tragedy (cf. Luke 9:29; 1 John 2:28; 2 John 1:8). Besides, the Bible says that Christians who live truly godly lives will be persecuted, so rather than try to avoid it, the best strategy is to learn how to thrive in it and do God’s work (2 Tim. 3:12).

[For more on rewards in the coming Kingdom of Christ, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10.]

Psa 118:22

**“cornerstone.”** The Hebrew is “head of the corner,” which is the same as the Greek in the New Testament when Psalm 118:22 is quoted. The “head of the corner” is the “cornerstone.” This verse is so important in identifying Jesus Christ as the Messiah that it is quoted or referred to six times in the New Testament (Matt. 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:6 and 2:7).

**Psalms Chapter 119**

Psa 119:1

**“Blessed.”** The Hebrew text of Psalm 119 begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, aleph.

Psalm 119 is an acrostic psalm. An acrostic psalm or poem in the Bible occurs when the first letter in a line or stanza in the psalm begins with the first letter in the Hebrew alphabet (aleph), the second line or stanza begins with the second letter (beth), the third line or stanza beings with the third letter (gimel), and so forth (there are some “broken acrostics” (or “imperfect acrostics) that follow the general pattern but may have a missing letter or letters, reversed letters, or other abnormality). God has a small number of acrostic writings in the Bible, and they catch the attention of the reader and are also a mnemonic device to aid in memorization. When an acrostic uses the letters of the alphabet in order, grammarians refer to it as an abecedarius.

The Bible has a number of acrostics, including Psalm 25, 34, 37, 111, 113, 119, 145; Proverbs 31:10-31, and the book of Lamentations.

Psalm 119 is unique in that it has all 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet with each letter starting a section of eight verses, making Psalm 119 to be 176 verses. As for imperfect acrostics, Psalm 9 seems to make a single acrostic, but with imperfections. For example, five letters of the Hebrew alphabet are missing, and two letters that are there are in reverse order. Psalm 25 is missing one letter but the “R” (resh) occurs twice. Psalm 37 is missing the letter “D” (daleth). Psalm 145 is missing the letter “N” (nun), but that may be a copyist’s error because the Septuagint and the Qumran manuscripts of Psalm 145 contain it.

**“law.”** The Hebrew word is “Torah.” In this case, the “Torah” refers to the law and instructions given by God.

[For more on the meaning of “law,” *Torah*, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

Psa 119:18

**“law.”** The Hebrew word is “Torah.” In this case, the “Torah” refers to the law and instructions given by God.

[For more on the meaning of “law,” *Torah*, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

Psa 119:29

**“instruction.”** The Hebrew word is “Torah.” In this case, the “Torah” refers to the law and instructions given by God.

[For more on the meaning of “law,” *Torah*, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

Psa 119:34

**“law.”** The Hebrew word is “Torah.” In this case, the “Torah” refers to the law and instructions given by God.

[For more on the meaning of “law,” *Torah*, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

Psa 119:44

**“law.”** The Hebrew word is “Torah.” In this case, the “Torah” refers to the law and instructions given by God.

[For more on the meaning of “law,” *Torah*, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

Psa 119:51

**“law.”** The Hebrew word is “Torah.” In this case, the “Torah” refers to the law and instructions given by God.

[For more on the meaning of “law,” *Torah*, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

Psa 119:53

**“law.”** The Hebrew word is “Torah.” In this case, the “Torah” refers to the law and instructions given by God. [For more on the meaning of “law,” *Torah*, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

Psa 119:55

**“law.”** The Hebrew word is “Torah.” In this case, the “Torah” refers to the law and instructions given by God.

[For more on the meaning of “law,” *Torah*, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

Psa 119:61

**“law.”** The Hebrew word is “Torah.” In this case, the “Torah” refers to the law and instructions given by God.

[For more on the meaning of “law,” *Torah*, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

Psa 119:68

**“You are good, and you do good.”** God is good. This is stated in a number of places in the Bible (e.g., Ps. 100:5; 119:68; 135:3; cp. Prov. 10:22. See commentary on James 1:17)

Psa 119:70

**“Their hearts are insensitive, as if *covered with* fat.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “Their heart is insensitive as the fat,” but that is unclear to most people who would be confused by what “fat” is referring to. Some people might think, for example, that the text was saying that “Their hearts are insensitive, like fat people’s hearts are,” which is not at all what the text is saying.

**“law.”** The Hebrew word is “Torah.”

[For more on the meaning of “law,” *Torah*, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

Psa 119:72

**“Instruction.”** The Hebrew word is “Torah.” In this case, the “Torah” refers to the law and instructions given by God.

[For more on the meaning of “law,” *Torah*, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

Psa 119:77

**“law.”** The Hebrew word is “Torah.”

[For more on the meaning of “law,” *Torah*, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

Psa 119:85

**“law.”** The Hebrew word is “Torah.”

[For more on the meaning of “law,” *Torah*, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

Psa 119:92

**“law.”** The Hebrew word is “Torah.”

[For more on the meaning of “law,” *Torah*, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

Psa 119:97

**“law.”** The Hebrew word is “Torah.”

[For more on the meaning of “law,” *Torah*, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

Psa 119:109

**“law.”** The Hebrew word is “Torah.”

[For more on the meaning of “law,” *Torah*, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

Psa 119:113

**“law.”** The Hebrew word is “Torah.”

[For more on the meaning of “law,” *Torah*, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

Psa 119:118

**“because their thoughts are unrighteous.”** The Hebrew is unclear, and the REV more closely follows the LXX as do some other versions (cf. BBE, DRA, Aramaic Bible in Plain English, The Lamsa Bible).

Psa 119:126

**“law.”** The Hebrew word is “Torah.”

[For more on the meaning of “law,” *Torah*, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

Psa 119:136

**“law.”** The Hebrew word is “Torah.” In this case, the “Torah” refers to the law and instructions given by God.

[For more on the meaning of “law,” *Torah*, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

Psa 119:150

**“law.”** The Hebrew word is “Torah.” In this case, the “Torah” refers to the law and instructions given by God.

[For more on the meaning of “law,” *Torah*, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

Psa 119:153

**“law.”** The Hebrew word is “Torah.” In this case, the “Torah” refers to the law and instructions given by God.

[For more on the meaning of “law,” *Torah*, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

Psa 119:160

**“entirety.”** The Hebrew word is *roʾsh* (#07218 רֹאשׁ), most commonly translated as “head.” The word *roʾsh* is used of many things, including “head” (the head of a person, animal, etc.), individual, height, upper end, beginning, leader, chief, total amount, sum, epitome, etc.[[39]](#footnote-15332) A number of versions use the word “sum,” and the NKJV uses “entirety,” which seems to catch the meaning of the verse.

Psa 119:163

**“law.”** The Hebrew word is “Torah.” In this case, the “Torah” refers to the law and instructions given by God.

[For more on the meaning of “law,” *Torah*, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

Psa 119:165

**“law.”** The Hebrew word is “Torah.” In this case, the “Torah” refers to the law and instructions given by God.

[For more on the meaning of “law,” *Torah*, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

Psa 119:174

**“law.”** The Hebrew word is “Torah.” In this case, the “Torah” refers to the law and instructions given by God.

[For more on the meaning of “law,” *Torah*, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

**Psalms Chapter 120**

**Psalms Chapter 121**

**Psalms Chapter 122**

**Psalms Chapter 123**

**Psalms Chapter 124**

Psa 124:4

**“the waters.”** This is one of the verses that represents people, especially masses of Gentiles or wicked people, as the sea or as water; it was the people who “rose up against us” (Ps. 124:2).

[For more information on the “sea,” “water,” or “deep” being the Gentile nations or Gentile masses of people, see commentary on Revelation 17:15.]

**Psalms Chapter 125**

**Psalms Chapter 126**

**Psalms Chapter 127**

Psa 127:5

**“Blessed is the person who has his quiver full of them.”** The man’s household is compared to a quiver that keeps arrows protected and close by, ready for action. At a time when there was no police force to provide protection, and no government that provided people support in their old age, a large family, and especially lots of sons, was a person’s best hope for having a comfortable old age.

**“They will not be put to shame.”** The “they” refers to the father and his sons who are supporting him.

**“when they speak with their enemies at the gate.”** In this instance, the word “speak” is a synecdoche (the part for the whole), because if a man has “enemies,” his sons will do more than just “speak” to them, although most confrontations would start with speaking. At a time when family members defended family members, if a father had enemies, the sons would do whatever it took to defend and protect the family. In the biblical period, there were no police forces to defend the average person or his property. The best way to stay safe was to have a large family and belong to a powerful clan that could defend property, search for muggers and thieves, help keep food on the table, and care for people if they were sick or elderly.

**Psalms Chapter 128**

**Psalms Chapter 129**

Psa 129:3

**“The plowers have plowed upon my back.”** Psalm 129:3 has long been considered by spiritual people to refer to the suffering of Christ and the whippings he endured at the hands of the Romans, and that is no doubt the case. Although the Psalmist himself may have been whipped, and many others certainly have been, the great subject of the Word of God is Jesus Christ, and this verse and others like it must have helped prepare him for the things he had to go through to purchase our salvation. Thankfully, after the suffering comes the glory, and in the case of Jesus, the cords that bound him were eventually cut by God and he was delivered and glorified (Ps. 129:4).

Psa 129:4

**“he has cut the rope of the wicked.”** The context is the wicked plowing upon the back of the righteous. God delivers the righteous by cutting the rope. Exactly what the “rope” refers to is unclear, but the general meaning of the verse is very clear: God delivers the righteous. It is possible that the “rope” is the rope that connected the oxen to the plow, or it could be the rope that connects the yoke to the oxen. It is even possible that verse 4 is not connected to verse 3 and that the “rope” refers to some other kind of oppressive rope. Concerning Jesus, the “rope” was things that bound him, and God cut that rope and fully delivered and then glorified him.

The wicked often succeed “upon the backs” of the righteous, in other words, by making the righteous work and toil, but God sets the captives free.

**Psalms Chapter 130**

**Psalms Chapter 131**

**Psalms Chapter 132**

Psa 132:7

**“worship.”** Or, “bow down at his footstool.” The Hebrew word translated “worship,” *shachah* (#07812 שָׁחָה), is the same Hebrew word as “bow down.”

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

Psa 132:8

**“the ark of your strength.”** This phrase also occurs in 2 Chronicles 6:41.

**Psalms Chapter 133**

**Psalms Chapter 134**

**Psalms Chapter 135**

Psa 135:3

**“for Yahweh is good.”** God is good. This is stated in a number of places in the Bible (e.g., Ps. 100:5; 119:68; 135:3; cp. Prov. 10:22. See commentary on James 1:17)

Psa 135:13

**“how you are to be remembered.”** Yahweh is God’s name from generation to generation (see commentary on Exod. 3:15).

**Psalms Chapter 136**

**Psalms Chapter 137**

Psa 137:1

**“By the rivers of Babylon.”** This psalm was written during the Babylonian Captivity and the author is unknown, though some scholars have suggested Jeremiah.

Psa 137:7

**“the Edomites.”** This refers to the people from the area of Edom, who no doubt rejoiced when Babylon conquered Judah, but also “Edom” was used by the figure synecdoche of the part for Judah’s enemies as a whole. It was not just Edomites that rejoiced when Judah was destroyed.

[See Word Study: “Synecdoche.”]

Psa 137:8

**“O daughter Babylon.”** The Hebrew text is idiomatic and is referring to Babylon, calling it a “daughter.” It was common to refer to cities and countries as being female (see commentary on Isa. 1:8).

**Psalms Chapter 138**

Psa 138:2

**“bow down.”** This would be bowing down in prayer and worship. The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body and face to the earth. The word translated “bow down,” *shachah* (#07812 שָׁחָה), is the same Hebrew word as “worship.” Daniel kneeled and prayed toward Jerusalem where the Temple had been (Dan. 6:10), and Muslims pray toward Mecca.

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

**Psalms Chapter 139**

Psa 139:7

**“your spirit.”** Here used of God, i.e., “you.” The phrase “the spirit of God” is often used for God, cf. Genesis 1:2. We can confirm that by looking at the last phrase in the verse, which is “your presence.”

Psa 139:15

**“in the lowest parts of the earth.”** The scholars agree that this is a difficult phrase to understand. It is most likely a hyperbole, relating back to Psalm 139:7-10, where God is said to be everywhere, even in Sheol, and thus even before the baby was fully formed and might as well have been in the lowest parts of the earth (a phrase that sometimes refers to Sheol), the person was “not hidden from you [God].”

Psa 139:20

**“They speak.”** The Hebrew text is literally, “who speak,” referring to God’s enemies speaking against Him.

**Psalms Chapter 140**

Psa 140:9

**“caused by their own lips.”** The Hebrew uses the genitive, “trouble of their own lips,” and it is a genitive of origin, indicating the origin, source, or agent, and thus the verse is saying that the trouble “of” their lips is the trouble caused by their lips. The enemies were stirring up trouble by what they were saying. It is a consistent theme throughout Scripture that evil people bring evil upon themselves (see commentary on Prov. 1:18). Here the afflicted psalmist prays that what God so often said about the wicked being caught in their own wickedness will happen to his enemy.

Psa 140:11

**“evil.”** Here in Psalm 140:11, “evil” is a double entendre and is both a generalization for evil occurrences and a personification of evil beings such as the Devil and demons. People who do evil invite evil into their lives, and often suffer attacks from evil circumstances, people, and demons. See commentary on Proverbs 13:21.

**Psalms Chapter 141**

**Psalms Chapter 142**

Psa 142:3

**“spirit.”** This is the use of “spirit” (Hebrew: *ruach* #07307 רוּחַ) that refers to the activities of the mind: the thoughts, attitudes, and emotions. The troubles that the psalmist was having were causing his thoughts, emotions, and attitude to change and grow weak concerning his future and God’s help.

[For more on the uses of “spirit,” see Word Study: “Pneuma.” Usage #13 concerns thoughts and emotions.]

**Psalms Chapter 143**

Psa 143:2

**“before you.”** Or, in your presence.

**Psalms Chapter 144**

Psa 144:7

**“great waters.”** This is one of the verses that represents people, especially masses of Gentiles or wicked people, as water.

[For more information on the “sea,” “water,” or “deep” being the Gentile nations or Gentile masses of people, see commentary on Revelation 17:15.]

**Psalms Chapter 145**

Psa 145:17

**“ways.”** The Hebrew is more literally the idiom “roads,” meaning everywhere He goes (all that He does).

**Psalms Chapter 146**

Psa 146:6

**“who remains faithful.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “who guards faithfulness,” but it refers to being faithful.

**Psalms Chapter 147**

Psa 147:4

**“He calls them all by their names.”** God created every star and every star has a purpose (see commentary on Gen. 1:14).

Psa 147:13

**“bars.”** The “bars” were strong wooden beams that were placed behind the doors so they could not be opened and could withstand pounding from the outside without giving way. Those bars were the origin of the shout “Bar the doors!” when an enemy would approach. That God would strengthen the bars of a city gate means He made it secure and safe from attack.

**Psalms Chapter 148**

Psa 148:7

**“sea creatures.”** This could also refer to “sea monsters.”

Psa 148:10

**“creeping things.”** These are partially described in Leviticus 11:29-31 and include the small animals and rodents that crawl along the ground, such as mice, rats, weasels, lizards, etc.

**Psalms Chapter 149**

**Psalms Chapter 150**

Psa 150:3

**“shofar.”** The ram’s horn trumpet, not the metal trumpet.

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2. James Mays, Psalms, Interpretation, 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-23196)
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5. Cf. Peter C. Craigie, Psalms 1-50 [WBC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-10128)
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7. Cf. Ross, A commentary on the Psalms, vol. 1, Kregel Exegetical Library. [↑](#footnote-ref-16677)
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22. Cf. Keil and Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament: Psalms, 110-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-27748)
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