

Bible Study # 80
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The Writings Series—Book Five—Psalms 107—150

This evening we are in the final section of Psalms. We have been going through the book of Psalms and have focused on the fact that there are five divisions of the book of Psalms, as the Jews have traditionally reckoned it. This evening we are in the section that is termed **Book Five of Psalms—Psalms 107—150, which is the concluding portion of the book of Psalms.**

One of the things we have noted in this section of Bible studies is the fact that there is a correlation between the material in each of these books of Psalms with two other sets of five books—the five books of the Law (the Torah) or the five books of Moses and then the five Festival Scrolls called the Megillot by the Jews, which were traditionally read during various festival commemorative seasons.

We are in the final fifth section or book of the Psalms and that would correspond with the fifth book of the Law, which would be the book of Deuteronomy. It would also correspond with the fifth book of the Festival Scroll, which is the book of Esther. Now, what possible correlation or connection is there between the book of Esther, the book of Deuteronomy and this final fifth section of the Psalms? We **will note the correspondence of Deuteronomy and Esther with Book Five of Psalms.**

The Jews traditionally read the book of Esther during Purim. Purim is not one of God's Holy Days; it is a national holiday that commemorates an event that is described in the book of Esther. Remember the story? The Persian king had issued a decree that all the Jews were to be executed. He gave permission that on a certain day they were all to be killed. The book of Esther is the story of how God delivered His people through Esther. The celebration that takes place at the end of the book is a celebration of God's deliverance. It comes out very clearly in Esther that God is our Deliverer and the One who worked circumstances. Esther was read during Purim, which was a national festival of celebration of God's deliverance and God's salvation in the physical sense.

The book of Deuteronomy is a summing up—a restatement of the law—as Israel stood on the brink of crossing the Jordan River and entering into the Promised Land. They were on the verge

of entering into God's promises and of entering into God's rest. Moses died at the end of the book. Joshua then prepared to lead them across the Jordan River. "Deuteronomy" means "the second law." It is a restatement of the law. It reiterates the fact that obedience is the key to blessings. As the people were being prepared to cross into the Promised Land and to receive God's blessings, they were reminded of the need to obey. Blessings and obedience go together, just as curses and disobedience go together.

The emphasis of this section of the Psalms is a section on praise to God and praise to God as our Deliverer. Yet much of this section focuses on obedience to God and on the benefits and blessings that God bestows upon His people. We'll find this theme of praise running very noticeably through this entire section.

We have commented before how the first Psalm of each section sorts of sets the theme.

Psalm 107:1-3, "Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy, and gathered out of the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south." This section opens with giving praise and thanks to God for what He has done. It pictures the redeemed of the Lord and praise to God.

The rest of Psalm 107 looks back. You can almost read it with the idea that you are standing at the end of the Millennium, on the brink of eternity, looking back at what God has done to deliver His people—how He has brought them to Himself, how God has done and accomplished this, how He has established His reign on the earth and how He brought His people back. It is praise to God for what He has done in setting up His government and delivering His people. In that way, there is certainly a lot of correlation to these other things that we have talked about.

In this section of the Psalms, there are several Psalms that merit special attention. One is Psalm 119, which is the longest Psalm in the entire book of Psalms and the longest chapter in the entirety of the Bible.

Psalm 119 is very interesting in several ways. In most of your Bibles, if you will look at Psalm 119, you will notice something very unusual. In my Bible, right under the title Psalm 119, there is an unusual little mark (sort of a little squiggle) and next to it says, "Aleph." Then, if you come down eight verses—between verses eight and nine—there's another little squiggle and it says, "Beth." If you continue down eight more verses, between verses 16 and 17, there is another little

squiggle and it says, “Gimel.” There’s “Daleth,” “He,” “Waw,” “Zayin,” and you can just continue down. What you will find is that every eight verses you have another one of these peculiar little marks with a strange word by the side of it. What you are looking at is the Hebrew alphabet.

Why did they print the Hebrew alphabet here in this Psalm? It is to point out something. We can’t see it in the English, but if we were reading it in Hebrew, there is something that would stand out very unusual in this Psalm. The first word in the first eight verses begins with “A” or “Aleph.” In the next eight verses, the first word in each verse begins with “B” or “Beth,” as it is called in the Hebrew. In the next eight verses, the first word begins with “G”; the next eight verses begin with “D.”

You might just notice; I will point out something to you. Notice the first two letters of the Hebrew alphabet are “Aleph” and “Beth.” What do we call it? We call it the “alphabet.” That’s where it comes from.

The Greeks adopted their alphabet from the Phoenicians, who got it from the Israelites. The indication is that the Phoenicians picked it up during the time of King Solomon when they were handling the shipping for King Solomon. The Greeks got it from them, and so the Greek letters had similar names. “Alpha” and “Beta” are the first two letters in the Greek alphabet, which are just various spellings of the first two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, “Aleph” and “Beth.” It comes all the way down to English today because we talk about our “A-B-C’s”—our Aleph Beths or our alphabet. Every time you talk about the alphabet, you are really going back to Hebrew. It’s just one of those little sidelights.

This is a very unusual Psalm. It is a poem. It is called an “acrostic,” which means that every letter of the alphabet is used. If you go through, you’ll find that there are 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. I won’t go through each one of them. You will notice that there’s eight verses attached to each one—that comes out to 176 verses in all.

That’s sort of a remarkable thing. How would you like to write a poem where you have 22 sections of eight verses each and in each one of those sections, the first word of each verse begins with the same letter? Most of us would have trouble coming up with eight words that started with some of the letters. How would you like to come up with eight words that started with “x” in English? It’s an unusual way of doing it, and it stands out because it is the only

section like that in the Bible. It’s what’s called a “perfect acrostic.” There are several that are partial acrostics. It’s very difficult to do, where you use every single letter all the way through.

There are very simple ways—like in little children’s primers that would start out with “‘a’ is for ‘apple’; ‘b’ is for ‘bat’; ‘c’ is for ‘cat’” and this sort of thing. That’s a very simple sort of an acrostic where you go through and see it done. Sometimes you see it done for advertising. They will have a word spelled down with words spelled out horizontally from each letter. Well, that’s an acrostic.

Here, you have the entire alphabet written down, and then verses written across from that—only you have eight verses with “a,” eight with “b,” eight with “c,” coming down that way. The significance of that was a sense of perfection and completion because the entire alphabet was used. The sense of it was that God’s perfect law is being praised because Psalm 119 is really a Psalm of praise to God’s law. It focuses in on how wonderful, perfect and complete God’s law is. It focuses on the greatness of the law that God has designed and put together. It’s as though the entire Hebrew language and alphabet were completely used in saying everything there was to say about it in a poetic way. We will come back and look at some things in Psalm 119. It is interesting to note that.

In the next 15 Psalms, beginning with Psalm 120 through Psalm 134, you will notice right under each of those Psalms it says, KJV, “A Song of Degrees”; NKJV, “A Song of Ascent.” You will notice there are 15 of them that are called “Songs of Degrees.” What is that talking about?

One indication is that there is a Jewish tradition as to why there are 15 Psalms called “Psalms of Degrees” and where that comes from.

Isaiah 38:1-2, “In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death. And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, went to him and said to him, ‘Thus says the Lord: “Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live.”’ Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the Lord...”

Verse 3, he really besought God.

Verses 5-8, God told him, “Go and say to Hezekiah, ‘Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father, ‘I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; and I will add to your days fifteen years. I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city.’” And this is the sign to you from the Lord, that the Lord will do this thing which He has spoken: ‘Behold, I will bring the shadow on

the sundial, which has gone down with the sun on the sundial of Ahaz, ten degrees backward.’ So the sun returned ten degrees on the dial by which it has gone down.”

Verse 9, in the aftermath of that, we are told, “This is the writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, when he had been sick and had recovered from his sickness...”

Verse 20, he writes in the latter part of the chapter, “The Lord was ready to save me; therefore we will sing my songs with stringed instruments all the days of our life, in the house of the Lord.” In the aftermath of his healing and God’s deliverance, Hezekiah ordained some songs (Psalms) as a tribute to God that were sung by the Levitical choir in the house of the Lord. There were 15 years added to Hezekiah’s life. The sun went backward the equivalent of ten degrees on the sundial. Here we have 15 Psalms—Psalm 120 through Psalm 134—called “Songs of Ascents” (KJV, “Songs of Degrees”).

Let me just call your attention to something. Notice that Psalms 120 and 121 say, “A Song of Ascents [Degrees].” Psalm 122 says, “A Song of Degrees of David.” Now keep count. We come down to Psalm 123, “A Song of Degrees” and Psalm 124, “A Song of Degrees of David.” Psalms 125 and 126 are both “Songs of Degrees.” Psalm 127 is “A Song of Degrees for Solomon.” So, here’s the third one that has an author’s name given to it. Psalms 128, 129 and 130 are just “Songs of Degrees.” Psalm 131 is “A Song of Degrees of David”—this is the fourth one that has an author’s name to it. Psalm 132 is just “A Song of Degrees.” Psalm 133 is “A Song of Degrees of David”—that’s the fifth one that has an author’s name to it. Psalm 134 is just “A Song of Degrees.”

What you find, if you count it, is that ten of those “Songs of Degrees” are anonymous and five have authors that are given—four by David and one by Solomon. You have 15 Psalms—ten of which don’t give the author’s name; they are just called “Songs of Degrees.” Then you have five more that are added that bring it up to 15.

Jewish tradition holds that Hezekiah wrote those ten, and there were 15 of them in honor of the fact that there were 15 years that God added to his life. They are called “Songs of Degrees” because it commemorated the fact that the sundial went backward ten degrees as a miraculous sign of what God was going to do. Hezekiah wrote ten songs, one for each degree. Then there were five more Psalms that had previously been written but not added to the

canon. There were five Psalms that had been written either by David or Solomon that he added in to bring the total up to 15. These were added at the time of King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah as a celebration of God’s deliverance.

It’s sort of an interesting thing. These 15 Psalms were traditionally sung by the Jews on their way up to Jerusalem prior to the Feast. If you started with the evening that began the Feast of Trumpets and you take one a day for each song, you come up to Psalm 134 on the evening that begins the Feast of Tabernacles. We know from Jewish history that, in later years, the Levitical choir did that in the temple. There were 15 steps that led down into the inner court. They did this during that 15-day period leading up to the Feast of Tabernacles. They moved down a step every night and culminated with Psalm 134 on the evening that began the Feast of Tabernacles, which they sang on the evening that began the Feast. It’s sort of interesting if you read Psalm 134 and think of it in those terms.

Psalm 134:1-3, “Behold, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, who by night stand in the house of the Lord! Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the Lord. The Lord who made heaven and earth bless you from Zion!” That’s sort of an interesting opening to the Feast of Tabernacles.

This section of the Psalms and the entire book of Psalms end with five Psalms that are called the five “Hallelujah Psalms.” They are called that because the first word in each of these last five Psalms is “Hallelujah.” In most of our English Bibles, it is translated “Praise the Lord!”

Psalm 146:1, you will notice, “Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul!” The word “Hallelujah” is a Hebrew word and translated into English means “Praise the Lord.” Sometimes we hear the word or we have used the word “Hallelujah” in that way. In some cases, it’s just rendered that way in the Bible. It’s rendered as a phrase, which is just the Hebrew word. Or if it is translated, it literally means “Praise the Lord.”

There are a couple of Hebrew words that most of us have used over the years and never thought anything about; we probably didn’t even realize we were speaking Hebrew. There’s one Hebrew word that you and I say probably every day—“Amen.” It is a Hebrew word that literally means “let it be so.” It is the root word of the word that’s translated “faith” in the Old Testament and is sort of an affirmation of what is said.

This section of the Psalms and the whole book of Psalms end up with the five Hallelujah Psalms. You see this number five that runs through the book of Psalms. Here it ends up with five Psalms that are the Hallelujah Psalms. The thing you notice about each of these Psalms is that “Hallelujah” is the first word and also the last word. In each of these last five Psalms, the first word is “Hallelujah” and the last word is “Hallelujah.” That’s a good reason for calling them the “Hallelujah Psalms.”

Psalms 150 begins and ends up with, “Praise the Lord!”

Psalms 150: 1, “Praise the Lord! Praise God in His sanctuary; praise Him in His mighty firmament!”

Verse 6, it builds up and finally, “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!” There is that sense of climax.

The book of Psalms is a poetic book; that’s the nature of Psalms. There are several things that we might look at. I would call your attention to phrases and things that are in the book of Psalms that we may not have commented on before.

You’ll find that many of the Psalms have a title to them. Most of those say “A Psalm of David.” Some are directed to “The Chief Musician.” Many say, “A Psalm of Asaph” or “A Psalm for Asaph.”

Asaph was the chief of the Levitical musicians in the time of King David. The Levitical musicians were descendants of Asaph’s family. Asaph, evidently, played a major role under King David in originally organizing and putting together much of the book of Psalms. His descendants were the section of Levites that were the professional choir that sang in the temple. So, when you see the word “Asaph” in there, it is a reference to the chief of the Levitical musicians.

As you go through, you will notice in Psalms 4, 5 and 6, for instance, that it uses a rather unusual term. Psalm 4, KJV, says, “To the Chief Musician on Neginoth,” The spelling is a slight variation in Psalm 5, “To the Chief Musician upon Nehiloth.” Psalm 6 says, “To the Chief Musician on Neginoth....” We could go through, but you will find that phrase used in various places.

The question comes up: What do these terms mean? Some commentators connect it with some sort of musical notation that had meaning to the Levitical choir and that doesn’t necessarily have a meaning to us. The term “Neginoth” in Hebrew literally means “smiting.” Some have sort of connected that with reference for some sort of percussion instrument that was used in its

performance. There is, in most of the Psalms that use this term, a theme that has to do with deliverance from personal smiting and trouble. It may simply be a play on words, referring both to some sort of musical percussion instrument and may very well make reference to some of the subject matter. If it refers to a musical instrument, it would obviously be some sort of a percussion instrument, just by the meaning of the word.

Psalms 8, KJV, other terms are used, for instance, “To the chief Musician upon Gittith,” If you check, you will find that term is used a fair amount of times later on in the book of Psalms. That term is used in various places. Psalms 81 and 84, for instance, use it. There are various places. It’s literally a reference to winepresses, and it is thought of as a poetic term that relates to the subject matter of the autumn Feast of Tabernacles. The Feast of Tabernacles, of course, was a time of the grape harvest, a time when the winepresses were running and wine was being made.

In ancient times when the grapes were harvested, you either made wine or you made raisins. The fresh grapes didn’t last very long. They come off the vine and you eat some of them fresh—but what are you going to have through the remainder of the year?

Sometimes people ask if it was wine or grape juice Christ took at the Passover. Well, I’ll tell you what. You go out, get some grapes, press them out and make some juice. Set it up and see how long it stays grape juice. If you don’t put it in the refrigerator, freeze it or don’t give modern processing to it, you will find out how long you have grape juice. You may have wine or vinegar, but you are not going to have grape juice for too long because it simply won’t keep as grape juice.

So, that’s why it’s silly for some of the Baptists and different ones that want to claim maybe Christ took grape juice at the Passover. How did you keep it? You don’t harvest grapes in the spring; you harvest them in the fall. There was no such thing as grape juice in the spring until “Welch’s” came along. They didn’t go to the store and buy a bottle of Welch’s. They didn’t have pasteurization where they processed and pasteurized it. They didn’t get out a can of frozen concentrate and make it up. They didn’t have those things. Frankly, a lot of you remember when you didn’t have those things either. It hasn’t been that many years ago since some of those things came along.

There is a symbolism that the word “winepresses” ties in with the Feast of Tabernacles. God uses it in a symbolic sense, referring to His punishment of the wicked. He talks about, in that sense, treading out the grapes of wrath. He talks about the wicked, in that sense, being treading out. He draws the analogy to that back in the book of Revelation.

We find in the Psalms that the term “Gittith” is a poetic term. You’ll find that generally the subject matter is related to the fall festival season.

There are others. We will pick up one more that is used. I don’t want to get too bogged down on that, but I think it’s good to note because there are a lot of these strange-sounding words in the titles and a lot of times we wonder what they mean.

Psalm 32, KJV, says, “A Psalm of David, Maschil.” You’ll find that term used a number of places. Psalm 42, KJV, Psalm 52, KJV, and various other places use it. That’s a term that seems to relate to understanding or public instruction.

You find that some of the Psalms make reference in the title to “Korah.” It actually relates to the sons of Korah. Psalms 47, 48 and 49 are Psalms for the sons of Korah. The sons of Korah were Levitical musicians. This was one branch of the Levites who were musicians. These were notations that had reference either to the Psalm as it was used in public worship in the temple or in terms of the musicians who prepared it and used it. We won’t try to get all of these terms, but just in noting a few, it may help to figure out some of the others as well.

Let’s get on into this section a little more. We already noticed a little bit of the theme of Psalm 107; it is a Psalm of praise to God for His mercy and His redemptive power.

Psalm 107:1-2, “Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy...” In a lot of ways, it’s praising God right at the beginning of the Millennium.

Verse 3, “And gathered out of the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.”

Verse 6, “Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distresses.”

It talks about the punishments that came on those that had disobeyed God.

Psalm 108 is, again, a Psalm of praise to God.

Psalm 109:1, “Do not keep silent, O God of my praise!”

Verse 8, there’s an interesting statement, “Let his days be few, and let another take his office [or take his charge].” We would tend to just read over that. But if you go back to Acts 1:20, you will find that Peter quoted it there and applied it to Judas. Psalm 109 is written in the sense of David being a type of Christ.

Verses 3-8, “They have also surrounded me with words of hatred, and fought against me without a cause. In return for my love they are my accusers, but I give myself to prayer. Thus they have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love. Set a wicked man over him, and let an accuser stand at his right hand. When he is judged, let him be found guilty, and let his prayer become sin. Let his days be few, and let another take his office.” Here’s a reference to one who was a betrayer.

Acts 1:20, Peter quotes it, “‘For it is written in the book of Psalms: “Let his habitation be desolate, and let no one live in it;””

That’s taken from Psalm 69.

Psalm 69:25, “Let their habitation be desolate; let no one dwell in their tents.”

Acts 1:20, “...and, “Let another take his office [bishopric].””

This is quoted out of Psalm 109.

Psalm 109:8, “...and let another take his office.”

Peter quotes this Psalm and applies it to Judas Iscariot. He used that as a basis of saying that a replacement apostle needed to be chosen to round out the number to 12.

Now, you and I may not have known this if all we had was the book of Psalms. We probably would have never figured that out. But the point is that we understand the Old Testament by the New Testament. The New Testament provides a proper understanding and interpretation of the Old. There are many things that we could never understand completely without what the New Testament adds.

Psalms 110:1, an interesting example, “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.’” What is being talked about here?

If you just hold your place there, notice back in Matthew 22, Jesus quoted this part.

Verse 15, the Pharisees were trying to challenge Christ and trip Him up.

Matthew 22:41-43, “While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, ‘What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?’ They said to Him, ‘The Son of David.’ He said to them, ‘How then does David in the Spirit call Him “Lord,” saying...”

Christ said, 'You fellows have a lot of questions for Me; I have one for you. Whose Son is the Messiah? Who is the Messiah a descendant of?' And they said, 'He'd be the Son of David, a descendant of David.' And He said, 'That's interesting. How is it that David in the Spirit calls Him "Lord"? If He is David's Son, why does David speaking under inspiration call Him "Lord"? Then He makes reference to the book of Psalms—He quotes Psalm 110:1.

Verses 44-45, ""The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool'"? 'If David then calls Him "Lord," how is He his Son?'" It was sort of a trick question for them. They couldn't answer. Since they were trying to trip Him up, He just asked them a question that He knew they couldn't answer. Jesus Christ quoted it.

Verse 46, we are told, "And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore." They quit asking Him questions. That was His way of doing this.

You might notice that a lot of Psalm 110 is a reference to Christ.

Psalm 110:4, ""The Lord has sworn and will not relent, You are a Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." This is quoted in the book of Hebrews 7:21.

Psalm 111 is a very interesting Psalm.

Psalm 111:9, "...holy and awesome [KJV, "reverend"] is His name." That is one of the reasons we don't use the title "reverend" in God's Church. We don't refer to the ministry by the title "reverend" because we are told that 'holy and reverend is His name.' That's God's name. "Reverend" means "worthy of worship." I am not worthy of worship; neither was Mr. Herbert Armstrong or any human being. God is worthy of worship; He is reverend and holy. We don't use that title because it says 'holy and reverend is His name.'

Verse 10, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever." That's an important thing. The starting point for wisdom is to stand in awe of God.

The world doesn't have a lot of wisdom because the world's starting point is that people are impressed with themselves. The starting point for most of the intellectuals of this world is that they are impressed with themselves and how much they know. They think they are pretty smart; as a result, they will wind up coming up with some pretty stupid philosophies and pretty stupid answers.

'The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God'—really standing in awe of God and being impressed with God. If you start out impressed with God, it's amazing how everything else falls into place. You can figure out a lot of things if you realize how great God is and how small we are by comparison. It has to do with setting our whole worldview.

It says, "A good understanding have all who do His commandments." Do you want to understand? You have to act on what you know. It's interesting. When God began to work with Mr. Herbert Armstrong, when God began to open his mind, the first thing was the understanding of the Sabbath. The Sabbath and the Holy Days was the test. Once Mr. Herbert Armstrong showed he was willing to start doing that, his mind was opened to other things.

It's interesting. Right there at the beginning, the beginning was the Sabbath and the Holy days; the next had to do with the identity of Israel, which unlocked Bible prophecy and the Old Testament. Within a fairly short time—within a matter of months—he began to understand the overview of the prophetic outline and the identity of who is the beast. Those were things he began to understand early on. But he never would have understood some of those things if he hadn't started obeying God.

"A good understanding have all those who do His commandments." Mr. Herbert Armstrong used to mention the fact that he and his wife kept the Holy Days for seven years before they understood what the days meant. If he had waited to understand what they meant before he did it, he would never have understood. See, "a good understanding have all they that do His commandments."

If you want to grow in understanding, act on what you know. Start where you are and do what you see God says to do. You may not understand all the "whys," but if we're yielded to God, we don't have to understand all the "whys." The fact that God said it should be enough. I don't have to evaluate whether it's a good idea or not. If God said, 'Do it'—that's sufficient. And if I do it, sooner or later I'm going to come to understand.

The world wants to put themselves in the seat of being the judges. They don't see what difference it makes. The point is not whether *I* see what difference it makes; the point is: Does *God* say it makes a difference to Him? If it makes a difference to Him, whether or not I see what difference it makes is irrelevant. The point is: God said it; I start doing it. And you know what?

The longer you do it, the more you understand about it and the clearer it becomes. I think most of you can look at that in your own life and see that you have grown in understanding after you started acting on the things you saw. It's like God will lead us as long as we follow, but if you quit following, then all of a sudden, you don't continue to understand more and more. This is a key thing here in Psalm 111.

Psalm 112:1, again, a Psalm of praise, "Praise the Lord! Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who delights greatly in His commandments."

Verse 5, "A good man deals graciously and lends; he will guide his affairs with discretion." A good man is going to be kind and generous, but he's also going to use good judgment in guiding his affairs.

Verse 7, he's going to trust God.

Psalm 113 is, again, a Psalm of praise to God.

Psalm 113:4, "The Lord is high above all nations, and His glory above the heavens." He's the One that can be looked to.

Psalm 114:1-2, "When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language, Judah became His sanctuary, and Israel His dominion." This is a Psalm of praise to God for the great things that He did.

Psalm 115 talks about how really insane it is for people to make idols and to trust in those idols.

Psalm 115:2-8, "Why should the Gentiles say, 'Where now is their God?' But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak; eyes they have, but they do not see; they have ears, but they do not hear; noses they have, but they do not smell; they have hands, but they do not handle; feet they have, but they do not walk; nor do they mutter through their throat. Those who make them are like them; so is everyone who trusts in them."

It is absolutely futile. What's the use? What's the point? You have some statue sitting up there; it can't move, talk, see or do anything—and here's somebody bowing down and praying to it.

Verse 9, the point is, "O Israel, trust in the Lord; He is their help and their shield." We are to trust in the Eternal. We are to trust in God who dwells in heaven, and He delivers.

Verse 16, "The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's; but the earth He has given to the children of men."

It's interesting how people always want to get "ahead of the game." We are told that as the sons of God, we ultimately are going to inherit all things. We'll inherit the universe. It talks about

that in Revelation 21:7. But you know, 'the heavens are God's, the earth He has given to the children of men.' But, of course, what do people want to do? We have made a mess out of the earth. We have polluted it. We have gotten it dirty and made a "wreck" out of so much. Now man wants to conquer outer space. That surely makes a lot of sense; we can't take care of what we have.

God's principle is to start where you are. Learn to take care of what you have. Then, when you're faithful with a little, you will be given rulership over much. Man makes a mess out of what he has and then wants to quickly move on to something else. We are going to find that is something that is not for man at this time. That is something that we ultimately can have a part in on into the Millennium. But right now, the earth is what we have and what God has given us to take care of.

Psalm 116:1, "I love the Lord, because He has heard my voice and my supplications."

Psalm 117:1, "Oh, praise the Lord, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!"

Psalm 118:1, "Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! Because His mercy endures forever." It is, again, a Psalm of praise and rejoicing.

Verses 22-23, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes." You will find this is quoted in Matthew 21:42, Mark 12:10, Luke 20:17, Acts 4:11 and Ephesians 2:20. This particular verse is quoted in a variety of places in the New Testament. The book of Psalms is heavily quoted in the New Testament.

Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible. We have already talked about that. It is praising God's law. You will find that there are seven different terms that are used.

Psalm 119:1, "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord!" It talks about the law of the Lord.

Verse 2, "Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with the whole heart!" The second term is testimonies.

Verse 4, "You have commanded us to keep Your precepts diligently." Precepts—that's a little bit different.

Verse 5, "Oh, that my ways were directed to keep Your statutes!" Statutes is the fourth term.

Verse 6, "Then I would not be ashamed, when I look into all Your commandments." The fifth term is commandments.

Verse 7, “I will praise You with uprightness of heart, when I learn Your righteous judgment.” Judgment is a sixth term.

Verses 9, “How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.”

Verse 11, “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.”

We read of God’s law, His testimonies, His precepts, His statutes, His commandments, His judgment and the seventh term, His word. There is a lot of overlap between these terms. There are certain differences. Perhaps at a later time I may give a sermon on God’s law and go through a little bit of the differences between these terms. There’s a lot of overlap. Some of it is more poetic, but there are some differences.

The term “Law” or “Torah” includes the testimonies, precepts, statutes, commandments, judgments; it includes everything. The term “the Word of God” includes everything God says. His testimonies relate more to accounts or illustrations.

Some people operate on the basis that if you can’t show them a verse that says, “thou shall do so-and-so,” then they are not going to do it. They don’t see why they can’t. We should all understand that the Bible isn’t written that way. God does give commandments where He says, “thou shall” and “thou shall not,” but that’s not the only way God speaks to us.

When you go through and read the story of Abraham, that’s part of the testimonies. When you read the story of David, that’s a part of the testimonies. You see the way God worked. You see the things they did; you see what they should have done and what they shouldn’t have done. You get God’s evaluation of it. We should learn from that. If God had wanted to simply give us a list of 375 things to do and not to do, He could have written the Bible that way—where it was just a few pages long and a list of 375 rules. That’s not the way God wrote it.

Matthew 4:4, Jesus said, “...‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’” We need to study the Bible from the standpoint of trying to see how God views things. We are not to have an attitude of, “Unless you can show me God says right here, ‘thou shalt not do such and such,’...” God deals with a lot of things in principle. That’s what’s known as having the mind of Christ. There are illustrations and specifics. There are commandments that are given that certainly summarize. There are statutes that have more to do with civil matters. There are many different things. There are judgments that may apply to

specific circumstances. There are a lot of different things that come out.

Psalms 119 deals with all of that. It talks about the various aspects of God’s law and how God’s law is for our good. We think of law as simply a list of rules. That’s a mistake because the word for “law” in Hebrew was the word “Torah” which means “instruction.” The term “God’s law” includes rules, but it also includes testimonies and other things. It is an overall term that refers to God’s instructions. God’s instructions are what we should want and what we are looking for.

Verse 97, “Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.” In God’s law, there’s an orientation toward God’s instruction.

Verse 105, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

Verse 142, it’s very clear that God’s law is eternal because we are told, “Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Your law is truth.”

Verse 172, “...for all Your commandments are righteousness.” If God’s righteousness is everlasting and all His commandments are righteousness, then that sounds like the law is going to be around forever.

Verses 151-152, “You are near, O Lord, and all Your commandments are truth. Concerning Your testimonies, I have known of old that You have founded them forever.”

Verse 160, “The entirety of Your word is truth [KJV, “Your word is true from the beginning”], and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever.” We see that God’s law is intended to be around for a long, long time.

The next 15 Psalms—Psalms 120—134—are the Songs of Degrees. We have already commented about that.

Psalms 122:1-2, “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go into the house of the Lord.’ Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem!” This is a theme that certainly focuses in on when God’s people are going to go up to Jerusalem in peace in the beginning of the Millennium.

Verses 3-4, “Jerusalem is built as a city that is compact together, where the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, to the Testimony of Israel, to give thanks to the name of the Lord.”

Psalms 123:1, “Unto You I lift up my eyes, O You who dwell in the heavens.”

Psalms 126 describes God bringing the captives back after the return of Jesus Christ.

Psalms 126:1-4, “When the Lord brought back the captivity of Zion, we were like those who dream.

Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing. Then they said among the nations, 'The Lord has done great things for them.' The Lord has done great things for us, whereof we are glad. Bring back our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the South."

Psalm 127:1-2, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows; for so He gives His beloved sleep."

If God is not behind it, it's futile. If God is not involved in what we are doing, then it is an exercise in futility. It's an important point, KJV, "Unless the Lord builds the house, the weary builders toil in vain." Whether it's our lives or family or anything that we are doing, if God is not involved in it, then no matter how hard you work and no matter how much effort you put into it, there's never going to be anything permanent out of it. If you are trying to do something that is going to last, you don't leave God out. You don't leave God out and you don't put God in last. God has to be the starting point.

Psalm 133:1, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" It shows how that is important and precious in God's sight.

In Psalm 135, we find a Psalm of praise to God for all the great things that He has done—the things He's done in ages past—the work of creation, His intervention for His people in times of need. Some of the great things that God has done are detailed out in Psalm 135. It is a hymn of praise to God.

Psalm 136:1, "Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever." Again, it's a continuation of the same sort of thing as in Psalm 135.

Psalm 137 is a little different. It is written in the context of the Babylonian captivity. It is a reference to God's people in the Babylonian captivity looking to God as their Deliverer and the fact that even on into the Millennium, God's people, whom He's redeemed and brought back, will look to God. They will look back on the captivity and the things that God has brought them out of.

Psalm 138:1-2, "I will praise You with my whole heart; before the gods I will sing praises to You. I will worship toward Your holy temple, and praise Your name for Your lovingkindness and Your truth; for You have magnified Your word above all your name."

Verse 6, "Though the Lord is on high, yet He regards the lowly; but the proud He knows from afar." That's an important concept to realize. In this world, if you want to gain access to somebody important, you better have a lot of money. You better have great power if you want to get in to see the governor. If you are a multi-millionaire, you can get right in. If you have enough money, your phone calls can get right through, even to the President of the United States. But if you or I were to try that, we would be doing well to get the secretary's secretary. That's just the way the world is structured.

But what we have to realize is that though you and I may not have direct access to all the great and mighty and powerful of this world, we do have direct access to the very headquarters of the Universe. KJV, "Though the Lord be high, yet has He respect unto the lowly; but the proud He knows afar off." The way to gain access to God is to be lowly, to be humble. Come before God, have an attitude of humility and we can have direct access to Him.

Verse 8, there is another important point that's brought out, "The Lord will perfect that which concerns me; Your mercy, O Lord, endures forever; do not forsake the works of Your hands." It's not what you can make out of yourself or what I can make out of myself; it's what God can make out of us as we yield to Him. "The Lord will perfect that which concerns me." To the extent that we will surrender our life and our will to Him, He will perfect that which concerns us. He will take it and develop it. He will make us what we could never make ourselves. In that sense, to the extent that we get out of the way, we let God work. His mercy endures forever and He won't forsake the work of His own hands. We are the work of His hands. He is in the process of making us, not only physically in His image but spiritually.

Psalm 139:1-6, "O Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O Lord, you know it altogether. You have hedged me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it."

He is saying, 'God knows me better than I know myself. He knows everything about me. He knows when I rise up and when I sit down.'

Verses 7-12, 'Where am I going to go away from Him? There's no place I can go that He is not

going to find me. Even the darkness can't hide me from Him.' He goes on and describes that. He shows how God can see us in the remotest of places.

Verses 23-24, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." He's asking God to search him, examine him, to help him to see himself. God knows everything about me; He knows me better than I know myself. 'Search me, try me, see if there's anything that shouldn't be there.' We have to go to God for spiritual insight into ourselves. One of the hardest things for any of us to do as human beings is to be completely honest with and about ourselves.

What are we told?

Jeremiah 17:9, "'The heart is deceitful above all things. ?...'" First and foremost, the primary ingredient of human nature is that we kid ourselves. It's hard to be really honest with or even about myself. But God knows. He sees us in the dark, in the daylight, when we rise up and sit down.

The psalmist (David) asks God, 'Help me to see myself. Search me and try me. Help me to understand, to see and to perceive, what You see.'

Psalm 140 is a prayer for deliverance and preservation.

Psalm 140:13, "Surely the righteous shall give thanks to Your name; the upright shall dwell in Your presence."

Psalm 141:1-2, "Lord, I cry out to You; make haste to me! Give ear to my voice when I cry out to You. Let my prayer be set before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice." Incense is used to symbolize the prayers of the saints. Revelation 5:8 states that specifically. He draws the analogy of prayer being likened to incense.

Verse 3, he makes an interesting statement, "Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips." What does that mean? He's asking God to post an armed guard right at his lips to not let anything get out that shouldn't. I'll tell you what. We would be an awful lot better off if some people had that attitude.

Verse 4, "Do not incline my heart to any evil things, to practice wicked works with men who work iniquity; and do not let me eat of their delicacies." 'Don't let me have an attitude of wanting to collect gossip and standing around to eat of their dainties.' They have this little juicy tidbit, this little morsel of gossip. 'Hey, did you hear what "so-and-so" did?' That's the normal

human reaction. The ears perk up, 'Oh, really! I can't believe it.'

David recognized that was something that really should not be. He says, 'What I want to do is let my prayer come out—let my prayer come before you as incense and please set a guard at the door of my mouth so that no wicked words escape. I don't want things to come out that shouldn't. I don't want to take in all these little delectable morsels from people about wicked things. I don't want my heart and mind to be that way.'

Psalm 142:1, "I cry out to the Lord with my voice; with my voice to the Lord I make my supplication."

Verse 5, "I cried out to You, O Lord: I said, 'You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.'"

Psalm 143:1, "Hear my prayer, O Lord, give ear to my supplications!"

Psalm 144:1, "Blessed be the Lord my Rock, who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle..."

Psalm 145:1, "I will extol You, my God, O King; and I will bless Your name forever and ever."

Verses 7-9, "They shall utter the memory of Your great goodness, and shall sing of Your righteousness. The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works." God is compassionate and merciful. His tender mercies are over all His works.

It's interesting. I will point out here that over the years, in certain countries, there have been many sports that are, let's say, cruel sports or "blood sports," as they are called. I'm not making reference to hunting but, let's say, to everything from bullfighting, cock fighting, dog fighting, bull baiting and all sorts of things like that. A lot of those things have sort of fallen into disrepute.

Jews, who have been devout, have never engaged in that sort of thing. Their basis for refusing to involve themselves in things like this—things that involve sort of a slow torturous death to animals—has been this verse. The verse that they quote is Psalm 145.

"The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works." That verse is their basis of why not to be involved in, let's say, sports of cruelty. Here's an example that they extrapolate out of this verse. Now you can't point to a verse that says, "Thou shall not" and come up with something like that. But here's a principle that's stated, "The Lord is good to all." Now, obviously, God created certain animals to be

consumed, but if you go back to the law and the instructions that were given to the priests and the Levites, a slaughter was quick. It was not something that was slow and torturous. It didn't involve cruelty. Of course, there were certain animals that were created to be eaten, but there's a difference between slaughtering an animal to eat and putting two animals together and watching them "go for it" and goad until finally one of them kills the other. It's just sort of a little aside. It's maybe a minor point, but I think it is just a little bit of insight into the character and nature of God.

The point is that when we read the Bible, we want to read it from a standpoint of trying to understand how God thinks so that we can learn to think that way, too. We should not read the Bible trying to spiritualize everything away. We should not read the Bible from a modern lawyer's standpoint, sort of looking for loopholes—'Awh, He didn't say you couldn't do this at this time, so I'll do it.'

The point is that God gives us an overview. He gives us principles that relate to the way He thinks and, if we have a converted mind, then we are trying to find the principles. We are trying to understand how He thinks because we want to learn to think that way, too. He's gracious. He's full of compassion. He's slow to anger. He's of great mercy. Those are the characteristics that should characterize us. If we're not gracious, if we lack any compassion, if we're quick to anger, if we have very little mercy, well, when we read this, we need to realize that here are some areas that we need to work on.

Psalm 145:18-20, "The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth. He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them. The Lord preserves all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy."

Psalm 147:3-4, "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name." Now that's an incredible thing. God can count all the stars, and the number of stars is infinite to man's reckoning. Man can't count how many there are; God knows the number. There is a specific number. I don't know how many, but God does. One of these days you and I can find out. Not only does He know how many there are, He remembers all their names. You talk about memory; now that's memory!

1 John 3:2, the encouraging point is, "...it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we

know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

When Christ comes back in glory, we are going to be like Him. Our glorified body is going to be just like His. We are going to be like God. We are going to be a part of His Family. Maybe you and I forget an awful lot of things that we try to learn right now, but the time is going to come, in a few years, when we are going to be like Him. That means we are going to have the kind of mind that's able, not only to count how many stars there are, but also to remember all their names. The things you read, study and try to remember—if you have trouble remembering it all—in a few years, it will come right back and you will have no trouble. It's a little bit of insight into the greatness of God's mind and God's greatness.

Psalm 147:11, "The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His mercy." We have already commented on these final "Hallelujah" Psalms—Psalms 146, 147, 148, 149 and 150.

Notice how Psalm 150 climaxes.

Psalm 150:1-6, "Praise the Lord [Hallelujah]! Praise God in His sanctuary; praise Him in His mighty firmament! Praise Him for His mighty acts; praise Him according to His excellent greatness! Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet; praise Him with the lute and harp! Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes! Praise Him with loud cymbals; praise Him with high-sounding cymbals! Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord [Hallelujah]!"

There is a poetic climax that focuses in on the use of music in the worship of God and the fact that it plays a very important role. We should realize that's part of the importance of music. There's nothing that has a greater impact upon the mood and the emotions of human beings than music. Certainly, an atmosphere of awe and majesty can be created through music, just as negative moods and emotions can be created.

Music was something that was used in a very special way in ancient Israel. God considered it important enough that a portion of the Levites were a professional orchestra and a professional choir. That was what they did. They were supported, of course, by the tithes of the people, but they were a professional orchestra and a professional choir. God obviously considered music and its impact on the people as an important part of worshipping Him and an important part of what was important in society.

The whole book of Psalms is a poetic book. It is a book that was set to music and sung. It is a book that is suited for meditation and for memorization. It is poetic, yet, it has a tremendous amount of content and “meat” packed into it that all of us can, hopefully, get more out of as we study it and realize the role and impact that God designed it to have.

We can just sort of feel some of this, here in Psalm 150, as we imagine the Levitical choir performing this number—the sense of awe, majesty and worship that was created in the proper use of music.

There are various proper moods to be created with music. There are, certainly, celebration and festive occasions, as well as for worship and for other things.

We have now concluded the book of Psalms. We are going to continue this series of the Writings by going right on into the book of Proverbs. The next Bible study we will cover the first portion of the book of Proverbs—the first nine chapters.