

STUDIES IN THE PSALMS

Study 1

Messiah - The Sovereign

Read Psalm 2

In our first study in this series, we saw among the variety of Psalms contained in the book, that there were some that spoke of the future. These we classed as PROPHECY, and noted that in this class especially, there are those known as Messianic Psalms because they look forward to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. In our next two studies we are going to look at two Psalms which wonderfully tell of the coming Messiah.

Perhaps you feel a little doubtful about the idea that these Old Testament passages could foretell facts relating to the coming of Christ over a thousand years later. What authority have we for assuming this? One wonderful indication is the way in which the Lord Jesus Himself understood the Old Testament. Look at **Luke 24: 44-45**. He had risen from the dead and was dealing with baffled, half believing disciples. What did He do? He turned to the Old Testament - the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms - and showed them things concerning Himself. He told them these must be fulfilled. Later we have indications too, that the disciples themselves recognised events concerning the Lord Jesus which they could relate back to the Old Testament - see for example **Acts 4: 23-28**. Thus they could see prophecy being fulfilled before their very eyes.

This is very significant when you think about it. So with this in mind, let us look carefully at **Psalm 2** which we will divide into three parts:

1. A Rebellion Declared - verses 1-5
2. A Royal Decree - verses 6-9
3. A Reasonable Demand - verses 10-12

1. A Rebellion Declared - verses 1-5

It is helpful to understand the emotive feelings expressed in these verses. Here is a picture of rage, resistance and rebellion. Today, perhaps more than ever before, we hear and read of conspiracies to overthrow governments. In many parts of the world, counsel has been taken to destroy authority, resulting in uprisings, coups and revolutions. But here it is rebellion against God and against His **"Anointed One"** - the meaning of Messiah. The Psalmist looks ahead and sees this rebellion which will be directed against Israel's Saviour. When the Lord Jesus came into the world, men resented Him and rejected Him. They treated His coming as an interference. Eventually they cried, **"Away with Him, crucify Him. We will not have this man to**

reign over us." Compare these first three verses with **Matthew 27: 1- 2** and **11-26**. See also **Luke 19: 14**.

2. A Royal Decree - verses 6-9

God laughs at the opposition. His plans were made in an eternity past, and the plots and schemes of puny man can never thwart them. God has no need of emergency measures. Man may rage and rebel, but God remains unmoved. This is the wonderful thing about Him! Rebellion against Him is futile. He is the Sovereign ruler of the world and the future is absolutely under His control. This is why the Christian's heart can be at peace in the troubled times in which we live. Although all around the world we may hear of **"wars and rumours of wars"** (**Matthew 24: 6**), and **"the love of many will grow cold."** (**Matthew 24: 12**) Yet the child of God can look up and say, 'My Father knoweth....' Our God IS still in control - Praise His Name!

Notice in **verses 6-7** we read the titles given to the Messiah by God **"My King"** and **"My Son"**. Over and above the rule of men God has planned that His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, will be King of Kings. When He came into the world it seemed that the only crown that men could give Him was a crown of thorns - given in mockery. How sad that they did not recognise Him as their true Messiah! As Christians we believe that one day, that One who died wearing a crown of thorns, will come again. Then He will wear a crown of glory. See **Revelation 19: 11-18**. These verses look on to the time when the Lord Jesus will reign over the whole earth as absolute King. See also **Revelation 11: 15**.

3. A Reasonable Demand - verses 10-12

This wonderful Psalm ends with an appeal to the kings of the earth to bring their homage to God's King. The alternatives of wrath or refuge, perishing or blessing, still lie before them. To serve, submit and surrender, is to show true wisdom. Look at that phrase **"Kiss (or do homage to) the Son"**. (**verse 12**) I think that we can also take our place here realising that even today we can respond to the Lord Jesus Christ by making Him King of our lives. He can rule in our lives as Lord and Saviour if we will let Him. All the world will one day have to own His rule. How wonderful that we can do this voluntarily today in our own lives. Lives in which the Lord Jesus reigns are the only lives really worth living - living with a purpose, an inner peace, and a secure future.

Study 2

Messiah - The Suffering Saviour

Read Psalm 22

Our last lesson gave us a picture of Messiah as Sovereign and the note struck by **Psalm 2** was a triumphant one. But **Psalm 22** gives a different picture altogether. We do not need to read much of it before we are made aware of a sense of tragedy rather than triumph. Do read the verses carefully before studying these notes and ask yourself, as you read, who could possibly fit the picture that is painted in such vivid detail.

First of all notice that it is a Psalm of David. It could well be that this lament could have come from one of David's bitter experiences of sorrow. Some feel that it was written during the time of his exile, when Absalom rebelled against him. We can well imagine that he could even feel forsaken of God, when being relentlessly pursued by a son whom he loved so much. Whatever the cause, the first part of the **Psalm, verses 1-21**, is taken up with his tragic circumstances, and no language is as vivid as that which comes from actual experience. Yet, even allowing for this, the Psalm has a far wider application, in that the very words that the psalmist chose to describe his own agony of mind and body, became an extraordinarily precise description of the last hours of the Messiah. And it is from this latter standpoint that we are going to view the Psalm.

Four points can be seen:

1. The Cry. 2. The Cross. 3. The Cost. 4. The Climax.

1. The Cry - verse 1

Jesus used the opening words of this psalm to express His anguish on the cross. "**My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?**" (**Matthew 27: 46**) Here is a cry wrung from the lips of one who felt absolutely and utterly alone. To be forsaken by one's friends is a grim enough experience. To feel utterly alone in the world is terrible. But to be forsaken by God is surely horrendous.

The Psalmist only FELT himself deserted by God, (confidence returns in **verse 22**). but the separation that the Lord Jesus experienced was REAL. Thus if you read **Matthew 27** you will see that this central cry from the cross came at the darkest point of His sufferings. (**verse 46**) Does it surprise you that Christ should be so forsaken? What was the reason behind this dreadful experience? It was the crushing, suffocating weight of human sin that shut the Lord Jesus out from His Father's sight. God, who is holy, cannot look upon sin, and it was as the Lord Jesus Christ paid the penalty for your sin and mine that God had to turn away from His own beloved Son. **See 2 Corinthians 5: 21.**

2. The Cross

There are details given in this Psalm which can only find their true reflection in death by crucifixion. If you read the events surrounding the cross in the Gospels, I think you will agree with this. Look at **verses 14-18**. How telling these words are when you think that death by crucifixion was unknown when these words were written.

When a person was put to death in Israel he was stoned. Crucifixion was a Roman form of capital punishment. So then, such details as the sufferer's hands and feet being pierced and lots being cast for his garments, are really most amazing. Notice, too, the mockery of **verse 8**. These words were actually hurled at Christ as He hung on the Cross, **Matthew 27: 43**. Think about this carefully.

3. The Cost

Perhaps it is good to pause as you read this Psalm and in applying it to the Lord Jesus. ask yourself again why this suffering had to be. All the physical details are of relatively minor significance compared with the fact that the cry of **verses 1-2** expresses the greatest suffering ever known. I want you to realise as you study this that our sins cost the Lord Jesus ALL the sufferings of the cross, and finally His death. These were in order that we might never be forsaken by God, but would be able to enjoy forever His forgiveness and His life. How well the hymn- writer put it:

*Was it for crimes that I had done
He groaned upon the tree?
Amazing pity, grace unknown,
And love beyond degree!*

Have you ever thanked the Lord Jesus for showing His love for you?

4. The Climax

It is good to read **verses 22-31** and to feel the joy and triumph which follow the dark picture of the earlier verses. Here is true gladness and praise. Although the sufferings of the cross were bitter and costly to the Lord Jesus, yet out of such deep tragedy came triumph. Many thousands of people of all ages will join together to declare that the risen Saviour has done this. (**verse 31**) So if at the deepest level, the early verses of this Psalm speak of Christ's suffering, surely these closing verses speak of the world-wide deliverance which He made possible. And remember that the Sufferer of **Psalm 22** is the Sovereign of **Psalm 2**.

Study 3

Problems in Perspective

Read Psalm 73

Does life ever seem unfair to you? It could be that as you look at the lives of other people, you become very bitter and frustrated. In our first study in the series, one kind of Psalm we mentioned was a "Song of Protest". These Psalms express some of the writers' deepest problems. In them, at times, God seems very far away and trust in Him seems almost foolish or at least, unwise. Reading them would leave us feeling rather sad, and over them is written a very big Why? I thought that among our studies it would be good to include one of these. **Psalm 73** is quite a long psalm, but try to read carefully, as much of it as you can, and notice how the theme of the Psalm develops.

There are two views of life that we can take. One is just superficial - not going beneath the surface of things. The other is much deeper and more thoughtful - looking at the very essence of life. This is often true in our contacts with people. We meet people for the first time and may decide that we dislike them. But on further and closer

acquaintance we can change our whole estimation of their character, and we perhaps become friends for life! God wants us to look at life from the best point of view and our Psalm will teach us something of this. You will find that the Psalmists ultimate assessment is the one from God's point of view.

Three points are worth noting about Asaph the Psalmist - **1. His Assessment. 2. His Approach. 3. His Acceptance.**

1. His Assessment, verses 1-15.

Here in these opening verses is Asaph's assessment of the situation as he sees it, and his subsequent protest and condemnation. **"I saw the prosperity of the wicked."** (verse 3) **"Behold these are the ungodly ...they increase in riches."** (verse 12) You can feel the deep resentment in his mind because of what he saw. How is it that those who flout God's laws prosper, and yet trouble falls on those who least deserve it? (verses 3b-14) Why should he be concerned about right ways when the wicked could take wrong ones and get away with it? It is enough to make a good man envious and bitter, (verses 3&5) and tempt him to say things better left unsaid. (verse 15) He was ready to give up all the good of his life because of the evil he saw in others. If we take this reasoning to its logical conclusion, we see how wrong it is, for it leads to our laying the blame upon God and to questioning His ways. We must never do this. It will ruin our lives. So we must find a different way of looking at life.

2. His Approach.

"Until I went into the sanctuary of God: then I understood their end". (verse 17)

Only as he turns to God does the Psalmist learn to see beyond appearances. He takes to God, what has grown too painful to him even to consider. This is good! You know there will always be problems in life that are too big for us to handle. If we are 'thinking' people we will meet with so much that causes us to protest. Maybe as Christians we shall be tempted to give up. God certainly wants us to think life through, but He wants us to realise that He is bigger than all our doubts and fears. The wicked, for all their wealth and prosperity, are destined for destruction, if they continue to live without God. Look at **Luke 12: 16-21**. This kind of problem and many others, can only be approached from the standpoint of prayer in the presence of God. Then the picture will change and we will begin to look at things as God sees them.

3. His Acceptance. **"Then I understood their end"** (verse 17)

It is good when our troubles and trials lead us, through trust in God, to triumph. I like the ending of this Psalm very much. The writer sees clearly now that the wicked cannot flout God and escape. He admits how foolish and ignorant he was. He realises that life had baffled him because he had not looked at it in the light of the final issue - eternal destiny. Do you realise that prayer not only changes things, it changes me - and you? Asaph seems to realise in **verses 25-26** that whatever the wicked may possess, it is nothing compared with his riches in God. They are **"far from You,"** (verse 27) whereas he can draw **"near to God".** (verse 28)

Look at the beauty of **verse 28**. To be closer to God

is the source and cause of all his well-being. Thus the general statement of **verse 1** becomes his own personal confession and testimony.

As you study this Psalm, do you know what it is to commit all your ways to God? With Jesus Christ as your Saviour, prayer can be a vital reality and God's great provision in Christ is enough to satisfy all your needs.

When you have finished this lesson, compare **Philippians 4: 4-19** with it. What do you think 'contentment' really is?

Study 4

A Personal God

Read Psalm 139

For our final study in the Psalms, we are going to look at one of the finest ever written. In some ways it is the deepest and most mysterious of all. Of course this is to be expected when we consider the subject - GOD! what I wonder, are your thoughts and concept of God? Someone has said that each one of us must have a God who is our own. There IS only one God, but it is true that we cannot live by someone else's knowledge of God. This may sound strange to you until you give it consideration. For a long period of my life I lived on my father's knowledge of God. I formed my concept of God from his. No doubt this was very good, but there came a time when I had to know God for myself. We all need to do this and of course, the earlier in your life you discover it for yourself, the better. **Psalm 139** gives the picture of God whom David, the Psalmist, knew for himself.

It is a characteristic of the Bible to express its great truths in the context of personal experience. This is partly because God is never proposed merely as a subject for man's intellectual or speculative enquiry, compare **Job 1: 7-8**. God is primarily for man's devotion, worship and obedience. It is also because the Bible never considers any truth to be 'known' until it controls the life of the learner. Pause a moment and think about this carefully. **Psalm 139** is a classic example of this view of things.

There are three great truths presented in this Psalm.

1. God is All-Knowing - His Perception
2. God is All-Present - His Presence
3. God Is Almighty - His Power

Although David is expressing these great truths about God, he is doing so in relation to himself, e.g. 'God's complete knowledge of ME', and 'God is with ME no matter where I am,' etc. So let us look at this Psalm carefully and prayerfully, bearing this in mind.

1. God is All-Knowing - verses 1-6

It is amazing how little we know about each other. There are depths in every person's life which always remain hidden. Even the closest of friendships does not unlock all secrets. But the Psalmist feels absolutely open before God. Thoughts, words, deeds, are all known to God. Even beyond our own limits of self-knowledge, God

knows and understands.

This intimate, detailed knowledge is seen as part of God's protective, tender care, which although going beyond the Psalmist's capability to understand, yet reassures him that he is cared for by a wisdom far in excess of his own. This is wonderful! With all our sin and mistakes, however much He knows, it does not affect His love for us. He loves us just the same! If our lives are open to His knowledge, even so is His heart open to us in love.

2, God is All-Present - verses 7-12

These verses are to me among the finest in the Bible. God is everywhere. The Psalmist thinks in terms of distance, depth and even darkness, and realises that all are cancelled out as potential hiding places because GOD is there. Think about what this means. One thing of course is certain - we cannot run away from Him. Jonah tried to do just that. He tried every way he knew to escape from God, but God followed him and eventually Jonah had to meet with God. How futile to try to run away from God! But it means also that God can always be with us, and His presence is there to '**lead**' and '**to hold us**'. (**verse 10**) Furthermore, this Divine presence remains the same in all the varied circumstances of life, in its 'darkness' and its 'light'. (**verses 11-12**)

The Lord Jesus said after He rose from the dead. "**Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.**" **Matthew 28: 20**. Bring God into your life by trusting Jesus Christ as your Saviour, if you have not already done so. He has promised to be with you in every circumstance.

3. God is All-Powerful - verses 13-18

It is wonderful really, that when David wants to describe God's power in this psalm, he looks at his own body. "**I am fearfully and wonderfully made,**" he says. "**marvellous are Your works.**" (**verse 14**) He realises how intricate his body is, just a proof of God's wisdom and skill. The implication of this creative work is God's intimate knowledge of His creature, which covers not only the person concerned **verse 16a**, but also the experiences yet in store for that person, **verse 16b**. What marvellous comfort is contained in this truth, that not only has the Creator planned our life, but all our experiences are under His sovereign control!

David wanted this God to be involved in his life in the closest possible way. In **verses 23-24** he invites God to search all his ways, even his innermost thoughts, so that he can be led into lasting blessing. The Psalmist knew God personally. We can experience God in this way through knowing the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. Compare **John 17: 3**.

For further study: Look more closely at the Book of Jonah and see how it confirms what we learnt from this Psalm.

Questions

Study 1

MESSIAH - THE SOVEREIGN

- 1 a) What is a Messianic Psalm?
b) What authority have we for saying a Psalm is Messianic?
2. Where in the New Testament would you say that **Psalm 2: 2** finds its counterpart?
3. Why can God laugh at the 'opposition'?
4. Why is it possible for Christians to have peace of heart in these troubled times in which we live?
5. What connection is there between this Psalm and **Revelation 11: 15** and **19: 11-16**?

Study 2

MESSIAH - THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR

1. Why are the details contained in the first part of this Psalm so very significant in their wider application?
2. Why was it necessary for the Lord Jesus to be forsaken by God when on the cross?
3. Select four things from the Psalm which you think were true of the Lord Jesus in His sufferings.
4. What do you consider was Christ's greatest suffering, and why?
5. In what way can we be sharers in the 'triumph' that came out of the tragedy of the cross?

Study 3

PROBLEMS IN PERSPECTIVE

1. What two 'views' of life can we see presented in this Psalm?
2. At what was the Psalmist protesting?
3. What is the significance of 'the Sanctuary' in the life of the Christian?
4. What do you understand by the Psalmist's words, "**Then I understood their end**"? (**Psalm 73: 17**)
5. What was the source or cause of the Psalmist's ultimate state of well-being?

Study 4

A PERSONAL GOD

1. In what way does the Bible usually present its great truths?
2. What is the Psalmist saying about God and himself in **verses 1-6**?
3. What comfort can the Christian derive from **verses 7-12**?
4. What are the implications of 'God the Creator' in your life?
5. What is the prayer of your heart, as we close this study of the Psalms?