

Notes on Psalm 1—17

by Grant Thorpe

available at

<http://www.corobaptist.org.au>

The following notes may be copied and distributed freely if they are acknowledged and not used for profit.

Psalm 1

While the law God gave can be followed with a view to proving oneself, it can also be followed by faith (Rom. 9:32), that is, by believing that God will establish in us all that he has commanded us to do. In a world where many choose wickedness and are scattered uselessly, God will bless us as we delight in and meditate on his instruction. We will see that we cannot fulfil God's requirements apart from Christ (John 15:1–11) and God will cause us to be fruitful.

Psalm 2

God's rule in the earth was expressed in David's kingship over Israel, but now, it has been established forever in Jesus Christ raised from the dead. How foolish to think that God's reign can be put aside! God acknowledged Israel's kings as sons (II Sam. 7:14) but with a view to the sending of his Son who now reigns. Jesus knew this psalm applied to him (Matt. 3:17; 17:5) and so did the apostles (Acts 13:33; Rom. 1:4; Heb. 1:5; 5:5). Raised from the dead, he leads us, his people, into all the blessings of God's reign. With him, we will inherit the nations. In jealous love, this King acts with wrath against all rivals. But those who pay him homage find a refuge.

Psalm 3

Our enemies are not those who oppose our purposes but those who hate us for trusting in God. Christ had this taunt made against him while on the cross. His trust in God had aroused Israel's jealousy and hatred. But while he, and we, trust in God, we have him as our shield and him to hear us pray. We have sleep for the night and sustaining for the new day. The only enemies we have are God's enemies and he will bring them to an end. So, may his blessing be on his people!

Prayer

Father, I delight in your law, not because I can establish myself by it, but because it has shown me the beauty of your nature and the sureness of your purpose for me. It has led me to your Son. I bless you for Christ, established as your King, and I worship him. Through him, Father, you have given us every blessing. How good it is to trust you Father. May I not be tempted by wickedness or deterred by those who think that to trust in you is foolish. Amen

Psalm 4

The writer had been wrongfully shamed. Perhaps it was David when he fled before his own son who sought to supplant him. But David had long lived in the favour of God and appealed to God for a demonstration of his grace. The rebuke given to his enemies was subdued but clear; they should not worship God in vain. They should remember that God protects those who call on him; in their anger they should be careful not to sin, especially when their thoughts caught up with them in the night hours. They should come to the same faith as him. Many of his friends longed for better days, but he was already filled with joy. His sleep would be undisturbed for God had drawn near and his enemies would be unable to touch him.

Psalm 5

It is good to remember that these Psalms have their life because of the Spirit of Christ that inspired them. How could one person stand before God asserting his righteousness above another if it were not that he relied on the God who made atonement for his sins? The righteousness of this man was through faith in the promise of atonement given in Israel's sacrifices, just as ours relies on Christ who lived in true faith and made atonement for us to bring us all to God.

We may be surrounded with falsehood, even within God's covenant community (Rom. 3:13, 19), but may bring our sighs and tears to God. He will recognise those who trust in his mercy, he will destroy those who speak lies (particularly the lies that say we cannot trust in God). We may pray to be lead into God's holy presence, and in right ways of living. We may pray against those who oppose God and for the joy of all who trust in him.

Psalm 6

Sickness may have come to this man because of the pressure that his enemies put on him, but in this, he sensed that God had dealt with him personally. There is no 'moral high ground' in the disputes that exist between sinners; all of us live to God and he uses such times to make us aware of our own need for mercy. It is in facing death (and all the little 'deaths' along the way) that we truly understand the nature of God's mercy. We deserve to die . . . but then comes the revelation, which is the renewing word of grace that God has given up his Son in our place. Nothing can take the place of this revelation. Then we know our prayer has been heard and that our enemies (who oppose God) will suffer terror and shame.

Prayer

Holy Father, we are set among many that say that there is no hope in you. They ridicule the proclamation of your grace and oppose those who trust in you. Father, we cannot exalt ourselves against them for you have been against us all in our impiety and arrogance. You have judged us all in the death of your Son. Father, keep us in your peace. May we seek no higher station in life than to be raised with Christ and to be called his servants. Prosper those who so call on your name, and bring to nought the proud works of those who seek to establish themselves. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Psalm 7

The attack against God's servant was fierce. He appealed to God to judge him if his opponent's accusation was true.

What other recourse can we have? We are not excused because we know of nothing against ourselves (I Cor. 4:1–5). God can convict us of our sins so that we may turn from them. But God's enemies only want to accuse us to bring us down. But if God does not accuse us, we have boldness to pray for the pulling down of Satan's strongholds.

Those who are justified through faith in Jesus Christ and walk in the integrity of their heart (as this man did) know that God will demolish every proud edifice built to resist him. They are not concerned to fight against flesh and blood, but can recognise evil powers when they manifest themselves in flesh, and they may speak against them. With Jesus, the zeal of the Lord of hosts (John 2:15–17) may stir them for they know that God has sharpened his sword, or will confuse his enemies and turn them to fall into their own trap. But the Lord's servant does not derive any life from these struggles. Rather, his life is in the song he sings to God for his goodness.

Psalm 8

Here is the true teaching concerning humanity. 'What is man?' The answer is that this creature recognises the greatness of God in his creation, and has childlike faith in his good governance of all things. But he or she who wonder at their own place in it know they are little less than God and that they are crowned with glory. By their witness they are established as a defence against all the enemies of God.

They see the creation as the raw materials to be shaped for the glory of God. They do not need to grasp the creation or worship it or fear it. It is God's gift to them and they marvel at the revelation of God in what he has made. With themselves as creation's stewards they agree with God that everything is 'very good'.

Yet this teaching would be vain if there were not The Man, Jesus Christ, to be crowned with glory and honour for his high calling of bearing the shame of our fallen humanity. He has come to fulfil our vocation and has been raised up from death to lead many other children of God with him to glory (Heb. 2:5–15; cf. Phil. 2:4–11).

Psalm 9

Our personal story of faith in God and relying on him in our distress is part of the larger story of God among the nations. Has the Judge of all the earth seen us and declared in our favour? If we have trusted in Jesus Christ, he has certainly pronounced that we are wholly justified in his presence. In all lesser matters of judgment, we long only that this righteousness may be vindicated.

Prayer

Father, the accusations that are made against me in this world are fierce. You know the truth or otherwise of them. But I have trusted in you and acted according to the integrity of my heart. Deal, then, with those who seem intent to bring me down. You

have called us all to a noble office in this present world. Then make me bold by your word, strong in your Son, hopeful in your interventions and gentle with all that seek you. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Psalm 10

How can wicked people prosper for so long? They become complacent about their evil and make bold plans around the sureness that they will never be stopped. This writer did not want an impersonal justice. He wanted God to be God. Has not God made a world in which wicked people fall by their own wickedness? Does he not see the suffering of his people? Why do wicked people despise God anyway?

In asking God to act, his mind awakened to the truth of God. He knew God did see and he was made bold to pray that God would make a full end of evil. Again, he could see the world with God as its King, hearing his people, strengthening their hearts and answering their prayers.

The Christian is saved in hope. He or she cannot prove that justice will prevail, but they have encountered God's dealing with sin so decisively at the cross that they believe such a God will most certainly act to destroy all vestiges of evil from his creation. Jesus encouraged us in this regard by the parable of the weeds (Matt. 13:37–43), and exhorted us to believe we would be vindicated for our faith in God (Luke 18:7–8).

Psalm 11

How could we have an otherworldly faith when God is the creator of all things? Even so, the evil of this world may make us want to flee from it. Its very foundations seem to be pulled up so that no true city could ever be built here.

But in this world, God is our refuge, the Lord who has revealed himself in this creation through the flesh of Christ, the one who has raised him to be at his right hand. Christ was constantly proclaimed by the early church as the Judge of all the earth (Acts 10:39–43; 17:31; Romans 14:9; II Corinthians 5:10; II Timothy 4:1). So let us not be weary in doing well (II Thes. 3:13) in this world for our labour is not in vain (II Cor. 15:57–58). The foundations have not been moved at all.

Psalm 12

Many Psalms give us words to pray when evil prospers. Lies and flattery prevail when people do not acknowledge God as their master. But there is a place of help, God himself. The promises of God may be trusted. Such faith need not be tarnished by the prevalence of lies.

Prayer

Father, awaken me anew to the truth that you see and hear and act, and bring all things to their goal. Be a refuge to me now lest I join the ranks of the disenchanting and lose hope. Father, your truth and love will prevail. Of this I am made sure by the presence of Jesus Christ at your right hand, in whose name I pray. Amen.

Psalm 13

This man felt the victories of his enemy as God hiding his face from him. His whole being suffered and it seemed he would die. But the memory of God's steadfast love covenanted to the nation, and the victories given to the nation and to himself (if David writes this psalm) rose up to make him confess that he would again delight in God's deliverance. Already, he knew the fullness of God's blessing.

Psalm 14

God's people are not morally superior to others. They, together with all humanity, have gone astray (so Rom. 3:11–12). But they do call on the Lord. They know there is a God on whom they may rely. He is with them. But by their faith they have become prey to those who trust in this world's riches. Zion was David's fort and the word was broadened to mean the place of God's presence in the temple as well.

God has established his King in this present world, raising him from the dead, and he is present among us. May our help come from him!

Psalm 15

This writer perhaps saw that not all were truly God's people who went by that name. Those who abide with God and whom God will establish are those who have been humbled by the sureness of God's reign, the faithfulness of his word and his generosity to them. They know this is the honour they owe one another. Jesus said the love of his Father which he represented to us must be the rule of our life in this world (John 13:34–35; 15:9–14).

Prayer

Lord there is no health or hope in either my society or my own heart. But by the love of your Son, by his death for my sin, and by your raising him from the dead, my hope is in you. Let me not be content with lesser trusts. Let not my heart become proud. Rather, may the meekness and gentleness of Christ be formed in me as I wait for your salvation, for your glory. Amen.

Psalm 16

Here is what it means to have the Lord as one's God. At any moment, we may hide in him for we own no other source of well being in our life than him. (What terrors wait if one should choose another god?) We choose him but he has already apportioned a wonderful life for us. We keep him in mind but he is always before us. He instructs us in our labour and at night our heart's reflection is at one with his counsel. Our whole being is upheld, heart, soul, and, yes, body which otherwise would tremble at death. God has revealed himself to us, brought us into communion with him and will provide for us forever.

Such was revealed to the psalmist, but he was also a prophet. The Spirit of Christ already warmed his heart with truth which could not be so without Christ's faith, Christ's God, Christ's dealing, not just with the fear of death but with death itself, and Christ's glorious resurrection (Acts 2:29–33). It is Christ who was not abandoned to

death. The truths of this psalm are now brought to us with all the love and joy of a God who welcomes us as he welcomes his Son. You are not abandoned either. This is your God, and you are his people!

A theme of the happiness of the people who have the Lord as their God recurs throughout the Psalter (e.g. 33, 144, 40 and 84).

Psalm 17

Ruthless attacks from people whose lives derived wholly from this world brought this man to God. Nothing would avail, and he desired nothing else, than an act of God to vindicate him. But what a blessing this trial brought. In coming to God, he knew his heart had been purified through the fear of God. He asked for a wonderful display of God's steadfast love. In New Testament terms, he had access to grace in which he now stood (Rom. 5:2).

What were in question in this conflict were not just the triumph of one party over another but the fact of a person being upheld by God. The antagonists not only lived for this world but also sought to remove from the world the witness to a God who cared for his creation. May all such come to nought! But none of this will destroy what the Lord has created, a person whose vision is not of victories but of the Lord himself. If the Lord came in the night to test his heart (v. 3), in the morning, his eyes would be on God (v. 15).

Prayer

Father, you have granted that we know you, and that we be upheld by you, and that we have access to you, and that we be your servants in this present creation. Who are we to have you as our God? Yet you have made atonement for our sin. You have raised Christ your Son from death to assure us that you have made a full end of our sins. Lord, you know that our trust can no longer be in this present world. We trust in you. May the witness of your servants not be thwarted. Give us counsel in the day, and in the night. Keep our eyes on you, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ in whose name we pray. Amen.