

Psalm 46

Aim: To trust in God, who is our ever-present help in time of trouble, so that we do not fear.

Read Psalm 46

Who were the “sons of Korah” who wrote this psalm? (Num 16:1-3; 31-35; Jude 1:11)

They were the descendants of Korah, the one who rebelled against Moses and Aaron (and the Lord). Unlike the others who teamed up with him in the rebellion, Korah’s children were not destroyed like the other families were - only Korah’s men. It was Korah’s children who then ended up fearing the Lord, even composing some of the psalms.

What is the tone of this psalm?

The tone of the psalm is confident and exultant. It glorifies God for His greatness and goodness.

God our Refuge and Strength (vv.1-3)

What is the central truth of vv.1-3? What is the central consequence of that truth for us?

God is our refuge and strength (v.1). Therefore, we will not fear (v.2).

According to this psalm, what kind of circumstances should we even not fear? Why?

The psalmist describes the world breaking apart. Even then, we should not fear, for God is our refuge.

What do you think the psalmist means by saying that God is “our refuge”, “our strength”, and our “very present help in trouble”?

God protects His people as a strong refuge, He strengthens us when we feel weak and fearful, and He is always with us to help us in times of trouble. He is our all in all.

How have you seen this in your own life? [Discuss]

Consider Mark 4:35-41 in relation to Psalm 46:1-3. Who cares for us and stills our fears?

Jesus! He is a refuge and strength to those who trust in Him.

The City of God (vv.4-7)

What “city of God” is being talked about in v.4?

It’s Jerusalem; the city (in the time of the psalmist) where God’s temple was, and where God’s glorious presence dwelt between the cherubim in the Holy of Holies of the temple.

What “river” is being spoken of in v.4?

It’s not a physical river, but a metaphor for the blessings that flow to us because of God’s presence; because of God being Israel’s refuge and strength (v.1), and deliverer (vv.5-6).

Why should Jerusalem’s inhabitants be glad if the nations are “roaring” against them?

Because God will preserve the city by His awesome power (cf. 2 Kings 19:32-37).

God no longer dwells in a building but in the hearts of all those who are in Christ. What “river” do we have that should make us full of gladness and joy? (cf. John 4:13-14; 7:37-39)

We have the water of life, the Holy Spirit, who enables us to know God’s blessings in full.

God the Judge and Deliverer (vv.8-11)

What does v.8 remind us of so that we might not fear any trouble?

It reminds us that God has great and awesome power to rescue and deliver His people.

What examples in the Old Testament remind us of God’s great power to deliver?

Noah’s family in the flood; Israel’s deliverance from Egypt; Israel conquering Canaan; the defeat of Israel’s enemies, such as Assyria, Babylon and Nineveh.

One day v.9 will be fulfilled completely. When will wars cease and there will be everlasting peace?

It will be when Jesus comes again in His kingdom and all submit to His righteous rule.

How might vv.8-9 encourage us as we see evil increasing about us?

It helps us see that God is truly great, and it is He who sits on the throne. By His great power, He will both rescue us, as well as bring all trouble to an end. Indeed, He has something better planned for us.

Consider vv.10-11. What does God assure us of in these verses?

God assures us that He is GOD! Despite the nations raging, He rules and is above the nations; and He is with us and is our stronghold. He will protect and keep us.

How should we respond to who God is and His promises to us? (v.10a)

We should cease fearing and striving (v.10) and be still and settled. Why? For He is the Sovereign Lord ruling over all things, and will work things out for our good if we love and trust in Him (Rom 8:28).

Consider Phil 4:4-7. In the light of who God is, how should we be?

We should be rejoicing, and not be anxious, but know God’s peace guarding our hearts and minds.

Summary: God is all powerful. We do not ever need to fear. He will protect and keep us.

Psalm 50

Aim: God is the great Judge, and He calls us to repent and to worship Him rightly and to live uprightly.

The Judge Summons (vv.1-6)

Read vv.1-4. What do we learn about God?

He is the mighty king, who has the authority to speak and summon people for judgment. His glory has been revealed in Zion through the temple. He is to be feared and revered (Heb 12:28-29).

The Lord is judge over all (Gen 18:25; Heb 12:23). Who also comes under His judgment? (vv.4-6)

The Lord also judges His own people. Israel was not exempt from judgment. Is that a surprise?

Should we expect God to judge Christians? (cf. Rom 14:10-12; 2 Cor 5:10; 1 Pet 4:17).

The New Testament clearly teaches that Christians will be judged, and by Christ Himself (John 5:21-23).

What must we bear in mind when it comes to Christians being judged? (Rom 8:1; 1 Cor 3:10-15)

Christians will never be judged for their sin, for Jesus paid the penalty for all our sins. However, we will be judged in regard to how well we served Jesus in His kingdom. Rewards will be given accordingly.

The Judge's Case against Ritual (vv.7-15)

Why is God displeased with His people? (vv.7-15)

Although God's people offered sacrifices according to Law, they offered them by rote. Their hearts were far from Him (Isa 29:13). They did not worship the Lord with thankfulness, or fulfill their vows to God.

What does the Lord mean by His words in vv.9-13?

His people thought that He was pleased by having them sacrifice countless animals they owned, but God reminds them that He is the one who owns all the cattle and beasts already. Animal sacrifices were not about "how many", but finding forgiveness for sins, and giving thanks and praise to God.

What do we learn from 1 Sam 15:22 and Psa 51:16-17?

God never wanted vain offerings, but obedient hearts that would turn to Him in repentance and trust!

In Heb 10:1-10 and Heb 13:15-16, what do we learn about sacrifices?

The Old Testament sacrifices highlighted sin and the need for atonement, but they didn't really atone for sin. Only Christ's sacrifice, to which the animal sacrifices point, could bring lasting forgiveness for sin and a right standing with God. Since Christ's death and resurrection, the only sacrifices left for us to make are honour to God, and thanksgiving and praise to Him, through Christ our Lord.

What danger do we face in offering "right sacrifices" wrongly? (Rom 3:19-24)

We risk thinking that our religious works save us, rather than God's grace through faith in Christ.

The Judge's Case against Hypocrisy (vv.16-21)

Why was God incensed with His people who didn't follow Him (the "wicked")? (vv.16-20)

They acted like people who knew God (by their talk; v.16), but their lives were contradictory with their talk (they were hypocrites). They hated God's discipline and cast His words from them (v.17), they endorsed sin and associated with sinners (v.18), and spoke deceitful and slanderous words (vv.19-20).

What serious error of judgment had the "wicked" made in regard to God? (v.21)

They thought that God was just like them; winking at sin and tolerant of it. Many are like that today!

What lessons can we learn for ourselves in living our lives as God's people?

We should accept discipline, heed God's words, hate sin, be distinctively holy, speak truth, and understand that God is not like us. He is holy and pure, and to be feared (Hab 1:13)

The Judge's Appeal (vv.22-23)

What had the wicked amongst God's people really done? (v.22)

They had forgotten God; ie, His holy character and His radiant righteousness. They did not fear Him.

God issues a solemn warning of destruction. What's His real intent? (v. 22)

It's no idle threat! God has the power to fulfill His word. But He wanted them to consider their ways and to repent of their sins. God's desire is for the wicked to repent and be saved (v.23b) – He is gracious.

What does repentance look like, both for the people of the psalmist's day and for us? (v.23)

It's about a heart change where we honour God and worship Him for who He is. There is a behavioural change where we obey Him. Repentance, together with faith, is core to the Gospel (Acts 2:38, 3:19).

Summary: God is not like us. He is holy and He has the right to judge us. But before judgment falls, He calls us to repent, to worship Him rightly, and to follow Him uprightly. What grace!

Psalm 51

Aim: To help us learn what our prayer and response to God should look like when we sin against Him.

What is the background of Psalm 51 - a psalm of David? (refer to the heading of the psalm)

The psalm is David's cry and plea for mercy from the Lord, after being convicted through Nathan the prophet of his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah. (2 Sam 12:1-7, v.13)

David's cry (vv.1-2)

Upon what basis does David 'ry out to God for mercy in v.1?

David cries out on the basis of God's lovingkindness and great compassion. David calls upon God's gracious character, for he knows there is no other basis for forgiveness before a holy God.

What does David specifically ask God to do? (vv.1-2)

He pleads for God not only to be gracious, but to "blot" out his transgressions like erasing ink from a page, and for him to be thoroughly "washed" or "cleansed" from the defilement and filthiness of his sin.

David's plea (vv.3-7)

Who does David acknowledge that He has sinned against? (v.4)

David had committed multiple "transgressions" (v.3). He had sinned against Bathsheba, Uriah, Joab (his commander), but ultimately, David had sinned against God. He also acknowledged that it was right for God to judge him; he hadn't just "slipped" up, or had a "moment of weakness". He had sinned.

What is David declaring in vv.5-6?

David's core problem is not just from his recent sins, but a sinful nature he had inherited at conception. What God requires of us humans David had failed to live out – just as we all do (cf. Rom 3:23).

In the light of how grievous his sin was, what does he plead again in v.7 (similar to vv.1-2)?

David pleads again for the Lord to "purify" and "wash" him thoroughly, for he feels so unclean and dirty from the sins he had committed. NB: This language of being washed clean of our sins is also what we read of in the NT as we trust in our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Cor 6:9-11; Heb 10:22; Rev 7:14).

David's appeal (vv.8-12)

How did David's sin affect him and what is David's appeal? (vv.8-9, 12)

David was sorrowful and "broken" before the Lord. He had lost the joy of the Lord's presence. Besides appealing again for the Lord to blot out his sins, he appeals that he might have joy and gladness again. David knew that this can only come when we are forgiven of our sins and are made right with God.

What does David see as the real issue after God forgives him, according to v.10?

What David needed is not just for the Lord to change his situation, but to change him. We need a new heart, a clean heart from the Lord, and a heart that is faithful to God. Our heart is not something we can "fix-up" by ourselves – it is something we must humbly ask the Lord to do.

What does David fear as a result of his sin? (v.11)

David fears that God's Holy Spirit will be removed from him. David knows that holiness and sin cannot dwell together, and his sin places a barrier between God and himself (cf. Psa 66:18, Isa 59:2).

Can our sin cause God to remove His Spirit from us now?

Under the old covenant, God's Spirit could be given and taken from people (eg Saul: 1 Sam 10:6, 1 Sam 16:14). Under the new covenant, God has promised that His Spirit will remain with us forever (John 14:16). We can grieve the Holy Spirit, but God in His grace, will never remove His Spirit from us.

David's desire (vv.13-19)

After being forgiven and restored, what did David desire to do? (vv.13-15)

David wanted to teach people God's ways so that they would be saved (v.13), to sing joyfully of God's righteousness (v.14), and to declare God's praises to others (v.15).

What heart are we to have if we want the Lord to forgive us, cleanse us and restore us? (vv.16-17)

God desires for us to have a broken and contrite ("crushed") heart when we come to Him for cleansing. It's not through ritual and religion, but through humility and confession (cf. Psa 32:5, Luke 18:9-14)

David's sin affected his city (he was the king). What would his restoration bring about? (vv.18-19)

It would bring about God blessings on his city and people would even bring right worship to the Lord (v.19). What blessings come to us and those about us when we confess our sins and are right with God.

Summary: When we sin, God calls us to humbly seek His mercy for cleansing and renewal (Isa 55:7).

Psalm 73

Aim: To show the goodness of God to His people, even when they stray and almost fall away.

Read Psalm 73

Has there been an experience in your life that caused you to almost fall away? [discuss]

The Psalmist's struggle – why do the wicked prosper? (vv.1-12)

What did the psalmist know to be true (v.1)?

The psalmist knew God is good to those who are pure in heart; to those who live faithfully and rightly.

But God is good all the time, and all the time God is good. Why is this? (v.1)

God's goodness is a fundamental attribute of His character. He cannot be but good.

What caused the Psalmist to doubt God's goodness? (vv.2-3)

When he looked around and saw the wicked prosper, he became envious of them. But more than that, he nearly fell away from the faith because he felt that God was not being good and just.

What does the psalmist see (or think he sees) in the life of the wicked? (vv.4-12)

- They have no struggles in death or life (vv.4-5)
- They profit from pride and violence (vv.6-7)
- They are arrogant and oppress others (vv.8-9)
- Those who turn to them share in prosperity (v.10)
- They boast God doesn't see their actions (v.11)
- They are free of the worries of this life (v.12).

Can you relate to the way the psalmist feels? Do you struggle with the "unfairness"? [discuss]

The Psalmist's struggle – do the righteous live in vain? (vv.13-15)

What does the psalmist's envy lead to? (vv.13-14)

It leads to a crisis of faith – he questions whether there is anything to be gained in living righteously before the Lord. In fact, living a godly life seems to bring only pain, while the wicked enjoy prosperity.

What restrains the psalmist from publicly denouncing God's goodness in v.15?

His love for God's people restrains him so that he doesn't shipwreck the faith of others (Matt 18:6).

The Psalmist's salvation – God's intervention (vv.16-20)

What caused the psalmist's faith in God's goodness to be restored? (vv.16-17) What didn't help?

Trying to reason out his experience with human logic brought him to a dead end – it only brought pain and confusion. Only when he came into God's presence was the true plight of the wicked revealed from God's perspective. God revealed what human reasoning could not (cf. Prov 14:12).

What did God reveal to the psalmist concerning the wicked? (vv.18-20)

God revealed that despite their apparent "prosperity", they are on the slippery path to destruction (Matt 7:13-14). Their end will come upon them suddenly, and they will experience the terrors of hell. They will leave their prosperity behind (Luke 12:16-21). The life of the wicked is to be grieved over; not envied.

The Psalmist's new sight – God is to be sought and adored (vv.21-28)

What did the psalmist begin to realise about himself and about God in vv.21-24?

He realised that when he was angry (embittered) against God in envying the wicked, he was acting like an ignorant beast. God had been (and still was) in charge all along, caring for His people. God was with him, holding his right hand (v.23), guiding the course of his life (v.24) and would ultimately receive him into His presence (v.24). God's guidance and presence is a blessing the wicked will never experience.

What does the psalmist now appreciate is the most precious thing he can have? (vv.25-26)

It is not anything that God can give him (eg prosperity or blessing), but to enjoy and commune with God Himself. There is nothing that he desired besides God.

The psalmist began by questioning God's goodness in the light of the prosperity of the wicked. What does he now realise is truly good? (vv.27-28)

It is not good to be wicked (people without faith), even if they prosper. They may seem blessed in this life, but they will face the ultimate misery - of perishing far from God. The ultimate good is to be near God, even if we should suffer. In God's presence is goodness, and not just now, but forever.

Consider Rom 5:6-11 and Tit 3:4-6. What can we conclude about God's goodness?

God is good to us because He chooses to be gracious. God revealed the pinnacle of His goodness to us, when He sent His son to rescue us from our sins, to renew us, and to reconcile us to Himself.

Summary: God's goodness is not seen in outward prosperity, but it is manifested to those of us who walk with Him and trust in Jesus. They are blessed with true peace and joy, and the hope of eternal life.

Psalm 121

Aim: To take comfort that the LORD is our keeper and guardian, and for us to cast our soul upon Him.

Read Psalm 121

Why is this a well-loved psalm amongst Christians?

It encourages us. Just as the Lord kept His people of old, the Lord will keep us who are in Christ.

Where do you Turn? (vv.1-2)

When the psalmist is down-cast from the trials and troubles of life, where does he turn? Why?

He turns toward the mountains, for they remind him of the Lord. He created them, and just as the mountains stand against the storms, the Lord can help us stand when we face the storms of life.

Why is it often hard for us to look upward to God for help, when we are experiencing troubles and trials? Of what then, can these verses remind us of, when we are down-cast?

We often find it hard to look to God, because we are focussed on the circumstances of our situation and the difficulties of our problem. These verses remind us to use God's creation to help us turn to Him.

What aspects of God's creation lift your soul to God? [discuss]

Consider Isa 40:26-31. What part of creation does God direct our attention to? Why?

God directs us to the heavens and the starry host to remind us of His existence and greatness. Just as He knows each star by name and keeps each one, He knows and keeps us and gives us strength to cope.

In the New Testament, where else should we turn our eyes? (Heb 12:1-3)

We should turn our eyes to Jesus (fix our eyes on Him), so that we might not lose heart.

No Slipping; No Slumber (vv.3-4)

What will God particularly do for us (v.3a)? What does this mean?

He will not allow our foot to slip; that is, we will not stumble and fall away from Him and His good ways.

Experientially, we know that there are times that we do fall away, either due to temptation or the trials of life. How then are we to understand v.3? (cf. Psa 73:23-24).

Even if we should fall, God will always bring us back if we are a true believer. He never lets us go.

Why can God guarantee that He will always keep and watch over us? (vv.3-4) (cf. Heb 13:5-8)

He is always on the job. He never slumbers nor sleeps. His eye is always on us to help us.

God – the Keeper and Guardian of our Soul (vv.5-8)

What things does the Lord do for us according to vv.5-8?

The Lord is our keeper (v.5), He is our shade and protector (vv.6-7), He will keep our soul (v.8), He will guard our going out and coming in forever (v.8) – what an amazing God who cares for us.

How should we understand v.5b and 6? Will God really protect us from sun-burn or moon-burn?

This is metaphoric language. Just as shade protects us from being hurt by the sun, the Lord will protect us from being hurt by evil (as v.7 goes on to clearly declare).

What does the language of vv.5-8 remind you of? (cf. Psa 23)

It reminds us of God being our shepherd, who will guard us and look after us.

What does this psalm assure us when we may feel that God is not being our keeper and guardian?

Despite our feelings, God is always there to keep, protect and guide us. He WILL do it (cf. vv.6-8).

New Testament Perspectives

In John 6:37-40 and John 10:27-30 what does Jesus promise to all those who trust in Him?

Jesus promises to keep us and to bring us home to glory, and that no one can take us from Him.

What are we promised in 1 Peter 2:24-25? Who is Jesus to us?

Jesus bore our sins Himself. He is the shepherd and guardian of our soul.

What are we to do when we are overwhelmed with anxiety and worry? (Phil 4:6-7)

We should present our requests by prayer with thanksgiving to God, instead of being anxious. God promises His peace to keep and guard our heart and mind in Christ Jesus.

How do we know that God has our best interests at heart? (Rom 8:31-39)

God was prepared to sacrifice His own Son for us. He will therefore certainly do everything to help us.

What troubles you? Have you entrusted the issue to God through prayer; with thanksgiving?

Do you look to Him who made the mountains and gave us Jesus, and who promises to keep you?

Summary: God is our keeper & guardian. Let us trust Him with all the troubles and trials of life.