

Psalms: Book Two (Part Two)

Psalms of Faith in Trial

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Last time, before I ran out of time, I presented the background material on book two of the Psalms and I want to go through some of the Psalms in book two today; but before I do, I want to review a little bit to refresh our memories on some of the particulars about book two that will help us understand what is going on.

What I explained in all of these sermons on the Psalms is that the Psalms as a whole are broken into five books and most bibles have them noted that way (Psalm 1: Book one, Psalm 42: Book two, etc.). So there are five books of the Psalms, but there are also five books of the the torah or the Pentateuch. There are also five festival scrolls. The Hebrews call this the Megilloth, and these five books of the festival scrolls are: the Song of Songs, the book of Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastics, and Esther. So we have three sets of five there: the five books of the Psalms, the five books of the Torah, and the five scrolls of the Megilloth.

Now, the Jews also had a way of dividing the year into five different seasons rather than our four. They, meaning the Jews, were at some point in tune with the festivals, and so they chopped the year into five parts instead four. They had one season around the time of Passover, a season for Pentecost, the season of summer, a season for the fall feast, and a season of winter bringing us background to Passover time.

Now we have four sets of fives and what the Jews found is that there were similarities of themes among these sets of five. I should also mention at this point that they also found that the five final Psalms, Psalms 146-150, seemed to be summary Psalms for each of the five books of the Psalms. So Psalms 1-41 (book one) seemed to be summarized in Psalms 146. It is not exact, but there are little things in there that seems to pick up some of the details and themes in book one.

So they put all these things together and found that not only did Psalms 146 match Psalms 1-41, but they also found out that Genesis had similar themes and Song of Songs also had some of the themes, and they all seemed to fit these themes into the season of Passover. So they found that these sets reflected one another. So we have five sets that all tend to have similar themes among them.

When we studied book five a couple of years ago, we found out that those Psalms fit well with Psalms 150, and they also had some of the same themes of the book of Deuteronomy, the book of Esther and the winter season. So when you study, let us say you are going through something in the winter time...if you study the book of Deuteronomy and the book of Esther and the final book of the Psalms, there are things, there, that might help you get through that time of deadness that winter tends to be. There are things that really pick you up in these books and show you that God is in charge, things are moving forward, and it will not be long before Passover; and we can rehearse all of these things once again.

Now, book two of the Psalms, which is today's topic, is summarized in Psalms 147, which we went over last time. We found that it is thematically linked to the book of Exodus, the book of Ruth and the Pentecost season, which we are in right now.

Now again these set of five are: Book two of the Psalms, the book of Exodus, the Festival scroll that is similar to it—the book of Ruth, which obviously has Pentecost themes, and of course the summary Psalm, Psalm 147. All of these things have correlations to one another. So that is what we are going to be talking about today: these thirty-one Psalms today, Psalm 42-72.

As I was closing my last sermon, we found out that most of these Psalms were written by David himself. There are some Psalms such as 42-49 that are ascribed to the sons of Korah, and they may have indeed written them. The sons of Korah being the descendants of the person, Korah, that you find in Numbers 16. They tended to be a very musical family, and they had a part in the liturgy that was done at the temple.

There is another idea that these were not done by the sons of Korah, but that they were written to the sons of Korah, by David himself. We do not know whether that was the case or not, but if that is the case, then almost all of the Psalms in this book were written by David. It would be 29 out of the 31 that would have been written by David, if we count the ones that were not ascribed to anyone. It is a possibility that this is the case because the final verse of book two says: “...the prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended,” so there is pretty good indication that most of the Psalms, at least, were written by David.

There is one that says that Asaph wrote it—Psalm 50; and the final one in the book, Psalm 72, is written by David's son Solomon. So they kept it mostly in the family.

Now one of the things that we need to remember is that a major background theme or background idea, in this second book of Psalms, uses the word Elohim more than Yahveh. This is a very important point. They did not just use these terms willy-nilly. When they are talking about the name of God, they used the name in a specific way because each name would bring up a different idea, a different emphasis that he wanted to get across. Yahveh, if you go back to the early parts of Exodus, is the name that He told Moses to tell Israel was the answer for, “What should I call you?” So it became the personal name of God gave to the Israelites, which is different than how the Gentiles would know Him. It was the name that He gave them to identify Himself.

It became a personal thing between them and God by means of the covenant that was made. So the name Yahveh was linked to the covenant that they made with Him and He with them. So when a Hebrew at the time (an Israelite) heard the name Yahveh, it reminded him of his duties as a Hebrew under the covenant. It reminded him of what he must do to please God, to fulfill the parts of the covenant that he had to fulfill under God. But that is not the way that book two of the Psalms works; that is the way book one works. Book one has a whole lot of references to Yahveh and almost none to Elohim. But this gets flipped over in book two, and he talks almost exclusively about Elohim when he is using the name of God.

In book two of Psalms, Elohim is mentioned 164 times compared to Yahveh which is mentioned only 30 times. It is a reversal in book two from book one which gives us a clue that what David (we will give David the credit here but it is really God) is trying to get us to think of in term of God; that is not as the covenant God, though that is always in the background, but he is specifically wanting us to think of God as Creator. “In the beginning, God (Elohim), created the heavens and the earth.” That is what he wants us to think about when we see God in this set of Psalms because the word Elohim has, as its background, its root, the idea of strength and power.

He wants us to think of God as a Being who is almighty. A Being who has so much power to use on our behalf, that it is going to foil any enemy's plan against us. Any trial that comes up, we might think that it is as huge as a mountain, but God is greater than any mountain. He created the mountain. If He created the mountain, he can destroy the mountain, He could move it out of the way. He could throw it out in the sea. He is Elohim and Elohim can do anything.

But there is also an idea in Elohim that not only did He have the power to create and do all of this wonderful stuff, but He also had the mind to think about all of these things and put all of this interconnectedness in and all these changes of state, water, Curcumin, liquid, gas and even solid. We have wonderful uses for all of it, and that was designed by God.

So if God is so smart and so wonderful, if He knows so much and He can put all of these things together and make them work and make this little blue orb spin in the heavens around the sun that gives us heat and puts us exactly where we need to be so that we are not too hot and not too cold, and we get enough rain, and on and on, all these systems work... If God is wonderful in being able to do all of these things, then He can surely solve one of my problems because my problems are pretty small when looked at in this vast array of time and space.

That is another idea behind the word Elohim—that God is not only powerful—but He is an intelligent Designer, and He can think His way through any Gordian [knot]. That is why so many mentions of God as Elohim rather than Yahveh is important here. We are not as concerned about the fact that we have an agreement with God; a lot of that is in book one of the Psalms.

Book one has a lot to do with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ: God giving Himself for us as our redeemer, and of course in accepting that, we come under the covenant heavily stressing the fact that we are God's people. But here in book two he wants us to think of Him as the powerful problem solver, the one who can smash through our trials if He needs to, or the one who can give us the truth that we need to work our way through it. It does not matter how it gets solved in the overall sense, he wants us to think of Him as the one who is able to overcome anything, any problem, whether it is the Kings of the earth rising up against us or whether we have the sniffles. God can get us through; we just need to be patient and wait on Him, remain loyal to Him and wait for His answer.

Now there is one other idea behind the use of Elohim that we need to understand and that is the overall fact that He is Creator and that He creates. He does not stop creating. His nature is to create. He has a wonderful imagination. He can always think of new things to do and new frontiers to go out and do things. But He is less interested in the creation that we see in Genesis 1 than He is with another creation that is going on. Let us go to Genesis 1:26, because it is hinted at right in the beginning.

Genesis 1:26 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

So He made man to look like Him and to have thoughts similar to His, to have plans like Him. So we were made not only in His physical likeness, if you could call God having a physical likeness, but we are also made in His spiritual likeness or His intellectual likeness. He has given us the ability to

think, as it says in Job 32:8, where it talks about Him giving us the spirit in man, give us understanding. So we have understanding like God. That is what He breathed into Adam. He not only breathed into Him air to give Him life, but He also gave him the power of mind.

So we have that in common with God, but there is still more than that. He gave us a Spirit that gives us the ability to have a spiritual relationship with Him because He was planning for the future. He wanted to be able to interface (modern term there) with us on a spiritual level.

In Ephesians 4, we have another creation. He is not finished creating; and David, in book two, is trying to get us to understand that God's creation did not stop in Genesis 2 with the creation of Adam and Eve. He is actually doing something else.

Ephesians 4:17-24 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

So here Paul tells us that there is a spiritual creation going on. He has taken some of these physical people that He has made and has pulled them out of the world and given them a new mind by His spirit, and He is creating in these people what he calls here “the new man”, which is according to the image of Jesus Christ. So what He is doing is creating a people that are going to be like Christ. We could see that in I John 3 where it says:

I John 3:2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and 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.

That is the end game. He is creating a spiritual people. And we know, if we look in various other places in scripture, that the ones that He is creating right now—the ones who were told will be in the first resurrection—will make up the bride of Christ and will be with Him forever. The bride of Christ will be those among humanity who are the most like Christ. They have worked and grown and been created under the same conditions They have gone through all kinds of trials and tests; they have grown in character; they have suffered; they have been persecuted; and the end result is the image of Christ in them. They reflect Christ as perfectly as God can accomplish this effect in a human being.

Then once He clothes us in the resurrection with the spiritual body, then the difference is hardly to be noted. He has made a people that are prepared to be with Christ forever—His bride. That is the spiritual creation that He is working on now, that we are working on that now; we have not reached that yet.

Book two of the Psalms concentrates on all the hard times that we must go through to reach that point. That point is not forgotten; it keeps being brought up every now and then as we go through these various Psalms. So you never lose sight of the goal, but it is not as important right now as we

are going through these trials and persecutions and tests and character growth experiences. We have to focus on solving the problems and growing in character.

The Psalmist then wants us to think of Elohim—God—as the One who is in the process of spiritually creating us. So we recognize His power; we recognize His intelligence; and we recognize His design, His purpose as Creator. He is still creating.

In terms of the thematic parallels in Exodus, Ruth and Pentecost, we saw some things pop up as we went through the scriptures last time. In Exodus we saw the law as a pretty big factor. We also saw that on Pentecost was when the Holy Spirit came. The Holy Spirit is another one of these ideas that keep popping up.

In Ruth we saw the idea of marriage come in. Boaz, the type of Christ, redeems Ruth. He marries her, takes her as his own, and from that union, we found, came David; and later on and more importantly came Christ. So you see this line of descent having to do with family, bringing together a family through this marriage. Marriage is a covenant, so the idea of covenant also keeps popping up in this.

We also found in these books that there is idea of separation. The children of Israel were separated in Egypt and then they were put out in the wilderness and separated from everybody so God could work with them and bring them through to the promised land.

When we read the book of Ruth, we find that the family of Elimelech is separated from the rest of Judah because there has been a famine, and they have gone to Moab. The story is about Naomi bringing Ruth back with her and rejoining Israel, and of course not only Israel, but rejoining the line of Christ through Boaz.

Of course, the idea of redemption is always present. Boaz redeemed Ruth; God redeemed Israel from Egypt; and in the book of Psalms, we find Him frequently redeeming and saving David in the straits that he gets in. So from a New Covenant perspective, what we see as we go through all of these different themes in book two is that God is preparing a people in Christ's image to marry Him, Christ, and to rule His Kingdom. This book is all about preparing the bride.

Now the preparation is done through God's power, through His giving of His law in His spirit to help, and by that and by His providence to produce a people for God. You do this by “going through the wilderness” and by taking a long journey of privation. It is a long journey that God supplies and provides for (every need along the way) and which finally, at the end, leads to the promised land. Just keep these things in the back of your mind as we go through these Psalms.

So in book two, what we see is David as the prototype Christian. He was probably one of the few who was actually a real Christian at the time. There were some others, but David was the major one. We see him under severe trial time and time again. In just about every Psalm he is in trouble somewhere. He is outcast; he is hiding from somebody, usual Saul; he is depressed, things are not going well for him, his friends are leaving him and going to his enemies, his enemies are people he does not even know that are reporting to Saul where he is. There are various other things, but he is always in trouble, there is always something going wrong, and he needs God's help to get out.

What he finds as he goes through these trials is that only God can help him. He has got his back up against a wall. He has few friends; and the friends he does have are powerless to help him.

Everything that he comes up with fizzles out. He just must let God work these things out for him and keep faith, be patient and let God work. Then once it is over, he must think about what this taught him? Why did God put him through this? How can he grow from this experience? Then at the end, as a good Christian will do, he praises God for what He has done to save him from this particular trial.

So we to see through David's experiences, God's faithfulness, His Sovereignty, and His providence as He works with us through these trials so that we can grow in character. The thing that we must take out of this, if there is nothing else to take out of book two, is that when we are in a trial: trust God. God will save us! He will lead us to His Kingdom. We have the life of David as a long detailed example of how that works.

So now we are going to look at some of these Psalms and how they correspond especially to this time of the year and our pilgrimage to the Kingdom. I hope that in these last few weeks before Pentecost that it will help us see the spiritual application to our lives and prepare us for being the first-fruits of God, which is what Pentecost is all about.

Now I gave you a caveat last time. I gave the same caveat when I gave the sermon about book five, and again when I gave all those sermons on the parables. When we are dealing with themes, we need to make sure that we do not try to cram too much in and try to see everything as part of the theme. Themes are general, they are overviews of things, so not everything is going to fit here exactly, but there is enough to show that it is a theme, that these ideas keep popping up. So if you see something in there that does not seem to fit, well then it is probably one of these details that we should not try to cram in there where it does not fit.

Now let us go to Psalms 42. If you have read Psalm 42 and 43, you probably recognize that they are very similar. The reason for this is because were once one Psalm. It is evident that they were one Psalm because if you look at verse 5

Psalm 42:5 Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him For the help of His countenance.

Psalm 42:11 Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; For I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God.

Psalm 43:5 Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; For I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God.

Notice anything? They are a refrain, it is a chorus and it was repeated three times through this one Psalm, but for some reason when they were chopping this book up, they made an extra Psalm out of the last stanza of this one Psalm. So, we are going to treat this as one Psalm rather than two because it works better that way. You can see that there was a plan to this Psalm, in three parts. I do not know why this was done, but that is the way it appears in the Bible and we just have to work with it. Let us read the whole thing here except for the refrains

Psalm 42:1-4 As the deer pants for the water brooks, So pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night, While they continually say to me, "Where is

your God?” When I remember these things, I pour out my soul within me. For I used to go with the multitude; I went with them to the house of God, With the voice of joy and praise, With a multitude that kept a pilgrim feast.

There is the refrain. He is cast down, he is depressed, things are not going right. He asks “where is God?” Now the second stanza starts in verse 6.

Psalm 42:6-10 O my God, my soul is cast down within me; Therefore I will remember You from the land of the Jordan, And from the heights of Hermon, from the Hill Mizar. Deep calls unto deep at the noise of Your waterfalls; All Your waves and billows have gone over me. [He is feeling like he is trapped in this river, under this waterfall and he is caught underneath trying to get up to surface for some air, but he keeps feeling like he is pushed down again into the water.] The Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, And in the night His song shall be with me— A prayer to the God of my life. I will say to God my Rock, “Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?” As with a breaking of my bones, My enemies reproach me, While they say to me all day long, “Where is your God?”

We have heard that a couple of times now. His enemies are taunting him saying, “you are in really good straights now; what has God done for you lately?” So he says, “Why am I so depressed?” There is a good reason he is depressed; he is having a pretty hard time.

Psalm 43:1-5 Vindicate me, O God, And plead my cause against an ungodly nation; Oh, deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man! For You are the God of my strength; Why do You cast me off? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? Oh, send out Your light and Your truth! Let them lead me; Let them bring me to Your holy hill And to Your tabernacle. Then I will go to the altar of God, To God my exceeding joy; And on the harp I will praise You, O God, my God. [Notice all of those Elohim's in there.] Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; For I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God.

What we find here is that the Psalmist is clearly in distress; he is going through a really rough patch and worse than that, he is far away from the Temple. He is far away from the center of activity. He mentions Hermon here; that is way up in the north. He is, for some reason, in a position of exile, whether it was self-imposed or whether it was a military campaign, we do not know, but he was far away and he felt like the distance was representative of how far he was from God because he was not getting any help from God, or so he felt.

He was starting to believe his enemies and think, “Where is God in all of this?” He is feeling it because he is a long way away from the sanctuary where all the action was taking place, where he wanted to be. He is depressed because he does not have any fellowship with God's people. He felt so far from God and His people. He was remembering the good times of former days when things were a lot better, when he was not depressed, when everything he looked at did not remind him of how far away he was from everybody and everything.

Worst of all, every which way he looked...all the feedback that he was getting, even his own thoughts were telling him that God, for some reason, had forsaken him. He did not feel inspired; he did not feel like his prayers were being answered; he did not feel like God was doing anything in his life, that He had gone off and completely forgot about him.

There is a progression here as we go through these various stanzas. Things start to change a little bit and it changes with the refrain, because the refrain is not necessarily, “Woe is me.” Let us read the refrain again. He asks himself:

“Why are you cast down, O my soul? [He is kind of demanding of himself to give a reason for why he is so depressed]. And why are you disquieted within me? [What has gotten into you? where is your head? Why are you doing this to yourself? Why are you questioning everything and attributing all the wrong to God?] Hope in God; [Do not blame Him. Hope in Him] For I shall yet praise Him [There is a light at the end of the tunnel, I can see me getting over this depression if I continue to hope in God], The help of my countenance and my God.”

He is saying here that he believes that God has turned his back on him. He is saying that “...*there is a time in the future when I will see God's face again and that is going to be my help. I am going to turn my attitude around at some point and realize that God has been looking at me the whole time. I have been doing this to myself. There have been people who tried to get me to lack faith and are biting at my heals, but I am the one that is reacting badly. I am not seeing God in all of this, so for help I need to see God's countenance and I know at some point I am going to snap out of it, and things are going to get better,*” but it is not right now, because we have to go on to stanza two.

So stanza one is, “*Woe is me, everything is bad. I cannot see anything coming good out of this.*” but then he says, “*maybe if God would turn around and look at me.*” It is not a definite, “I know God will turn around,” or “I know that things are going to get better.” He is just saying that there is a chance that I am going to feel better because God is going to give me a break.

Psalm 42:6-8 O my God, my soul is cast down within me; [here, we know automatically that he still has not come out of his funk. He is still depressed.] Therefore I will remember You from the land of the Jordan, and from the heights of Hermon, from the Hill Mizar. [So he is saying that even though he is a long way away, he is at the Jordan, maybe the source of the Jordan, way up towards Mt. Hermon. Even though the distance is far, he is going to force himself to remember Him.] Deep calls unto deep at the noise of Your waterfalls; All Your waves and billows have gone over me. [he feels like he is under water, he is not getting the boost up to get a breath of air. He is in turmoil. He feels that he is not coming out of his depression. Verse 8] The Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime. And in the night His song shall be with me, A prayer to the God of my life.

He understands that God is going to act. He is going to act in loving kindness. This word in the Old Testament has to do with God doing His part as part of the covenant. It is part of covenant loyalty. Because I have a covenant with God and because God has a covenant with me, He is going to act in loving kindness toward me. We know that in I Corinthians 10:13 where He provides a way of escape. It does not matter what the temptation or trial is, there is a way of escape that God provides, and He gives that as part of His lovingkindness toward us as His covenant people. So there is an assurance, here, that God will command some good to come out of this and bring him out of his depression.

So not only does he have this hope of a solution, but he also knows that he has a relationship with God. He says, in a way, “God sings to me and I pray back.” Now when you were in the dark, when you were young, and you were having a little bit of trouble, your parent would come sit at your

bedside and they would say soothing words to you or even sing a lullaby. This is the essence of what he is trying to say here. God is going to send him comfort in the night like a lullaby would comfort a child, and then he would pray to God as his response.

So what we are seeing is that David is beginning to turn around from not being quite so depressed to seeing that there is some hope. God is with Him, and He is going to send a solution and comfort him, and they are going to get their communication going again.

Psalm 42:9-10 I will say to God my Rock, [now that they are talking again] “Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?” [*Have you not seen what has been going on in my life?*] As with a breaking of my bones, My enemies reproach me, While they say to me all day long, “Where is your God?”

What he is saying is, “*God, you missed a lot while you have been gone. Have you seen what they have been doing? They are telling me that you have gone away and will not help me and that I need to fill you in on all the things that have been going on in my life, it is just terrible. I need your help.*” Then in verse 11 we have a repeat of the refrain, where he asks himself again,

Psalm 42:11 Why are you cast down? And why are you disquieted within me? [What has gone on to make you so depressed? Then he says:] hope in God [He needs that hope; he needs to keep reminding himself that God is his hope, God is his deliverance, God is the One that is going to solve his problems, so he says:] for I shall yet praise Him. [We have made movement; we are going forward a little bit, but he is not out of it yet. He knows the help that is going to come from God's attention to his problem] the help of my countenance and my God.

Now notice in verse 5 it said: “for the help of His countenance.” He was really focused on the fact God was watching (God's face being on him). In verse 11, he adds the word: “Help of His countenance and my God.” Remember the word Elohim. He is saying that not only is God's attention on the problem going to enable a solution, but there is His power, His intelligence and the fact that His is creating something special in him that is noteworthy. That is the idea of Elohim coming through; God is working with him.

So he has added a little more to his understanding; it is bringing him slowly up out of his depression. He is beginning to feel some momentum by understanding that God is actually helping him. He is turning his attitude around.

Psalm 43:1-2 Vindicate me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation; Oh, deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man! For You are the God of my strength; Why do You cast me off? [he still has this idea that God has gone away, but it is not true] Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?

There is already a different attitude there. At the beginning of the first stanza he was saying “I am so far from God, I am just so depressed.” Then in stanza two he says “My soul is cast down within me,” but now in stanza three he starts out, “*Vindicate me, I really have not been in the wrong against my enemies.*” Now he was in the wrong in terms of his attitude toward God, but within the relationship with his enemies he feels like he needs to be vindicated.

I think at this point the statement, “Why do you cast me out” is more rhetorical. He is not really thinking that anymore; he is almost saying it to himself. Maybe a different way to think of it is that he is saying to himself, “*Why did I ever think that You had cast me off?*” Stanza three is where he is beginning to come around and be positive again, and so he asks himself “Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?”

Verse 3 then is the solution. He asks God for help; he asks for specific help.

Psalm 43:3 Oh, send out Your light and Your truth! Let them lead me; [where does he go? God's word, that is where God's light shines, where His truth is.] Let them bring me to Your holy hill And to Your tabernacle. [He is also asking for guidance through his entire trial here to bring him back home. He was out in exile, gone far away from Jerusalem, and he wanted to come back and enjoy all of those things that he had in former times, such as the fellowship with the people and going to the temple, etc.]

He is basically asking God, “*Give me the inspiration to go somewhere in Your word to lighten my path; lead me to where I need to go to give me the inspiration and the truth that I need to work through this problem. Let your words guide me, not the words of my enemies. It is the words of my enemy that have been making me so depressed. They have been saying, ‘Where is your God,’ and I took the cue and said that He is gone, but it is not true*”

The whole Bible tells us God is always there. So he is asking God for inspiration so that he will know how to turn and to make a positive appraisal of what is going on through His word. He not only wants to solve this one problem, but to be given guidance and council that would bring him back to that more ideal situation.

Psalm 43: 4- 5 Then I will go to the altar of God, To God my exceeding joy; And on the harp I will praise You, O God, my God. [But then it finishes with the refrain again.] Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; For I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God.

This is a lesson for us all. The repeat of the refrain is a lesson. The lesson is that even after we have that aha moment and we realize what we have to do, when God lead us to see the solution to our problems in His word, the trial is not really over yet. We can still get down even though we know these things. The depression may not be completely lifted, and the situation may not have been fully solved because at the end of the Psalm he is still far away, he has not gone to the temple, he has not gone to the alter, he has not expressed his exceeding joy to God in Jerusalem. There is still a lot of work that must be done to get to that point.

So even after being inspired with the answer to our problem or trial, we still have to go through the steps and those are hard, too. So he is very realistic about our problems. It is not all sunshine and rainbows. Even after we find the solution, we may have to slog through some pretty rough spots before we finally get everything resolved.

What we see in Psalms 42-43 is the typical progression of a sore trial. David was a very emotional man, and he felt things. He has a way of writing things in the Psalms that make people think that everything is terrible. You feel like the enemies are right outside the door with a knife and about ready to cut off his head or something. So you get this idea from David that things are horrible and

all things are going wrong, and they are. A lot of people are like David, they fell deeply like David, and think that their whole world is falling apart.

God gives us this example through the pen of David, to help us understand and process and work through these emotions, our feelings of isolation, our feelings of thinking that God is not around, and various other things that we feel in a trial. We can use this as a way to encourage ourselves just to keep plotting on and follow God's instructions, His principals. Keep on. Realize that depression is not forever. God's countenance is on us. Keep going, things will get better, even though it may take some time, because God is on the ball. He is always there. He is always watching.

God is going to work out whatever He has planned no matter if we cooperate with Him or not. It would be better if we did cooperate, but the point is that God will just keep on working until His will is accomplished. If we do not learn the lesson the first time the trial comes around, we might learn the lesson better the second time it comes around or the fifth or the ninety-eighth time or so on. It does not matter how many times that trial comes around, God is there and He is working. Over time our attitude will get better, and we will come to realize that He is there. We will realize the steps we need to take and that we need to trust Him because He is working with us. When He creates, He does not throw out any failures because He is God, He is Elohim. He is the perfect Creator.

Remember what He said at the end of Genesis 1, "God saw all that He had made and said it was very good." That is Elohim, that is the Creator. Even though we might think that these rough spots are deep dungeons of trials, God is greater than that. He can work through it.

So we go through the "Woe is me," phase, then we go through the "Where is God? I need your comfort, where are you?" phase, then finally we get to the point where we say, "I am going to follow what God says and work this out." That is the Christian trials in a nutshell, and that is what we open book two with because just about every Psalm is about that same thing. We are working through some kind of trial so that we can be made into something better, something greater.

So we just need to keep looking toward God, carry on in hope and faith, forge ahead, remember that His face is always turned toward us and keep on keeping on, persevere, endure. If we are thinking about what is going on in our lives, what has been produced through the trial, then we can distill from these trials good spiritual lessons. And if we are doing what we need to do, we will be growing in character. Hopefully it will not take too many times in the trial to get us to learn the lesson, but as we continue in our trials and we keep learning the lessons, it should get a little easier. We should not have to repeat the trials quite so often if we are growing in character and learning how we should be responding to these things.

So this is the overall thrust of Psalms book two: overcoming trials through faith, and growing in character by them, allowing ourselves to be made in the image of God.

Now what I want to do at this point is show you in Psalm 44 another way that this book covers the life of trial of a Christian. The difference between Psalms 42-43 versus Psalm 44 is that we go from personal in Psalm 42-43 to corporate in Psalms 44, a much larger body, whether it be the body of the church, of the nation, or a group within the church, a family or whatever. We go from being specific to being more general.

Psalm 44:1-3 We [it is not I or my, but we] have heard with our ears, O God, Our fathers have told us, The deeds You did in their days, In days of old: You drove out the

nations with Your hand, But them [meaning their fathers] You planted; You afflicted the peoples, and cast them out. For they did not gain possession of the land by their own sword, Nor did their own arm save them; But it was Your right hand, Your arm, and the light of Your countenance, Because You favored them.

He goes on here and talks about how God is our King and how He is going to punish the enemies and that God is going to fight for us. Verses 1-8 is remembrance of how God has redeemed and delivered the people of Israel in history, in the past. He is looking back and saying, "We have this record of God intervening in our affairs from a long way back and He has done this because He loved His people." So this section ends with praise for God for all that He has done in the past. Then things change in verse 9:

Psalm 44:9-12 But You have cast us off and put us to shame, And You do not go out with our armies. You make us turn back from the enemy, And those who hate us have taken spoil for themselves. You have given us up like sheep intended for food, And have scattered us among the nations. You sell Your people for next to nothing, And are not enriched by selling them.

They are accusing God saying: "*You do nothing for selling us out God. You have done all these great things for us in the past, but what have you done for us lately? We are dying out here. You are allowing enemies to plunder us; some of us have been taken into slavery and exiled. What is going on, why have you done this to us?*" Like Psalms 42-43 says: "Where are you, God, why have you forsaken us?" The only difference is that it is a bunch of people saying this and not just David.

So they are feeling that God is a long way off and has forgotten about them. The current situation for them is one of weakness, defeat, dishonor, and separation. That goes all the way through to verse 16. Now there is an interesting fact that we need to add in here.

Psalm 44:17-22 All this has come upon us; But we have not forgotten You, Nor have we dealt falsely with Your covenant. Our heart has not turned back, Nor have our steps departed from Your way; But You have severely broken us in the place of jackals, And covered us with the shadow of death. If we had forgotten the name of our God, Or stretched out our hands to a foreign god, Would not God search this out? For He knows the secrets of the heart. Yet for Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

This is interesting because they, this group, is going through hell on earth. They have kept the covenant, been obedient; they have not been rebellious ; they have not worshiped idols. They have been doing everything, as far as they understand, correctly. They are keeping their end of the bargain. So they are thinking, "God, why are you doing this to us? We have done everything you have asked." That is the conundrum here, if you want to put it that way. This is trial or persecution when they do not deserve it at all. They have been faithful; they have been keeping the Sabbath; they have not harmed their fellow man. They have been making all the proper sacrifices. They praise God; they keep the covenant. They do what is right, yet still they are oppressed, still under fire. They are still going through a sore trial. Does this sound familiar?

We cannot pat ourselves on the back and say, as Rodger Dangerfield would say, "I am a good guy; I have not does anything wrong, but nothing good ever happens." We could think, "Why is this happening to us? Are we not supposed to be blessed when we do good, instead of cursed? Are we not

supposed to be given wonderful crops, peace with our enemies and prosperity and all this good stuff when we keep God's way? Then why are people out there hacking off our kid's heads; why are we being sold into slavery. God, where are you?"

Now this is a totally different trial than what was going on in the first two Psalms (Psalms 42-43). This is a persecution for doing good. This is suffering for righteousness sake. So they plea to God here in verse 26,

Psalm 44:26 Arise for our help, And redeem us for Your mercies' sake.

They can only call on God to give them relief from this problem. But this is what happens to God's people who are living in a world that has rejected God. And even though God has given us promises of protection and safety, sometimes He lets us go through things because He is trying to teach us something.

If you read Acts 5, after Ananias and Sapphire, you will find that they are healing people, casting out demons. The apostles are preaching, thousands are coming into the church, and the next thing you know the apostles are in prison. They have been doing everything right; they were doing everything God told them to do. They are preaching the gospel, healing the sick, casting out demons, yet the Jews place them in prison and then an angel comes, opens the door, and they all ran away. Then they are back in prison because they were out there in public preaching again and the Jews just came and rounded them up and took them to a big court trial and the apostles get beaten this time for their loyalty to Christ. They do not deserve it.

But it says at the end of the chapter that they are praising God and rejoicing that they can share in the sufferings of Christ. This was the right way to handle it. David's way is just one long complaint and so he asks for God to help him, and I am sure God did, but what we see through New Testament eyes is how this all works out.

There is a man who was used to a lot of suffering, trial and persecution, and so he writes to give us some advice about it in I Peter 3:13.

I Peter 3:13-17 And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled." [he quotes Isaiah] But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

So we are given a warning that sometimes we have done everything right, but God has allowed us to go into trial, into persecution, to have suffering, to test us because He wants to gauge our reaction. Are we going to fight, are we going to sin, are we going to do something we should not do, or are we going to turn to God and trust Him for His deliverance? Are we going to be faithful and wait for His deliverance? It still hurts because it is still suffering, but He wants to see our faith. He wants to see if we are going to remain loyal and that will give Him a good gauge of our growth.

I just want to remind you of the major theme here, as you go through book two of the Psalms—it is all about what God is creating in His people.