

## Psalm 101-104 • Chapter Study

### INTRO

#### Psalm 101

A Psalm of David.

David spent considerable time meditating on God & His Word

Those meditations led to some dramatic revelations that moved him to respond.

This psalm is one of those times.

It's David's commitment to be a man of integrity.

<sup>1</sup> I will sing of mercy and justice; To You, O Lord, I will sing praises.

Mercy & justice seem opposites.

Justice is getting what's deserved; mercy is **NOT** getting it.

As much as we want the civil government to be just, we also recognize the need for mercy.

Criminals need to be punished for their crimes.

But when an otherwise well-meaning person runs afoul of the law, we want the judge to be understanding and show mercy.

What irks us is when judges show mercy to habitual criminals & deal harshly with the good-intentioned.

David understood what while God is absolutely Just, He looks on our hearts & knows the motives behind our actions.

His justice is tempered by mercy. Just as His mercy is measured justly. So -

<sup>2</sup> I will behave wisely in a perfect way. Oh, when will You come to me?

That question is asked **rhetorically**.

What David means is – “When are You **NOT** with me?”

Because God was always with him, that's why he would behave wisely & consistently.

I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.

There's an old adage which says that **character** is what you are when no one is watching.

David understood that God is **always** watching.

So he would not be 2 people; one in public & another in private.

He was a man of integrity who sought to live consistently before both God & man.

Now David gives a list of things he knew would **bolster** his integrity.

<sup>3</sup> I will set nothing wicked before my eyes;

While all people are attracted to enticements by what they see, **men** are especially susceptible to visual lust.

Temptation can be greatly enhanced by what is seen.

The enemy knows this so he wraps temptation in an appealing package; whether it's sexual, sensual, or greed.

There's also a satisfaction that comes **just from** looking.

A person who has no intention of committing an act of sexual immorality can content themselves with a fantasy fueled by an image.

They substitute 15 minutes of an actual act with a couple hours of fantasy.

This is what Jesus was speaking of when He warned about lusting after someone.

He said it was sin.

The danger of lust is that it's **progressive**.

The thrill of the first encounters diminish over time with exposure to the same kinds of images.

So more overt & risqué images are sought out to achieve the same sense of excitement.

Then over the months & years they grow progressively more obscene.

Eventually, looking isn't enough & the person begins to act out the things they'd seen.

David knew well the snare of lust.

You read his story & realize this was his weakness.

So he says he will not seek out things to look at that will entice him to sin.

He knows he can't avoid seeing something **by chance**, but he won't go in pursuit of it.

He makes a decision **ahead of time** that if his eyes are confronted with something appealing, he won't

let it **become evil** by the 2<sup>nd</sup> **lingering**, then **leering** look.

That's what Jesus meant when he said, “He who looks on a woman **TO LUST FOR HER**, commits sin

in his heart.”

Seeing a woman isn't sin; looking TO lust for her is.

If David wrote this **before** his encounter with Bathsheba, he didn't stick to his commitment.

If he wrote it **afterward**, no doubt he did so because of the grief his error in this area caused.

3b I hate the work of those who fall away; It shall not cling to me.

He repeats the same thing in different words ...

<sup>4</sup> A perverse heart shall depart from me; I will not know wickedness.

Falling away here would be from God's covenant with Israel.

These are people who have no regard for the Law or worship.

Their god is self so they make up their own rules as they go.

David will have to part with them.

<sup>5</sup> Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, Him I will destroy;

Unlike today, social standing was **everything** in that culture.

Everybody knew everybody else.

There weren't dozens of different cliques to chose to associate with.

Society was a united whole & once your reputation was tarnished, it was extremely hard to restore it.

If someone told a vicious rumor about you that caused you to lose standing, it didn't just effect you, it besmirched you entire family.

This is why honor was so important to the ancient world and **continues** to be throughout the Middle East.

As king, David pledged himself to **punish** those who started rumors aimed at harming others.

The one who has a haughty look and a proud heart, Him I will not endure.

David understood the grave spiritual danger presented by pride.

Arrogance was the mark of a soul that stood in opposition to God.

Like gossip, David would use his authority as the ruler to humble the haughty.

But he understood that his authority wasn't to be used just in the **restraint** of evil.

He would also reward the faithful.

<sup>6</sup> My eyes *shall be* on the faithful of the land, That they may dwell with me; He who walks in a perfect way, He shall serve me.

<sup>7</sup> He who works deceit shall not dwell within my house; He who tells lies shall not continue in my presence.

How would David know if they were lies?

Well – lies always end up being exposed. It's the nature of truth to come out.

<sup>8</sup> Early I will destroy all the wicked of the land, That I may cut off all the evildoers from the city of the Lord.

David made a commitment to enforce justice quickly.

Once he had a chance to review each case and determine whether justice or mercy was the right course, then he would carry out the sentence.

This is one of the weaknesses of our judicial system today – justice is so often delayed.

When it's finally carried out, there's little connection between the crime & the punishment.

## Psalm 102

A Prayer of the Afflicted, When He is Overwhelmed and Pours Out His Complaint Before the Lord.

The superscription here is unique among the Psalms.

Unlike other superscriptions, it doesn't tell us either who wrote it or the situation that prompted it.

Rather – it simply describes who it's good for.

This is the cry of someone who's in distress & cries out to God for help.

<sup>1</sup> Hear my prayer, O Lord, And let my cry come to You.

<sup>2</sup> Do not hide Your face from me in the day of my trouble; Incline Your ear to me; In the day that I call, answer me speedily.

<sup>3</sup> For my days are consumed like smoke, And my bones are burned like a hearth.

His trials have robbed him of all joy. He feels dry & insubstantial.

4 My heart is stricken and withered like grass, So that I forget to eat my bread.  
He's so stressed he's lost his appetite.

Some forms of depression are marked by overeating; food becomes a kind of medication.  
But when your appetite is gone and the idea of eating makes you nauseous, **that's bad**.

5 Because of the sound of my groaning My bones cling to my skin.  
He's lost weight and has become a bony skin-bag.

6 I am like a pelican of the wilderness; I am like an owl of the desert.  
The pelican is a sea bird and totally out of place in the wilderness.  
The owl needs tall trees and plenty game, none of which are found in the desert.  
This poor guy feels completely **dislocated**.

7 I lie awake, And am like a sparrow alone on the housetop.  
Sparrows are communal creatures. A lone sparrow is a picture of mournfulness.

8 My enemies reproach me all day long; Those who deride me swear an oath against me.  
Trouble due to **circumstances** like **health** or **finances** is one thing.  
But trouble caused by **enemies** who've set themselves to do you harm is far worse.  
Whatever else was going on in this man's life, hostility from others was complicated matters.

9 For I have eaten ashes like bread, And mingled my drink with weeping,  
Next we get a clue as to what prompted this psalm ...

10 Because of Your indignation and Your wrath; For You have lifted me up and cast me away.

11 My days *are* like a shadow that lengthens, And I wither away like grass.

12 But You, O Lord, shall endure forever, And the remembrance of Your name to all generations.

13 You will arise *and* have mercy on Zion; For the time to favor her, Yes, the set time, has come.

14 For Your servants take pleasure in her stones, And show favor to her dust.

15 So the nations shall fear the name of the Lord, And all the kings of the earth Your glory.

While we can't be certain, there's a good chance this was written by Nehemiah.

We know he was a humble man, and that accounts for why no name is listed in the superscription.

The psalm begins in despair & a personal sense of loss & judgment by God.

Then it moves to hope in the restoration of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah probably wrote this after news reached him in the Persian court of the desperate condition of Jerusalem.

He personalized the distress of the people of the city, then looked forward to the future when the city would be rebuilt and would become the scene of the arrival of the long-awaited Messiah.

16 For the Lord shall build up Zion; He shall appear in His glory.

17 He shall regard the prayer of the destitute, And shall not despise their prayer.

18 This will be written for the generation to come, That a people yet to be created may praise the Lord.

19 For He looked down from the height of His sanctuary; From heaven the Lord viewed the earth,

20 To hear the groaning of the prisoner, To release those appointed to death,

21 To declare the name of the Lord in Zion, And His praise in Jerusalem,

22 When the peoples are gathered together, And the kingdoms, to serve the Lord.

Once Nehemiah led in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, he called for a great convocation of the people to renew the covenant with God.

That became the basis of the new nation of Israel to which Jesus came 400 years later.

All of that is captured here.

Then Nehemiah look back to when he first heard the discouraging report about the condition of Jerusalem from his brother.

23 He weakened my strength in the way; He shortened my days.

Nehemiah was so bummed out by the news of Jerusalem's distress it felt like he was dying.

24 I said, “O my God, Do not take me away in the midst of my days; Your years *are* throughout all generations.

25 Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens *are* the work of Your hands.

26 They will perish, but You will endure; Yes, they will all grow old like a garment; Like a cloak You will change them, And they will be changed.

27 But You *are* the same, And Your years will have no end.

28 The children of Your servants will continue, And their descendants will be established before You.”

This is what Nehemiah prayed. God heard his prayer and sent him to Jerusalem to rebuild it’s defenses.

In Hebrews 1, vs. 25-27 here in Psalm 102 are used in reference to Jesus to show that He’s superior to angels.

So this Psalm is not only the prayer of Nehemiah, it’s **prophetic** of Jesus.

We don’t have time for it now but there’s a great parallel between Nehemiah & the Spirit of Christ.

Just as Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit rebuilds us in the image of Christ.

And the details of correlation between the two are too numerous & clear to be coincidence.

Psalm 103

A *Psalm* Of David.

It becomes clear right away that Psalm 103 & 4 go together.

Look at v. 1 of each -

103:1 Bless the Lord, O my soul; ... // 104:1 Bless the Lord, O my soul! ...

Their last verses are the same refrain to “Bless the Lord, O my soul.”

The word “bless” is one of those words with a wide field of meaning.

The common thought throughout is good-will and a desire to advance or benefit that which is blessed.

To bless God means to desire His glory to grow & to see His will done.

When we bless God, we aren’t adding anything to Him since He’s already perfect.

What we’re doing is simply expressing the desire that His fame would spread to more of those who at present fail to know it.

1 Bless the Lord, O my soul; And all that is within me, *bless* His holy name!

2 Bless the Lord, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits:

Now David lists some of them.

In reading this list, keep in mind that while there’s a taste & glimmer of these things in this life, their ultimate fulfillment will only be in heaven.

3 Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases,

Forgiveness of all sin is for now – although we won’t be liberated from the presence of sin until heaven.

While God heals, and heals all disease – we won’t know complete deliverance from sickness till heaven.

4 Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies,

5 Who satisfies your mouth with good *things*, *So that* your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

How old will we be in heaven? Age won’t be an issue to worry about. We’ll be in perfect health.

6 The Lord executes righteousness And justice for all who are oppressed.

David looks back 500 years ...

7 He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel.

Then David quotes from Moses -

8 The Lord *is* merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.

That’s from Exodus 34. / Then he refers to the early chapters of Genesis & the flood -

9 He will not always strive *with us*, Nor will He keep *His anger* forever.

These quotes are telling because they reveal David had a thorough familiarity with God’s Word.

We know that Moses had given a command in the Law that when a new king took his throne he was to write for himself a copy of the law.

But David had a thorough knowledge of God’s Word long before he became king.

This presents a huge challenge to the idea of liberal scholars who say writing was rare & scrolls scant in ancient Israel.

Even though David came from a modest background, he knew how to read and was well-versed in God's Word.

10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities.

11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, *So* great is His mercy toward those who fear Him;

12 As far as the east is from the west, *So* far has He removed our transgressions from us.

What a great promise!

13 As a father pities *his* children, *So* the Lord pities those who fear Him.

What that means becomes clear as we read on ...

14 For He knows our frame; He remembers that we *are* dust.

15 *As for* man, his days *are* like grass; As a flower of the field, so he flourishes.

16 For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, And its place remembers it no more.

A dad watches while his little child tries to walk for the first time.

He doesn't yell at the little tyke because she wobbles & falls down.

He encourages her with smiles & hugs.

And not just for a few minutes. It takes days before the toddler can walk a straight line.

That's why they're called '**toddlers**.'

Parents **pity** their young children trying some new endeavor that marks an emerging phase of maturity in the sense that they know how HARD it is and the struggle that has to be endured in order to win through to the skill.

God is no less patient with us as we learn to walk with Him.

The Fall has crippled us spiritually and learning to walk in maturity takes time.

We all go through a phase as spiritual toddlers.

God doesn't yell at us to get it together; stop wobbling! Stop falling!

Hey, just as we expect 10 year olds to not only be walking but running & riding bikes, & hopping over walls & trying new things like water-skiing & wake-boarding – so Christians ought to move out of the toddler phase quickly.

But God is patient with us as we learn new spiritual skills.

The Holy Spirit is **NOT** a Spiritual drill-sergeant, barking out orders & demeaning us when we fail.

As the psalmist says here, compared to God, mortal man is weak & frail.

His life passes quickly. As our Creator, God knows exactly what we can endure & will never press us beyond our capacity.

17 But the mercy of the Lord *is* from everlasting to everlasting On those who fear Him, And His righteousness to children's children,

18 To such as keep His covenant, And to those who remember His commandments to do them.

19 The Lord has established His throne in heaven, And His kingdom rules over all.

An important reminder to those of us who are news-junkies & find ourselves getting bummed out, frustrated, worked up by current events & the shenanigans of civil rulers.

20 Bless the Lord, you His angels, Who excel in strength, who do His word, Heeding the voice of His word.

21 Bless the Lord, all *you* His hosts, *You* ministers of His, who do His pleasure.

22 Bless the Lord, all His works, In all places of His dominion. Bless the Lord, O my soul!

Psalm 104

1 Bless the Lord, O my soul! O Lord my God, You are very great: You are clothed with honor and majesty,

2 Who cover *Yourself* with light as *with* a garment, Who stretch out the heavens like a curtain.

Every year at the Academy Awards, before the show, the big deal is the red carpet.

All the fashion founts are out snapping pictures, shooting video.

And the buzz is all about the gowns the women wear.

God's garment makes the most elegant dress ever worn on Hollywood's red carpet look like a thread-bare, dirty burlap sack.

His garment is light – bright, shining, radiant glory!

3 He lays the beams of His upper chambers in the waters, Who makes the clouds His chariot, Who walks on the wings of the wind,

The most awesome demonstration of power ancient man witnessed on a regular basis was the lightning storm. So that imagery is parleyed here then used poetically as the setting for where God goes for a stroll. When the lightning flashes & thunder booms, man hides. God has fun with it and takes it for a ride!

4 Who makes His angels spirits, His ministers a flame of fire.

In our day, because of the artistic Romance Era idea of angels & the silly **angelology** that's made a big splash a decade ago, people think of angels as kind of milk-toast beings who don't do much.

That's a very different idea from David's day when angels were rightly understood as awesome beings of huge power & glory.

No one thought of having an angel on their shoulder – that would have terrified them to death!

God has a massive host of these majestic, powerful beings at His beckon call.

How much MORE majestic & powerful must He be if they these august creatures are His **messengers**, his **errand runners**?

5 *You who* laid the foundations of the earth, So *that* it should not be moved forever,

6 You covered it with the deep as *with* a garment; The waters stood above the mountains.

7 At Your rebuke they fled; At the voice of Your thunder they hastened away.

The flood.

8 They went up over the mountains; They went down into the valleys, To the place which You founded for them.

9 You have set a boundary that they may not pass over, That they may not return to cover the earth.

Now David is on a roll as he ponders the creation.

The complexity of it all moves him to wonder . . .

10 He sends the springs into the valleys; They flow among the hills.

11 They give drink to every beast of the field; The wild donkeys quench their thirst.

12 By them the birds of the heavens have their home; They sing among the branches.

13 He waters the hills from His upper chambers; The earth is satisfied with the fruit of Your works.

14 He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, And vegetation for the service of man, That he may bring forth food from the earth,

15 And wine *that* makes glad the heart of man, Oil to make *his* face shine, And bread *which* strengthens man's heart.

16 The trees of the Lord are full *of sap*, The cedars of Lebanon which He planted,

17 Where the birds make their nests; The stork has her home in the fir trees.

18 The high hills *are* for the wild goats; The cliffs are a refuge for the rock badgers.

19 He appointed the moon for seasons; The sun knows its going down.

20 You make darkness, and it is night, In which all the beasts of the forest creep about.

21 The young lions roar after their prey, And seek their food from God.

22 *When* the sun rises, they gather together And lie down in their dens.

23 Man goes out to his work And to his labor until the evening.

24 O Lord, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all. The earth is full of Your possessions—

David realizes God had the world with all its creatures in mind before any of it was created.

25 This great and wide sea, In which *are* innumerable teeming things, Living things both small and great.

26 There the ships sail about; *There is* that Leviathan Which You have made to play there.

Job also spoke of a large sea creature called **Leviathan**.

We don't know what it was; whether it was an animal that still lives today or something that went extinct. The point is it was a massive, awe-inspiring creature.

27 These all wait for You, That You may give *them* their food in due season.

28 *What* You give them they gather in; You open Your hand, they are filled with good.

29 You hide Your face, they are troubled; You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.

30 You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; And You renew the face of the earth.

31 May the glory of the Lord endure forever; May the Lord rejoice in His works.

32 He looks on the earth, and it trembles; He touches the hills, and they smoke.

33 I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being.

34 May my meditation be sweet to Him; I will be glad in the Lord.

35 May sinners be consumed from the earth, And the wicked be no more.

Bless the Lord, O my soul! Praise the Lord!