

April 29

Psalm 8, 9, 16, 19, 21, 24

One term that you see often in the Psalms is *Selah*. It occurs 71 times in the text of 39 Psalms. It is probably a musical instruction on the reading of the text, something like "stop and listen". *Selah* can also be used to indicate that there is to be a musical interlude at that point in the Psalm. One commentator explains *Selah* to mean "pause, and think of that". It can also be interpreted as a form of underlining in preparation for the next paragraph.

Psalm 8 starts out with a strong expression of praise!

O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! u have set your glory above the heavens. From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger. When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.

The Psalmist's words about God having made us the crown of His creation, with dignity, and honor, just a "little lower than the angels", reflect the Biblical understanding of what it means to be created "in the image of God".

Psalm 9 says:

O LORD, see how my enemies persecute me! Have mercy and lift me up from the gates of death, that I may declare your praises in the gates of the Daughter of Zion and there rejoice in your salvation. The nations have fallen into the pit they have dug; their feet are caught in the net they have hidden. The LORD is known by his justice; the wicked are ensnared by the work of their hands. Selah The wicked return to the grave, all the nations that forget God. But the needy will not always be forgotten, nor the hope of the afflicted ever perish.

Psalm 9 begins not with a plea for God's help, but a shout of praise, because God has given David victory over his enemies. Two things to notice about this Psalm. First, there is a strong appeal here for the Lord's justice. David sees his cause as the one which is pure and upright. He attributes his victory to the rightness of his cause.

The second thing to notice is David's observation that "the nations have fallen into the pit they have dug" is becoming very, very familiar to us. We have seen that figure of speech four or five times now in the Psalms. It is one of David's favorite expressions.

Behind all of this, of course, is the unstated conviction that God is the righteous judge of all the earth. He keeps strict accounts; He doesn't miss a single thing; and He will right all wrongs in the end.

Psalm 16

Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Of all the Psalms we read today, Psalm 16 was different because it was not a desperate prayer in the time of trouble. It stands by itself as a prayer of confidence and rejoicing. It is very likely that the circumstances in which it was written were not all that different from the other Psalms we read today, but the Psalmist's heart was different; full of faith and reflection upon the promises of God.

It ends as does Psalm 17 with what sounds very much like an affirmation of a belief in the resurrection: *"My heart is glad because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your holy one see decay. You have made known to me the path of life. You will fill me with joy in your presence with eternal pleasures at your right hand."*

Note that in Acts 2:31 and again in Acts 13:35 that verse from Psalm 16 is taken by Peter and then Paul as a prophecy of Christ's resurrection.

Psalm 19

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

There are two forms of revelation God uses to tell us about Himself. One is *general revelation* and that's available to all human beings equally. It is the revelation available by viewing creation itself – theologians call it 'natural revelation.' The other kind of revelation is *special* – it is available to a smaller group of people – the ones who have the Bible. Creation tells us some things about God – about His power, His majesty, His grandeur – but we need '*special revelation*' also. The Bible tells us how we can know God; about Christ; and about the way in which we can come to peace with God. General revelation and *special* revelation – we need them both. These two are themes that will be developed more and more as we move through the Bible.

Psalm 21

O LORD, the king rejoices in your strength. How great is his joy in the victories you give! You have granted him the desire of his heart and have not withheld the request of his lips.

Psalm 21 is a Psalm of praise for victories God has given to the king. It follows Psalm 20, which was the prayer the Israelites prayed before sending their king out into battle. I am sure that accounts for its placement in our Bibles, but there is no real evidence that they were either written or recited together. Psalm 20 was the prayer before the battle and Psalm 21 the praise song afterward. It reminds me that I need always to remember to pray not only the desperate prayer for help when I am in big trouble, but also the grateful prayer of thanksgiving after the deliverance has come. Sometimes I forget to do that and I suspect you do as well.

And finally, Psalm 24, one of my favorites.

Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty— he is the King of glory.

In the days when cities were protected by thick walls and strong gates, opening a gate was a significant event, especially following a time of war. Once a king conquered his enemy, he returned to his city in triumph. The gates were thrown open, and the victor was given a joyous welcome to his home. This psalm praises the Lord as the great victor, proclaiming him to be “strong and mighty” and “invincible in battle”. Let us join the Psalmist in worshipping our Lord, the King of glory, who has conquered the enemy of sin and death.

I'd like to close our time today with the full reading of Psalm 24. Get your bible in front of you. You might have noted spots in the text with the word, *Selah*, which we discussed earlier. I won't sing the text today, but during my reading, we'll pause in the middle and again at the end for a brief musical interlude from the harp. Read and text along with me and use the *Selah* moments to ponder the portion of the Psalm that was just read. May God bless the reading of His word.

The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters. Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God his Savior. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, O God of Jacob. Selah

Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty— he is the King of glory. Selah