

SECTIONS AND READINGS FOR TRAIL VIII

Section VIII.1	Proverbs 1:1-3:35	Section VIII.32	Psalms 95; 81; 75 & 50
Section VIII.2	Proverbs 4:1-6:35	Section VIII.33	Psalms 29; 104 & 148
Section VIII.3	Proverbs 7:1-9:18	Section VIII.34	Psalms 78; 85 & 82
Section VIII.4	Proverbs 10:1-12:28	Section VIII.35	Psalms 147; 114; 14/ 53 & 19
Section VIII.5	Proverbs 13:1-14:35	Section VIII.36	Psalms 119
Section VIII.6	Proverbs 15:1-17:14	Section VIII.37	Psalms 84; 120-122
Section VIII.7	Proverbs 17:15-19:29	Section VIII.38	Psalms 123-126 & 129
Section VIII.8	Proverbs 20:1-22:16	Section VIII.39	Psalms 130-132 & 134
Section VIII.9	Proverbs 22:17-24:34	Section VIII.40	Psalms 24; 15; 100; 117 & 33
Section VIII.10	Proverbs 25:1-27:13	Section VIII.41	Psalms 8; 103 & 111
Section VIII.11	Proverbs 27:14-29:27	Section VIII.42	Psalms 113; 115 & 135
Section VIII.12	Proverbs 30:1-31:31	Section VIII.43	Psalms 136; 145 & 150
Section VIII.13	Psalms 49; 127 & 133	Section VIII.44	Psalms 6; 38 & 143
Section VIII.14	Psalms 37; 128 & 112	Section VIII.45	Psalms 67 & 107
Section VIII.15	Psalms 73	Section VIII.46	Psalms 65; 66 & 146
Section VIII.16	Job 1:1-3:26	Section VIII.47	Psalms 23; 118 & 138
Section VIII.17	Job 4:1-7:21	Section VIII.48	Psalms 40; 92 & 116
Section VIII.18	Job 8:1-10:22	Section VIII.49	Psalms 139; 16 & 91
Section VIII.19	Job 11:1-14:21	Section VIII.50	Psalms 11; 42; 43 & 22
Section VIII.20	Job 15:1-19:29	Section VIII.51	Psalms 25; 55; 64; 70 & 26
Section VIII.21	Job 20:1-24:25	Section VIII.52	Psalms 140; 94; 31 & 141
Section VIII.22	Job 25:1-28:28	Section VIII.53	Psalms 71; 17 & 27
Section VIII.23	Job 29:1-31:37	Section VIII.54	Psalms 28; 35 & 109
Section VIII.24	Job 32:1-37:24	Section VIII.55	Psalms 41; 69 & 86
Section VIII.25	Job 38:1-40:5	Section VIII.56	Psalms 39; 62; 88; 77 & 108
Section VIII.26	Job 40:6-42:17	Section VIII.57	Psalms 44; 80; 83 & 90
Section VIII.27	Ecclesiastes 1:1-4:16	Section VIII.58	Psalms 10; 12; 9; 36 & 58
Section VIII.28	Ecclesiastes 5:1-9:12	Section VIII.59	Psalms 2; 20 & 21
Section VIII.29	Ecclesiastes 9:13-2:14	Section VIII.60	Psalms 45; 61 & 63
Section VIII.30	Song of Songs 1:1-5:1	Section VIII.61	Psalms 101; 144 & 110
Section VIII.31	Song of Songs 5:2-8:14	Section VIII.62	Psalms 93; 97-99 & 149
		Section VIII.63	Psalms 96 & 68

TRAIL VIII THE INTERTESTAMENTAL ERA (ca. 420 B.C. – 6 B.C.)

PROVERBS; JOB; ECCLESIASTES; SONG OF SOLOMON, THE REST OF THE PSALMS

COMPREHENSIVE QUESTION:

What is the content of divine wisdom in comparison to that of mere human wisdom?

NOTE: On this last Old Testament trail we will study all of the remaining literature of the Writings, the third section of the Hebrew Bible, that was translated in the poetic sections of the 3rd century B.C. Septuagint [LXX] Greek translation and of the Protestant Christian Bible. Although much of this literature may well have been written well before this period, we are treating these biblical books here for three reasons: First, they are found collected in the Hebrew Writings section which was still being formed and sanctioned in this era. Second, they are not clearly datable at all, because of their general interest and their few internal historical references. And third, their wisdom and songs were particularly valued in this era of the second temple, while Palestine came successively under Persian, Greek and Roman political and cultural influences.

Jewish literature of various genres was still being written during these three centuries and also well into the early Christian era. Several new books in Hebrew were translated and included along with Greek additions to the stories of Daniel and Esther in the Septuagint [LXX Greek] translation. This additional wisdom, history, narrative and apocalyptic literature is included in the Old Testament of some Catholic and Orthodox Christian Bibles and is sometimes printed separately as the Old Testament Apocrypha ["hidden"] in some editions of many Protestant English Bible translations. More Jewish literature from this period and the 1st century A.D., including especially a number of apocalyptic works, have survived in whole or part in various languages and are now collected as the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha ["written under an assumed name"]. A few of these apocryphal and pseudepigraphical works have been found in the Dead Sea Scrolls collection of documents, along with the Qumran community's own sectarian writings. All of this extra-canonical Palestinian Jewish literature from between the Old and New Testaments, throws some light upon aspects of the development of Jewish faith and practice in the latter portion of this period and well into the 1st century A.D. It, thus, also provides very valuable contextual background for New Testament studies.

To bridge the transition from the Old to the New Testament, we will briefly survey this period's Palestinian Jewish history, its extant Jewish literature and its main theological developments. Our primary focus will, however, continue to be the content of all of the balance of the canonical Old Testament texts: Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs plus the majority of the Psalms.

For the introduction to the Wisdom Literature genre see HTB VI.D.

INTRODUCTION TO PROVERBS.

Pr 1:7 provides the key to the whole of Hebrew wisdom literature, for its wisdom is the practical knowledge of God stressed by both Moses and the great prophets, namely, pleasing Yahweh in every dimension and aspect of one's personal and corporate life. As a guidebook to the art of successful living with and for Yahweh, Proverbs cites and illustrates positive and negative rules for life and clarifies right and wrong human conduct in a host of situations. Its aim is to apply the principles of Israel's covenant faith to everyday attitudes and experiences. Thus, the book serves as an extended commentary on the two general Mosaic laws of love in Dt 6:5 and Lv 19:18 that are so central to both Old and New Testaments. Hence, its wisdom tradition is connected not only with the prophetic and legal traditions of the Old Testament but also with the evangelistic and teaching dimensions of the New Testament.

Structurally Proverbs is a collection of collections. At least 8 distinct sub-collections are discernable, either by titles or by changes in literary style. The first six verses act as an introduction, indicating the purpose of the whole book and connecting it with king Solomon, Israel's internationally famous sage [971-931 BC]. Since similar wisdom literature is well attested throughout the Ancient Near East long before Solomon's time, there is no good historical reason to doubt that 10:1-22:16 presents the fruit of a major flowering of proverbial wisdom in Israel in the mid-10th century B.C. Other collections within Proverbs witness to the continuation of this tradition throughout the later monarchy periods and perhaps well into the exilic and post-exilic periods. Jewish proverbial literature continued to develop in the intertestamental period, but was then somewhat influenced by philosophical thought patterns of the Hellenistic culture.

The variety of literary styles in the book illustrates the wide range covered by the Hebrew word for proverb ["mascot"], which is probably derived from the verbal root "to be like or compared with". Though explicit comparison is often present (e.g., 15:17; 16:24), it is not necessary for a good Hebrew proverb. Pithy sayings condensing the wisdom of life's experience (e.g., 1 S 24:13), bywords (Dt 28:37; Jr 24:9; Ek 14:8) and even some discourses (Jb 27:1-23 & 29:1-31:40), words of advice (Pr 30:1-9 & 31:1-9) and acrostic poems (Pr 31:10-31) may qualify equally as "mascot". The lengthy discourse of Pr 1:7-9:18, although by no means devoid of specific instructions, serves largely to clarify issues involved in choosing between wisdom and folly, righteousness and wickedness, as well as to prepare for the hundreds of specific proverbs which follow.

In seeking to apply the various individual proverbs to life, one must remember that each proverb is a generalization that is true all things being considered, but which requires wise discernment be applied to specific concrete situations. Knowing the right time to employ a specific proverb was itself an important part of being wise (25:11). Therefore, implicit to understanding this form of wisdom was an appreciation of its limits. Proverbs can be misleading if they are treated as magical sayings guaranteeing predictable results in each and every circumstance. The wise person always left room for God to work his sovereign surprises (16:9; 21:31). Failure to live within these inherent limits of specific individual proverbs, probably helped call forth sharp Hebrew wisdom protests like those of Job, Ecclesiastes and Ps 73, sometimes termed Wisdom Level II or B, in comparison to Level I or A as exhibited in Proverbs.

ANALYSIS OF PROVERBS

I:1-6	Introduction;
1:7-9:18	Importance of Wisdom;
10:1-22:16	Short proverbs of Solomon;
22:17-24:22	Anonymous "Words of the Wise";
24:23-34	Additional anonymous sayings;
25:1-29:27	Proverbs of Solomon collected by Hezekiah's men;
30:1-33	Advice of Ague
31:1-9	Advice of King Lemuel's mother;
31:19-31	Acrostic poem describing the ideal wife.

1. According to Pr 1:1-6, what is the purpose of this book? What would you hope to gain by studying it? How would that be possible? What are some of the topics on which you are seeking wisdom as you read through the book? What do you find on these topics even in this very first section?
2. In your own words, what is the meaning of the refrain in 1:7a, 29; 2:5f; 9:10a; and 15:33a? How might this be the key to understanding the whole book of Proverbs and even of biblical wisdom literature generally (Jb 28:28; Ps 111:10; Ec 12:13)? How is wisdom related to knowing God as your Heavenly Parent (Pr 1:8; 2:1, 6; 3:1, 11f, 21; 4:1, 10, 20; 5:1, 7; 6:1, 3, 20; 7:1, 24; 8:32; He 12:5-13)? Why?
3. What variety of words is used in this section to characterize the different aspects of wisdom? How do these aspects differ in your mind? What are the appropriate and inappropriate responses to each aspect? Which aspects do you seem to need most right now? How could you obtain them?
4. How are the character and results of the two ways labeled and contrasted in this section of Proverbs? How do they relate to the two ways and their illustrations in Ps 1 (Pr 3:18)?
5. Which of the many words of wisdom in this section have you personally discovered to be quite true? How so?
6. How important to your own personal walk with God could the basic advice of (a) 3:3f, (b) 3:5f, (c) 3:7f, (d) 3:9f, (e) 3:25f and (f) 3:27f be? Could some or all of them have the force of general promises of Yahweh as well as being wise proverbs? How could you tell? Which of these would make great mottos for wise living? Have you chosen a life's motto or verse? What is it? Why did you pick it?

1. How does 4:14-19 further clarify the differences between the two ways of Ps 1? How does this also fit with Jesus' teaching about the two ways in Mt 7:13f? Which way do you want to take? Why? How consistently have you followed that way so far? How can one change ways?
2. To what extent is 4:23-27 an admirable guide to successful living? What would you like to add or subtract from this prescription? Why? How well do you watch over your own heart? What clues are there here for how to do so effectively?
3. What do you make of the sexual advice offered in 2:16-19; 5:3-20 and 6:24-35? What equivalent parallel advice would be appropriate for women? Why might it be that this further advice is not given here? Yet how relevant is all such advice in your society today? At what points have you witnessed its truth?
4. How important is it for older men to follow the special advice of 5:18b (Ec 9:9; MI 2:13-16)? What also might be suitable advice for older women today?
5. How much do you think we humans can learn from observing the lifestyle of other life forms? How well does modern science do this? What in particular can you personally learn from the ant (6:6-11)? What lessons can you recall Jesus drawing from nature? What other lessons from other animals can you think of off-hand?
6. In light of 6:16-19, how well does your life measure up? What might God hate in your life? What could be done about changing this? flow (Ro 12:2)?

1. How many different ways is the simile of "the apple/ pupil of the eye" of 7:2 used in the Old Testament (Dt 32:10; Ps 17:8; Zc 2:8)? What enables you to determine its specific meaning each time it is used? What might this imply for interpreting many other biblical similes and metaphors? Or must "one size fit all circumstances, i.e. "This means that."
2. How can God's commandments/ teachings be written on the tablet of your heart (Pr 3:3; 7:3; Ps 119:11; 37:31; 40:8)? How is this facilitated by the fulfillment of what God promises in Jr 31:33? What has this to do with the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:26; 16:13)?
3. How do the women of chapters 7 and 8 compare with respect to (a) speech, (b) conduct, (c) relationships, (d) approaches, (e) what they offer and (f) the goals to which they lead their followers?
4. What characteristics of a woman might make her a more appropriate metaphor than a man for both wisdom and folly in this context? How might you rewrite this in your own cultural setting? Is there any hint that women are usually practically wiser than men here or elsewhere in the Bible [e.g., Tamar (Gn 38); Deborah (Jg 4:4-9); the wise women of Tekoa (2 S 14:1-23) and Beth-maacah (2 S 20:16-22), Huldah (2K 22:14-20; 2 Ch 34:22-29) and even Eve (Gn 3:6; 1 Ti 2:14)]? Is there any significance in the fact that the commonest Hebrew words for wisdom in Proverbs are either always feminine or sometimes feminine?
5. How does the comparison of Lady Wisdom (9:1-6) with Lady Folly/ Foolishness (9:13-18) summarize the major theme of the first 8 chapters of Proverbs? What makes each of these women attractive? How so?
6. What is said of wisdom here that could be understood by Christians as a foreshadowing of Jesus as God's Messiah (Mt 11:27; Jn 1:1-3, 14; 8:12, 31f; 9:5; 12:46; 14:6; Cl 1:15-17; He 2:17f) and of the similar but greater gifts that Jesus offers his disciples/followers (Mt 11:29; Lk 11:28; Jn 3:36; 14:21; 17:21)?

1. How true to your life are the similes of the family relations proverbs of Pr 10:1; 15:20 and 17:25? What alternative similes would you recommend? How much do you think might Solomon be reflecting upon the relationships of his own family's life?
2. How have you witnessed the truths of the theme treated in 1:5; 9:81; 10:8; 12:1, 15f and 15:12? What can you personally learn from all this for yourself and for your relations with others?
3. What wisdom is given here for the use of your tongue and lips? How true have you found this? How might it help you to behave differently in the future? Why is this so important for Christians (Mt 12:36f; Ja 3:2-12; Cl 3:17), especially for Christian teachers (Ja 3:1)?
4. Why are integrity and honesty so important to a person? How important are they to you in yourself and in others you deal with? How does their level of reliability influence the integrity of your own lifestyle and relationships? Why?
5. What would be involved in your applying to yourself the principles presented here for gaining and using wealth? What changes in your economic lifestyle would these principles require? How could these changes be effected? What and whom might be impacted by such changes? Should these economic principles also be applied well beyond personal finances? Where? With what possible results in those spheres?
6. Looking back over the first 12 chapters of Proverbs, which few proverbs seem most appropriate to your life here and now? What would it mean to start to apply them? What resources would you need to try to do so? Where could you find such resources? Would it help to begin by memorizing those proverbs? Why not do that right now? Might it even help you further to try what some other Christian have done with the few proverbs they deemed critically important for third lives, namely, to make a suitable illustrated plaque for each one to be kept prominently displayed where they and the other people they relate to will be reminded daily of that practical wisdom?

1. How are the outcomes of life for the wicked and the righteous contrasted in the proverbs of Solomon so far (10:1-14:35)? Are these different outcomes sufficient to motivate you to live more righteously? What is involved in living righteously? How difficult would that be for you? What resources would you need to do so? Where can they be found (Ro 6:8)?
2. How true have you found the application of 13:24 and related child-rearing proverbs (19:18; 22:15; 23:13f; 29:15, 17) to be? Why? Would they apply to daughters just as well as to sons? Do all children need the same rearing practices? How so? How is the wisdom here balanced by other biblical childrearing wisdom (Pr 22:6; Gn 25:27f; Dt 6:4-7; 11:19; Ps 78:1-4; Ep 6:4; Cl 3:21; 2 Ti 3:14-17)? What might be the consequences of neglecting any part of the whole range of biblical child-rearing wisdom? If all of this wisdom is appropriately applied, can good results be guaranteed (Pr 13:1; 15:12; 17:10; 22:6)? Why?
3. How do you relate to the additional wisdom on wealth and poverty in this section? What implications might it have for you? What do you think about implementing such wisdom?
4. Which insights into the human heart presented in 13:12; 14:13, 30, 33; 15:15, 30 and 17:22 are most significant to you? How so? What other insightful proverb might you want to add to this collection? How do you know it is true?
5. How is the earlier theme of contrasting ways of life (3:18) continued and developed in this section?
6. What range of normal life situations is the wisdom of Proverbs applied to? How spiritual does this seem to you? Is that range of life coincident with the range of Yahweh's concerns for his people to live according to his ways? How widely does the Spirit of God work in human lives and in God's world? How spiritual is all this? What, then, is the difference between the sacred and the secular spheres of behaviour from God's point of view?

1. How true have you found the wisdom of 15:1, 4, 18; 16:24 and 25:15 to be? How is this illustrated by the words of Gideon (Jg 8:1-3) and Nabal (1 S 25:10-13)? What implications are there for you? How is the other wisdom here about speaking also relevant to you?
2. What is taught here about Yahweh's dealing with humanity (15:8f, 11, 16, 25f, 29, 33; 16:1-7, 9, 11, 20, 33; 17:3, 5, 15)? How, then, should we respond to him? What implications might this have for your own thinking, worship and practice?
3. How might the wisdom about kings and princes given here relate to your political leaders today? How much adjustment would be needed to apply it wisely in your society today? How could it also be applied in your relationships to your own Christian leaders? How could you apply it to your own Christian leadership/ ministry/ service (15:22)?
4. What is taught in 15:25; 16:5, 8f and 17:2 about pride and humility? How important should this be to Christians (1 P 5:5-7)? How relevant is this to you and to your acquaintances?
5. Which of all of the many proverbs that you have encountered in Proverbs so far have found a place in the common wisdom of the society in which you were brought up? How have they influenced your living? Which other proverbs have you noticed in Proverbs that you would like to have added to your family's traditional wisdom? How could that be effected?
6. What criteria do you think were employed to select which proverbs from among the many that circulated throughout the Ancient Near East, should be included in the Judean book of Proverbs? What further proverbial wisdom that you personally value, would you recommend that contemporary Christian gatherers of proverbs should consider appending to the proverbs now in the book of Proverbs? Would such proverbs have the same authority as those now assembled in Proverbs? How so? How should all Christian wisdom relate to the character and purposes of Yahweh God, especially as revealed in and through his Messiah, Jesus (1 Co 2:16; 2 Co 10:5)?

1. What can be learned about Yahweh and his concerns for humanity from the many proverbs that employ his personal covenantal name [LORD = Yahweh](17:15 18:10, 22; 19:3, 14, 17, 21, 23)? How does the fact of Yahweh's presence and the revelation of his will for his people, provide the foundation and framework of the wisdom of the book of Proverbs?
2. How relevant is the further wisdom here about wealth and poverty to your own experience? What additional economic wisdom of your own might you want to add? Why? How might that fit into the framework of God's revealed will about human riches and poverty?
3. How does the wisdom about the human tongue presented here and in the previous section fit with that given in Ja 3:1-12? How could you, your family and your congregation profit from applying this particular range of wisdom? Where can the resources needed to do so be found (Ga 6:23; Tt 1:8; 2 P 1:6)?
4. Of all that has been said about the fool thus far, what strikes you as most telling? On the basis of this, how would you define a fool? How are a fool's spoken words related to his/her foolishness? Why?
5. Is what is said about brothers equally true about sisters? How do you relate to what is said about siblings and friends here? How have these relationships impacted your life? How much social, psychological and spiritual healing is needed here? How is that possible (1 Jn 4:19)?
6. Which other proverbs in this section seem to be most relevant to your life circumstances right now? How so? What would be involved in practicing their wisdom?

1. As you scan these proverbs slowly one-by-one, which ones do you find helpful for living your life? Why? Who do you know who might also benefit from discovering specific ones of them? How can those proverbs be drawn to their attention in such a way that they would appreciate learning about them?
2. What is revealed here about God's sovereignty and human responsibility (20:10, 12, 22, 27; 21:1f, 30f)? What clues are given as to how the two are related? What does that mean to you?
3. In this section's proverbs, what are (a) three dealing with observation, (b) three dealing with interpretation and (c) three dealing with application? How are these three types of proverbs related? What do these three related categories reveal about the general nature of biblical wisdom and also the inductive process that we are employing to understand scripture?
4. Do the observations about contentious/ quarrelsome/ nagging wives (19:13; 21:9, 19; 25:24; 27:15f) apply to some husbands as well? Why? How do you cope with contention in your family (Pr 15:1, 18; 26:20f)? What common strategies do your friends recommend? How helpful are they? Does contemporary social science offer better advice? How so?
5. What might present-day governments learn from Pr 22:16? What hinders them?
6. How can practical wisdom be taught today? How effective might a curriculum based primarily upon a topical arrangement of the proverbs of this biblical book be for teaching Christian young people today to live wisely with God, themselves and other people? If such a curriculum were available, how would you use it? Why? How well might it relate to secular wisdom? How so?

1. When have you been tempted to envy sinners (23:17f; 24:1f, 19f)? Why is it unwise? How does this wisdom help you deal with such a common temptation?
2. Does 1 Ti 5:23 contradict the proverbial wisdom about strong drink (e.g., 23:19-21, 29-35)? How appropriate are the similes used to portray the folly of heavy drinking? What other similes might you recommend? What do you think about the advice in 31:4-7?
3. What do 24:10-12, 17f and 24:28f have to say about loving our neighbour as we love ourselves (Lv 19:18) rather than as they have treated us? Which way is better? Which is harder? How, then, can we humans follow it (1 Jn 4:19f)? What considerations might make it easier (11:21, 31; 15:3; 19:5, 11; 20:22; 21:28; 24:19f; 25:21f; Dt 32:35; Ro 12:19)?
4. What can you learn from the many proverbs relating to laziness, sloth and sluggards (6:6-11; 10:4f; 12:24, 27; 13:4; 15:19; 18:9; 19:15, 24; 20:4; 21:25f; 22:13; 24:30-34; 26:13-16)? Who are the people referred to in these verses? What might motivate them to act in this way? Could some of their excuse be circumstantially quite legitimate? How so? Do we always have a choice? What are the personal and social costs of this behaviour? Is this matter as important as the repetition suggests? How so? Is this true today? Even among Christians? Why?
5. How many proverbs have you found that speak about the prevalent modern counter vice of "workaholism" (23:4)? What other scriptures might speak to this problem (Ps 127:1f)? What motivates such behaviour? Who is most susceptible to it? What are its personal and social costs? How might respecting the Sabbath rest laws be therapeutic here?
6. What difference would it make to you to discover that there are significant parallels between Pr 22:17-24:22 and the Egyptian wisdom text "The Wisdom of Amenemope"? Would it matter which text were older? What would it mean to you to discover that the Hebrew proverbial wisdom as found in the Book of Proverbs has many parallels to the common proverbs that circulated throughout The Fertile Crescent for centuries before the biblical book was written? What differences, however, would you expect to find in a biblical book's collection of the best of human wisdom (Pr 1:7; 9:10; 15:33; 22:2; 23:17)?

1. What might be implied by the statement in Pr 25:1 that king Hezekiah [716-687 B.C.] had men collect further proverbs of Solomon [971-931 B.C.]?
2. What does 25:2 mean to you? How might Dt 29:29; Is 40:28; 45:15; 55:6-11 and Ro 11:33 help you interpret this? In your own words, what might this mean for human knowledge of God?
3. Of the many illustrations and metaphors used here about the power and influence of words for good or ill, which best illuminate your own experience? What metaphors would you add to the list from your own experience of the power of words?
4. How did Jesus use Pr 25:6f in Lk 14:8-10, Pr 28:24 in Mt 15:4-6 and Pr 30:8b in Lk 11:3? How did Paul use Pr 25:21f in Ro 12:20f and Pr 27:2 in 2 Co 10:12-18 and 12:1-13? How did James use Pr 27:1f in Ja 4:13-16? What do these usages reveal about the New Testament's view of the wisdom of the Old Testament? How might this influence your view of its value?
5. In light of Pr 26:1-12 and 27:3, what might be an appropriate brief definition of a fool? Whom did Jesus consider fools (Mt 7:24-27; 23:17f; 25:2-13; Lk 11:37-41; 12:16-22; 24:25-27)? How might your definition need to be adjusted in light of Jesus' usage? What difference should this new understanding of the term make in your personal relationships (Mt 5:21-24)?
6. How does one try to practice 26:5? Is that what Jesus was doing in Mt 16:1-4 and 21:23-27? What other biblical examples can you think of? How is it biblically appropriate to respond to the fool of Ps 14:1 or 54:1, especially when he proclaims proudly what is in his heart? What might Paul say (Ro 1:18-32; Ac 14:15-17; 17:22-34)?

1. According to the proverbs of this section, how do the righteous and wicked differ in (a) character, (b) temperament, (c) concerns, (d) conduct, (e) influence and (f) ultimate end? How well does such a black and white schematic help you as a Christian discern the values of what may well seem today like a completely grey world (Ro 12:9; 1 Th 5:21f; 1 Jn 1:5-2:2)?
2. How can being praised be a means of testing the metal of people (27:21; 28:23; 29:15)? How well do you handle praise? What about criticism, even when meant positively?
3. What could political leaders at all levels today learn from the wisdom offered here to and about leaders? How might it guide you in exercising whatever responsibilities you have as a citizen? Do you agree with the wisdom given here about law and order? Why? What difference would it make to remember that for Hebrews law [“torah”] meant instruction, which included far more than just legislation?
4. How does 29:18a indicate that mere human insight and wisdom, however obvious/ self-evident/ patent/ commonplace it may seem, is not really enough for living? How does that connect to the themes (a) of Pr 14:12; 16:2, 9, 25 and 21:2 and (b) of Pr 1:7 and 3:5f?
5. How many of the proverbs here seem too obvious even to need to be stated? Yet, how many people frequently live as if they were completely ignorant of what is self-evident? Have you ever found yourself doing so too? Why? Why might one of the truest definitions of a philosopher [Greek = “lover of wisdom”] be: “one who has a firm grasp of the obvious”? Could 28:11 be as relevant to wisdom as to riches?
6. Which proverbs so far puzzle you because they seem far from evident, let alone self-evident? Are they equally puzzling when they are rendered in another English translation? How much do translators seem to interpret the text for their readers? Is that helpful, or confusing? Should you just choose the translation that you like? What might be the consequences of habitually doing so?

1. What in the wisdom of Agur (ch. 30) and Lemuel's mother (31:1-9 [or perhaps even to v. 31]) do you find particularly profound? Would you ever want to pray Agur's prayer (30:7-9)? When? Might the names for God in ch 30 indicate that Agur was an Israelite or at least a proselyte? What relevance does such wisdom have for Christians? How much can Christians learn from secular wisdom (Lk 14:28-32; 16:8)? What about from the wisdom of other religions? Why (Ac 14:17; 17:28; Ro 1:19f; 2:15)?
2. What significance do you find in the fact that Lemuel's mother is one of the authors of the Jewish and Christian scriptures? Why do you think she is not personally named? Could there also be other women authors of some of the anonymous books of the Old or New Testament? For example, could Paul's "fellow-worker in Christ" (Ro 16:3), Priscilla, have been the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews?
3. What might a contemporary woman make of the wisdom of the ancient acrostic poem on the excellent wife that concludes the Book of Proverbs? What many roles does this good wife play? How much are they confined to running a home? How does she impact those around her, including her husband? How does this picture challenge the views of women's roles (a) in your church, (b) in your society and (c) in your own mind? Is there evidence here of either a male or a female perspective, such as that of Lemuel or his mother? How so? How does this picture compare to the figure of wisdom as a woman (chs. 8 & 9) and to other portrayals of the good wife in Pr 12:4; 18:22 and 19:14?
4. What themes treated here and there in the topically unorganized sections of the book of Proverbs do you think you should look at more carefully than we were able to do in passing in this study? How could you find all the verses relevant to those themes? Once located, how would you expect the various proverbs to relate to one another? Why?
5. How much agreement and harmony have you found among the proverbs on each the several themes that we have singled out for attention in this study? Do the themes in the book when taken together present a comprehensive rule-book for living God's way? Where else in the Christian scriptures is further practical wisdom to be found? Would even all of the scriptural wisdom, taken together and organized topically, be sufficient guidance for godly living in all of life's circumstances in all ages and societies? What makes you think that is so? What other divine guidance does a Christian have (Mt 28:18-20; Ac 1:8; Jn 14:26; 16:13-15; 1 Jn 2:17, 19; 3:7, 24-4:6, 13-21; 1 Th 4:7-9)? How important is that for your Christian living?

INTRODUCTION TO PSALMS.

The Book of Psalms is the hymnbook of the Jewish "church", containing psalms for both public and private worship. Some seem to have been written for public worship [e.g., those with superscriptions "to the choirmaster"]. Others were probably original personal meditations that were later taken over for use in the sanctuary and/or family worship. There are also teaching poems and historical recitals. The total collection stood at the beginning of the third and final section of the Hebrew Scriptures, "The Writings", but sometimes that whole section was called "The Psalms".

All of the Psalms are in beautiful Hebrew poetry, which like much other Ancient Near Eastern poetry, does not depend on rhyming but upon parallelism of thought between two or more parts of a line and/or between groupings of two or more lines. The commonest general forms of parallelism are synonymous, antithetical and synthetic. In synonymous parallelism essentially the same thought is repeated in a different way (e.g., Ps 1:4). In antithetical parallelism a second thought is set in contrast with the first one, often with a "but" connective (e.g., Ps 1:6). In synthetic parallelism the original thought is developed further in the remainder (e.g., Ps 1:2). Within this basic parallelism, Hebrew poetry also liberally employs most of the literary devices common to most poetry -- e.g., repetition, inverted arrangement, climax, exaggeration, personification and plays on words and sounds -- and occasionally even rhyming.

Some Psalms have titles/ superscriptions; some have none. They are not part of the original Hebrew text, but only appear perhaps as late as the 2nd century B.C. They are printed in only some translations, often in smaller print or italics. Many of them traditionally associate the Psalm with some person or group, and sometimes even with some particular occasion. That person or group may or may not be referred to as its author, because phrases like "A Psalm of David" are quite ambiguous in Hebrew. Some psalm titles have what appear to be musical notations, which are difficult to interpret today. Some of these may even be subscriptions rather than superscriptions and thus apply to the preceding psalm.

The psalms seem to have been originally composed throughout Israel's history from the Exodus through the Exile and perhaps beyond and reworked later to fit new circumstances. The first psalm and the last one or few psalms may even have been especially composed as introduction and conclusion for the entire collection. The final Hebrew edition of the Psalter was divided into five books, each of which ends with a doxology and usually an "Amen" or two: Books One (1-41), Two (42-72); Three (73-89); Four (90-106); Five (107-150). This may possibly indicate that five separate preexisting hymn books were now combined without alteration into one comprehensive psalter, even if that meant including two very similar versions of essentially the same psalm (e.g., Ps 14 and 53), as do even some modern hymnals to serve a wider public. The exact order and contents of the psalms books 4 and 5 are not all fully established in the manuscripts of the Dead Sea Scrolls. For example, those scrolls include a Hebrew original of the 151st psalm, which was acknowledged to be "outside the number" in the 3rd century LXX [Septuagint] Greek translation. Also included as the Hebrew original of two psalms found otherwise only in the Syria Psalter of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Some of the biblical wisdom literature comes in the form of psalms.

1. How does Ps 14:1 indicate that it is a wisdom psalm? What is the understanding of its theme according to its introduction in vv. 1-3? What generally accepted wisdom is criticized in the psalm? What basic facts undermine that wisdom? How is God the best security? What implications might this have for you and for your lifestyle? Why? Why might this psalm almost (vv4ff) be duplicated in Ps 53?
2. What hints are there in Ps 49 about life after death? How much clearer is the New Testament on this subject? What more would you like to know about this? How could you find this out? How might having such answers enable you to live better now?
3. What in Ps 49 suggests that Jesus might have had it in mind in Mk 8:36f and Mt 16:26? How might such a biblical reference have helped his disciples, and others who knew their scriptures well, to understand what Jesus was trying to say to them then? How does what Jesus said compare to what Ps 49 says?
4. How could Ps 127 [also studied in Trail IV Section 34 Question 2 as a Psalm of Solomon] be viewed as a wisdom psalm? How is the theme of vv. 1f related to that of vv. 3-5? How is that first theme also related to Is 49:4 and 1 Co 15:58?
5. How meaningful to you are Ps 133's similes celebrating sibling harmony? What is the vital ecological connection between the dew that falls on Mt Hermon and Mt. Zion 180 Km to the south? Why was that relationship so important to the whole of the country? What did precious oil poured out on the head of someone signify to Israelites (Ex 30:23-25, 30-33; Lv 8:2,6, 10, 12; 1 S 10:1; 16:1, 13; Mk 14:3, 6-8)? What do these two metaphors suggest about sibling unity? What contemporary images can you think of that might illustrate this theme? Why is sibling love chosen as the paradigm/ model/ pattern for the loving relationships within the Christian church (Ro 12:10; 1 Th 4:9; He 13:1; 2 P 1:7) and even the primary criterion by which Jesus said his true disciples could be recognized (Lk 8:21; Jn 13:34f; 14:21; 17:22f)? How important is this (a) to you, (b) to your congregation, (c) to outsiders seeking the true and loving God?

1. How are the positive and negative counsels of Ps 37 related to each other? Which do you find the hardest to follow? How so?
2. On the basis of Ps 37, what would be a well-rounded picture of a truly righteous person's character, attitudes and activities? How well do you personally measure up to this? In what respects?
3. What are the many blessings promised to righteous people in Ps 37? Which are the most attractive to you? Besides this feature of the psalm, what else about it might account for it being one of the most favourite of psalms for Christians? How well do you like it? Do you agree with its description of the fate to the wicked? Why?
4. In your own words, what is the general wisdom theme of Ps 128? How does it compare to the wisdom of Ps 1 [Trail 6 Section 21 Question 4]? What new dimensions does Ps 128 add to the usual list of blessings that you anticipate when this theme is treated in the Old Testament? How important are these new dimensions to you?
5. How does Ps 112 further expand upon the obligations and blessings of the person who truly reveres Yahweh? How might this psalm have informed Jesus' final advice in Mk 10:21? How relevant is this to you?

1. According to Ps 73:1, what is the wisdom theme that the psalmist is going to reflect upon? How good a summary is it of the main theme of the Wisdom Level I psalms that we have just been studying? What does vs. 2 immediately signal about the character of his forthcoming reflections? Why might such reflections be termed Wisdom Level II?
2. According to the first half of Ps 73 (vv. 1-14), what is the problem with the initial thesis? Have you ever asked a similar question? When? How often have you heard others asking such a question? What often triggers such questioning?
3. In the balance of the psalm, what are the several stages of the psalmist's gradually coming to terms with his problem as a loyal worshiper of Yahweh? Which aspects of his "solution" do you as a Christian find most satisfying?
4. Why might this psalm be called "The Great Nevertheless Psalm" (v. 23)? Why is it considered by many biblical scholars to be the highest point of Old Testament piety? Can you detect in v. 24 at least a faint hope of Yahweh's rectifying temporal moral inequities after death? What is there about such inequities that prompt thinkers, even skeptical philosophers like Immanuel Kant, to postulate both a human afterlife that would be far more substantial and morally differentiated than the Hebrew's view of shadowy existence in Sheol and even a morally just god to supervise that life?
5. What do you make of the personal resolution that the psalmist comes to in vv 23-26? How similar is that to Habakkuk's in Hb 3:16-19 or Job's response to Yahweh's presence and words in Jb 42:1-6? What do they have in common with Peter's response to Jesus' question in Jn 6:66-69? Do you continue to want to live with God, even in spite of your unanswered questions? Why might that be?
6. What further light is thrown upon "the problem of evil" by Is 53:3-12 and the New Testament (Ro 5:8; 8:32; 1 P 2:18-25; 3:14-18; 4:1, 12-19)? How would you articulate the Bible's fullest answer to this perennial problem for all theists? How satisfying do you personally find this answer? What might make a complete answer possible for you?

INTRODUCTION TO JOB.

Beyond the book itself, Job, the book's chief character, is mentioned only in Ek 14:14, 20 and Ja 5:11. We know very little about him, and the date and setting of the story are matters of conjecture. While Job probably lived in the land of Edom (Jb 1:1; Lm 4:21), there is no indication that he was an Edomite (Gn 22:31). Many details of the story fit best with the patriarchal age as does its prose narrative. While its Hebrew poetry has either late or foreign characteristics, there is nothing about its theme or its detailed development to link it to the post-Exilic period with its Persian and Greek influences. Indeed, its dramatic treatment of the theme of undeserved individual suffering may well have been one of the important influences on the Suffering Servant Messiah of Is 53.

We are given the portrait of good man suddenly overtaken by extraordinary disasters. The main action of the story, however, lies in three cycles of speeches by Job and his three companions, the speech of a young man, Elihu and finally of Yahweh himself. The companions insist that suffering comes only when a person has sinned, therefore, Job should repent of his sins in order to be restored to God's favour. But Job is adamant that he has not sinned, at least not greatly enough to have deserved such devastating punishments. His principle agony is not so much in his diseased body as in his bewildered mind. Thus, his cry for Yahweh to explain himself is maintained with growing impatience cycle by cycle of dialogue. Job's real trial is theological, for he, like his companions, had once believed the humans suffered here and now only because of their sins, in accordance with the theme of Wisdom Level I. When at last his desire to hear Yahweh speak is answered, it is far different from what he expected. He is dumbfounded, but God demands a verbal response. Job admits that he has spoken rashly in ignorance. He is astounded and humbled in Yahweh's presence. Though he is abjectly sorry, it is not for any particular sins. Yahweh is satisfied with Job's response and, therefore, commends, restores and blesses him, but rebukes his companions because of their faulty theology.

The book is often construed as an inquiry into the reasons for innocent suffering, yet, from the standpoint of the prologue, it is also disinterested goodness that is under discussion. Does Job revere God for nothing? Job's loyalty to Yahweh, however severely challenged, meant that his pain wasn't aggravated by guilt. He remained steadfast in his trust in God's compassion and mercy (Ja 5:11). The book also introduces Yahweh as the God who is free to work surprises, correct human misconceptions and theologies, for he is bound by only his own character. The study of subordinate themes in the book is also worthwhile, e.g., Job's view of death and his hopes for life thereafter, his certainty that a mediator between God and man will be found, plus his and his companions' different views of God, creation and humanity.

Few stories in the literature of human experience have the power Job has to stretch the human mind, to tax consciousness and to expand our vision of God. It forms its own unique literary genre in the Bible. While it is a part of the class of Ancient Near Eastern literature that at Wisdom Level II struggles with the suffering of people in society, it surpasses all its parallels in profundity and continues to impact discussions of undeserved suffering down to our day, e.g. Karl Jung.

The unknown author's style is rich in a variety of peptic parallelisms, masterful metaphors, unrivaled descriptions of creation, apt quotations and a vast array of literary forms like prose narrative (chs 1f & 42), lament (ch. 3), complaint, hymn, vision, personal observation, proverb, rhetorical question, catalogue, prophetic judgement and dialogue. Thus, the book is often acclaimed as one of the great literary masterpieces of all time, even if its Hebrew is, for moderns, the most difficult in the Bible to translate because of his rare words and usages.

ANALYSIS OF JOB:

1-2	Prologue	28	Poem on Wisdom
3	Job's lament	29-31	Job's summation
4-27	Dialogues:	32-37	Elihu's speeches
4-14	Cycle one;		Yahweh's dialogue with Job
15-21	Cycle two;	42:7-17	Epilogue
22-27	Cycle three		

1. What is God's initial estimate of Job's character? What do each of these characteristics mean? What, however, does the Accuser [Hebrew = "Satan"] think of Job's character? Which characteristic of Job is specially singled out by Yahweh and Job's wife? Why is that one so important? How important is it to you?
2. What light is thrown here upon Satan's role as an accuser (1 Ch 21:1 // 2 S 24:1; Zc 3:1f, Ps 109:6)? What is inimical to God and his people in how Satan exercises this supposedly neutral role (Mt 13:38f; Mk 4:15; Lk 22:31f; Jn 8:44; 1 P 5:8; 1 Jn 3:8; 2 Co 2:11; 11:14; Ep 6:11f; 1 Ti 3:7; 2 Ti 2:26)? Who limits his activity (Jb 1:12; 2:6; 1 Co 10:13) and even uses it to accomplish his own good purposes (1 Co 5:5; 2 Co 12:7)?
3. How does Job respond to God at each stage in the story so far? In spite of Job's reply to his wife (2:9f), does he eventually come to take her advice in his lament of ch. 3 (Jr 20:14-18)? Has Job's view of Yahweh changed? How so?
4. What sort of "evil" does Yahweh himself bring upon humanity according to Jb 1:21 and 2:10 (Jg 2:15; Am 3:6; Is 31:2; 45:7; Jr 32:42; Lm 3:38)? Is this consistent with the New Testament presentation of God (He 12:7-13; Ja 1:13-17; 1 Jn 1:5)? How so?
5. What is the view of life and death Job presents in his lament of ch. 3? Have you ever had reason to agree with him? When? What might have consoled you then? How were Job's companions most helpful at this stage (2:13)? How relevant is this basic approach to others' profound sufferings and laments? How good are you at practicing it? Might praying at the same time help you do it better? How has it also been helpful for you from time to time?

1. What, in your own words, is the basic thrust of Eliphaz' first speech (chs. 4 & 5)? What did he take as the source of his wisdom? How true was what he said? Is everything in the Bible true just because it is accurately/ truly reported there (e.g. 1:9-11; 2:4f)? Why?
2. What seems to be Eliphaz' view of humanity's relationship to God? What about his view do you agree with? How much of this would God himself agree with (42:7f)?
3. How did what Job expected from his friends (6:4) compare with what he actually received from Eliphaz? What might account for Eliphaz' behaviour, words and attitudes? What would you have felt, said or done in similar circumstances?
4. In his response to Eliphaz (chs.6f), what hope does Job have? What does that lead him to do? Would you have the same hope? What would yours lead you to do?
5. At the end of his response, what does Job ask Yahweh to do? How is that in accordance with Job's estimation of himself as a human being? How is what you ask God to treat you personally, related to your view of humanity? Yet how does Yahweh's present treatment of Job seem to be quite at odds with Job's view of humanity? In this context, then, is 7:17 really a question or more of an exclamation (Ps 8:4; Ps 144:3f)? Could Job be beginning to wonder whether Yahweh is operating with a very different estimate of who humans really are than Job himself has been? Have you noticed any discontinuity between how God seems to be treating you and how you think he should treat mere human beings? What divine estimate of humans might account for how God actually deals with us (1:8, 12; 2:3, 6; Ps 8:2, 5f)?

1. What, in your own words, is Bildad's view of the relationship between God and humanity? What do you think of this view of human life?
2. What is his source for his beliefs? How reliable is it? Why do so many people seem to trust it (8:5)?
3. How well did Bildad really understand Job's situation? What does he accuse Job of here (8:13)? How would you feel if he were talking about the reason for the death of your own children? What sort of conditional hope does Bildad offer? What comfort does this give Job? How would you have coped with his "comforting"?
4. In Job's response to Bildad, why does he feel so frustrated? What attributes and actions of God make presenting his complaint and case to him so difficult (9:3-13)? Which of Job's beliefs about Yahweh's relationship with humans multiply his difficulties (9:12-24)? In your own words, how would you describe the real feelings that Job expresses about what seems to be God's attitude towards him? Have you ever felt (a) that God's acceptance of you is conditional upon your good behaviour or even (b) that he is your adversary? Could you express these feelings towards God as frankly and publicly as Job did? How completely true are Job's suppositions about Yahweh here?
5. What might make a confrontation with Yahweh really possible (9:32-35)? What case does Job want to present (9:1-7, 16f)? What, then, makes him want to die (9:21, 29; 10:1, 18-20)? What seems to be Job's view of death both here and in ch. 7 (14:12)? How does it differ from your view of death? What difference might a Christian view of death (Jn 5:24; 11:25f; Ro 5:10, 12, 14, 17f, 21; 1 Co 15:19-26, 50-28; Ph 1:21-24; 1 Th 4:13-15; He 2:9, 14f; Rv 1:18; 20:4-6; 11-15; 21:4, 8) make even in the midst of such suffering (2 Co 1:8-10; 4:6-18)?

1. What is Zophar's reaction (ch. 11) to Job's passionate words (chs. 9f)? What does he presume about Job and his claims (11:20)? What are the "two sides" of wisdom in 11:4f? How does Zophar interpret Job's arguments (11:7-9 & 9:4-10; 11:10 & 9:32; 11:11 & 10:14)? What course of action does he, therefore, recommend as Job's only hope (11:13-20)? How possible is this for Job? How so?
2. How well does 12:7-25 confirm Job's claims in 12:3 and 13:1f? What, however, does Job's "but" in 13:3 imply (13:15, 18)? What makes Job a joke/ laughingstock to his contemporaries (12:4f; 17:6)? How often do we humans judge people's moral state by their circumstances? How well does this take into account how God's greater wisdom and might (12:13-16) actually operate causally in the real world (12:17-25)?
3. Why does Job turn against his companions and what they are saying (13:41)? Why does he think they who speak on God's behalf are risking God's judgement more than he, the questioner, is? How correct is Job about this (42:8)? What might this teach you? Could they accept his advice to them (13:5f)? Could you? Why?
4. Why does Job still want to argue/ defend his ways before [literally "to the face of"] Yahweh (13:3, 15-19)? What does he think Yahweh would have to do to make this possible (13:20-22; 9:34f)? What questions does he want to ask God (13:23-28)? Which similar questions would you like to ask Yahweh?
5. In your own words, what are the most devastating sources of Job's hopelessness (13:24; 14:5,7-12, 18-20)? What is his fervent desire (13:21f; 14:13, 15-17)? What does this reveal about the essence of his relationship with Yahweh? In this context, which of two traditional ways of reading the Hebrew of 13:15 seems to fit best: (a) "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" or (b) "He may well slay me; I may have no hope"? How so?

1. How would you describe the mood or tone of the dialogue as the second cycle of speeches begin? What feelings are evident on each side? Who blames whom for what? Why the difference?
2. How truly orthodox [theologically correct] is the view of human sin and its consequences presented in 15:14-35 by Eliphaz? What does Job think of that view (16:2f 17:10)? What do you think? Why? What might God do of it (42:7f)?
3. Have you ever felt despair as deep as that which Job describes in ch. 17? When? What glimmer of hope is there still for Job here? What is its ground? What are the roots of your hope? How do they help you cope with despair? What encouragement could you give to others from your source of hope? Why might they listen?
4. What are Bildad's four metaphors describing the fate of the wicked? How well do they fit the godless person? Do they fit Job's situation, as Bildad sees it? How does the extensive elaboration of these metaphors just "pile on" poor Job? What motivates Bildad to do so? How appropriate is Job's expostulation (19:1-3)?
5. What does Job want here from his family and companions? What, however, does he receive (16:10f; 17:2; 19:2f, 13-22)? Why do people, even intimate friends and close relatives, commonly turn on those who are suffering? Who do they blame for the situation? However, who does Job blame? Is he believed? Why couldn't they have pity on him? How would you describe Job at this low point? Nevertheless, what does Job still hope for from God for himself (19:23-27) and for his persistent persecutors (19:6, 21f, 28f)?

1. How do Zophar's (ch. 20) and Job's (ch. 21) views of the state and fate of the wicked compare? In your experience, which picture seems more true to life? How are other people affected in each case? What bothers Job most about Zophar's view?
2. How would you answer Eliphaz' s questions in 22:2a and 3a at the beginning of cycle three? What would your answers reveal about your own views of (a) humanity, (b) God and (c) God's view of humanity?
3. To what extent do Eliphaz (22:5-9) and Job (24:2-17) seem to agree on what constitutes great wickedness and on the eventual fate of the wicked (22:15-20; 24:18-25; 27:13-23)? What is the difference in what they say and how they say it? What does Eliphaz really accuse Job of? What advice does he, therefore, give? How does Job respond (ch. 23:1)? How might you have responded?
4. Why doesn't Job defend himself from Eliphaz's accusations (22:5-9, 22f, 29f), if he is sure that he is in the right (23:4-7, 10-12)? What does he desire? What stands in his way? What about Yahweh terrifies him (23:13-15)? Does this terrify you too? Do you respond the way Job does? Why?
5. How might it help if Yahweh revealed his times for judging the wicked (24:1)? As it is, who suffers most from the actions of the wicked (24:4-11)? How, therefore, do the victims perceive God (24:12)? If the attitude of the wicked is correctly shown in 2:13-17 and if their temporal fate is that described in 24:18-24, then would there really be the Job's moral problem of 21:31-33 (24:25; Ps 73:1-14)?

1. How many Christians do you know who seem to assume that Bildad's view of humanity's essential sinfulness is correct (25:1-6), especially v. 6? Could Paul have God's evaluation of Bildad's views (Jb 42:71) in mind, in deciding not to include this vivid passage in his long list of Old Testament texts about the universal spread of human sinfulness in Ro 3:10-18? Are humans unclean, unjust or sinful (25:4) simply because we are on the creaturely side of the great creator/ creature gap? How would such an idea accord with the biblical view of the separate origins of humanity in Gen 1:25-28 and of human sinfulness in Gen 3? How important is it to keep clear the distinction between the sin/ moral gap and the ontological [essential/ being] gap between us and God? What theological distortions can you imagine coming out of identifying these two great gaps? Can God deal with the sin gap without making us and all other creatures [even the stars or astral beings (Jb 25:5; Ps 8:3)] as divine as he himself? How might this distinction impact your Christian living and thinking?
2. Why do you think Bildad's zetetic speech (ch. 25) was so short? How sarcastic are Job's questions in reply (26:1-4)? What does he imply about Bildad's inspiration (26:4b)? What prevented all Job's friends from being more helpful to him in his present circumstances? What spiritual resource do Christians have that should enable us to be better comforters/ encouragers/ consolers (2 Co 1:3-11)? How often do you have an opportunity to exercise this much needed spiritual ministry? How often do you respond appropriately? Why?
3. How does Job's description (26:7-14) of God's power, based upon pre-scientific observations of natural events, fit our more sophisticated understanding of the forces of nature? How often do you, and other modern Christians, see in nature signs of God's power and control? Can you think of a better way than Job's for expressing God's power today? What explanatory exceptions do we make even today, e.g., when extraordinary natural events are called "acts of God"? Does a better understanding of the causes of natural events and the "laws of nature" really eliminate all need for the presence of God's activity? How so?
4. Why do you think that there is no speech by Zophar in this third cycle? In light of Job's adamant stand in 26:1-6, why do you think that in 27:7-23 he suddenly seems to be in agreement with his companions' earlier arguments and even contradicts (27:14f) his own earlier observations (21:11-13)? Could it be that this section was originally Zophar's third speech, as some biblical scholars believe? If so, why is there no response to him by Job? Or is that what ch. 28 is? Or is Job in 27:7-23 acknowledging the general truth of his friends' statements, while denying that they are applicable to him (v. 5)? Or could he be viewing his friends as his enemy/ opponent (v. 7) who deserve the fate he is describing? Which of these or other solutions is the best? How so?
5. Why is human and divine wisdom compared in the poem of ch. 28? How are the two wisdoms connected? Where does sharing in divine wisdom begin for humans (28:28; Pr 1:7; 9:10; 15:33)? What implications might all this have for you? Does 28:24-26 help you understand God's interaction with the earth?

1. Why does Job begin his summary with a reflection on his good old days lived in Yahweh's favour? How do his reflections help you to appreciate how God has blessed your life too (29:2-10, 18-25)? Are you still living in those good old days? How so? How do Job's present days compare (30:1-31; 31:2-4)? What sort of days are you living in now? Why do you think that is the case?
2. In Job's descriptions of his own righteousness (29:11-17; 30:25; 31:1, 5-34, 38-40), how much of it is strictly religious (31:1-4, 11f, 14f, 23, 26-28)? What was his motivation? Why was it necessary in this situation to spell out his own righteous behaviour (22:5-11; 31:23, 33-37; 32:1)? Have you ever found yourself in a similar position (2 Co 11:22-31; Ph 3:4-7)? How were you feeling? Might others have judged you as Job's friends did him (32:1)? Does that help you understand Job here?
3. How would you compare your past righteousness over your lifetime to what Job delineates in 27:1-7; 29:2-25 & 31:1-40? How comprehensive is his righteousness, both in time and range? What aspects of right living would you like to include that weren't on his list? How are they examples of true righteousness? How much did the type, quantity and quality of your personal righteousness flow from your experience of God's love (1 Jn 4:19)? How so?
4. How much does Job see his treatment by Yahweh and people as having flowed from (a) his own righteousness, (b) his unrighteousness, (c) Yahweh's favour or (d) Yahweh's disfavour? How true is this of you too?
5. What, then, is Job's general claim before God? What is he finally asking Yahweh for (31:20-24, 35-37)? If you were in his place, what would you be asking God for? How so?
6. What do you make of Job's only reference to Adam (33:31; Gn 3:7-12)? What point was he making?

1. Who is Elihu the Buzite (Gn 22:21)? Why might that be important to the Israelites as descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? Why does he become involved only at this late stage of the dramatic dialogue? Whom is he addressing (32:6-22; 33:1)? Have you ever found yourself in a position similar to his? What did you do? Why
2. To what extent has Elihu really heard Job's case (33:9-11; 34:5f; 35:2)? What do his three answers (33:12; 34:10; 35:4) reveal about his basic opinion of Job and his case? How does he perceive God's actions towards humans? How much does he go beyond his older companions' views? To what extent do you agree with him? Can youth be as wise as their elders (32:6-10)? How well does he represent the wisdom (33:33) of the youth that you know?
3. In ch. 36, what does Elihu claim is God's purpose in bringing suffering to people? In his eyes, how does Job fit his case (36:17, 21)? Do you agree? How adequate is his view? Why is he so sure that he is correct (33:1-4; 36:30)? How much of God's economy does he claim to understand? How much of it do you feel you understand? How does this help you cope with the mystery of suffering, especially your own?
4. Why do you think Job does not reply to Elihu? Is it (a) because of his own present physical and mental state, (b) because of Elihu's youthful (30:1-15) anger (32:2, 5, 19) and certainty (36:4), (c) because of the sheer force of his arguments or (d) what? How much do you think his intervention really helped advance the discussion? Would your contribution have done any better? How so?
5. According to 37:2-5 (40:9) what seems to have happened in the midst of Elihu's speech that prompts him to shift his focus from 36:24 on? What is that new focus? How does it go beyond his previous argument?
6. Why do you think the author of Job felt it was necessary to interrupt the flow of the narrative between Job's resting his case (31:40) and Yahweh's response (38:1)? How does Elihu's speech's timing and themes prepare the reader dramatically and theologically for the coming theophany [appearance of God to humans]?

1. How fitting is it that here (38:1; 40:6) and elsewhere (Ek 1:4) Yahweh's appearance to Job should be in a whirlwind/ tempest (36:23-37:5, 11, 15, 21) that in the Bible was so often associated with God's judgement (Am 1:14; Jo 1:4, 12; Is 29:6; 30:30; 40:24; 41:16; Jr 23:19; 30:23; Ek 13:11, 13; Ps 83:15)? Is there a similar association for you? Why?
2. What is the purpose and thrust of Yahweh's first speech (chs. 38 & 39)? How does 38:2f set the stage for this? Which of Yahweh's many questions might wise people today think they can answer? Which ones do you think are not likely able to be answered by humans just yet, but perhaps might be in the not too distant future? What further questions might Yahweh pose today to accomplish the same purpose he had in asking Job so many questions then? What questions could he pose that humans could never answer without his special revelation?
3. How similar is relationship of the creator to the creation revealed here to that expressed earlier by Elihu (37:2-24)? What is very different (37:13, 20-24)? What is missing?
4. What descriptions suggest Yahweh's delight in his creation? How contingent is this enjoyment on creation's usefulness to humans? In fact, what do ch. 39's repeated questions "do you know", "can you", "do you", etc. imply? Does it surprise you that such ancient people could have such accurate descriptions of the behaviour and character of God's creatures? How much should we today value the knowledge of nature passed on by aboriginal peoples? How could such knowledge be judged "primitive" or "naïve"? In the animal studies here, what part is literal and what is metaphor and vivid poetic exaggeration? How, then, can such language it be thought to reveal the ancients' primitive world view?
5. What do you make of Job's very brief answer (40:3-5) to Yahweh's many questions, especially the last question (40:2)? Was he cowed by Yahweh's power (9:14-19), or terrified by his otherness/ transcendence (9:33-35), as he had feared? Why does Job attempt any answer at all (38:21)? What might your response have been, if you had been in Job's place?

1. What divine estimate of humanity is implicit in Yahweh's reiterated demand that Job stand up and brace himself like a man [Heb. *geber* = strong man, hero (also in Jb 3:3, 23; 4:17; 14:10, 14; 16:21; 22:2; 33:17, 29; 34:7, 9, 34)] to give God an answer (38:3; 40:7; Ek 2:1, 3:24; Dn 10:9-12)? How is this view consistent with Yahweh's next challenging questions and commands in 40:8-14 (Ps 8:1-6)?
2. Which of Job's earlier condemnations of Yahweh (Jb 10:3,7; 16:11; 19:6; 27:2) in order to justify himself before God (13:18; 27:5f) might Yahweh have in mind in his questions to Job in 40:8? How does Yahweh's following presentation to Job of two of his greatest creatures (40:14-24; 41:1-34) help make the point of the questions and commands of 40:8-14? How well do the descriptions of these creatures fit the hippopotamus and the crocodile respectively?
3. What do you make of Job's second brief answer (42:2-6)? Does Job admit in 42:3 that Yahweh was correct in 38:2 and/or that Elihu was right in 34:35-37 about Job's foolishness, sin and rebellion? What sinning, therefore, does Job "repent" of in 42:6, in spite of the fact that here alone in the entire Old Testament there is no object specified for the same verb? What difference would it make if 42:6 were translated literally as follows: "Therefore I melt away; I mourn in dust and ashes", or rendered as in the Aramaic translation found at Qumran (11Q.10 36:80) "I am poured out and astonished; and I will become dust and ashes"? Why, then, do so many Christian interpreters of 42:6 insist that Job here repented of specific some sin(s)? Which would you propose? Why?
4. Why do you think that some biblical scholars claim that 42:7f are the most important verses in the whole book? In spite of Job's quarreling with Yahweh, doubting his justice, insisting upon his own innocence and wanting to end his life, what was right about what Job had said about God? What implications might this have for a proper view of Yahweh as God? Would Yahweh's endorsement and condemnation here also apply to Job's and his companions' understanding of Yahweh's view of humanity (ch25; Ps 8)? What might this imply for your own understanding of Yahweh and his view of you as a human being?
5. Could the Book of Job be viewed as a dramatic clash between Levels I and II of wisdom? Who championed each level? With which level does Yahweh himself agree? What does that mean to you?
6. What is the most important answer to the problem of the suffering of innocent people that we get in the Book of Job (Mt 1:23; 18:20; 28:18, 20; Jn 9:1-3)? How should we respond to this (1 P 2:18-23; 3:19-23; 4:19; Ja 1:2-5; 5:7-13)?
7. What other themes do you think might be profitably studied in this book?

INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIASTIES.

The title "Ecclesiastes" is a Greek translation of the Hebrew term "Qoheleth" which means one who convenes a congregation, presumably to preach to it, i.e., a preacher. This Preacher's texts are taken from his own observations of human life rather than from the biblical law or prophets. Because of his apparently humanistic, almost skeptical, outlook, Jews and Christians alike have debated whether this book should be included in their sacred scriptures. Its traditional link with king Solomon helped it gain acceptance into the writings section of the Old Testament. Later Jews have read it annually at their Feast of Tabernacles during the fall grape harvest. Modern readers have often found it one of the most helpful biblical texts for understanding the character and limits of their secular age.

On literary, linguistic and conceptual grounds, it is far easier to maintain that 10th century king Solomon was not really its author, than to argue either that he was or to identify who else might have been. At least, by associating himself with Solomon, biblical wisdom's patron and mentor, the author certainly helped his words carry more weight, especially against his fellow sages who frequently celebrated the value of human wisdom, pleasure, wealth, influence and accomplishments. What better illustration of the limitations of all of these than Solomon's own historical example? Qoheleth sought to criticize the oversimplified traditional conclusions of Israel's wisdom in light of the hard facts of human injustice and death. As he saw it, conventional Wisdom Level I was not only inadequate, but close to blasphemous, both because it trespassed on territory belonging to God alone and because it attempted to predict the inevitable outcome of wise and foolish human conduct. There was really a vast gulf between what only God knows and does and what human beings can know and do (Is 55:8f).

The book has two interrelated themes. Qoheleth begins with his negative conclusion – "vanity of vanities; all is vanity" [insubstantial breath/ vapour] — and continues to defend it against the brash optimism of his fellow sages. Yet interwoven throughout the book is his positive recommendation for wise living — enjoy the simple things of your present life as God's gracious gifts. Wisely he concludes on his positive note.

Qoheleth's apparently unique method of critical argumentation renders a logically coherent outline of the book almost impossible for our modern minds. Nevertheless, if we can appreciate the ancient Semitic method of argumentation — a rich mixture of repetition, demonstrable arguments and clusters of clarifying and reinforcing proverbs — then a unified outline is possible. The backbone of Qoheleth's literary style is a series of first-person prose narratives relating his own observations about the futility of various common foci of human life. Usually these sections end with a brief summary conclusion. Proverbs are used both conventionally and unconventionally. As truth statements, admonitions and comparisons, they are embedded in his reflections or gathered in advice sections to reinforce, summarize or illustrate his basic conclusions. Sometimes they are used to help the reader cope with life's difficulties. Yet he also quotes conventional proverbs to criticize them, sometimes by cleverly coining anti-proverbs to counter the traditional messages of Wisdom Level 1(1:18; Pr 2:10). Frequent rhetorical questions draw his audience into the argument and force his desired response — usually a negative one. At the end of the book, he reinforces his positive conclusion with an extended cluster of metaphors.

Theologically, Qoheleth can help us recognize the freedom of God, the limits of human wisdom and the meaningless of our lives without reference to God. Practically, he can encourage us to face the realities of life with joy, rather than false optimism, by trusting in our gracious God.

ANALYSIS OF ECCLESIASTIES

- 1:1-3 Introduction:
1:1 Title,
1:2f Theme — negative conclusion.
- 1:4-2:26 1st demonstration of the negative theme:
1:4-11 By human life in general;
1:12-18 By knowledge;
2:1-11 By pleasure;
2:12-17 By everyone's fate;
2:18-23 By human toil.
2:24-26 [1st interim positive conclusion].
- 3:1-4:16 2nd demonstration of the negative theme:
3:1-11 By God's making every human activity appropriate only in its time,
3:12-15 [2nd interim positive conclusion]
3:16-17 By prevailing wickedness;
3:18-21 By the lack of immortality for humans;
3:22 [3th interim positive conclusion]
4:1-3 By evil oppression;
4:4-6 By human work;
4:7-12 By hoarding of wealth;
4:13-16 By the fleeting nature of political popularity.
- 5:1-12 1st words of advice:
5:1-3 Honour God in you worship;
5:4-7 Pay your vows;
5:8f Expect injustice in government;
5:10-12 Do not overvalue wealth.
- 5:13-6:12 3rd demonstration of the negative theme:
5:13-17 By wealth lost in business;
5:18-20 [4th interim positive conclusion]
6:1-9 By wealth that cannot be enjoyed;
6:10-12 By the fixity of fate.
- 7:1-8:9 2nd words of advice:
7:1 Honour is better than luxury;
7:2-7 Sobriety is better than levity;
7:8-10 Caution is better than rashness;
7:11f Wisdom with wealth is better than wisdom alone;
7:13f Resignation is better than indignation;
7:15-22 Moderation is better than intemperance;
7:23-29 Men are better than women;
8:1-9 Compromise is sometimes better than being right.
- 8:10-9:12 4th demonstration of the negative theme:
8:10-14 By inconsistencies in justice;
8:15 [5th interim positive conclusion]
8:16-1 By the mystery of God's ways.
9:1-6 By death for wise and foolish alike;
9:7-10 [Positive conclusion]
9:11f By the uncertainty of life.
- 9:13-12:8 3rd words of advice:
9:13-16 Introduction: a story of the value of wisdom;
9:17-10:15 Wisdom and folly;
10:16-20 Rule of kings;
11:1-6 Sound business practices;
11:7-12:8 Enjoying life before old age comes.
- 12:9-14 Epilogue:
12:9-1 Aim of the Preacher;
12:11f Commendation of his teaching;
12:23f Conclusion of the whole matter.

1. How would you appreciate a preacher like Qoheleth in your congregation? How Christian do you find his general estimate of the basic meaning of human life (1:2f)? What does "vanity"/ "utter futility" mean to you? When does it express what you sometimes feel about life? What is the Preacher's goal in asking all of these questions (2:1-3)?
2. What, in your own words, are Qoheleth's arguments for his negative theme in the first set of arguments (1 :4-2:23)? How persuasive is each one to you? What value might these things have in themselves? Nevertheless, why does he conclude that each one is meaningless? Do you agree? Why can't any of them satisfy the human heart?
3. How would you summarize each of his second set of arguments for his negative theme (3:1-4:16)? What is Qoheleth saying in his famous poem (3:1-8)? When would it be helpful to quote this? When have you heard it? For him, to what does it direct attention positively (3:12-15, 22) and negatively (3:16-21)? What might it mean to a modern hearer?
4. What might 4:1-12 say to people today who seem to firmly believe that human competition and industriousness are the primary keys to both a prosperous and efficient economy and to human wellbeing [Hebrew = "shalom"] generally? Whom and what usually get forgotten? How relevant to his argument here are the proverbs cited in 4:9-12? How well does all this accord with what the Hebrew prophets said that God thinks about human economic theory and practice?
5. What does Qoheleth think about human politics (4:13-16)? How applicable is this to politics today in your country?
6. What interim positive conclusions has Qoheleth reached so far (2:24-26; 3:12-15, 22)? What might be his reasons for them? Do they help you cope with life? How? How does God himself figure into this for Qoheleth? For you as a Christian?

1. How does the advice in 5:1 compare with that given by Samuel to king Saul in 1 S 15:22f (Pr 15:8; 21:27; Ps 40:6-8; 51:16f; Is 11:1-15; Jr 7:22f; He 6:60)? What does it mean to you personally? How short are your prayers (Ec 5:2f)? Why (5:7)?
2. How would you summarize what is taught about wealth in chs. 5 & 6? How much of this is very relevant to a modern materialistic age that seems to worship serve Mammon [possessions] rather than God (Mt 6:24; Lk6:9, 11, 13)? What here is most pertinent to you?
3. What unifying theme can you discern in 5:1-9:12? Which elements of this do you find most enlightening? Why? Which is most relevant to you personally? What do you find most puzzling here?
4. What do you think and feel about the sorts of inconsistencies in justice pointed out in 8:10-14? How does the Preacher think that they help demonstrate his negative and positive conclusions? Do you agree? How so?
5. What is Qoheleth's understanding of death in 9:1-6? Are you concerned with what troubles him? Why? What further understanding of death does a Christian have? How should that change how Christians face life (9:10; Ro 12:11; Ph 1:21-26; Cl 3:17, 23f; 2 Ti 4:18)? How does this further light change your approach to both life and death?
6. How would you express the interim positive conclusions Qoheleth draws in this section (5:18-20; 8:15; 9:7-10)? How much of this fits with his estimate of the value of wealth, pleasure and wisdom so far? How do his positive conclusions help you cope with life, even when it does seem quite meaningless? What roles does God himself play in all this for Qoheleth? What about for you as a Christian?

1. What do you make of the short story in 9:13-26? Have you ever witnessed the same thing happening? How would you describe it? What further insights into the nature of wisdom and folly can you discern in 9:17-10:15? Which proverbs here puzzle you? How so? Which of them might be helpful for guiding your daily living?
2. How relevant is the wisdom in the proverbs of 10:16-20 to the political leaders with whom you are familiar? As a member of God's people, how do you relate to political leaders (Ro 13:1-7; 1 P 2:13-17)? Is 10:19b really true, even in politics and economics?
3. How might the ancient advice about sound business practices in 11:1-6 be translated into modern terms and illustrations? Would people today still consider the illustration of 11:5 apt? Why? How would each of the wisdom insights here apply well beyond the sphere of agriculture? In what ways might they be worth following yourself?
4. How would you express the advice given to youth about living in 11:7-12:8? To what extent do you share the Preacher's view of aging and death? How would you understand and apply the brilliant metaphors for aging in 12:2-8? How well do they fit your experience, or that of your acquaintances? What further biblical light do Christians have on these matters? (2 Co 4:16-18; 2 Ti 4:6-8; 1 P 1:3-9)? What roles does God play (a) for Quothelth and (b) for Christians? What difference should this make for Christians? What difference does it make for you?
5. What does the epilogue (12:9-14) add to your understanding of (a) the purpose of the book, (b) its fundamental findings and (c) the value of trying to probe more deeply into matters like this without the aid of God's further revelation? How does this book's conclusion help you see the true value of this biblical book for communication with people in your secular society?

INTRODUCTION TO THE SONG OF SONGS.

Biblical scholars probably agree less about the origin, primary meaning and purpose of this book than about the equivalent for any other book in the Old Testament. Erotic lyrics, absence of an explicit religious note and the opaqueness of the plot baffle, all scholars and tempt their imaginative ingenuity. Not only is the history of its interpretation full of conflicting theories on these issues, but all the extra resources of modern biblical scholarship — archaeological discoveries, recovery of huge bodies of ancient literature, insights into Ancient Near Eastern psychology and sociology—have produced no uniform approach to this wonderful little poetic book. It is helpful to bear in mind all of the main traditional approaches to the book as you read it and study it.

Probably the allegorical interpretation coupled with the supposed Solomonic authorship was largely responsible, under the providence of God, for its inclusion in the Jewish and Christian Bibles. The earliest recorded Jewish interpretation viewed it as a portrait of God's love for his beloved people, Israel. This accounts for it traditionally being read at Passover, the great annual celebration of Yahweh's covenant love for Israel. The early Christian Fathers "baptized" this general interpretation by seeing here a dramatic picture of Christ's love for either his church (Ep 5:22-33; Rv 19:7-9; 21:2, 9f) or individual Christians. To try to avoid some of the subjectivity involved in interpreting the Song's details allegorically, however, some scholars have favoured a typological approach that stresses the major themes of love and devotion rather than the romantic details of the poetic text. Yet, in the warmth and strength of the lover's mutual affection, even typologists hear overtones of the relationship between either Yahweh and Israel or between Christ and his church. Unfortunately, there is no hint in the text of the Song itself of either of these interpretive approaches, however spiritually satisfying they have continued to be for many later generations of God's people.

The presence of dialogue, soliloquy and choruses has led many ancient and modern students of literature to treat the Song of Songs as a drama. Some discern a two-character drama celebrating the more-than-merely-physical relationship between Solomon and the Shulamite woman (6:13). Others find a third character as well: the maiden's shepherd lover. In that case, the plot turns on her faithfulness to him despite Solomon's luxurious attempts to woo and win her. However, both dramatic approaches suffer both from the absence of any dramatic instructions in the original Hebrew text and from little evidence of the existence of a genre of dramatic literature among the Semites in general and the Hebrews in particular. The headings in most versions are modern guesses

Recent discoveries of elaborate ancient Mesopotamian cultic wedding rites have fostered several modern speculative attempts to read the Song as either a Jewish wedding festival or engagement pact. However, the actual order of the poem doesn't seem amenable to such approaches. Nor is it likely that the Hebrews would have included in their Scriptures a song modeled explicitly upon an ancient Babylonian fertility cult's liturgical marriage of pagan deities.

In recent times many biblical scholars have viewed the Song as either an extended love poem or a collection of love poems perhaps, but not necessarily, connected with wedding celebrations. In spite of various attempts to dissect the poem into a few of many independent poems, an overriding sense of unity is evident because of the continuity of the theme, the refrain-like repetitions, the chain-like structure binding sequential parts together plus the linguistic use of the same particles and rare words throughout the book. Though some movement is evident, there is still only a shadow of a plot. The couple's love is as intense at the beginning as at the end. The poem's power lies not in a lofty climax, but in the creative and delicate repetitions of the themes of love. On this quite literal interpretation, the book is an object lesson, extended proverb, or parable illustrating the rich wonders of human love which is itself a gift of a loving God. Though expressed in bold language, the Song provides a wholesome, biblical balance between the extremes of sexual excesses of perversions and asceticism. Thus, as such, it can be seen to point to the model of all true human love, God's own incarnate love for his people.

ANALYSIS OF THE SONG OF SONGS:

If possible look at how several quite diverse modern English translations' editors divide up the text; then try to work out your own interpretive outline. Every outline of any book, especially one like this one, necessarily involves some degree of interpretation. Remember the paragraph headings in a translation are, at best, only educated editorial suggestions, not part of the original text. Try creating your own outline below based only upon the clues in the text itself. Then check with the translations that you have to see if any of them agree with your textually based outline. Revise your outline only if the text seems to warrant it.

YOUR OWN OUTLINE OF THE SONG OF SONGS

1. What can be learned from the ranges of imagery used respectively by the man and the woman to express their passionate love for one another? Can you discern here any differences of perspective, values, qualities, interests or needs of the two genders?
2. What purposes do the various pictures from nature serve in revealing the qualities of their love?
3. What characteristics of true love emerge here? How do they relate to your own experience of love? Do they apply to loves other than erotic love? What other kinds of love are there? Which ones are most relevant to you?
4. Why is such emphasis placed upon the warning of 2:7; 3:5 and 8:4 by repeating it? Whose injunction is it [watch out for your translation's editorial additions here]? Does your answer make a difference as to how you understand the warning? To whom is it addressed? What do you think it means? How relevant is that for each kind of love? Does God himself head that warning (Jn 3:16; Ro 5:8; 1 Jn 4:9f; 19)? Why is that important? How is it important for you?
5. What role does the chorus seem to play in the flow of the song or collection of songs (e.g., 14 ["we"])?

1. What plot, if any, have you been able to discern in the Song? As you read it, how many characters seem to be involved? What dramatic outline would you, therefore, recommend for the story?
2. What role does the character Solomon play throughout (1:1 [not likely part of the original song or collection of songs], 1:5, 12; 3:7, 9, 11; 6:8f, 12; 7:1, 5; 8:11f)? How well does king Solomon as presented in 1K 1-11 and 2 Ch 1-9 fit the character of Solomon in the Song? Do you think they are one and the same? Why?
3. What developments can you see in the woman's attitudes to her lover from 2:16 through 6:3 and 7:10? How important is such development for (a) human marriage relations, (b) other human loving relationships and (c) our relationship with God? What developments in love have you personally experienced on these three fronts? How important are these to you?
4. Since the Bible employs human marriage as a picture of Yahweh's relationship to his people and of Christ's relationship to his church (Ho 2; Is 61:10; 62:5; Ek 16; Ep 5:21-33; Rv 19:7, 9; 21:2, 9; 22:17), how might the Song of Songs be legitimately read as one or more songs celebrating the divine-human relationship? How meaningful would it be for you to read it that way? How so?
5. How important is human sexual love to you as a Christian? Do you view it as one of God's good gifts to you? How does it also pose problems for you? How do you deal with them as a Christian? Does the perspective of the Song of Songs help you here in any way? How so?
6. How does the joyful physicality of the Song serve as a biblical antidote to Ezekiel's graphic portrait of two sisters in 23:1-21? In what essential ways do these two depictions of human sex differ? Is there any biblical reason to believe that human sexual love is sinful in itself (Gn 1:27f; 2:23-25; 1 Co 7)? Why, then, is it commonly viewed so negatively (a) by many Christians, (b) by many non Christians and (c) by many people as the official Christian evaluation of it? Would reading the Song of Songs more often help correct this? Should it be read privately or publicly? How so?

INTRODUCTION TO THE PSALMS.

We have already considered 37 of the 150 psalms contained in the book of the Psalms, some as they fit into the lives of David and Solomon in Trail IV and others as wisdom psalms earlier in this trail. The other 113 psalms will be looked at now as representative of the public and private prayers of God's people in the second temple period with which to Old Testament closes. Although they are individually very hard to date, many of them were probably composed in their original form much earlier and adapted for later use. Some of them are clearly individual prayers ["I", "me", "my"]; others are definitely communal "we", "us", "our"; some seem to flit from one and the other. Most of them were eventually set to music, as some of their later prefixes seem to indicate. Some have specific solo and/or chorus sections. Some may even be antiphonal.

Rather than treat them in numerical order following their apparently random arrangement in one grand anthology of five earlier collections/ books, we will consider them according to the general types that modern biblical scholars have discerned:

- (a) ones echoing prophetic themes;
- (b) ones seeing nature, history and/or scripture witnessing to Yahweh's character;
- (c) those associated with the three annual pilgrimages to the central sanctuary in Jerusalem;
- (d) calls to adore and praise Yahweh;
- (e) confessional/ penitential prayers;
- (f) thanksgivings;
- (g) expressions of trust;
- (h) supplications/ petitions of many sorts:
 - (i) cries for Yahweh's vindication of the righteous,
 - (ii) pleas of those falsely accused,
 - (iii) requests for divine healing,
 - (iv) individual and communal laments, plus
 - (v) petitions for God's blessing of the nation;
- (i) royal psalms associated with Israelite kings, past, present and future, and finally
- (j) celebrations of Yahweh's enthronement.

There is at least one psalm for every occasion in the life of Yahweh's people. Thus, it is not surprising that these psalms have continued to be employed and adapted by God's people down to our day as common prayers and hymns for public and private worship. They have also been fertile inspiration for much praying, hymn writing, meditating and theologizing. As you read and reflect on them all, you too might be motivated to try writing new examples of some of these types of psalms. Try it and see how it helps you focus upon Yahweh your God.

1. What about Ps 95 is so attractive to many Christian congregations that much of its first half is often used in their liturgical calls to worship? Why, then, is the prophetic message of its second half usually overlooked (Ex 17; Nu 14)? Do you think contemporary Christian congregations need to hear this warning (He 3:6-4:11)? How so?
2. What range of corporate emotions is expressed in Ps 95? In what ways does your congregation's worship service facilitate the expression of each of these feelings? How important is this to you and your fellow worshipers? How does the remembrance of God's role in your congregation's history play a part in your worship?
3. Comparing Ps 81 and Ps 95, how similar are their structures and prophetic themes? What positive concerns does Yahweh have for his people? What negative actions by his people make his continuing involvement well-nigh impossible? How does Yahweh deal with this? What is his purpose in so doing (Ro 1:18-25; 2:4; 3:21-26)? Should Christians today take 81:12f and 95:11 seriously? Why?
4. What characteristics of Yahweh's judgement are singled out in Ps 75? What common symbol of his judgement is employed here (Ps 11:6; Is 51:17; Rv 14:10)? Why was it also an appropriate symbol for Jesus to use for his and his disciples' sufferings (Mt 26:39; Lk 22:20f)? In Mt 26:27f and Lk 22:20 does it symbolize the same thing (Ps 16:5; 23:5)? What does this tell you about discerning the meaning of biblical symbols? How do you relate to the psalmist's response to Yahweh as judge in v. 7f? How might this apply to you as a Christian (1 P 5:5-7)? How important is it for you to express your feelings to God, even if they are not quite "correct"? What about Yahweh's character makes this acceptable to do?
5. To whom does Ps 50 speak prophetically about Yahweh's judgement and salvation? How seriously should each audience take what is said to them? Who are the witnesses? What is Yahweh concerned about for each group? What might this all mean for you and people you know? Have you ever thought of God as like yourself (Is 55:8f)? What have been the consequences?

TRAIL VIII -- SECTION 33: Psalms Witnessing to Yahweh's Character: Ps 29; 104 & 148.

1. What natural phenomena does the author of Ps 29 draw upon to describe Yahweh's character (Ps 18:7-15)? What attributes of God are highlighted? How do his people respond? To what degree do we today still feel awe when confronted with the same phenomena, in spite of our modern sophisticated scientific knowledge? What is the relation between God and these natural events in these psalms and in Jb 26:26-37:22? How does the incident in Lk 8:22-25 further illustrate this relationship? However, what else is needed to evoke the conclusion of 29:10f?
2. Would you agree with the claim that Ps 104 is the poetic version of Gen 1? What are the similarities? What, however, has been added in the psalm? How comprehensive is Yahweh's personal care for each part of his creation (Jb 38:39-39:30)? How impressed are you with the ecological interdependence of every aspect of God's work in creation? What roles do humans play in this amazing network (Ps 104:9, 14f, 23, 26, 35; Gn 1:26-31; 2:15; Ps 8)? But why do you think the jarring words of 104:35a are included before concluding with "Hallelujah"?
3. How should vivid poetic language, such as that found in Ps 104 and Jb 38-41, be interpreted? Should it be taken totally literally, as just presenting the Hebrew's Ancient Near Eastern, primitive, pre-scientific view of the world of nature? What is the relationship today between the modern scientific materialistic view of the world and the metaphorical views of art and poetry? Which sides of our double-brain are involved in each view? How might the ancient Hebrew's two-sided brain be working similarly in Ps 104? What might their poetic language, then, be intending? What, then, should Ps 104 say to literarily sensitive modern readers?
4. To what extent do you think Jesus in Mt 6:25-33 draws upon Ps 104's view of Yahweh? Which characteristics of Yahweh does Ps 104 help you to celebrate?
5. How appropriate is it in a scientific age to envision every aspect of nature singing its creator's praise as in Ps 148? What contemporary celebrations of God's character as expressed in nature are you aware of? According to the Bible what is the essential relationship between Yahweh and nature? What aspects of his character are celebrated in Ps 148? Why should God's activities in nature still be praised today (Ro 1:19-21; Ac 14:17; Mt 5:44f)? What alternative human explanatory responses to the awesomeness of nature are prevalent today? How strictly scientific are they really? What do they reveal about those who prefer them over acknowledging God's wonderful involvement in nature?

1. According to vv. 1-8, what was the general purpose of Ps 78's lengthy teaching/instruction [Hebrew "torah" vv. 1 & 5] (Dt 4:9; 6:4-9, 20-25)? Why was it so important? How seriously should Christians today take this instruction?
2. What particular wondrous involvement of Yahweh in Israel's earliest national history does Ps 78:9-53 focus upon? What was there about his people's responses to him that repeatedly provoked Yahweh's anger? According to this psalm, what limited the actual expression of his fierce anger? How does Israel's resultant repentance (vv. 34-37) compare with true repentance (Dt 4:29; Jr 29:13)? What should you and Yahweh's people learn from this?
3. Why did Yahweh abandon once for all the chosen site for his sanctuary in Shiloh in the territory of the tribe of Ephraim, Jacob's favourite of Joseph's two sons (Ps 78:60, 67)? How did Yahweh make his rejection evident (v. 61; 1 S 4:3-18)? What, however, was God's gracious alternative plan for his people and their leadership (vv. 65-72)? What other new beginnings can you think of that Yahweh has made in the long history of his people recorded in the Bible? Does God continue to make new beginnings with his people thereafter? Could he be doing so today? What does all this indicate about Yahweh's character and purposes for his people?
4. What heading would you give to each of the three sections of Ps 85's prayer for renewal and restoration? How might a Hebrew choir director assign different parts of the psalm (a) to soloists, (b) to the choir, (c) to the congregation or (d) combinations of them? Would this be an interesting challenge for your congregation's worship leader? What parallels might be found between events in Israel's and in your congregation's histories? What grounds stated in the psalm support Israel's plea for renewal and restoration to Yahweh's favour? How much depends (a) upon Yahweh's character (Ex 34:6f) and (b) upon the people themselves? What exactly does Yahweh promise his people? On what conditions?
5. How might Jesus' reference in Mt 10:34f help you understand who are being talked about in Ps 82:1 & 6 as "gods" and "sons of the Most High" who will nevertheless "die like men" (v. 7)? How does God judge among his people (Ex 18:13-27; Ro 13:1-5; 1 P 2:13-15)? What happens among God's people (v. 1) and among nations (v. 8) when human rulers judge unjustly? How are they meant to judge on Yahweh's behalf? What should this say today (a) to rulers of all kinds and (b) especially to Christian ones? How does your attitude to justice reveal your concept of God and how he works in human society? What particular injustices has he laid upon your heart to see remedied? How might that be possible? Why?

1. What is the theme of each of the three sections of Ps 147? In each section, how do God's actions in history and nature fit together? What characteristics of Yahweh are praiseworthy? What does Yahweh delight in about humans? What is more noteworthy than even God's sovereignty over cold and heat? What makes praising God good, pleasant and becoming/ fitting for us (v. 1), rather than just our duty? What in nature and in your own personal history moves you to praise him? How do you do this? How often?
2. What particular acts of Yahweh in Israel's early history are woven into Ps 114's celebration of his sovereignty? How do they see nature engaging with Yahweh's mighty historical acts? How does your environment participate in your salvation history? What characteristics of God are emphasized in this psalm? Which ones would be emphasized in a psalm you might write about Yahweh's involvement in your life's history?
3. Why do you think that there are two copies of the same psalm, one in book 1 (Ps 14) and one in book 2 (Ps 53) of the five-fold collection of Israel's psalms? What differences can you detect between the two versions, even in your English translation? What impact do these difference make upon the psalm's theme? Can you discern which way the psalm may have developed over the years? How?
4. Do only fools say "There is no God", or is anyone a fool to say this seriously? Why? Is what follows in vv. 1-3 the result of atheism, or a description of the type of atheism the psalmist has in mind in v. 1? How many types of atheists can you think of? How many atheists that you know are really seeking after God (v. 2)? Why haven't they discovered the truth of the promise of Dt 4:29; 1 Ch 28:9; 2 Ch 15:2; Jr 29:13f and Mt 7:7? What use does the apostle Paul make of vv. 1-3 in Ro 3:10f? Do you agree? Who is Paul talking about? What are the implications of this according to Ro 3:19-25 for your life and for that of others?
5. How does Ps 19 see God revealed in nature (vv. 1-6)? How can there be speech/ utterance without speech or sound? To whom is the speech addressed? What is communicated? How does Yahweh's revelation through his torah/ instruction differ (vv. 7-10)? How do the many synonyms here for God's law convey its meaning, extent and value? What effect should both sources of divine revelation have upon God's servants (vv. 11-14)? What would it mean for you to say that Yahweh is you rock and redeemer? What other metaphors might you employ to say essentially the same thing? How does Paul evaluate the value of both revelatory sources in Ro 1:18-2:29? Does the similar order in which the two sources are discussed in both Ps 19 and Ro 1f, imply anything about how people generally come to know about God? How so? What sorts of unity are there between the two sources? How important to you is it that there are two or more sources of divine revelation?

1. How is Ps 119 related to the theme of Ps 19:7-14? What feelings seemed to have motivated the psalmist to expand this theme greatly using the complex form of a lengthy acrostic poem, where not only does each section begin with a new letter of the Hebrew alphabet, but each of the eight lines [verses in English] begins with that section's particular letter? What synonyms for the multifaceted Hebrew word "torah" [usually translated into English as "law"] can you discern in these two psalms that spell out the term's shades of meaning? What are those meanings? What aspect/s of Yahweh's torah is/are being examined like a precious jewel in each of the poem's 22 sections?
2. From the above, what overall impression have you got of God's torah? What is included? How and to what extent is Yahweh himself involved? Would meditating upon the law of our modern western civilization inspire the personal responses that Yahweh's torah does in this psalm? What makes the difference? How might this understanding of the nature of God's law change people's instinctive reaction to the word law in the Bible?
3. What several sub-themes run through most of the poem's sections like strings of a complex necklace? For example, what do they say about Yahweh himself and about the psalmist's feelings about Yahweh's word, his prayers, his desires, his hopes, his attitudes? Is God's word here spoken or written? Does it matter? How so? What helps the writer remember what Yahweh says (e.g., vv. 6, 11, 15, 54 etc.)? What other connecting themes can you discern? How are each of them developed throughout the poem?
4. What are the purposes of God's word? What conditions, if any, are specified for these purposes to be realized in individual lives? What actions could you take to experience more fully the benefits of God's ways in your life?
5. Could this whole psalm be viewed as a prayer? Which of the psalmist's requests could well be yours? How important is prayer in understanding and applying God's teaching? How many Christian hymns, songs or choruses do you know that are based on some part of this great psalm?

TRAIL VIII -- SECTION 37: Pilgrimage Psalms: Psalms 84; 120-122.

[Since these are psalms for the road, each one should be read aloud before looking at the relevant question.]

1. In the general pilgrimage psalm 84, what names are given to God? Which of these names do you use? How are the feelings and aspirations of a pilgrim journeying to Zion described? Which of these emotions do you share as you anticipate worshiping in Yahweh's sanctuary? How might the idea of a pilgrimage also be a metaphor for your ongoing walk with God? What would be its goal (Ro 8:29; 1 Co 13:12f; 2 Co 3:18; Ep 4:13-16; Ph 3:13-17, 20f; 2 P 1:4-7; 1 Jn 3:2)?
2. In Ps 120, the first of the fifteen of Psalms of Ascent (120-134) probably sung in order by pilgrims traveling to Zion for the three great Jewish festivals, how closely does the description of the relational dimensions of their home setting at the start of their pilgrimage fit your own home situation? How close do you find the connections between your tongue and lips and lying, deceit and strife (Pr 15:1, 4; 16:28; 17:4; 7, 9, 27; 18:6, 21; 21:23; 22:10; 25:23; 29:5; 30:10; Ps 141:3; Ja 3:1-12; 4:1-3)? How intense is the conflict between those who pursue peace and those who subvert it in your congregation, community and nation? Why is this important for Christians (Mt 5:9; Mk 9:50; Ro 12:18; 14:19; 2 Co 13:11; 1 Th 5:13)? What can you do about it? Can you appreciate why this is one of God's people's favourite psalms?
3. In Ps 121, why might the travelers setting up camp at dusk by a road winding through the valleys between the Palestinian mountains, feel concerned for their safety? Can they really depend entirely upon their lookouts posted on the surrounding hills/ mountains (v. 1)? In how many respects do they realize that they have to trust in Yahweh for protection (Is 49:10)? Why is his guardianship sufficient? In what respects do you need God's oversight/ guardianship/ protection on your life's journey? What of his protection are you aware of having experienced so far? Can you trust in Yahweh's many promises to always be with his own people as their protector and guide (e.g., Gn 28:15; 31:3; Ex 3:12; 4:12, 15; 33:14-17; Mt 28:18-20)?
4. In Ps 122, why did the Israelites, especially the Judeans, associate the house of Yahweh with Jerusalem? Is that association relevant to you as a Christian today (Jn 4:21-24)? Should Christians, like Jews, still pray for the peace and prosperity of Jerusalem? For whose sake should such prayers be addressed by Christians (v. 8f; Jr 20:7; 1 Ti 2:1-6, 8)? What well-known, rousing church anthem based on this psalm, is regularly sung at major British festival events? What real connection is there between Israel and Great Britain? How so?
5. Would your answers to any of the above questions about Ps 122, change if you were thinking not of the present city of Jerusalem in the modern state of Israel, but about either (a) the heavenly Jerusalem of He 11:10, 16 and 12:22f or (b) of the heavenly city that will descend to earth as in Rv 20f? How might these two heavenly Jerusalems be connected either to (c) the ancient city of Jerusalem, or (d) the modern city of Jerusalem? Where does the "beloved city" of Rv 20:9 fit in?

1. In Ps 123, How is Yahweh's sovereignty and graciousness conceived? Why in particular did the author want Yahweh to be gracious to them? How might that be also true of Christians following God's ways (1 P 2:12, 18-23; 3:13-18; 4:12-19; 5:8-11)? Do you really believe that Yahweh is interested in you and your personal welfare [Hebrew= "shalom"], even how you are treated and how you feel (Mt 6:25-34; Lk 12:22-32)?
2. According to Ps 124, who is this Yahweh who is on the side of his people? What difference does it make for him to be there with them as they face opposition? How have you experienced his presence? How do your past experiences influence your present trust in Yahweh to be involved in your present and future challenges? What further difficulties might you well have to face together with him? How do you feel about such prospects?
3. In Ps 125, what distant sight inspires the pilgrims? Who are the two groups that are contrasted? What fate is in store for each of them? How so? Do their punishments fit their crimes? Who is held responsible for this? What is hoped to be the final result for God's people? Why?
4. In your translation of Ps 126, what clues can you find as to the probable date its original composition? What great deed of Yahweh is in focus? What are the responses of which people? What more did the psalmist want to accomplish? Why was this so necessary at that particular point in Jewish history? What do the two agricultural metaphors of vv. 4-6 imply about Yahweh's contribution (Mk 4:26-29)? Yet what are they aware of having to do themselves, well before Yahweh's act? What indicates that it was difficult for them both to initiate, and then to have to wait for Yahweh to act? How difficult, yet wonderful, is it for you and others to be involved with God in a similar way (1 Co 3:6-9; 1 Th 3:2; Cl 1:29)? How is this involvement connected to our general human vocational identity (Gn 1:26-28; Ps 8:4, 6-9)? Is this involvement more than just a human dream (v. 1b)? How much is human faith and hope involved? Is your practical faith/ trust and hope just as grounded in Yahweh's faithful commitments (Is 35:1, 6; 41:18; 51:3; Jr 31:16) as theirs was? Nevertheless, do you still respond as they did (v. 2a), when Yahweh does realize your hopes? Who witnesses all this according to the psalm (v. 2b)? Is this process, therefore, an essential part of Israel's special calling to be Yahweh's witnesses (Is 43:10, 12; 49:6; Ac 13:47)? Could it also be a vital part of our Christian calling to witnesses to God's graciousness and faithfulness (1 P 3:13-18; Jn 13:34f Ep 2:10; Mt 5:14-16)?
5. Why do you think two wisdom psalms, Ps 123 & 128 [see Trail VIII, 13 & 14], are included among the Songs of Ascent? What is promised to God's people in them? How important is that (a) to them and (b) to you?
6. In Ps 129, what images are borrowed from Is 51:12, 16, 22f to illustrate the plight of Israel? Yet what hope is expressed both by the prophet and the psalmist? When have you felt like a victim or a doormat? Do the feelings expressed in vv. 5-8, therefore, seem understandable and legitimate to you? Nevertheless, who alone has the right and wisdom to bring recompense and to deliver the oppressed (Dt 12:35; Ro 12:17-21)? Why do you think such an imprecatory psalm is included in the Songs of Ascent? Can you pray such a psalm? How so?

1. Why do you think both Martin Luther and John Wesley acclaimed Ps 130 "the best of the best" psalms both personally and theologically (Ep 2:8-10; Ro 1:17; 3:28; Ga 2:20; 3:11)? How does the psalm offer fundamental good news/ gospel about Yahweh (Ex 34:6)? Are you surprised to find such clear gospel teaching in the Old Testament? Why, given that Ex 34:6's "loving kindness" [Hebrew="cheseh"] and forgiveness echo throughout the entire Old Testament? How appropriate would it be to employ this psalm as an affirmation of hope in a Christian funeral service?
2. Have you felt such overwhelming depths as to prompt you to cry a penitential plea for divine mercy like Ps 130? Have you also felt that God has not yet answered your cries for help? How so? Would you feel free to express such honest anguish to Yahweh himself? Does the psalmist feel that his sin has cut him off from God (v. 3)? What about Yahweh prompts his reverence/ awe/ fear (v. 4)? Yet what does he believe to be the fundamental grounds (v. 7) for hoping for Yahweh's mercy? For what/ whom, therefore, is he waiting (v. 5,6)? Can you appreciate the aptness of the watchman metaphor for such waiting (v. 6)? What does its underlining add (v. 6b)? Why is waiting so vital to our human relationship with God? Are you inspired like the psalmist both to witness to your fellows about Yahweh's relevant character and ability (v. 7) and also to predict his action on their behalf (v. 8)? What role does such a penitential psalm play in the pilgrims' Songs of Ascent to worship Yahweh?
3. What does the brief Ps 131 say to you? What three important notes does it sound for approaching Yahweh's house to worship him? What life experiences might prompt you to pray this way? When in Job's struggle might it have been a suitable response to Yahweh? For an adult, what is the significance of feeling like a weaned child now contented with its mother? How does this lead naturally to his advice to Israel (v. 3)? Might Jesus have had in mind in Mt 18:1-4; Mk 9:33-37; 10:13-16; Lk 9:46-48? As we appropriately mature as Christians (1 P 2:2; 1Co 4:20; Ep 4:13-15; He 6:1), should we expect to outgrow these childlike characteristics (1 P 5:6f; 1 Jn 2:28)?
4. How does Ps 132 begin by reflecting upon the historical situation recorded in 1 S 7 and 1 Ch 28? How did the treatment of the ark of Yahweh's covenant in 2 S 6 and 1 Ch 13 necessitate this new development? Of what do the terms "dwelling place", "resting place", "footstool" and "sit enthroned" remind you? Whose vows, David's (vv. 2-5) or Yahweh's (vv. 11f), were conditional? What implications does this difference have for you, your congregation, your nation? What benefits would flow from Yahweh's temple being located permanently in Zion (vv. 13-18)? Should Jerusalem, therefore, expect to be so blessed today? Who is Yahweh's anointed of vv. 10 & 17? How relevant is that today for Christians (Lk 4:18; Ac 4:27; 10:38; He 1:9; 2 Co 1:21)? According to 1 Co 3:16 and 1 P 2:5, where is God's special dwelling place now? And where and how is God to be worshiped (Jn 4:22-24; Ro 12:1)?
5. How does Ps 134 provide a suitable concluding climax to the weary pilgrims' Songs of Ascent? What is the pilgrims' relationship to Yahweh? What should they, therefore, be doing in his sanctuary? What do they expect Yahweh to do in response? Is Yahweh the very same God that Christians are both to bless and also expect to be blessed by (2 Co 1:3f; Ep 1:3; 1 P 1:3-5)? How significant is this to you? In what special social context should Christians regularly bless God and expect to be blessed by him (Mt 18:19f; 1 Co 14:26; He 10:23-25)? How is that happening for you? For your family?

TRAIL VIII -- SECTION 40: Psalms of Adoration and Praise: Psalms 24; 15; 100; 117; 33.

1. According to Ps 24, what is Yahweh's character, that he should be worshiped? What sort of holiness is appropriate for anyone seeking to worship in Yahweh's holy place (vv. 3f)? What are the results of so worshiping? Why? How might vv. 7-10 be related to the events recorded in 2 S 6 and 1 Ch 13? What would it mean to call Yahweh your "king of glory" (v. 8)? Is he that to you now? Could this title also apply to Jesus, Yahweh's messiah, according to 1 Co 2:8 (Mk 11:9; Mt 21:9-11; Lk 19:38; Jn 12:13)? Does the poetic imagery of v. 2 really imply a primitive view of a floating-island earth? If not, what is it saying?
2. How does Ps 15 expand upon Ps 24:3's answer to the question of who can appropriately associate with Yahweh? How well does what is said here apply to you and to your fellow worshippers? To what spheres of your life and relationships does this apply? Can you, therefore, claim the concluding promise? If not (1 Jn 1:6-8, 10), how might the promises of 1 Jn 1: 9 and 2:1f help you? What does all this imply about the nature of Yahweh's own holiness? What does it mean for your worship of him?
3. In Ps 100 who all are called to worship Yahweh? How are they to do so (vv. 2 & 4)? How well does that characterize your and your congregation's worship? Does everything confessed about Yahweh in vv. 3 & 5 apply to everyone who is called to worship him in v.1 (Mt 6:45; Ac 14:15, 17; Ro 1:19-21)? What are the implications of this (a) for people you know and (b) for God's relationship to them? Whenever this psalm is employed as an invocation in Christian worship, how aware are you of its range of meaning? What difference would that awareness make?
4. In light of the meaning of Ps 100 above, who might be included in the "us" in v. 2 of the shortest of all psalms, Ps 117, include? How aware are most people who occasionally employ the briefest of all divine praises, "Hallelujah!", that they are positively responding to the command of Ps 117:2? How seriously, do you think, does Yahweh take (1 S 16:7; 1 K 8:39; 1 Ch 28:9; 2 Ch 6:30; Lk 16:15) such unconscious verbal praise (Is 29:13; Mt 15:8f; Mk 7:6f)? Yet how prophetic might even such thin praise be of what will one day be universal (Is 45:22f; Ph 2:11; Rv 7:9-12)?
5. Why do you think Ps 33:6 prompted some Christians to view this psalm as sufficiently trinitarian to read it on Trinity Sunday? Might a greater sensitivity to the common use of synonymous parallelism in Hebrew poetry have undermined their interpretation? After the initial call to praise Yahweh (vv. 1-3), what grounds are adduced for praising him (vv. 4-14)? Which of these reasons inspire your praise of Yahweh the most? How so? Why do the worship responses of v. 8 and of vv. 1-3 & 12 differ? How is this difference warranted in vv. 16-21? Have you witnessed the security truths of both vv. 16f and vv. 18f? Can you, therefore, confess with the psalmist as in vv. 20f and pray as in v.22?

1. Why do you think Ps 8 begins and ends the same way? What, therefore, about Yahweh is its focus throughout? What do the pronouns "our" in vv. 1a & 9 and "I" in v. 4 indicate about who sings which part of this psalm? Have you ever wondered why there are such diverse translations of vv. 1b-2a? What do you make of the amazing defensive role that the weakest of all human beings play in Yahweh's war to defeat his evil enemies (vv. 2f)? How might this divine strategy reveal Yahweh's sovereignty (1 Co 1:27; 2 Co 12:9f)? When contemplating God's awesome handiwork in a clear night's sky (v. 3), have you ever wondered with this psalmist, why Yahweh chose to focus his special attention on weak /puny humanity (v. 4a), rather than on the amazing astral beings which ancient near easterners tended to worship? Why has Yahweh even commissioned individual humans [Hebrew = sons of man] as his agents (v. 4b)? Does the special biblical revelation (Gn 1:26-28) about humanity's divinely-arranged demi-divine status (v. 5a) and divinely-bestowed glory and honour (v. 5b), lessen or intensify your wonder at Yahweh's surprising election and calling of humanity? What about Yahweh's even making shared-sovereignty over his great creation the human vocation (v. 6)? How do the widening circles illustrating the scope of this sovereignty (vv. 7f), indicate the antiquity of this relational and vocational interpretation of our human identity? Does reflecting at some length upon our amazing divinely-constituted identity, lead you away from the psalm's divine focus, or to conclude with the psalmist with an intensified celebration of our sovereign Yahweh's majesty, now not merely viewed as universal [throughout] but also as through [by means of] the entire earth [as the literal Hebrew text of v. 1b suggests] especially through us? Do the practical expressions of your human identity and vocation motivate observers to glorify your heavenly Father, Yahweh (Mt 5:16) because they signify his artistry [Greek="poema"] (Ep 2:10)?
2. What reasons are given in Ps 103:1-5 for individuals to bless Yahweh? How would you describe the nature of these benefits? Which of them do you tend to forget? How does Yahweh counter sin, disease and even death?
3. Whom does the psalmist have in mind when in vv 103:10-14 he shifts to the 1st person plural? How is Yahweh's graciousness and compassion expressed to his people (Ex 34:6f; 1 Co 13:4)? To whom does he give judgement /justice? Recognizing that the Hebrew word for compassion derives from the same verbal root as the word "womb", what male and female metaphors are mixed together in v. 13? Should Yahweh, therefore, continue to be conceived as male? In light of today's scientific knowledge, how amazing are the great truths expressed in vv. 11f? How important to you and to all God's people are these disclosures of Yahweh's character?
4. As finite human beings, how important is it that Yahweh takes our earthiness and morality into account in all his dealings with us Ps 103:14-16? But how then is it possible for us humans to enjoy the benefits of Yahweh's everlasting covenant love forever? Is it only through our descendants (v. 17)? Would even that proxy enjoyment be contingent upon their continuing to revere Yahweh (vv. 11, 13, 18)? Why do you think the writer concludes his psalm with a call for all creatures within his dominion – everywhere, everyone, everything, including the psalmist [Thy soul] – to bless Yahweh? How often do you do so?
5. What is the main theme of Ps 111 according to vv.1f? With such adjectives as "great", "splendid", "glorious" and "majestic", what works of Yahweh would you naturally think of in company with the founders of Cambridge University's famous Cavendish Chemistry laboratory (v. 3)'s "splendid and majestic are his works" inscribed over its main doorway. Nevertheless, what sort of great deeds does the Hebrew psalmist have in mind in the rest of his line-by-line acrostic poem? What actions of Yahweh are reflected in vv. 5f and what ones are described in vv. 7-9? Does the contemplations of the same great divine wonders of mercy and compassion inspire you to praise Yahweh (vv. 1, 10) more than do his wonders in nature? How is such reverence for God the beginning of wisdom (v. 10a)? What understanding does your practice of

this wisdom bring to you (v. 10b)?

1. How closely related are praising (113:1, 3) and blessing (113:2) in your worship of Yahweh? Do you find such worship appropriate both always (v. 2) and everywhere (v. 3)? How so? Could regularly employing the word that frames (vv. 1 & 9) the psalm, help you practice this? What particular objective (vv. 41) and self-involving (vv. 6-9) reasons inspire your regular praise of Yahweh? Do they, as for the psalmist, correspond to God's transcendence and immanence? Do you celebrate Yahweh's all-knowing (v.6), especially when it leads to such involvement in human affairs as those specified in vv.7-9? How open are you and your congregation to becoming God's human partners in his caring for marginalized people? Could this be a significant part of God's purpose in creating and recreating you (Lk 10:37; Ep 2:10)?
2. According to Psalm 115:9-11, what is the appropriate response to Yahweh's fundamental character (v.1; Ex 34:6)? What is the consequence of responding that way to false gods (v. 8)? What does v. 3 suggest is both (a) the answer to the pagans' taunt (v. 2) and (b) what distinguishes Yahweh from all pagan deities (vv 4f)? How relevant is all this to you amid the more subtle, yet prevailing, idolatries of your contemporary culture? Are you as confident as the psalmist of Yahweh's mindfulness and blessing (vv. 12f)? Which blessing in this life (vv. 17f) do you have in mind? What implications might follow from vv. 15f which are consistent with the teachings of Ps 89:11 and 8:6-8?
3. How does Ps 135:6 echo Ps 115:3's thesis? What natural and historical evidence does the psalmist offer to support this claim (vv. 7-12)? What evidence might you cite? How is this basic characteristic of Yahweh related to his goodness (v.3) and to his election of Israel as his possession (v.4; Gn 12:2f; Is 42:6; 43:10; 44:8; 49:6)? How does this relate to you as a Christian member of God's chosen people (Ro 4:11, 13; Ga 3:28f; 4:28; Ro 9:8)? How does this relate to you as a Christian member of God's chosen people (Ro 4:11, 13; Ro 9:8; Ga 3:28f; 4:28)? Should you, therefore, respond as the psalmist does in v. 13 and even for the same reason (v. 14)? How important is the latter to you? How does vv. 15-17 echo Ps 115:6-8's themes? How does this fit the flow of Ps 135? How should blessing Yahweh flow from revering/ fearing Yahweh (v. 20) by all those who are specially chosen by him (vv. 19f)?
4. Why might many readers of Ps 135:8-12, and even of Ps 113:7-9, find it so difficult to view Yahweh's sovereign actions in history as good (v. 3)? Why should they, therefore, praise him rather than curse him? How can you, a beneficiary of God's sovereign acts, counter their view of Yahweh as indiscriminate, wrathful, vengeful and violent? Why do even so many Christians view the God of Israel and of the Old Testament as the antithesis of the good and loving Father of Jesus? How would you answer them (Ps 115:1; Ex 35:6)?
5. How important is it for God's covenant people to use rather than shun the self-revealed personal covenant name of God, "Yahweh", in praising him whom they claim to revere and trust (Ps 113:1; 135:1)?

1. According to Ps 136:1-3, how sovereign is Yahweh? How does that compare to the sovereignty theme of the praise psalms 115 and 135? What is so good about Yahweh's sovereignty that it is not only asserted at the outset, but also underlined by the congregation's refrain ringing throughout the entire psalm? How well is this characteristic grounded in Israel's credo (Ex 34:6)?
2. According to the subsequent sections of psalm 136 (vv. 4-9; 10-22 and 23-25), in what three broad spheres is Yahweh's sovereignty incarnated in this vital way? How might the details presented in the first line attach verse by a cantor or choir be important to ancient Israelites and Jews of all ages? If this psalm were to be rewritten so as to be immediately relevant to your Christian congregation, what appropriate details might be presented in the first lines of each of the broad spheres of Yahweh's sovereignty? Can you see why this psalm was later called the Great Hallel [Hebrew = praise] Psalm?
3. What dimension of God's sovereignty celebrated at the end of psalm 136 (v. 26) relates to his sovereignty at the beginning of the psalm (vv. 20)? How is this dimension of Yahweh's sovereignty quite different from the immanent dimension of his sovereignty celebrated in detail in various spheres throughout the body of the psalm? How are both dimensions of his sovereignty necessary for Yahweh to be (a) gracious and (b) everlasting? How does it being everlasting relate it being true to here and now for you?
4. Do you agree with John Calvin's claim that in Ps 145 "the powers of God's character [are] so specifically reckoned, that nothing could seem to have been omitted"? What are those many characteristics of Yahweh? How is each of them important? What significance can you see in how his specific characteristics are woven together in each of the psalm's three sections (vv. 1-7; 8-13 & 14-21)? How do Yahweh's characteristics express themselves in relation to people? Which of these ways and characteristics are most important to you? Do you respond to them in all the ways the psalmist does?
5. What makes Ps 150 such a fitting and comprehensive conclusion to this omnibus collection of Hebrew psalms? Where should Yahweh be praised? Why is he worthy of praise? Who should be praising him? With what range of musical instruments should he be praised? What are other appropriate ways to praise him? Where today might you find such an expression of worship? How would you feel worshipping Yahweh this way? How so?

1. Why have deeply personal and individual psalms like Ps 6 and 38 (plus Ps 32, 51, 108 and 130 that we have studied earlier in other contexts) frequently been used intact as liturgical prayers of general confession in Christian churches? Would the two here be suitable for Ash Wednesday confession at the beginning of the traditional season of Lent? What adaptations of these psalms might make them even more appropriate for public confessions in Christian congregations today? How many Christian hymns can you think of that have been inspired by any of these penitential psalms?
2. What do you imagine is happening to the psalmist in Ps 6:1-3? Have you ever been in such a sorry state (vv. 6f)? Why might she believe that her present condition is a result of God's righteous wrath (Lv 26:14-17; Dt 28:58-60)? What does she fear in v. 5? What basis does she find to appeal for rescue (v. 4)? How does the presence of her foes (v. 7) exacerbate her torment (Jb 6:14f 19:24; 12:4; 30:11-15; Mt 27:39-44)? How might the context of Jesus' use of v. 8a in Mt 7:23 illustrate the psalmist's situation? Judging from vv. 8-10, what has changed in her state of mind? What can you learn personally from this whole psalm to instruct and encourage you spiritually? How could you be a true friend rather than yet another foe to someone in such deep distress (Ga 6:1f; He 13:3; Ro 12:15; 2 Co 1:3f)?
3. Though very similar, how does Ps 38 differ from Ps 6 in its sense of personal responsibility? What sorts of sufferings are described? How many descriptions in vv. 3-10 can you identify with? Who does he think is responsible for his condition (v. 3)? Why do his friends and family avoid him? When have you ever felt the same? How do his enemies plan to take advantage of his situation? Why doesn't he defend himself (vv. 13f, 17f)? What could he say to them? Even while acknowledging his guilt (v. 18) and God's discipline (v. 1), why does he appeal to Yahweh (v. 15; Ex 34:6f Ek 18:30-32)? What about the nature of his enemies' attack adds strength to his appeal (v. 19f)? What can we learn from this psalm and from He 12:5-11 about the purposes of Yahweh's discipline and how to respond to it? How do you respond to God's fatherly discipline?
4. What about Ps 143 suggests that it should be treated traditionally as a penitential psalm, when there seems to be no clear confession of personal sinning or appeal for divine forgiveness? What, then, is v. 2 about?
5. What difference do you see in Ps 143 regarding the actions of the psalmist's enemy (vv. 3, 12)? If you were the psalmist, who might such an enemy be (Jb 2:3; 1 Ch 21:1; Ep 6:12; 1 P 5:8f; 2 Co 11:14)? Have you ever felt as crushed in spirit as the psalmist? How would you describe that feeling? How might the psalmist's meditation (vv. 5f) or a similar one help you? Why would a quick answer seem so necessary to him or you? Have you ever asked God for his help by morning? How well did you sleep then? Why (v. 8a)? How often have you asked God for the basic things that the psalmist does in v. 8b-10? What characteristics of Yahweh epitomise the psalmist's relationship with him and make these particular requests eminently suitable? How appropriate is the further request in v. 11 for a servant of God (v. 12)? Would it, therefore, be appropriate for you too (Ro 6:22; 8:14-17, 26-28)? What would it involve? Should you pray for God to deal with your enemies as in v 12? What would be a better way to deal with them (Mt 5:44f; Ro 12:17-21; 1 Ti 2:11-4; 2 P 3:9)? Why would that way be better? What, however, if your real spiritual enemy was as suggested above (Ja 4:7f)?

1. What synonyms for "bless" do you find in psalm 67 (Nu 6:24-26)? What does blessing God mean? Who are the "us" in vv. 2 & 7? Who are the others mentioned? As a result of this blessing, what is the connection between the "us" and the "them"? How might this fulfill Yahweh's covenantal promise to Abram (Gn 12:1-3; Is 42:6; 44:8; 49:6; 51:4; 60:1-3; Mt 5:14-16)? What particular actions of God are to be celebrated by these others (vv. 4-6)? How do these actions reveal Yahweh's graciousness as well as his sovereignty? How inclusive, now, is the-"us" in vv. 61f? How is it possible for Christians today to share God's blessings with the peoples of the earth?
2. In the introductory refrain (v. 1) of Ps 107, why, in general, should Yahweh be thanked? What are the threatening situations described in each of the four sections (vv. 2-9, 10-16, 17-22 and 23-32) of this elegantly structured poem? What is the repeated refrain of vv. 6, 13, 18 and 28? In each use, how does it depict both the response of each of the peoples involved and also Yahweh's special action in each case (2 Ch 7:14)? What role does the second repeated refrain (vv. 8, 15, 21 and 31) play? In each case what wonderful deeds of Yahweh were in view?
3. In the first threatening example (Ps 107:2-9), what specific contemporary situation would come to mind for Israelites? In the other examples, what other much earlier historical crises would they remember? What experiences of God's deliverance have you and your Christian congregation had that you should be thanking Yahweh for? How relevant might these examples of divine deliverance be to Christians trapped in war-torn countries today?
4. What situation is described in the second example (107:10-16)? How did it come about (Mi 7:8f)? In spite of this, how did Yahweh respond? Why? Have you ever been trapped in this way? How were you rescued? In the next section (vv. 17-22), what is the connection between the people being "fools" and their affliction? Given the nature of their illness, besides giving thanks for being rescued, why are other specific responses deemed appropriate? In the final example (vv. 23-32), what might be the cause of the merchant's misfortune? What does this mean to you? Why were those rescued mandated to bear public witness of this both to the congregation and the council of elders? Have you ever had occasion to have to bear such public witness? What biblical examples of this might come to mind (Jo 1:4-16; Mt 14:22-33; Ac 27:13-44)?
5. What wisdom does the very last section of the psalm Ps 107:33-43 draw from the psalm's earlier recitals of Yahweh's saving activity in the history of his covenant people? Who causes these great reversals for God's people? How is their environment involved in these changes? Why are the fates of the nobility and the needy set in such dramatic contrast? Why might considering the implications of Yahweh's loving kindness/ covenant love/ faithful love ([Heb. = chesed] v. 43) be the unrighteous person's wisest response? How might these wise insights resonate for Israelites reflecting upon their past experience with Davidic and non-Davidic leaders? What hope is offered for their future? How relevant is this wisdom for you?

1. In Ps 65:1-4, where does the psalmist envision the appropriate place to praise God? What particular reasons for gratitude are specified here? Which ones can you identify with? How significant is v. 2 for the rest of the psalm? How does vv. 3-8 expand this picture? Which events in Israel's history displaying God's saving power over nature are suggested here? What was the importance of these events to God's people? Noting the parallelism of Hebrew poetry in vv. 7f, who else benefits from witnessing God's deeds? Who shouts for joy in v. 8? In what ways might Christians see this psalm prefiguring God's kingdom/ reign coming through Jesus his Messiah?
2. Do you see God as intimately involved in agricultural production as Ps 65:9-13 does? How often do you give thanks for God's caring for the land (Dt 11:11-15)? Is an annual Thanksgiving Day sufficient? How dependent are we today on the water that God provides? How are God's natural blessings connected to obedience to his commands (Dt 11:11-15), especially as summarized by Jesus in Mt 22:37-40? How might disobedience to these basic divine commands be a factor in modern crises such as global hunger, water shortages and ecological disasters? Can you imagine the land shouting for joy and singing because of its abundance?
3. Do God's enemies today respond to the greatness of his power, as Ps 66:3 and 7 suggest? Why? What two awesome events in Israel's history are referred to in v. 6? Who besides Israel witnessed them, and with what response (v. 3)? What would have been a more appropriate response (v. 7)? According to vv. 8-12 in what other ways was God involved in his people's history? Why should other peoples praise him for this? Are you thankful for God's gracious activities in the long history of the Jewish people? What light does this throw on his gracious activities in your own life? Do you hope that your experience of God in your own history will be a similar witness to those coming after you?
4. In Ps 66:13-15, what was the psalmist's own response to God's activities in his people's life? What further witness did he give to others (vv. 16-20)? What equivalent witness could you give today about God's activity in your and your people's lives? Do you yourself bless, praise, shout and sing aloud about God? Why? What impact might such joyous public expressions, or lack thereof, have on those closest to you?
5. According to Ps 146:4, when is the appropriate time to praise Yahweh? What reasons are given as to why we should hope and trust in Yahweh? Which of these reasons are most important for you personally? How well do the descriptions of Yahweh here fit with your ideas of the nature of God's reign on earth? How well do they relate to your society's values? Should we have these divine actions in mind as we Christians pray as in the Lord's Prayer "thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven"? Why?

1. Why do you think Ps 23 is the favorite of so many people? Why would they want it sung at their funeral, even at their wedding? Which feature cited most appeals to you: its brief simplicity, its child-like clarity, its personal nature, its realism, its fundamental optimism, or its link to the shepherd-king David? Nevertheless, how helpful are its two major metaphors to modern urban people? Can you think of a contemporary metaphor that might communicate better Yahweh's character, actions, motives, and his relationship to you and his people? Why not try your hand at using a more urban and relevant metaphor to paraphrase the entire psalm?
2. Is Ps 23 a good representation of all that Yahweh is like when he claims to be his people's Good Shepherd (Is 40:11; Jr 31:10; Ek 34:11)? Can you make the same pastoral claim about Jesus, God's Messiah (Ek 34:23f; in 10:11-16)? Should Christian pastors, as Jesus' under-shepherds, also be like this (Ek 34:1-10; Jn 21:15-17; 1 P 5:1-4)? How would you respond to such good shepherding, whether divine, human or both (1 Co 3:9; 1 Th 3:2; Cl 1:29)? Why?
3. Is Ps 118 a communal thanksgiving (vv 1-4 and 22-29) or an individual one (vv. 5-21)? Could it be construed as both, if there were different singers for different sections? Who the might singers of the it' different sections of the psalm be, and whom might they represent? Where might the king himself participate? What contribution do vv. 8f and 15f make? Who might sing them? Do vv. 24 and 27 indicate that this psalm was designed as a public thanksgiving for one of the three great Jewish festivals? If so, which one?
4. Since "hosanna" in Hebrew is the plea "Please save us", how appropriate was it for all or part of Ps 118 to be sung by the crowd as Jesus rode as messiah-king with public acclaim into Jerusalem just a week before his last Passover (Mt 21:9; Mk 11:9f; Lk 19:38; Jn 13:13)? Why does Jesus refer to v. 26 again in the temple just a few days later (Mt 23:39) as well as once somewhat earlier (Lk 13:35)? What use does Jesus make of v 22f in his teaching in the temple later in his week (Mt 21:42; Mk 12:10f; Lk 10:17)? How do Jesus' apostles use the same verse in Ac 4:11; Ep 2:20 and 1 P 2:7? Who probably gave them their pattern of interpreting this psalm and many other sections of the Hebrew Scriptures (Jn 5:39; Lk 24:25-27, 44-47)? What uses do many Christian congregations now make of Ps 118:24? Have you ever considered weaving this verse into your first prayer each morning? What about including v. 1 as well? How many of the reasons for corporate and individual thanksgiving in this psalm are relevant to you personally?
5. Who do you think the "gods" Ps 138:1 are? How different is the psalms' meaning if you take them to be (a) God (very common), (b) gods other than Yahweh (very common), (c) angels (LXX of Ps 97:7 and 8:5 [He 3:7]), (d) rulers (Ps 82:1) or (e) judges (Ex 21:6; 22:8f)? For what things about Yahweh is the psalmist thankful? Are all of these reasons equally true for you? Why might these reasons lead others to praise Yahweh too? How meaningful and reassuring is v. 8 to the psalmist and to you? What basis is alluded to here for trusting in God?

1. Can you affirm Ps 40:1-5? What is involved in your doing so? Do you hear and clearly understand the prophetic theme expressed in v. 6 (1 S 15:22; Is 1:11; Jr 6:20; Am 5:22; Ps 51:16; Mt 9:13; He 10:5-7)? Is the psalmist's response in vv. 7f also true of you? How did his experience (Jr 31:33) lead to the public creedal witness (Ex 34:6f) of vv. 9-11?
2. Why does the psalmist after such thanksgiving and witness, append a modified version of Ps 70's plea for divine vindication to the end of his psalm (vv. 13-17)? How does v 12 help to link the two diverse parts of Ps 40? What can you learn from vv. 16f about your on-going attitude about God's salvation?
3. What has the Most High, Yahweh, done in your life that might motivate you to sing thankfully as in Ps 92:1-4? How does wisdom level 1 theme (Dt 28; Ps 1 & 37) fit with the psalmist's perception (vv. 5-9)? With which group does he identify? Is this what makes him thankful? How aptly are the wicked described? Are there any qualifications made about the psalmist's sense of his personal righteousness (40:12; Lk 18:9-14)?
4. Have you personally observed the truth of the wisdom level 1 theme discussed in vv. 10f? Do you think, as some interpreters do, that vv. 7 & 9 imply the predestination of the wicked to damnation? Why? How fixed are the categories of the wicked and the righteous in the scriptures (Ek 18:26-28; Jr 18:7-11; He 3:12-14, 19; 4:6; 6:4-8)? What might this imply about the certainty of their destiny?
5. Have you ever had the sort of experience described in Ps 116:1-4 or 6-8? What happened to you? Did you find that Yahweh's deliverance when you called out to him in desperation, led you too to continue to call upon him at other times? For the psalmist, what other responses to Yahweh's salvation followed (vv. 1f, 7, 9, 14, 16, 19)? How might they be appropriate responses for you as well? What allows you to be at rest (v. 7) even when greatly afflicted (Ph 4:7) and no one will tell you the truth (v. 11)? What might paying your vows to God publicly, in your congregation and even in your city (vv. 18f), involve for you? Could you imagine this psalm being sung either by Peter in prison in Ac 12:1-19 or Paul and Silas in Ac 16:25f? How well does Paul's use of v. 11 in Ro 3:4, fit the context of this psalm? Is his meaning, nevertheless, true? How so?

1. How would you characterize in a word or phrase the theme each of the four six-verse sections (vv. 1-6, 7-12, 13-18, 19-24) of Psalm 139, often considered one of the Old Testament's greatest literary and theological poems? In section 1 how does the psalmist's knowledge of God compare with Yahweh's knowledge of him? How do you feel about living with God knowing you so well? Have you ever felt hemmed in by Yahweh, especially when like Jonah you want to avoid pursuing his mission (vv. 7-12)? Have you ever felt as Job did in Jb 7:17-19? However, what about God's knowledge of you gives you comfort or hope? How might You rephrase the poetic imagery of vv. 7-12 so as to include modern scientific discoveries and understandings? What might such knowledge by Yahweh mean for astronauts, cave explorers, deep sea divers artificial insemination, AI developers and you?
2. In section 3, what further aspects of Yahweh's knowledge are described? Although expressed in poetic language, what can we learn about the ancient Hebrew' understanding of prenatal development? What is taught about God's continuing role in the beginning and ending of life? What implications might this have for Christian thinking about the contemporary life issues of abortion and euthanasia? How does the psalmist respond to God's involvement? How thankful are you about this? Have you ever fallen asleep thinking about Yahweh's wonderful thoughts about you, and awoken later still aware of his knowing presence? If not, why not try this out?
3. What perennial human problem is the focus of the last section of Ps 139? According to the psalmist, what makes people God's enemy? What makes the psalmist respond so violently to God's enemies? How well can you sympathize with him? What does the New Testament say about how the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus himself and his apostles respond to their enemies (Mt 5:43-48; Lk 6:27f; 23:34; Ac 7:60; Ro 5:6, 8)? What hint can you find in the concluding prayer (vv. 23f) both (a) of the psalmist's own vulnerability and (b) of the possible hope of Yahweh's sparing the wicked (Ek 18:27f; 1 Ti 2:4; 2 P 3:9)? In light of the thrust of the whole poem, do you dare to pray this prayer?
4. As you read Ps 91 aloud, can you appreciate why later Jews and early Christians employed it in their exorcisms of evil spirits? Are you confident enough in Yahweh as your refuge (v. 9) to recommend that people that you know should also trust regularly in him? Is that what the devil is doing with Jesus by quoting vv. 11 (Ps 34:7) during Jesus' desert temptations (Mt 4:6; Lk 4:10f)? What was wrong with the devil's use of scripture? How might Jesus' immediate response to the devil from Dt 6:16, be very relevant to anyone who becomes involved in exorcism? How important is it to remember the context of Ps 91:1 and Yahweh's own words in v. 14, whenever you think about depending upon God's faithfulness (v. 4) for deliverance (v. 3), protection (v. 4-7 and rescue (v. 15)? How does this trusting of God fit with the great promises in Pr 3:5f and Ro 8:31-37? How hard is trusting in God's faithfulness for you? Is vv. 11f evidence for personal guardian angels? Do you believe in them (Gn 24:40; Ex 23:20; Mt 4:11; 18:10; Mk 1:13; Lk 23:43; Ac 12:7-10, 15; He 1:14)?
5. Why might Ps 16, a psalm of personal and exclusive trust in the good and sovereign Yahweh (v. 2), help someone deal with anxiety? What are our modern day equivalent of "other gods" (v.4; Mt 6:1f, 19f, 24)? Why does dependence on such gods for security inevitably lead to "sorrows"? How much surer is reliance upon the community of God's people (v. 3)? What are the meanings of the several metaphors applied to the psalmist's past and present experiences of Yahweh's gracious involvement in his life (vv. 5-8)? What equivalent metaphors might both fit your experience, and also assure you of Yahweh's gracious presence? According to vv. 9-11, what feelings flow from this trust and experiences of Yahweh to alleviate human anxiety on the feeling level itself? How might the confidence in the hope expressed here relieve you of fear of the future? How does Jesus' further development of this theme in Mt 6:25-34 and Lk 12:22-34, help you face every-day anxiety? Does Paul's use of v. 11 in Ac 13:35 suggest that this and other Old Testament verses like Ps 23:6 should be interpreted by Christians as referring to life after death? What else could these verses mean? How helpful do you find this psalm?

1. What advice does Ps 11 reject? Why might such advice seem eminently sane when the foundations of civil society have crumbled? Have you heard similar advice today? Where, when and by whom? Why, nevertheless, does the psalmist stand firm and take refuge in Yahweh for suitable vindication for the violence against those who are upright in heart? How is the hope of seeing Yahweh's face compatible with Ex 33:20; Jn 1:18; 5:37; Cl 1:15; 1 Ti 1:17; 6:16 and 1 Jn 4:12?
2. What refrain repeated in Ps 42 and 43, suggests that they were originally one poem? What other phrases and themes support this? What causes the psalmist's state of mind? How does the enemy aggravate it? How can comforting friends inadvertently have the same effect (Jb 6:14-26)? How then can he find help for his despair (Ro 15:4)? How can he actively participate in finding it? Would remembering God's past involvement in his life help, or just deepen his present sense of abandonment (42:9)? Why would he pray for light and truth (43:3), especially in the situation described in 43:1f (Jn 1:4f, 9, 14, 17)? Where does he expect that this will take him again (42:4; 43:4)? How well does the poetic imagery employed here fit your feelings when you feel like the psalmist? Might this united poem help you in times of depression? Does the thought of Yahweh's faithful love/ loving kindness inspire your songs and prayers at night (42:8)?
3. What things make the sufferings of Ps 22 harder for the psalmist to bear? What thoughts occur to him that seem to help him continue to trust in God? When have you ever felt more like a worm than a human being (22:6)? Why? Is he endorsing Bildad's general estimate of humanity (Jb 25:6)? What is his repeated plea while feeling abandoned by his God (vv. 11, 19)? Why would a positive answer to this plea have helped him in his circumstances?
4. What about the second half of Ps 22 is much more positive than its first half? What is his faithful witness to Yahweh (vv. 22-31), even before he experiences Yahweh's help? Should this section be viewed as a separate prayer? What in the first half of the psalm might give rise to the second half's theme(s)? Can you offer a similar witness when feeling pain and abandonment? From where does he claim that his praise of Yahweh comes (v.25)? How can this be (Ro 8:15)? How true is it for you too? To whom does the psalmist witness? Why? Do you feel included in v.22? Why should you (He 2:10-12)?
5. How many of the experiences of Jesus on the cross (Mt 27:33-46; Mk 15:22-37; Lk 23:33-46; Jn 19:17-30) seem to be pictured in Ps 22? How do these parallels help fill out the gospels' portraits of Jesus' intense suffering? Do his last words from the cross suggest that he has this psalm in mind (Mt 27:46; Lk 23:46; Jn 19:30)? What verses from the psalm might have given him hope and strength to endure even God's apparent absence (22:24, 27f, 30f)? What result was Jesus anticipating (Mt 16:25; Mk 8:31; 9:31; Lk 9:22)? Nevertheless, what else was he expecting (Mt 12:39f; 16:4, 21)? According to the psalm what made all Jesus' anguish worthwhile (He 12:2)? Why do you think Jesus quotes Ps 22:1 aloud from the cross? Was he really claiming to be abandoned by his father? Why (Is 53:10-12; 2 Co 5:19, 21)? Why would divine abandonment be particularly devastating to him? Could Jesus be reminding his disciples who were witnessing the crucifixion, to pay attention to the whole psalm, especially its second half (Lk 23:46)? Might Jesus also have had in mind on the cross such other scriptures as Is 52:1-53:12 and Ps 32:8; 36:5; 42:3, 9f and 43:5? How important are scriptural passages to you in your times of suffering or feeling abandonment? Do you agree that this psalm warrants being called "the fifth gospel"?

1. What do you imagine is happening to the psalmist in Ps 25 [an acrostic psalm? From whom? What might fuel their behaviour? When have you ever been in a similar situation? What about Yahweh's character encourages the psalmist to trust him (vv. 6-8)? Why does he pray so frequently for forgiveness (vv. 1, 11, 18)? Especially in this case, what would be the value of being forgiven (vv. 20f)? Besides forgiveness, what does he want God to do (vv. 4-6, 8-10, 12, 14)? What similarities can you find in Jesus' teaching (Mt 5:3-11; 7:12-14; Jn 14:4-6)? In how many ways does he describe his relationship to Yahweh? What evidence do you see that he is one of the humbled? How does he pray about his enemies? What does his final request add to the psalm? How would you express that today?
2. How well can you identify with Ps 55's introductory plea and circumstances? When have you ever felt the desire to escape your present circumstances? Why? How well might the images of vv. 6-8 have expressed your feelings then? What makes his distress most unbearable (vv. 12-14 & 19-21)? Has this ever happened to you? Would you ever feel like praying vv. 9 and 15 against your intimate oppressors? Or would you as a Christian find the requests of vv. 16-18 much more appropriate (Mt 5:43-48; Ro 12:14-21; 2 K 6:22)? How and why might that be better than what as contemplated in vv. 6 and 8 (ro 12:18-21)?
3. What sort of oppression do you think was the present concern of the writer of Ps 64? How does he describe what he suspects is going on? What is the role of the tongue here (Ja 3:5-8; Pr 6:12, 14, 18; 16:27f)? How might you express the same thing? How well can you identify with the psalmist? How does he see God dealing with his oppressors? With what results? Have you ever witnessed this happening? When? Do devious plots only threaten people in leadership positions? How so? Who should we fear? Why?
4. Why does the writer of Ps 70 seem to be in such a rush for God to help him? When might you also be? What does he want God to do to those who delight in afflicting him? Could you pray this more easily than what was prayed in Ps 55:9-11? Why? Why do you think that Ps 70 was circulated both as a separate psalm and as the concluding half of Ps 40? What sections of other psalms might also be helpful to be prayed on their own in some circumstances? Is that why Christian congregations and their choirs often sing only small portions of many of the 150 psalms?
5. In pleading for Yahweh's vindication, could you qualify on the same grounds as are specified in Ps 26:1-8? Would your answer be appropriate for victims of unjust slander? To what principle of holiness does the psalmist adhere? How does this compare (a) to Jesus' view in Jn 17:14-17 and (b) to Ps 25's view? Why do you think these two psalms are placed side by side? How common, however, is Ps 26's conception of holiness in many Christian circles today? How can we transcend that?

1. According to Ps 140:1-3, what in your own words is the psalm's subject? What metaphor in v. 3 have you seen before? Where? What makes the hunting image in vv. 4f so appropriate for such a concern? What modern metaphor might be just as apt and vivid? Could Paul have had the metaphor of v. 7 in mind in Ep 6:13-17? On what relationship to Yahweh does the psalmist base his plea? What exactly is his plea? What does he wish for his enemies? Why might he intensify his prayers against his enemies in vv. 9-11? Could you ever feel like praying for such a fate? Why? Perhaps reflecting on v. 10 and Pr 25:21f, what alternative strategy does Paul recommend in Ro 12:19-21? Why is that better? Could it even prove quite effective (2 K 6:21-23)? Can you think of other examples of its successful application? Based on how the psalm ends, is the psalmist here asking God's to help him take vengeance into his own hands? How hard is it for you to leave all vengeance and vindication to Yahweh's just ways and perfect timing (Dt 32:4, 35)?
2. How does the poetic structure of Ps 94:1-3 emphasize the psalmist's passionate concerns? When have you felt that way? Why? In vv. 4-7, what actions and attitudes crying out for Yahweh's vengeance are still prevalent today? How do we respond to such blatant evils? Why might the wicked think that God doesn't see or care (v. 7)? What reply does vv. 8-11 offer? Is it adequate? How so? In light of the current situation in our world, might even Christians sometimes feel that the wicked might be correct? What aspect of the suffering of God's own people is focused upon in vv. 12-15 (He 12:3-11)? Does this throw more light on God's complex dealings with human wickedness and righteousness? What is the psalmist asking for in v. 16? What sort of help does he need in his confrontation with evildoers (vv. 17-19)? How true is this for you? How accurately might vv. 20f describe the current situation in many nations? Could it apply even to sacred and secular leaders in your society? How might the note that the psalm concludes on in vv. 23f, help you face the evil impact of your environment? Does it imply complete passivity and submission? How so? How does it fit for Christians with Mt 5:44-48 and Ro 12:14-21?
3. What common spiritual issue is presented in Ps 141:1-4? How do gestures help you express the intent of your prayers (v.2; Ps 28:2; 1 K 8:22; 2 Ch 6:12f; Ek 9:5; Lm 2:19; 1 Ti 2:8)? What other actions or gestures do you find helpful? When have you ever been tempted to treat the wicked as they have treated you in word or deed (Pr 20:22; 24:22f; Ro 12:17)? Would you want Yahweh to help you break this very human reciprocal response pattern? Why? In v. 5, what do you think the psalmist is asking for help to do or not to do (1 Th 5:14; 2 Th 3:14f; Ga 6:1f)? How much do you need this help too? Can you trust the same one that the psalmist does, to protect and vindicate you too?
4. What seems to be the author's present plight in Ps 31? What is happening and who are involved? How well could this fit situations in the latter days of David's reign? Why is refuge so important to him? What does he associate with it? What does refuge mean to you? How meaningful is v. 15 to you? What other relevant characteristics of Yahweh are celebrated? What reasons are offered for trusting him (vv. 6-8, 14-16, 19-22)? In your life experience, what reasons have you found for trusting God? Because of this, can you recommend to God's people the same basic faith of vv. 23f? Why do you think Jesus quoted v. 5a at the end of his life (Lk 23:46)? How much of this psalm applied to his life and death? How much of it clearly didn't apply to him anytime? Is it, therefore, appropriate to apply part of a biblical passage to you self, even if not all of it fits?
5. What general lessons have you learned from these psalms of vindication? What new discoveries have you made? How might these help you deal with your feelings in difficult life situations? What metaphors for God have you found most meaningful? Do you now feel freer, like the psalmists, to express your deepest and strongest emotions and passions to God? How does this reflect your relationship to Yahweh and his character? What prayers for justice do you now find more appropriate?

TRAIL VIII -- SECTION 53: Supplication Psalms: Of the Falsely Accused: Psalms 71; 17 & 27

1. How similar is Ps 71 to Ps 31 that we have just studied? Yet what makes Ps 71 different in content, feeling and purpose? How does this warrant biblical scholars' classifying the two psalms quite differently? What exactly is the psalmist's request? Why does he need help this time? Where in David's life might this psalm fit?
2. Even though Ps 71 was written by an older person (vv. 9, 18), how can you appropriate it as your own prayer? Is your relationship to Yahweh similar to that of the psalmist (vv. 5-8)? How have you experienced similar deeds and characteristics of Yahweh? How often do you praise him for them? Do you see the various stages of your life as connected together as he does? How easy has his life been? How much of it does he see connected with Yahweh? How is Yahweh also involved in his continuing hope? How well can you number all the reasons that you have to praise Yahweh (v. 15)? Could v. 20 be taken to indicate a belief in life after death, even a personal bodily resurrection? What makes music such a good vehicle for praise of Yahweh (vv. 22-14)? How true is this for you?
3. What is the basic request of Ps 17:1f? What is the psalmist's confidence of a positive answer based upon, his innocence (vv. 3-5) and/or Yahweh's character (vv. 6f)? Exactly what does he ask for in vv. 8f and 13? How have his enemies treated him (vv. 9-12)? In what sense are they people of the world in contrast to the psalmist himself (vv. 14f)? Which characterizes your relationship to Yahweh? Can you see in v. 15 a beatific vision of Yahweh similar to that of Moses (Ex 24:9-11; 33:11, 18-23; 34:5-8; Nu 12:8; Dt 34:10)? What ultimate experience do you hope will climax your relationship with God (Ps 42:2; Mt 5:8; Jn 17:24; 1 Jn 3:2; 1 Co 13:12; 2 Co 3:18; Rv 22:3-5)? How important is that great hope to you?
4. Why might some see Ps 27 as originally two psalms (vv. 1-6 & vv. 7-14) linked by a common theme? What is that theme? Is it an individual or a communal psalm? What reasons are given for not fearing one's adversaries in vv. 1-3? How meaningful are these metaphors to you? What circumstances made the last metaphor so important for the psalmist? Has this ever been your situation? What for you is Yahweh's house? How might living there change your circumstances (v. 5)? Why else would the psalmist or you want to dwell there (v. 4)? How could that be possible? How important to you is the response of v. 6? How well might this half of the psalm fit with the historical situation of the siege of Jerusalem in Hezekiah's time (Is 36f)?
5. Does the grammatical change from 3rd person talk about Yahweh to 2nd person in speaking to him in the second half of the psalm, suggest a separate psalm or merely an intensifying of the circumstances specified in vv. 21? What change in style of writing and mood accompany this? What experience could have prompted his plea in v. 9, even right after his response to Yahweh's invitation (v. 8)? What does he now fear more than his enemies and war (Ex 33:14-17)? Why does he still trust Yahweh's affirmation in spite of his parents' rejection? Do you, like the psalmist, think of Yahweh as your true parent (Mt 6:8-11; Ro 8:15; Ga 4:6)? What three types of help is he confident of receiving as expressions of God's goodness (vv. 11-13)? What practical expressions of God's goodness do you expect? Why? To whom is his final charge addressed (v. 14)? What difference might it make for you to remember, that in the Bible the words for "hope" and "wait in positive anticipation" are the same?

1. What seems to be the desperate concern of the writer of Ps 28? Which actions, words and attitudes of the wicked does he see as deserving Yahweh's retribution? Why does he cry for mercy? How did God answer? What was his response then? What similar situation have you experienced? Did you feel as the psalmist did in vv. 6f? How does the psalm's focus change in the last two verses? Who is/are Yahweh's anointed here? Is this always the case (Is 45:1)? How important, therefore, is context in interpreting any passage?
2. In your own words, what is the nature of the vicious attack that the psalmist is experiencing in Ps 35 (vv.7, 11f, 15f, 19-21)? Do only leaders experience such malicious persecution? What has your experience been? Where and when have Christians been targets of persecution, and even death? What makes such attacks even harder to bear (vv. 13f, 19)? How does the victim respond (vv. 4-8)? Does his need for divine vindication (vv. 22-24) necessarily include personal justice meted out on a strictly reciprocal basis (Ex 21:23-25; Lv 24:19f; Dt 19:16-19; Mt 7:1)? What dramatic images express the psalmist's intense feelings? Have you ever desired that oppressors get exactly what they gave? What better way does God have (Mt 5:38-48; 7:12; Lk 6:31; 23:34; Ac 7:60; Ro 12:17-21; 1 P 3:8-18)? Would following this way still lead you to praise God (vv. 3:9f; 18, 27)? To what characteristics of Yahweh does the psalmist appeal? What has he also forgotten (Ex 34:6f; Ek 32:11, 18-20)? Is the common human hunger for retributive justice to be fully satisfied in God's final judgement (Mt 16:27; Ac 10:42f; Ro 14:10, 12f; 2 Co 5:10; Rv 20:12f; 22:12)? Or is there still the possibility of God's mercy (Ek 18:23, 32; Rv 20:15; Ja 2:13b, 1 Ti 2:4; 4:10; Tf 2:11; 2 P 3:9)? How do you feel about that?
3. What is clearly the situation in Ps 109:4f and 20? What makes this so unbearable (vv. 2-5, 16,22)? In retaliation, how does the psalmist wish his accuser to be treated (vv. 6-15)? Why (vv 16-20)? What physical catastrophe does he ask for (vv. 8-13)? How many people would that effect as well (vv. 7, 14f)? On what grounds, then, does he appeal to Yahweh's sovereignty ["Lord"] for deliverance (vv. 21-26)? Why does he want his accusers to know that Yahweh has saved him? Why do you think his feelings are mitigated somewhat by vv. 28f (v. 8f)? Would you also want to make Yahweh's deliverance known in public worship? What might this psalm teach about judging someone else's life (v. 31; Mt 7:1-5; Lk 6:36f, 41f)?
4. Why were such imprecatory psalms included in the Bible? What value have you found in them for a Christian (2 Ti 3:16f; Ro 15:4)? What have you learned through them (a) about Yahweh's character, (b) about yourself and (c) about praying honestly to Father Yahweh about the whole range of your feelings? How do you imagine him reacting to such feelings, requests, demands, and view of justice and human rights? What psychological and spiritual value might there be in venting your strong emotions to someone who can handle them appropriately? How might doing so have helped mitigate some of the psalmists' demands against their adversaries (Ps 35:5, 26; 109:8, 28)? How appropriate is it for Christians to recite or sing these psalms, especially as a community of God's people? Why are some of God's people embarrassed by them today?
5. What other questions do such psalms raise for you? Where might you turn to find answers to these questions?

TRAIL VIII -- SECTION 55: Supplication Psalms: For Healing: Psalms 41; 69 & 86

1. What clues indicate that Ps 41 is a prayer of someone who is seriously ill? What does he want Yahweh to do for him? What range of healing does he have in view? What is the basis of his appeal (vv. 1-3)? How do his enemies aggravate the situation (vv. 5-9)? What do you imagine transpired at his sick-bed when his "friends" visited? How well can you identify with him both in his illness and in his aggravation? Can you even identify with his visitors? How might this fit Job's situation? Might Jesus have this psalm in mind in Mk 14:18? Does v. 10 reveal the real reason he wants Yahweh to heal him? Is it right to appeal to Yahweh's graciousness for this purpose? If he needs spiritual healing because of his sins in v. 4, how in v. 12 can he claim that his integrity is grounds for Yahweh to uphold him? How different is one's relationship with Yahweh after one has been forgiven? What do you do with the forgiveness you have received from God (Mt 6:12, 14; 18:23-35)?
2. How well does Ps 41:13 fit with the theme of the psalm? Rather than really being an integral part of the psalm, could this verse function as a doxology concluding the first book of collected psalms within the larger collection of collections? Might this be true of Ps 72:18-20; 89:52; 106:48 and 150:1-6 as well? How important are doxologies (a) to Yahweh (Rv 4:8, 11; etc.), (b) to God's people, (c) to you?
3. According to Ps 69:1-4 and 14f, what is going on? What vivid metaphors are used to describe his foes? What else is happening at the same time (vv. 18-20)? What other worry torments him (v. 5f)? What has caused him to be estranged even from his relatives? What evidence is there of the psalmist's great religious zeal (vv. 9-12)? Why would Jesus' disciples remember v. 9a when they witnessed him cleaning the Jerusalem temple (Jn 2:17)? When else in Jesus ministry might he have been reproached for excessive zeal by those close to him (Mk 3:20-22, 31-35)? Have you ever felt as the psalmist did in v.20? Why is v.21 important enough to be quoted in all of the gospels' passion narratives (Mt 27:34, 48; Mk 15:23; Lk 23:36; Jn 19:28-30)? In your role as a caregiver or comforter, have you ever "piled on" someone whom God may be disciplining? How much does gossip contribute to one's suffering (v. 26)? How much of the depth of his pain revealed in v. 29, speaks out in his wishes (vv. 22-28)? Does such social aggravation deserve such severe punishments? What difference might the divine salvation that he pleads for make for him?
4. What do the two praise sections at the end of Ps 69 (vv. 30-33 and 34-36) have to do (a) with the rest of the psalm, (b) with each other? How do each of the praises fit the theme of the psalm? How does the first praise section echo the theme of Ps 40:6; 50:13f and 51:16f? What does that theme mean to you in your worship? How might the second praise section be particularly relevant to the Hebrew exiles in Babylon and/ or those of them who returned to Judah with Zerubbabel (Ez 7f)? Why might it have been added one of these times?
5. What variety of grounds for appealing to Yahweh for help is given in Ps 86? Do you call upon God because you believe he will answer you? What development of thought about God's uniqueness can you detect in vv. 8-10? What is the connection between the gods (v.8) and the nations? Why is it significant that God made all the nations and that they will come to worship him? But why isn't Yahweh's name ["LORD"] actually mentioned in this section, even though it is said that the nations will glorify it (v. 9)? How much of vv. 11-13 can you personally pray? In what sense have you ever been delivered from death (v. 13)? How does v. 14 clarify the psalmist's circumstances? How central to his appeal for deliverance is his basic faith in the covenant making and keeping Yahweh (vv. 5, 8-10, 15; Ex 34:6)?

1. How wise is the advice of Ps 39:1 for sick people, especially when the wicked are present? What would such silence prevent? Yet why did this strategy backfire? When do the feelings expressed in vv. 4-6 most likely come to mind? What helps when one is gripped with such thoughts of futility? What, according to vv. 7-11, is behind his suffering? Is this true of all physical and mental pain (Jn 9:1-3)? Nevertheless, is it always appropriate to seek Yahweh's forgiveness when experiencing suffering? Why, then, does the psalmist want God to leave him alone, in spite of acknowledging his hope in him (vv. 7, 13)? Have you ever felt that you were a stranger to God? What caused such feelings of estrangement? How much of the psalmists, and your, experience and thinking when suffering is parallel to that of Job (Jb 7:11-21)? Does this help you? How so?
2. What seems to be the situation faced by the psalmist in Ps 62:3f? If there is sickness involved, what sort might it be? Why does he think his only hope of deliverance lies in God alone? What characteristics of God suggest that he alone can save (vv. 11f)? In comparison, how reliable are humans and their words, devices and resources? How does this warrant his recommendation to his own people in v. 8? How is all this compatible with his waiting in silence (vv. 1 & 15)? Would you, like the psalmist in v. 12, link Yahweh's loving kindness [Hebrew = "chesed"] to his recompensing each person according to his/her work? Why (Ex 34:6f; Ep 2:8-10; 2 Co 5:10; Rv 10:11f, 13, 15)? How helpful is this psalm to you?
3. In Ps 88 how serious is the illness deemed to be? How would you describe his state of mind? What impact does this have on his imagery and style? Who does he think caused his illness? Why does he keep on calling out to Yahweh for help? What is the force of his questions to Yahweh in vv. 10-12? How much do these questions reveal about the common Hebrew understanding of the state of the dead at that time (Ps 6:5; 30:9; Is 38:18f)? How differently should Christians think about death (1 Co 15:20-23, 51-57; 2 Co 5: 8; Ph 1:21-34; 2 Ti 1:10; He 2:14f)? Why does he feel rejected and abandoned by God? Would you for the same reasons? Is that sometimes the case when you are very ill? Could this psalm, like Ps 22:1, describe how Jesus felt on the cross (Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34)? Yet, what note of hope can you detect in this psalm? How much more hope does Jesus' last word on the cross offer you (Lk 23:47)?
4. How deeply troubled is the writer of Ps 77? Why does he respond as he does when he remembers God (vv. 3f)? Do you sometimes ask the same kinds of questions that he does in vv. 7-9? How do you think God responds to being questioned this way? Does verbalizing such questions remind you of Yahweh's revealed character and help you remember and meditate on his great historical deliverance of his people (vv. 11-20; Ex 13-15)? What great act of divine exodus do you as a Christian ponder (Lk 9:30f; Ro 5:8)? Does this give you new hope to continue to wait for God's deliverance, even while in the depths of feeling of lamentation? How did nature act sympathetically to God's great historical reconciliation of the world to himself (2 Co 5:19, 21) in Jesus' passion (Mt 27:51-54), just as in the historical exodus of Israel (vv. 16-19)?
5. How well do you think the splicing together of substantial parts of two psalms traditionally linked to David's life — Ps 57:7-11 and 60:5-12 — creates in Ps 108 a new unified individual lament psalm also attributed to David? Have you ever witnessed other poets combining parts of earlier works to create a new one for a new occasion? How in this new song can such deep lament (vv. 6, 10-13) arise out of such vibrant praise (vv. 1-5)? How does recalling the historical fulfillment of God's territorial promises (vv. 7-9), help David raise the question about what to do about Edom's recent rebellion against God's people, Israel (vv 10f)? Similarly, does remembering God's past gracious actions in your life, help you to trust him and to hope for triumph, even if the current crisis seems to be the reversal of an earlier divine victory?

1. On the basis of past experience (Ps 44:1-8), what does the psalmist expect King Yahweh (v.4) to continue to do for his people? Yet what does Yahweh seem to be doing to his people in their present situation (vv. 9-16)? When have you ever felt like reminding God of a similar apparent discontinuity? In this context, would it be correct to interpret v. 12 as reprimanding God for not properly pursuing the profit motive in his dealings with his people and their avenging enemies? What claim is being made in vv. 17-21? When in Israel's or Judah's history might this have been a credible claim (1 K 19:15-19; 37:16-20)? Is Yahweh, then, being accused of being unfair or negligent (vv. 23-26)? How does v.22 intensify the complaint? Yet what is the psalmist's final and fundamental ground of appeal to Yahweh for deliverance (v. 26)? How is that related to God's sovereignty? How is it also your fundamental ground for appealing to God for salvation (Ep 2:8-10)?
2. How well do Is 53:7-10 and Jr 12:2f seem to echo the theme of Ps 44:22? In quoting Ps 44:22 in Ro 8:36, how might Paul be applying the theme in his immediate context and, perhaps, even have the whole psalm in mind throughout Ro 8:17-39? Can you detect a hint of Paul's great assurance of Ro 8:37-39 in Ps 44:26? How does the psalm help you understand some of what is involved in the undeserved suffering of God's people today (1 P 4:16)?
3. How does the repeated refrain (vv. 3, 7, 19) both act as the backbone of Ps 80's communal lament and through its regular and changing details connect with all of the parts of the psalm? What loss does the shepherd metaphor express (vv. 1, 5f)? How does that compare with the use of same metaphor in Ps 23:2f, 5? How does the development of the vine-branch metaphor intensify the feeling (vv. 8-13)? How commonly are these same two metaphors used in both the Old and New Testaments to portray God's relationship to his people? How well do they apply to God's relationship to you and to the church? What more contemporary metaphors would communicate better to non-agrarian Christians? To whom might Christians think that vv. 1, 15 and 17 symbolically refer (Ek 34:1-16; Is 11:1-5)? What can be gleaned about the process of church renewal from vv. 14-19? Based upon the details in the psalm, when in Israel's long history might this psalm have originated?
4. What exactly is the plea of Ps 83? Why are the named peoples God's enemies? What is asked for in vv. 9-15? How is this compatible with the requests of vv. 16-18? Which set of goals would you wish Yahweh to have in dealing with your enemies? Why? How universally do you expect Yahweh's sovereignty and name to be acknowledged (v. 18; Is 45:23f; Ph 2:10f)? How happy will you be with that? Why?
5. Is the communal lament of Ps 90 also a national lament? What relationships between God and humans are discussed? What wise conclusion should be drawn (v. 11)? Nevertheless, what are the psalmist's pleas in vv. 13-17? How are these pleas related to God's covenantal name, Yahweh (vv. 1 & 13), and character (v. 14)? What difference does this make as to how humans are described here (Ps 8:4-8)? Why do you think this psalm was traditionally attributed to Moses (Ps 90: title)? What use does Peter make of v. 4 in 2 P 3:8? How does the different context modify its meaning? How does its meaning apply to you?

1. What is the theme of Ps 10? What is the basic underlying attitude of "the wicked" (vv. 2-4, 6, 11, 13)? What areas of people's lives are impacted by this attitude (vv. 2-7)? Who are targeted most (vv. 2, 8-10)? Why, do you think? How accurately does the psalmist describe the attitudes of many well-known personalities today? What do they say about God? What, therefore, does the psalmist plead with Yahweh to do (vv. 12-15)? How much do you agree with this? Why?
2. In Ps 12, how do Yahweh's words compare with those of the proud wicked people afflicting the godly and faithful? How hard is it sometimes to believe vv. 5 and 7? How much is the graciousness of Yahweh's sovereignty at stake in lament, wisdom level II and vindication psalms that wrestle with the problem of the innocent suffering while the wicked prosper? How much does this problem bother you? How can you answer those who claim to reject the goodness, power or even the existence of Yahweh God because of this problem? Do these psalms at least help you appreciate such peoples' moral concern? Why might this problem prompt a philosopher like Kant to posit the moral necessity of an afterlife supervised by a perfectly just and powerful deity?
3. What is the overall theme of the two-verse-unit acrostic Ps 9? How would you label the various aspects of this common theme as they are presented in the successive four-verse sub-sections (vv. 3-6, 7-10, 13-16, 17-20)? What is the function of the two shorter praise sections (vv. 1f & 11f)? How much of the psalm focuses (a) on Yahweh's past actions and (b) on his present good works? How would it illuminate the meaning of the psalm if the speaker were understood to be the nation's king? Why should the nations (c) acknowledge the great difference between humanity and the gracious and sovereign Yahweh and even (d) obey his commands vv. 7f? What particular foci of God's will are singled out in vv. 9, 12 & 18? How important are these matters in your nation's stated and functional priorities and goals? How could they be expressed in a religiously pluralistic society? How are your nation's trust in God and thankfulness related, and even expressed in its national anthem and motto? How does Yahweh use the causalities of history to discipline nations and individuals (vv. 15f; Ps 15f; He 12:5-11)? Why is an ultimate reckoning for all nations and individuals inevitable sooner or later?
4. What is being personified in Ps 36:1f? What are the consequences for the ungodly (vv. 3f)? How does this fit with Jesus' teaching in Mt 12:33-35; Mk 7:20-23 & Lk 6:43-45? In contrast, what is Yahweh himself like (vv. 5f)? What are the consequences for those who trust in him and his character (vv. 7-9)? Do you too want this experience of Yahweh to continue (v. 10)? How is that possible? Might Jesus have had v. 9a in mind when speaking to the Samaritan woman (in 4:14) and to his fellow Jews (6:35; 7:38f)? What relevance does this have for you? What does v. 11 add? How important is that to bear in mind (Ro 11:20f; 1 Co 10:12; Ga 6:1)? How significant is v. 6b to you (Gn 9:15)?
5. In the context of the whole of Ps 58, who are the "gods" of v. 1? Might Jesus, therefore, have quoted this text just as aptly as Ps 82:6 in the context of his dialogue with the Jews in Jn 10:34? How true are the descriptions of these particular wicked people in vv. 2-5? Why is Yahweh requested to treat them so violently (vv. 6-9)? Should the righteous, therefore, rejoice over such a fate for the wicked? Why? How is Yahweh's own righteousness linked to such wicked people both getting, and also being seen to get their just deserts (Dt 32:35f; Ro 12:19; 13:1-5)? How could their recompense itself be a reward for the righteous (v. 10f), even if they are not directly involved in it (v. 10b)? Do you always depend upon God for vindication? Are you willing to wait for God's final assay to balance his moral books (2 Co 5:10; Rv 20:12f)? Why (Rv. 20:12, 15)?

1. How illuminating is it for you to read Ps 2 aloud as a drama in four acts of three verses each: (a) vv. 1-3 as set in the courts of Israel's vassal kingdoms [Edom, Moab, Ammon, etc.], (b) vv. 4-6 as set in Yahweh's heavenly court, (c) vv. 7-9 as set in Israel's court in Jerusalem/ Zion, and (d) vv. 10-12 as a prophetic epilogue addressed to all human rulers? What attitudes and actions of the sovereign/ lord Yahweh respond to the vassal nations' rebellious schemes? What might it mean for rulers of all types and at all levels of society to heed the advice of the epilogue?
2. Is Ps 2 only an expansion of Yahweh's covenant with David and his royal house in 2 S 7:8-16 (Ps 89:26f)? What can be learned from Ps 2 at three levels: (a) about the reigns of David and Solomon over their vassal states, (b) about great David's greater son, Jesus of Nazareth, as Yahweh's Anointed! Messiah/ Christ (i) at his baptism (Mt 3:17; Mk 1:11; Lk 3:22; Jn 1:29-34; Ac 13:22f; He 1:5; 2 P 1:17), (ii) at his transfiguration (Mt 17:5; Mk 9:7; Lk 9:35; Ac 13:23; He 1:5), and (iii) at his ascension (He 5:5; 7:28), and (c) about the relationship of the All-sovereign Yahweh and his Messiah to all human rulers (Ro 13:1-7; 1 P 2:13-15; 1 Co 15:27f, Ph 2:9f; Rv 5:13; 7:12; 15:3f)? With whom do Rv 1:6; 2:26f; 19:15 20:4, 6 suggest that the Messiah shares his earthly rule? How significant is that to you? Why?
3. How important, especially today, is autonomy/ self-determination/ freedom to human beings, both as nations/ peoples and as individuals? What grounds can be adduced for this highly vaunted human right? If it is innate/ inborn or God-given, is it really free from God himself and his values and purposes for humanity and his creation (Mt 6:10)? How is autonomy like and not like sovereignty, authority and rights? Should it ever be confused with power, strength or might, as "may" is too often confused with "can"? Can sovereignty ever really wholly be given away, even by Yahweh, the All-sovereign? Is a degree of sovereignty lost if it is shared or delegated, as seems to be the case with power? Does this psalm ground Yahweh's great sovereignty in his great power? Which other biblical passage do so? What does this mean to you?
4. To what circumstance in an anointed king's life does Ps 20 seem to apply? How is the confidence of the monarch and his people linked to their God as King Yahweh? How does this compare to the relationship of pagan rulers and their peoples to their gods? How relevant is this to Christians and Christian congregations today? What about those who claim to be living in a "Christian country"?
5. How closely is Ps 21 linked to Ps 20's concern and circumstances for the king and his people? What words, phrases and themes do they have in common? Who is addressed (a) in vv. 1-6, (b) in vv. 7-12 and (c) in v. 13? What does Yahweh give to his king? How true is this of all rulers (Ro 13:1)? What characteristics of God are most important in dealing with his king? How are these relevant to your nation's rulers? How well do they know this? How do they also apply to you and to your fellow Christians? How are the king's and the nation's enemies viewed in relation to Yahweh? Is this true of a Christian's enemies too? How might Ps 21 apply to Yahweh's Messiah?

1. What indicates that Ps 45 was written for a royal wedding? How appropriate, then, is the later superscription's title and musical specifications? If the king is being addressed in vv. 1-9 & 16f, what do you make of the special address of v. 6? Is Israel's king here identified with Israel's God, Yahweh, as would probably have been the case in some of the other Ancient Near Eastern societies? How does v. 7 put this appellation into perspective? Does the clarification of the Israelite king's unique role in 1 Ch 29:22-25, justify translating v. 6a dynamically as "Your divine throne is everlasting" (Tanack: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1985)? Does this apply to all thrones (Ro 13:1-7; 1 P 2:13-15), or is it limited only to rulers fitting the criteria of vv.4a & 7? Even if it is universal, is the concept of "the divine right of kings" claimed by many monarchs over the centuries, compatible with these verses? How might all this apply to contemporary constitutional monarchs or to senior executives of democratic republics?
2. Who is addressed in Ps 45:10-15? How wise is the counsel in v. 10f? How does it fit with the picture given in Gn 2:24f? What implications does this scripture have for all marriages, Christian and non-Christian? How does the groom treat the royal women and his bride (v. 9)? What else can you learn about their relationship and the queen's influence in vv. 11-15? How does this accord with the fact that in the Davidic dynasty of the kingdom of Judah the queen who becomes the mother of the new king is always named? Could you view, as many Christians have through the ages, this royal wedding psalm as an allegory of the relationship between the ascended and glorified messiah and his bride, the church (Ep 5:22-33)? What spiritual analogies for your Christian life can you find in the bride's description, even in her rich apparel? What new meaning might such an analogy give to the advice of vv. 10f for you and other Christians? To whom are the promises of vv. 16f given? In what sense are we Christians all royalty, the king's daughters and sons (1 Jn 3:2)?
3. What clues are there as to what the royal psalm 61 is about? Who do you think the "I" and "me" might be? In vv. 1-4, what suggests his age, status and possible identity? What is familiar about his metaphors? What clue does the word "tent" in v. 4 give as to the historical time frame of the psalm? What has been the author's past experience of Yahweh? What does he pray for in the future? What might he mean by his vows (v. 5)? Is the king referred to in vv. 6f the author, or someone else, or even both? How well might this poem fit into the critical and turbulent period just prior to David's death (1 K 1)? Could v. 5 then refer to Solomon (1 K 1:48) and vv. 6ff be David's prayer for him? Might the vows of v. 5 indicate David's charge to Solomon (1 K 2:1-4) to fulfill the conditions necessary for maintaining the blessings of the Davidic covenant relationship with Yahweh (2 S 7:12-16; Ex 34:6f)? What other specific charges did David give to Solomon (1 K 2:5f and 8f)? What was the important result of them being properly fulfilled (1 K 2:28-34; 41-46; Ps 61:6)?
4. What application might Ps 61 have for your life? When have you felt as the psalmist did in v. 2a? What would the metaphor of v. 2b mean to you then? When has your life been involved in a crucial transition? How important was it then to trust in the covenant making and keeping God to help you continue being faithful to the vows you have made to him in order that you may fulfill the conditions he has set for his continued blessing (2 Ch 7:14)? What encouragement does the working out of this psalm's prayer in David's and Solomon's history give you? However, what warning is given by the consequences of the bad policy decision made by Solomon's son Rehoboam (1 K 12)? How might this psalm also apply to great king David's greater royal son, Jesus, God's messiah (Jn 12:27f; Mt 28:37-44; Mk 14:33-41; Lk 22:40-45; 23:46)?
5. Why do you think readers are left to the very end of Ps 63 to discover that it too is a royal psalm? Can you identify with the writer's feelings, even if you are not a ruler? How well does the desert metaphor of v. 1 apply to you sometimes? How human, then, should you remember that rulers also are? Do you find that Christian sanctuaries help you sense God's power and glory (v. 2)? Is Yahweh's loving kindness [Hebrew – "chesed"] really better than life and satisfying to you (vv. 3-5)? Why? What aspects of your own past or present experience of Yahweh do you meditate upon before you fall asleep at night (v. 6f)? Do you express this to him in prayer then? How apt for you are the relational metaphors of vv. 7f? What sort of mortal threat does the king have in mind in the last section of the psalm? Could a similar threat and trust apply to Jesus and God's kingly Messiah (Lk 23:1-5, 13, 46; He 12:2; Ph 2:8-10)?

1. What indicates that Ps 101 is also a royal psalm? Who then is the 1st person speaker? Was Martin Luther correct in calling this psalm "David's mirror of a messiah"? In light of Yahweh's characteristics celebrated in v. 1, what types of behaviour will God approve of and disapprove of: (a) in himself, (b) in his servants/ ministers, and (c) in his people? How fitting are these criteria for evaluating all leaders, even today (Ro 13:1-7; 1 Ti 2:1; 1 P 2:13-15)? Do you pray regularly that your civic leaders would live up to this standard? Why should the same norm apply to the sacred leaders of God's own people? How does it even apply to your ministry in God's economy?
2. In Ps 144:1-4, why is the king amazed that Yahweh should be such a great support for a mere human, even for a king? What images are employed in vv. 5-7 to express the great difference between God and human beings? What particular divine support does the king think he is in most need of right at the moment (vv. 7f & 11)? What is he well aware of as depending on Yahweh's favour (vv. 12-14)? How does the "our" of vv. 12-15 fit with the "I" and "me" of the new song (vv. 9-11)? How could this psalm be adapted for use by a Christian ruler today? Are there such rulers? How could it apply in principle to other levels of Christian leaders? What parts of the psalm could apply even to non-Christian rulers and leaders (Ro 13:1-7)? How could its prayer for bounty (vv. 12-15) relate to non-leaders, to single people, or to those who are childless?
3. How similar is Ps 144:3 to Ps 8:4? Is the "what" here a true question of an exclamation? How similar are the points being made in these two very different contexts? How does the "what" function in Jb 7:16-19 and in Jb 15:12-16? How does the change of speakers in the two Job passages make a difference in the points being made? Does the quotation of Ps 8:4f in He 2:5-9 change the point being made? Why might so many commentators on Hebrews miss the positive human designation? Does the application to Jesus preempt the original application to humanity? How so?
4. What does the 1st half of Ps 110 understand to be the grounds for the king of Israel's success as a ruler within and beyond his own people? Who was the historical Melchizedek of v. 4 (Gn 14:18-24)? How does Melchizedek help connect the priesthood of the 2nd half of the psalm to the kingship of the 1st half? Is it the same person at Yahweh's right hand in v. 1 & v.5? Who, then, is the "he" of vv. 5-7? Does your answers here only depend upon the interpretive boost that some translations give by employing capitalized and antiquated 2nd person pronouns "Thee", "Thou" and "Thy" to refer to God, even when the Hebrew original uses the singular uncapitalized "you" and "your" throughout this psalm?
5. Why do you think that some Jewish groups in Jesus' day viewed Melchizedek as a model for the coming messiah? Knowing this, how does Jesus himself employ Ps 110:1 on two strategic occasions during his last week in Jerusalem (Mt 22:43-46; 26:63-66; Mk 12:35-37; 14:61-64; Lk 20:41-45; 22:67-71)? How much do you think Jesus' interpretation of this psalm became normative for the earliest church's many other New Testament references to the psalm (Mk 16:19; Ac 2:34f; 1 Co 15:25-27; Ep 1:20; Cl 3:1; He 1:3, 13; 5:5f, 10; 6:20; 7:1-28; 8:1; 10:12f; 12:2)? When might Jesus have elaborated his messianic interpretation of this psalm and other Old Testament scriptures for his disciples (Lk 24:27, 32, 44-48; Ac 1:3)? How important do you think the psalms are as background for New Testament thinking? Should they be taken as major sources of Christian theology, as in they were by the Protestant reformers? How important are they for forming your view of Yahweh? How so?

TRAIL VIII -- SECTION 62: Psalms of Yahweh's Enthronement: Psalms 93; 97; 98; 99 & 149.

1. In Ps 91 what characteristic of Yahweh is closely associated with his reign? Is it, however, said to be the source of his sovereignty? What is the distinction between majesty and strength/ power? What are the practical ramifications of his reign for (a) his world, (b) his throne, (c) his statutes/ decrees and (d) his house? What has all this to do with Yahweh being eternal? What is the point of the comparison between Yahweh's majesty and the ocean's floods? How easily could this psalm be made into a popular song?
2. What aspect of Yahweh's sovereignty does Ps 97 celebrate? Why are violent thunderstorms such a powerful metaphor for this aspect of God's majesty in the land of Israel? What natural events in other lands could be just as awesome? Why should all gods and their worshipers bow down before Yahweh (vv. 7,9)? Who are these gods? How does Yahweh compare to them (Ps 95:31; 96:41; 135:5-7, 15-17)? For those who love the exalted Yahweh, what behaviours and characteristics are appropriate, and, therefore, what benefits flow to them (vv. 10-12)? How much does God's sovereignty and reign/ kingdom mean to you (Mt 6:10; Lk 11:2)? Can you picture this psalm being expressed in song and dance (2 S 6:14f)? How might you choreograph it?
3. What historical experiences of salvation may have given rise to Ps 98:1's call for a new song to Yahweh? What specific characteristics of Yahweh can you sense a new appreciation of in this psalm (Ex 34:6)? When have you also felt this way? Was it like falling in love, when you want the whole world to join in your joy? What is so different about God's judgement, that it makes you want to sing and have the whole world sing with you (vv. 7-9)? Is this perhaps what Paul had in mind in Ep 5:19f? How is joy expressed in your congregation's worship? How often? Would visitors sense it and get caught up in it? Might a suitable organ postlude facilitate this?
4. Looking at the repeated refrain "Holy is He" (vv. 3b, 5b, 9b), what aspect of Yahweh's holiness does Ps 99 explore? Where is Yahweh enthroned in vv. 1-3? What does that imply? What vital dimension is described in v. 4? With what appropriate response? How did the great leaders of God's people in the past respond to Yahweh? With what results, even when God's people were not perfect? What connections can you see between Yahweh's sovereignty, holiness, justice, forgiveness and discipline? Are all of these still grounds for his people's worship today? How is God's holiness celebrated in your congregation?
5. Who do the "godly ones" of Ps 149:1, 5 & 9 seem to be? What relationship with Yahweh should they be celebrating in their new song? What emotions should permeate their praise? How and where should they express such praise? What could Christian congregations today learn from this? How important and surprising are the two reasons given for this praise in v. 4? How meaningful are they to you personally? In light of this, what do you make of the second half of the psalm? How are God's godly ones to share in Yahweh's sovereign and just judgement of the nations (Dn 7:18, 22, 27)? How is this theme developed in the New Testament (Mt 19:28; Lk 22:30; 1 Co 6:2f; Rv 5:10; 20:4, 6; 22:5)? Why is it so difficult for Christians today to appreciate this as part of their future glory?

1. How does Ps 96 compare with the great celebratory psalm at David's rehousing of the ark of Yahweh's covenant in Jerusalem (1 Ch 16:23-33)? How might the differences here reflect adjustments to the psalm before it was included for later uses in the 4th collection of Israel's psalms? How do the additions make this a suitable psalm to celebrate Yahweh's enthronement/ reign/ sovereignty? What important characteristics of Yahweh's rule are commemorated? How important are they to Christians too? Do you welcome his coming to judge just as much as the creation is said to in vv. 11-13? Is this a reference to God's final judgement all humanity (Mt 16:27; 25:31-46; Ro 2:5-8; 2 Co 5:10; Rv 20:11-13)? Do you welcome the coming of Yahweh's messiah (Ti 2:13; Rv 22:12, 17,20)? Why?
2. What are the manifold expressions of Yahweh's great power according to Ps 68? Who and what all are involved in each one? In what ways? How did or should each one respond? Why? How evident are these manifestations Yahweh's power in your world today? How do people respond to his power now? How is God's power connected to some of his other characteristics in this psalm? Yet, is his great might ever seen as their basis? Why? How important is it to you that it is Yahweh who has such characteristics who is so mighty? Why do you think the French Calvinist Huguenot Christians, who saw themselves as chosen to be a very significant part of God's people, employed this psalm as their battle hymn in the prolonged religious wars of 16th and 17th century Europe? How many other nations have invoked God in their militaristic anthems? In doing so, would they really have been listening to v. 30? How so?
3. How might paying close attention to the theology of these seven psalms celebrating Yahweh's enthronement have helped Jesus' contemporaries understand one of the main themes of Jesus' preaching and teaching, the kingdom of God? How might the same theology help your understanding of this theme? How is the same divine kingdom theme developed when it is treated explicitly by Jesus' apostles, not only among Jews (Ac 8:12; 19:8; 28:23; 2 Ti 4:1, 18; He 1:8; 12:28; Ja 2:5) as might be expected, but also among the gentiles (Ac 14:22; 20:25; Ro 14:17; 1 Co 4:20; 6:9f; 15:24, 50; Ga 5:21; Ep 5:5; Cl 1:13; 1 Th 2:12; 2 Th 1:5; 2 P 1:11; Rv 1:9; 12:10)? How else was God's reign presented by the apostles to the gentiles who were unfamiliar with the Old Testament (2 Co 6:18; Rv 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22) ? How important is the sovereignty of Yahweh and his messiah to you and your fellow Christians today?
4. If you were trying to spell out how the Old Testament's revelation of Yahweh fits harmoniously with the New Testament's revelation of God, as Jesus suggests in Mt 13:52, what would you list as the major Old Testament theological themes that underlie and permeate the teachings of Jesus and his apostles? What Old Testament themes seem to need further development in the New Testament? Does the great theme of Yahweh's sovereignty need that? Does the idea of God's kingdom? What basic New Testament themes seem to you to be missing in the Old Testament?
5. As we now wind up our study of the Old Testament, what do you recollect to be: (a) an outline of the history of God's people thus far, (b) the major personages in each period of that history, (c) the general sections of the Bible that treat each of those historical periods, (d) the presentation of Yahweh's character throughout, and (e) the promises of more self-revelation of Yahweh yet to come? How much more significant might the Old Testament be to you now that you have completed this semi-inductive study of it? What more would you like to discover in it some day? What resources might help you do that? How much are you looking forward to studying the New Testament? Why?