

LESSON 12

PSALMS 85—87

PSALM 85: A REVIVAL SUPPLICATION

The sons of Korah may have written or acquired this psalm sometime during or after the return of the exiles from the Babylonian captivity. While facts and details are lacking concerning the time of writing, it appears to fit either the time of Zerubbabel or that of Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra 9; 10; Neh. 2—4).

The people about whom the psalm was written had experienced God's great grace in the past and were seeking that grace again. The outpouring of God's lovingkindness alluded to must have been the return from captivity, and the further need for it may have stemmed from Israel's failure to carry out God's will by restoring the religious and national life God had planned for them.

The psalm is a national lament and illustrates the timeless relationship that we have with God. It focuses upon our continual walk with the eternal God.

1. Why does the writer begin with examples of God's mercy?
2. What does the writer think will happen when God revives the people to follow Him?
3. Why does the psalmist fear for his people's future?

PSALM 86: THE GOD TO WHOM WE PRAY

Underlying this psalm are three traits of God—His concern for His people, His power, and His faithfulness. The psalm is a prayer; but more importantly, it is an expression of faith in God.

In order for the writer to be devoted to prayer and confident in his praying to God, he has to believe and cherish the truth about the nature of God in his heart. If he is not confident that God is interested in his prayers and has the ability to answer his prayers, and if he does not trust in God's faithfulness to keep His promises, he could not pray the way he does. Furthermore, if he prays without

confidence in God, his prayers will be nothing more than an empty ritual.

This prayer seems to be a mosaic of fragments from other psalms and Scriptures. It either quotes or alludes to about twenty other psalms. Some thoughts have been borrowed from Exodus, Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. The quotations from later prophets must indicate that the psalm is a prayer of David only in that it grew out of Davidic passages, and its parts were quoted by later writers.

The possibility that much of the prayer could have been borrowed illustrates the lesson that the value of a prayer does not necessarily consist in originality, provided it is a genuine expression of the heart. (See comments on Ps. 53 and 70.)

The general nature of the author's distress in this psalm makes the message applicable to anyone in trouble.

4. What does the speaker ask of God?
5. How does the psalmist express his faith?
6. How does he show his insistence?
7. Why does the writer say he calls out to God (v. 7)?

PSALM 87: THE PLACE OF GOD'S PRESENCE

Exalting Jerusalem as the dwelling place of God, this psalm poetically pictures the city of Zion as the greatest of all cities, a city that offers unsurpassed privileges to its citizens. With beautiful poetic language, the writer says that divine glory falls upon those who are born within it and surrounds those who live between its walls. The practical truth being expressed is that the person who dwells in the city of God's presence lives in the sphere of His grace and greatness.

As a psalm that exults in Zion's glory, it reminds the reader that true significance is not found in physical strength and beauty, educated intelligence, or material fortunes. Those who find their value in these fleeting treasures will sink into discouragement when their health fails, their good looks disappear, their minds fade, or their money passes to someone else. Real worth is found in God alone—our love for Him and His love for us.

The reference to Babylon in verse 4 may indicate that this empire has already become a world power. Perhaps the psalm was written shortly before or during the exile. If it was written during the exile, it is a reflection upon the glory and privilege that once was and is being sung about and fondly remembered.

As a psalm of praise, these seven verses extol the virtue of being where God is. For those of us who live in the Christian Age, we are reminded of the blessed state of abiding in Christ, where we receive and live in the fullness of God (Eph. 1:22, 23).

The psalm is divided into two major divisions of three verses each that are separated by the word "Selah." Verse 7 functions as the concluding line which expresses in one sweeping sentence that Zion is the source of all joys.

8. How does this writer feel about being a child of God?
9. What does it mean for this psalmist to be from Zion?
10. Can we relate to this psalm today?
11. How should we approach God during our times of trouble?