

such connections. In the Bible, themes are all important, and the thematic material clearly points to the work of the Messiah. Thank God for the countless thousands of faithful Israelites who maintained their beliefs and trust in God at times of great heartache and apparent failure within Israelite society and the nation. They did not see the results of their faith, but they were vindicated!

#### Ideas for discipleship programme

- *In what circumstances do people tend to feel that God has abandoned them? How can the church minister to people who are so oppressed and, or, depressed?*
- *Pray for people who have known God's love, and yet do not find it possible to remain confident in His provision because of the suffering they endure. Pray that they will be blessed.*

## Final Prayer

Almighty Father, give us humility in the face of the great truths of the Gospel. May we handle them with dignity and care, and always remember that we are dependent upon You for everything, including our wisdom and understanding. Guide us in all truth, Almighty Father; AMEN

As for me, I trust in your faithful love; and my heart rejoices in your salvation.

## Prayer

Lord Jesus, we can barely understand what it must have been like to come into Jerusalem knowing what lay ahead of you. Nevertheless, we know from Your Word that You faced the future with great courage, faith, determination and love. We ask You to help us do the same, so that we might be victorious over the enemy as You were. Thank You Lord Jesus: AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Charity

*Pray for the many Christian charities that exist that have become less 'Christian' and more 'secular' over the years. Pray that our Christian heritage is not lost through compromise.*

### On-going prayers

- *Pray for people who fear for their jobs at the present time*
- *Pray for leaders of nations who must deal with nuclear weapons*
- *Give thanks for what Jesus did for us in the days before He died*

## Meditation

Bring me safely to Your place of rest, O Lord;  
Forgive my wayward spirit for all its wandering:

I do know not where to go and may need to ask the way;  
I turn away from the genuine, gracious help you offer;  
I keep on going when I am too tired and need to stop;  
I become exhausted by my efforts, but strive on further;  
I take advice from others yet ignore Your true guidance;  
I think my own pathway will give me rest, but it does not;  
I tire of all the many burdens I carry that slow me down;  
I fail to release myself to You that I may be released.

Give me simple obedience, my Lord and my God;  
So that by walking in Your way I may find Your rest.

## Bible Study - Psalm 13

To the worship leader. A Psalm of David.

- <sup>1</sup> *How long will you forget me Lord?  
Forever?  
How long will you hide yourself  
from me?*
- <sup>2</sup> *How long must my soul be in  
anguish,  
with sorrow in my heart all day  
long?*

*How long shall my enemy get the  
better of me?*

- <sup>3</sup> *Consider me and answer me, O Lord  
my God!  
Give light to my eyes, or I will  
sleep in death,*
- <sup>4</sup> *and my enemy will say, 'I have  
beaten him'.  
They will rejoice at my downfall!*

<sup>5</sup> *As for me, I trust in your faithful love;  
and my heart rejoices in your salvation.*

<sup>6</sup> *I will sing to the Lord,  
for He has dealt well with me.*

## Review

This is a brief psalm that speaks to us of the profoundly human experience of waiting on God for help in the midst of trial or distress. The psalm begins with two verses that describe the anguish of waiting (13:1,2), and then continues with two verses that ask for help (13:3,4). The psalm concludes with two further verses that express classic praise to God for His salvation (13:5,6). All in all, it is a highly compact poem with a straightforward theme.

### ***Psalm 13, a prayer for salvation***

In our recent studies, we have discovered that psalms written about incidents in David's life can help us understand something about Jesus' walk to Jerusalem to fulfil His calling as the Messiah. This is not surprising because His own people called Jesus the 'Son of David', and there are many links in the Old Testament between David and the 'Messiah'. Today, however, we will not follow this method of interpretation. The story of Easter is the story of Jesus' submission to the task given Him by the Father to bring salvation to the world and answer the prayers of God's faithful people who await deliverance. We will therefore use this psalm to reflect on the world's need for salvation at God's hand, and the amazing fact that by His death and resurrection, Jesus has answered this prayer completely.

### ***The anguished call for help (13:1,2)***

Psalm 13 begins with a powerful opening that is quite unlike most psalms. It launches immediately into its theme with no introduction or call upon the Lord to hear the prayer; 'How long will you forget me O Lord? Forever?' (13:1). The language is that of someone calling upon the Lord for help, and books on the psalms suggest that such an individual might be asking for help whilst suffering chronic pain, or enduring some other personal situation that seems irresolvable and unrelenting. This is certainly one good way of reading the psalm. Today, however, we will take these words as the cry of humanity as a whole, calling out to God who appears hidden to people on earth because of sin and wickedness in the world. People experience separation from God and cannot find Him (13:1); and the sorrow and anguish (13:2) of the human condition is aptly expressed by what the writer of the psalm says in the final plea; 'how long will my enemy get the better of me?' (13:2).

The message of Easter addresses this situation exactly. According to Genesis 3 the human condition is precisely that of separation from God because of sin. Moreover, the Lord God Himself has been working since the earliest of days after the 'Fall' to overcome sin and restore humanity and all Creation (Gen 3:13f.). The history of the Old Testament is a long and weary cry of 'How long?' asking about when this will happen! The Israelite people, who had been blessed with a special relationship with God, nevertheless struggled with their own failings. Their story is one of great sorrow due to these failings, and the people frequently found themselves overcome by enemies (read the prophets, such as Isaiah 7 to 14, for example). When would it ever end?

### ***The appeal for victory (13:3,4)***

Logically, the only two possible results from the story of the Old Testament people of God were that either God would answer the people's prayers for salvation, or the 'enemy' would win. In the two or three hundred years before the time of Christ, when few contributions were made to the text of the Old Testament as we know it today, people began to realise that the enemy of God could be understood as being like a 'person', named 'Satan', or

more generally, the devil. He is barely mentioned in the Old Testament, but by the time of Jesus' life, people had a well developed understanding of the nature of the works of Satan through demons and heavenly 'powers' (as when Jesus 'casts out demons', for example). In a quite brilliant way, the central verses of psalm 13 reflect the essential need for God to work in the world to defeat this evil and restore Creation. People need God's eternal answer to evil in the world, for unless He brings 'light to (our) eyes' (13:3), then the 'enemy' will have the victory (13:4) and rejoice in defeating God's people! Underneath the tone of psalm 13, especially in the first four verses, there is a powerful unspoken assumption. It is like an instinctive human response to the state of the world observed by all, and it says this; 'what we experience now surely cannot be God's purpose for His Creation!'

### ***Trusting in the Lord's salvation (13:5,6)***

This assumption however, is like the stirring of faith within the human heart. In Old Testament times, most Jewish people believed passionately that God would rectify the world. They read the words of ancient prophets and concluded that God would send His 'Messiah' ('Anointed One'), and when they saw Jesus doing amazing things in their midst they began to hope that God was at last beginning to act! For them, this was the proper conclusion of God's ancient Covenant, expressed in His 'faithful love' (13:5 - a phrase found throughout the Old Testament). God's 'salvation' was at hand!

We do not know how many Jewish people held on to their faith in the Messiah when they saw the man they so dearly believed to be 'the One' taken into custody in Jerusalem, hauled before the Jewish Sanhedrin and before the Roman governor Pilate, and then crucified on a Cross. For a fraction of time within the history of the world that must have seemed like an eternity, the disciples and others experienced a test of faith that no other people have ever faced. For them, the hope of the world was killed, and they did not know what would come next, even though Jesus had told them He would be raised! However, resurrection was only a theory before Jesus was Himself raised from the dead, and God's faithful love was proved triumphant (13:5)! We have faith now in a fact, but the disciples needed to have faith simply in what Jesus said. How tough those days must have been! Yet in a moment of time almost too brief to comprehend, the world was indeed turned upside down, because for those who place their trust in Jesus, death is now defeated and Satan's power is now overcome and destroyed! From the moment of Christ's resurrection until now, all who have faith in Him can sing 'He has dealt well with me!' (13:6) Alleluia!

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss in your group those occasions you know about when it has seemed that God's presence has been hidden. What does this mean?
2. What does the phrase 'give light to my eyes' in verse 3 mean to you, and how does it help us understand the psalm?
3. When the psalm says 'my heart rejoices in Your salvation', how does your own heart rejoice in God's salvation?

## Discipleship

### **Personal comment:**

*When I first studied this psalm, I felt it was a rather dour piece of poetry that appeared to focus on a rather defeatist attitude towards God actually doing anything in the world. IN the light of my later study, I discovered that the whole poem came alive when I saw it as a classic statement describing Israel's cry for the Messiah! Of course, the Messiah is not mentioned here, but we do not need to be so pedantic as to require certain words to make*