

The Story of Psalm 116

We do not know who wrote Psalm 116. We call him "the *psalmist". But we do know that God saved him from death. Maybe he was very ill, and in much pain, (verse 10). Maybe his enemies were trying to kill him, and this gave him pain in his mind. We call this "worry" or "grief". Perhaps he was in prison, waiting for execution. Execution is when the prison authorities kill people. They kill them because they have done something very bad. But the *psalmist prayed to God ... and the *LORD saved him. *LORD is a special name for God that God's people use. It is the *covenant name. A *covenant is when two people (or groups of people) agree. God agreed to love and give help to his people; his people agreed to love and obey God.

Some old Bibles make Psalm 116 into 2 psalms: verses 1-9 is the first, verses 10-18 the second. The old Greek Bible does this. But most Bible students think that Psalm 116 is just one psalm, all by the same *psalmist.

We do not know when the *psalmist wrote Psalm 116. It is the fourth of the 6 Egyptian Hallel's. The Hallel's are Psalms 113-118. They are called "Egyptian" because they remember the story of God saving his people from Egypt. The story is in the Bible Book of Exodus. But this psalm is about one man's trouble, not the whole country. It is a "hallel" because the word "*hallelujah" is in verse 19.

What Psalm 116 means

Verses 1-4 tell us that the *psalmist nearly died ... but God saved him. In verse 1, the Hebrew Bible says, "he hears my voice and my cries". This tells us that the *psalmist cried aloud when he prayed. And in verse 2, the Hebrew Bible says, "God turns his ear to me". This is a Hebrew way to say, "God listens to me". Hebrew is the language that the *psalmist spoke. *Sheol is in verse 3. *Jews believed that they went to *Sheol when they died. But the *psalmist did not want to go to *Sheol. He did not want to die. So he prayed, "*LORD, please save me!" (verse 4). "Save" here means "save me from death". It is not the same "save" as Christians now use. Christians mean "save me from hell when I die". Hell is a bad place where God sends bad people.

Verses 5-7 tell us about God. He loves people, and he is kind and good to them, (verse 5). He gives them help when they need it, (verse 6). "He saved me" here means "saved from dying", not "saved from hell". The words "me" in verses 4 and 8, and "myself" in verse 7, are all the same in Hebrew. It is the Hebrew word "nafeshi". It means "the part of me that stays alive when my body dies". Some people translate it "my soul". So another translation of the beginning of verse 7 is "My soul, go back to your rest". Before God saved him, the *psalmist could not rest, or sleep at night. Now he can ... he is safe!

We can also translate the end of verse 4 as "*LORD, save my soul".

Verses 8-11 tell us more about what God did. Again, we can translate the beginning of verse 8 as "Yes, you saved my soul from death". "*LORD" is not in the Hebrew Bible. It is there to give us help to understand the verse. "Serve" in verse 9 means "do what God tells me to do". The *psalmist can now be God's servant on earth, not in *Sheol. Again, *Sheol is not in the Hebrew Bible. It gives us help to remember what God saved the *psalmist from. But verses 10-11 tell us about the *psalmist. God saved him when he was in much pain. God saved him when he thought that nobody told him what was true. This made him very sad. But that was when God saved him!

Verses 12-18 tell us what the *psalmist promises to do. He asks what he can give (or pay) to God, (verse 12). His answer is in verses 13-18. He will offer a cup of wine to the *LORD, (verse 13). He will say "thanks" to the *LORD in front of all the people, (verse

14). He will do this in the courts of the house of the *LORD in Jerusalem, (verse 18). What does all this mean?

- the cup of wine. We can translate this "cup of *safety". *Safety means being in a safe place. This cup of *safety was part of the *Jewish Passover Dinner. The Passover was when they remembered that God saved them from Egypt. They drank several cups of wine at this special dinner, or *feast. Wine is a drink with alcohol in it. The cup of *safety was the fourth cup of wine at the Passover Dinner.

- the house of the *LORD. This was the *temple in Jerusalem. Only men from the tribe (or family) of Levi could go into the *temple. Everyone else stayed in one of the yards (or courts) outside. There everybody would hear him say "thanks!" to the *LORD.

Something to do

1. Ask God to show you what to do. Then do it to show God that you love him.
2. Read Psalm 18, where David tells God that he loves God. He loves him because God saved him.

Word List

courts ~ places outside the *temple.

covenant ~ two people have agreed what each should do (here, God and his people). Look in Psalm 120 about the covenant.

feast ~ a meal with much to eat and drink; a party.

grapes ~ the fruit of a plant called the vine. People use them to make drink that has alcohol in it. The drink is wine.

hallelujah ~ say that the *LORD is great. (Jah is *Hebrew for *LORD.)

Hebrew ~ the language that the Jews spoke; they wrote the Psalms in Hebrew.

Jew ~ a person who is born from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their children.

Jewish ~ a word that describes a *Jew or anything to do with a *Jew.

LORD ~ the *covenant name for God (in a *covenant you agree with someone).

psalmist ~ the person that wrote a psalm (or psalms).

safety ~ when we are in a safe place.

serve ~ do what someone tells you to do.

Sheol ~ *Jews believed that you went to Sheol when you died.

temple ~ a place where people meet to worship God.

wine ~ a drink with alcohol in it. People make it from *grapes.