

Psalm 18

To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, the servant of the LORD, who spake unto the LORD the words of this song in the day [that] the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul (as he said in verse 1).

Psalm 18 is a royal song of thanksgiving that rehearses God's deliverance of David from all his enemies. It appears to be a popular version of the song in (2 Sam. chapter 22). The title "servant of the Lord" places David in an elite company, namely, that of Moses, Joshua, and the Messiah, who also bear the title. The psalm includes a declaration of David's love and trust in the Lord (verses 1-3), a narrative of his deliverance by the Lord (verses 4-19), an explanation of the cause for David's deliverance (verses 20-24), an exposition of the display of God's attributes to those who trust in Him (verses 25-30), a further description of David's victory (verses 31-45), and a concluding word of thanks for God's deliverance (verses 46-50). The description of the Lord's intervention given (in verses 7-19), is called a theophany, one of many in the Old Testament, in which God visibly manifests Himself. The theophany characteristically has two parts: the Lord leaves His residence and nature reacts. It is thus a highly poetic and vivid way of describing the fact that the God of Israel intervened in history on David's behalf. The entire psalm is a celebration of that fact.

Verses 1-50; Psalm 18 is clearly an individual psalm of thanksgiving, also bearing royal characteristics. Its poetry and theme resemble other ancient testimonies to God's great historical deliverances (e.g., Exodus chapter 15; Judges chapter 5). Between David's opening (verses 1-3), and closing (verses 46-50), praises to God, his life with the Lord is described in 3 stages.

- I. Prelude: His Opening Praises (18:1-3).
- II. The States of His Life (18:4-45).
 - A. In the pit of Peril (18:4-19);
 1. His desperation (18:4-5);
 2. His defender (18:6-15);
 3. His deliverance (18:16-19).
 - B. On a Course of Ethical Integrity (18:20-28).
 1. The principles of the Lord's direction (18:20-26);
 2. The privileges of the Lord's direction (18:27-28).
 - C. In the Turbulent Atmosphere of Leadership (18:29-45).
 1. Military leadership (18:29-42);
 2. Theocratic leadership (18:43-45).
- III. Postscript: His Closing Praises (18:46-50).

This large psalm bears a large title. Although the title seems to refer to only one specific occasion (e.g., “in the day”), it does state that God’s deliverance was “from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul”. Therefore, it is preferable that the language of this superscription be understood to summarize the testimony of David’s whole life in retrospect.

Verses 1-2: (Here and in 2 Sam chapter 22), David employs the same series of strong words to express the security he has in God. A “high tower” is a place located above the reach of violence.

Psalm 18:1 "I will love thee, O LORD, my strength."

“Love”: This is not the normal word for love that often bears covenant meaning (e.g., Deut. 7:8; Psalm 119:97), but it is a rare verb form of a word group that expresses tender intimacy. David’s choice of words intended to express very strong devotion, like Peter’s (in John 21:15-17).

David was prouder of the fact that he was a servant of the LORD, than the fact that he was king of the Hebrews. David is looking back at the problems he had pertaining to Saul, and the wicked we have been reading about in previous lessons. This is a song of thanksgiving for the wonderful way God has brought him through his trials. David knows full well that it was not his strength that saved him, but the strength of God working in him.

Psalm 18:2 "The LORD [is] my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, [and] my high tower."

Military metaphors for the Divine Warrior multiply in this verse. Both defensively and offensively, the Lord was all David needed in life’s tough battles.

David had hidden in the caves and among the rocks, and found that God was his protection. These are all things that every Christian could say about the LORD as well. I built my house, not on the sand, but on the solid Rock (Jesus Christ). He is my fortress. He has built a fortress around me to protect me from the devil. He has delivered me from all my sin. I will have no other god before Him. In my weakness, He has made me strong. I am as Abraham, who had faith and it was counted unto him as righteousness. The horn, as we have studied in all of these lessons, means strength. My salvation is bought by the precious shed blood of the Lamb.

Psalm 18:3 "I will call upon the LORD, [who is worthy] to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies."

In prayer, for fresh mercies, and further appearances of Himself. And discoveries of His grace and favor.

"Who is worthy to be praised": For the perfections of His nature and the works of His hands. His providential goodness, and more especially for his covenant grace and blessings in Christ. The

Targum is, "in praise, or with a hymn, I pray before the Lord." Agreeably to the rule the apostle gives (Phil. 4:6). And this prayer was a prayer of faith, as follows.

"So shall I be saved from mine enemies": Which was founded upon past experience of God's goodness to him in distress, when he called upon Him, as the words show in the next verse.

God inhabits the praises of His people. We are to praise God in all things. We, like David, should know from past blessings that God will be with us in all our battles. He is our help.

Psalm 18:4 "The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid."

I.e. dangerous and deadly troubles. Or, the bands or cords of death, which had almost seized me, and was putting its bands upon me (compare Psalm 73:4; Jonah 2:2-9).

"The floods of ungodly men": Their great multitudes, and strength, and violent assaults, breaking in upon me like a flood.

"Made me afraid." Made me apprehensive of losing my life. To what particular period of his life he here refers it is impossible now to determine.

Psalm 18:5 "The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me."

Or "the cords of the grave", under the power of which he was detained for a while. The allusion may be to the manner of burying among the Jews, who wound up their dead bodies in linen clothes. So that they were as persons bound hand and foot. And thus were they laid in the grave (see John 11:44). And so was Christ, till He was raised from the dead, when he showed Himself to have the keys of hell and death, and to be no more under their power, or be held by them.

"The snares of death prevented me": Or "met" or "got before me" the sense is; he was taken in them. This phrase designs the insidious ways and methods which the enemies of Christ took to ensnare him, and take away His life, and in which they succeeded (see Matt. 26:4).

David is telling of his condition, before the Lord came to his rescue. David's fear was turned into joy. David was in danger of death from his enemies, until the Lord rescued him.

Psalm 18:6 "In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, [even] into his ears."

The great Jehovah, the everlasting I AM, who is the Most High in all the earth, and who is able to save (Heb. 5:7).

"And cried unto my God": As Jesus did (Matt. 27:46). So the members of Christ, when in distress, as they often are, through sin and Satan, through the hidings of God's face, a variety of

afflictions, and the persecutions of men. Betake themselves to the Lord, and call upon their God. A time of distress is a time for prayer; and sometimes the end God has in suffering them to be in distress is to bring them to the throne of his grace. And a great privilege it is they have that they have such a throne to come to for grace and mercy to help them in time of need. And such a God to sympathize with them, and help them. And their encouragement to call upon Him, and cry unto Him, is, that he is Jehovah, omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. Who knows their wants, is able to help them, and is a God at hand to do it.

"He heard my voice out of his temple": That is, out of heaven his dwelling place. For the temple at Jerusalem was not built in David's time. And it may be observed, that the prayer of the psalmist, or whom he represents, was a vocal one, and not merely mental. And hearing it intends a gracious regard unto it, an acceptance of it, and an agreeable answer. For it follows.

"And my cry came before him, even into his ears": God did not cover himself with a cloud, that his prayer could not pass through. But it was admitted and received. It came up before Him with acceptance; it reached His ears, and even entered into them. And was delightful music to them (see John 11:41).

In this David is setting us a pattern to follow when troubles come upon us. In our deepest need, we should cry out to God. He will hear and answer our prayers. God's ears are always tuned into the needs of His people.

Verses 7-15: This theophany, a vivid poetic picture of God's presence, rivals other biblical presentations (compare Exodus 19:16; Deut. 33:2; Judges chapters 4 and 5; Psalm 68:7-8; Micah 1:3-4; Hab. chapter 3; Rev. chapter 19). His presence is largely described by various catastrophic responses by all creation.

Psalm 18:7 "Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth."

As it did quickly after Christ called upon the Lord, and cried to his God upon the cross (Matt. 27:50). And so some time after, when his people were praying together, the place where they were assembled was shaken (Acts 4:31). As a token of God's presence being with them. And the shaking and trembling of the earth is often used as a symbol of the presence of God, and of the greatness of his majesty. As when he brought the children of Israel through the Red sea, went before them in the wilderness, and descended on Mount Sinai, which mountain then moved and quaked exceedingly (see Psalm 104:32).

"The foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken": And design the shaking of the earth and heavens, prophesied of in (Hag. 2:6). And which is explained in (Heb. 12:26). Of the

removing the ordinances of the ceremonial law, that Gospel ordinances might remain unshaken. For in (2 Sam. 22:8); the words are, "the foundations of heaven moved and shook". And the shaking and moving of the earth and mountains may denote the abolition and destruction of kingdoms and nations.

"Because he was wroth": With the people of the Jews, for disbelieving and rejecting the Messiah. For setting themselves, and taking counsel together against him, and putting Him to death. For these things God was angry with them, and wrath came upon them to the uttermost, and their nation, city, and temple were destroyed (Psalm 2:1). And with the Pagan empire and antichristian powers (Rev. 6:16).

Many times in the Bible, God shook the earth. Once was the earthquake when Moses came down the mountain and saw the children of Israel worshipping a golden calf. When Jesus died on the cross, the earth quaked. The earth is God's and the fullness thereof. He can shake it if He desires to. When God's anger comes up in His face at the end of the age, the earth will quake as never before. In fact, the earth will quake so that it will be felt around the world. It is best not to anger God.

Psalm 18:8 "There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it."

God sends forth "smoke" in the heat of His wrath and zeal. He will not endure rebellion forever.

Deuteronomy 9:3 "Understand therefore this day, that the LORD thy God [is] He which goeth over before thee; [as] a consuming fire He shall destroy them, and He shall bring them down before thy face: so shalt thou drive them out, and destroy them quickly, as the LORD hath said unto thee."

Hebrews 12:29 "For our God [is] a consuming fire."

We know that the wrath of God is something we do not want to encounter. If God is a flaming fire, and the Word says He is, it would be only natural for His anger to proceed from His mouth as a fire.

Psalm 18:9 "He bowed the heavens also, and came down: and darkness [was] under his feet."

To execute wrath and vengeance on wicked men; which is always the sense of these phrases when they go together (see Psalm 144:6). The Targum is, "He bowed the heavens, and his glory appeared". That is, the glory of his power, and of his mighty hand of vengeance. For not His grace and mercy, but his indignation and wrath, showed themselves; for it follows.

"And darkness was under his feet": The Targum is, "a dark cloud", expressive of the awfulness of the dispensation to wicked men. Who are not allowed to see the face of God, are debarred His presence, and denied, communion with Him. And to whom everything appears awful and terrible (Psalm 97:2).

God showed Himself to the Israelites in a fire by night, and a cloud by day. He descended and His presence was over the mercy seat. As far as the people were concerned, this cloud was as thick darkness because they could not see God. For that matter, all things are under His feet, not just darkness.

Psalm 18:10 "And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind."

Or, upon the cherubims, that is, upon the angels, who are so called (Gen. 3:24; Hebrews 9:5). Who are also called God's chariots (Psalm 68:17), upon which he is said to sit and ride. All which is not to be understood grossly, but only to note God's using of the ministry of angels in raising such storms and tempests as are here described.

"Upon the wings of the wind": As swiftly as the wind. He came to my rescue with all speed.

This is just David's explanation of how God can move through the air, as He moves through the earth. Jesus rose into heaven after 40 days of ministry here on the earth after His resurrection from the dead. He did not need an airplane to carry Him, He just went up on a cloud.

Psalm 18:11 "He made darkness his secret place; his pavilion round about him [were] dark waters [and] thick clouds of the skies."

Which, and the dark waters in the next clause, are the same with the thick clouds in the last. In which Jehovah is represented as wrapping Himself, and in which He lies hid as in a secret place. Not so as that He cannot see others, as wicked men imagine (Job 22:13). But as that He cannot be beheld by others. The Targum interprets it, "he caused his Shekinah to dwell in darkness."

"His pavilion round about Him were dark waters, and thick clouds of the skies": These were as a tent or tabernacle, in which He dwelt unseen by men (see Job 36:29). All this may design the dark dispensation of the Jews, after their rejection and crucifixion of Christ. When God departed from them, left their house desolate, and them without his presence and protection. When the light of the Gospel was taken away from them, and blindness happened unto them. And they had eyes that they should not see, and were given up to a judicial darkness of mind and hardness of heart. Which were some of the dark, deep, and mysterious methods of divine Providence. With respect to which God may be said to be surrounded with darkness, dark waters, and thick clouds (see Rom. 11:7).

The smoke in the Holy of Holies was so thick that the High Priest could not see the presence of God, even though he was in the same room with Him. Jesus opened the way in to the heavenlies for you and me. Someday, the darkness of clouds surrounding the Father will be removed and we will see Him as He is. That is when the secret of God will be revealed in heaven to us.

Psalm 18:12 "At the brightness [that was] before him his thick clouds passed, hail [stones] and coals of fire."

The lightning that came out of the thick clouds. Which may denote, either the coming of Christ to take vengeance on the Jewish nation, which was swift and sudden, clear and manifest. Or the spreading of the Gospel in the Gentile world, in which Christ, the brightness of his Father's glory and appeared to the illumination of many (see Matt. 24:27). And both may be intended, as the effects following show.

"His thick clouds passed": That is, passed away. The gross darkness, which had for so many years covered the Gentile world, was removed when God sent forth his light and truth. And multitudes, who were darkness itself, were made light in the Lord.

"Hail stones and coals of fire": The same Gospel that was enlightening to the Gentiles, and the savor of life unto life unto them, was grievous. Like hail stones, and tormenting, scorching, irritating, and provoking, like coals of fire, and the savor of death unto death, to the Jews. When God provoked them, by sending the Gospel among the Gentiles, and calling them. Or these may design the heavy, awful, and consuming judgments of God upon them, which are sometimes signified by hail storms (see Rev. 8:7). In (2 Sam. 22:13), it is only, "through the brightness before Him were coals of fire kindled".

Psalm 18:13 "The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice; hail [stones] and coals of fire."

By his apostles and ministers, some of which were Boanerges, sons of thunder. Whose ministry was useful to shake the consciences of men, and bring them to a sense of themselves (Mark 3:17).

"And the Highest gave his voice": The same with thunder; for thunder is often called the voice of the Lord (Job 37:5). Compare with this (Psalm 68:11); the Targum interprets it, "he lifted up his word"; the same effects as before follow.

"Hail stones and coals of fire" (see note on Psalm 18:12).

The strangest hail that ever hit the earth, was the hail mingled with fire that God rained on Pharaoh in Egypt. The anger of God was kindled against him and it hailed this strange hail, because he would not let God's children go. We also know that fire and brimstone from heaven

rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah in God's anger toward them. Even the elements of hail and fire are at the command of God.

Psalm 18:14 "Yea, he sent out his arrows, and scattered them; and he shot out lightnings, and discomfited them."

By which thunderbolts, cracks of thunder, and flashes of lightning, seem to be meant (see Psalm 77:17). Comparable to arrows shot, and sent out of a bow. And may denote, either the doctrines of the Gospel, which were sharp in the hearts of Christ's enemies, and are either the means of subduing them to him, or of destroying them, being the savor of death unto death. Or however, like arrows, give great pain and uneasiness where they stick. And grievously distress and torment; as does the fire which comes out of the mouth of the two witnesses (Rev. 11:5). The Targum is, "he sent his word as arrows." Or else the judgments of God are meant, as famine, pestilence, and the sword, which God sent unto, and spent upon the Jewish nation (Deut. 32:23).

"And scattered them": Among the nations of the world, where they have been dispersed ever since.

"And he shot out lightnings": Or "many lightnings", so the Targum. And discomfited them; troubled, terrified, and distressed them.

One of the most frightening times in my life was a night out west, when it was lightening so bad that it looked as if the world was coming to an end. The lightening seemed to come from all directions. Men pale in front of God who controls even the lightning.

Psalm 18:15 "Then the channels of waters were seen, and the foundations of the world were discovered at thy rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils."

Or, "of the sea"; as in (2 Sam. 22:16). There seems to be an allusion to the drying up of the sea when the Israelites passed through it. Aben Ezra interprets this of the discovery of the secrets of enemies, and of their deep schemes and counsels. Which they seek to hide, but are made known by him who sees all things in the dark. And so the following clause.

"And the foundations of the world were discovered": But it rather seems to intend the utter destruction and ruin of the Jewish nation. Both in their civil and ecclesiastic state, the foundation of which was rooted up and laid bare. Unless with Jerome we understand this of the ministers of the word, in whom the doctrines of grace were channeled, and who were as fountains of water. And of the foundation of the apostles and prophets made known in the Gospel. But the former sense is best; since it follows.

"At thy rebuke, O Lord; at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils": For the destruction of the Jews was the effect of divine wrath and vengeance. So ends the account of the wonderful appearance

of God in favor of the person the subject of this psalm, and against his enemies. The deliverance wrought for him is next described.

We will see a small illustration of the power of the nostrils of God in the next verse, where the Red Sea was opened and the children of Israel walked through the middle of the sea on dry ground.

Exodus 15:8 "And with the blast of thy nostrils the waters were gathered together, the floods stood upright as a heap, [and] the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea."

As I said in the beginning, this is just a minor illustration. God could blow with His nostrils and blow the whole world away.

Verses 16-19: His sheer power, exhibited so dramatically (in verses 7-15), is now amazingly attested as coming to rescue the psalmist personally.

God delivered David as a lifeguard rescues a drowning person from the waters that threatens to overwhelm (144:7).

Psalm 18:16 "He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters."

He interposed to save me. All these manifestations of the divine interposition were from above, or from heaven and all came from God.

"He took me" He took hold on me; he rescued me.

"He drew me out of many waters": Waters are often expressive of calamity and trouble (Psalms 46:3; 69:1; 73:10; 124:4-5). The meaning here is, that God had rescued him out of the many troubles and dangers that encompassed him. As if he had fallen into the sea and was in danger of perishing.

David's work and our work, is dependent upon Him protecting us. He brings us out of our troubles. In Revelation, we read of the Christians standing around the throne in white robes washed in the blood of the Lamb. They have been brought out of great tribulation upon the earth.

Psalm 18 Questions

1. Who was chapter 18 addressed to?
2. What made David prouder than the fact he was a king?

3. What is David giving thanks for in this first verse?
4. What things does David call the LORD in verse 2?
5. Where does the Christian build his house?
6. Who is the solid Rock?
7. He has delivered me from what?
8. How are Christians like Abraham?
9. What does the horn symbolize?
10. God inhabits the _____ of His people.
11. David's fear was turned into _____.
12. What should we do in our deepest need?
13. Name a time when God shook the earth in His anger.
14. Our God is a _____.
15. How did God show Himself to the Israelites?
16. Why did the people think of this cloud as thick darkness?
17. How did Jesus go to heaven after His 40 day ministry on the earth after the resurrection?
18. Why had the High Priest, who went into the Most Holy Place, not seen God?
19. How was the way to the heavenlies opened for you and me?
20. What was the strangest hail that ever fell?
21. Where do we find the Scripture that tells us the nostrils of God opened the Red Sea?
22. Where have the Christians, in Revelation, come out of?