

Psalm 86

A Prayer of David.

Psalm 86: This is one of the five psalms called prayers (see also chapters 17, 90, 102, 142). The spontaneous nature does not lend itself to a logical structure. The psalm actually constitutes a mosaic arrangement of quotations and allusions to other psalms (especially chapters 25-28, 54-57), and other books (Exodus, Deuteronomy, Isaiah and Jeremiah). There is a brief reference to David's enemies (verse 14), but no specific historical situation is suggested. As a prayer, the psalm partakes of all the elements normally associated with prayer: petition (verses 1-7, 11, 14-17), adoration (verses 8-10), and thanksgiving (verses 12-13). In addition, the petitions are often backed up with motivations that encourage God to intervene. These range from the psalmist's innocence (verse 2), to God's gracious attributes (verse 15).

Verses 1-17: This psalm is an individual lament (compare psalm 56), in which David expresses his distress and overcomes that distress through praise and worship. There is a sense of urgency demonstrated by some 14 prayer requests. Undergirding the requests is the covenant relationship (verse 2, 5, 13).

- I. The Request for God's Attention (86:1-7).
- II. The Testimony to God's Uniqueness (86:8-13).
- III. The Plea for God's Deliverance (86:14-17).

Verses 1-7: Our poverty and wretchedness, when felt, powerfully plead in our behalf at the throne of grace. The best self-preservation is to commit ourselves to God's keeping. I am one whom thou favors, hast set apart for thyself, and made partaker of sanctifying grace. It is a great encouragement to prayer, to feel that we have received the converting grace of God, have learned to trust in him, and to be his servants. We may expect comfort from God, when we keep up our communion with God. God's goodness appears in two things, in giving and forgiving. Whatever others do, let us call upon God, and commit our case to him; we shall not seek in vain.

Psalm 86:1 "Bow down thine ear, O LORD, hear me: for I [am] poor and needy."

David pictures God leaning over to "bow" down His "ear". This image captures the humble position of David and the high position of God, and shows the attentiveness of the Almighty to the cries of His people.

Sometimes the penman is obscure, but this Psalm is credited to the pen of David. We know that David was not a poor man in finances, so this perhaps is speaking of him being poor in spirit. This is perhaps, one of the many times that David was suffering persecution. This is a plea for the LORD to turn His ear toward David and hear his request. Consider how badly I need you and listen to my earnest prayer, is possibly what he is trying to say. David is a lot like some of us, in that he prays pretty often and always asks God not to turn away from his request.

Psalm 86:2 "Preserve my soul; for I [am] holy: O thou my God, save thy servant that trusteth in thee."

"For I am holy": David, through recognizing his sinfulness (verse 1), insisted that by the grace of God he had not broken his covenant with the Lord.

David was "holy" in the sense that he faithfully followed God's laws, not in the sense that he was perfect.

I believe David is saying in a sense, (lead me not into temptation, deliver me from evil). In the (I am holy), I believe David has made a definite decision to follow the Lord all the way. His heart is holy, it does not desire to sin. He is also aware that it is not in his power alone to remain holy. He asks God to preserve him. Christians should pray that God would place a hedge around us to keep the enemy from attacking us. Satan greatly fears the blood of Jesus, because it was the shed blood of our Lord that defeated Satan. Notice also, that David calls himself the LORD's servant. The key word in this is, perhaps, "my". David has accepted the LORD as his own personal Savior. In the verse above, I believe that David is asking the Lord to protect him from his enemies, and to help him live by his spirit which is committed to the LORD.

Psalm 86:3 "Be merciful unto me, O Lord: for I cry unto thee daily."

In my distressed and miserable condition, being an object of mercy, pity, and compassion. This petition is used by Christ in (Psalm 41:10).

"For I cry unto thee daily": Or "all the day". Every day, and several times in a day (Psalm 55:17). Constant and importunate prayer is the duty of saints, and available with God (1 Thess. 5:17). Christ was much in the exercise of it (Luke 6:12).

We are taught, even by the smoke that goes up from the altar in the sanctuary, to pray at least twice a day. The oil is refueled twice a day. The smoke that goes up from burning this oil, symbolizes the prayers of the saints. David fellowshiped with God in prayer every day. Every person who ever lived (except Jesus Christ), should cry out for mercy, and not justice. This consistent prayer will get God's attention.

James 5:16 "Confess [your] faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

Psalm 86:4 "Rejoice the soul of thy servant: for unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul."

"Soul ... soul": The psalmist requests that his inner person would be preserved according to the covenant agreements (compare Deut. 7-8, 20).

The soul of man cries out for fellowship with God. The only true joy and peace comes from knowing that all is right with your soul. True rejoicing comes from the inner man.

Psalm 86:5 "For thou, Lord, [art] good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee."

Essentially and independently good, from whom every good and perfect gift comes. Good in himself, and good to others. Good to all, in a providential way; and good to his own special people in a way of grace. This is asserted by Christ (Matt. 19:17).

"And ready to forgive": There is forgiveness with him, and it is to be had without difficulty, he has largely provided for it. He is forward unto it, he freely giving it; it is according to the riches of his grace. He does abundantly pardon; no sooner is it asked but it is had. This David knew by experience (Psalm 32:5).

"And plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee": In truth, in sincerity, in a right way, through Christ, and faith in him. To such not only the Lord shows himself merciful, but is rich and abundant in mercy. He has a multitude of tender mercies, and abounds in his grace and goodness, and in the donation of it to his people. All which encourage their faith and hope in their petitions to him.

The Israelites (whom David was part of), knew better than anyone else just how forgiving the Lord was, because He forgave them over and over as they journeyed through the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land. He does the very same thing for us, as we go through our wilderness wanderings on our way to our Promised Land (heaven).

Acts 2:21 "And it shall come to pass, [that] whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

When I study the journeys of the Israelites and see the mercy and forgiveness the Lord had for these rebellious people, I think maybe there is hope for me.

Psalm 86:6 "Give ear, O LORD, unto my prayer; and attend to the voice of my supplications."

As this psalm is called, in the title of it. His own prayer, and not another's. Not one composed for him, but what was composed by him. This petition is repeated, as to the sense of it, from (Psalm 86:1), to show his importunity to be heard.

"And attend to the voice of my supplications": Which proceeded from the spirit of grace and supplication. Put up in a humble manner, in a dependence on the mercy of God, which the word used has the signification of, and were attended with thanksgiving (Psalm 86:12). According to the apostle's rule (Phil. 4:6), these were vocal prayers, and not mere mental ones (see Heb. 5:7).

Supplications, in this verse means prayers. The special thing that we must notice here, is that David said this aloud. This was not a silent prayer. The word voice lets us know that.

Verses 8-17: Our God alone possesses almighty power and infinite love. Christ is the way and the truth. And the believing soul will be more desirous to be taught the way and the truth. And the believing soul will be more desirous to be taught the way and the truth of God, in order to walk therein, than to be delivered out of earthly distress. Those who set not the Lord before them, seek after believers' souls; but the compassion, mercy, and truth of God, will be their

refuge and consolation. And those whose parents were the servants of the Lord, may urge this as a plea why he should hear and help them. In considering David's experience, and that of the believer, we must not lose sight of Him, who though he was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich.

Psalm 86:7 "In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee: for thou wilt answer me."

David had his troubles, both inward and outward. Before and after he came to the throne. In private and public life; and every good man has his troubles. And there are some particular times or days of trouble; which trouble arises from different causes. Sometimes from themselves, their corruptions, the weakness of their grace, and the poor performance of their duties. Sometimes from others; from the persecutions of the men of the world. From the wicked lives of profane sinners, and especially professors of religion, and from the spread of false doctrine. Sometimes from Satan and his temptations. And sometimes from the more immediate hand of God in afflictions. And from the hidings of his face. These troubles do not last always; they are but for a day, for a particular time. And such a season is a fit one for prayer, and the Lord invites and encourages his people to call upon him in prayer when this is the case (Psalm 50:15). Christ had his times of trouble, in which he called upon his divine Father (John 11:33).

"For thou wilt answer me": Which the idols of the Gentiles could not do. Baal could not answer his priests (1 Kings 18:26). This the psalmist concluded, both from the promise of God (Psalm 50:15), and from his frequent experience (Psalm 138:3). A very encouraging reason or argument to call on the Lord: Christ was always heard and answered (John 11:41).

This is a bold statement of faith by David here. He is saying, I need not worry, because I know you will answer my prayer once you have heard.

Psalm 86:8 "Among the gods [there is] none like unto thee, O Lord; neither [are there any works] like unto thy works."

"Among the gods": David is here contrasting the true God with the imaginary deities of the heathen nations (compare verse 10; Exodus 15:11; Psalm 89:6; Isa. 46:5-11).

Notice, gods is not capitalized. This then, is speaking of all the of false gods. God proved this statement to be absolutely true when He defamed all the gods of Egypt. As we have said so many times, Egypt symbolizes the world. When He defamed Egypt's gods, it was defaming all the false gods of the world. No one can match the creation of all the world and everything in it, and around it. No work was ever greater than what God did for all of us. Idols translate (nothings), if you look them up in the Strong's concordance.

Psalm 86:9 "All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name."

"All nations ... worship": The psalmists and prophets often look into the future messianic age when all the nations of the world will worship the Lord (compare Psalm 22:27; Isa. 2:3; Zech. 8:21-22; 14:16-19; Rev. 15:4).

This means that people of every nation will bow down and worship God. The following three Scripture say it better than I possible could.

Romans 14:11 "For it is written, [As] I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God."

Philippians 2:10-11 "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of [things] in heaven, and [things] in earth, and [things] under the earth;" "And [that] every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ [is] Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

The Creator will be recognized and worshipped by His creation.

Psalm 86:10 "For thou [art] great, and doest wondrous things: thou [art] God alone."

In his nature, and the perfections of it. In his power, wisdom, truth, faithfulness, love, grace, and mercy, and in all his persons. The Father is great, greater than all. The Son is the great God, and our Savior; and the Spirit, which is in his people, is greater than he that is in the world.

"And doest wondrous things": In nature and providence; such as the forming of all things out of nothing. Upholding all things by the word of his power. The formation of man, soul and body, and the union of both. And the constant government of the world. And more especially in grace, as the provision in the covenant in eternity. The mission of Christ in time, the conversion of a sinner, and bringing him to eternal glory.

"Thou art God alone": To the exclusion of all such who are not gods by nature. But not to the exclusion of the Son and Spirit, who are, with the Father, the one God (1 John 5:7).

There is only One good or great, and that is God. The wondrous things He has done are so many, that all the books in the world could not hold them if they were all written down. One of the most wondrous things of all to me, is purchasing our salvation for us. Only God can forgive sin. Sin brings the sentence of death to the sinner. God the Son became my substitute and paid in full my sentence of death. The word (doest), means continues to do.

Hebrews 9:12-15 "Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption [for us]." "For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh:" "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" "And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions [that were] under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance."

Psalm 86:11 "Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name."

"Unite my heart": The psalmist prays that he would have an undivided heart, single-heartedly loyal to his Lord (compare Rom. 7:15; James 1:8).

We know that David is not saying, teach me thy law, because David was already aware of God's law. I can see David saying in this, I want to know you better O LORD. The very best way to know the LORD and His Truth is to read the Word. The Bible reveals the secrets of life. It also, teaches more about our Lord, and what His wishes for us are. David is saying, in the word unite, make my heart stayed upon you. I do not want to have a heart that listens to the flesh. I want my heart stayed upon the Lord. Fear, or reverence of the Lord, is the beginning of wisdom. The Holy Spirit of God is the Teacher in heavenly things.

Psalm 86:12 "I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore."

And under that consideration, that he was his God, and which itself is sufficient matter of praise. This makes him amiable, and such he is, love itself. This is a blessing of pure grace, and is the foundation of all other blessings, and continues for ever. This work of praise, which is no other than ascribing glory to God, and giving thanks unto him for mercies received. The psalmist determines to do with his whole heart, which is to be engaged in every spiritual service. Even all of it, all that is within it, every power and faculty of the soul (Psalm 103:1). Which is expressive not of perfection, but sincerity.

"And I will glorify thy name for evermore": By celebrating the perfections of his nature, by giving him the glory of the works of his hands, by praising him for all favors. By devoting himself unto him, and by doing all things for his glory. And that for ever, in time as long as he lived, and to all eternity.

In verse 11 above, David had requested the Lord to cause his heart to be united in the Lord. David had asked for a pure heart. Now we see this heart totally committed to the Lord praising the Lord. Again David says, my God. In this verse, you can easily see that God is a person's personal God. He may be God of the masses, but He is our God, one at a time. It is so good to know that He is my God too. To each individual, He is my God. With a heart stayed on God, knowing that all is well with my soul, would bring overwhelming praise from my inner most being. We should be like David, and glorify his name for evermore.

Psalm 86:13 "For great [is] thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell."

Both in things temporal and spiritual. An instance of which follows.

"And thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell": From a very distressed and disconsolate condition, being almost in despair, under a deep sense of sin, and a fearful apprehension of the wrath of God. As, particularly, when he was charged by Nathan. Or from hell itself, and the severest punishment in it. From the second and eternal death, which every man is deserving of, and are only delivered from by the grace of God, and blood of Christ. This shows the sense the psalmist had of the just demerit of sin, and his thankfulness for deliverance from it (see Psalm 56:13). Kimchi interprets it of the grave; but says, there are some that interpret it of the judgment, or condemnation of hell. Such who have escaped great dangers in long and perilous journeys, or have been delivered from threatening diseases, are said to be saved from hell.

The fate of every living creature would be hell, had it not been for the Savior. He not only delivered David, but you and me as well. It is difficult to understand the great mercy of the Lord. We all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, but His mercy endureth forever and He sent His Son to save us.

Psalm 86:14 "O God, the proud are risen against me, and the assemblies of violent [men] have sought after my soul; and have not set thee before them."

"Violent men": The arrogant (i.e. proud, insolent), are those who act independently from God, rebelling against Him and His people (compare Psalm 119:21, 51, 69, 78, 85, 122).

We have discussed before, how evil men hate the servants of God. I believe it pricks their conscience greatly. It is a shame, but many times those in great earthly authority are the very ones who ridicule the servant of God. Let's look at what Jesus said about this. It might give us some consolation.

John 15:18 "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before [it hated] you."

The world and its people are really not hating David, but are hating the God within David. That is true of the servant of God today. The world hates the Christ within you. The Christ within you causes them great concern for their soul.

The only out they think they have, is to attack the servant of God.

Psalm 86:15 "But thou, O Lord, [art] a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth."

Or merciful, in the most affectionate and tender manner, as a parent to its child, or particularly as a mother to the son of her womb. And is rich and plenteous in his mercy, and freely bestows it. And this was the support of the psalmist under his troubles from his enemies, that though they were cruel the Lord was merciful.

"And gracious": So he has been in eternity, as appears by his election of grace. By the covenant of his grace, and the provisions of it in his Son. And so he is in time, as is manifest from his kindness in Christ Jesus. From his justification, pardon, adoption, effectual calling and salvation of his people, which are all of grace.

"Longsuffering": Not only to wicked men, but to his chosen ones. Which longsuffering of his is salvation to them. He bears with them, and waits to be gracious to them, to bring them to repentance, and save them (2 Peter 3:9).

"Plenteous in mercy": Or goodness (see note on Psalm 86:5).

"And truth": In fulfilling promises (see Exodus 34:6), to which these words refer.

We know that the Lord is delaying His coming back right now, hoping that a few more will be saved.

2 Peter 3:9 "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

God has always had mercy on those who cry to Him for help. The Israelites in Egypt, are possibly one of the best examples of His mercy. Their rebellious deeds, and being forgiven over and over, is a perfect example of God's longsuffering and mercy. Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life. God cannot lie, He is the Truth.

Psalm 86:16 "O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me; give thy strength unto thy servant, and save the son of thine handmaid."

"The son of thine handmaid": David asks for special favor from God just as a servant born in the household would receive more than a servant brought in from outside the household (compare Psalm. 116:16).

Possibly the handmaid referred to would show, that even though Samuel came and anointed David, he had been serving God since birth. It possibly means that he had a mother who loved God and taught him from infancy. It does appear that David's mother belonged to God (thine handmaid). I can also see that he does not want God to look on him in judgement, but in mercy. In speaking of the strength, let's look at how much strength the Christian receives from Christ.

Philippians 4:13 "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

Psalm 86:17 "Show me a token for good; that they which hate me may see [it], and be ashamed: because thou, LORD, hast holpen me, and comforted me."

"Token": A request for a favorable indication that would demonstrate that God was truly on David's side.

David is asking for God to do something of the nature that would show all of these doubting Thomas's, that he belongs to God. David knows his help and comfort are in the Lord. He just wants all his enemies to know it too. The best example in all the Bible of this is when Elijah came against the hundreds of Baal's prophets.

1 Kings 18:24 "And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken."

Of course, Baal never answered. God answered by fire and the people killed all of the false prophets.

1 Kings 18:36-40 "And it came to pass at [the time of] the offering of the [evening] sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou [art] God in Israel, and [that] I [am] thy servant, and [that] I have done all these things at thy word." "Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou [art] the LORD God, and [that] thou hast turned their heart back again." "Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that [was] in the trench." "And when all the people saw [it], they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he [is] the God; the LORD, he [is] the God." "And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there."

To get the whole story, read the entire chapter 18 of 1 Kings.

To summarize this lesson, I would say it emphasizes the fact that God is God of individuals. He is longsuffering and full of mercy. He will forgive and deliver all who call on His name.

Psalm 86 Questions

1. What two reasons does David give for the Lord hearing his prayer in verse 1?
2. What was the poor, in verse 1, probably speaking of?
3. How is David like most believers in verse 1?
4. What is David saying, in a sense, in verse 2?
5. What does he mean by, I am holy?
6. Why did David ask God to preserve him?
7. Satan greatly fears the _____ of Jesus.
8. David calls himself the Lord's _____.
9. How often did David cry unto the Lord?
10. What, in the tabernacle, symbolizes the prayers of the saint?
11. What does the fact that David speaks of God as my God indicate?
12. What does the only true joy and peace come from?
13. Why did the Israelites, more than anyone else, know how forgiving God is?
14. What does supplications, in verse 6, mean?

15. What one word, from verse 6, lets us know David's prayer was spoken aloud?
16. Why is gods, in verse 8, not capitalized?
17. What symbolic meaning can we find in God defaming the gods of Egypt?
18. What does the word idols mean?
19. Philippians 2:10 says, _____ knee shall bow.
20. Verse 11 of the same chapter says, every tongue confesses what?
21. Sin brings what sentence to the sinner?
22. What was David asking the LORD to teach him, in verse 11?
23. How is the best way to know the Lord better?
24. What did David mean by unite my heart?
25. Who is the Teacher in heavenly things?
26. God is God of the masses, but _____ at a time.
27. Had it not been for our Savior, the fate of every human being would be _____.
28. How long does God's mercy last?
29. They are not really hating David, but whom?
30. Who is the Lord willing to lose?
31. What was intended by David calling himself, son of thy handmaid?
32. Who was the prophet who called on God to show His people whether God, or Baal, is God?
33. What was the outcome of his prayer?
34. What does this lesson emphasize?