

SESSION FOUR

A God Who Strengthens (*Psalms 18:1-30*)

"In bringing his [psalmist] plea before God he has been reminded of the reality of his spiritual situation and experience. He knows again what he has always known; he returns to his own position of equilibrium, which is one of faith and trust. God has spoken, therefore, by reminding him of the great things he has done for him in the past, and the adversity of the present pales into insignificance beside the thought of it."
~ Gordon McConville, "The Psalms: Introduction and Theology," 50

I. Overview

Psalms 18 may be classified as a thanksgiving psalm or even a royal psalm. King David pens these words of gratitude to the Lord for delivering him. Based upon a version of this exact psalm in 2 Samuel 22, it would seem that David employs this psalm as a celebration after a series of victories.

II. The Content

A. A Summary of Praise (vv. 1-3)

v. 1a - David begins by expressing deep feelings of compassion and tender affection for the Lord. The uniqueness of this term strongly indicates the intimacy he has with God.

"my strength" - This description of the Lord is personal, exclusive, and extremely relevant (cf. Ps 27:14).

v. 2 - The character of God is depicted in a series of figures of speech—terms taken both from military settings and geographical locations. In listing these descriptions of God, David was reliving his escapes and victories (cf. Kidner, *Psalms*, 1:91).

v. 3 - The focal point of the psalm is detailed—the Lord delivers! The verse could be rendered present tense: "I am saved."

Note the use of "my" in verses 1-3. What does it reveal about the psalm?

B. A Report on His Experiences and God's Deliverance (vv. 4-19)

vv. 4-5 - David uses the following four parallel expressions to stress the point that he almost died: (1) "the cords of death," "the torrents of destruction," "the cords of the grave," and "the snares of death." As noted by Ross, "God would not surrender his servant to such an untimely death, and certainly not to any evil powers of death and hell, real or imagined" (*Psalms*, 1:446).

v. 6 - A summary statement of the answer to the prayer is given.

vv. 7-15 - By utilizing language that is reminiscent of the Lord appearing at Sinai, David provides a vivid description of God's supernatural intervention (cf. Deut 33:2-3; Judg 5:4-5; Ps 68:7-8). Note the disappearance of all references to first person (e.g., "my"). All attention is given to the Deliverer. What is terrifying and deified by the pagans is all under the power of God and used by God for the destruction of the wicked.

vv. 16-19 - David concludes this section of the psalm by thanking the Lord for rescuing him. The language resembles the Lord's deliverance of Israel during the Exodus and the Red Sea.

Contrast David's previous state in verses 4-5 with what he describes in these four verses.

C. A Praise to God for the Deliverance (vv. 20-30)

vv. 20-24 - David will begin this section by highlighting his faithfulness to the Lord—a point he stresses twice in this section (i.e., vv. 20, 24). Rather than assume David is arrogantly boasting, these verses simply affirm that God deals with people as He sees their heart's receptivity towards Him. These words are in the context of praising God for His faithfulness (cf. Perowne, *Psalms*, 1:213). David knows God has approved him because the Lord rescued him (cf. Ps 118:19-21).

vv. 25-30 - The psalmist now focuses upon the Lord's faithfulness to the righteous. Note the three to one ratio between how the Lord acts with the righteous (i.e., loyal, trustworthy, and reliable) versus how the Lord interacts with the wicked (i.e., deceptive). Each group is treated respectively according to their own ways of operation (e.g., the Lord turned the wickedness of the perverse around to come back upon them).

v. 28 - Even in the darkness, the Lord is a source of life.

v. 29 - Even in battle, the Lord provides protection and a way for escape (cf. 1 Sam 23:2).

v. 30 - David summarizes this section of the psalm by affirming that the Lord and all of His ways are perfect.

One commentator correctly reminds the reader, "the theological perspective of this meditation is only a part of the whole picture and does not attempt to encompass an experience like that of Job; it is valid, nevertheless, for it represents faithfully one dimension of the goodness of God toward his servants, and the retributive action of God toward the tortuous and arrogant" (Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 175).

III. Intersect

In a recent book entitled, *The Red Sea Rules*, Robert Morgan utilizes the Israelites' story in Exodus 14 as a template for Christians to move from fear to faith. This work aptly captures what the biblical writers sought to convey. Life is hard, especially for those who follow the Lord. It is certain that God will allow us to face difficulties just as He enabled the Israelites to become trapped between Pharaoh's rushing armies and the uncrossable Red Sea. But just as certain is the fact that the same God who led us in WILL lead us out. David reminds the Israelites of this truth in Psalm 18. Indeed, the Lord is in control. Even in the midst of seemingly impossible situations, God promises to make a way for us. His loving guidance will protect us through danger, illness, marital strife, divorce, financial problems, or whatever challenges Satan places in our path.

Identify one "Red Sea" moment in your life, when the Lord miraculously provided and cared for you? What is one truth you learned about the Lord in this past experience?

"Promises, though they be for a time seemingly delayed, cannot be finally frustrated . . . the heart of God is not turned though His face be hid; and prayers are not flung back, though they be not instantly answered."

~ Timothy Cruso

