

## The Book of Psalms

### Psalm 17

#### Opening Prayer

#### ***Read Psalm 17***

#### Overview

Psalm 17 is an individual lament psalm with a cry for help. Interestingly it begins with a series of reasons that the Lord should listen to the psalmist who states his case for being heard in verses 1-5. As distinct from the righteous path that he has followed (v.1-5), he clearly states why his enemies should receive no answer or help from God and should in fact be “made to bow down” or “brought low” (v.13).

Historically, it is possible that this psalm is written by David when he is surrounded by Saul’s troops in the Desert of Maon. *See 1 Samuel 23:24-28*. As we will see when we address verse 11, there is an emphasis on how David is encircled and the Hebrew word is repeated in that verse. In 1 Samuel 23:26 we read, “*for Saul and his men were **surrounding** David and his men to seize them.*” So it would be easy to set this psalm within that historical circumstance.

#### Outline/Structure

The psalm is set up as a prayer...

1. For God’s vindication (17:1-5)
2. For God’s intervention (17:6-9)
3. For God’s deliverance from enemies (17:10-14)
4. Of assurance (17:15)

#### For God’s Vindication (17:1-5)

- :1 - The psalmist’s righteousness serves as bookends to this psalm. Here in verse 1 his “cause” is righteous (just) and in verse 15 he can behold the Lord’s face in “righteousness”.  
-Additionally that righteousness is defined primarily in terms of speech.  
    a. In 17:1 – *not from deceitful lips*  
    b. In 17:3 – *my mouth will not transgress*  
- We see righteousness defined in much the same way back in Psalm 15:2-3, *and speaks truth in his heart. He does not slander with his tongue.*

- It could very well be that because he is offering words in a prayer, he desires that God should know that they come from a “righteous” place.

**Read James 3:9-10**

*How does James’ admonition line up with the psalmist’s defense of his righteous tongue?*

:2 - Here David seems supremely confident in his righteousness for he invites God to judge him. He even tells God to look at him with “integrity” (equity). The implication is that God will not find anything wrong in him.

**Read Job 27:1-6**

*How does Job make the same argument as David?*

*What is the danger of relying upon our righteousness to appeal to God?*

:3 - David continues his defense of his righteousness so that he will be vindicated by God. He points out that God has “tried his heart”, “visited him by night”, and even “tested” him. These three clauses run parallel to one another and emphasize for David that he has indeed been scrutinized by God and God “finds nothing” to hold against him.

- “tested him” is the Hebrew word for refined and is used in a similar way in **Zechariah 13:9**.

- Additionally to what God has already seen of David’s righteousness, David almost makes a promise at the end of verse 3 that he would continue to keep his mouth in check.

*Can we win God’s favor by the demonstration of a righteous life or the promise of one?*

:4-5 - Now David turns his attention to what temptations he has faced in those around him. Others had committed violent acts and pursued violent paths, but David has kept his feet on the paths of the Lord. He even indicates at the beginning of verse 4 that it is God who is saying of David that David has kept himself from violent ways. *By the word of **Your** lips.*

- We are told that Christ will make a confession of us. That is by His lips we will be vindicated. **Read Matthew 10:32-33**

*When will Christ acknowledge us?*

For God’s Intervention (17:6-9)

:6 - Now that David has made his case, he will call upon God to act. Notice how he emphasizes, “*hear my speech*”, after he had just vindicated himself in the way he used his mouth and tongue and lips earlier. He is asking God to hear and act upon these words of prayer, because his words are righteous.

- :7 - This verse demonstrates David's faith that God can and will act.
1. God will act wondrously – **Read Genesis 18:14**
  2. God will demonstrate his *hesed*, His “lovingkindness”. This is the foundational word for Yahweh's covenant with Israel and it is extended into the New Testament with the Greek love word: *agape*. It would be hard to overemphasize the importance of both of these words to the faith life of God's people.
  3. “Savior” – while this word is rightly translated as a noun in the English, in the Hebrew it appears as a participle, thus the *Saving one*. The implication of the participle is that saving is an ongoing activity of God.
  4. “take refuge” – David's faith recognizes that God is the protector and desires to be so.
  5. “right hand” – The right hand is the place of honor but also the place of power. **Read Psalm 110:1(Matthew 22:34); Ephesians 1:20-23**

- Notice that while the verse demonstrates David's faith, the emphasis is on the power and love(*hesed*) of God!

*What is the danger of too strong a focus on our faith rather than on God's power and love?*

- :8-9 - “apple of your eye” - This metaphor may also be translated “*pupil of your eye*” or even “*the daughter of the eye*”. The implication remains the same: the metaphor is that something is very precious. The same metaphor is used of Israel in **Deuteronomy 32:10** and of the Torah in **Proverbs 7:2**.

- These two metaphors here in 17:8 are also found together in the Song of Moses in **Deuteronomy 32:10-11**. David was likely familiar with this song.

*Do we have similar metaphors we use for those things which are most precious to us?*

### For God's Deliverance From Enemies (17:10-14)

- :10 - This verse would literally be translated, “*They close up their own fat.*” In ancient times fat was a symbol of stupidity or rebellion. **See Job 15:27; Psalm 119:70**. The implication of the verse is then that they have acted in rebellion and stupidity because of their arrogance and pride.

- :11-12 - Here we perhaps see a clue to the historical setting of the psalm: Saul's pursuit and attempted surrounding of David. (**1 Samuel 23:24-28**) Most notably the Hebrew word for “encircled” or “surrounded” is repeated in the original Hebrew text. So it would read “*They have encircled and*

*encircled our steps.*” Remember that repetition serves as an emphazier in the Hebrew.

- Additionally the ravenous intent of the enemies is displayed by the similes of the lion and the young lion.

:13-14 - Once again the call for God to “rise up”. We have seen this in Psalms 9 and 10 and in **Numbers 10:35**. Recall that in Numbers 10 as the Ark of the Covenant went before the Israelites, it gave them the advantage over their enemies.

- Verse 14 presents further David’s assessment of those who pursue him. They are men of the world; men of this life; men who store up treasures for themselves and for their children. The implication is that the focus of the enemies is so much on the life that is now that they have not the faith for the life to come.

*Is there anything wrong with storing up wealth for your children?  
At what point, does savings cross the line into greed or even a lack of faith in God as the provider?*

**Read Matthew 6:25-34**

*What does Jesus teach us about worrying about storing up for tomorrow?*

*What is the danger of worrying about these things?*

### Of Assurance – (17:15)

:15 - The assurance given in verse 15 is the assurance of eternal life. When David wakes he will see the “face” or “likeness” of God. David may have in mind here what the Lord had said of Moses to Aaron and Miriam in **Numbers 13:8**. The greatest joy of heaven is to be in the presence of the Lord face to face.

- Job expresses this exact sentiment and in doing so gives us the text for one of the greatest Easter hymns. **Read Job 19:25-27** Such is the joy of that hymn and the hope that it offers to us. One particular stanza sums up the idea of both Job 19:25-27 and Psalm 17:15 very well:

*He lives and grants me daily breath;  
He lives, and I shall conquer death;  
He lives my mansion to prepare;  
He lives to bring me safely there.*

### Summary

Psalm 15 is a psalm of righteous David calling for deliverance from his enemies. Yet in the end even if such earthly deliverance should not come, David is delivered through eternal life and so are we!

Closing Prayer