

## The Book of Psalms

### Psalm 18

#### Lesson 1 – 18:16-29

#### Opening Prayer

#### ***Read Psalm 18:16-29***

#### Overview

Psalm 18 is a royal psalm recounting David's political and military victories brought about by God's direction. It is one of the longer psalms that we have studied at some 50 verses. Since it is fairly long we will divide the psalm into 3 lessons. See below in the outline for the explanation of the division.

In the first lesson on Psalm 18 we covered verses 1-15 which recalled the psalmist's crying out to God for help in verses 1-6 and the Theophany in verses 7-15 which followed. Verses 16-29 give us God's answer to the crying out of the psalmist and the result.

For more detail on the historical background to Psalm 18 see the first lesson on it.

#### Outline/Structure

- I. David take's refuge in God (18:1-30)
  - a. Introductory hymn of praise – (18:1-3, Lesson 1)
  - b. Account of the crisis – (18:4-6, Lesson 1)
  - c. The theophany – (18:7-15, Lesson 1)
  - d. The rescue – (18:16-19, Lesson 2)**
  - e. The psalmist's righteousness – (18:20-24, Lesson 2)**
  - f. The Lord's response – (18:25-29, Lesson 2)**
- II. There is no god besides Yahweh
  - a. Confession of praise – (18:30-36, Lesson 3)
  - b. David's rehearsal of his exploits – (18:37-42, Lesson 3)
  - c. David's rehearsal of God's deliverance – (18:43-45, Lesson 3)
- III. Final Doxology – (18:46-50, Lesson 3)

#### The Rescue – 18:16-19

:16 - "drew me out" – David pictures God drawing him out of the dangerous waters that have encircled him. This may indeed harken back to his

description of his troubles in verse 4 where he states, “*the torrents of ungodliness terrified me*”. The idea may also parallel the rescue of David here with the rescue of baby Moses from the Nile. (*See Exodus 2:10*)

- We see also a similar prayer from Jonah in the belly of the fish. **Read *Jonah 2:5-6***

*Why was Jonah in the water?*

*How is the image of God drawing us up out of the water comforting?*

**(See also *Matthew 14:28-31*)**

:17-18 – Two things become apparent in many of the psalms calling on God for help and they are both evident in these two verses. First, we are often powerless against these things on our own. David admits they were too mighty for him. Second, they will seize upon circumstances when we are the weakest to act against us. David tells us that they, “*confronted him in the day of my calamity*”. Whether or not there were other things going on or if their confrontation caused the calamity, they take advantage of David’s weakened state.

- “*the Lord was my stay*” – This may sound like any other reassurance that we find in the psalms, but many of these words translated similarly in English have distinct backgrounds and bring with them distinct images of rescue. Here the word “stay” is actually the Hebrew word *Meshach* which literally means “bread pole” or “bread staff”. The term is used in ***Leviticus 26:26; Isaiah 3:1; Ezekiel 4:16-17***. There we see that the term refers to the main sustenance of life, since when it is removed there will be famine in the land. So here as the psalmist uses the term, the Lord is not just his helper, but his main source and sustenance of life. This is a picture of Jewish *Meshach* bread:



:19 - The rescue of David brings him into a broad place and what David means by that is that God has brought him to a place of safety.

*Why would a broad place be a place of safety?*

## The Psalmist's Righteousness – 18:20-24

:20,24 - We will handle these two verses together since they are virtually duplicates and bookend this section of the psalm.

- We see a recurring pattern of David offering up his righteousness before God that God may answer him. In Psalm 17 David specifically asked God to examine his lips which had never brought forth deceit. His defense of his righteousness in that Psalm was all about his speech. Here in Psalm 18 the defense of his righteousness has to do with the “cleanliness” of his hands.

*Why might David here be emphasizing the cleanliness of his hands? How do we avoid the idea that we earn a hearing from God by being righteous?*

*How then can we understand David's claim of the Lord rewarding his righteousness? **Read James 5:16***

:21-22 – David seems to have in mind in these verses some very specific commands of God that he has kept. Notice he refers to them three times as: *ways, ordinances, and statutes*. Whether these specific things are the Ten Commandments or the other commands given throughout the Pentateuch for the people of Israel we cannot say from the context.

- There is an emphasis in verse 21 on “wickedly departed”. This seems to suggest an intentional sinning even when the right thing is known. It reminds of the notion of “cheap grace”. The idea being that we can always go to confession and be forgiven so it doesn't really matter what we do. Dietrich Bonhoeffer talks about cheap grace in his book, The Cost of Discipleship. His point is that we need to live a life that reflects repentance and discipleship.

:23 - The specificity of David's obedience in verses 21 and 22 is now more generalized to “blameless” and “kept myself from iniquity”. While you and I would probably never call ourselves blameless, we still engage at times in a “comparative goodness”.

*What is comparative goodness? Why is it dangerous?*

**Read James 2:10**

*What does James tell us about our goodness?*

## The Lord's Response – 18:25-29

:25-27 – *“Yet it does not mean that we, by our own behavior, determine God's attitude towards us, but rather God responds to our behavior in appropriate ways..that is God rewards us in kind. In fact, keeping his commandments is*

*our duty as God's servants, and God does not owe us anything for our duty. The image behind verses 25-27 is that of a servant and master, **but it does not define the totality of divine grace.** In fact, the "faithful", "blameless", and "pure" are equipped by God's flawless word (v.30-36). While the language of this psalm is not strictly the New Testament notion of unmerited favor, the underlying grace of God meets individuals in their strength (v.25-29) as well as in their weakness (v.36)."*<sup>1</sup>

**Read Romans 5:8**

*How does this passage show us that this is not a reciprocal arrangement?*

- :28 - Not only does the Lord rescue David, but He lights the path before him. What was unclear to David, the outcome of his battles, was made clear or bright by God.
- :29 - This verse emphasizes the military nature of the delivery that God has brought David. Its' language of "running upon a troupe" and "leaping a wall" give powerful military imagery and continue the imagery of verse 2.

Summary

God completely delivers David and answers the requests he made in verses 3-6. Much of today's lesson had David laying out his own righteousness, but we must remember that our righteousness does not earn God's favor. Yet by engaging in discipleship, repentance, and active righteousness we come to understand God better.

Closing Prayer

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<sup>1</sup> Bullock, C. Hassell, Psalms: Volume 1(1-72), p. 131