

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

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Psalm 18 — Twice Given—Twice Triumphant

1.0 Introducing Psalm 18

- Scripture also records Psalm 18 in 2 Samuel 22. Its double appearance indicates its significance for God's people. The psalm presents an extended hymn of praise for divine deliverance from the psalmist's enemies.
- The psalm in 2 Samuel 22 is older—probably the original. An historical appendix to the Book of Samuel (2 Sam 22–24) offers the psalm as one of the official documents supporting the history of David.
- David may have edited Psalm 18 himself to make it more suitable for singing in Temple worship. See John Phillips, *Exploring Psalms*, 2 vols., John Phillips Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1988), 1:137.
- Both psalms begin with the same inscription.
 - ◆ It employs the longest inscription on any psalm in the Psalter.
 - ◆ This repetition makes a strong argument for the authenticity and inspiration of the psalm inscriptions.
 - ◆ The musical subscription (“For the choir director”) occurs only in Psalm 18 because it has been displaced from the end of Psalm 17 (cf. Habakkuk 3:19). The musical notation was unnecessary for the document as historical evidence in 2 Samuel 22, but was needed for the liturgical setting of the Psalms.

2.0 Reading Psalm 18 (NAU)

18:1 A *Psalm* of David the servant of the LORD, who spoke to 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. And he said,

“I love You, O LORD, **my strength.**”

18:2 The LORD is **my rock** and **my fortress** and my deliverer,
My God, **my rock**, in whom I take refuge;

- My shield and the horn of my salvation, **my stronghold**.
- 18:3** I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised,
And I am saved from my enemies.
- 18:4** The cords of death encompassed me,
And the torrents of ungodliness terrified me.
- 18:5** The cords of Sheol surrounded me;
The snares of death confronted me.
- 18:6** In my distress I called upon the LORD,
And cried to my God for help;
He heard my voice out of His temple,
And my cry for help before Him came into His ears.
- 18:7** Then the earth shook and quaked;
And the foundations of the mountains were trembling
And were shaken, because He was angry.
- 18:8** Smoke went up out of His nostrils,
And fire from His mouth devoured;
Coals were kindled by it.
- 18:9** He bowed the heavens also, and came down
With thick darkness under His feet.
- 18:10** He rode upon a cherub and flew;
And He sped upon the wings of the wind.
- 18:11** He made darkness His hiding place, His canopy around Him,
Darkness of waters, thick clouds of the skies.
- 18:12** From the brightness before Him passed His thick clouds,
Hailstones and coals of fire.
- 18:13** The LORD also thundered in the heavens,
And the Most High uttered His voice,
Hailstones and coals of fire.
- 18:14** He sent out His arrows, and scattered them,
And lightning flashes in abundance, and routed them.
- 18:15** Then the channels of water appeared,
And the foundations of the world were laid bare
At Your rebuke, O LORD,
At the blast of the breath of Your nostrils.
- 18:16** He sent from on high, He took me;
He drew me out of many waters.
- 18:17** He delivered me from my strong enemy,
And from those who hated me, for they were too mighty for me.
- 18:18** They confronted me in the day of my calamity,
But the LORD was my stay.
- 18:19** He brought me forth also into a broad place;
He rescued me, because He delighted in me.
- 18:20**

The LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness; According to the cleanness of my hands He has recompensed me.
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- 18:21** For I have kept the ways of the LORD,

- 18:42** Then I beat them fine as the dust before the wind;
I emptied them out as the mire of the streets.
- 18:43** You have delivered me from the contentions of the people;
You have placed me as head of the nations;
A people whom I have not known serve me.
- 18:44** As soon as they hear, they obey me;
Foreigners submit to me.
- 18:45** Foreigners fade away,
And come trembling out of their fortresses.
- 18:46** The LORD lives, and blessed be my rock;
And exalted be the God of my salvation,
- 18:47** The God who executes vengeance for me,
And subdues peoples under me.
- 18:48** He delivers me from my enemies;
Surely You lift me above those who rise up against me;
You rescue me from the violent man.
- 18:49** Therefore I will give thanks to You among the nations, O LORD,
And I will sing praises to Your name.
- 18:50** He gives great deliverance to His king,
And shows lovingkindness to His anointed,
To David and his descendants forever.

For the choir director.

3.0 Understanding Psalm 18

3.1 Outline

- I. Introductory Praise (vv. 1-3)
- II. Account of Deliverance (vv. 4-19)
- III. Instruction in Righteousness (vv. 20-29)
- IV. Example of Devotion (vv. 30-45)
- V. Concluding Praise (vv. 46-50)



3.2 Notes

- **v. 1** “from the hand of”
 - The double occurrence employs two different Hebrew terms. Both are symbolic of power or control.
 - The first is literally “palm” or “grasp” while the second is “hand.”
- **v. 1** “I love You”
 - These opening words do not appear in the parallel psalm in 2 Samuel 22.
 - This is not the usual word for “love.” It is more often translated “have mercy,” “have compassion,” or “have pity.” The particular Hebrew form of the verb here is unique.
 - God is more frequently the subject of this verb (cf. Pss 102:13; 103:13).

- **v. 2** Metaphors
 - This verse is rich with metaphors: rock, fortress, refuge, shield, horn, and tower.
 - All the metaphors are symbolic of strength, security, and refuge.
 - Note the repeated “my” that personalizes God’s strong and secure refuge for David.
 - David draws from his experience in the wilderness while fleeing from Saul. These metaphors help express David’s escapes and victories.
 - Such language confirms David’s trust in the LORD, the One Who provides protection.

- **v. 3** “worthy to be praised”
 - David places this first in the Hebrew text. By position it is emphatic and exclamatory.

- **v. 4** “cords of death . . . torrents of ungodliness”
 - David refers to death and Sheol in these two metaphors.
 - ✓ Death restrains the individual from return to this life.
 - “Torrents of ungodliness” is literally “floods of Belial”—symbolic of the overwhelming wickedness of David’s enemies. In 1 Samuel 25:17 “a worthless man” is literally “a son of Belial” (cf. Deut 13:14).

- **v. 10** “He rode upon a cherub and flew”
 - “He rode upon a cherub” in the Hebrew exhibits alliteration or assonance of consonants.
 - ✓ David intended the assonance to enhance a memorable depiction of the LORD and to focus attention upon the concept of His swift intervention.
 - The imagery of this verse could personify a thunderstorm.
 - “To attempt to analyze such language is to destroy its rich cadences and to violate its appeal to the imagination. It seeks at one and the same time to witness to, yet to keep wrapped in mystery, the awesome glory and power of God. It is for congregational singing, not for grammatical dissection!”—Robert Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 66.

- **vv. 12, 13** “Hailstones and coals of fire”
 - This phrase does not occur in 2 Samuel 22:14 (parallel to Ps 18:12). The repetition heightens the hymnic and liturgical nature of Psalm 18.
 - Clouds, fire, darkness, thunder, lightning, and hailstones characterize the appearance of God (theophany) in the Old Testament when He acts on behalf of His people or presents revelation.
 - ✓ See Exodus 19:16; Deuteronomy 33:2; Joshua 10:11; Psalm 78:48; Isaiah 30:30; Ezekiel 1:13; 38:22.

- **v. 18** “But the LORD was my stay”
 - “Stay” is the same Hebrew word as “staff” in Psalm 23:4.

- The LORD is the psalmist's support and protection.
- **v. 19** "into a broad place"
 - Having space or room to breathe depicts relief from the pressures and stress of enemies and calamity.
- **vv. 20, 24** "according to my righteousness . . . the cleanness of my hands"
 - David's words, repeated for emphasis, affirm that the LORD rewards those who obey Him (vv. 21-23) and serve Him.
 - ✓ The text does not speak of salvation from sin, but of deliverance from enemies.
 - ✓ Cf. 1 Kings 8:32; Psalms 1:6; 5:12; 7:9; 34:15, 17, 19; 37:39; 55:22 (cp. 1 Pet 5:7).
- **v. 28** "You light my lamp"
 - "You" is emphatic: "You Yourself."
 - The Israelite soldiers referred to King David as "the lamp of Israel" (2 Sam 21:17; cp. Ps 132:17). The parallel to Psalm 18:28 in 2 Samuel 22:29 declares that the LORD Himself was David's "lamp."
 - Scripture also uses the "lamp" as a figure of life and preservation (Job 21:17; Prov 13:9; 20:20).
- **v. 30** "His way is blameless"
 - See verses 25 and 32. Whatever God does is right. Those who worship Him must display the same characteristic.
- **v. 31** "who is God"
 - The Hebrew word for God (*Eloah*) occurs here for the first of its four uses in the Psalter (cf. 50:22; 114:7; 139:19).
 - ✓ *Eloah* makes its first appearance in Deuteronomy 32:15 and 17.
 - ✓ However, its earliest biblical occurrences are its 41 uses in Job (e.g., 3:4, 23; 16:21; 19:26; 33:12; 35:10; 40:2).
 - ✓ *Eloah* (Hebrew) and *Allah* (Arabic) are equivalent and etymologically related titles. Scripture seems to locate Job's home, Uz (Job 1:1), among the Edomites (descendants of Esau) in the Arabian peninsula (cp. Gen 36:19-43).
- **v. 34** "a bow of bronze"
 - This phrase can be understood a number of ways:
 - ✓ A wooden bow with bronze decoration.
 - ✓ A bow shooting bronze-tipped arrows.
 - ✓ A bow "snakelike" ("bronze" and "snake" are similar Hebrew words) in shape—a double-convex bow.
 - ✓ A poetic figure speaking of a bow of great strength.
 - ✓ Best view: a literal bronze bow.
 - Job 20:24 also refers to a bronze bow.
 - James K. Hoffmeier reports the recovery of Egyptian bronze bows in the Sinai (see <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2004/688/eg10.htm>).

- Another ancient source, the “Instruction Text for the Lords of the Towers” (47.3) of the Hittite king Arnuwanda I, refers to “bronze bows” in a context referring also to bronze scale armor (see <http://www.hittites.info/translations.aspx?text=translations/adminInstruction/AWARIYAS.html>).
- **v. 35** “Your gentleness”
 - Literally, “Your humility” or “Your condescension.”
 - God condescended to come down from Heaven and intervene on behalf of David.
- **vv. 37-42** David Owes His Victory to God
 - The psalmist makes it very clear that the victory was not due to his own skill, strength, armaments, or strategy (cp. vv. 47-48). The king dare not be proud, because the LORD was the true Victor.
- **v. 46** “The LORD lives, and blessed be my rock”
 - Beginning at verse 46, “The epilogue is in the form of a doxology which puts the king’s triumph in context. The initial joy-filled cry, ‘The LORD lives!’ . . . , sums up the witness of the whole psalm.”—Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship*, 68-69.
- **v. 49** “I will give thanks to You among the nations”
 - Paul quotes this verse in Romans 15:9 at the beginning of a number of Old Testament citations proving that God’s plan had always been for the Gentiles to experience spiritual salvation and worship the LORD.
 - ✓ The context and grammar of Romans 15:8-11 indicates that Christ is the one speaking the words from the Old Testament.
 - ✓ “In Paul’s citation the risen Christ implicitly stands in the place of David.”—Mark A. Seifrid, “Romans,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. by G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 689.
- **v. 50** “His anointed”
 - Who is the “anointed” (Hebrew: “messiah”)?
 - “It is impossible to find a definitive historical setting for this psalm, some victory by a king of Judah that would account for its language.” “This ‘mythic’ character of the psalm makes it inherently prophetic.”—James Luther Mays, *Psalms, Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1994), 95.
 - King David penned the psalm as thanksgiving to the victory that God had given him over his enemies. David, as God’s “anointed” king, established the role of “messiah” that the ultimate Davidic King would fulfill to an even greater extent.

4.0 Singing Psalm 18

I Will Ever Sing Thy Praises

(Tune: “All the Way My Savior Leads Me” or “Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us”
or “O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus” or “Face to Face with Christ, My Savior”)

I will ever sing Thy praises.
Mighty God and gracious King;
Loud my heart its tribute raises,
And to Thee my psalms I sing;
Thou art King of all creation,
Every land and every nation;
“Thousand, thousand thanks to Thee,
Mighty God,” my song shall be!

All the people shall proclaim Thee,
Sing Thy praise from shore to shore;
Every human heart shall name Thee,
God and King forevermore;
On Thy throne in heaven vaulted,
In Thy majesty exalted,
“Thousand, thousand thanks to Thee,
Mighty God,” my song shall be!

When at last my feet have found Thee,
When at last I am Thy own;
When the ransomed hosts surround Thee,
On Thy great eternal throne;
When in yonder land of glory
Angels tell redemption’s story,
“Thousand, thousand thanks to Thee,
Mighty God,” my song shall be!

For another song to sing for Psalm 18, try “Only in God Is My Soul at Rest” by John Michael Talbot
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5.0 Praying Psalm 18

- Praise the Lord! You are my Rock and Refuge! [v. 2]
- You are worthy to be praised, Lord. [v. 3]
- Lord, help me—I’m in trouble. [vv. 4-6]
- O God, give me light for my darkness. [v. 28]
- Show Yourself to all the nations, Lord. [vv. 43-45, 49]

6.0 Applying Psalm 18

- God alone provides His people with protection and salvation.
- We must obey God’s Word and do that which is right.
- We must thank God and praise Him for saving us.
- God will bring glory to Himself among all nations through His Messiah.