

Psalm 17

A prayer of David.

Psalm 17 is one of three that bear the title “A prayer of David” (also 86 and 142).

It is a most appropriate heading since the psalm is rich with words for petition: “hear, attend, unto, give ear,” and so on.

After an initial cry to God (verses 1-2), David defends his character and motives (verses 3-5).

On this basis, he is able to offer his petition, which includes both a beautiful prayer for divine protection (verse 8), and a repulsive description of his would-be captors (verses 9-12).

The request, “Keep me as the apple of the eye” (verse 8), is a petition that God protect David just as a man protects the pupil of his eye, the most sensitive part of the most sensitive member of a person’s body.

Finally, David asks that his deliverance might be granted: it will involve the destruction of his enemies (verses 13-14), but will result in David’s unhindered devotion (verse 15).

Verses 1-15:

This “prayer” of David brims with petitions, as many as seventeen of them depending upon the translation of certain Hebrew verb forms.

There are many literary parallels (with Psalm 16).

Although the psalm shows indications of mixed forms, it is essentially a prayer for protection.

David is fond of using themes and phrases from the Exodus narrative (compare Exodus chapter 15; Deut. Chapter 32).

A logical repetition pattern development is detected in its verses, with the focus shifting from the psalmist (verses 1-8), to his enemies (verses 9-12), remaining on his enemies in (verses 13-14), then shifting back to David (verse 15).

Or viewing its development from another angle, David approaches the divine court with 3 clusters of appeals in seeking justice.

(1) Appeals Dealing with Response and Recognition (17:1-5).

(2) Appeals Dealing with Rescue and Relief (17:6-12).

A. His Need for Rescue is Presented (17:6-8);

B. His Need for Relief is Documented (17:9-12).

(3) Appeals Dealing with Retribution and Rest (17:13-15).

A. His Anticipation of Their Retribution (17:13-14);

B. His Assurance of His Own Rest (17:15).

This is the first psalm simply entitled “A Prayer” (compare Psalms 86, 90, 102, 142).

Verses 1-2: The introductory language is that of the law court, and David stands before the ultimate Chief Justice to present his case.

David claimed to be representing “the right”, asking for a fair ruling in God’s court.

Psalm 17:1 “Hear the right, O LORD, attend unto my cry, give ear unto my prayer, [that goeth] not out of feigned lips.”

Hebrew (tzedek), righteousness.

That is my righteous cause, or me, who notwithstanding all their accusations and slanders, am righteous in my conduct toward them and all men.

"Attend unto my cry":

My fervent prayer, attended with strong cries.

"That goeth not out of feigned lips":

Hebrew (shipthee mirmah), lips of deceit or of guile, which speak one thing when the heart knows and designs another.

This profession of his sincerity in his words fitly makes way for his solemn appeal to God in the following verses.

Feigned in the verse above, means deceiving or fraud.

Rinnah, the word that was translated cry here, means shout loudly.

David says, that he is not speaking with false lips.

He shouts, as if he needs to get God's attention.

David is sure that he is on the side of the right.

We see in this, that David feels justified in calling for God's help.

Psalm 17:2 "Let my sentence come forth from thy presence; let thine eyes behold the things that are equal."

Hebrew, my right or judgment.

I.e. judgment in my cause, or on my behalf.

"From thy presence":

I.e. from thee and from thy tribunal, to which I bring my cause.

Do not suspend or delay it, but speedily examine my cause and give sentence in it.

"Things that are equal":

Or right, for though I desire and need thy grace and favor in many other respects, yet I beg only thy justice in this cause between me and them.

David is not afraid to be judged by the just God.

David feels sure that, if he is tried in the balance scale, the scale would be in favor of him.

We may be assured also, if we walk uprightly before our God, the balances will be weighed in our favor as well.

Verses 3-5:

His basic integrity (verses 3-4), especially in view of the present age, was and is dependent upon the grace of God (verse 5).

Psalm 17:3 "Thou hast proved mine heart; thou hast visited [me] in the night; thou hast tried me, [and] shalt find nothing; I am purposed [that] my mouth shall not transgress."

Like Job, David did not claim he never sinned, but only that he was innocent of the kind of sin that would warrant his present difficulty (17:9).

Sometimes personal difficulties are caused by personal sin, but not always (1 Peter 1:6-7).

When a person has remained faithful and obedient and still faces trouble, the wise response is to appeal honestly to God, who is just and loving (17:7), as David does here.

David has every confidence that God knows the thoughts of David's heart.

David feels that he has been through many tests, and has shown during these tests that he is on God's side.

We remember when all the soldiers were so afraid of Goliath, they would not go out to fight him, David, as a lad went knowing that God was with him.

In fact, he went in the name of God.

He was not defeated, and I am sure David is reflecting on some of those times here.

Many of God's people are comforted by God in the night in visions and dreams.

David had definitely made up his mind that every word that proceeds from his mouth will be pleasing unto God.

Psalm 17:4 "Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have kept [me from] the paths of the destroyer."

Of wicked men, as to what respects and concerns them, or in the midst of them.

In the midst of a wicked generation of men, and their filthy conversation.

Who appear to be so,

"By the word of thy lips":

The law of God, the Scriptures of truth, the rule and standard of faith and practice.

Which show what works are good and what are not.

By the use, help, and benefit of this;

"I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer":

Such is the devil, who was a murderer from the beginning.

The Antichrist, whose name is Abaddon and Apollyon, both which signify a destroyer.

False teachers, and all wicked men: The "paths" of such are their wicked principles and practices, their damnable errors and heresies, and their sins and lusts, which make up the broad road that leads to destruction.

These the psalmist has "kept" or "observed", for the words "me" and "from" are not in the original text.

And the sense is, that he took notice of them, and avoided them.

And, as a faithful prince and magistrate, forbade his subjects walking in them, and restrained them from them, making the word of God the rule of his conduct.

The word of thy lips here is speaking of the Word of God (the Bible).

The teachings of God have kept David from the concerns of the works of men.

Notice in this that, David's will was involved in staying away from the destroyer.

He says (I have kept).

David has let the teachings of God direct him.

Christians today must hide the Word of God in their inner being, and let that Word direct them in all decisions they make.

I do not believe a person can walk as a Christian without studying His Word (the Bible), daily.

We are living in very dangerous times.

We cannot take someone else's word for what the Bible says.

We must know for ourselves what the Bible teaches, so that we cannot be deceived.

Psalm 17:5 "Hold up my goings in thy paths, [that] my footsteps slip not."

Which being spoken by David in his own person, and for himself, shows that he was conscious of his own weakness to keep himself in the ways of God, and to direct his steps therein.

And that he was sensible of both the need he stood in, and of divine power to uphold and support him in them.

"That my footsteps slip not":

Out of the paths of truth and duty, of faith and holiness.

Of which there is danger, should a man be left to himself, and destitute of divine direction and aid (see Psalm 73:2).

And though Christ had no moral weakness in him, and was in no danger of falling into sin, or slipping out of the ways of God; Yet these words may be applied to him in a good sense, as considered in human nature.

And attended with the sinless infirmities of it, he being God's servant, whom he upheld.

And of whom he gave his angels charge to keep him in all his ways (Isa. 42:1).

Those who walk in spiritual darkness, stumble and fall.

We must walk in the Light of Jesus so we will not fall.

John 12:35 "Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth."

John 8:12 "Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

Psalm 17:6 "I have called upon thee, for thou wilt hear me, O God: incline thine ear unto me, [and hear] my speech."

In prayer.

This had been the constant practice of the psalmist, and he still continued in it.

"For thou wilt hear me, O God": God is a God who hears our prayers.

He is used to hearing his people, and they have frequent experience of it.

And they may be assured that whatsoever they ask according to his will, and in the name of Christ, he will hear.

And such an assurance is a good reason engaging the saints to a constant calling upon God (see Psalm 116:2).

And such confidence of being always heard Christ had (John 11:41).

"Incline thine ear unto me, and hear my speech":

Meaning his prayer, which he now directed to him in full assurance of being heard and is as we see in the following.

Just the fact that a person prays, shows that he believes that God hears and answers prayers.

Notice again, the confidence that David has (thou wilt hear me).

David is saying, God listen carefully to my request before you answer.

Have you ever felt that God tired of hearing your requests in prayer?

I believe this is David saying this is a more important prayer than some I have prayed.

When Jesus prayed for the sick, and they were healed, He said, your faith has made you whole.

It is very important to believe that our prayer will be answered when we pray.

Mark 11:24 "Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive [them], and ye shall have [them]."

Psalm 17:7 "Show thy marvelous lovingkindness, O thou that savest by thy right hand them which put their trust [in thee] from those that rise up [against them]."

Namely, in preserving and delivering me.

Which, if thou dost, I must ever acknowledge it to be an act of kindness, or free grace and mercy.

Yea, and of marvelous kindness.

Because of my extreme and pressing dangers, out of which nothing but a miracle of divine mercy and power can save me.

"O thou that savest by thy right hand":

Either by his power, or by the man of his right hand, his own son.

"Them which put their trust in thee":

Meaning not in men, not in an arm of flesh, not in themselves, in their own power, wisdom, riches, and righteousness.

But in the LORD their God, who is the Savior of all men, but especially of them that believe, see (1 Tim. 4:10).

For these he saves both in a temporal and in a spiritual manner.

"From those that rise up against them":

From all their spiritual enemies, sin and Satan.

And from all outward ones, from the men of the world, oppressors and violent persecutors.

Who are afterwards described: the phrase, "by thy right hand", is by some, as Aben Ezra.

Connected with the word trust, and rendered, "them which trust in thy right hand".

Either in the grace, mercy, and favor of God, dispensed by his right hand; or in his strength, and the mighty power of his arm.

Jesus not only sits at the right hand of God, but in fact, is the Right Hand of God.

(To understand this better, read the little pamphlet on The Right Hand of God).

The Right Hand that saved all of us is Jesus.

We know that in the 14th chapter of John beginning with the 12th verse, we can pray and receive answers to those prayers if we ask in Jesus' name.

It is impossible to pray in someone's name you do not believe in.

Those who rose up against Jesus, and those who even now reject Him, will not pray in His name.

God's lovingkindness was shown abundantly to all of us, when He gave Himself to die for our sin.

God's love for mankind could never be questioned.

1 John 4:10 "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son [to be] the propitiation for our sins."

Verses 8-9:

The "apple" of the "eye" refers to the pupil, or, as the Hebrew language calls it, "the daughter of the eye".

God places the eye in a well-protected position; it stands surrounded by projecting bones.

Likewise, the righteous are in a protected position, no matter how "deadly" or "wicked" the enemy is.

Psalm 17:8 "Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings,"

"The apple of the eye":

An expression meaning the pupil of the human eye.

As a person protects that vital organ of vision, so God protects His people.

I believe the eye is the window to the man's soul.

The apple mentioned here, is possibly the pupil of the eye.

The first moment any foreign object comes toward the eye; the lid closes to protect the pupil.

I have used the expression so many times, about the mother hen spreading her wings and saving the little chicks from the storm under her wings.

How wonderful to know that God will spread His wings and save us from harm, if we are His.

David wants the supernatural protection of God.

If we are smart, we will want that protection too.

Psalm 17:9 "From the wicked that oppress me, [from] my deadly enemies, [who] compass me about."

Or "waste" or "destroy"; as wild beasts do a field or vineyard when they get into it.

And such havoc that persecutors and false teachers make of the church and people of God.

When they are suffered to get in among them (Psalm 80:13).

Wherefore from such wicked and unreasonable men protection is desired (2 Thess. 3:2).

"From my deadly enemies":

Enemies against his soul or life, who sought to take it away.

Nothing would satisfy them but this.

"Who compass me about":

On all sides, in order to obtain their desire.

Such were the enemies of Christ, and so they are described (Psalm 22:12).

David is not crying for protection from a natural storm, but he is asking for protection from the wicked who would like to kill him.

Our prayer should be that the blood of Jesus will build a hedge around us that the enemy cannot get through to harm us.

When you are covered in the blood of Jesus, the enemy will flee.

The enemy is afraid of the blood of Jesus.

The blood of Jesus is what defeated Satan.

Verses 10-12: These verses apply powerful imagery to demonstrate what sort of people were troubling David.

David's enemies were ruthless and lacking compassion, waiting to tear away at his life, much like a "lion" would his "prey".

Yet David knew that God could protect him, even from such bloodthirsty people.

God is able to shield all His children from those who seek to do them harm.

Psalm 17:10 "They are enclosed in their own fat: with their mouth they speak proudly."

"They are enclosed in their own fat": (Meaning their fat hearts).

Literally "They have closed their fat".

This was a common Old Testament idiom for insensitivity (compare 32:15; Job 15:27; Psalm 73:7; Jer. 5:28).

"With their mouth they speak proudly":

Haughtily; in an arrogant tone; as a consequence of their prosperity.

They would possibly wonder why they needed God, because they have most everything this world can offer them.

Psalm 17:11 "They have now compassed us in our steps: they have set their eyes bowing down to the earth;"

I.e., in all our ways.

We go from place to place, to rocks, and caves, and woods.

But wherever we go they are at hand, and ready to surround us.

Of which see an example (1 Sam. 23:26).

"They have set their eyes":

To wit, upon or against us.

I.e. they have discovered us, and keep their eyes fixed upon us, that we may not escape, or as designing to shoot at us.

"Bowing down to the earth":

Couching and casting themselves down upon the earth, that they may not be discovered.

And so may watch the fittest opportunity to surprise us.

Which sense is favored by the next verse, and by comparing (Psalm 10:10).

Otherwise, to cast us down to the earth.

This probably means that David believes he is surrounded by these worldly people.

Notice their eyes are not looking heavenward, but at the earth.

You and I are surrounded by people of the earth today. They see only the here and now.

They want the things the earth has to offer and are not concerned about their life after death.

Psalm 17:12 "Like as a lion [that] is greedy of his prey, and as it were a young lion lurking in secret places."

Or "the likeness of him is as a lion"; meaning Saul, as Kimchi interprets it.

Or every one of them that compassed them about, as Aben Ezra observes.

Sometimes wicked and persecuting princes are compared to lions, for their strength and cruelty (see Prov. 28:15).

So the devil is called a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8).

And the antichristian beast is said to have the mouth of a lion (Rev. 13:2).

"And as it were a young lion lurking in secret places":

To leap upon its prey, and seize it, as it has opportunity.

This denotes the secret and insidious method which the enemies of Christ take to do mischief (see Psalm 10:9).

Notice they are not a lion, but are acting like one.

We will look at the devil who runs around (like a lion), seeking whom he may destroy.

1 Peter 5:8 "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:"

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Psalm 17:13 "Arise, O LORD, disappoint him, cast him down: deliver my soul from the wicked, [which is] thy sword:"

That is, go forth against him, and meet and face him in battle, as enemies are accustomed to do.

Or, prevent the execution of his mischievous designs against me:

"Deliver my soul from the wicked, which is thy sword":

So Jarchi, Aben Ezra, Kimchi, and Ben Melech, render the words.

That is, from wicked men, whom God makes use of as instruments to afflict and also chastises his people.

Compare with this (Psalm 22:20).

The words are rendered by some, "deliver my soul from the wicked by thy swords".

Meaning not the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God by which Christ was delivered from the wicked one, when tempted by him in the wilderness.

But the avenging justice of God, the sword of the LORD, which, being whetted and taken hold on, and used by him, brings vengeance on his enemies, and salvation to his people (see Deuteronomy 32:41).

The Targum paraphrases the clause thus "deliver my soul from the wicked, who deserves to be slain by thy sword."

David was well aware that battles were won by God being on his side.

To fight a battle without the aid of God, would be disastrous.

David is asking God to destroy his enemies for him.

Verses 14-15:

The common grace of God is overlooked by those who are satisfied with temporal prosperities (verse 14), but David brings back the proper perspective on true satisfaction in verse 15.

Compare Jesus' teaching on these vital issues (in Matt. 6:19-34).

Psalm 17:14 "From men [which are] thy hand, O LORD, from men of the world, [which have] their portion in [this] life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid [treasure]: they are full of children, and leave the rest of their [substance] to their babes."

Wherewith thou dost correct me.

"Men of the world":

I. e. who prosper in and set their hearts upon this vain and transitory world, and neither have, nor choose, or desire any other portion or felicity, as it follows.

"Whose belly":

I.e. mind or appetite, as that word is used (Job 20:20; Prov. 20:30).

"With thy hid treasure":

I.e. not only with common mercies, as food and raiment; but with thy choicest and most precious good things, such as men use to hide or keep in their treasures, with extraordinary wealth and glory, and all the delights and of the present life.

"They are full of children":

When many of the faithful servants are barren, these are blessed with a numerous posterity.

Or, their children are filled or satisfied as well as their parents.

There is abundantly enough, both for them and for their children, and to spare for their children's children, as it follows.

The worldly people who have rejected Jesus as their Savior, had better enjoy this world, because this is all the pleasure they will have.

Hell awaits that type of person.

Notice their treasures are all of this world.

When they die they will leave their treasures here on the earth.

Their worldly children will be the only ones that will get any good out of them.

They have laid up no treasures for heaven.

The only thing meant by these people being (thy hand), is that God was their Creator.

They have no future with God in heaven at all.

Their portion is for this life.

Psalm 17:15 "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness."

"To behold Jehovah's face" is to enjoy communion with Him and enjoy all the blessings that flow from it.

It is the inward reality which corresponds to “appearing before Him” in the sanctuary.

“I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness”:

David had already spoken of death as a "sleep" (Psalm 13:3).

Now he speaks of "awaking."

What awaking can this be but an awaking from the sleep of death?

When he so awakes, he says, he will be "satisfied with God's likeness."

The word used is the same as that employed in (Num. 12:8), of the manifestation of the Divine glory to Moses.

David therefore expects to see, on awaking, a similar manifestation.

He will have the enjoyment of the "beatific vision," if not in the Christian sense.

At any rate in a true and real sense, and one that will wholly "satisfy" him.

Let me be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.

David says here, that heaven is good enough for him.

He knows that someday he will stand before the righteous Judge of all the earth.

He also knows that he will have taken on the likeness of God.

Praise God, we are adopted into the family of God when we become a Christian.

When we die, we will be like David and see His righteousness.

We will be righteous too, because we have washed our robe in the blood of the Lamb and taken on His righteousness.

1 John 3:2 "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."

We shall be heirs according to the promise.

Galatians 3:29 "And if ye [be] Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

Titus 3:7 "That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

Psalm 17 Questions

1. What does feigned mean?
2. Rinnah means what?
3. David says, he is not speaking with _____.
4. Why does David feel that he is justified to receive God's help?
5. How does David feel about being tried in the balance scale?
6. Name one of the tests that David went through.
7. What are just 2 ways that God comforts His people?
8. What is the (word of thy lips) speaking of in verse 4?
9. How do we know that David's will was involved in staying away from the destroyer?
10. What does the author believe is a must to walk as a Christian?
11. What happens to those who walk in spiritual darkness?
12. Who is the Light of the world?
13. What is a simple thing that shows that people believe in prayer?
14. When Jesus healed the sick, He said, Your _____ has made you whole.
15. Who is the Right Hand of God?
16. How can we pray and receive answers to our prayers?
17. 1 John 4:10 tells us what about love?
18. What is the (apple of the eye) probably?
19. What is David asking for when he says, hide me under the shadow of thy wings?
20. What protects the Christian from the devil?
21. Being enclosed in their own fat means what?
22. Why do they speak proudly?
23. What kind of people was David surrounded by?
24. What is meant by, they have set their eyes, bowing down to earth?

- 25. The devil runs around seeking whom he may destroy, acting like what animal?
- 26. To fight a battle, without the aid of God, would be _____.
- 27. Why should worldly people get all the enjoyment they can out of this world?
- 28. What is meant by, leaving the rest of their substance to their babes?