

## PSALM 18:1-50

### CHAPTER STUDIES ON THE PSALTER

"God's arrows never miss their mark."

The title deserves attention. David, although king, calls himself, **the servant of the LORD**. He does not mention his royalty. We gather that he counted it a higher honor to be the Lord's servant than Judah's king; right wisely he judged. Possessed of poetic genius, he served the Lord by composing this Psalm. It is no small task to improve that delightful part of divine worship, the singing of the Lord's praises. Would that more music and poetic ability were consecrated and that our chief musicians could be trusted with devout and spiritual songs.

David did not compose the words of this song to gratify human taste, but he spoke to Jehovah. It would be well if we had a single eye to the Lord's honor in our singing. Praise is of little value when it is not directed solely and heartily to the Lord. David is direct in his gratitude, for he owed all to God. The day he was delivered he had no one to thank but the Lord, whose right hand had preserved him. We too should feel that to God, and God alone, we owe the greatest debt of honor and thanksgiving.

The second and forty-ninth verses are quoted in the New Testament as the words of the Lord Jesus (Heb. 2:13; Rom. 15:9). A greater than David is clearly seen

here. If you know Jesus, you will readily find Him in His sorrows, deliverance, and triumphs throughout this wonderful psalm.

#### Division

The first three verses are the preface in which the resolve to bless God is declared.

- David poetically extols mercy, verses 4-19.
- The happy songster proclaims that God had acted righteously in favoring him, verses 20-28.
- Filled with grateful joy, he again pictures his deliverance and anticipates future victories, verses 29-45.

In closing, he speaks prophetically of the glorious triumphs of the Messiah, David's heir and the Lord's anointed.

(Ps. 18:2) **The LORD is my rock and my fortress.** Dwelling among the craggy mountain security of Judea, David escaped Saul's malice. He compares God to a secure hiding place. Believers are often hidden in God from the strife of tongues and the fury of trouble's storm. The clefts of the Rock of Ages are safe.

**My deliverer.** You interpose in my hour of peril. When almost captured by the mighty, He who is mightier than the mighty rescues

His people. This title, **deliverer**, has many sermons in it and is well worth studying.

**My God.** This is all good things in one. What a boundless wealth in this expression; it means, "my perpetual, unchanging, infinite, eternal good." Those who can truly say my God may well add "my heaven, my all."

(Ps. 18:4) **The sorrows of death compassed me.** Death, like a cruel conqueror, seemed to twist the cords of pain around him. David was hemmed in and threatened with the most appalling death. He was like a mariner broken by the storm and driven on the rocks by dreadful breakers, white as death's teeth. A sad plight for the man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14). Yet this is how Jehovah deals with His children.

(Ps. 18:5) **The sorrows of Hell compassed me.** From all sides, the hounds of hell barked furiously. A cordon of devils hemmed in the hunted man of God. Every way of escape was closed. Satan knows how to blockade our coasts with the iron warship of sorrow. Blessed be God, the port of prayer is still open. Grace can run the blockade, carrying messages from earth to heaven and blessings from heaven to earth.

**The sorrows of death compassed me.** The old enemy hunts his prey, not only with the dogs of the infernal kennel, but also with the snares of deadly skill. The nets were drawn closer and closer until the contracted circle completely prevented the captive's escape. About me the cords of hell were wound, And snares of death my footsteps bound. The case was hopeless, as hopeless as a case could be, so utterly desperate that none but

an almighty arm could save. David employs four metaphors: he was bound like a criminal for execution; overwhelmed like a ship-wrecked mariner; surrounded like a hunted deer; captured in a net like a trembling bird. What additional terror and distress could fell on one poor defenseless head?

(Ps. 18:6) **In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears.**

(Ps. 18:7) There was no great space between the cry and the answer. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise (2 Pet. 3:9), but He is swift to rescue His afflicted. David has in mind the glorious manifestations of God in Egypt, at Sinai, and on different occasions to Joshua and the judges. The psalmist believes that his case exhibits the same glory of power and goodness; he fits the descriptions of former displays of divine majesty in this hymn of praise. **Then the earth shook and trembled.** The most solid and immovable things feel the force of supplication. Prayer has shaken houses, opened prison doors, and made stout hearts sink. Prayer rings the alarm bell, and the Master of the house comes to the rescue, shaking all things under His step.

**The foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because He was wroth.**

He who fixed the world's pillars can make them rock in their sockets; He can heave creation's cornerstone. The huge roots of the towering mountains are torn loose when the Lord moves in anger to slay His people's enemies. How can puny humanity face it with-

out God? Let not the boasters dream that their false confidence will support them in the dread day of wrath.

**(Ps. 18:8) Smoke out of His nostrils.** This is an oriental expression of fierce, violent wrath, since strong emotion heats the breath that comes from the nostrils. The figure portrays the Almighty Deliverer as pouring out smoke in the heat of His wrath and the impetuosity of His zeal. Nothing makes God so angry as an injury to His children. He that touches you touches the apple of His eye (Deut. 32:10). God is not subject to the passions that govern His creatures. He does, however, act with all the energy and speed of one who is angry. Here God is aptly set in poetic imagery suitable to human understanding.

**Fire out of his mouth devoured.** The opening of His lips is sufficient to destroy His enemies. This fire was not temporary but steady and lasting.

**Coals were kindled by it.** David intended this entire passage to depict God's descent to help His child. At the majesty of His appearing, attended by earthquake and tempest, the earth rocks, the clouds gather like smoke, and the lightning as flaming fire sets the world ablaze.

**(Ps. 18:9)** Without speculating on the mysterious and disputed cherubim, it is enough to remark that angels are our guards and ministering friends. All their powers are enlisted to expedite the rescue of the afflicted.

**He rode upon a cherub.** Nature is also our helper; even the powers of the air are subservient to God. **He did fly upon the wings of the wind.** The Lord comes flying when mercy

is His errand, but He lingers when sinners are being wooed to repent. This flight is pictured as majestic and swift. "Flying all abroad" is Sternhold's word, and he is not far from correct. As the eagle soars in easy grandeur, wings spread without flapping and exertion, so the Lord comes with majestic omnipotence to aid His own.

The storm thickened and the clouds, pouring torrents of rain, combined to form the secret chamber of the invisible but wonder-working God. "Pavilioned in impervious shade" faith saw Him, but no other eye could gaze through the **thick clouds of the skies**. Blessed is the darkness that covers my God. If I do not see Him, it is sweet just knowing that He is working in secret for my eternal good. Even fools can believe that God is abroad in the sunshine and the calm, but faith is wise and discerns Him in the terrible darkness and threatening storm.

**(Ps. 18:14)** The lightning darted, as forked arrows **readily scattered them**. Boastful sinners are great cowards when Jehovah strikes. They despise His words and are tongue-valiant only; when it comes to blows, they flee. The glittering flames and the fierce fire bolts **discomfited them**. God is never at a loss for weapons. Woe to those who contend with their Maker! God's arrows never miss their mark. They are feathered with lightning and barbed with everlasting death. Sinner, fly to the rock of refuge before these arrows stick fast in your soul.

**(Ps. 18:15)** So tremendous was the shock of God's assault that the order of nature was changed. River and sea beds were laid

bare, **then the channels of the waters were seen.** Earth's deep cavernous foundations were heaved, until **the foundations of the world were discovered.** What will Jehovah's rebuke do? If **the blast of the breath of thy nostrils** is so terrible, what must Your arm be? Vain are the attempts to conceal anything from Him whose word unbars the deep and lifts the doors of the earth from their hinges! Vain are all hopes of resistance, for a whisper of His voice makes the whole earth shake in abject terror.

**(Ps. 18:16)** Now comes the rescue. The Author of the rescue is divine, **He sent.** The work is heavenly, **from above.** The deliverance is marvelous, **He drew me out of many waters.** Here David was like Moses, drawn from the water (Ex. 2:10). Believers are like their Lord, whose baptism in many waters of agony and in His own blood has redeemed us from the wrath to come. Torrents of evil will not drown the one whose God sits on the floods to restrain the fury.

**(Ps. 18:17)** When we have been rescued, we must ascribe all the glory to God, by confessing our weakness and remembering the power of the conquered enemy. God's power derives honor from all the incidents of the conflict. Our great spiritual adversary is a strong enemy, much too strong for poor, weak creatures like us. Nevertheless, we have been delivered, and will be, even to the end. Our weakness is a reason for divine help; mark the force of the for in the text.

**(Ps. 18:19)** **He brought me forth also into a large place.** After languishing in prison, Joseph reached the palace, and from the

cave of Adullam, David rose to the throne. Sweet is pleasure after pain. Enlargement is more delightful after a season of pinching poverty and sorrowful confinement. Besieged souls delight in the broad places of promise when God drives off the enemy and opens the gates of the surrounded city. The Lord does not leave His work half done; having routed the foe, He leads the captive to liberty. Broad, indeed, is the possession and place of the believer in Jesus. There is no limit to His peace, for there is no boundary to His privilege.

**He delivered me because He delighted in me.** Free grace lies at the foundation. Rest assured, if we go deep enough, sovereign grace is the truth at the bottom of every well of mercy. Deep sea fisheries in the ocean of divine bounty always bring the pearls of electing, discriminating love to light. Why Jehovah should delight in us is a question without an answer, a mystery that angels cannot solve. The fact that He does delight in His beloved is certain, and it is the fruitful root of favors as numerous as they are precious. Believer, digest this instructive sentence. Learn to view the uncaused love of God as the cause of all the lovingkindness we receive.

**(Ps. 18:20)** **The LORD rewarded me according to my righteousness.** Viewing this psalm as prophetic of the Messiah, these strongly expressed claims to righteousness are readily understood. His garments were as white as snow (Mark 9:3). These words are perplexing if applied to David, but the case is clear if the words are not strained beyond their original intent. The dispensations of di-

vine grace are to the fullest degree sovereign and do not depend on human merit. Yet in the dealings of Providence, there is often a discernible rule of justice where the injured are avenged and the righteous are delivered.

David's early troubles rose from envious Saul's wicked malice. Saul persecuted David under the cover of charges brought against the character of the man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14). David declares these charges utterly false; he possesses a grace-given righteousness that the Lord graciously rewarded in defiance of his slanderers. Before God, the man after God's own heart was a humble sinner. Before his slanderers, he could with an unblushing face speak of the **cleanness** of [his] **hands** and the righteousness of his life. You know little of the sanctifying power of divine grace if you cannot plead innocent at the bar of human equity. There is no self-righteousness in an honest person knowing he is honest, nor even in believing that God rewards because of his honesty. It is often a most evident matter of fact, but it would be self-righteousness if we transferred such thoughts from the providential government to the spiritual kingdom where grace reigns alone in the distribution of divine favors.

It is not opposition to the doctrine of salvation by grace, nor a Pharisee's spirit, when a slandered, gracious person maintains his integrity and vigorously defends his character. Godly people have a clear conscience and know they are upright. They will not deny their conscience and despise the Holy

Spirit's work by hypocritically making themselves to be worse than they are. Godly people prize integrity, or else they would not be godly. Are they called proud because they will not readily lose the jewel of a reputable character? A godly person can see that, in divine providence, uprightness and truth bring their own reward. When they see that reward given, may they not praise the Lord? Yes, and must they not show the faithfulness and goodness of God?

Read the cluster of expressions in this and the following verses as the song of a good conscience. Because he has safely ridden out a storm of contempt, persecution, and abuse, we will not upbraid the writer as one who sets too high a price on moral character.

**(Ps. 18:29) For by thee I have run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall.** Whether we meet the enemy in the open field or leap on them while they lurk behind the battlements, we will by God's grace defeat them. If they hem us in with living legions or surround us with stone walls, we will with equal certainty obtain our liberty. We have already performed such feats, hewing our way through a host of difficulties and scaling impossibilities at a leap. God's warriors can expect to have a taste of every form of fighting, and by the power of faith, act as soldiers of the cross. It behooves them to lay all their laurels at Jehovah's feet and say that by my God I have accomplished this valiant deed. Our spolia optima, the trophies of our conflicts, we dedicate to the God of Battles and ascribe to Him all glory and strength.

**(Ps. 18:30) As for God, His way is perfect.**

Far beyond faults and errors are God's dealings with His people. All His actions are resplendent with justice, truth, tenderness, mercy, and holiness. God's every way is complete, and all His ways put together are matchless in harmony and goodness. It is consolatory to believe that He who has begun to bless will perfect His work, for all His ways are perfect.

**The word of the LORD is tried**, like silver refined in the furnace. The doctrines are glorious, the precepts are pure, the promises are faithful, and the whole revelation is superlatively full of grace and truth. David had tried it, thousands have tried it, we have tried it, and it has never failed. It was fitting that, when way and word had been extolled, the Lord would be magnified.

**He is a buckler to all those that trust in Him.** No armor protects the warrior so well as the covenant God of Israel. He is the shield of trustful ones. What a thought! What peace may every trusting soul enjoy!

**(Ps. 18:31)** Having mentioned God, the psalmist's heart burns, and his words sparkle. David challenges heaven and earth to find another who is worthy of adoration or trust in comparison with Jehovah. "His God," as Matthew Henry says, "is a None such." He scorns the idols of the heathen, considering them mere nothings. **Who is God, save the LORD?** Who else creates, sustains, foresees, overrules? Who but He is perfect in every attribute, glorious in every act? To whom but Jehovah should creatures bow? Who else can claim their service and their love? **Who is a**

**rock, save our God?** Where can lasting hopes be fixed? Where can the soul find rest? Where is stability found? Where is strength discovered? Surely in the Lord Jehovah alone can we find rest and refuge.

**(Ps. 18:32)** Surveying all the armor in which he fought and conquered, the joyful victor praises the Lord for every part of the protection. Strength earns the first stanza. **It is God that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect.** Strengthened with power from heaven, the warrior was filled with vigor far above all created might. If God had not armed him with strength, he would have been feeble. Yet when braced with strength, David is compact in purpose, courageous in daring, concentrated in power. His action was a complete success, so undisturbed by disastrous defeat as to be called **perfect**. Have we been made more than conquerors over sin? Does our life become the gospel? Then ascribe all the glory to Him who arms us with inexhaustible strength so that we might be undefeated in battle and unwearied in the pilgrimage.

**(Ps. 18:33)** A divine hand had shod the conqueror's feet. **He maketh my feet like hinds' feet, and setteth me upon my high places.** Pursuing his foes, the warrior had been as swift as a young deer. He credits this swiftness to the Lord alone. When our thoughts are nimble and our spirits as rapid as the chariots of Amminadib (Song 6:12), let us not forget that our Beloved's hand has given us choice favor. While climbing into impregnable fortresses, David had been preserved from slipping by God. He stood where wild



goats had difficulty in finding footing. This was preserving mercy manifested. We, too, have had **high places** of honor, service, temptation, and danger, and we have been kept from falling. Bring the harp, emulate the psalmist's joyful thanksgiving. Had we fallen, our wailing would have been terrible, but since we have stood, let our gratitude be fervent.

**(Ps. 18:50)** In this final verse, the writer throws a fullness of expression that indicates the rapturous delight of gratitude, **great deliverance**. The word deliverance is plural, showing the variety and completeness of salvation. The adjective **great** is well-placed, if we consider from what, to what, and how we are saved. All this mercy is given in our King, the Lord's Anointed. We are blessed, for, as His heirs, we may expect mercy to be built up forevermore. The Lord was faithful to the literal David. He will not break His covenant with the spiritual David, for that would involve the honor of His crown and character. The Psalm concludes with the same loving spirit that shone at the beginning. Happy are they who can sing from love to love, just as the pilgrims marched from strength to strength. (The Treasury of David, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, updated by Mark Wash)

The word —"rock" is used in Psalm 18:2 to bring out God's protective care of us. **Show other instances in the Bible where the word "rock" is used as our identity with Him.** Gen. 49:24 Deut. 32:3-4 Ps. 92:15 Isa. 26:4

Would you say the love God experienced so richly by David generated in him an intense reciprocal love toward God? Do you also think the world problems facing him lost their power over him?

Psalm 18:35 says: —"You have also given me the shield of Your salvation." **What is the meaning of the shield?** Isa. 66:1-2 Eph. 6:16