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“LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.” Psalm 18:2

Main Idea: This is a cry of gratitude because God delivered David from his enemies. We, too, can take comfort and be assured that God is our strength and protection. I can take comfort and stand strong and firm in Him. Therefore, He is worthy of our praise. We can give Him our love and gratitude. David recounts how he was saved us from so many overwhelming certainties of hurt and death. Outside of His protection, you and I will be overwhelmed and useless. Thank God that Christ is with the Christian now; we have our help and security. Therefore, when we are in distress and all we see is despair, we can call upon and trust in our Lord God. David continues, “I have seen Him work in ways that confound the mind and my enemies.” Take note: many times our foes and obstacles that are ahead of us will seem impossible; but, our God makes a way in His rightness. Do not turn away from God or forsake Him in any way. Rather, stand firm in Him, be faithful and blameless. Be humble. In so doing, be willing and deserving of His Work in you. Let God work, see what He can do, and remember the world is flawed while God is flawless. Allow Him to be your shield, not your fears or sin or bad choices. Allow His rescue, receive His salvation and work in us. In Him, our lives will be victorious.

Contexts and Background:

Psalm 18 is David’s energetic expression of jubilation and praise to God for giving him victory and deliverance from the famine and the Philistines. Basically, this is a victory song of an epic battle, common from times of war, but it is not boasting. It is a response to Divine help and the goodness of God and His provision. This was towards the end of David’s reign as king. Thus, it may also look back to how God has interceded throughout his life from shepherd boy, to killing Goliath, to becoming king of Israel, all of the wars and betrayals he faced, how God brought him through it all. This psalm is also recorded in 2 Samuel 22 and many of the events are depicted in 2 Samuel 8. Psalm 18 also points us to Christ the Messiah, and what Paul wrote in Romans 8:28; 15:8, that Christ is with us through it all, thick and thin, when we can see Him or not. He is our Refuge and Strength and Deliver!

Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings:

- *Director of music / choirmaster.* Perhaps a musical or liturgical symbolization for worshiping congregation and or choir. As the Psalms were used as a hymn book in the Temple and by early Christians, some still use it this way, the Psalter (Hab. 3:19; 2 Sam. 22:1; 1 Chron. 23:5, 30, Neh. 11:17; Psalm 36).

Verses 1-3: God is our comfort who deeply loves and cares for us. He is there in the midst of trials, so we can call upon Him. We do not always escape pain; however, we always have Him working in us.

- *I love you, LORD.* Meaning, intimacy and personal devotion. *Rock* and *love* together, signifies God’s “unfailing love.” Also, the context denotes care, like having compassion for someone who can’t do anything for you. Or, in David’s and our place, can’t do anything for God but love and trust and then obey (Isa. 26:4).
- *My strength.* God is all sufficient to a person of faith. To be diligent and rely on God the strength of God by our faith (Psalm 29:11; 46:1; 73:26; 81:1; 140:7).
- *My rock, my fortress.* A poetic symbol for God. This is a symbol of security and defense as well as a place of refuge. Like a well-built fort in the side of a mountain that the people of a village could flee to in an attack. Like the ancient Canaanite cities carved into cliffs. Here God is our security. This also denotes David hiding in a cave from Saul as God protected him (Duet. 32: 4,5-18, 31, 37; Judges 6:2; 2 Sam. 23:25-38; Psalm 27:5; 61:2; Isa. 44:8).

- *My deliverer / Salvation.* Salvation now is in and from Christ, not in any belief or religious system. God's nature and will is to save what is lost: us. Thus, our Salvation is personal, but we serve Him as a collective. (Psalm 18:47, 25:5).
- *Refuge.* A safe place to flee to in times of war like the Masada outside of Jerusalem.
- *Shield.* This gives us the image of a God who protects us (Duet. 33:29; Psalm 5:8-12; Prov. 30:5).
- *Horn of my salvation.* Referring to the outpouring of God's power and a symbol of victory (1 Kings 1:50 - 53; 2:28; Amos 3:14; Rev. 9:12-21).
- *Stronghold / high place.* Also, an image of a safe place to flee to, an image of great comfort and our gratitude to be faithful of who God is and what He can do (Isa. 33:16).
- *Worthy of praise.* Our God who is forever faithful, remains true, is the Only One who is worthy of our worship, and whose love endures forever, our help comes from the LORD (Psalm 33:6; 89:11-13; 96:4-5; 104:2-9; 124:8; 134:3; 136:4-9; 146:6)!

Verses 4-15: God hears the cry and displays His power over the earth. God rescues us out of death and perdition, and eternal separation. God sees humanity as a matter of worth rescuing, so we should receive His hand by realizing our debt to Him.

- *Cords of death / grave / sorrows of hell.* A synonym to *Sheol*, the underworld, place of the dead. Like tentacles reaching up out of a grave to grab someone. Referring to nose snares used by many hunters in the ancient world. Meaning death is our hunter, God is our Savior. In Christ, we can overcome the fear of death (Isa. 14:9).
- *Torrents of destruction.* Referring to the power evil has, like a raging sea on a small boat (Psalm 46:2; Isa. 28:15-17; Matt. 16:18).
- *My distress.* God is concerned with our distress. This has the language of a "Theophany" God taking human form and acting personally for us.
- *Called to / upon the LORD.* We can go to our Lord at any time with confidence. We have a duty to give our full attention to God's voice, His Word, and reverence Him (Ex. 19:16-19; Job 37:5-6; Psalm 18:11-15; 77:18; Ezek. 1:4, 24; 43:2; Dan. 10:6; Heb. 12:18-29; Rev. 4:1- 11).
- *He heard my voice.* God cares enough to hear us (Gen. 14:19; Psalm 29; 2 Kings 8:19; Job 37:2-5; Isa. 55:3).
- *Earth trembled / rocked.* When God reveals Himself, the only response is terror, even from nature. A metaphor on how God delivered the Hebrews out of Egypt, through the Sea of Reeds against Pharaoh's mighty army (vs. 15; Judges 5:4-f; Isa. 24:4-13; Nah. 1:5; Hab. 3).
- *Smoke rose from his nostrils.* Sin in the presence of Holiness, Divine righteous jealousy. A metaphor of Mt. Sinai, and *nostrils* are the "organ of anger." A poetic description, as a metaphor--not a literal account--of God's attributes (Gen. 15:17; Ex. 19:18; Num. 24:6; Deut. 6:4; Nah. 1:6; Isa. 6:4; 31:5; Lam. 3:10; Job. 26:14; Hos. 13:7).
- *Cherubim.* Angelic beings in attendance to God. Many ancient deities are portrayed riding on the backs of animals, usually bulls. God is described with cherubim to point to His Holiness (Gen. 3:24; Ex. 25:18-22; 26:1, 31-33; 1 Sam. 3:3-4; Ezek. 1; 10:1).
- *Darkness his covering.* An imagery of Baal as a rider upon the storm clouds, as a metaphor of God's retribution and fighting for His peoples' justice. Also, a metaphor for judgment (Psalm 68:4; 104:3; Nah. 1:3; Dan. 7:13; Mark 13:26; Rev. 1:7).

- *LORD thundered.* Like the Hittite gods and Baal throwing thunder bolts to those who violate treaties. Here, an image of God fighting our battles (Psalm 29:3-9; 77:17; 144:6; Hab. 3:11).
- *Valleys of the sea / deep waters.* Rough and deep water was a representation of distress, chaos and destruction, what is frightful and terrible; it was also a colloquialism (saying) for a dwelling for monsters and things inexplicable and/or hostile. Like the river of death in "Pilgrim's Progress." Here it is God saving David from death (Job 7:12; 41:1; Psalms 69:2; 74:13; 89:9-10; Is. 27:1; Rev. 13:1-4).
- *Rebuke.* God is in control, even the chaos of the sea and in our lives (Psalm 106:9; Luke 8:22-25).
- *Spacious / broad place.* A metaphor for the "Promised Land," how God delivered at the conquest of Canaan by the Hebrews.

Verses 16-30: God delivers and rewards and displays His power in us personally. That shows us not just His love, but also His Way is perfect and ours is feeble. Therefore, we can trust in Him and be better off for it.

- *LORD has dealt with me.* David did not deserve the treatment which he received from his enemies, and therefore God intervened to save him (Psalm 17:3).
- *My righteousness.* As if I were, God regarded David as righteous, not that he was. Jesus is our righteousness and that only through Him who declares us righteous can we live righteously. David's or our righteousness, is not merited, the favor of God is given by what Christ will do in his behalf (Jer. 23:5-6, 6, 33:16).
- *Kept the ways of the LORD.* God the protector of those who commit themselves to Him. This is also the commitment and in context, the reward to be after God's heart (1 Sam. 13:14 15:28; 1 King 14:8; 15:5; Isa. 50:7-7; 1 Pet. 4:19).
- *Decrees / ordinances.* These are the judgments, as in the precepts of God for rightful living. A summary of the law on how we relate to God, others and the world. This was a matter of being faithful, not necessarily an exact legalistic following all of the laws in Leviticus (Ex. 21; Lev. 3:17; Deut. 6:4)
- *Blameless / godly... faithful.* Being loyal to God, our authentic relationship in Him. As Christians, we can have peace with God as a result of being justified by faith, our resulting obedience to and trust in Christ and being humble (Psalm 30:4; Jer. 3:12; Rom. 5:1; 1 Pet. 1:19; 2 Pet. 3:14-18).
- *Devious / crooked / savage.* Meaning to travel crooked, as to veer off the right path. Also, twisting God's precepts into something they are not, ignoring truth and righteousness (Gen. 30:8).
- *Humble.* Like meek, keeping our strength and thoughts under control. Also, to know our need for God and how God is gentle with us (Psalm 25:9; 37:11; 113:7-9).
- *Haughty.* Being very prideful and arrogant, the opposite of humble and the enemy to reverence God (Prov. 16:18-19).
- *Lamp burning.* A symbol of life, prosperity and endurance, as well as one's life being lived and or the descendants carrying it forward. "Your lamp has gone out" means you died. Why lamps of fire are lit at graves. Here God is the One who lights and continues our life and wards off danger (2 Sam. 7:8-16).
- *LORD's word / Word of the Lord is flawless / perfect.* God's perfect revelation to His people. Because God's ways are perfect, only a fool would refuse to follow them (2 Sam. 7; Phil. 3:12).

Verses 31-50: The language is epic and climatic, that God pursues, saves and gives victory. The Closing doxology.

- *Feet of a deer.* Meaning negotiating the narrow path on the side of treacherous rocky steep hills. Referring to the sure footedness of the wild "Iranian deer" (extinct in the 19th century) in Palestine, like a mountain sheep on rugged treacherous paths. Also denotes a steadfast faith no matter what.
- *Bow of bronze.* Meaning royal or God-given strength. Here an image of the power of God. Referring to a bow decorated or strengthened with bronze and or bronze tipped arrows. (A weapon of a warrior like Artemis, a Greek goddess, or *Odysseus' bow that is also used by Ulysses, in the form of like Zeus' lightning bolts.*)
- *Right hand sustains me.* Here David received strength from God (Isa. 55:5).
- *Cried for help ... to the LORD.* When David had to fight against his fellow Israelites and Saul. God only helped the one, David, who was in the right.
- *Lose heart / fade away.* That David's enemies would disappear, like a withering flower, and that he and Israel would be at peace (Psalm 1:3; 37:2; Isa. 1:30; 28:1).
- *Strongholds.* The fortified base camp of a powerful army. Referring to the sovereignty of God, He is our stronghold, defender, and protection from all attacks.
- *The LORD lives!* God does as He pleases in contrast to idols made by man that can't talk or act (1 Kings 1:25, 39).
- *Exalted.* God, is majestic and glorious and excellent throughout the universe. He alone deserves the right to be honored!
- *I will praise you.* It is a call to worship God "Praise the Lord," (Praise Yahweh) is found in the Psalms, chapters 104-106, 111-113, 117, 135, 146-150, and many more. This is a Liturgical expletive a priest uses called a "piel," as in a command to call the people to praise and worship Yahweh (Jer. 51:48; Psalm 104:34; Rom. 15:8-12).
- ***Unfailing love. God is One of unfailing love and great mercy! He allows us to come to Him in prayer, to come before Him and be saved. He hears us and has compassion upon us. The tenses in context are future continuous action, as in stable with tireless energy. Also, a retort to Baal who does not live or cares or loves (Psalm 5:1-7).***

Devotional Thoughts and Applications:

Psalm 18 is a song of faith and confidence in our Lord filled with incredible keywords of affirmation and protection. This is also a reflection on how David looked back though his life. He saw the hand of God under him the whole time. It is a declaration of trust, to look to our Lord God beyond what we know or can see, so we can have confidence in what He has ahead for us. David sang to God in his crises, when all was lost and the situation was hopeless. Many of us may find us in such prevailing circumstance. Thus, we can take a lead from this and hang on tight and longer in whatever trial we face—even singing our way through it. We may be delivered, we may not be; what matters mostly is what we learn and grow from it. If we just have faith and look, we can see that same Hand under, over and though us, Christ our Lord.

Perhaps no real trial will come your way. This too is a high praise, but often we have to be careful of our conceit and shallowness does not blind us. What matters most to God is not just our belief, as in our thoughts of God or that He exists, or that He may work in others but not me, but that our belief is the basis for our conviction, trust, and faithfulness in Him that leads to our obedience, for which we are rewarded.

Christian Life Principle: How do we respond to God when we can't see what He is doing? We can be grateful and praise Him for what He has already done. And have faith for what He will do. Then, it will be easier for us to trust Him and look beyond what we feel and see when things may get worse.

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions, see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. How has Christ brought you through tough times?
2. How do these words of our Lord, *my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge*; comfort you?
3. How important is humility for a Christians? What about a church leader or pastor?
4. What role does gratitude play in your spiritual formation? What about your disposition and interpersonal relationships?
5. What gets in our way of God's call for us to take comfort and be assured that He is our strength and protection?
6. We do not always escape the pains and consequences of a sin filled world; however, we always have Christ working in us. How has this been true for you?
7. When you are in distress and all you see is despair, how confident are you that you can call upon and trust in our Lord?
8. Have you ever faced antagonists and obstacles in life that will seem impossible? How did you get through? How did our Lord God make a way?
9. What does it take to let God work, and see what He can do? Keep in mind that the world is flawed while God is flawless.
10. What causes some Christians to turn away from God or abandon their faith in Him? What could be a catalyst to help us all stand firm in Him, Be faithful and of good character?
11. What can you do to be more confident in times of suffering and despair, to call upon and trust in our Lord?
12. When you may feel a pull to turn away from God or forsake Him in any way, what can you do to stand firm in Him, Be faithful and blameless?