

PSALM 18:

I LOVE YOU, LORD

INTRODUCTION

- Psalm 18 is a particularly special psalm. It constitutes an extended hymn of praise thanking God for delivering the psalmist from his enemies.
- It has also been identified as a “royal thanksgiving” psalm because of the focus on God’s “anointed” and his descendants (v. 50), as well as the king’s rule over the nations (vv. 43-45, 49).
- It appears here as well as in 2 Samuel 22 (with minor variations). This double-appearance underscores its importance for the people of God.
- Most likely, the psalm in 2 Samuel 22 is the original, and is included in the historical appendix to the book of Samuel (2 Sam 22-24) as part of the official documents supporting the history of David.
- Psalm 18 may be a form of that psalm which David edited for use in corporate worship.
- It is also one of the longest psalms in the Psalter. At 50 verses (51 verses in the Hebrew text), it is surpassed in length only by Pss. 78, 89, and 119.
- Psalm 18 is also very personal. There are numerous personal pronouns which heighten the intimacy of the psalm (e.g., **my** rock).
- Psalm 18:49 is quoted by Paul in Romans 15:9 to demonstrate the inclusion of the Gentiles in God’s plan of salvation.

Translation

I	Opening Praise (18:1-3)
1	By David, the servant of Yahweh, who spoke the words of this song to Yahweh on the day Yahweh delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. He said: I love you, O Yahweh, my strength

- 2 Yahweh is my cliff 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.
- 3 The praised one I call upon—Yahweh,
and I am delivered from my enemies.

II Account of Deliverance (18:4-19)

- 4 The cords of death surrounded me;
the torrents of wickedness terrified me.
- 5 The cords of Sheol entangled me;
the snares of death confronted me.
- 6 In my distress, I called upon Yahweh,
and to my God I cried out;
He heard my voice from His temple,
My cry came before Him in His ears
- 7 Then the earth shook and quaked,
and the foundations of the mountains started trembling:
They shook because He was angry.
- 8 Smoke went up out of his nostrils,
and fire from his mouth devoured:
Coals burned from it.
- 9 He bowed the heavens and came down;
Thick darkness was under His feet.
- 10 He rode upon a cherub and flew;
He swooped upon the wings of the wind.
- 11 He set darkness as His covering, His canopy around Him;
darkness of water—clouds of sky.
- 12 From the brightness before Him, His cloud passed by;
hailstones and coals of fire.
- 13 Yahweh thundered in the heavens;
the Almighty uttered His voice;
hailstones and coals of fire.
- 14 He sent out His arrows and scattered them;
He shot lightning and routed them.
- 15 Channels of water appeared,
and the foundations of the world were uncovered,
because of Your rebuke, O Yahweh,
from the blast of the breath of Your anger.

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- 16 He sent from on high, He took me;
He drew me from many waters.
- 17 He delivered me from my strong enemies,
and from those who hate me, for they were stronger than me.
- 18 He met me on the day of my calamity;
Yahweh was my support.
- 19 He brought me out to the broad place;
He delivered me, for He delights in me.

III Principles for Deliverance (18:20-29)

- 20 Yahweh rewarded me according to my righteousness;
According to the cleanness of my hands, He recompensed me.
- 21 For I have kept the ways of Yahweh,
And have not departed from my God.
- 22 For all His judgments are before me,
and His statutes I have not turned aside from me.
- 23 I have been blameless with Him;
I have kept myself from iniquity.
- 24 Therefore, Yahweh has recompensed me according to my righteousness;
according to the cleanness of my hands in His eyes.
- 25 With the faithful You show yourself to be faithful;
With the blameless man You show yourself to be blameless.
- 26 With the pure You show yourself to be pure;
and with the crooked You show yourself to be tortuous.
- 27 For You deliver an afflicted people,
but haughty eyes You bring down.
- 28 For You light up my lamp;
Yahweh my God illuminates my darkness.
- 29 For by You I can overrun a troop;
and by my God I can leap over a wall.

IV Examples of Divine Enablement (18:30-45)

- 30 This God—His ways are perfect;
the word of Yahweh is verified;
It is a shield for all who take refuge in Him.
- 31 For who is God, but Yahweh?
Or who is a rock except our God?

- 32 This God is He who equips me with strength,
and makes my way blameless.
- 33 He makes my feet like deer,
and on the heights he causes me to stand.
- 34 He trains my hands for war;
My arms can bend a bow of bronze.
- 35 You give me the shield of Your salvation,
and your right hand sustains me,
and Your gentleness makes me great.
- 36 You widen my step under me;
My feet do not slip.
- 37 I pursued my enemies and overtook them;
I did not turn back until they were consumed.
- 38 I thrust them through so they were not able to stand;
They fell under my feet.
- 39 You equipped me with strength for the battle;
You made those who rise against me sink down.
- 40 You gave me the backs of my enemies;
Those who hate me—You destroyed them.
- 41 They cried for help, but there was no deliverance;
They cried out to Yahweh, but He did not answer.
- 42 I beat them fine like dust before the wind;
Like the mud of the street I casted them out.
- 43 You have delivered me from the contentions of the people;
You have made me as head of the nations;
People I do not know serve me.
- 44 As soon as they hear, they obey me;
Foreigners come cowering to me.
- 45 Foreigners faint;
They tremble from their fortresses.

V Closing Praise (18:46-50)

- 46 Yahweh lives, and blessed be my rock!
Let the God of my salvation be exalted!
- 47 God is the giver of my vengeance;
He subdues peoples under me.

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- 48 He rescues me from my enemies;
Indeed, You lift me above those who rise against me,
From the violent man You deliver me.
- 49 Therefore, I will praise You among the nations, O Yahweh,
and to Your name I will sing praises.
- 50 He brings great salvation to His king;
He shows loyal love to His anointed,
To David and to his seed forever.

1. Opening Praise (18:1-3)

The psalm begins with praise to God for protecting and delivering David from his enemies.

“For the Choir Director” (v. 1)

- This phrase actually belongs to the subscription of Psalm 17.
- It appears as part of the superscription of Psalm 19 in today's Bibles.
- The fact that this phrase is absent in 2 Sam 22, it becomes more clear that Psalm 18 is a version intended for corporate singing in temple worship.

“By David, the servant of Yahweh” (v. 1)

- Few critical scholars accept Davidic authorship for this Psalm and instead suggest it is written in the style of David or in his honor. They prefer to date the psalm to later in Israel's history.
- Goldingay notes that the psalmist's claim to moral purity (vv. 20, 24) exclude him from consideration. But this argument assumes the psalm was written later in his life.
- Instead, nothing seems to preclude Davidic authorship, and in fact, most of the details of the psalm fit David's life and experiences rather well.
- Its appearance in 2 Samuel 22 strongly contests for Davidic authorship. Even though the words “by David” do not appear in 2 Sam 22 as they do in Psalm 18, that text does say, “David spoke to Yahweh the words of this song...” (2 Sam 22:1). *If Davidic authorship of Psalm 18 is questioned, it must also be questioned of 2 Sam 22!*

“who spoke the words of this song to Yahweh on the day Yahweh delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul” (v. 1)

- This is the longest superscription in the psalter, and the most detailed regarding historical context.
- The superscription here matches 2 Sam 22:1 with only a few minor variations. This lends strong support to the authenticity of the superscriptions in the Psalms as part of inspired Scripture. If we cannot accept the authenticity of the superscription to Psalm 18, then how can we not also reject 2 Sam 22:1?
- The historical context for this psalm is difficult to identify. The location of the psalm in 2 Samuel doesn't help, since chs. 22-24 of that book are a historical appendix and shouldn't be viewed as chronologically related to the rest of the book.
- “The psalm appears to refer to one significant battle in which God supernaturally intervened, but it also provides a summary of God's interventions to enable David to have victory over many enemies and so cannot completely be limited to one event” (Ross, 438).

“I love you” (v. 1)

- This phrase is unique in the OT, and they do not appear in 2 Sam 22.
- The usual term for “love” in Hebrew is *ahab* (e.g., “You shall **love** Yahweh your God...” [Deut 6:5]).
- Here the term is *reham*. Normally this term appears in a form that carries the idea of having “mercy, compassion,” usually with God as the subject (cf. Pss 102:13; 103:13).
- But here, it appears in a unique form, which in Aramaic carries the idea of love. The expression here denotes intimacy in David's relationship with God engendered by God's compassion displayed towards him through his deliverance.

“my strength” (v. 1)

- Strength is a major theme in the psalm, and metaphors and expressions of power and strength are replete throughout it
- The personal pronoun “my” also appears extensively in the psalm and contributes to the personal nature of the psalm. David was not merely rehearsing theoretical theology—he had learned these truths about God personally through real-life experiences.

“Yahweh is my cliff 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” (v. 2)

- The build-up of staccato-like metaphors for God is unprecedented in Scripture
- All these terms are symbolic for power, strength, security, and protection
- They are images drawn from military settings and geographical locations in the wilderness where David spent much of his early years escaping from Saul.
- “In this rush of metaphors David re-lives his escapes and victories...and probes into their meaning” (Kidner, 108).
 - “cliff” = rocky crag used for military defense, reminiscent of his unexpected delivery from Saul (“rock of escapes,” 1 Sam 23:25-28)
 - “fortress” = *mitsudah*, from which we get the name *masada*, the rocky plateau in southern Israel upon which Herod the Great built two palaces and where the last Judean holdouts fled following the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Kidner writes: “the cave of Adullam, where David first formed his band of outlaws; a refuge in many crises, and a place of many memories (1 Sam 22:4; 24:22; 2 Sam 5:17; 23:13f)” (Kidner, 108n58).
 - “rock” = cf. rocks of the wild goats (1 Sam 24:3)
 - “shield” = provides protection from the enemy during battle
 - “horn of my salvation” = drawn from an animal’s horns, which is symbolic of strength
 - “stronghold” = high tower, either natural or manmade

“the praised one” (v. 3)

- This term is positioned at the beginning of the verse for emphasis
- It reveals the overall intent of the psalm—to praise Yahweh for his deliverance.
- The psalm both begins (vv. 1-3) and ends (vv. 46-50) with praise

“I call upon...I am delivered” (v. 3)

- As part of the introduction, David is setting out his overall experience which he will then illustrate in vv. 4-19.
- Thus, instead of viewing this in the past tense (“I called upon...I was delivered”), it’s better to see them as habitual verbs...they describe a general principle that flows out of many personal experiences (e.g., “whenever I call upon...I am delivered”).

2. Account of Deliverance (18:4-19)

This section recounts a particular historical instance in which David faced great danger from his enemies and how God intervened supernaturally to deliver him.

“the cords of death...torrents of wickedness (v. 4)

- “cords of death” = poetic description of death and Sheol...it depicts death as cords which wrap around the person, restraining him from returning to this life.
- He uses the same imagery in v. 5 (“cords of Sheol...snares of death”).
- “wickedness” = lit. *belial*...the term is used to describe wicked, worthless men (1 Sam 25:17; Deut 13:14). He uses the term to symbolize “the overwhelming wickedness of [his] enemies” (Barrick).
- David is describing the utter desperation of his circumstances...his wicked enemies had pursued him to the point where he was at the point of death.

“In my distress, I called upon Yahweh; to my God I cried out” (v. 6)

- David’s instinctual response was to call upon the only one he knew could deliver him...God.
- *Where do you go when you experience distresses in life? Are you tempted to pursue human strength and resources to find refuge and safety?*

“He heard my voice from His temple” (v. 6)

- This probably does not refer to the tabernacle or the temple in Jerusalem, especially if this situation occurred at the time leading up to David’s ascension to the throne
- This “temple” is God’s cosmic/heavenly temple (cf. Gen 1, where the heavens are described with terms later used to refer to the tabernacle complex).
- Implicit in this is the nearness of God...though he is enthroned in the heavens, God hears the cries of saints...their cry comes “in his ears before him” (v. 6).

Theophany description (vv. 7-15)

- The language from vv. 7-15 draws upon the terms associated with Exodus and Sinai imagery...it is classic and foundational language related to divine theophany—when God manifests his presence physically on earth
 - Earthquake language (v. 7)
 - Smoke (v. 8)
 - Thick darkness (v. 9)

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- Darkness and clouds (v. 11)
- Brightness (v. 12)
- Lightning (v. 14)
- All these descriptions characterize God's appearance in the OT (cf. Exod 19:16; Deut 33:2; Josh 10:11; Ps 78:48; Isa 30:30; Ezek 1:13; 38:22).
- Note that there is no description of God's form...he is always shrouded in darkness, with bursts of brilliant light
- "The fact that a Yahweh theophany is not spiritually neutral but defining relates to another quality of those theophanies. *When Yahweh does reveal himself, he does not only reveal himself, he also conceals himself.* The revelation comes in flashes of glory that resemble lightning. The concealment takes the form of a thick, dark cloud. God's holiness is the reason for this twofold phenomenon. Because of his holiness, a full revelation of God's glory would be unendurable" (Niehaus, *God at Sinai*, 26).
- "he rode upon a cherub and flew" = the phrase uses alliteration of vowels and assonance of consonants (*yircab 'al cerub*) to make the description memorable and underscore the swiftness of God's intervention.
- It appears that God's theophany is being portrayed using the personification of a thunderstorm
- "To attempt to analyze such language is to destroy its rich cadence 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!" (Davidson, *Vitality of Worship*, 66).
- David "sees his perils and deliverance as no less crucial and miraculous than those of Moses' Day, to be described in the same tremendous terms, since God himself 'reached from on high' (16) to save him" (Kidner, 109).

"He drew me from many waters" (v. 16)

- The first person pronouns ("me") appear again, picking up from where v. 6 left off
- David describes his rescue as being saved out of a flood...though he was not literally drowning, he used the imagery to describe the drama of his deliverance. Flood waters are used elsewhere to describe armies of invaders (Isa 8:6-8).
- "drew out" = used in Exod 2:10 of Moses being drawn out of the water. Its use here may intentionally allude to that event.

“Yahweh is my support” (v. 18)

- “support” = the same term appears in Ps 23:4 of Yahweh’s “staff”
- God is David’s support who protects him “on the day of calamity”

“He brought me out to a broad place” (v. 19)

- “broad place” = if danger presses in on the individual, enclosing around him with “cords of death” and threatening to suffocate him, then the “broad place” is the place of safety and relief from calamity and enemies

“for he delights in me” (v. 19)

- David presents a broad “apology” for his deliverance...his deliverance came because God delighted in him
- This phrase serves as a transition into vv. 20-29, where David expounds upon the “principle of deliverance” in which God rescues the one who is righteous and faithful to the covenant.

3. Principles for Deliverance (vv. 20-29)

This section moves from the historical to the general. David explains why God has intervened, and then provides theological instruction.

“Yahweh rewarded me according to my righteousness...according to the cleanness of my hands he recompensed me” (vv. 20, 24)

- This phrase appears (with slight variation) in vv. 20 and 24 and forms an inclusion to this section
- David is expounding a theological principle—God rewards those who obey him
- This assertion has caused some to question Davidic authorship since David could not possibly claim to be morally pure. However, as was already discussed, this psalm most likely reflects experiences in David’s life from before his moral failure.
- Some have also balked at the underlying theological premise of this assertion. On the surface, it may appear like moral boasting, but a proper OT context clarifies things.
- First, the text does not speak about spiritual salvation from sin, but rather deliverance from danger and enemies.

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- The Mosaic Covenant promised safety and security for covenant faithfulness (Lev 26; Deut 28) and other OT passages reaffirm this covenant promise (cf. 1 Kgs 8:32; Pss 1:6; 5:12; 7:9; 34:15, 17, 19; 37:39; 5:22).
- “From a theological perspective, the passage must be understood in context; the righteousness of the psalmist placed him in that intimate relationship with God from which he could call upon God in distress and expect God’s deliverance. He had lived a life of moral integrity, he had walked in God’s ways and avoided wickedness, he had lived within God’s judgments and statutes and had been blameless, yet nevertheless he had been attacked by enemies. But the assault of enemies had not been a consequence of his behavior; it did not reflect divine judgment. So he had been able to call for divine deliverance, and deliverance had come. That deliverance was a reflection of God’s fair dealings with him” (Craigie, 175).
- “These verses may at first seem like arrogant boasting, but that is not the case since they form part of the praise for God’s faithfulness. They simply affirm that because God deals with people as he sees their heart to be towards him, the people of God may explain divine intervention through prayer as divine reward for righteousness” (Ross, 450-1).

“With the faithful...blameless...pure...crooked” (vv. 25-26)

- David moves from personal experience to theological maxim
- “faithful” = the word denotes covenant faithfulness and loyalty
- “blameless” = those who maintain integrity
- “pure” = moral purity through upright living
- “crooked” = twisted, describing the wicked person. The term contrasts with the previous three adjectives.
- The basic maxim is that God has a reciprocal relationship with the righteous and the wicked (cf. Ps 1:6).

“For you deliver an afflicted people, and haughty eyes you bring down” (v. 27)

- This is a more general principle encapsulating vv. 25-26
- God saves the humble, but brings down the proud

4. Examples of Divine Enablement (18:30-45)

David moves from theological principle to specific examples of how God has been with him and given him victory.

“this God—He is perfect in His ways” (v. 30)

- “This God” = emphatically placed—i.e., “This God—the one who I praise and who has delivered me and who promises to deliver the righteous”
- “perfect” = “blameless”...everything He does it right
- In v. 32, “this God” is repeated, and David asserts that He “makes my way blameless”.
- “Obviously *perfect*...has a far richer content as a description of God’s activity than of man’s, but his flawless wisdom, love and power are mirrored in the relative soundness of thought, motive and achievement (here it is especially achievement) which he produces in his servants” (Kidner, 112).

“the word of Yahweh is verified” (v. 30)

- “verified” = as refined by fire (Ps 12:6) = proven to be true
- “The psalmist knows that God’s word is true and therefore trustworthy, because he has been a shield (a metaphor for protection) to those who acknowledge their need and take refuge in him” (Ross, 454).

“For who is God except Yahweh; or who is a rock except our God?” (v. 31)

- “God” = *eloah*, a unique term for God used only 4x in Psalms (18:31; 50:22; 114:7; 139:4). It first appears in Deut 32:15 and 17, but appears 41x in Job (e.g., 3:4, 23; 16:21; 19:26; 33:12; 35:10; 40:2), which is chronologically earlier.
- The Hebrew term *eloah* is etymologically related to the Arabic term *allah*
- These links seem to correspond with the biblical data which locates Job’s home of Uz (1:1) in the Arabian peninsula among the Edomites (Gen 36:19-43).
- Rhetorical question amplifies David’s theological confession—*there is no other God but Yahweh—there is no other rock!*
- “rock” = harkens back to “my rock” and “my God” in v. 2
- God has promised and has proven that He alone is the rock of God and Israel

“He makes my feet like a deer, and on the heights he causes me to stand” (v. 33)

- Comparison is made to the indigenous deer, perhaps an ibex, known for their sure-footedness on rocky ledges
- God gives David physical ability and sure-footedness

“my arms can bend a bow of bronze” (v. 34)

- Some understand this to refer to a bow decorated with bronze
- Others suggest it refers to bronze-tipped arrows
- It could also refer to a snakelike bow (due to similarities between the terms for “bronze” and “snake”)
- It could be hyperbole—poetically describing great strength
- But it could be a literal bronze bow (cf. Job 20:24), considering that an Egyptian bronze bow was discovered in Sinai
- The point is that God endows David with strength and ability to handle advanced weaponry that was perhaps wielded only with superior strength and skill

“You give me the shield of Your salvation...your gentleness makes me great” (v. 35)

- David moves from 3rd person (“He”) back to 2nd person (“You”)...he can’t help but maintain the personal nature of his praise because these things he has seen through personal experience on the battlefield
- “gentleness” = lit. “humility”...God condescends to come down from heaven and give David help, protection, strength, and ability

God gave David complete victory over his enemies (vv. 37-42)

- David rehearses how God has enabled him to attain victory
- The victory is complete
 - He pursued and overtook them
 - He didn’t relent until they were destroyed
 - His enemies were not able to stand
 - God gave him strength to accomplish this
- David attributes his victory completely to God
- *How often do we acknowledge God in our victories? Are we tempted to attribute it to our own abilities and ingenuities? To other persons? To happy circumstances?*

God gave David dominion over the nations (vv. 43-45)

- The scope broadens from specific enemies to the nations
- His victories have resulted in the subdual of nations

5. Closing Praise (18:46-50)

The psalm closes by returning to the praise that it began with. The entire psalm recapitulates to praise, establishing what this psalm is really about. It is about thanksgiving and acknowledging God for his great protection and deliverance and generosity to his king.

“Yahweh lives, and blessed be my rock” (v. 46)

- “Yahweh lives” = God’s intervention proves that he is not like the dead gods of the pagans (cf. Ps 115:3-5)
- “The praise begins with a declaration of joy and faith: ‘the Lord is alive,’ an expression for which the whole preceding psalm has given evidence. It was only because God was a Living Lord that deliverance and victory had been possible: an idol, or a figment of the pious imagination, could not have provided real deliverance from the threat of real disaster” (Craigie, 176).
- “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, 68-69).

“Therefore, I will praise you among the nations” (v. 49)

- David’s intent is that God’s glory will be known throughout the nations
- Paul quotes this verse in Romans 15:9 along with a slew of other OT passages to demonstrate that God’s plan of salvation has always included Gentiles.
- As the ultimate Davidic King, Jesus (who in context is speaking these words in Romans 15:8-11) stands as the one whom God has upheld as the ruler of the nations and who brings praise to God among them.

“He brings great salvation to His king; he shows loyal love to His anointed, to David and to His seed forever” (v. 50)

- Who is this “king” and “anointed”?
- On the one hand, David is the author of the psalm, and his words are a thanksgiving to God for granting him victory over his enemies.
- On the other hand, the scope of the psalm and its use by Paul broadens its scope beyond its historical circumstances.
- David is the anointed king who “establishes the role of ‘messiah’ that the ultimate Davidic King would fulfill to an even greater extent” (Barrick).

Applications

- God is the one we should turn to in times of trouble. He alone provides the help and protection believers need
- Believers are responsible for obeying God and His word...he responds to our spiritual posture and comes to the aid of those who show their love for him
- God’s work in our lives should elicit unbound praise and thanksgiving. Thankfulness is the posture of those who have truly experienced God’s help.
- David’s troubles were physical and his enemies were human. Our warfare as New Covenant believers is spiritual, and he has equipped us for this battle with spiritual armor
- Christ has gained ultimate victory, and we can trust that we are conquerors through Him