



Psalm 28 - Prayer for Help and Thanksgiving for It

Of David.

Introduction

This is a lament, a cry for help amid the threat posed by evildoers. It is not clear whether the threat is to the individual or to the whole community; if the speaker is a representative figure like King David, he could be speaking both for himself and for the community. It is probably best to see the hostility as a threat to the whole community (vv.8-9), which each of the faithful is personally involved in, indicated by the references to 'I', 'me', and 'my' throughout.

Psalm 28:1-2 - Hear Me When I Call!

This model prayer brings its requests before God with urgency. The situation is desperate; to be like those who go down to the pit is probably more than simply to die, but to be like those who suffer divine judgement; the godly do not want to be treated in the same way as the wicked.

¹ To you, O Lord, I call;
my rock, do not refuse to hear me,
for if you are silent to me,
I shall be like those who go down to the Pit.

Psalm 28:1

To you, O Lord, I call; my rock, do not refuse to hear me. With this opening to the psalm, David was both trusting and hopeful. In faith he gave God the title he longed for him to fulfil; to be David's Rock in the present season of difficulty. David said this also in hope, because at the moment he felt God to be silent to

him: <<*When you returned and wept before the Lord, the Lord would neither heed your voice nor pay you any attention*>> (Deuteronomy 1:45).

For if you are silent to me, I shall be like those who go down to the Pit. In his trouble, David felt the grave was near, and if God did not intervene he would not live long. The response and intervention of God, the opposite of being his silence, was what David needed and longed for. The Pit can be either a reference to the grave or to Sheol, the place of the dead: <<*to spare their souls from the Pit, their lives from traversing the River*>> (Job 33:18). David wanted to avoid both.

² Hear the voice of my supplication,
as I cry to you for help,
as I lift up my hands
towards your most holy sanctuary.

Psalm 28:2

As I cry to you for help, as I lift up my hands towards your most holy sanctuary. David used the poetic technique of repletion and parallelism to say essentially the same thing in two ways. His prayer was a cry to God; and his body was set in the traditional posture of prayer: <<*At the evening sacrifice I got up from my fasting, with my garments and my mantle torn, and fell on my knees, spread out my hands to the Lord my God*>> (Ezra 9:5), <<*Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice*>> (Psalm 141:2), <<*Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the watches! Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord! Lift your hands to him for the lives of your children, who faint for hunger at the head of every street*>> (Lamentations 2:19), and: <<*I desire, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument*>> (1 Timothy 2:8).

Your most holy sanctuary. This is the ‘inner sanctuary,’ the place mentioned in: <<*He built twenty cubits of the rear of the house with boards of cedar from the floor to the rafters, and he built this within as an inner sanctuary, as the most holy place*>> (1 Kings 6:16).

Psalm 28:3-5 - Do Not Drag Me Off with the Wicked

The psalms generally recognise that God will indeed hold the wicked, i.e. those who defy the Lord, accountable for their deeds. The pious wish to see God’s justice vindicated, when those who defy his rule receive their due, and they do not want to suffer when the judgement falls: <<*These will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, separated from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes to be glorified by his saints and to be*

marvelled at on that day among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed>> (2 Thessalonians 1:9-10).

The wicked here are not simply people who commit sins, for even the faithful do that: *<<Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them>> (Psalm 32:6),* but those who oppose God and his people with deceit and treachery, that is, evil is in their hearts. Note the contrast between their work, i.e. the deeds of the wicked, and the work of their hands (v.4), and God's works and the work of his hands (v.5).

³ Do not drag me away with the wicked,
with those who are workers of evil,
who speak peace with their neighbours,
while mischief is in their hearts.

Psalm 28:3

Do not drag me away with the wicked. David happily knew that his life was different than the workers of iniquity, and he asked that God would treat him differently than the wicked.

Who speak peace with their neighbours, while mischief is in their hearts. When David thought to describe the wicked, he began by noting that they were false in their words, hiding the evil that dwelt within their hearts: *<<They utter lies to each other; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak>> (Psalm 12:2),* and: *<<Their tongue is a deadly arrow; it speaks deceit through the mouth. They all speak friendly words to their neighbours, but inwardly are planning to lay an ambush>> (Jeremiah 9:8).*

⁴ Repay them according to their work,
and according to the evil of their deeds;
repay them according to the work of their hands;
render them their due reward.

Psalm 28:4

Repay them according to their work. In his own seasons of sin, David cast himself upon the mercy of God and asked to be forgiven his sinful deeds. Here, he prayed for a harsh judgement to be applied to the wicked; that God deal with them according to the evil of their deeds. David is not seeking revenge on his enemies, but asking for God's righteous justice: *<<and steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord. For you repay to all according to their work>> (Psalm 62:12),* *<<Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will pay him back*

for his deeds>> (2 Timothy 4:14), and: <<*See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's work*>> (Revelation 22:12).

- ⁵ Because they do not regard the works of the Lord,
or the work of his hands,
he will break them down and build them up no more.

Psalm 28:5

Because they do not regard the works of the Lord, or the work of his hands. When David considered the wicked deeds of the ungodly, he also considered that they ignored the creative work of God. To David, this was evidence of one being sinful and ripe for judgement. Paul expressed the same idea: <<*Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; for though they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened*>> (Romans 1:20-21).

He will break them down and build them up no more. The wicked forget about God, but he does not forget about them. God promises to give those who reject him what they deserve.

Psalm 28:6-9 - The Lord Has Heard Me

The psalm ends with confidence that God will protect his people and his anointed, i.e. the Davidic king, who represents and embodies the whole people, as confirmed by 2:8. This leads to prayer for God to save them and to bless his heritage: <<*the Lord's own portion was his people, Jacob his allotted share*>> (Deuteronomy 32:9).

- ⁶ Blessed be the Lord,
for he has heard the sound of my pleadings.
- ⁷ The Lord is my strength and my shield;
in him my heart trusts;
so I am helped, and my heart exults,
and with my song I give thanks to him.

Psalm 28:6-7

Blessed be the Lord, for he has heard. In his trouble, David cried out to God. Now he praises the God who heard and answered his prayer, becoming David's strength

and shield. It is a beautiful thing to be able to say my strength and my shield. Some have a theoretical knowledge of God as a strength or shield, without knowing the goodness of it in the individual life.

In him my heart trusts; so I am helped, and my heart exults. David here adds his voice to the testimony of countless others who have found help as their heart trusted in God: <<*Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace – in peace because they trust in you*>> (Isaiah 26:3). This brought great rejoicing and singing to David.

With my song I give thanks to him. David was both a gifted singer and a worship leader, and song was always his immediate reaction when he thought of God.

- 8 The Lord is the strength of his people;
he is the saving refuge of his anointed.
- 9 O save your people, and bless your heritage;
be their shepherd, and carry them for ever.

Psalm 28:8-9

The Lord is the strength of his people; he is the saving refuge of his anointed. This is the blessing given to the heart that trusts God; God becomes their strength. He does not merely give strength; he is their strength, and the refuge of his anointed: <<*You came forth to save your people, to save your anointed. You crushed the head of the wicked house, laying it bare from foundation to roof*>> (Habakkuk 3:13). The word anointed, Hebrew *mashiach*, is a reminder of the ultimate anointed one, Jesus the Messiah. His anointed are in the Messiah, and therefore strong and safe.

O save your people, and bless your heritage; be their shepherd, and carry them for ever. David concludes this psalm with a series of short prayers asking God to bring his people what they need and look to him for. His prays as God to:

- Save them: God's people need rescuing, and look to God for it.
- Bless them: God's people need his blessing and favour, and they receive it as being his inheritance.
- Be their Shepherd: God's people need his care and guidance as a shepherd guides his flock. The Hebrew word *raah* signifies both to feed and to govern. To feed them, as a shepherd does his flock; and to rule them, as a father does his children.
- Carry them: God's people need God's constant, sustaining presence, and they need it for ever.