

Protection for this Life, and Prospect for the Life to Come

Psalm 17

Psalm 17 - *“Hear a just cause, O LORD. Attend to my cry. Give ear to my prayer that is not from deceitful lips. Let my vindication come from Your presence: let Your eyes look on the things that are upright. You have tested my heart; You have visited me in the night; You have tried me and have found nothing. I have purposed that my mouth shall not transgress. Concerning the works of men, by the word of Your lips, I have kept away from the paths of the destroyer.*

Uphold my steps in Your paths that my footsteps may not slip. I have called upon You, for You will hear me, O God. Incline Your ear to me, and hear my speech. Show Your marvelous loving kindness by Your right hand, O You who save those who trust in You, from those who rise up against them. Keep me as the apple of Your eye. Hide me under the shadow of Your wings, from the wicked who oppress me, from my deadly enemies who surround me. They have closed up their fat hearts; with their mouths they speak proudly. They have now surrounded us in our steps. They have set their eyes, crouching down to the earth, as a lion is eager to tear his prey, and like a young lion lurking in secret places.

Arise, O LORD! Confront him, cast him down. Deliver my life from the wicked with Your sword, with Your hand from men, O LORD, from men of the world who have their portion in this life, and whose belly You fill with Your hidden treasure. They are satisfied with children, and leave the rest of their possession for their babes.

As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness. I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness.”

Background Notes

In this psalm David spoke of the believer’s great protection for this life, and the believer’s great prospect for the life to come. In the title and verse 1, notice that Psalm 17 is designated as a prayer. Although many of the psalms are prayers, only five of them are actually designated as prayers. Psalm 17 is one of those psalms.

In this psalm, David’ prayed for deliverance from the danger that was immediately threatening him. He urgently called for help because his need was pressing: *“From the wicked who oppress me, from my deadly enemies who surround me. They have closed up their fat hearts. With their mouths they speak proudly. They have now surrounded us in our steps; they have set their eyes, crouching down to the earth, as a lion is eager to tear his prey, and like a young lion lurking in secret places. Arise, O LORD! Confront him! Cast him down! Deliver my life from the wicked with Your sword...”* (v9-13).

We don't know the occasion of this psalm, but clearly, David was confronted by a threatening and dangerous situation. Perhaps it was written when King Saul and his soldiers were about to capture David and his small group of men in 1 Samuel 23:25-29: *"When Saul and his men went to seek David, he went and stayed in the Wilderness of Maon. When Saul heard it, he pursued David in the Wilderness of Maon. Then Saul went on one side of the mountain, and David and his men on the other side of the mountain. So David made haste to get away from Saul, for Saul and his men were encircling David and his men to take them. But a messenger came to Saul, saying, 'Hurry and come, for the Philistines have invaded the land!' So Saul returned from pursuing David, and went against the Philistines. So they called that place the Rock of Escape."*

In Psalm 17:1-3, was David was claiming righteousness before God based on his own merits? *"You have tested my heart... You have tried me and have found nothing"* (v3). Could this passage of Scripture be used as a proof text for salvation by good works? Was David claiming to be righteous because of his own good works?

No, not at all! We must remember the historical **background** of this psalm. David was asking God to vindicate him and rescue him from the forces that surrounded him – enemies that threatened to capture him and kill him. David was **not** claiming that he was perfect – **in that background**, and in that situation he was facing, David was claiming that he was innocent. In contrast, he indicated that the enemy was wrong, unjust, unrighteous, and evil in their attempt to destroy him. David referred to the opposition as "wicked": *"Deliver my life from the wicked with Your sword..."* (v13).

In light of these verses, let's do a self-check with these questions. When we find ourselves facing opposition, can we always claim to be innocent? Or righteous? Can we say that our prayers are from clean lips (v1)? Can we say, "Lord I'll accept Your judgment if I'm at all guilty in this situation" (v2)? Can we say that the Lord has tested us, and we've passed the test with honors (v3)? Can we say that we have carefully guarded everything we say, so that we won't sin with our mouths (v3)? Do we pass these tests when we face troubling and threatening situations? Think it over.

Doctrinal Points

1. The "eye" and "wings" of the Lord are the greatest protection for the believer.

"Keep me as the apple of Your eye; hide me under the shadow of Your wings" (v8). The "apple of the eye" is the pupil of the eye - the source of sight. When David asked the Lord to *"keep me as the apple of Your eye,"* David was asking the Lord to make him the focus of attention. What better protection is there than to be the focus of God's attention? The opposition doesn't have a chance if you are "the apple of God's eye"!

In Zechariah 2:8, the Jewish people are said to be the apple of God's eye. In that prophecy, the nations were warned not to plunder God's chosen people, or they would be plundered in return. That warning is just as good today as it was when the prophet Zechariah gave it over 2500 years ago. *"For thus says the LORD of hosts: "He sent Me after glory, to the nations which plunder you; for he who touches you touches the apple of His eye. For surely I will shake My hand against them, and they shall become spoil for their servants. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me" (Zechariah 2:8-9).* (And by the way, in this passage the "Me" is the Messiah!)

David was confident that the Lord would answer his prayer for protection: *"I have called upon You, for You will hear me, O God. Show Your marvelous loving kindness by Your right hand, O You who save those who trust in You" (v6-7).*

In verse 8, David asked to be hidden in the shadow of God's wings. Once again this was a beautiful picture of care and protection. As a mother bird gathers her young under her wings for care and protection, so the Lord protects us. Is there any greater protection than to be under the "wings" of the Lord?

As David was sure that the Lord would protect him in the midst of the surrounding opposition and danger, so we can be sure of the Lord's care and protection. The "eye" and the "wings" of the Lord are the greatest protection for the believer!

2. The face and likeness of the Lord are the greatest prospects for the believer!

"As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness. I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness" (v15).

Question: When David used the word "awake," was he thinking of his resurrection and his life in heaven with the Lord, or was he thinking of waking up every morning and living in the presence of the Lord each day? I believe David was thinking primarily of the experience of all believers in the eternal future. In commentaries on the book of Psalms, you will find that both positions are taken, but I lean toward the interpretation that David was thinking primarily of his eternal destiny in heaven.

A contrast with the wicked is given in verses 13-14: *"Deliver my life from the wicked with Your sword. With Your hand from men, O LORD, from men of the world who have their portion in this life, and whose belly You fill with Your hidden treasure. They are satisfied with children, and leave the rest of their possession for their babes."*

The wicked live for this life only. They are satisfied with the temporal and transitory things that God allows them to have in this life. But David was looking forward to more than the blessings of this life. He was looking forward to the day when he would be completely righteous, and would have the ultimate satisfaction of enjoying the Lord's presence forever. This is the great future prospect for all believers!

Philippians 3:20-21 says, *“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”*

In our righteous, resurrected bodies, we will see the Lord face to face! As a wonderful old hymn says: *“And is it so? I shall be like Thy Son? Is this the grace that He for me has won? Father of glory - thought beyond all thought! - in glory, to His own blest likeness brought! ... Nor I alone; Thy loved ones all, complete, in glory round Thee there with joy shall meet. All like Thee, for Thy glory like thee, Lord - Object supreme of all, by all adored.”* Seeing the face of the Lord, and being transformed into His likeness - these are the greatest prospects for the believer!

Practical Application

Let Scripture keep you from slipping!

“By the word of Your lips I have kept away from the paths of the destroyer. Uphold my steps in Your paths, that my footsteps may not slip” (v4-5).

How was David kept from the paths of the wicked people? How was he preserved from the evil schemes the one who seeks to trip us up? How was he saved from going down the slippery slope of wickedness and ungodliness? How was he kept in the footsteps of the Lord? The answer is right here in these verses: **it was by the Word of God!**

The Word of God is the answer to the problem of backsliding. Scripture will keep us from slipping and falling! Psalm 119:9: *“How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.”* And Psalm 119:11: *“Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.”*

John 15:3 and Ephesians 5:26 teach us that believers are cleansed by the Word of God. Scripture is the means of salvation, and it's the means of sanctification as well. So let's ask ourselves: am I getting a steady diet of Scripture? Not just on Sunday morning, but every day?

Scripture is the secret for sanctification. Let God's Word keep you from slipping!