

The Greatness of God is Emphasized

Psalm 18

Psalm 18:1-3 - *“I will love You, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from my enemies.”*

Background Notes

In this psalm, the greatness of God is emphasized in His character, His deliverance, and in His blessings.

Psalm 18 and 2 Samuel 22 are almost identical. 2 Samuel 22:1 is essentially the title of Psalm 18. In fact, it appears that 2 Samuel 22, with only slight modifications, was made a psalm and song for use in Temple worship. This is another indication that the psalms are part of the inspired text of Scripture, because 2 Samuel 22 is part of the inspired book of 2 Samuel.

In Romans 15:9, the apostle Paul quoted Psalm 18:49 in reference to Christ, indicating that Psalm 18 is in fact a Messianic psalm. Specifically, it is a “typical” Messianic psalm because David’s experiences in 2 Samuel 22 are a “type” or picture, of the Messiah. The psalm looks ahead to the life of the Messiah, the greater Son of David.

Thus, in this psalm David’s experiences foreshadow, or are a “type,” of the coming Messiah. In fact, Psalm 18 follows the sequence of the life of our Lord: His death, His resurrection, His exaltation, His second coming, and His glorious earthly kingdom of the future. These can all be glimpsed in a prophetic way as David recounted his experiences in Psalm 18.

In verse 4 and following, we glimpse the death of the coming Messiah. In verse 16 and following, we glimpse His resurrection. In verse 20 and following, we glimpse the exaltation of Christ. In verse 32 and following, we glimpse His second coming. And in verse 43 and following, we catch a glimpse of our Lord’s future earthly kingdom.

The Messianic insights and implications of Psalm 18 could certainly be enlarged upon for our doctrinal or teachings points, but let’s consider three aspects of God’s greatness.

Doctrinal Points

1. God is great in His character.

In the first three verses of this psalm, the greatness of God's character is described in a series of metaphors: rock, fortress, shield, horn, and stronghold. The horn of an animal was symbolic of strength, so all these metaphors emphasize God's strength, His security, and His power to protect those who trust in Him.

Aren't you glad that the metaphors used here for God aren't marshmallow, or soft clay? The greatness of God's character is guarded by the powerful metaphors of rock, fortress, shield, horn, and stronghold. God is great in His character!

2. God is great in His deliverance.

Psalm 18:4-19 - *"The pangs of death surrounded me, and the floods of ungodliness made me afraid. The sorrows of Sheol surrounded me. The snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried out to my God. He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry came before Him, even to His ears. Then the earth shook and trembled. The foundations of the hills also quaked and were shaken, because He was angry. Smoke went up from His nostrils, and devouring fire from His mouth. Coals were kindled by it. He bowed the heavens also, and came down with darkness under His feet. He rode upon a cherub, and flew. He flew upon the wings of the wind. He made darkness His secret place; his canopy around Him was dark waters and thick clouds of the skies. From the brightness before Him; His thick clouds passed with hailstones and coals of fire. The LORD thundered from heaven, and the Most High uttered His voice, hailstones and coals of fire. He sent out His arrows and scattered the foe, lightnings in abundance, and He vanquished them. Then the channels of the sea were seen, the foundations of the world were uncovered at Your rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of Your nostrils. He sent from above, He took me; He drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy, from those who hated me, or they were too strong for me. They confronted me in the day of my calamity, but the LORD was my support. He also brought me out into a broad place. He delivered me because He delighted in me."*

In these verses, David reviewed the many times that God had delivered him from the dangers of death, including the use of supernatural means to subdue the enemy. In this highly poetic portion of Scripture, David pictured the Lord as coming in a huge and frightening storm to rescue David. God was so angry with the enemy that the Lord Himself is pictured as breathing fire and smoke! *"Smoke went up from His nostrils, and devouring fire from His mouth. Coals were kindled by it!"* (v8). And in verses 16-19, David described that the Lord rescued him in the nick of time from turbulent waters that were about to engulf him.

Psalm 18:20-29 - *"The LORD rewarded me according to my righteousness. According to the cleanness of my hands He has recompensed me. For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and have not wickedly departed from my God. All His*

judgments were before me, and I did not put away His statutes from me. I was also blameless before Him, and I kept myself from my iniquity. Therefore the LORD has recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in His sight. With the merciful You will show Yourself merciful. With a blameless man You will show Yourself blameless. With the pure You will show Yourself pure, and with the devious You will show Yourself shrewd. For You will save the humble people, but will bring down haughty looks. For You will light my lamp. The LORD my God will enlighten my darkness. For by You I can run against a troop. By my God I can leap over a wall.”

In verses 20-24, was David implying that we are saved by our good works? No! The point here is that God honors and rewards believers who live righteously and do the right thing. Verses 25-29 describe the divine moral principle in Galatians 6:7 - *“For whatever man sows, that he will also reap.”*

And do these verses mean that the godly believer will never face death by martyrdom? In the light of the New Testament, no! With the eye of faith, David explained the **moral principles** that are involved in God’s way of deliverance. The Lord may deliver **from** death, or He may deliver **through** death (as in the case of our Lord).

God is great in His deliverance, both in the results and in the means He uses.

3. God is great in His blessing.

Psalm 18:30-50 - *“As for God, His way is perfect. The word of the LORD is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him. For who is God, except the LORD? And who is a rock, except our God? It is God who arms me with strength, and makes my way perfect. He makes my feet like the feet of deer, and sets me on my high places. He teaches my hands to make war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze. You have also given me the shield of Your salvation. Your right hand has held me up. Your gentleness has made me great. You enlarged my path under me so my feet did not slip. I have pursued my enemies and overtaken them; neither did I turn back again till they were destroyed. I have wounded them so that they could not rise. They have fallen under my feet. For You have armed me with strength for the battle. You have subdued under me those who rose up against me. You have also given me the necks of my enemies so that I destroyed those who hated me. They cried out, but there was none to save; even to the LORD, but He did not answer them. Then I beat them as fine as the dust before the wind. I cast them out like dirt in the streets. You have delivered me from the strivings of the people. You have made me the head of the nations; a people I have not known shall serve me. As soon as they hear of me they obey me. The foreigners submit to me. The foreigners fade away, and come frightened from their hideouts. The LORD lives! Blessed be my Rock! Let the God of my salvation be exalted. It is God who avenges me, and subdues the peoples under me. He delivers me from my enemies. You also lift me up above those who rise against me. You have delivered me from the violent man. Therefore I will give thanks to You, O LORD, among the Gentiles, and sing praises to Your name. Great deliverance He gives to His king, and shows mercy to His anointed - to David and his descendants forevermore.”*

In these verses David gave all the credit to the Lord for victory in battle. This is a victory song of thanksgiving and praise to the Lord for His deliverance and His defeat of the enemy.

When I slipped and fell off a stepladder a few days ago, I was reminded of the verse, *“He makes my feet like the feet of deer, and sets me on my high places.”* I needed the sure-footedness of *“feet like a deer”* (and a ladder with larger steps)! Of course David wasn't thinking of stepladders - but as we look to the Lord for strength and endurance, He keeps our feet steady and our arms strong in spiritual warfare (v 33 & 36). Praise God!

Notice that David saw the destruction of the enemy as a blessing. Does this contradict what the Lord taught on the Sermon on the Mount, that we should love our personal enemies? No, because these enemies were not just David's enemies - they were enemies of **God**. When we are wronged personally, God has promised to take vengeance for believers (see Romans 12:19).

Psalms 18 certainly goes beyond David's experience. When David thanked the Lord for the blessing of foreigners submitting to him and serving him (v43-45), and when David said that he would give thanks and praise among the nations (v49-50), these blessings go beyond David's life experience. Those verses look forward to the return of our Lord and His glorious worldwide earthly kingdom, when all nations will submit to His rule.

God is great in His blessing!

Practical Application

Don't expect God to answer ungodly prayers.

Of the enemy, verse 41 says: *“They cried out, but there was none to save; even to the Lord, but He did not answer them.”*

They prayed, but the Lord did not answer them? Why not? These were not righteous people, and God didn't answer them because they weren't calling out in repentance and asking for forgiveness. They wanted help in their rebellious and unrighteous ways. God doesn't answer ungodly prayers.

Did you ever pray an ungodly prayer? Even Christians can pray ungodly prayers. Selfish prayers, angry prayers, rebellious prayers, vengeful prayers, prayers for God to satisfy ungodly lusts - even prayers for the injury of a fellow believer! These are ungodly prayers.

Be careful how you pray! We should only pray in line with the godly principles that are given to us in God's Word. Don't expect God to answer ungodly prayers.