

Israel's Hymnal
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PSALM SEVENTEEN

[Pss 17:1] Hear the right, O Jehovah, attend unto my cry; Give ear unto my prayer, that goeth not out of feigned lips.

[Pss 17:2] Let my sentence come forth from thy presence; Let thine eyes look upon equity.

[Pss 17:3] Thou hast proved my heart; thou hast visited me in the night; Thou hast tried me, and findest nothing; I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress.

[Pss 17:4] As for the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the ways of the violent.

[Pss 17:5] My steps have held fast to thy paths, My feet have not slipped.

[Pss 17:6] I have called upon thee, for thou wilt answer me, O God: Incline thine ear unto me, [and] hear my speech.

[Pss 17:7] Show thy marvelous lovingkindness, O thou that savest by thy right hand them that take refuge [in thee] From those that rise up [against them].

[Pss 17:8] Keep me as the apple of the eye; Hide me under the shadow of thy wings,

[Pss 17:9] From the wicked that oppress me, My deadly enemies, that compass me about.

[Pss 17:10] They are inclosed in their own fat: With their mouth they speak proudly.

[Pss 17:11] They have now compassed us in our steps; They set their eyes to cast [us] down to the earth.

[Pss 17:12] He is like a lion that is greedy of his prey, And as it were a young lion lurking in secret places.

[Pss 17:13] Arise, O Jehovah, Confront him, cast him down: Deliver my soul from the wicked by thy sword;

[Pss 17:14] From men by thy hand, O Jehovah, From men of the world, whose portion is in [this] life, And whose belly thou fillest with thy treasure: They are satisfied with children, And leave the rest of their substance to their babes.

[Pss 17:15] As for me, I shall behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with [beholding] thy form.

I. David's petition regarding himself.

A. The boldness of innocency (vss. 1-5).

B. Prayer for personal protection (vss. 6-9).

II. David's petition for Israel in the Tribulation.

A. Description of Israel's foes--The Antichrist and his aides (vss. 10-12).

B. Prayer for protection (vss. 13, 14).

III. Conclusion: A vision of fellowship with God eternally (vs. 15).

In many of the Psalms one can glean from some little data or reminiscence the situation which gave rise to the composition of the poem. There are others that are devoid of such little touches. Hence it is impossible to locate such compositions historically. All that we know about Psalm 17 is that David was the human author. It is not necessary for us to know any more than this. This psalm has a marvelous and a rich meaning for us today.

I. David's Petition Regarding Himself

All men whom God used throughout the Scriptures were men of prayer. If we could only realize what a factor prayer is in the life of a person or in that of a nation, we would certainly pray more. Along with our prayers we would offer thanksgiving and praise. Prayer changes things; prayer brings victory.

A. The boldness of innocency

Hear the right, O Jehovah, attend unto my cry;
 Give ear unto my prayer, that goeth not out of feigned lips.
 Let my sentence come forth from thy presence;
 Let thine eyes look upon equity.
 Thou hast proved my heart; thou hast visited me in the night;
 Thou hast tried me, and findest nothing;
 I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress.
 As for the work of men, by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the ways of the violent.
 My steps have held fast to thy paths,
 My feet have not slipped (vss. 1-5).

If we read this psalm carefully, we come to the conclusion that there were certain ones who were opposing and persecuting David because of something that they thought he had done. Being of this conviction, they consistently did everything that they could to destroy him. But the king was absolutely confident that he was in nowise guilty; so far as the matter in hand was concerned, he was as innocent as a newborn babe. Whenever one is absolutely certain that he is innocent with reference to a matter, that fact gives him boldness that he otherwise could not have.

In verse 1 the king prayed Jehovah to give ear to his cry and to attend to that which was right. There are certain things about which there can be no doubt whatsoever as to their being proper, right, and just. The matter in hand was of that nature; David therefore could ask the Lord to "hear the right" and to give ear to that which proceeded from unfeigned lips. This last expression indicates that there was no hypocrisy or coloring of the matter about which the king was praying. One should always bear in mind that there is nothing that is concealed from God and that all things are naked and open before the face of Him with whom we have to deal. If there is something shady in the life and the transactions of the Christian, he should remember that, if he regards iniquity in his heart, the Lord will not hear (Ps. 66:18).

Being absolutely conscious of his innocency in regard to the matter brought against him, King David asked that he be tried before the Lord, who he knew would render a just and righteous decision. Of course, in asking the Lord to judge him in this and to render a decision, David was speaking only of this special thing with which he was charged. He was not thinking of the many wrongs of which he had been guilty and of which he was possibly guilty at that time. But in the matter under discussion he could, with all confidence, ask the Lord to judge him and render the decision.

Even when David was guilty, he preferred for the Lord to be his judge. He knew life and human nature well enough that he could not expect a fair and an impartial decision from men. Even those judges who wish to render correct decisions are not always able to do so, because of their limited knowledge of facts and natural human bias. When David, therefore, sinned in the matter of numbering the children of Israel and the Lord gave him the opportunity to choose between one of three things, namely: "three years of famine; or three months to be consumed before thy foes, while the sword of thine enemies overtaketh thee; or else three days the sword of Jehovah, even pestilence in the land, and the angel of Jehovah destroying throughout all the borders of Israel. Now therefore consider what answer I (Gad the prophet) shall return to him that sent me" (I Chron. 21:12). Then David declared to Gad, "I am in a great strait: let me fall, I pray, into the hand of Jehovah; for very great are his mercies: and let me not fall into the hand of man" (21:13). Everyone who knows the Lord in a real way prefers that He should judge his case and render the decision; because for the penitent transgressor there are always mercy and forgiveness. The Lord will always temper His chastisement with mercy and grace.

David realized that God was always dealing with him. He, like all true disciples, was a student in the school of the Almighty. At times when we little suspect, God, figuratively speaking, gives us an unannounced test. Often have I gone to the classroom during my college and seminary days and have heard the instructor announce, "Well, we will have a quiz today." Without God's announcing anything unusual, He brings, or permits, certain experiences to come to pass in our lives which prove to be "examinations." Thus David said in Psalm 17:3, "Thou hast proved my heart; thou hast visited me in the night; Thou hast tried me, and findest nothing; I am purpose that my mouth shall not transgress." Again, let me throw out the caution that David was not speaking concerning his life as a whole, but concerning the matter that was charged against him by his enemies. He had been on his guard to keep himself pure and clean with reference to this and not to become ensnared by evil or wickedness in anyway in relation to it. Every true Christian should be careful on this point in regard to all matters.

Sometimes we sing,
Yield not to temptation,
For yielding is sin;
Each victory will help you,
Some other to win.

There is a certain amount of truth in this sentiment; and a certain amount of error. The more experiences we have with the Lord and the more often we resist the devil, strong in our faith, the more will be the victories which we will win. There can be no question concerning the truth of these statements. On the other hand, the thought is lying embedded in these words that, by our resisting Satan and overcoming at one time, we shall be strengthened and can resist a greater temptation from Satan. The philosophy of

this type of reasoning might be illustrated by the use of any of the members of our body. If we take plenty of exercise, of the proper kind, and have the right kind of nourishment, all things being equal, the member of our body thus exercised will become stronger. But by our resisting Satan we will not thus accumulate a great amount of spiritual strength which will enable us to overcome Satan. We are frail and weak and can resist Satan and win victories over him only by the strength that the Lord supplies. We can never reach the point that we, in and of ourselves, can resist Satan and can be victorious in our daily walk. Thus in verse 4 David declared that he was kept from the works of men by the words of the Almighty. The Word of God is indeed precious to us. It is indispensable. In it we are instructed how to live and how to trust God for everything that pertains to life and godliness.

Following this statement is one to this effect: "My steps have held fast to thy paths, My feet have not slipped." This verse must be read in the light of the preceding one. For if it is not, the reader may think that David was claiming that, in his own strength, he had held fast to God's ways and had strength and power not to stumble or fall. It was only by the strength which the Lord supplies and the wisdom which is found in His Word that one can thus avoid the pitfalls of life and stay in the straight and narrow way.

B. Prayer for personal protection

I have called upon thee, for thou wilt answer me, O God:
 Incline thine ear unto me, *and* hear my speech.
 Show thy marvelous lovingkindness,
 O thou that savest by thy right hand them that take refuge *in thee*
 From those that rise up *against them*.
 Keep me as the apple of the eye;
 Hide me under the shadow of thy wings,
 From the wicked that oppress me,
 My deadly enemies that compass me about (vss. 6-9).

Everyone who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecutions. The one who takes his stand for God and is attempting to work for Him and serve Him becomes a special target for Satan and the forces of darkness under him. Just as soon as one takes his stand on the side of Jesus Christ, immediately Satan declares eternal vengeance and war against him. I might illustrate this by our Lord Jesus. In Matthew 3:13-17 we have the record of His leaving Galilee, going to John and being baptized by him, at which time God recognized Him as His beloved Son in whom He was well pleased. Jesus was immediately attacked by the devil and tempted for forty days. See Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12,13; Luke 4:1-15. According to these records Satan tried in every way to induce our Lord to depart from the will of God and to sin in some way. But Jesus took His stand upon the Word of God and refused to budge one fraction of a unit. I have heard the testimony of many Christians to the effect that, as soon as they took their stand for Christ, Satan immediately began to oppose them and to attempt to defeat them. Such is my own testimony. Though we may win a victory over him at first, Satan never becomes discouraged, but will reappear, approaching us in a different way or through someone--even through a friend or relative whom he might be able to use as a tool in order to accomplish his purposes against us.

David was being attacked by certain wicked ones who were oppressing him. He spoke of them as "My deadly enemies that compass me about." Whenever one is out-and-out for God, Satan will raise up wicked men and deadly enemies. Man in and of himself is unable to go against these foes. Our wrestling is not with flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places. On this point see Ephesians 6:10-20. When foes beset the child of God, he should do as David did: Bring the matter in earnest prayer to God and turn his case over to Him. David kept bringing his problem before the Lord. This conclusion is drawn from the following words: "I have called upon thee, for thou wilt answer me, O God: incline thine ear unto me, *and* hear my speech." We are encouraged to bring continually our petitions before the Lord. Jesus taught this lesson in the parable of the unjust judge, which is found in Luke, chapter 18. When we bring our petitions before the Lord, we must do so in faith. For he who doubts should not expect to receive anything from God. If our faith is wavering in any way, we should pray the Lord to increase it and to help our unbelief. He will certainly heed the cry of one who really wishes a strengthening of his faith.

In verse 7 the psalmist prayed that God would work some miracle of His grace in his behalf. Our God is a miracle-working God. We must recognize that fact and come and ask largely of Him. It is an honor to God for us dependent creatures to come asking Him that, if necessary, He would perform a miracle in delivering us at a given time of need. Thus David prayed, "Show thy marvelous lovingkindness, O thou that savest by thy right hand them that take refuge *in thee* from those that rise up *against them*." God saves those who by faith come to Him "by thy (God's) right hand." Sometimes the expression, right hand, indicates God's power. At other times, it is used figuratively for the Son of God as is quite frequent in the Book of Isaiah. The Lord stands ready to save all who call upon Him in faith. At the same time we must remember that sometimes it is the will of God to subject us to severe trials and testings. Whenever He does that, such an experience is intended for our good. He will put the hand of blessing upon every experience which He permits to come into our lives and will convert that which is intended by an adversary for a curse into a blessing and a steppingstone to higher things in the spiritual life.

The psalmist prayed especially for protection, as we see in verse 8 where he uses two beautiful figures of speech. In the first place, he asked the Lord to keep him "as the apple of the eye." Our eyes are indeed delicate and very sensitive. Hence they must be protected at all times. God has made us in a most marvelous manner. In fact, the eye is the most wonderful piece of mechanism in existence today. (This fact is recognized by physicians.) It is well-protected by nature. At the same time, if it is necessary, we will at all hazards protect our eyes. We do this instinctively. With all of these thoughts in mind, the psalmist was led to pray that the Lord would protect him just as we protect our eyes. Then he changed his figure and thought of the Lord as being a fowl under whose wings the young is protected. Thus he prayed, "Hide me under the shadow of thy wings." If we will but ask in faith, the Lord will do this for even the least of us. It is well for us in this connection to remember Romans 8:28 which teaches that all things work together for the good of those who know God and those who are called according to His purpose.

II. David's petition for Israel in the Tribulation

As we have already seen, all that is said in verses 1-9 of Psalm 17 primarily refers to what David prayed in his own behalf. When we, however, come to verses 10-14, we see that the prophet is no longer speaking of himself, but is including others in the petition. For instance, in verse 11 he uses the pronouns, *us* and *our*. This is conclusive proof that he was no longer thinking simply of his own local situation. From verse

13 we see that the speaker prayed to Jehovah to arise and confront His enemies and deal drastically with His opponents. When these facts are taken into consideration, one comes to the conclusion that we have in this psalm an illustration of what is known as the law of double or manifold fulfillment of prophecy. According to this principle, the biblical writer or speaker began by dealing with his own local situation and then moved out into a wider circle of experiences through which he personally never passed. Or he spoke of something in the near future and blended that description with something remotely removed from him. In each instance there is a blending of the near with the remote. Should I be speaking in political terms, I would say that men who are in public life, and who make speeches on certain occasions, deal with the situation at hand and then move out into the future in their discussion of problems that confront the nation. The human mind naturally runs that way. The basis for this principle is that of the law of association of ideas, which is one of the laws of our being.

David in his own experiences had many enemies who were wrongfully his foes and opponents. They wished to destroy him and thus be rid of him. History repeats itself. There will arise *the* great enemy of Israel and the people of God in the end time, who is known in the Scriptures as the man of sin, the son of perdition, the Antichrist. With his lieutenants he will attempt to force his will upon all peoples of every nation, tribe, tongue, and language. He will especially endeavor to exterminate the Jews. A definite prediction to that effect is found in Psalm 58. We see this same future world dictator and his cohorts in the following verses of Psalm 17.

A. Description of Israel's foes --the Antichrist and his aides (vss. 10-12)

They are inclosed in their own fat:

With their mouth they speak proudly.

They have now compassed us in our steps;

They set their eyes to cast *us* down to the earth.

He is like a lion that is greedy of his prey.

And as it were a young lion lurking in secret places (vss. 10-12).

The prophet described this future ruler and his lieutenants as being inclosed in their own fat. This statement indicates that these men will live off the fat of the land and have everything that man could wish. According to the second statement of verse 10 they will be, proud, haughty, and conceited. They will even speak against the Most High and blaspheme His holy name, as we learn from other portions of the Scriptures.

In verse 11 is a prediction that this future ruler, with his forces, will have "compassed us (the Jews) in our steps." The purpose of this action is "to cast *us* down to the earth." This verse is parallel to such passages as Zechariah, chapter 14, which foretells that the Antichrist will draw up the armies of the world against Jerusalem in the day of Jehovah, for the purpose of exterminating the Hebrew race from the face of the globe.

This great world dictator is compared to a greedy lion and to a young lion lurking in secret places. From various passages of Scripture we know that the Antichrist will use stealth and all kinds of deceit in trying

to accomplish his plans and purposes. For the time being it will seem as if he is successful--but God will still be on the throne and will accomplish his downfall at the psychological moment.

B. Prayer for protection

Arise, O Jehovah,
 Confront him, cast him down:
 Deliver my soul from the wicked by thy sword;
 From men by thy hand, O Jehovah.
 From men of the world whose portion is in *this* life,
 And whose belly thou fillest with thy treasure:
 They are satisfied with children,
 And leave the rest of their substance to their babes (vss. 13,14).

In verse 13 the psalmist prayed for God to arise, to confront him, the Antichrist, and to cast him down to the earth. Not only did David pray this petition, but the faithful believing remnant of Israel will utter these very words.

Moreover, Israel will pray Jehovah to arise and deal with this wicked one. When this passage is read in the light of relevant Scriptures, it is seen that Jehovah here is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, the Hebrew Messiah, who is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God. At the time here foreseen the petition will be offered by Israel requesting Messiah to arise from His position at the right hand of God and to come and deliver His sorely oppressed people.

They will ask Him to deliver them by His sword. Thus He is represented as a warrior, having a sword. This language reminds us of that which is found in Moses' swan song, Deuteronomy 32:40-43. Those who, according to verse 14, support the Antichrist and his program are men of the world whose portion is in this life and whose belly is their god. They are satisfied with the things of this world, caring nothing about eternal verities. As the reader considers verse 14, he should read carefully Psalm 49; for there he will get a full picture of men of the world, who are caring only for the accumulation of property and for the storing up of wealth here upon earth. Regardless of how much one accumulates, he can under no condition redeem his soul nor that of his brother. Man is put in this world for a purpose, which is to seek after God and find Him and then to pass the message of redeeming love on to others. We live but once. A life that is consecrated to the Lord Jesus is the only one that counts after all. Let us be up and doing for the Master while we have time and opportunity.

Conclusion: A vision of fellowship with God eternally (vs. 15)

The psalmist concluded this hymn with the following words:

As for me, I shall behold thy face in righteousness:
I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with *beholding* thy form.

The wicked, concerning whom the psalmist has been talking, especially in verse 14, have no hope of the future. They will pass out of this life into darkness, from which they will never return. In contrast with them, however, the psalmist expresses his conviction that he will behold God's face in righteousness. At that time he will be satisfied, when he awakes, with beholding God's form. All of us who have put our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ have this same hope of seeing Christ face to face and of being associated with Him throughout all eternity.

Someday, we know not when, the Lord Jesus will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, with the trump of God. The dead in Christ will be raised first. Then those who are alive, and who know Christ, will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Thus those who are now asleep in Christ will awake in glory and will behold the Lord Jesus Christ and be blessed forever and ever.

Have you, friend, made your peace with Christ? Are you prepared for that great event, the coming of the Lord for His saints? If not, why not now? The Lord bless you in making this decision.