

A Prayer by David.

PSALM 17: 1 Hear, LORD, my righteous plea; Give ear to my prayer, that doesn't go out of deceitful lips.

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David implores the succor of God against his enemies; and professes his integrity and determination to live to God's glory, Psa 17:1. He prays for support, and expresses strong confidence in God, Psa 17:5-9; describes the malice and cruelty of his enemies, and prays against them, Psa 17:10-14; receives a strong persuasion of support and final victory, Psa 17:15.

The title is, A prayer of David; in which there is nothing that requires explanation. David was most probably the author of this Psalm; and it appears to have been written about the time in which Saul had carried his persecution against him to the highest pitch. See 1Sam 27:1-12 : The Arabic calls it "A prayer of a perfect man, of Christ himself, or of any one redeemed by him." Dr. Delaney, in his life of David, supposes that this poem was written just after parting with Jonathan, when David went into exile.

Verse 1

Hear the right - Attend to the justice of my cause, יהוה צדק Yehovah tsedek, righteous Jehovah. "O righteous Jehovah, attend unto my cry."

Goeth not out of feigned lips - My supplication is sincere: and the desire of my heart accompanies the words of my lips.

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PSALM 17: 2 Let my sentence come out of your presence. Let your eyes look on equity.

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Verse 2

My sentence come forth from thy presence - Thou knowest my heart, and my ways; judge me as thou shalt find; let me not fall under the judgment of man.

Let thine eyes behold the things that are equal - Thou knowest whether I render to all their due, and whether others act justly by me. Thou canst not be deceived: do justice between me and my adversaries.

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PSALM 17: 3 You have proved my heart. You have visited me in the night. You have tried me, and found nothing. I have resolved that my mouth shall not disobey.

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Verse 3

Thou hast proved mine heart - Thou well knowest whether there be any evil way in me. Thou hast given me to see many and sore trials; and yet, through thy mercy, I have preserved my integrity both

to thee and to my king. Thou hast seen me in my most secret retirements, and knowest whether I have plotted mischief against him who now wishes to take away my life.

Thou hast tried me - צרפתני tseraphtani; Thou hast put me to the test, as they do metals in order to detect their alloy, and to purify them: well expressed by the Vulgate, Igne me examinasti, "Thou hast tried me by fire;" and well paraphrased in my old Psalter, - The examynd me the lykkenyng of the founnas, that purges metal, and imang al this, wykednes es nout funden in me: that es, I am funden clene of syn, and so ryghtwis. - He who is saved from his sin is right wise; he has found the true wisdom.

My mouth shall not transgress - This clause is added to the following verse by the Vulgate and Septuagint: "That my mouth may not speak according to the works of men, I have observed difficult ways because of the words of thy lips." That is, So far from doing any improper action, I have even refrained from all words that might be counted inflammatory or seditious by my adversaries; for I took thy word for the regulation of my conduct, and prescribed to myself the most painful duties, in order that I might, in every respect, avoid what would give offense either to thee or to man. Among the genuine followers of God, plots and civil broils are never found.

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PSALM 17: 4 As for the works of men, by the word of your lips, I have kept myself from the ways of the violent.

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Verse 4

The paths of the destroyer - Some render, hard or difficult paths, the sense of which is given above. But the passage is exceedingly obscure. My old Psalter translates and paraphrases as follows: -

Trans. That my mouthe speke nocht the werkes of men, for the wordes of thi lippes I haf keped hard wayse.

Par - That es, that nothing passe of my mouthe bot at falles to the louyng of the; nocht til werkes of men, that dos o gaynes thy wil; als to say, I spak nocht bot gude; and for the wordes of thi lippes, that es, to ful fil the wordes that thi prophetes saide; I kepe hard waies of verteus and of tribulacioun, the qwilk men thynk hard; and for thi thai leve the hard way til heven, and takes the soft way til hel; but it es ful hard at the end.

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PSALM 17: 5 My steps have held fast to your paths. My feet have not slipped.

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Verse 5

Hold up my goings in thy paths - David walked in God's ways; but, without Divine assistance, he could not walk steadily, even in them. The words of God's lips had shown him the steps he was to take, and he implores the strength of God's grace to enable him to walk in those steps. He had been kept from the paths of the destroyer; but this was not sufficient; he must walk in God's paths - must spend his life in obedience to the Divine will. Negative holiness ean save no man. "Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire."

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PSALM 17: 6 I have called on you, for you will answer me, God. Turn your ear to me. Hear my speech.

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Verse 6

Incline thine ear unto me - David prayed from a conviction that God would hear: but he could not be satisfied unless he received an answer. In a believer's mind the petition and the answer should not be separated.

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PSALM 17: 7 Show your marvellous loving kindness, you who save those who take refuge by your right hand from their enemies.

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Verse 7

Show thy marvellous lovingkindness - David was now exposed to imminent danger; common interpositions of Providence could not save him; if God did not work miracles for him, he must fall by the hand of Saul. Yet he lays no claim to such miraculous interpositions; he expects all from God's lovingkindness.

The common reading here is חסדיך הפלה חסדיך haphleh chasadeycha, "distinguish thy holy ones;" but הפלא haphle, "do wonders," is the reading of about seventy MSS., some ancient editions, with the Septuagint, Vulgate, Chaldee, Syriac, and Arabic. The marginal reading of this verse is nearer the original than that of the text.

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PSALM 17: 8 Keep me as the apple of your eye. Hide me under the shadow of your wings,

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Verse 8

Keep me as the apple of the eye - Or, as the black of the daughter of eye. Take as much care to preserve me now by Divine influence, as thou hast to preserve my eye by thy good providence. Thou hast entrenched it deeply in the skull; hast ramparted it with the forehead and cheek-bones; defended it by the eyebrow, eyelids, and eyelashes; and placed it in that situation where the hands can best protect it.

Hide me under the shadow of thy wings - This is a metaphor taken from the hen and her chickens. See it explained at large in the note on Mat 23:37 (note). The Lord says of his followers, Zac 2:8 : "He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of mine eye." How dear are our eyes to us! how dear must his followers be to God!

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PSALM 17: 9 from the wicked who oppress me, my deadly enemies, who surround me.

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## Verse 9

From my deadly enemies, who compass me about - This is a metaphor taken from huntsmen, who spread themselves around a large track of forest, driving in the deer from every part of the circumference, till they are forced into the nets or traps which they have set for them in some particular narrow passage. The metaphor is carried on in the following verses.

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PSALM 17: 10 They close up their callous hearts. With their mouth they speak proudly.

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## Verse 10

They are enclosed in their own fat - Dr. Kennicott, Bishop Horsley, Houbigant, and others, read the passage thus: **עלי חבלמו סגרו** alai chablamu sageru, "They have closed their net upon me." This continues the metaphor which was introduced in the preceding verse, and which is continued in the two following: and requires only that **עלי** ali, "upon me," should begin this verse instead of end the preceding; and that **חלב** cheleb, which signifies fat, should be read **חבל** chebel, which signifies rope, cable, or net. This important reading requires only the interchange of two letters. The Syriac translates it, shut their mouth: but the above emendation is most likely to be true.

They speak proudly - Having compassed the mountain on which I had taken refuge, they now exult, being assured that they will soon be in possession of their prey.

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PSALM 17: 11 They have now surrounded us in our steps. They set their eyes to cast us down to the earth.

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## Verse 11

They have now compassed us in our steps - Instead of **אשרנו** ashshurenu, "our steps," Dr. Kennicott and others recommend **אשרינו** ashreynu, "O lucky we, at last we have compassed him." He cannot now escape; he is sure to fall into our hands.

They have set their eyes bowing down to the earth - All the commentators and critics have missed the very expressive and elegant metaphor contained in this clause. Kennicott says, They drove the hart into toils, and then shot him. Bishop Horsley says, on the clause, They have set their eyes bowing down to the earth: "This is the attitude of huntsmen, taking aim at an animal upon the ground." No, it is the attitude of the huntsmen looking for the slot, or track of the hart's, hind's, or antelope's foot on the ground. See at the conclusion of the Psalm.

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

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## Verse 12

Like as a lion that is greedy of his prey - I believe the word lion is here used to express Saul in his strength, kingly power and fierce rapacity. See the observations at the end of the Psalm.

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PSALM 17: 13 Arise, LORD, confront him. Cast him down. Deliver my soul from the wicked by your sword;

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#### Verse 13

Arise, O Lord, disappoint him - When he arises to spring upon and tear me to pieces, arise thou, O Lord; disappoint him of his prey; seize him, and cast him down.

Deliver my soul - Save my life.

From the wicked, which is thy sword - Saul is still meant, and we may understand the words as either implying the sword, the civil power, with which God had intrusted him, and which he was now grievously abusing; or, it may mean, deliver me by Thy sword - cut him off who wishes to cut me off. On this ground the next verse should be read from men, By thy hand. So the margin. The hand of God not only meaning his power, but his providence.

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PSALM 17: 14 from men by your hand, LORD, from men of the world, whose portion is in this life. You fill the belly of your cherished ones. Your sons have plenty, and they store up wealth for their children.

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#### Verse 14

From men of the world, which have - ממתים מחלד mimethim mecheled, from mortal men of time; temporizers; men who shift with the times, who have no fixed principle but one, that of securing their own secular interest: and this agrees with what follows - which have their portion in this life; who never seek after any thing spiritual; who have bartered heaven for earth, and have got the portion they desired; for thou fillest their belly with thy hid treasure. Their belly - their sensual appetites - is their god; and, when their animal desires are satisfied, they take their rest without consideration, like the beasts that perish.

Their portion in this life - בחיים bachaiyim, in lives, probably meaning heritable lands and estates; for they leave them to their children, they descend to posterity, and every one has his life portion in them. They are lands of lives.

They are full of children - Have a numerous offspring, whom they educate in the same principles, and to whom they leave a large earthly patrimony, and who spend it as their fathers have done, and perhaps even more dissolutely. Often covetous fathers lay up riches, which profligate sons scatter to all the winds of heaven. I have seen many instances of this.

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PSALM 17: 15 As for me, I shall see your face in righteousness. I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with seeing your form.

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 Verse 15

As for me - I cannot be satisfied with such a portion.

I will behold thy face - Nothing but an evidence of thy approbation can content my soul.

In righteousness - I cannot have thy approbation unless I am conformed to thy will. I must be righteous in order that my heart and life may please thee.

I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness - Nothing but God can satisfy the wishes of an immortal spirit. He made it with infinite capacities and desires; and he alone, the infinite Good, can meet and gratify these desires, and fill this all-capacious mind. No soul was ever satisfied but by God; and he satisfies the soul only by restoring it to his image, which, by the fall, it has lost.

I think there is an allusion here to the creation of Adam. When God breathed into him the breath of lives, and he became a living soul, he would appear as one suddenly awaked from sleep. The first object that met his eyes was his glorious Creator, and being made in his image and in his likeness, he could converse with him face to face - was capable of the most intimate union with him, because he was filled with holiness and moral perfection. Thus was he satisfied, the God of infinite perfection and purity filling all the powers and faculties of his soul. David sees this in the light of the Divine Spirit, and knows that his happiness depends on being restored to this image and likeness; and he longs for the time when he shall completely arise out of the sleep and death of sin, and be created anew after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness. I do not think that he refers to the resurrection of the body, but to the resurrection of the soul in this life; to the regaining the image which Adam lost.

The paraphrase in my old Psalter understands the whole of this Psalm as referring to the persecution, passion, death, and resurrection of Christ; and so did several of the primitive fathers, particularly St. Jerome and St. Augustine. I shall give a specimen from Psa 17:11 : -

Projicientes me, nunc circumdederunt me: oculos suos statuerunt declinare in terram.

Trans. Forth castand me now, thai haf umgyfen me: thair egheu thai sette to heelde in the erde.

Par - Forth kasten me out of the cite, als the stede had bene fyled of me: now thai haf umgyfen me in the cros hyngand, als folk that gedys til a somer gamen: for thai sett thair eghen, that es the entent of thaire hert to heeld in the erde; that es, in erdly thynges to covayte tham, and haf tham. And thai wende qwen thai slew Crist that he had suffird al the ill, and thai nane.

Perhaps some of my readers may think that this needs translating, so far does our present differ from our ancient tongue.

Text - They have now cast me forth; they have surrounded me: their eyes they set down to the earth.

Par - They have cast me out of the city, as if the state were to be defiled by me: now they have surrounded me hanging on the cross, as people gathered together at summer games. For they set their eyes, that is, the intent of their heart, down to the earth; that is, earthly things, to covet them and to have them: and they thought, when they slew Christ, that he had suffered all the ill, and they none.

By the slot or track of the hart on the ground, referred to in Psa 17:11, experienced huntsmen can discern whether there have been a hart there, whether he has been there lately, whether the slot they see be the track of a hart or a hind, and whether the animal be young or old. All these can be discerned by the slot. And if the reader have that scarce book at hand, Tuberville on Hunting, 4th, 1575 or 1611, he will find all this information in chapter 22, p. 63, entitled, The Judgment and Knowledge by the Slot of a Hart; and on the same page; a wood-cut, representing a huntsman with his eyes set, bowing down to the earth, examining three slots which he had just found. The cut is a fine illustration of this clause. Saul and his men were hunting David, and curiously searching every place to find out any track, mark, or footstep, by which they might learn whether he had been in such a place, and whether he had been there lately. Nothing can more fully display the accuracy and intensity of this search than the metaphor contained in the above clause. He who has been his late Majesty's huntsmen looking for the slot in Windsor Forest will see the strength and propriety of the figure used by the psalmist.

#### Verse 12

Like as a lion that is greedy of his prey - This is the picture of Saul. While his huntsmen were beating every bush, prying into every cave and crevice, and examining every foot of ground to find out a track, Saul is ready, whenever the game is started, to spring upon, seize, and destroy it. The metaphors are well connected, well sustained, and strongly expressive of the whole process of this persecution.

In the ninth verse the huntsmen beat the forest to raise and drive in the game. In the tenth they set their nets, and speak confidently of the expected success. In the eleventh, they felicitate themselves on having found the slot, the certain indication of the prey being at hand. And in the twelfth, the king of the sport is represented as just ready to spring upon the prey; or, as having his bow bent, and his arrow on the string, ready to let fly the moment the prey appears. It is worthy of remark, that kings and queens were frequently present, and were the chiefs of the sport; and it was they who, when he had been killed, broke up the deer: 1. Slitting down the brisket with their knife or sword; and, 2. Cutting off the head. And, as Tuberville published the first edition of his book in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, he gives a large wood-cut, p. 133, representing this princess just alighted from her horse - the stag stretched upon the ground - the huntsman kneeling, holding the fore foot of the animal with his left hand, and with his right presenting a knife to the queen for the purpose of the breaking up. As the second edition was published in the reign of James the First, the image of the queen is taken out and a whole length of James introduced in the place.

The same appears in Tuberville's Book of Falconrie, connected with the above. In p. 81, edition 1575, where the flight of the hawk at the heron is represented, the queen is seated on her charger: but in the edition of 1611 King James is placed on the same charger, the queen being removed.

The lion is the monarch of the forest; and is used successfully here to represent Saul, king of Israel, endeavoring to hunt down David; hennoming him in on every side; searching for his footsteps; and ready to spring upon him, shoot him with his bow, or pierce him with his javelin, as soon as he should be obliged to flee from his last cover. The whole is finely imagined, and beautifully described.