

The Dragon King and the Rivers of Belial

Psalm 84:1 "To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David, the servant of the LORD, who addressed the words of this song to the LORD on the day when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. He said:

I love you, O LORD, my strength.

² The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

³ I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies.

⁴ The cords of death encompassed me; the torrents of destruction assailed me;

⁵ the cords of Sheol entangled me; the snares of death confronted me.

⁶ In my distress I called upon the LORD; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears.

⁷ Then the earth reeled and rocked; the foundations also of the mountains trembled and quaked, because he was angry.

⁸ Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth; glowing coals flamed forth from him.

⁹ He bowed the heavens and came down; thick darkness was under his feet.

¹⁰ He rode on a cherub and flew; he came swiftly on the wings of the wind.

- ¹¹ He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him, thick clouds dark with water.
- ¹² Out of the brightness before him hailstones and coals of fire broke through his clouds.
- ¹³ The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Most High uttered his voice, hailstones and coals of fire.
- ¹⁴ And he sent out his arrows and scattered them; he flashed forth lightnings and routed them.
- ¹⁵ Then the channels of the sea were seen, and the foundations of the world were laid bare at your rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of your nostrils.
- ¹⁶ He sent from on high, he took me; he drew me out of many waters.
- ¹⁷ He rescued me from my strong enemy and from those who hated me, for they were too mighty for me.
- ¹⁸ They confronted me in the day of my calamity, but the LORD was my support.
- ¹⁹ He brought me out into a broad place; he rescued me, because he delighted in me.
- ²⁰ The LORD dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he rewarded me.
- ²¹ For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and have not wickedly departed from my God.
- ²² For all his rules were before me, and his statutes I did not put away from me.
- ²³ I was blameless before him, and I kept myself from my guilt.
- ²⁴ So the LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight.
- ²⁵ With the merciful you show yourself merciful; with the blameless man you show yourself blameless;
- ²⁶ with the purified you show yourself pure; and with the crooked you make yourself seem tortuous.
- ²⁷ For you save a humble people, but the haughty eyes you bring down.
- ²⁸ For it is you who light my lamp; the LORD my God lightens my darkness.

²⁹ For by you I can run against a troop, and by my God I can leap over a wall.

³⁰ This God-- his way is perfect; the word of the LORD proves true; he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him.

³¹ For who is God, but the LORD? And who is a rock, except our God?--

³² the God who equipped me with strength and made my way blameless.

³³ He made my feet like the feet of a deer and set me secure on the heights.

³⁴ He trains my hands for war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.

³⁵ You have given me the shield of your salvation, and your right hand supported me, and your gentleness made me great.

³⁶ You gave a wide place for my steps under me, and my feet did not slip.

³⁷ I pursued my enemies and overtook them, and did not turn back till they were consumed.

³⁸ I thrust them through, so that they were not able to rise; they fell under my feet.

³⁹ For you equipped me with strength for the battle; you made those who rise against me sink under me.

⁴⁰ You made my enemies turn their backs to me, and those who hated me I destroyed.

⁴¹ They cried for help, but there was none to save; they cried to the LORD, but he did not answer them.

⁴² I beat them fine as dust before the wind; I cast them out like the mire of the streets.

⁴³ You delivered me from strife with the people; you made me the head of the nations; people whom I had not known served me.

⁴⁴ As soon as they heard of me they obeyed me; foreigners came cringing to me.

⁴⁵ Foreigners lost heart and came trembling out of their fortresses.

⁴⁶ The LORD lives, and blessed be my rock, and exalted be the God of my salvation--

- ⁴⁷ the God who gave me vengeance and subdued peoples under me,
⁴⁸ who rescued me from my enemies; yes, you exalted me above those who rose against me; you delivered me from the man of violence.
⁴⁹ For this I will praise you, O LORD, among the nations, and sing to your name.
⁵⁰ Great salvation he brings to his king, and shows steadfast love to his anointed, to David and his offspring forever."

Psalm 18

Seeing God with Human Eyes

WE LIVE IN A SECULAR AGE of science, materialism, and naturalism. What this means is that for many modern people, the only things that are real are things that are physical. If you can sense it (taste, touch, smell, see, or hear), then it is real. If you can do an experiment on it, then it is real. If you can't, then it belongs to the realm of fantasy. It shouldn't be taken seriously.

This is how many people treat God and religion today. The idea of God (especially what they see as the God of the Old Testament) is laughed at as having as much existence as the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy, while simultaneously mocked and ridiculed as being the moral equivalent of Jack

the Ripper and Attila the Hun. I mean, just look at all of those evil horrible slaughters commanded in the OT by Yahweh. Meanwhile, religion is for weak sissy kooks and nut-jobs.

A major problem here is that people lack **the right receivers** to “pick up” God’s transmissions and sense them. What is a receiver? A receiver is something that is able to capture a signal and make it intelligible to your mind. A radio is a receiver. Would you ever know that there are radio waves passing right through your body this very moment if you had no ability whatsoever to pick them up? Do they somehow not really exist because you don’t have a radio nearby? Your senses are receivers. Try explaining what something smells like to someone who has never smelled anything in their life. They have no frame of reference and they can’t understand what you are talking about. Try as I might to convince people that smell doesn’t actually exist simply because I can’t smell, I’ve never actually convinced anyone.

The problem with scientism and materialism and naturalism is that they presuppose these are the only things that exist. This isn’t an argument. It is a faith claim rooted

in itself. How do you scientifically verify that which is not empirical to begin with? How do you do material experiments on that which is immaterial? It is impossible to argue on scientific grounds that there is a spiritual world, because the spiritual world is not subject to physical tests. By definition, it is beyond the physical world and not open to investigation in the same way that physical things are.

This does not mean that the spiritual world does not interact with our world. It doesn't mean it is irrational to believe in the spiritual world, or that there are no effects of the former on the latter. It means that we need a different receiver to "get the message." Where would we find such a receiver? We find it in [receiving God's word by faith](#). God's word is the message from the spiritual world. Faith alone is the instrument that receives it.

This morning I'm not going to make an apologetic for why God's word is true and trustworthy and something that ought to be received by faith. Rather, I simply want to prepare you for the content of Psalm 18. This Psalm will describe things that cannot be seen with the eyes, things which seem amazing, perhaps even impossible, but which

are nevertheless just as real as anything in this physical world.

Psalm 18

The fourth longest Psalm in the Psalter (by verses), Psalm 18 is also duplicated almost exactly in **2 Samuel 22**. Its context in Samuel is **the climax of the wars David** fought against the Philistines and several giants (other than Goliath) who were still living in the land fighting as Israel's enemies (**2Sa 21:15-22**). Given its placement it is possibly the climactic, perhaps even last psalm David wrote. Someone says, “**The psalm expresses David's thanks to God after a lifetime of deliverances ... it [may] be viewed as words of thanks from the old king to the God who had been faithful to him for a lifetime, since his deliverance from the hand of Goliath. Read in that light, the psalm is the faith testimony of an aged elder.**”¹ It is therefore full of well-aged wisdom. It is something any older Christian who has fought the good

¹ **Rolf A. Jacobson** and **Beth Tanner**, “Book One of the Psalter: Psalms 1–41,” in *The Book of Psalms*, ed. E. J. Young, R. K. Harrison, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 201.

fight can reflect deeply upon from their own experiences in the spiritual battle they have waged, and that any younger one should strive with all their might to make sure they can sing when they come to the end of their years.

The **superscription** is nearly identical in both passages: “A Psalm of David, the servant of the LORD, who addressed thee words of this song to the LORD on the day when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul.” The only difference is that Psalm 18 begins with that musical notation: “**For the Choirmaster,**” or as the LXX translates it: “**For the End.**” The great church historian **Eusebius** who was no slouch as a biblical scholar either said, “The psalm is inscribed “for the end’ chiefly because it is proclaimed in the last years of his life and after all his deeds that were accomplished in history; or because it announces the prophecy of things that are going to happen in the future age; or, third, because the reader is told about those things that happened in the last part of this hymn, at the end of which is the call of the Gentiles and a prophecy about Christ” (COMMENTARY ON PSALMS 18.1). Indeed. The next to the last verse of the psalm is quoted by Paul in **Romans 15:9** as being a Messianic

prophecy fulfilled by Jesus. But the Psalm is so much more than this, as incredibly amazing as prophecy always is.

You Must Love Yahweh

It is an individual psalm, a royal psalm, a psalm about David's great love for the LORD and why. It begins with those words: "I love you, Yahweh" (Ps 18:1).² Yes, there is actually a song in the Bible that has that same basic line as many contemporary songs do. It is good to sing of one's love of the Lord. But David quickly moves away from the sentimentalism of modern CCM music. He soon describes a God who is utterly unfamiliar to most modern people with images and metaphors that take us back to the earliest times of human story-telling.

But not before giving a semi-automatic series of metaphors about God that are unrivaled in number perhaps anywhere else in Scripture. David loves the LORD because he is strength (*chezeq*; vs. 1), rock (*sela*), fortress (*metsudah*), deliverer (*palat*), God (*El*), rock (*tsur*), refuge (*chasah*), shield

² Some scholars have pointed out that the word "love" (*'erhomka*) is a Qal hapax (meaning used only one time in the OT) and the root *rbm* is no where else used to describe man's love toward a deity (J. Kenneth Kuntz, *Beyond Form Criticism: Essays in Old Testament Literary Criticism*, ed. Paul R. House [Eisenbrauns, 1992], 77). Thus, the suggestion is the translation "I exalt you." But every major translation has "love/adore" including the Targum and the LXX.

(*magen*), **horn** (*qeren*), and **stronghold** (*misgab*; vs. 2). Ten descriptives that tell you why David loves the Lord. The object of love has reasons for love.

Not David, but Yahweh is **his strength**. He has upheld David throughout his years, in his weakest moments physically and morally. Yahweh is **his rock**. This word and several others in the list³ come from Moses' great song in Deuteronomy 32 (which we saw was also related to Psalm 17, therefore giving the two psalms a connection). This song has been helpfully described as “**an exhortation and challenge to the people of Israel, as a covenantal sign or witness calling them to faithfulness and trust in Yahweh. The song seems to function as a[n exhortation and teaching] reminder to the people of Israel prior to their entry into the Promised Land, encouraging them to place their trust entirely in Yahweh and not to wander off after other gods.**”⁴ In citing language from Deuteronomy 32; David is saying that he has done what Moses exhorted, and he is emboldening you to do the same.

³ *Sela* (Dt 32:13); *El* (32:4); *tsur* (32:4); *chasab* (32:37); also *magen* (33:29); *qeren* (33:17); *yesha* (33:29).

⁴ **Jamie A Grant**, *The King as Exemplar: The Function of Deuteronomy's Kingship Law in the Shaping of the Book of Psalms* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Lit, 2004), 79.

It seems that many of these words here are actually **extrapolations of the “rock.”** The first word for a “rock” is actually more like a **crag** in a rock, like the place where Moses was put when God showed him his glory. The second word for a rock is more like a **solid foundation**, a stable place to stand. **Fortresses** are strong rocky castles that protect. **Strongholds** are a similar idea. God hides believers, protects them, makes their feet solid, gives them refuge, shields them, delivers them, and saves them.

As impressive and important as these images are for teaching you what God is like, there are three things that are perhaps more important still, if this Psalm is to apply to you. **First**, all of these words are prefixed by the pronoun “**my**.” This is a personal Psalm. These things were true for David. Therefore, you must be able to say personally that they are true for you. Can you say that God is these things for you? As we will see, he isn’t for everyone you know.

Second, *El* is his God. Following Deuteronomy 32, David has not followed the gods of the nations. *El* is his God. Not Baal. Not Asherah. Not Zeus. Not Allah. *El*. This is the name given to the Most High God of gods. We might call him the Father. However, in the song of Moses, *El* is also the

Rock (32:4; 18). But we know from Paul that the Rock is Christ (1Co 10:4). These words therefore describe the triune God who alone saves. Therefore, this God must be your God, and no other.

Finally, David says this is the God in whom he takes refuge. The older translations say, “**in whom I trust**” (KJV). The LXX has “hope.” This is a word for personal faith. David has trusted, hoped, believed in this God and he has been all these things for him throughout his life. **Spurgeon** says of this, “**Faith must be exercised, or the preciousness of God is not truly known; and God must be the object of faith, or faith is mere presumption.**”⁵ Most of the Fathers rightly preached this psalm as a song of faith in Christ. Beloved, can you say these things yourself of this God? Do *you* love the Lord? If not, see what kind of a God this is by meditating on these descriptive words, give up your striving, and trust in the Rock of Ages. Then continue listening to a wise, old man sing his song to you.

Call Upon the Lord

⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Psalms 1-26*, vol. 1 (London; Edinburgh; New York: Marshall Brothers, n.d.), 237.

As we now move into the song, we see the king even at this stage in his life—perhaps especially *because* he is at this stage in life—calling upon the LORD. “I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies” (Ps 18:3). If you believe in the Lord, then call upon him! He delights in hearing your prayers and praise; he delights in showing you his power and strength. Remember, at this stage in his life, the kingdom is now secure, the enemy Gentiles and giants (literally) have been vanquished, God has saved David at every step along the way. He is now able to look back upon his life and reflect.

It has not been easy. He now uses the metaphor of drowning, perhaps even of baptism, to describe it. Christian baptism sacramentally images what will happen to David in this Psalm. I can think of few things more horrible than drowning, especially being tied up and drowning. “The cords of death encompassed me; the torrents of destruction assailed me” (4). “Destruction” is the Hebrew word Belial. Belial (sometimes spelled Beliar) becomes a word for Satan in the NT: “What accord does Christ have with Belial?” (2Co 6:15). The word is associated with all manner of heinous evil: The worship foreign gods (Dt 13:14); perjury

(1Kg 21:10, 13; Pr 19:28); breach of hospitality (Jdg 19:22; 1Sa 25:17); scoundrels (1Sa 10:27); usurpation (2Sa 16:7–8; 20:1); female drunkenness near the sanctuary (1Sa 1:13–17); and sexual harassment of women by priests (1Sa 2:12–22). It is possible that it refers to a combination of words for “underworld” and “wickedness.” Belial is the wicked god of the underworld.

The underworld is the word “Sheol” (*hades* in Greek) in the next verse, which continues the dark imagery. “The cords of Sheol entangled me; the snares of death confronted me” (Ps 18:5). In using a word for supernatural evil combined with images of death,⁶ David is basically saying that Evil has followed him like a river of fire which sweeps through the entire world and destroys everything in its path. No wonder he will call upon the Lord! Who can stand up to such evil by themselves and live to tell about it?

Something to learn here from this wise old man is how so many things in his earlier life were deadly serious, and how satanic evil was always following him. Did he see them that way at the time? He does now. This, again, takes a

⁶ In Greek mythology, both Hades and Thanatos—the words used in the LXX—were considered gods.

different kind of receiver to hear its message than the one our culture is using. Because in our culture, there is no evil, much less a devil. But Satan and the forces of darkness are real and they are a main struggle for the Christian. That is why David finishes this part of the song the way it began, “In my distress I called upon the LORD; to my God I cried for help” (6a). How will God answer him?

- A. I call upon the LORD (3)
- B. The cords of death (4a)
- C. The torrents of destruction (4b)
- C¹. The cords of Sheol (5a)
- B¹. The snares of death (5b)
- A¹. I called upon the LORD (6a)

God Hears and Comes

At this point, the picture of God changes dramatically. This is no soft-spoken, gentleman, boyfriend God that is so often sung about in churches today. One of my big complaints is that too much of our music is taken out of context. For example, **Psalm 18:3** became a popular chorus a couple of decades back: “I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, so shall I be saved from my enemies.”

It is obviously a wonderful verse and promise. But the song tells us very little what this God is like. But the Psalm does. The chorus is wrenched from the rest of the Psalm.

Behold David's God. “From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears” (6). It starts in a way that might not seem to unusual, until you remember that this Christian is summoning the King of the Universe who hears him and leaves his heavenly abode—probably a heavenly mountain palace—to answer him. Then things get scary—if the Lord is not on your side.

How did Yahweh leave his temple? How did he come to meet David? “The earth reeled and rocked; the foundations also of the mountains trembled and quaked, because he was angry” (7). Have you ever lived through an earthquake? Absolutely devastating. Have you witnessed the power of a volcano making mountains tremble? Sheer destruction. God coming to David like this. Because he is angry that the hordes of hell, the snares of death, and the enemies of his anointed are pouring down upon his servant. God hears! God answers!

“Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth; glowing coals flamed forth from him” (8).

God is now pictured with the same imagery as the archenemy of his people in the OT: **Leviathan**, who is also an image of Satan! Leviathan is the sea-monster (an appropriate figure for the drowning image just described). He is a dragon (**Isa 27:1**). He is described in the most detail in Job 41.

Unlike David, Leviathan can't have cords or ropes put on him (**Job 41:1-2**). He breaks them like pretzels. The deep is stirred up by him (**31-32**). He is like a volcano underwater. “Out of his mouth go flaming torches, sparks of fire leap forth. Out of his nostrils comes forth smoke, as from a boiling pot and burning rushes” (**19-20**).

In a fascinating study of Job, **Robert Fyall** argues that the image of Leviathan actually runs all the way through that book. In other words, Satan doesn't vanish after ch. 2, but is there throughout, confusing the man as to who is causing his trouble. How? By pretending to be God. He summarizes, “If Leviathan is the great enemy who aspires to Godhead, then his coming must be eerily like that of God himself.”⁷ It isn't then that God is like Leviathan in Psalm

⁷ Robert S. Fyall, *Now My Eyes Have Seen You: Images of Creation and Evil in the Book of Job*, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 12, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL; England: InterVarsity Press; Apollos, 2002), 163.

18, but that Satan-Leviathan is like God in Job, “a creature who throughout the book has so successfully imitated God that Job has mistaken him for the Almighty.”⁸ If the image of the sea monster is terrifying, if this image of Satan is horrifying, then understand that this monster is but a creation and type of the matchless power and invincible strength and undefeatable supremacy that is David’s God! God is the Dragon King. Yet, he is still far away.

Until vs. 9. “He bowed the heavens [bent them or made the sky sink] and came down.” Who can make the entire sky melt away? How does the Behemoth from heaven arrive? As he did on Sinai. “Thick darkness was under his feet” (9). “He rode on a cherub and flew; he came swiftly on the wings of the wind” (10). David’s God is coming on the clouds of heaven. Legions of angels are at his command.

“He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him, thick clouds dark with water. Out of the brightness before him hailstones and coals of fire broke through his clouds. The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Most High uttered his voice, hailstones and coals of fire. And he sent out his arrows and scattered them; he flashed forth

⁸ 164.

lightnings and routed them.” (11-14). He comes as a terror hidden from sight. To gaze upon him would cause you to be undone. Before him are storms and stones from heaven. The Exodus plagues. The bowls of Revelation. “Then the channels of the sea were seen, and the foundations of the world were laid bare at your rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of your nostrils” (15). Nothing is safe when he arrives. Oceans dry up. Mountains crumble. The very foundations of the earth shudder and quake as God shakes his head and blasts his nose. This is not your Worship Team’s lead song about God. Sadly, there may be reasons why we too often pick and choose verses in the Psalms to the exclusion of others. We can’t control or tame or domesticate David’s God. He is utterly beyond our handling.

And yet, [just here we need our receiver turned on again](#). David is not speaking literally, but metaphorically. He is using the language of poetry and myth to describe something very real, but not apprehended by our five senses. He is describing the coming of a spiritual being using the language of what theologians call [theophany](#)—God-Appearance. Can you recall a time in David’s life when anything at all like this was demonstrable to the eyes and ears

of David's enemies? How often do we read in the Psalms of them mocking David for even believing there is a God? They certainly did not "see" God coming this way. Brute men do not perceive God coming with their senses, for they are shut off and have no receiver that wants to dial in to the right frequency. When you hear this God described, does it register in your heart? God came to David many times like this. Have you seen him?

God Rescues and Saves His Son

If it has registered, what is your response? There are two that you might have to what we have read thus far. The one nearest to our context would probably be **sheer terror and fear**. This is not a God you want angry at you! But listen to David sing about this terror from heaven.

"He sent from on high, he took me; he drew me out of many waters" (16). David was drowning up to his neck, he had almost died, but the sheer power of his God pulled him out of the watery grave. Leviathan surfaced and David was riding on his back, like Jesus walking on the waters of the sea.

“He rescued me from my strong enemy and from those who hated me, for they were too mighty for me. They confronted me in the day of my calamity, but the LORD was my support.” (17-18). David was all alone on the hill of battle. Archers bows were drawn. Chariots were mounting the charge. Suddenly, the True Dragon from heaven lifted off the ground. As he flew and caused mighty waves over the waters, smoke and fire rushed from his mouth and consumed David’s enemies. Smaug sought to destroy Laketown as he jealously guarded his mountain treasure horde. Yahweh’s jealously guarded his beloved son, and his fire saved the king of Jerusalem.

Do you see, then, that thought the LORD is depicted as a fierce dragon descending from his high lofty mountain palace, that if you are called by his name, if you have faith and believe that he will rescue you, that his terrors become your help? He has power to destroy, and power to save. Fear and terror are one response. The other is faith and hope and trust and praise.

Keeping the Ways of the LORD

At this point, we come to the center of the poem. The center of this poem actually prepares us for the center of a whole series of psalms that are arranged chiastically by the scribes who put the Psalter together:

Psalm 15 entrance liturgy
Psalm 16 psalm of trust
Psalm 17 prayer for help
Psalm 18 royal psalm
Psalm 19 Torah psalm
Psalms 20–21 royal psalms
Psalm 22 prayer for help
Psalm 23 psalm of trust
Psalm 24 entrance liturgy

Its as if Psalms 15-24 are taking us into a whole worship service: a call to worship, a song of trust in Christ, a prayer to him, and in our Psalm today, to focus our eyes on the King. But the heart of these Psalms (**Psalm 19**) and of our Psalm today is actually **Torah and our relationship to it**. This becomes the reason in the Psalm why God rescues the king.

- a) Ps 18:1-2, I love You, O LORD, my strength and my deliverer, in whom I trust;
- b) Ps 18:3a, I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised;
- c) Ps 18:3-18, The LORD delivers David from his enemies:
- d) Ps 18:19, He also brought me out into a broad place; He delivered me because He delighted in me;
- e) Ps 18:20-24, He recompensed me according to my righteousness, for I kept His ways and His statutes:
- f)—central axis) Psa 18:25-28, 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;
- e¹) Ps 18:29-33, He enables me, for His way + His word is perfect + proven, for He is God:
- d¹) Ps 18:32-39a, He established my feet on the high places + armed me with strength so that I prevailed:
- c¹) Ps 18:39b-48, The LORD delivers David from his enemies:
- b¹) Ps 18:49, Therefore I give thanks to You, O Lord, among the Gentiles, and sing praises to Your name;
- a¹) Ps 18:50, Great deliverance He gives to His king, and shows mercy to His anointed.

“He brought me out into a broad place; he rescued me, because he delighted in me” (Psalm 18:19). What an amazing thing to say. God delighted in this believer. Is that your understanding of how God views you in Christ? He delights in you.

“The LORD dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he

rewarded me. For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all his rules were before me, and his statutes I did not put away from me. I was blameless before him, and I kept myself from my guilt. So the LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight” (20-24).

- a) Ps 18:20a, Dealt with According to my righteousness;
- b) Ps 20b, Rewarded according to cleanness of my hands;
- c) Ps 18:21a, Kept the ways of the Lord
- d) Ps 18:21b, Have not wickedly departed
- e) Ps 18:22a, His rules were before me**
- e¹) Ps 18:22b, His statutes I did not put away from me**
- d¹) Ps 18:23, I was blameless
- c¹) Ps 18:23b, Kept myself from my guilt:
- b¹) Ps 18:24a, Rewarded according to my righteousness;
- a¹) Ps 18:24b, Rewarded according to cleanness of my hands.

Again, it is about obedience in the Psalms. Obedience to the Law. In thinking about these amazing words of David, we do well to remember the context of the previous Psalm where the King was not claiming absolute perfection regarding the law, but blamelessness regarding the way he treated his enemies. We see in vv. 25-27 that David knows

he is a sinner. “With the merciful you show yourself merciful; with the blameless man you show yourself blameless; with the purified you show yourself pure; and with the crooked you make yourself seem tortuous. For you save a humble people; but the haughty eyes you bring down.” Four words are parallel in these verses: merciful, blameless, purified, and humble. You might be able to say that a blameless person is without sin, but certainly not a purified one, for you only need to be purified if you are first impure.

A Psalm of Christ

Yet, David’s words still seem so impossible. And on one level they are. This is why we need to remember that our Lord Jesus taught us that the whole Scripture is about himself (**Luke 24:27**; **John 5:39**). When we step back and look around, we find that the Psalm begins and ends on the same note. Christ is our Octave as we have seen in other psalms. In **vv. 1-2**, God is his **deliverer**. In **vs. 50**, God is his great **salvation** who shows love to his anointed, that is his messiah, meaning “**to David and his seed forever.**” Psalm 2 showed us that David the little messiah is a type of Jesus the

Great Messiah. Now, we see that both Messiah's are in mind, not just David, for Jesus is David's offspring. And this is the point.

Thus consider how Psalm 18 is used in the NT. At the beginning of the Psalm David sings, “**The LORD is my rock and my fortress ... and the horn of my salvation.**” At the birth of Jesus, Luke reports that God “**has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David**” (**Luke 1:69**). In other words, Jesus is Psalm 18's horn of salvation.

At the other end of the Psalm we have **Psalm 18:49**, “**For this I will praise you, O LORD, among the nations, and sing to your name.**” This verse is cited by Paul in Romans. He argues, “**For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, ‘Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name’**” (**Rom 15:8-9**). This is actually part of a list of several quotations all proving that Jesus came to **save the Gentiles** [**last verse at end of sermon on this note**].

Commentators argue that Paul is citing this verse because Paul viewed David as typological of Christ in this

regard,⁹ and that this is a “**prophetic utterance by Christ.**”¹⁰ Remember again our context. David is singing this song at the climax of his life, when all of his enemies have been defeated. These enemies were Gentiles, especially Philistines.

The Warrior

He sings about this a lot more as the Psalm continues and winds its way back to where it began. “**By you I can run against a troop**” (29a). “**He trains my hands for war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze**” (34). “**I pursued my enemies and overtook them, and did not turn back till they were consumed**” (37). Remember, at the beginning, it was God destroying the enemies. Now, it is David. God is fighting as the Dragon King *through his servant*,¹¹ and this is why the enemies are not able to see what is actually happening. They only have physical eyes, not spiritual eyes.

⁹ Cf. Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 878–879.

¹⁰ A. T. Hanson, *Studies in Paul's Technique and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 155.

¹¹ I am reminded of the stories of **King Arthur** who was called the Dragon King. In the ancient world, the king was giving his kingship by the gods. Certainly, this was true of David. David would thus be a little dragon king fighting for the heavenly Dragon King.

Their receivers are broken, sin and rebellion are the static they hear rather than the clear truth of the word.

“I thrust them through, so that they were not able to rise; they fell under my feet. For you equipped me with strength for the battle; you made those who rise against me sink under me. You made my enemies turn their backs to me, and those who hated me I destroyed. They cried for help, but there was none to save; they cried to the LORD, but he did not answer them. I beat them fine as dust before the wind; I cast them out like the mire in the streets” (38-42). Again, in Samuel, this Psalm comes at the tail end of the mightiest victories of David and his mighty men defeating even the most unimaginable foes in battle. David was fighting. Yet God was fighting.

But if this is a song about Christ, then Christ is the God who was fighting for David (even as he was Moses’s “man of war”; Dt 15:3). In the NT, he becomes the Man who is fighting. How was he fighting? David sang, “The cords of death encompassed me; the torrents of Belial assailed me; the cords of Sheol entangled me; the snares of death confronted me ... he drew me out of many waters” (Ps 18:4-5; 16).

Sheol was viewed as a watery underworld. David is speaking metaphorically about death.

But Peter's very first sermon shows The Singer of Psalm 18 in a glorious light. "God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it" ([Acts 2:24](#)). Do you hear the echo of Psalm 18 in Peter's words? When David sings of himself, as a type of Christ he is singing prophetically about the Lord Jesus. It was at the cross that Jesus did his final and most glorious battle against Belial and his minions in his first coming. The fiery rivers of hell could not hold our Lord under. He has been raised from the dead and he has conquered. He is victorious. Hallelujah!

The King of the World

"You delivered me from strife with the people; you made me the head of the nations; people whom I had not known served me" ([43](#)). Suddenly, the Psalm begins to take our singers train of thought to that climactic verse 49 quoted about Christ. David did not literally rule the entire world—all the nations. No. But typologically he did, as the land of Canaan was now completely subjected to him as king, and

this land represented the entire world.¹² All that was promised had reached the highest point that it ever would in the OT. And thus the old king looks over his kingdom and sings, “As soon as they heard of me they obeyed me; foreigners came cringing to me. Foreigners lost heart and came trembling out of their fortresses” (44-45).

Too long we have thought of Jesus in terms foreign to this. We see the meek and gentle kind man who healed diseases and fed the poor and befriended prostitutes and tax collectors. All of this was necessary for him to show poor sinners trapped in darkness the light and love of God the Father. But the Jesus of Psalm 18 is a different vision we see with the eyes of faith. For this is the King of kings who now rules in his kingdom and nothing and no one can thwart his rule or will. No one can keep him from saving his people and justifying them and making it so that God sees only his own perfection as they are hidden inside the Rock. This is about Christ in his exaltation and ascension.

¹² This is Paul’s point that God promised Abraham that he would be heir of “the world” (*kosmos*) through the righteousness that is by faith (Rom 4:13). In the OT, God promised Abraham that he would be father of many nations and that he would inherit “the land,” and that all the peoples of the earth would be blessed through him. Thus, he takes the specific land of Canaan typologically of the whole world. See Moo, *Romans*, 274.

“For who is God, but the LORD?” David sings (31). “And who is a rock, except our God?” He is still remembering Deuteronomy 32 and the Rock who fought for Israel lo those many centuries before. “This God—his way is perfect; the Word of the LORD proves true; he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him” (30). Did you hear that? God is called the Word here. The word is called “He.” The Word is now called the shield and refuge that began the Psalm.

The Targum has the Aramaic equivalent here of John’s *Logos*: **Memra**. The Memra became a personification of God, a kind of personality seen by Jews as separate from yet not separate from Yahweh. In fact, Memra appears more times in this song than perhaps any other Psalm.¹³ Whereas it is probable that most Jews took the memra-word to refer to God’s law, we Christians know it as the Person of Christ. He is our God, and the one who perfectly reveals the Father in

¹³ 11 times in 10 verses. Vs. 9, “His wrath was destroying like coals of burning fire from his Memra.” Vs. 13, “... and blazing hail from his Memra.” Vs. 14, “... and the Most High lifted up his Memra; he cast down hail and coals of fire.” Vs. 15, “He sent his Memra like arrows, and scattered them.” Vs. 16, “... through his wrath from before the LORD, through the Memra of the strength of your anger.” Vs. 19, “The Memra of the LORD was a support for me.” Vs. 25, “... according to the purity of my hands before his Memra.” Vs. 28, “... by your Memra you will humble the strong nations.” Vs. 30, “By your Memra I will have large armies; and by the Memra of my God I will conquer strong cities.” Vs. 36, “You have made me great by your Memra.”

heaven. He is the one who alone causes us to obey the law and be found blameless as the heart of the song sings.

Thus the psalmist worships, “For it is you who light my lamp; the LORD my God lightens my darkness” (28). “By my God I can leap over a wall.” (29). “The God who equipped me with strength and made my way blameless. He made my feet like the feet of a deer and set me secure on the heights” (32-33). “You have given me the shield of your salvation, and your right hand supported me, and your gentleness made me great” (35). Here, the right hand, which personifies Christ who is at the right hand of the Father, is gentle. The fiery dragon who shows himself to be a terror to his enemies is gentle through the Lord Jesus Christ. “You gave a wide place for my steps under me, and my feet did not slip” (36). This recalls the same idea from the previous Psalm (17:5). My feet have not slipped, because the LORD would not let them.

The Savior for All Mankind

Thus the Psalm concludes with David praising the Lord who is exalted above the nations and among them, for he alone can save them from the rivers of Belial. “The LORD

lives, and blessed be my rock, and exalted be the God of my salvation—the God who gave me vengeance and subdued peoples under me, who rescued me from my enemies; yes, you exalted me above those who rose against me; you delivered me from the man of violence. For this I will praise you, O LORD, among the nations, and sing to your name. Great salvation he brings to his king, and shows steadfast love to his anointed, to David and his offspring forever” (Ps 18:46-50).

Yes, David sang it, but Christ Jesus is The Singer of Psalm 18. And he sings to you now to see the glorious God of our salvation, the rock and fortress, the mighty dragon from heaven, the one who conquered sin and death, who defeated his enemies, who silenced the kings of the earth, who himself had no fault of blemish but perfectly followed all of God’s law, who has the key to hell, who unlocks the shackles of those long imprisoned, who is the Savior. Sing loudly to his Name, for it is the Name above all names. And to him has been given all dominion and power on earth and in heaven for now and forevermore.

Amen.