

Prayers

Opening prayer

Lord God, teach us to be wise, for You have numbered our days. You are the Author of all life and You have created us according to Your plan. You the great Redeemer, and through Jesus Christ, Your Son, You have saved us. You are the Comforter, the Holy Spirit who empowers us and comforts us. Therefore, may we live in peace, reconciled to Your will, untroubled by the cares of this world, and ever hopeful of the glory of living with You in eternity. Lord God, we praise You! ALLELUIA!

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas_(Alternatives that can broaden the experience of prayer)

Speak out loud to the Lord God in thanksgiving for the many blessings you know He has given you. Pray also in thanks for the blessings He has given of which you do not know

On-going prayers

- **Pray about air we breathe.** Give thanks to God for the gift of fresh air, and ask for His forgiveness for the way we take this for granted. Pray that God's people will demonstrate true holiness in the way they respect His gifts.
- Pray for those who seek peace throughout the world, whether in Libya or on the streets of our cities.
- Give thanks to God for animal life, and in particular any pets or animals with which you have close contact.

Meditation

Rescue us, Lord Jesus Christ,
by Your Holy Spirit, rescue us.

Restore our bodies through rest,
and strengthen them with exercise;

Replenish our minds by the Word,
and fill our hearts with Your truth;

Re-ignite Your fire of love in us,
so that we may shine for You;

Recover our zeal to live the Faith,
by challenging us to do Your will;

Replace the tiredness in our hearts,
with the vigour of Your enthusiasm;

Recharge our souls through worship,
so we may enjoy Your presence;

Renew us, Lord Jesus Christ,
by Your Holy Spirit, renew us.

Bible Study

Bible passage – Psalm 18: 7-19

- ⁷ The earth shook and trembled,
and the heart of the mountains began to tremble

- and erupt because of His blazing anger.
- 8 He fumed in rage, spitting fire
and spewing out burning coals.
- 9 He broke through the heavens and came down,
standing on clouds of thunder.
- 10 He rode on a cherub and flew,
soaring on the wings of the wind.
- 11 He was concealed in darkness, draped all around him;
and his shelter was the dark rain clouds of the sky.
- 12 Out of clear blue sky in front of Him,
thunderclouds arose with hail and fiery lightning.
- 13 The Lord thundered from heaven;
the Most High spoke through the hail
and the fiery lightning.
- 14 He shot his arrows and scattered them,
and routed them with great bolts of lightning.
- 15 The depths of the sea were laid bare
and the foundations of the earth were exposed
by your rebuke, O Lord;
at the ferocious outpouring of Your anger.
- 16 He reached down from on high and took hold of me;
He pulled me out of deep water.
- 17 He rescued me from my strong enemy,
those who hated me and were too strong 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 delivered me, because He delighted in me.

Review

Psalm 18 is a cry to God for help. In the previous six verses, we read about David's commitment to the Lord (18:1,2), in whom he trusted for help. Some great trouble has come his way (18:4,5), and the psalm records both his cry for help and his confidence that God would hear him from His dwelling place, from His 'Temple' (18:6). Now, in verses 7 to 19, we read God's response to this cry of help.

Most people who read psalm 18 find that it comes as something of a shock. The language of these verses is sharp, moreover, the psalm describes God's wrath, and most people are not used to the idea that God acts in anger or with vengeance. If we are willing to lay aside our preconceived ideas, however, and accept that a God of love is as entitled to feelings of anger and wrath as ourselves, then we will begin to find out what this psalm has to say to us.

To begin with, we must remember that God is ultimately just, and He knows the difference between what is right and what is wrong, and what is good and what is evil. When He shows His wrath, it is against what is wrong and all that is evil. So here in this passage, we may assume that God is angry against evil and injustice, because David is suffering and has called out to Him for help. In this sense, God is acting with empathy; He sees David's distress, and responds accordingly. This shows the closeness of the relationship between David and God. Moreover, it also shows that God is deeply concerned for people generally, and especially those who call on Him for help. We can hardly complain at that. God is a God whose passion is aroused when evil assails, and He will act.

So in the first two verses of our reading today we read about the wrath of God in its fullness, and verse 7 describes what is commonly called a 'theophany'. This word refers to those occasions recorded in the Old Testament where God's very presence causes creation to respond violently. The language of verse seven is very similar to that in Exodus chapter 19, which records God's coming to Mount Sinai to speak to the people of Israel. Scriptures such as this (see also Job 4:9f. Psalm 46:2,3) explain to us that God is in control of His Creation and can come in power to do with it what He will, and sometimes He will show His anger at wrongdoing through what appears to us to be something like an earthquake. Verse 8 adds another dramatic picture of God's wrath, in the form of 'spitting fire'!

It is best to separate out the short stanzas that follow, for this enables us to see more clearly the purpose of God's wrath; it is not just anger for anger's sake, for God intends to do something to help David. Of course, Psalm 18 is a long Psalm and there is a long way to go, but our passage today tells us that God's wrath at David's distress is no mere show of force; it is purposeful. God acts ultimately to save David (18:16,17); he deals with his enemies, and delivers David into a safe place (18:18,19).

God's majesty (9,10)

Firstly, God comes to help His people from heaven; He rides on cherubs, who are the guardians of heaven (Gen 3:24), the guardians of the holy of holies (Ex 26:31ff), guardians of the mercy seat (Ex 25:18-22) and bearers of the chariot throne of God (Ezekiel 1:22, 10:1ff). By this, we know who God is; He is the God of heaven who has made all things.

God's nature (11,12)

In these verses, God is described as not entirely visible but clouded and concealed. In New Testament times, we claim our knowledge of God through Jesus Christ, but we have perhaps forgotten the Old Testament truth that whilst we remain human the fullness of God remains clouded to our eyes. The writer of Psalm 18 uses dramatic pictures of darkened crowds to convey God's coming to earth like a storm, and ready to burst out in power.

God's action – striking home (13,14)

God's coming is like a sudden thunderbolt of lightning accompanied by hail; the storm has started! The picture language of shooting arrows (18:14), tells us that God does not act as random. He is purposeful, and His wrath is directed against evil and wrong doing. Verse 14 does not say exactly this here, but we are entitled to believe this for two reasons, firstly, it is a constant theme of the book of Psalms, and secondly, Psalm 18 eventually tells us precisely this about the object of God's wrath, later on (see 18:25f.).

God's action – covering all (15)

Verse 15 is a long verse, making up one four line stanza, describing God's ultimately powerful wrath coming over the sea. Now we do not think of the sea in this way today, but in ancient times people thought of the sea as a *primaeva* force out of which Creation was made (Genesis 1, 1,2). Psalm 18 declares God's power even to the depths of the sea and the limits of Creation, or as we might say, to 'the ends of the universe'.

God's action – salvation (16-19)

In the last two stanzas, God acts to help David. Intriguingly, Psalm 18 talks of God lifting David up out of '*deep water*' (18:16). At first, this may seem obvious because of previous references to the ocean depths, but it means more. In the days of Jesus, John the Baptist baptised people for the repentance of sins, specifically drawing them up 'out of water'. Jesus and His disciples continued to do this, and when Jesus ascended, He commanded His disciples to 'baptise' those who believed in Him (Matthew 28:19). Today, baptism is a powerful reminder of God's salvation, and one that God blesses for all who repent of their sins and turn to Christ by faith.

Of course we have no idea whether this Psalm was written to celebrate any specific incident in David's life, such as his victories over Saul, for example. The important point is that David knew God's help and could depend upon it, and so can we. He writes '*He rescued me from my strong enemy, those who hated me and were too strong for me*' (18:17). As we have begun to discover in our studies of Psalms, words like these enable David's Psalms to rise above and beyond the days in which they were written, so that they help us, even today.

Discipleship

Questions for groups

1. How many occasions can you think of in which people are saved in the Bible 'through water'. What do these events teach us?
2. What does it mean to be saved through water? What does your baptism mean to you?
3. Are there any parts of the description of the anger of God in this passage that you find difficult? Discuss this with others to try and find some perspective on the passage.

Discipleship challenges

- *When God expresses His anger, it is for a good reason, but this is not necessarily true for us. How often do you get angry, and is it usually for a good reason? What can you do to 'disciple' your own soul so that your anger is in control. as God's anger is in control?*
 - *Write down a list of evils within the world today, and pray that God will deal with them in power and authority.*
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Final Prayer

Lord God, If we come into Your presence, will You be angry with us? Will you see in us the hidden evils of which we have lost sight, and act in wrath to confront it? Deal with us kindly, we pray, for we do not knowingly harbour the enemy and we long for Your salvation. We trust that You will faithfully hear our prayer and save us, in the name of Jesus Christ; AMEN
