

2 Samuel 22: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] 2 Samuel chapter 22 And David spoke to the Lord the words of this song on the day when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul.

He said, The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, my guard, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge, my saviour, you save me from violence.

I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies. For the waves of death encompassed me, the torrents of destruction assailed me, the cords of Sheol entangled me, the snares of death confronted me.

In my distress I called upon the Lord, to my God I called. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry came to his ears. Then the earth reeled and rocked, the foundations of the heavens trembled and quaked, because he was angry.

Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth. Glowing coals flamed forth from him. He bowed the heavens and came down. Thick darkness was under his feet. He rode on a cherub and flew.

[1 : 09] He was seen on the wings of the wind. He made darkness around him his canopy. Thick clouds, a gathering of water. Out of the brightness before him, coals of fire flamed forth. The Lord thundered from heaven, and the Most High uttered his voice, And he sent out arrows, and scattered them, lightning, and routed them. Then the channels of the sea were seen.

The foundations of the world were laid bare, at the rebuke of the Lord, at the blast of the breath of his nostrils. He sent from on high, he took me. He drew me out of many waters. He rescued me from my strong enemy, from those who hated me.

For they were too mighty for me. They confronted me to the day of my calamity. But the Lord was my support. He brought me out into a broad place. He rescued me, because he delighted in me.

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 from his statutes I did not turn aside. I was blameless before him, and I kept myself from guilt. And the Lord has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to my cleanness in his sight.

[2 : 27] With the merciful you show yourself merciful. With the blameless man you show yourself blameless. With the purified you deal purely. And with the crooked you make yourself seem tortuous.

You save a humble people, but your eyes are on the haughty to bring them down. For you are my lamp, O Lord, and my God lightens my darkness. For by you I can run against a troop, and by my God I can leap over a wall.

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. For who is God but the Lord? And who is a rock except our God?

This God is my strong refuge, and has made my way blameless. He made my feet like the feet of a deer, and set me secure on the heights. He trains my hands for war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.

You have given me the shield of your salvation, and your gentleness made me great. You gave a wide place for my steps under me, and my feet did not slip. I pursued my enemies and destroyed them, and did not turn back until they were consumed.

[3 : 36] I consumed them. I thrust them through, so that they did not 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, those who hated me, and I destroyed them. They looked, but there was none to save. They cried to the Lord, but he did not answer them. I beat them fine as the dust of the earth.

I crushed them and stamped them down like the mire of the streets. You delivered me from strife with my people. You kept me as the head of the nations. People whom I had not known served me.

Foreigners came cringing to me. As soon as they heard of me, they obeyed me. Foreigners lost heart and came trembling out of their fortresses. The Lord lives, and blessed be my rock, and exalted be my God, the rock of my salvation.

The God who gave me vengeance and brought down peoples under me, who brought me out from my enemies. You exalted me above those who rose against me. You delivered me from men of violence.

[4 : 39] For this I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations, and sing praises to your name. Great salvation he brings to his king, and shows steadfast love to his anointed, to David, and his offspring forever.

2 Samuel chapter 22 is essentially the same as Psalm 18. It particularly focuses upon the deliverance from Saul, but also addresses deliverance from enemies from other quarters.

Coming at this point in the book, it serves a larger summary purpose also. Deuteronomy ends with the Song of Moses. 1 Samuel has the prayer of Hannah near the beginning of it.

While Hannah's prayer looks forward to anticipated deliverance, David's song looks back to realized deliverance. As Peter Lighheart notes, they have several themes or images in common.

Both of them mention the horn. My heart exalts in the Lord. My horn is exalted in the Lord. 1 Samuel chapter 2 verse 1. And then in verse 10 of that chapter, He will give strength to his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed.

[5 : 39] In 2 Samuel chapter 22 verse 3. My God, my rock in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation. The theme of God as rock is also a very prominent image.

There is none holy like the Lord, for there is none besides you. There is no rock like our God. 1 Samuel chapter 2 verse 2. 2 Samuel chapter 22 verses 2 to 3.

He said, In verse 32.

For who is God but the Lord? And who is a rock except our God? And then in verse 47. The Lord lives, and blessed be my rock, and exalted be my God, the rock of my salvation.

The repeated emphasis upon God as rock, which frames the entire psalm, as the image appears both at its beginning and at its close, should also remind us of the song of Moses at the end of the book of Deuteronomy, where the image of the Lord as rock is very prominent.

[6 : 45] The rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he. Deuteronomy chapter 32 verse 4.

In verse 15 of that chapter. But Jeshurun grew fat and kicked. You grew fat, stout, and sleek. Then he forsook God who made him, and scoffed at the rock of his salvation.

In verse 18. You were unmindful of the rock that bore you, and you forgot the God who gave you birth. In verse 30 to 31. In both cases, these songs serve as memorials of the Lord's activity on behalf of his people.

They come at the end of their respective books, expressing the fundamental message of the books in the form of a song to be memorised and declared by the people. In these final chapters of 2 Samuel, some of the deep themes of the books of Samuel are being explored, recapitulated, and resolved.

If we read these chapters carefully, we will have a firmer grasp upon what is going on in the books more generally. They also help the reader to make the transition from reading the history to declaring the praise of the Lord on its basis.

[8 : 04] Both Hannah's prayer and David's psalm end on the note of the Lord's consideration of his anointed. 1 Samuel 2.10 In 2 Samuel 22.51 Both speak of the way that the Lord intervenes to deliver his people in distress, and to save them from their enemies and troubles.

The Lord turns the tables on the mighty of the earth, and exalts those who depend upon him. Read together as bookends for the story of 1 and 2 Samuel, we can see Hannah's prayer and David's psalm as related together like promise and fulfilment.

One looks forward to the Lord's salvation, and the other looks back upon it. Lighthouse suggests that the psalm can be divided into sections with a chiasmic or bookended pattern.

It begins with the praise of the Lord in verses 2-3, and then returns to the praise of the Lord at the very end in verses 47-51. The Lord saves David from violence in verse 3, and from men of violence in verse 49.

After the praise of the Lord, David speaks of the Lord's deliverance of him from his enemies, and his enabling of David to overcome his enemies. This comes in verses 4-20, and is returned to in verses 29-46.

[9 : 30] While the first of these sections focuses on the Lord's intervention to deliver David from dire straits, on the return stretch of the psalm, the accent shifts to David's triumphing over his enemies himself by the strength that the Lord has given him.

The imagery here might also remind us of the Song of the Sea in Exodus chapter 15, Moses' song of memorial after the deliverance at the Red Sea. Both contain theophanic imagery.

Exodus chapter 15, verses 6-12. Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power. Your right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy. In the greatness of your majesty you overthrow your adversaries.

You send out your fury. It consumes them like stubble. At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up. The floods stood up in a heap. The deeps congealed in the heart of the sea.

The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil. My desire shall have its fill of them. I will draw my sword. My hand shall destroy them. You blew with your wind.

[10 : 30] The sea covered them. They sank like lead in the mighty waters. Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?

You stretched out your right hand. The earth swallowed them. David describes his deliverance in language and imagery deeply redolent of the Lord's deliverance of his people at the Red Sea.

2 Samuel chapter 22, verses 8-18. Then the earth reeled and rocked. The foundations of the heavens trembled and quaked, because he was angry. Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth.

Glowing coals flamed forth from him. He bowed the heavens and came down. Thick darkness was under his feet. He rode on a cherub and flew. He was seen on the wings of the wind.

He made darkness around him his canopy. Thick clouds, a gathering of water. Out of the brightness before him coals of fire flamed forth. The Lord thundered from heaven, and the Most High uttered his voice.

[11 : 28] And he sent out arrows and scattered them, lightning and routed them. Then the channels of the sea were seen. The foundations of the world were laid bare. At the rebuke of the Lord, at the blast of the breath of his nostrils.

He sent from on high. He took me. He drew me out of many waters. He rescued me from my strong enemy, from those who hated me. For they were too mighty for me. The imagery that David employs here recalls the deliverance at the Red Sea.

But also relates to cosmic imagery that we find elsewhere in scripture. The deep of the waters is related to Sheol and the grave and its threat. As can be seen in passages such as Jonah chapter 2.

It is also related to the Gentile nations. If Israel is like the land, the Gentile nations and powers are like waters constantly threatening to overwhelm and to drown it. Yet the Lord is going to draw them out of the threatening deep by his might and establish them on the firmness of the rock.

However, while the earlier part of the psalm focuses upon the Lord's intervention to deliver David, later the emphasis shifts. It is no longer the Lord's action on David's behalf that is seen, but David's action in the Lord's strength.

[12 : 38] David is, by the Lord's strength, able to wage war effectively against his adversaries. Not only does the Lord act on behalf of the powerless against their adversaries, he will empower his king to act with strength against his enemies and the enemies of the people of the Lord.

There is an important progression to maturity here, from a situation of dependence in weakness to a situation of dependence in strength. Being dependent upon the Lord in strength is much more challenging, of course.

While in moments of desperation and powerlessness we can turn to the Lord, if only because there is nowhere else to turn, in moments where we feel we have strength, we seldom recognize the empowerment of the Lord and turn to him in thanksgiving.

David, however, recognizes his dependence and expresses his thanksgiving to the Lord in both of these conditions. Sandwiched in the centre of the psalm, in verses 21-28, Lighthouse finds the exploration of David's cleanness and the Lord's corresponding faithfulness.

This section might raise some questions for us. How can David claim righteousness and cleanness of hands? How can he claim that the Lord rewarded him according to his righteousness, as he does in verse 25?

[13 : 50] This is something that we frequently encounter in the psalms. The psalmist often approaches the Lord appealing to his own righteousness and blamelessness as grounds for divine action on his behalf.

To understand this, it is important to consider such statements within a covenant context. On occasion, such appeals are made concerning particular situations. We can appeal to God on the basis of our blamelessness in a particular matter, seeking his vindication against those who would accuse or attack us.

However, sometimes we meet with more general statements, such as those that we find here, where David appeals to the Lord on the basis of his blamelessness more generally. Such statements should be considered in the context of the covenant.

God has promised to act on behalf of people who are faithful in the covenant. The faithfulness that is looked for isn't sinless perfection, but keeping of the covenant. The covenant provides for atonement, for sacrifice, for forgiveness, and for the covering of sin.

It allows for sinners to be blameless as covenant members. When they sin, they turn to the Lord, they seek his forgiveness and his restoration, and stand before him as those whose sins are covered.

[15 : 00] Even David's terrible sins concerning Bathsheba and Uriah were covered by the Lord's gracious forgiveness and faithfulness. While there were dreadful consequences for what David did, consequences that David still suffered, even though he was forgiven, he could approach the Lord on the basis of the Lord's covenant and promise.

As someone continues in such a manner, they can approach the Lord and claim that their hands are clean, that they are righteous and blameless, and call to God to act on their behalf according to his promises.

The Lord's promises and the provision that he makes for dealing with sin in his covenant gives David, and can give us, great confidence as we approach him. We can appeal to him, assured that he will hear and act on the basis of these things.

David's song ends with foreigners coming to him to pay honour and tribute. David wins victories over enemies on various sides. He and the nation of Israel are exalted over surrounding peoples and nations.

The result of all of this is that the name of the Lord is praised and exalted among the nations. As David is delivered and lifted up, he praises the Lord among the nations. All around about see David's success, his exaltation, and David sings to the Lord for his deliverance and his steadfast love.

[16 : 15] The Lord is the God who keeps covenant with his people, and with David and his offspring forever, as he promised in the covenant given to David in chapter 7. A question to consider, how can we see David's song as an initial fulfilment of the Lord's purpose in delivering a people for his name?