

12 My foot stands on level ground.
In the chorus I bless the LORD.

12. *In the chorus I bless the LORD.* As a concrete expression of the sweetness of being able to stand in the place where God's glory dwells, the speaker at the conclusion of the psalm praises God among the many singers (in the Hebrew, "chorus" is in the plural) taking part in the joyous temple rite.



For David.

The LORD is my light and my rescue.

Whom should I fear?

The LORD is my life's stronghold.

Of whom should I be afraid?

When evildoers draw near me to eat my flesh—
my foes and my enemies are they—
they trip and they fall.

Though a camp is marshaled against me,

my heart shall not fear.

Though battle is roused against me,

nonetheless do I trust.

1. *The LORD is my light and my rescue. / Whom should I fear?* This psalm is a sup-
plication in which, as elsewhere, a speaker in great distress implores God to
intervene on his behalf. The distinction of emphasis is that the poem begins
with a confident affirmation of God as the source of help under all grave
threats. This positive note is continued through verses 2 and 3, 5 and 6, and,
most extravagantly, in verse 10. But this sense of trust, in a psalm that manifests
powerful psychological verisimilitude, does not preclude a feeling of fearful
urgency in the speaker's plea to God (see verses 9 and 13).

3. *Though a camp is marshaled . . . / Though battle is roused.* It is not entirely
clear whether the speaker is literally under assault by armed enemies seeking
to kill him or whether the martial imagery is a metaphor for other kinds of hos-
tility. In verse 12, at any rate, the voracious foes attempt to destroy him by
underhanded judicial proceedings rather than military means.

4 One thing do I ask of the LORD,
 it is this that I seek—
 that I dwell in the house of the LORD
 all the days of my life,
 to behold the LORD's sweetness
 and to gaze on His palace.

5 For He hides me in His shelter
 on the day of evil.
 He conceals me in the recess of His tent,
 on a rock He raises me up.

6 And now my head rises
 over my enemies around me:

4. *One thing do I ask of the LORD.* In a casual glance, this verse may look like a non sequitur: the speaker, having expressed his firm confidence in God as his rescuer in distress, suddenly declares that his most cherished desire is to spend all his time in the temple. But, as we have seen in other psalms, the privilege of enjoying God's presence in the Jerusalem sanctuary is a consequence of having followed the ways that God dictates to man. And the temple itself, within the walled city, is repeatedly seen as a sanctuary in the political sense—a place of secure refuge from threatening foes. There is, then, a logical link between this verse and the next one, in which God provides a shelter and a safe hiding place.

to gaze on. The precise meaning of the verb *baqer* is in dispute, but the cognate noun *baqoret*, used in Leviticus 19:20 in the sense of "observation," suggests it may mean here to take in with the eyes, to enjoy the sight of.

5. *shelter . . . tent.* The two nouns are drawn from the lexicon of nomadic habitation, but here they are used in subtle metaphorical understatement as designations for a much more solid and imposing structure, as the third term in the sequence, "rock," suggests.

5-6. *He raises me up. / And now my head rises.* The Hebrew plays on the same verbal stem in two different conjugations—*yeromememini*, then *yarum*—and the translation seeks to approximate that effect.

Let me offer in His tent
 sacrifices with joyous shouts.
 Let me sing and hymn to the LORD.
 Hear, O LORD, my voice when I call,
 and grant me grace and answer me.

7 Of You, my heart said:
 "Seek My face."
 Your face, LORD, I do seek.

8 Do not hide Your face from me,
 do not turn Your servant away in wrath.
 You are my help.

9 Abandon me not, nor forsake me,
 O God of my rescue.
 Though my father and mother forsook me,
 the LORD would gather me in.

6. *in His tent.* Here the metaphorical use of "tent" to indicate temple is perfectly clear.

9. *Do not hide Your face from me.* "Face" suggests "presence," but the anthropomorphic concreteness of "face" is palpable. The speaker desperately seeks God's face (a privilege denied Moses). The practical manifestation of God's turning away His face would be abandoning the person to his enemies.

10. *Though my father and mother forsook me, / the LORD would gather me in.* The extravagance of this declaration of trust in God, perhaps the most extreme in the whole Bible, is breathtaking and perhaps even disturbing. In the best of circumstance, the most unconditional, unstinting love and care we experience are from a mother and father. We can imagine, the psalmist says, circumstances in which even that love might fail, but God will be both father and mother to him in the most dire straits.

- 11 Teach me, O LORD, Your way,
and lead me on a level path
because of my adversaries.
- 12 Do not put me in the maw of my foes.
For false witnesses rose against me,
outrageous deponents.
- 13 If I but trust to see the LORD's goodness,
in the land of the living—
- 14 Hope for the LORD!
Let your heart be firm and bold,
and hope for the LORD.

11. *my adversaries*. This term for enemy, *shorerim* (sometimes *shorim*), appears half a dozen times in Psalms and nowhere else in the biblical corpus. It may be derived from a verbal root that means "to watch" (as enemies gleefully watch one's humiliation). It certainly plays on a more common word for "foes," *tsorerim* (or, as in the next verse here, *tsarim*).

12. *the maw of my foes*. Here *nefesh*, "life breath," shows a secondary meaning, through metonymy—the throat or gullet, through which breath passes.

13. *If I but trust*. This sentence, at least in the textual form passed down to us, seems to be an ellipsis.

14. *Hope for the LORD! / Let your heart be firm and bold*. This last exhortation—whether of the speaker to himself or to an individual member of his audience—is an apt summary of the psychology that informs this psalm. It begins by affirming trust in God and reiterates that hopeful confidence, but the trust has to be asserted against the terrors of being overwhelmed by implacable enemies.

For David.

To You, O LORD, I call.

My Rock, do not be deaf to me.

Lest You be mute to me

and I be like those gone down to the Pit.

Hear the sound of my pleading

when I cry out to You,

when I lift up my hands

to Your holy shrine.

1. *do not be deaf . . . / Lest You be mute*. The Hebrew uses a pun, the first verb being *teherash* and the second *tehesheh*. (Some interpreters actually understand *teherash* as "to be silent.") To follow the logic of the punning language, should God turn a deaf ear to the supplicant, He will not answer the supplicant's prayer and hence will be "mute." In an associative logic, the supplicant himself will then perish, becoming forever silent like all the legions of the dead and hence incapable of imploring God or praising him. In this psalm he does both, because, as elsewhere, the supplication turns into a thanksgiving psalm from verse 6 to the end.

2. *when I lift up my hands*. This is, of course, a gesture of prayer, abundantly attested to in a variety of ancient Near Eastern texts and drawings.