

Ponderings in the Psalms

The following is a Messianic Study on

Psalm 17

By Paul Cohen, Messianic Bible Teacher.
Brit Chadashah (Sydney)
www.BCSydney.com



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The *Pondering* studies were published in the Brit Chadashah Newsletter. Brit Chadashah (*New Covenant*) is a Messianic Fellowship in Sydney. Led by Paul Cohen a Jewish believer in Messiah Yeshua (Jesus). We meet together fortnightly for Bible studies from a Messianic Jewish Perspective. We are a unique fellowship made up of Jewish and Gentile people who are believers in Yeshua as the promised Messiah of Israel.

If you don't know Yeshua as your Messiah, we encourage you to search out the Scriptures for yourself. God promised in the book of Jeremiah, "*You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart*" (Jeremiah 29:13). And we hope you will make contact with us so that we can share more about the Messiah, His life and ministry.

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Brit Chadashah; P.O. Box 304; Caulfield South, VIC 3162, Australia
Email: bc@celebratemessiah.com.au
Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/BritChadashah.Sydney>
YouTube <https://tinyurl.com/BC-Video>

Pondering Psalm 17

- 1 A Prayer of David.
Hear a just cause, O LORD, give heed to my cry;
Give ear to my prayer, which is not from deceitful lips.
- 2 Let my judgment come forth from Your presence;
Let Your eyes look with equity.
- 3 You have tried my heart;
You have visited me by night;
You have tested me and You find nothing;
I have purposed that my mouth will not transgress.
- 4 As for the deeds of men, by the word of Your lips
I have kept from the paths of the violent.
- 5 My steps have held fast to Your paths.
My feet have not slipped.
- 6 I have called upon You, for You will answer me, O God;
Incline Your ear to me, hear my speech.
- 7 Wondrously show Your lovingkindness,
O Saviour of those who take refuge at Your right hand
From those who rise up against them.
- 8 Keep me as the apple of the eye;
Hide me in the shadow of Your wings
- 9 From the wicked who despoil me,
My deadly enemies who surround me.
- 10 They have closed their unfeeling heart,
With their mouth they speak proudly.
- 11 They have now surrounded us in our steps;
They set their eyes to cast us down to the ground.
- 12 He is like a lion that is eager to tear,
And as a young lion lurking in hiding places.
- 13 Arise, O LORD, confront him, bring him low;
Deliver my soul from the wicked, Your sword,
- 14 From men with Your hand, O LORD,
From men of the world, whose portion is in this life,
And whose belly You fill with Your treasure;
They are satisfied with children,
And leave their abundance to their babes.
- 15 As for me, I shall behold Your face in righteousness;
I will be satisfied with Your likeness when I awake.

Introduction

This Psalm is a prayer תְּפִלָּה (*t'filah*), not a song but a request a cry for help by David. In this psalm we see that David plays with the language, he does this by repetitions and body parts.

Repetitions

1. David *mouth* versus the *mouths* of the wicked (verses 3 & 10);

2. LORD *arise* against those who *rise* against those who take refuge in You (verses 7 & 13);
3. God's "eye" and the eyes of the wicked (verses 8 & 11).

Body parts

Of interest to note is the many words relating to the physical body: mouth, lip, feet, ear, right hand, fat, eye, heart, and soul (life), face and he mentions wing.

The two halves

Verse 1-6 are David's appeal to God for judgment, David had been tried by God and feels vindicated, he is right.

Verses 7-15 is David's prayer where he opposes the evildoers. David seeks God's protection and His assistance against the wicked.

Commentary

Verse 1 A Prayer

This is the first explicit prayer in the book of Psalms; it is not just a request but also an argument why God should move on his behalf. David believed he was *right* צדק (*zedek*), not based on some emotion but on the basis that God had tried him and God had tested his heart. And he repeats this in verse 15 where he declares that in his *righteousness* צדק (*zedek*) he will see the Lord. Why is David so incredibly confident? Had he not committed any sins? He had, but he had confessed his sins and stood in the grace that follows. Like in Psalms 139:23-24 after David had confessed his sins and says "*Search me, O God, and know my heart: Try me, and know my thoughts; 24 And see if there be any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.*" He had communed with God and knew he had been forgiven, reading this is a challenge for all of us, do I ask the Lord to search out my sins?

David used one word צדק (*zedek*) twice in the one chapter as such it should reflect the same, sadly few do, the Young and Stone translations bring this out.

Sometimes in error people teach that only the Brit Chadashah (the New Covenant) teaches that righteousness is by faith (Romans 1:17) through grace, but this was already taught in the Tanach (Older Testament) this Psalm is a good example of this see also Genesis 15:6 and Habakkuk 2:4.

As such David cries out and asks God's attention as says there is no hypocrisy (deceitful lips) in my prayer. He had confessed his sins and righteous. As Solomon expressed it in Proverbs 15:8 "*But the prayer of the upright is His delight*", and so God would hear his prayer.

Verse 2 Judgement

David knew that the Lord could and would bring judgment against him if he had unconfessed sins. Which God had done on at least two occasions, through the words of the prophets Nathan (2 Samuel 12:1-14) and Gad (2 Samuel 24:10-17). By experience David knew the LORD was known for his great mercy (2 Samuel 24:14). And he appeals to God to be evenhanded without partiality. Again an amazing prayer, far too often when we seek justice we blame the other and ask God to agree with us, David does not do this, but ask for an honest judgement.

Verse 3-5 Tried and Tested

David had given his heart to the Lord who tried (examined) him and tested him צָרַפְתָּנִי (*tz'raftani*). This word means to refine (smelt) like silver or gold and purge the dross. Because of his clean conscience he has bold language like the apostle Paul (Acts 23:1 & Acts 24:16). For he had kept evil thoughts in subjection within him (2 Corinthians 10:5), and not let them come out of his mouth. David kept the Word of the LORD, and stayed away from violent men, 'the paths of the violent' is the opposite of the 'path of life,' He cling to the way of life (Psalm 16:11) and not walked the path of the wicked (Proverbs 4:14).

Verse 6 Cry

God hears the cry of His people, and David was in the habit of seeking refuge in the Lord (Psalms 7:1, 11:1, 16:1, 18:2, 31:1, 57:1 and many other places) and constantly was calling upon the LORD, (Psalms 18:3, 20:9, 28:1, 55:16,...) as we ought to do. Like Messiah he has confidence of being heard (John 11:41).

Verse 7 Chesed

This is the centre of the psalm and contains the phrase "lovingkindness," some translations will says "steadfast love," the word is חֶסֶד (*chesed*) which may also be translated as *kindness* even *favour*, reflects God's *Covenantal faithfulness to His sure mercies*. Because of His *chesed* He will keep His promises and Covenants not just to the recipient but even to their children's children even forever more.

The word wondrously comes from the root is פִּלֵּא (*pele*) to you and me, we are wonderful people and we can do wondrously, not so in Biblical Hebrew this word always relates to God and His dealings with His people, i.e. only He can be wonderful (see for example Judges 13:18 & Isaiah 9:6) only He can do wondrously (see Job 37:5; Psalm 31:21; Joel 2:26).

David seeks the Lord his Saviour and seeks the right hand of protection (Exodus 15:6), against the enemies of the LORD, this is probably a reference to King Saul who sought David's life (1 Samuel 19:11-24 see also Psalm 59:1).

Verse 8 - The apple of the eye

It says *Keep me as the apple of the eye* - קְאִישׁוֹן בַּת־עַיִן (*k'ishon bat-a-yin*) literally as a *little men daughter-of-the-eye*. Pupil or apple is the word אִישׁוֹן (*ishon*) which means *little man*, this carries the thought that you can see yourself back as a miniature, as in a mirror, when looking into another person's eye. In verse 8 the full expression is used *little man* (or) *daughter of the eye*, (see also Lamentations 2:18 which only has בַּת־עַיִן *daughter-of-the-eye*) while Deuteronomy 32:10 and Proverbs 7:2 just have a *little man of the eye*).

It is an apt description how God takes tender care of the Jewish people (Deuteronomy 32:10) or as here in the Psalm His chosen one. (Note that the expression in Zechariah 2:8 [verse 12 in Hebrew] is not exactly the same there is no *little man* or *daughter* but *hollowed out eye* meaning "gate of the eye" while in translation it is still "the apple of the eye").

David uses the phrase "shadow of Your wings" four times here and in Psalms 36:7; 57:1 and 63:7, see also Psalm 91:1. *Hide me in the shadow of Your wings*, the Targum (the Aramaic Bible paraphrase) interprets this as "under the shadow of Your Shechinah (Glory) hide me" alluding to the wings of the cherubim which sat on the atonement cover, the mercy seat, the very place where God granted His presence (Exodus 25:22) and where He would meet with Israel.

Verse 9-11 The wicked prosper

David exposes the wicked, they had robbed him, these were his most fearsome enemies (King Saul and Doeg the Edomite) they now encircled him. The background might have been 1 Samuel 24, where David is cornered and had to withdraw into a cave.

Their prosperity resulted in a hardened heart and sneering speech (Psalm 73:7-8; Job 15:27). And again we note that they had trapped (encircled) David and if he had been caught they were ready to cast him down to the ground, which means to kill him (Psalm 37:32).

Verses 12-14 The enemy used by God

David's enemy is described as a lion אַרְיֵה (*ariyeh*) ready to kill, and like a כְּפִיר (*k'pir*); young lion, at times evil rulers are compared to lions, based on their strength and cruelty; (Proverbs 28:15, a non-Biblical example would be Josephus *Antiquities* 18.6.10, where one of Agrippa's men speaking in Hebrew says about the death of Tiberius "*the lion is dead*"). The devil too is called a roaring lion, (1 Peter 5:8) one who seeks to devour men.

David prays "*Deliver my soul from the wicked, your sword*", God is using the wicked as His means of punishment, God uses Israel to bless the nations (Genesis 12:3, 22:18, 26:4, 28:14) but at times uses the nations to punish Israel when they go astray (Leviticus 26:38; Deuteronomy 28:48) and so God uses even those who are not walking with Him for His purposes.

The men are the enemies of David, who seek pleasures today they are '*of the world*' (John 15:19), '*sons of this age*' (Luke 16:8; Luke 20:34-35), whose '*mind is on earthly things*' (Philippians 3:19). God also gives them their treasures (Matthew 5:45), they even have many children, and can leave their abundance to their grandchildren. Yet these men "*whose portion is in this life*" will miss the greater blessing, a good example is the story Yeshua tells of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). There are two kingdoms at war, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world (1 Corinthians 15:50) we need to seek the LORD and His righteousness, (Matthew 6:33) and then like David we too will see His face.

Verse 15 Asking for a Theophany

What boldness, because David's cause is just, he is declared righteous, he ask to see God's face this had been the prayer of Moses (Exodus 33:18) and was the great promise of the Aaronic benediction (Numbers 6:24-26). What David is saying is he will be content, when he is in the very presence of God Himself, this brings us back to the *sheltering under the shadow of Your wings*, for between the cherubim God met with Israel and David wants to meet with God in the secret place.

The enemies were satisfied with worldly things, but David the man after God's heart sought to be in His likeness. What a challenge to us to seek His face and be satisfied when His likeness is revealed to us (Romans 8:18).

Selah

Shalom in Messiah

Paul & Sue