

Psalm 118:5-7

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/ps/ps-118/psalm-1185-7/>

The psalmist begins his poetic narrative (Psalm 118:5-27) by recalling a time when he called out to the LORD in his distress. The LORD answered and exalted him. The psalmist does not fear because the LORD is with Him and wonders aloud—what can man do to me? He concludes that he can trust the LORD, and rest content to not pay back the evil they have done him because the LORD is among those who help him and the LORD will save and vindicate him.

Verses 1-4 of this psalm serve as a kind of introduction and/or chorus to Psalm 118. In this introductory chorus, the psalmist exhorts us to “Give thanks to the LORD for He is good” (Psalm 118:1), before repeating the phrase “His lovingkindness is everlasting” four times (Psalm 118:1, 2, 3, 4).

The everlasting nature of *the LORD*’s lovingkindness (the Hebrew word: “hesed”) is the baseline or expressed presupposition of this entire psalm.

Psalm 118:5 begins the main narrative section of this psalm. The poetic narrative runs from Psalm 118:5-27.

This personal narrative poetically tells a story of a time when the psalmist was surrounded by enemies in battle and faced imminent doom (Psalm 118:10-12). In this predicament, the psalmist, likely King David, calls upon the LORD (Psalm 118:5) and is not only rescued from death (Psalm 118:14, 17), but is also triumphant over his foes (Psalm 118:7).

The psalmist then celebrates in his tents after the battle (Psalm 118:15-16), triumphantly parades into his city (Psalm 118:19-20), and offers a sacrifice to *the LORD* (Psalm 118:21, 27). The retelling is punctuated with constant praises and exhortations to trust in *the LORD* (Psalm 118:6-9, 18, 22-26).

This poetic narrative is the psalmist’s personal testimony that *the LORD*’s “lovingkindness is everlasting” (Psalm 118:1-4, 29). It also provides an example for “those who trust in the name of the LORD” (Psalm 118:4) to sing, remember, and follow as they encounter their own trials.

Psalm 118 is “the Hosanna Hallel.” As mentioned in the commentary for Psalm 118:1, “Hosanna” is both a desperate petition and declaration of praise. As a petition, “Hosanna” is a cry for help meaning “Save!” or “Deliver us!” As a praise, “Hosanna” is a shout of joy meaning “Salvation!” or “Deliverance has come!” Both aspects of “Hosanna” are present in this psalm.

The first line of the psalmist’s poetic narrative begins with a cry for help—“Hosanna/Save us!”

*From my distress I called upon the LORD (v 5a).
 (“Hosanna/Save me!”)*

We do not know the exact circumstances of the *distress* from which the psalmist *called upon the LORD*. But we do know it was personal because he described it as: *my distress*.

The *distress* appears to be a military threat upon the psalmist's life.

As described in the Bible Says commentary for Psalm 118:1, the likely author of Psalm 118 is King David. The *distress* the psalmist describes also seems compatible with the military danger and divine deliverance that David described in Psalm 18. The danger of Psalm 18 consists of "the words [that David] spoke to the LORD...in the day that the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul" (Psalm 18, superscription).

Throughout his life, King David had many troubles and circumstances of personal *distress*. The personal distress described in Psalm 118 could refer to:

- David's exile under King Saul (1 Samuel 19–2 Samuel 1);
- David's battles with the Philistines (2 Samuel 5:17-21, 5:22-25);
- The rebellion of his son Absalom (2 Samuel 15-18).
- Another specific circumstance from the psalmist's life.
- A general conflation of various distressing circumstances from the psalmist's life.

It is not overly important to the message of Psalm 118 which of these distressing events the psalmist is referring to. What is important is that during the psalmist's *distress*, he *called upon the LORD*. All *distress* is personal to the one in *distress*. And the example the psalmist provides us, to call *upon the LORD* in moments of *distress*, is one we should heed.

The word *from* indicates that the psalmist *called upon the LORD* from the middle of or the depths of his *distress*. He did not wait until his *distress* was over before he *called upon the LORD*. The reason the psalmist *called upon the LORD* was because in his *distress* he remembered "His lovingkindness is everlasting" (Psalm 118:1, 2, 3, 4, 29).

The psalmist did not allow his present distressing circumstances to be the ultimate authority about God or his own life. He relied on God's word and *the LORD's* incredible faithfulness ("hesed") to be the final authority about *the LORD* and his reality.

Whenever we are in *distress* we should follow the psalmist's example of remembering *the LORD's* everlasting lovingkindness and call *upon the LORD* by seeking His perspective about our circumstances (James 1:5). We should follow *the LORD's* guidance for how we should deal with the difficulties of life (James 1:22-25).

If we do this, we will not be alone in our *distress* because *the LORD* will be with us. *The LORD* will hear us. He will help us (Joel 2:32a, Acts 2:21, Romans 10:13). And we will be able to overcome our distress in such a way that is pleasing to God (James 1:12).

When the psalmist *called upon the LORD*, he says:

The LORD answered me and set me in a large place (v 5b).
 (“Hosanna/I am saved!”)

The psalmist testifies that *the LORD* did not ignore him when he *called out*. He *answered* him.

The psalmist also describes how *the LORD* set him *in a large place*. The Hebrew word that is translated as “large place” is מְרֻחָב (H4800—pronounced: “mer-khawb”). This word depicts a broad or roomy place, or open expanse. If literal, it could describe a palace. If metaphorical, it describes salvation from oppression or danger, or liberty from the suffocating circumstances of distress.

King David experienced *the LORD* setting him *in a large place* after calling *upon the LORD* from his *distress*. David suffered suffocating circumstances as Saul pursued him. He literally was hiding in caves before *the LORD* set him as king over Israel, where he then lived *in a large, roomy place* compared to the crannies of caves.

Psalms 18, which was written by King David, describes this event with language similar to Psalm 118:5,

“In my distress I called upon the LORD,
And cried to my God for help;
He heard my voice out of His temple,
And my cry for help before Him came into His ears.”
(Psalm 18:6)

“He brought me forth also **into a broad place**;
He rescued me, because He delighted in me.”
(Psalm 18:19)

The Bible tells us that if we trust and call *upon the LORD* during the *distress* of our trials, He will answer us and *set* us in a *large place* of authority in the new heaven and the new earth (Matthew 19:28-29, 2 Timothy 2:12, Revelation 3:21).

Psalms 118:5 is also prophetic of King David’s descendant, Jesus the Messiah.

In Gethsemane, Jesus the Messiah was greatly distressed and grieved to the point of death (Matthew 26:37-38). But even in His *distress*, Jesus did not forget that *the LORD’s* lovingkindness was everlasting (Psalm 118:1-4). He fervently prayed and *called upon the LORD* in His *distress* (Matthew 26:39, 42, Luke 22:44).

The LORD answered Jesus in His distress (Luke 22:43). And because Jesus was faithful unto death, *the LORD* set Him with authority in a *large place*—heaven and earth (Isaiah 53:12, Matthew 28:18, Philippians 2:8-11, Hebrews 12:2).

The psalmist continues by explaining his confidence with an enthymeme and rhetorical boast.

An enthymeme is a logical syllogism that states only two of three statements. The third is implicitly understood—like an answer to a rhetorical question.

The psalmist's enthymeme is: *The LORD is for me; I will not fear* (v 6a).

In this case he states one of the premises: *The LORD is for me*; and the logical conclusion: *I will not fear*. The third and unstated premise is: "(even when) I am in danger."

"The LORD's lovingkindness ("hesed") is everlasting" (Psalm 118:1-4, 29), and *the LORD is for* the psalmist. This means that the psalmist is under the protection of the all-powerful God of the universe. Because *the LORD is for* him, nothing can harm him. This is why the psalmist, despite experiencing circumstances that cause much *distress*, concludes: *I will not fear*.

The psalmist then gives the rhetorical boast:

What can man do to me? (v 6b).

The expected and unstated reply to this question is: "They *can do* no harm *to me*."

The fact that the psalmist identifies *man* as his opposition and source of *distress* reveals that it is social or political in nature. If political it likely means that the prospect of death is a possible outcome, were it not for the fact that *the LORD is for* him. The prospect of death is confirmed later in the psalm (Psalm 118:17-18).

Jesus the Messiah rephrased the psalmist's enthymeme and rhetorical question—*The LORD is for me; I will not fear. What can man do to me?* with a clear directive to His disciples.

"Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell [literally 'Gehenna']."
(Matthew 10:28)

Paul gives a similar admonition to the psalmist's rhetorical question in his letter to the Roman believers:

"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?...Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?...But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us."
(Romans 8:31, 35, 37)

Paul too knew that *the LORD's* "lovingkindness is everlasting" (Psalm 118:1-4, 29):

"For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to

separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
(Romans 8:38-39)

Whenever people threaten us directly or indirectly for following *the LORD* we should adopt a similar perspective as the psalmist and follow Jesus and Paul’s teachings, knowing that *the LORD* is on our side, and to not be afraid of the rebuke or punishment of *man*.

Psalms 118:6 is prophetic of Jesus the Messiah.

Jesus the Messiah, knew that *the LORD was for Him* (Isaiah 50:7-9, John 17:1, 4-5). He did *not* act according to the *fear* of *man*. He despised (thought little of) the shame they heaped upon Him and endured an agonizing death on the cross for the joy of pleasing God and the reward set before Him (Hebrews 12:2).

The psalmist knows *who is* on his side and that he *will* be victorious because of his Helper,

*The LORD is for me among those who help me;
Therefore I will look with satisfaction on those who hate me (v 7).*

The psalmist repeats: *the LORD is for me* before explaining that He is *among those who help me*. In other words, the psalmist knows he will have success because *the LORD is among* his allies—and *the LORD* never fails. The reason *the LORD is among those who help* the psalmist is because the psalmist is doing the work that *the LORD* has called him to do.

The psalmist is not saying, “I can do whatever I want and win because *God is with me*.” Rather, he is saying, “I am on *the LORD’s* side and because I am doing His will, in His strength, I will be successful.” The success is in the faithfulness, not in a guaranteed circumstantial result.

Therefore, those who hate the righteous psalmist and the work he is doing in *the LORD* will eventually be defeated and discouraged. Perhaps it is in the next life. But eventually all will be judged by Him. The psalmist can rest his case. He does not need to retaliate or seek vengeance, because *the LORD is for* him and vengeance is in the hands of *the LORD* (Deuteronomy 32:35).

This is what the psalmist means when he says: *Therefore I will look with satisfaction on those who hate me*. He does not need to manufacture his own justice by paying back or punishing his enemies *who* are trying to destroy him.

For King David, the likely psalmist, *those who hate him* could include various people throughout his life. Among his most desperate enemies were King Saul, and David’s own rebellious son, Absalom. There were many people who opposed David as *the LORD’s* anointed king. David spared King Saul’s life in the cave at Engedi when the king was furiously trying to kill David (1 Samuel 24:1-7). David told his friends, who urged him to kill his enemy:

“Far be it from me because of the LORD that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD’s anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, since he is the LORD’s anointed.”
(1 Samuel 24:6)

David spared his enemy Saul a second time (1 Samuel 26:1-25). When King Saul camped on the hill of Hachilah, David entered his camp and found the king sleeping. David responded to his friend, Abishai, who requested to kill Saul on David's behalf:

“Do not destroy him...As the Lord lives, surely the Lord will strike him, or his day will come that he dies, or he will go down into battle and perish. The Lord forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the Lord's anointed.”

(1 Samuel 1:9a, 10-11a)

Saul was later killed in battle by the Philistines (1 Samuel 31:1-6).

When David's son Absalom led an insurrection against his father, the king, David instructed his generals to “Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom” (2 Samuel 18:5b).

Absalom was later ensnared by his own hair in an oak tree as he rode into battle (2 Samuel 18:9) and David wept when he learned his son was slain (2 Samuel 18:33).

In all of these instances, as David was unjustly and treacherously oppressed by *those who hated him*, he looked on them *with satisfaction* and was content to leave the outcome of justice to *the LORD* instead of seeking vengeance himself.

When we love *the LORD* (i.e. follow His commands—John 15:10), He *is for* us and He *is among those who help* us. And we have this confidence, that He “causes all things to work together for good to those who love God” (Romans 8:28).

Even when we are being unjustly treated or persecuted, we can entrust the outcome of our lives to *the LORD* (1 Peter 4:19). And we can rest *with satisfaction*, contenting ourselves without the need to retaliate or take justice into our own hands against *those who hate us*, because vengeance is *the LORD's* (Deuteronomy 32:35),

“Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.”

(Romans 12:17-19).

Psalm 118:7 is prophetic of Jesus the Messiah.

The LORD was *for* Him and *among those who* helped Him. This was true when Jesus the Messiah was betrayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. The only hand Jesus lifted at His arrest was to heal the wounded ear of one of His captors (Luke 22:49-51). During His trial, He did not speak against His accusers (Isaiah 53:7, Matthew 26:63a). He submitted to death under the charge of Pilate and carried His cross (John 19:17). And He never summoned the twelve legions of angels waiting in heaven, armed and ready to rescue Him at His command (Matthew 26:53).

Jesus the Messiah gave His back to those who struck Him; His cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; He did not cover His face from humiliation and spitting (Isaiah 50:6) because Jesus knew: “The LORD God helps Me; Therefore, I am not disgraced” (Isaiah 50:7). Jesus knew that He who vindicates Him was near (Isaiah 50:8). Jesus the Messiah was able to *look on those who hate Him with satisfaction* because *the LORD is for Him* (Isaiah 50:9). And even though His circumstances were dark, and He endured a martyr’s death, He triumphed completely (Philippians 2:9-11).

Biblical Text

**⁵ From my distress I called upon the LORD;
The LORD answered me and set me in a large place.**

**⁶ The LORD is for me; I will not fear;
What can man do to me?**

**⁷ The LORD is for me among those who help me;
Therefore I will look with satisfaction on those who hate me.**