

Psalm 28

Prayer during the Day Friday Week 1

This is an urgent plea that God will confront the wicked, and continue, like a shepherd, to watch over the king and bless those who act with justice. We hear the cry of YHWH's anointed king (28:8). The title reads 'Of David'.

¹You, YHWH*, I call on you. My rock, do not refuse to hear me. If you are silent to me, I shall be among those who go down to the Pit.

²Hear the sound of my pleading, as I cry to you for help*, as I lift up my hands toward your most holy sanctuary.

³Do not drag me away with the wicked, with those who do evil: offering a greeting of peace to their neighbours, while mischief is in their hearts*.

⁴Repay them according to what they do, the evil of their deeds; repay them according to their actions; repay them as much as they deserve.

⁵Because they have no regard for what YHWH is doing, for the work of his hands, he will break them down and not build them up again.

Compare the following:

Answer me quickly, YHWH; my spirit fails.
Do not hide your face from me,
or I shall be like those who go down to the Pit.

– Psalm 143:7

As Christians we can hear Jesus crying out in his agony and on the cross, his piercing cry met only with the silence of God. This is so often the case for us as well, for ultimately God is beyond all words.

The 'most holy sanctuary' [Hebrew d^ebîr, דְּבִיר; Greek naos, ναος] is the inner sanctuary, that is to say the Holy of Holies, where the ark of the covenant and its cover, the mercy-seat (YHWH's throne), were located. Compare the following:

Lift up your hands to the holy place, and bless YHWH.

– Psalm 134:2

Compare the following:

An enemy dissembles in speaking while harbouring deceit within; when an enemy speaks graciously, do not believe it, for there are seven abominations concealed within; though hatred is covered with guile, the enemy's wickedness will be exposed in the assembly.

– Proverbs 26:24-26

We know that we break ourselves down when we close ourselves off from God, the source of all good. The psalmist thought of God as controlling what happens and so of bringing about the breaking down as a punishment.

We would do well to allow these words of praise, exultation and gratitude to find an echo in our hearts.

⁶Blessed* be YHWH who hears the sound of my pleading.

⁷YHWH is my strength and my shield; in him my heart* trusts*.

He has helped me, my heart* exults, and with my song I give thanks to him.

The psalm concludes with a plea for the king and for the people. Verses 8-9 are only loosely attached to the rest of the psalm. The words ‘YHWH is the strength *of his people*’ are a translation of the Greek Septuagint version (του λαου αυτου). The received Hebrew text (the Massoretic Text) has ‘The Lord is strength *to him* (יְהוָה לִּי). The Greek fits the context better, which leads scholars to judge that the received Hebrew Text contains a scribal error, and that the original Hebrew was not יְהוָה לִּי (‘to him’) but יְהוָה לְעַמּוֹ (‘to his people’).

The image of the shepherd recalls king David. Compare the following:

Your flock found a dwelling in your land.

– Psalm 68:10

He chose his servant David, and took him from the sheepfolds; from tending the nursing ewes he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel, his inheritance.

– Psalm 78:70-71

We your people, the flock of your pasture, will give endless thanks to you.

– Psalm 79:13

⁸YHWH is the strength of his people; he is the saving* refuge of his anointed*.

⁹O help* your people, and bless* your heritage; be their shepherd, and sustain them forever.