

[Ps 27:1, 4, 13-14](#)

Responsorial Psalm

Jerome Biblical Commentary

Ps 27. An individual lament. Structure: 1-6, poem of trust in God for protection; 7-14, the complaint, ending with certainty of being heard (13), and oracle of encouragement. Although many scholars (Podechard, Weiser) claim that two Pss have been combined here, a certain unity can be recognized: Trust is a characteristic of the lament, and in both parts there is mention of enemies (2, 12). He could have expressed his confidence and desire for the “shelter of his tent” (5-6) before he succeeded in making his lament in the Temple.**2.** *devour...*: Destroy completely.**3.** The metaphor is taken from military experience; the victorious spirit of confidence is reminiscent of Rom 8:32-39.**4.** This single desire is also expressed in Ps 23:6.**6.** He is confident enough to vow that one day he will offer thanksgiving for his deliverance from his “enemies.”**7-10.** The insistent requests for “pity,” are still colored by his trust (10).**8.** The MT is not clear.**12.** The enemies are identified for the first time: “false witnesses.”**13.** The CCD correctly expresses the thought, but in the MT the anacoluthon is striking: “If I were not certain that I should see...!” *land of the living*: The present world, as opposed to Sheol (cf. Ps 52:7).**14.** This is best taken as an oracle of deliverance addressed to the psalmist.

Haydock’s Catholic Commentary

Ver. 1. *Anointed.* Hebrew has only, David. The rest of the title occurs only in some copies of the Septuagint, (Eusebius; Calmet) and is not of divine authority. Yet if any attention be paid to it, we must suppose that David composed this psalm before his second anointing, as he speaks of great dangers. But this is all uncertain. (Berthier) --- For dangers threatened David even after he had been declared king. (Haydock) --- Before Samuel anointed him, he was not endued with the spirit of prophecy. See 1 Kings xvi. 13., and 2 Kings ii. 4., and v. 3. (Calmet) --- Some suppose that he alludes to the entertainment given him by Abimelech[Achimelech?] , (ver. 5 and 12.; Theodoret) or to that night when, fearless of danger, he took away Saul's cup; (Ferrand) while Abenezra and De Muis rather believe, that he composed this psalm when his people dissuaded him from going out to battle, 2 Kings xxi 17. It expresses the sentiments of the Levites in captivity, (Calmet) and most beautifully consoles the just in distress. David did not write this for himself alone, but for all future generations. Hence it is not necessary to discover the particular circumstances of his life, to which this and many other psalms allude; nor is there any difficulty in explaining away the various

MT Masoretic Text (of the Hebrew Bible)

CCD Contraternity of Christian Doctrine translation of the Bible

imprecations, as they are not directed against any individual, but relate to all the enemies of the soul; while they foretell what the wicked shall suffer. (Berthier) --- *Afraid*. "Find one more powerful, and *then* fear." (St. Augustine) --- God both giveth light and strength, so that no enemy can hurt his servants, Luke xxi. 15. (Worthington)

Ver. 2. *Flesh*. This expression marks the fury of his enemies. See Job xix. 22., and xxxi. 31. (Calmet) --- *That*. Hebrew and Septuagint, "and my foes." This may denote domestic, and the former word public, enemies. (Haydock) --- *Weakened*. Hebrew also, "have stumbled." Those who came to take Jesus Christ, verified this prediction, John xviii. 6. (Calmet)

Ver. 3. *This*; God's protection (Haydock) and light, (Menochius) or in the very heat of battle: *prælium*. Septuagint express the Hebrew feminine pronoun, as they do with the Vulgate, ver. 4, *unam*. There is no neuter in Hebrew, which commonly uses the feminine, *instead*. (Calmet) --- It may be deemed too scrupulous an exactitude, to express this in a version. The word *petition* may be understood. (Berthier) (Menochius) - -- The *one* petition of David comprised every blessing; as he had his mind bent on heaven. (Du Hamel)

Ver. 4. *House*; the tabernacle, (Haydock) or temple, (Calmet) unless he may rather allude to God's presence and union, or his enjoyment in heaven. (Berthier) --- He had already expressed a similar wish, Psalm xxv. 8. (Calmet) --- "When we love what God approves, he will surely grant our request. (St. Augustine) --- David esteemed it as a special benefit to be in the Catholic Church, which is the only true house of God. (Worthington) --- *Delight*; beauty and sweetness, as the Hebrew implies. Many of the ancients read, "the will," *voluntatem*, with Sixtus V, &c. But the edition of Clement VIII agrees with the Hebrew and Oriental versions. (Calmet) --- To comply with God's will, is the only means of arriving at his beatific vision. (Haydock) --- David was more grieved at being kept at a distance from the tabernacle, than from his own family. He envied the happiness of those who could attend the divine worship. (Menochius)

Ver. 5. *Tabernacle*; in the Catholic Church, so that the enemy can either not find, or at least cannot hurt, my soul. (Worthington) --- I hope one day to enjoy rest in the temple. (Calmet) --- The verbs are in the future, in Hebrew both here and in the following verse. But they may be as well explained in the sense of the Vulgate. Those who find themselves in danger, must still have recourse to God's presence, (Berthier) where, as (Haydock) in the asylum of the tabernacle, (Menochius) or of the temple, they will be protected. (Calmet) --- God rewards those with glory in death, who have suffered for his name. (Worthington)

Ver. 6. *Round*. Hebrew, "my enemies around." But the Septuagint understand it of David, (Berthier) or of the priest, who poured the blood of the victims on different sides of the altar. (Haydock) --- *Jubilation*: singing and music, which are styled the *fruit*, or *calves of the lips*, Isaias lvii. 19., and Osee xiv. 3. (Calmet) --- David diligently recounted God's benefits, with all his heart and voice. (Worthington) --- He offered sacrifices by

ministry of the priests, on the altar of holocausts, which was not in, but before, the tabernacle. (Menochius)

Ver. 7. *To thee*, is understood in Hebrew and the Roman Septuagint. (Haydock)

Ver. 8. *Face hath*. Hebrew pointed, "faces seek ye." But Septuagint, St. Jerome, Chaldean, &c., take no notice of these points; and even Protestants' marginal note has, "My heart said unto thee, Let my face seek thy face;" (Berthier) though in the text they derange the words, and add, "*When thou saidst*, Seek ye my face, my heart said," &c. (Haydock) --- *Seek*. "I have sought for no reward besides thee." (St. Augustine) --- I have earnestly desired to see thee face to face, 1 Corinthians xiii. 12. (Worthington)

Ver. 9. *Decline not*. Hebrew, "put not away." (Protestants) But the Vulgate seems preferable. --- *Forsake*. Septuagint (Compl. and Ald.) *Greek: me aposkorakises*, "send me not to the crows," an expression borrowed from profane authors, who said, "to the crows," when they held a person in sovereign contempt. (Theodoret; Berthier) --- Grabe substitutes this word, though the Alexandrian and Vatican manuscripts agree with us. (Haydock) --- There seems to be a gradation in the condition of the reprobate here observed. God hides his countenance, withdraws, abandons, and despises them; and they only perceive their misery, when it is too late. (Berthier) --- David implores aid in this life, and deprecates the divine anger, looking upon himself as an orphan, whom God takes under his special protection. (Worthington)

Ver. 10. *For*. Hebrew, "Though." David's parents fled to him, 1 Kings xxii. 1. Yet they had made small account of him, till Samuel called him forth, 1 Kings xvi. 10. The father-in-law and mother-in-law may be also designated. When a saint is deprived of every human advantage, he may still say with St. Augustine, "They have taken from me what God gave, but they have not taken God from me, who gave those things." (Berthier) --- Though I am like an orphan, I hope for all good from God, my father, Isaias lxiii. 16. (Calmet)

Ver. 11. *Enemies*, who strive to pervert me. Keep me in the right path, which thou hast already made known to me. (Worthington)

Ver. 12. *Will*. Literally, "souls." (Haydock) --- Some ancient copies have, "the hands." --- *Unjust*. Hebrew, "false." (Haydock) --- *To itself*, ought not to be urged no more than *eat sibi, vade tibi*, Genesis xii. 1., and Canticle of Canticles i. 7. (Calmet) --- It is a Hebrew idiom. (Haydock) --- Many find fault with the Septuagint and Vulgate in this place, but without reason; and they do not agree in their versions. Symmachus and St. Jerome come near to us. *Puach* means to breathe, or entangle; and our version intimates, that "iniquity has entangled itself:" *vipheach chamas*, "and open lying." (St. Jerome) (Berthier) --- The accusers of Susanna, and of our Saviour, could not agree in their testimony. The Chaldeans continually calumniated the captives, Isaias lii. 4., and Jeremias I. 33. (Calmet) --- Worldlings still do the same, (Matthew v.) delighting in lies, which will prove their own ruin. (Worthington)

Ver. 13. *I.* Hebrew, "But I believe that I shall see." (St. Jerome) --- "*I had fainted, unless,*" &c. (Protestants) (Haydock) --- *Living*, or of promise, as this country is often designated, (Muis; Tirinus; Du Pin; Calmet) or rather in heaven, (Berthier; Menochius) where death shall be no more. (Haydock) --- The Fathers explain it in this more elevated sense. (Calmet) --- The just are comforted by God, and by the hope of heavenly rewards. (Worthington) --- The land of the living may be opposed to the grave, where none can worship God. (Haydock)

Ver. 14. *And let.* Hebrew, "and he will strengthen my heart, and wait" (instead of *and*, Protestants put, without reason, "Wait I say) on the Lord." We must do our utmost: yet all our strength must come from God. (Haydock) --- The prophet encourageth his own soul to exercise patience, fortitude, and longanimity (Psalm xxx.; Worthington) unto the end. (Worthington)

Daily Bible Study Series (non-Catholic)

David could well have been the original author of this psalm. Many of the references in it fit squarely into his life-experience. If this is so, then it was written (or at least recited in the first place) between 1,000 B.C., when he came to the throne, and 960 B.C. when he died. But later on this great and moving psalm found a place in the "hymn book of the Second Temple", as the Psalter came to be called. The "Second Temple" is the building that went up between 520 and 516 B.C. and which was dedicated the following year.

Our modern hymn books go through processes of revision, each new edition making slight changes in the words even of "old favourites". So it is with the Psalter. If it were not so, the Bible would not be the *living* book it is, one that speaks first to the days of David, then to those of Ezra, then to those of Jesus—and then to us. In fact we don't possess, and no one ever has, the original "autograph" of any part of the OT.

If God be for us ... The two nouns *light* and *salvation* are written as a hendiadys, a form common to poetry. That means the poet has chosen two words to say the same thing from two points of view. God's *light* creates my *salvation*, and my *salvation* has come about because God is *light*. Since it is God the Creator who is such, then there is nothing in all creation to be afraid of. When the University of Oxford, to be followed by the Oxford Press, took over the first words of this psalm in Latin as its motto, *Dominus Illuminatio Mea*, it spoiled the depths of the psalmist's insight. For without the word *salvation* we lose so much of the meaning of the word *light*. So much then for the harm we can do by quoting texts out of context.

Stronghold is really “the source of strength in my life”, God’s strength! In verse 2, the RSV *ftn.*, being the original reading (refuge), is surely more telling than any paraphrase of it. We have just reminded ourselves that we are reading poetry, not plain prose!

To David the host would have been a human army. To Ezra it might have referred to political pressure, as we can discover in that book that bears his name. Today, without sounding farfetched, our enemies might even be a host of destructive viruses. We have only recently been discovering how viruses can reproduce themselves by the million like living beings and how they depend upon their own biological ingenuity to recreate themselves in ever new destructive forms. So *though a host should encamp against me* can mean a completely new thing to a patient in a modern hospital! We are to remember that in the Bible evil is one, and can assume all kinds of manifestations (that wily old devil!), political, military, psychological, social, religious, so that there is in fact only one army of evil. Yet David *knows* God here. He does not cry to God for help. Knowing God is all he needs.

So there is a war on. The believer at all times is committed, in total *knowledge* of God’s “reliability”, to wage the “wars of the Lord”. These are spoken of in the old poems that precede even the days of David (see Exod. 15:1–18, and verse 21). That is why, in the developing meaning of the psalms, we today can sing with a like commitment of heart and mind the great hymn “Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war”.

This is a reality that the Psalter helps to set before us. It is that “the Army of the Lord” was not first recruited at Pentecost, as one occasionally hears said today. There is profound truth in the theological assertion that “Jesus did not found a church; he found one”. Anything else would be a deep disrespect to the faith of the Jewish people. Nor dare we limit the promise God made to Abraham at Gen. 12:2–3 to the Jewish people alone. For one thing, Abraham was not a Jew, but an ancestor both of the Jews and of many Gentiles; and for another, to deny either the Christian or the modern Jew a place in the promise would be to make nonsense of the Psalms.

The statement in verse 4 is a way of saying: “There is only *one* God. So what follows has *one* basic thing to say to me in my life.” Picture-theology is employed to declare what this *one thing* is. It is to remember the First Commandment. “Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.” There are other gods—lots of them—health, wealth, games, one’s own ego. But the worship of God at all times and in all places and in all activities is Number One. To *dwell* in the house of the Lord is literally to *sit* in it. There were four postures for worship in biblical times. (a) You could sit for meditative prayer, as the Jew does today, and as Jesus sat to teach (Matt. 5:1–2). You did not kneel in the modern fashion in those days. (b) To “kneel” in OT times was to go down on one’s knees and then place one’s brow on the ground, just as a Muslim does today. But that posture was abandoned when the Church spread to northern Europe, since its buildings possessed

RSV Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

ftn. Footnote to a verse in the RSV.

only wet, muddy floors, and no seats. (c) The third position, described as bowing down in the Bible, was to go flat on the ground on one's face. One had to do just that in the presence of the Pharaoh of Egypt. This position has survived only in the case of the ordination of a Roman Catholic priest. (d) But very often people just stood to pray.

So the picture here is of a man or a woman worshipping God while sitting in the temple, seeking over a long period (when he could be quite relaxed) to understand the ways of God. Of course he could not sit there if he lived in a village. Consequently these words are surely only a picture of an *attitude of life*. Yet we read next: "And *now...*" So because of his meditation he knows what it means to walk with God secure in his faith no matter what troubles assail. "For my head is now *higher than my enemies!*" He can see much further into the meaning of God's love and promises than they can. So he goes about his daily life with a song in his heart.

A DIALOGUE WITH GOD

Now we overhear part of the psalmist's conversation with God, that he held sitting in the temple (or in his village!).

(1) He says: *Lord, hear me when I cry aloud.*

(2) God has already replied, even before the psalmist spoke: *Seek my face—all of you.* The verb is plural, and so is addressed, not just to David, now, but to the whole congregation.

(3) My heart replies, he declares: *I have indeed been seeking thy face*, so don't hide it from me now. Sure of this, then, he can continue to speak, knowing that God is indeed *there*, listening, caring, waiting for his words.

Trouble. What experience has this poor man gone through? We do not need to know. For we all have our own private and individual hells to live through—and no one else knows what we must suffer. But he *does* say, *Thou hast been my help*, in times before this. "It is true that [*ki* in Hebrew] my parents have let me down. They do not understand me; there is really such a thing as the generation gap. But you are both my father and my mother and I am your son/daughter. You will surely gather me up in your arms."

Two-way traffic. In verse 11 he returns to the joy of that fellowship he spoke of in verse 4, but to reach it he declares that both God *and* man must act. But God must act first! "Teach *me*," says the psalmist; I don't know what to do myself and what to do about those false witnesses, those violent opponents of mine whom I spoke of before (verses 2–3). Yet, as we have seen, those enemies may be within us, and one of them may be just lack of faith. Professor Jung of Zürich once wrote: "Among my patients in the second half of life, that is, over thirty-five, there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life."

If God will do those two things for me (as he does!), he goes on at verse 13, *then ...* Now follows at this crucial moment a strange word in the text. See how the various versions try to deal with it, the AV, the NEB, the TEV and others. There is much merit in translating as “If I had not believed that I shall see...” (“then I might have abandoned all faith”), or something like that. We find just such a construction at Exod. 32:32. But as it is, the psalmist does confidently declare his belief that he *will* yet see God *being good* to him, the meaning of the word we have noted before. He makes this affirmation on the simple grounds that God is faithful, reliable, trustworthy.

But what does *in the land of the living* mean? (a) It could be translated as “in the land of life”—whatever that is. (b) The living may refer to us human beings so long as we live upon this earth. (c) It may refer to those who are alive with God now in eternity, in that God is the God of the living; and that he is the living God. The best thing to say, I believe, in the light of our argument at the beginning of this psalm, is that a biblical text, being the living Word of God, may begin in 1, 000 B.C. by conveying a meaning on a level that the people of that era could accept. But in the period since those days God has revealed himself ever more and more fully to his covenant people—in fact, as the NT would say, God has by its day revealed himself wholly, completely, and once-for-all (*eph hapax*) in Jesus Christ.

So, no matter at what level we take the statement of belief we find at verse 13, waiting for the Lord is clearly worth while! Joachim Neander wrote:

Hast thou not seen

How thy heart's wishes have been

Granted in what he ordaineth?

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AV Authorized, or King James, Version of the Bible.

NEB New English Bible.

TEV Today's English Version, or Good News Bible.

NT New Testament.

¹Knight, G. A. F. 2001, c1982. *Psalms : Volume 1*. The Daily study Bible series. Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville