

## Psalm 86

Written by K B Napier  
Monday, 10 April 2017 13:37

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This Psalm is a general prayer of hope, that God would be with David and the nation. David goes a step farther by asking God to show a sign of His help, one that proved beyond doubt that the help came from God and not from human power – particularly so that enemies would realise God is still active in the lives of His people. To attract such help David shows God that he was holy... a basic requirement to receive help.

### Verses 1-3

1.

(A Prayer of David.) Bow down thine ear, O LORD, hear me: for I am poor and needy.

2.

Preserve my soul; for I am holy: O thou my God, save thy servant that trusteth in thee.

3.

Be merciful unto me, O Lord: for I cry unto thee daily.

This prayer/Psalm of David does not appear to be for a particular occasion, so none is mentioned. David asks God to “*bow down*” His ear, indicating the ‘otherness’ of God (here named Jehovah), and that any request in prayer is to a God Who concedes to answer us, there being no obligation to do so, unless He has explicitly said He would. ‘Bow down’ does not suggest God is being subservient – quite the opposite. It means to turn aside Himself mercifully to listen to a created being; in His mercy His continual hearing of our prayers is described in the phrase “(His hand is) stretched out still” (example – Isaiah 9:12, 17, 21 and 10:4).

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David says what is obvious to the Lord – that he was “*poor and needy*”. Though a king he acknowledged that all he was and had was given by God, for his natural state is ‘poor and needy’. That is, he was lowly and afflicted, of no higher status than a beggar. Do YOU acknowledge your status before God? You might fool fellow men, or imply that you are of worth, but God knows the truth of us all!

David, then, openly admitted to being of no worth, except in one thing alone: “*I am holy*”. In their ignorance most Christians today would never say such a thing. They think it is not acceptable to say they are ‘holy’... yet this is what David said. He asks God to preserve his soul BECAUSE he was holy. This is not pride, nor is it seeking a reward for being holy. It is just a matter of fact, that David lived as purely as he could, worshipping the only one true God. He was, in human terms ‘holy’. Thus, as a man, he was poor and needy, worthless, but as a child of God, he was holy.

He wanted God to heed his life and take care of it, keeping him safe. ‘Soul’ in this text is ***nephe sh***, which refers particularly to David’s mind and heart – thoughts, emotions, etc. (See my article on soul and spirit). Throughout scripture, ‘soul’ and ‘spirit’ are the same for 50% of the time, but not here... it means David’s innermost being is “*holy*”

–  
***chaciyd***  
; godly, pious.

David calls to the God he sees as his own, “*my God*”, ‘***elohiym***. David uses this noun for the Lord to show His power and might to save, which is what David asks Him to do:

“*save thy servant*”

. Because he

“*trusteth in thee*”

,  
***batach***

, has faith in the surety of their relationship, making David bold in his request for help. It is true to say that every Christian in the world calls on God for help, but do not qualify for such help, because they do not trust God, nor do they even attempt to live holy lives!

By reason of his holiness and trust, David was legitimately asking God to be merciful to him and the nation, every single day of his life. To seek God every day is not vain repetition – it is never vain to continually pray to the Lord, unless we have no trust or we pray robotically, as most do.

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Though a servant of the Lord most high, David says he lifts up his heart and mind to God, daily.

It is evident from scripture that David prayed when he awoke, beginning his day by speaking to the only One Who could help him. Mostly, Christians call upon God when things go wrong and they want help. Far better to pray from the heart for God to rule our day, our thoughts, and our actions.

### Verses 4-7

1.

Rejoice the soul of thy servant: for unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.

2.

For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee.

3.

Give ear, O LORD, unto my prayer; and attend to the voice of my supplications.

4.

In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee: for thou wilt answer me.

David asks God to 'rejoice' his soul because of his holiness and daily giving up of his heart and mind to the Lord. In context, 'rejoice' is **samach**, to be joyful, glad, and even merry (remember when he danced for sheer joy when his army recaptured the Ark?). Some thought he was being uncouth, but he was only playing-out his joy.

David felt able to be joyful because God is good and "ready to forgive", a whole phrase using one Hebrew word, **calach**. That is, God is not just forgiving, but He is always ready to forgive, at any time. This forgiveness is rooted in the verb **calach**, so includes the fact of pardon, hence

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*“plenteous in mercy”*

to all who call upon him in holiness. As with most of God’s mercies, they are only available on condition that those who pray to Him are in a position to seek such mercies. They (and we) may not seek forgiveness unless we firstly repent and ask for His mercy... and only His elect can possibly repent; no unsaved man can repent and none may ask for mercy or forgiveness without repentance! In other words, only the elect are eligible for forgiveness. For such, His mercies are

*“plenteous”,*

**rab**

, many/more/mighty.

With these qualifications in mind, David asks God to hear his prayer/supplications. A supplication is a form of prayer, a request for favours. With the confidence only available to the holy, he says he will call upon God when he is in trouble, KNOWING God will answer. Do you *know*

God will answer? If not, is your soul in the right state to call upon Him? Is your spirit aligned to the Spirit of God? Are you holy? If not, you cannot expect an answer, except as a very rare circumstance.

### Verses 8-10

1.

Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord; neither are there any works like unto thy works.

2.

All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name.

3.

For thou art great, and doest wondrous things: thou art God alone.

Does David’s next statement surprise you? *“Among the gods there is none like unto thee”!* Is David placing God amongst all supposed gods, as their equal? Remember the rule – we must ALWAYS start with what we know, and what we know is David would NEVER suggest Jehovah

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was like any other (false) god. What, then, does he mean by his statement?

The word he uses for 'gods' is the word generally used of ANY god or mighty ruler, '*elohiym*', but it can also refer to the only true God. So, David is saying that though there are many false gods and countless earthly rulers, none of them is even close to God in their supposed glory. The worldly might line-up our Lord with their vain false gods, but David says this is fruitless, for Jehovah is the ONLY true God amongst them all. Nothing and no-one can equal Jehovah. And none of these invented beings or earthly rulers can do works that are similar to the works of God, which are unique.

This is why David (and the New Testament) proclaims that all nations and rulers will one day bow their knee to God, to glorify His Name, which is above all others. "*For thou art great*". As a powerful king in his own right, David dared not equal himself to Jehovah! Only God is great and can do

*"wondrous things"*

, which also includes divine wonders. Only God can do this

: "*thou art God alone*"

. This is why no Christian can show deference to any other supposed 'god', and why we have no right to show reverence or respect for false gods and religions.

### Verses 11-13

1.

Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name.

2.

I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore.

3.

For great is thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell.

David asks God/Jehovah to teach him His divine way, not the ways of false gods, so that David can walk in God's true path. "*Unite my heart to fear thy name*". David means that he asked God

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to make all his faculties to be 'as one' before God, ruled by holiness and divine authority. Only the man thus united in soul and spirit can possibly

*"fear thy name"*

... fear being the start of wisdom. To repeat what I always point out – this means actual, knee-shaking fear. If we are not afraid of God then we will be more likely to sin and dismiss what He says.

The fear a believer has for God is not one that prohibits joy: it is fear of sin and its consequences, and the punishment given by God if we do not repent. With this in mind, no genuine believer, who lives righteously, has any reason to think God will punish him, so he will praise God *"with all (his) heart"*. As well as praising God (and doing so before men) we will *"glorify (His) name for evermore"*, starting in this life and continuing in Heaven.

This is because the saved man will recognise God's great mercy towards him, undeserved. Indeed, God's mercy keeps the believer *"from the lowest hell"*. Does this mean hell has levels? The 'hell' spoken of is **she'owl** (sheol). The Hebrews did not just believe sheol was the underworld, or the grave. It was where everyone went when they died – some to the 'lowest' parts reserved for the most wicked, in the darkest parts. Thus, the 'worst part of the worst part'. So, God saved David from his humanly deserved place in hell.

Sheol was supposedly below the earth, a huge measureless cavern, and was the place the dead 'lived'. There was no return and the wicked were punished there. Some called this place *orcus*

or

*hades*

, a place of 'thick darkness' (Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon, Gesenius). This place supposedly had gates and valleys. Some also believed the souls of the righteous also dwelt there, in an entirely separate section, but for a short while until invited to be with God.

The Latin 'Orcus' was named by Romans after the 'god of the underworld'; Hades was named after the Greek equivalent. In modern days Tolkien named the brutish 'Orcs' in his literary trilogy after the mythical god of hell. Other references are also made, even in computer games (Dungeons and Dragons). Hades was the Greek god of the underworld, whose brothers were Zeus and Poseidon. In time, Orcus and Hades merged as Pluto.

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Interesting though all this is, as Christians we should understand that hell has no god. However, when time is finished with, Satan and his demons will wreak havoc there forever, making the afterlife miserable for all who are in it. Christians may, or may not, enter Paradise (see Jesus' words to the dying thief) before entering Heaven (unless the two words are synonyms for the same place). Only the triune God will rule Heaven. He will also rule hell, allowing Satan his way.

We can see, then, that the ancient Israelites had a different understanding of the grave and its meaning. We know the final place of the unsaved, hell, cannot be under the earth, because God will soon burn up all of Creation to create a new heaven and a new earth. Also, there can be no room for sin or its sinful practitioners in the next Creation, even if confined to below the earth's crust.

### Verses 14-16

1.

O God, the proud are risen against me, and the assemblies of violent men have sought after my soul; and have not set thee before them.

2.

But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth.

3.

O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me; give thy strength unto thy servant, and save the son of thine handmaid.

4.

Shew me a token for good; that they which hate me may see it, and be ashamed: because thou, LORD, hast holpen me, and comforted me.

David then calls out "O God" as an expression of need to the only One Who could help him. The proud (enemies) rise up against him and their violent men wanted to finish David off, because they did not believe in the Lord. Even so, said David,

*"tho*

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*u... art a God full of compassion...".*

This is true, but only for those who believe and are His people. He is filled with mercy and is gracious, longsuffering and

*"plenteous in mercy and truth".*

This also shows itself as the combination of love and truth in the New Testament. Mercy = truth; love = truth. God's anger and vengeance are foretold and exist, but so does His mercy and longsuffering (slow to anger).

With these in mind, David asks God to *"turn unto (him)"*. **Panah** can mean both turning away from, and turning back to. The context points to God turning His attention to David, and showering him with mercy and grace. This in itself would give David great strength, the *"son of thine handmaid"*.

By saying this David positions himself as the son of a servant (of God), his mother, a form of lowering himself before God. Yet, being the son of his mother, a servant of the Lord, he was also protected by God.

David then asks another mercy that few Christians today would dare utter – he asked God to give a sign that He was with him, *"a token for good"*. This token or **'owth** was a sign of some kind that could not be mistaken for anything else, a mark, or even a miracle. Each would be a proof God was with David. David wanted the sign so that his enemies could see that God was still with him and the nation, and if they saw God was with them, they would hesitate to attack. In this way God would comfort David.

Few Christians would seek such a genuine proof, for fear of angering God. They say we may not seek a sign, because did not Jesus show distaste for those who sought signs? They seem not to understand that the Pharisees sought a sign from Jesus not so they could believe, but so as to destroy Him. But, a true believer may seek such a sign to dispel the unbelief of many and to possibly lead some to salvation (Jesus' own reason for raising Lazarus some days after he had died). Today, Christians are filled with lack of faith, and this is the real reason they do not ask God to be with them, or to show them He has acted. Are you of this type?

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