

Psalm 31 The Ups and Downs of Life

By Pastor Roy Hogan

It is difficult to place a definitive time on the writing of Psalm 31. What period of David's life was he describing in this 31st Psalm? Rather than a specific time-period, most likely, this Psalm speaks about a span of several years. It speaks of several situations that David experienced in his lifetime. All people likely experience "ups and downs" in their lifetime. This Psalm speaks of the "ups and downs" of David's life. The Psalm goes back and forth between misery and mercy, between faith and feelings, between mountaintops and valleys.

It is interesting and important to note this Psalm is quoted by Jonah, by Jeremiah, and by Jesus. This alone makes this Psalm stand out as significant.

31:1-4

In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness. 2 Bow down thine ear to me; deliver me speedily: be thou my strong rock, for an house of defence to save me. 3 For thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me. 4 Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me: for thou art my strength.

In verse 1, David gives a cry for defense. Trouble is at hand. Some Bible scholars look to these 4 four verses as referencing the time David and his men went to the city of Keilah seeking refuge from Saul. The account is given in I Samuel 23:1-13. The city of Keilah was under attack by the Philistines. David and his men, at the direction of God, went into the city to spare it from the hand of the Philistines. Sadly, though, the very people whom David had saved revealed to Saul David's whereabouts. No good deed goes unpunished.

As David looked back on the experience in the city of Keilah, he described the situation in verse 4 as a secret net placed to catch him. He appealed unto the Lord to spare him and his men. As children of God, we cannot see the secretly placed nets of life. I do not know what lies beyond the next hill. However, we have the same assurance David had. God is our rock. God is our "house of defense." We are God's investment, and accordingly, he will direct us "for thy name's sake." Following the direction of the Lord, David and his men fled safely to the woods of Ziph. Saul missed out on another opportunity to take the life of David.

31:5-8

1

Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth. 6 I have hated them that regard lying vanities: but I trust in the LORD. 7 I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy: for thou hast considered my trouble; thou hast known my soul in adversities; 8 And hast not shut me up into the hand of the enemy: thou hast set my feet in a large room.

Where is David at the time of these 4 verses? Bible scholars believe he is likely in Hebron in Judah. Hebron is a special place in the Bible. Hebron is where David was when men from Judah came and crowned him king of Judah. This is recorded in II Samuel 2:4. At this time in David's life, Saul is dead. Saul's death is recorded in II Samuel 1. David was 30 years of age when the men of Judah crowned him.

We note the word *redeemed* in verse 5. Redemption is accomplished in two ways in the Bible- by payment and by power. God redeemed David by power. It was not by the power of David for in verse 5 he surrenders himself into the hand of God. David's redemption was by the power of God. Rather than lying dead beneath the spear of Saul, David was, by the mercy and protection of God, sitting on the throne of Judah. He had been redeemed by power. You and I, as children of God, are redeemed by payment. The Son of God died to be the payment for our soul.

Lying vanities are referenced in verse 6. It is so difficult to understand the power of Satan. Is it not an awesome thing that Satan can lie to a soul and have them blindly place their trust and faith in an idol? Lying vanities stand between many souls and God. Such is the power of Satan. It is a good thing that David "hated them that regard lying vanities" and said "but I trust in the LORD."

In reading verse 7 and 8, we are reminded that seemingly no one could exalt the God of Heaven in a more powerful manner than could David.

31:9-13

Have mercy upon me, O LORD, for I am in trouble: mine eye is consumed with grief, yea, my soul and my belly. 10 For my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing: my strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed. 11 I was a reproach among all mine enemies, but especially among my neighbours, and a fear to mine acquaintance: they that did see me without fled from me. 12 I am forgotten as a dead man out of mind: I am like a broken vessel. 13 For I have heard the slander of many: fear was on every side: while they took counsel together against me, they devised to take away my life.

The scene shifts drastically. Verse 9-13 surely refer to the time of the affair David had with Bathsheba. In these 5 verses, David relives that terrible chapter in his life. In verse 9 David states “for I am in trouble.” His trouble brought threefold grief– to his eye, to his soul, and to his belly. I believe the *eye* speaks of his spirit. The aftermath of the affair troubled his spirit. A troubled spirit is an awful experience. The *soul* is the inward man. It is so hard to put salve and a band-aid on the soul. The belly is the flesh. Sin is a worse sickness than is medical disease. A sick belly hurts. A sick belly causes one to be unable to eat food the body needs for nourishment. David is experiencing a trinity of trouble. Sin took David’s strength for he stated in verse 10 “my strength faileth.” Sin seeped into his bones, verse 10. How harmful is this monster called sin? Surely, it cannot hurt to the bone!

Have you ever said or heard it said “my sin is my problem?” This is a lie. The person who says this is deceived. Look at the influence David’s sin had unto others in verse 11. He became a reproach to his *enemies* and especially to his *neighbors*. You are stuck with your neighbors. The cost of moving is great. David’s sin caused his *acquaintances* to fear him. Do you suppose they especially guarded their wife when David was near? When David went outside the palace, the subjects of his kingdom avoided him. Sin is terrible. Don’t try it. In verse 12, David summed up his situation in a twofold manner- a *broken vessel* and a. Sin is awful.

Though our sin is under the blood and forgiven forever, memories can and do linger. It is good that the three of us, that is, the body, soul, and spirit, can go back to the place where we were forgiven through and by the blood of Christ. Though our sin is in the depth of the sea, the Devil is an accomplished fisherman.

31:14-18

But I trusted in thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my God. 15 My times are in thy hand: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me. 16 Make thy face to shine upon thy servant: save me for thy mercies’ sake. 17 Let me not be ashamed, O LORD; for I have called upon thee: let the wicked be ashamed, and let them be silent in the grave. 18 Let the lying lips be put to silence; which speak grievous things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous.

The scene in David’s life once again shifts abruptly. David’s many years of wandering to escape the spear of Saul were surely difficult. The time of the incident with Bathsheba was also a dreadful time. Yet, the time in David’s life when his son Absalom attempted to dethrone him may have been just as

bitter as his struggle with Saul and his affair with Bathsheba. David loved Absalom in an awesome way. Folk who supposedly love you can hurt you worse than total strangers.

Absalom stole the hearts of the people of Israel. Some of David's cabinet members betrayed David and sided with Absalom in the coup to dethrone him. In verses 14-18, David is out of answers. Try for a moment to put yourself in David's shoes. What would you do? David had one, and only one, recourse. He must call on the LORD. Deliverance must come at the hand of the LORD. He asked God to shame the wicked and then silence them in the grave. He asked God to silence lying lips. God heard David. He was restored to the throne as rightful King of Israel.

31:19-22

Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men! 20 Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man: thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues. 21 Blessed be the LORD: for he hath showed me his marvellous kindness in a strong city. 22 For I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes: nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto thee.

In the setting of verses 19-22, David is at peace. He is in the comfort of God's hand. Two enemies we are all subject to in life are prideful men and slandering tongues. This is seen in verse 20.

First of all, we consider the tongue. James had a small but powerful sermon on the tongue in chapter 3 of his epistle. James has nothing good to say concerning the tongue. We all have likely been a victim of a slandering tongue. The Devil used his tongue on Eve, and we know the rest of that story. We get a cut to the flesh and we place a bandage on the cut. There is no way to put a bandage on a wound made by the tongue. The tongue hurt David. The tongue hurt the Son of God. Have you ever been called an illegitimate as Christ was?

The second enemy of David from verse 20 is prideful men. Pride can blind a person to a point beyond comprehension. Men blinded by pride cannot see the moral path. They cannot see the hurt they inflict.

He asked God in verse 20 to keep him in a building wherein he would be safe from prideful men and the tongue of the slanderer.

31:23-24

O love the LORD, all ye his saints: for the LORD preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer. 24 Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD.

The final words of chapter 31, given in verse 23 and 24, are not directed toward David's life. The final words are an encouragement to the saints. It is unseemly to have to be encouraged to love the Lord. In our songs we say we love him. In our prayers we tell him the same. Yet, how much love to we have?

We can measure love toward God easily. We only have to measure our obedience to his commandments to determine our love for him. John 14:15 *If ye love me, keep my commandments.* You may say "his commandments are too harsh?" That statement is rendered totally false by I John 5:3 *For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.*