

# Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

Adult Sunday School  
Placerita Baptist Church  
2003

by  
William D. Barrick, Th.D.  
Professor of OT, The Master's Seminary

## Psalm 6 — How Long, O Lord?



### 1.0 Introducing Psalm 6

#### 1.1 The first of seven “penitential psalms.”

- See, also, Psalms 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143.
- “But there is no specific note of penitence or confession in this psalm. To interpret it as a penitential psalm, we must assume that God’s anger and the psalmist’s suffering are the consequence of sins he has committed. Since the psalmist in the extremity of his anguish does not protest his innocence, this may be so.” (Robert Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 29)
- The opening words of Psalm 6 occur again at the start of Psalm 38 with a few minor variations.

#### 1.2 Lament in the Psalms:

- Where is joy in the lives of Old Testament psalm writers? Life expectancy in good times was about 40 (approx. a “generation”).

- The problem of a sin-plagued and broken world is that life is not just difficult or painful—it is not what God originally designed.
- Were the psalmists “bargaining” with God? Man cannot resolve life’s problems—only God can.

## 2.0 Reading Psalm 6

A Psalm of David.

**6:1** O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your anger,  
Nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure.

**6:2** Have mercy on me, O LORD, for I *am* weak;  
\* Heal me, O LORD, for my bones are troubled.

**6:3** My soul also is greatly troubled;  
But You, O LORD – how long?

**6:4** Return, O LORD, deliver me!  
Oh, save me for Your mercies’ sake!

**6:5** For in death *there is* no remembrance of You;  
In the grave who will give You thanks?

**6:6** I am weary with my groaning;  
All night I make my bed swim;  
I drench my couch with my tears.

**6:7** My eye wastes away because of grief;  
It grows old because of all my enemies.



**6:8** Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity;  
For the LORD has heard the voice of my weeping.

**6:9** The LORD has heard my supplication;  
The LORD will receive my prayer.

**6:10** Let all my enemies be ashamed and greatly troubled;  
Let them turn back and be ashamed suddenly.

\* The order of this line in NKJV is “O LORD, heal me, for my bones are troubled.” The order given above follows the Hebrew text.

“As God sees the water in the spring in the veins of the earth before it bubble upon the face of the earth, so God sees tears in the heart of a man before they blubber his face; God hears the tears of that sorrowful soul, which for sorrow cannot shed tears.” – John Donne as quoted in C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 3 vols. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, n.d.), 1/1:65.

### 3.0 Understanding Psalm 6

#### 3.1 Outline

- I. Superscription
- II. Prayer for Grace (vv. 1-3)
- III. Prayer for Deliverance (vv. 4-7)
  - A. Because of God's Unfailing Love (vv. 4-5)
  - B. Because of the Psalmist's Failing Life (vv. 6-7)
- IV. Proclamation of Triumph (vv. 8-10)



#### 3.2 Notes

- v. 1 “do not rebuke me ... Nor chasten me”
  - The indication is that David may have brought his circumstances on himself because of some sin.
  - Training is asked for by David—but not training out of anger.
- v. 2 “Have mercy on me”
  - He is pleading for *grace*—unearned favor. He deserves God’s wrath, but asks that God will deal with him according to His love instead.
- v. 2 “for my bones are troubled”
  - The word translated “are troubled” usually refers to being “terrified out of one’s senses.” Here “it describes not just the agonizing pain of illness and disease but the suffering fear that can attend deteriorating life force and loss of control” — Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms Volume 1*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002), 179.
  - The same root word is used in v. 3 (“greatly troubled”).
  - “Soul-trouble is the very soul of trouble” — Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 1/1:57.
- v. 3 “But You, O LORD – how long?”
  - Concludes the first section of the psalm.
  - Sums up David’s desperation and need for help soon. “Calvin’s favourite exclamation was ‘Domine usque quo’—‘O Lord, how long?’” — Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 1/1:57.
- v. 4 “Return, O LORD, deliver me!”
  - David asks that the Lord change His dealings with him.

- “Deliver” is a word referring to tearing someone or something out of a situation or setting.
- v. 5 “in death ... In the grave”
  - Is David referring to the grave or to the place of departed spirits?
  - Is the Old Testament view of the afterlife different from the New Testament view?
- v. 7 “My eye wastes away because of grief”
  - “Grief” means “vexation.”
  - A transition is made from weeping to the vexation David faces from his enemies.
  - The idea is that of a loss of hope—he does not “see” a way out of these troubling circumstances.
- vv. 8-9 “the LORD has heard”
  - A threefold emphasis reveals David’s confidence in answered prayer.
- v. 9 “supplication”
  - This noun is from the same root as the verb “have mercy” (v. 2)—it refers to *grace* (“my plea for grace”).
- v. 10 “greatly troubled”
  - Same phraseology as in v. 3.
  - David prays that his enemies will experience what he has experienced. Such action on the part of God would be deemed justice.
- v. 10 “be ashamed ... be ashamed”
  - What is the role of shame in judgment?
- v. 10 “turn back *and* be ashamed”
  - David uses two words back-to-back of very similar sounds (assonance) to bring the psalm to a very forceful and memorable conclusion: *yashuvu yēvoshu*.

#### 4.0 Singing Psalm 6

**I am weak, but Thou art strong,  
Jesus, keep me from all wrong.  
I’ll be satisfied as long  
As I walk, let me walk close to Thee.**



*Just a closer walk with Thee,  
Grant it, Jesus, is my plea.  
Daily walking close to Thee,  
Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.*

**Through this world of toil and snares,  
If I falter, Lord, who cares?  
Who with me my burden shares?  
None but Thee, dear Lord, none but Thee.**

**When my feeble life is o'er,  
Time for me will be no more;  
Guide me gently, safely o'er  
To Thy kingdom shore, to Thy shore.**

## 5.0 Praying Psalm 6

- “It is, of course, right to pray for health, it is right to burst out in thanksgiving as done by the psalmist, who seems to feel the first intimations of being cured and of the retreat of his enemies. ... Most of those who pray for such favors will not obtain them, though they may obtain the even greater favor of bearing with patience the cross of their bodily infirmities. Of these few are so trying as the debilities of old age, ...” — Stanley L. Jaki, *Praying the Psalms: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 43.
  - “Let us learn to think of tears as liquid prayers, and of weeping as a constant dropping of importunate intercession which will wear its way right surely into the very heart of mercy, despite the stony difficulties which obstruct the way.” — Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 1/1:59.
- Have mercy on me Lord. I am weak. [v. 2]
  - Lord, hear my prayer and behold my tears. [vv. 8-9]
  - Father, shame those who are my enemies. [v. 10]



## 6.0 Applying Psalm 6

- Life's troubles and tears can only be ultimately assuaged by God Himself.
- Prayer is the door to the mercies of God in our time of need.