

LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for November 30: When considering matters of life and death

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When you are driving your car, whether down a quiet country road or on a busy city street, it is consistently the case that you see where you are going more clearly than where you have been. The view is always bigger and more distinct through the windshield than it is through the rear-view mirror.

But the life of a human being is, interestingly, the opposite: We see where we have been more clearly than we see where we are going. In 2 Samuel 22-23, David was looking backward from the perspective of an aging man who was evaluating his life and experiences. In his retrospective, David gave praise to God for his gracious actions that had preserved and protected his life.

The words of chapter 22 were prompted by David's memories of the dangers he had experienced during his days of fleeing from Saul as well as from other enemies. Recalling those former times, the king clearly could see God's gracious and providential work in his life.

Let me suggest a simple verbal exercise for you to try as you read verses 1-7, which I think will help you extract a great deal of meaning from the passage. Read the text several times—either out loud or in your own mind—and each time you read it, place emphasis on different words in the passage.

First, give special emphasis to the nouns which David used to describe what God meant to him: “The Lord is my ROCK, my FORTRESS and my DELIVERER; my God is my ROCK, in whom I take refuge, my SHIELD and the HORN OF MY SALVATION. He is my STRONGHOLD, my REFUGE and my SAVIOR ...” (22:2-3).

David lived some of the most dangerous days of his life in the desert wilderness, hiding from his enemies in secret caves and seeking shelter in the great stones. But as the king looked back at those desperate times, he realized the real Rock in whose shelter he had lived his life was the Lord God.

As we examine our own lives, let us also realize the Lord God is our Rock, our Fortress and Deliverer, our Refuge and Savior. He alone is the one who can provide salvation which cannot be assaulted by our enemies, whether those enemies be physical or spiritual.

Now read the passage again, but this time place emphasis on those words which refer to God: “THE LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; MY GOD is my rock in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation. HE is my stronghold, my refuge and my savior.”

Several lessons ago, we asked the vital question, “Whom do you trust?” Actually, we trust a lot of people and a lot of things. We trust our friends, our families, our own abilities; we trust the policeman to protect us, the pilot flying the airplane to get us to our destination safely and the doctor to prescribe the correct medication. And it isn’t necessarily wrong or unspiritual to trust those people or things.

But when I face a serious challenge—when I feel like I am in over my head, when the walls are closing in on me (choose your own favorite metaphor)—what is my first impulse? To what or whom do I reach out first? Here is a prayer we might need to learn to pray: “God, transform my mind and my heart so that in every situation and circumstance, instinctively I

reach upward to You. You are my rock, my fortress, my deliverer.”

Still other facets of this scriptural jewel come into focus when we emphasize the personal pronoun “my”: “The Lord is MY rock, MY fortress and MY deliverer; MY God is MY rock in whom I take refuge, MY shield and the horn of MY salvation. He is MY stronghold, MY refuge and MY savior.”

That ten-times repeated pronoun is not used in an exclusive sense; David was not suggesting God was interested only in him and was indifferent to the needs of others. This simply is David’s own personal testimony of God’s gracious work in his life.

As we make application of this passage, we need to remember that there is a tremendous difference between saying “Jesus is the Savior” and “Jesus is my Savior.” I strongly encourage you to ask yourself which of those descriptions of the Lord—“the Savior” or “my Savior—is applicable to your own life?

When we come to chapter 23, we are told the chapter contains “the last words of David” (v. 1). If that statement is taken literally, then the chapter is out of sequence in the account of the last days of the king’s life because additional words of David are recorded in the remainder of 2 Samuel as well as the first two chapters of 1 Kings. It probably is best to interpret that statement to mean something similar to a last will and testament, or a final pronouncement.

Verses 1-7 are called an “oracle,” a term used elsewhere in the Old Testament to identify divinely-inspired prophetic utterances. (See the NIV translation of Isaiah 13:1, Ezekiel 12:10, and Habakkuk 1:1 as other examples). Here David acted in a prophetic role as he spoke truths that God’s Spirit had revealed to him.

In this oracle, David spoke about the blessings that result when human rulers lead and rule in godly ways (vv. 3-4). From his perspective as the

king of Israel, as well from his first-hand knowledge of the reign of his predecessor King Saul, David had a unique standing from which to observe the truth of this pronouncement. He had seen the good that comes to a nation when her rulers lead wisely and spiritually, as well as the tragedy that results from ungodly leadership.

Just a few days ago, the voters of our nation elected a new President of the United States. Let us all pray for Mr. Obama that he will lead us “in righteousness ... (and) in the fear of God” (v. 3).

Then in verses 5-7, David drew a sharp contrast between those who are in God’s covenant community and the wicked. He compared the destiny of evil men to thorns in the fields, which are uprooted and burned. Jesus might well have been drawing on the imagery of this poem of David, which would have been familiar to the Jewish crowds who followed our Lord, when he told the parable of the tares (Matthew 13:24-30).

David spoke of God’s salvation of his life as a work begun but not yet completed (v. 5). David probably had in mind those many occasions when God had acted to bring him physical rescue and security. If that is the case, then here the king was expressing his hope and belief that God would continue to stand loving guard over his life.

But from our perspective as those who have seen life and immortality brought to light through the gospel of Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 1:10), there are echoes here of a much deeper and eternal salvation. The apostle Paul wrote, “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6). Salvation is a work begun in those who have trusted Jesus Christ, which is being carried forward in our lives and will be consummated when we see him face to face (1 John 3:2).

As we come now to the conclusion of our study of 1-2 Samuel, let me encourage you, if you have not yet done so, to trust Christ for salvation.

Invite him to begin that good work in you which he will carry forward in your life, and ultimately will bring to completion at the day of Christ Jesus.