

The Riches of His Grace (130:1-8)

Bibliography

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Translation

- ¹ One of the processional songs.^a
Out of the depths ^b *I invoke you, Yahweh:* (3+3)
- ² *Lord, listen to my cry.*
May your ears be attentive (3+2)
to my imploring ^a *cry.*
- ³ *If you were to take iniquities into account,*^a *Yah(weh),*^b (3+2)
Lord, who could stand? ^c
- ⁴ *But* ^a *with you there is forgiveness* ^b (3+2)
so that you may be revered. ^c
- ⁵ *I wait for Yahweh,*^a (2+2+2)
I wait with longing ^b
and in his word I put my hope.
- ⁶ *My longing is for the Lord,*^a (2+2+2)
more intent than that of watchmen for the morning,^b
watchmen for the morning. ^c
- ⁷ *Put your hope, Israel, in Yahweh,* (3+3+3)
for with Yahweh there is loyal love ^a
and redemption ^b *with him in abundance,*
^a *and he it is who will redeem Israel* (3+2)
from all their iniquities.

Notes/Comments

- 1.a. See the note on 120:1.
 1.b. The psalmist's troubles are described as deep waters of chaos which typify (the proximity of) Sheol and separation from Yahweh: cf. 69:3, 15 (2, 14) and N. J. Tromp, *Primitive Conception*,

57-58. It is not necessary to read מְמַקְיָם "from the depths of the sea" with N. Airoldi, *Augustinianum* 10 (1970) 174-77.

2.a. For the servant-master relationship implicit in תַּחֲנוּןִי see K. Neubauer, *Der Stamm CH N N*, 140 (cf. מְמַקְיָם "Lord," vv 2, 3, 6, and טוֹחַ "loyal love," v 7).

3.a. Lit. "keep" i.e. not overlook: cf. 1 Kgs 17:8; Job 7:20 and the metaphor of divine storage of sins in Deut 32:34; Hos 13:12, etc.

3.b. See the note on 118:5.

3.c. Cf. Ezra 9:15; Ps 76:8 (7); Nah 1:6. W. H. Schmidt (*TZ* 22 [1966] 245-46) has explained the question as an adaptation of the question of the entrance liturgy (יִקוּם מִי "who shall stand" 24:3; cf. 15:1), here generalized.

4.a. Lit. "for," introducing the reason for the negative implication of the condition of v 3a.

4.b. For divine forgiveness in the Psalms see H. McKeating, *SJT* 18 (1965) 69-83.

4.c. Or "so that you are revered," expressing consequence (P. Joüon, *Grammaire* § 169g). Forgiveness increases the sinner's reverent awe of and trust in Yahweh: cf. 1 Kgs 8:38-40. J. Becker (*Gottesfurcht im AT*, 170-71) has interpreted in a cultic sense of worshiping with reverence. Apart from here the niph of רָאָה "fear" occurs in the OT only in the participle. It was probably for this reason that the ancient versions mistranslated. *Tg. Vg* derived from the stem רָאָה "see," while LXX θ'σ' rendered νόμος, interpreting תּוֹרָה as תּוֹרָה "law" (the suffix σου "your" in LXX θ'σ' was probably an addition of the translators and hardly implies תּוֹרַתְךָ "your law" pace BHK and BHS). For the Gk. variant νόμαρος "name" see the list of inner-Greek νόμος-δνομα variants in J. Ziegler, *Beiträge zur Jeremias-Septuaginta* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958] 85, to which 2 Chr 6:16 LXX should be added.

5.a. For the divine direct object see the examples cited in BDB, 875b; an emendation ליהוה is hardly necessary. Vv 5-6 have been the object of much text-critical study (e.g. by S. Porúbčan, *VT* 9 [1959] 322-23; cf. BHK), but MT is to be retained.

5.b. For שָׁפַט as the seat of desire here and in v 6 see H. W. Wolff, *Anthropology*, 15-17, 52.

6.a. Cf. Judg 5:9 שָׁרָאֵל לְבִי לְחֻקֵּי "my heart goes out to Israel's commanders."
6.b. LXX S Hier imply not מאשמת הבקר, contra BHK and BHS, but מְשַׁפְּרִים לְבַקֵּר (cf. Exod 12:42). LXX's addition "till night" is probably an exegetical addition (cf. perhaps טַל-לילה Isa 38:12, 13).

6.c. S Hier took as an accusative of duration of time (cf. GKC § 118k), while LXX rendered in terms of the preceding phrase.

7.a. For the association of טוֹחַ "loyal love" with deliverance and forgiveness see K. D. Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Hesed*, 224-27. For its further combination with the motif of hope cf. 33:18-22.

7.b. Heb. פָּדוּת here refers to deliverance (C. Westermann, "Psalm 130," 609) as the visible sign of divine forgiveness, rather than actually to forgiveness of sins (W. H. Schmidt, *TZ* 22 [1966] 252). "Here we must not unduly spiritualize . . . Nowhere, in fact, is this word *padhah* used of redemption from sin alone; it always marks deliverance from some tangible and visible menace, which may or may not be regarded as a consequence of the suppliant's sin" (H. Wheeler Robinson, *Redemption and Revelation in the Actuality of History* [London: Nisbet, 1942] 223).

Form/Structure/Setting

It is by no means clear to which genre this psalm should be assigned. The difficulty stems from two causes, the ambivalent timing of the perfect verbs in vv 1b, 5 and the role of vv 7-8. If the verbs are interpreted as past ("I called, I waited . . ."), they belong to a thanksgiving: cf. 66:17; Jonah 2:3 (2) for the first verb and 40:2 (1) for the second, in such a context. P. Volz ("Psalm 16 und Psalm 130," 287-96) and A. Weiser (*Psalms*, 773) opted for this understanding of the psalm, while H.-J. Kraus (*Psalmen*, 1048) regards it as a possibility. Then v 1b introduces a previous complaint cited in vv 2-4, vv 5-6 are a testimony addressed to the religious community and vv 7-8 may be interpreted as an exhortation, associated with the thanksgiving form, to strengthen the community's faith. Volz deleted v 7a with LXX^s and

regarded vv 1b-4 and the rest of vv 5-8 as two parallel statements, the first directed to Yahweh and the second a statement of faith concerning him.

W. H. Schmidt (*TZ* 22 [1966] 244 note 4) has objected that there occurs in the psalm no narration of Yahweh's deliverance, such as is characteristic of the thanksgiving. The strength of his objection is debatable: the psalm does not represent any form completely. He himself classifies the psalm as an individual complaint which deviates from the basic form (*TZ* 22 [1966] 241). This is in fact the designation of most scholars, such as Kraus, *Psalmen*, 1048, who prefers it, C. Westermann ("Psalm 130," 606), C. H. Cornill ("Psalm 130," 38), O. Eissfeldt (*Introduction*, 115 note 44), G. Fohrer (*Introduction*, 292), M. Dahood (*Psalms III*, 235) and A. A. Anderson (*Psalms*, 874-75). Cornill ("Psalm 130," 38) noted the *qinah* meter within the psalm, which is so often characteristic of a complaint, although he unwisely sought to make every line conform to this model. The verbs of vv 1b, 5 can have a present significance (D. Michel, *Tempora*, 80). Vv 1b-2 are to be taken together, as the parallels in 17:6; 141:1 suggest; for the reference to present distress 86:7; 102:3 (2) are to be compared. They constitute the address and introductory petitions characteristic of a complaint. The psalm contains no standard description of distress—apart from the initial מְמַקְיָם "depths" in v 1b—nor plea for help. Their place is taken by an indirect confession of sin and implicit prayer for forgiveness in vv 3-4. Schmidt (*TZ* 22 [1966] 241) has observed that such a confession usually represents only one part of a total description of distress (cf. 38:19 [18]; 69:6 [5]). Westermann ("Psalm 130," 607) has suggested that a direct plea for help is missing precisely because of a sense of the gulf that lies between the psalmist and Yahweh because of his sin. Vv 3-4 are intended to urge Yahweh to bridge the gulf: to err is only human and to forgive divine. Vv 5-6 are a confession of confidence referring to Yahweh in the third person; for the verbs 25:5, 21; 38:16 (15) are to be compared.

Vv 7-8 have been variously interpreted. Kraus (*Psalmen*, 1048, 1050-51) has suggested that it is a priestly exhortation giving an assurance of salvation to the religious community among whom the psalmist is speaking. Westermann ("Psalm 130," 609) views only the praise of Yahweh's redeeming grace in v 7a^β-b as original and understands vv 7a^α, 8 as a later application of the psalm to the community, adapting it to the present collection of Ps 120-134. He here follows S. Mowinckel (*Psalmenstudien*, vol. 3, 53 note 7), but understands it simply as a communal supplement to an individual psalm, v 3:9 (10), etc., rather than implying a communal re-interpretation of the psalm. Dahood (*Psalms III*, 235) regards vv 7-8 as an original part of the psalm, commending to the community the psalmist's own attitude (cf. W. Skehan, *Israelite Poetry*, 60; Becker, *Israel deutet seine Psalmen*, 68 note 10); they do not make the psalm into a communal complaint, but rather the speaker is distinguished from Israel. His argument assumes that the speaker of vv 7-8 is that of the whole psalm. Schmidt (*TZ* 22 [1966] 251) sees the whole of vv 7-8 as an addition to the basic psalm. Likewise C. B. Culik ("Syllables and Psalms. A Statistical Linguistic Analysis," *JSOT* 14 [1979] 58) has claimed that statistical analysis of vv 7-8 demonstrates their difference from vv 1-6 and so their redactional nature.

Anderson (*Psalms*, 877) has urged the primary nature of vv 7-8 on the ground of their close theological and other similarities with vv 1-6 (cf. J. W. Rogerson and J. W. McKay, *Psalms 101-150*, 133). In this respect it is relevant to cite the observation of A. R. Ceresco (*CBQ* 38 [1976] 308) that vv 5-7 exhibit a chiasmic pattern (שומרים לבקר :: שומרים לבקר) הוהלת: "I put my hope : watchmen for the morning :: watchmen for the morning : put hope"). Ceresco used this phenomenon as an argument against the deletion of שומרים לבקר as a dittograph (cf. *BHK*, *BHS*) and also noted the presence of chiasmic repetition in v 7 (ישראל :: יפדה : ישראל) "Israel : redemption :: redeem : Israel"). In fact, Ceresco's example from vv 5-7 may be seen as part of a larger pattern covering vv 3-8: repetition appears in vv 3, 8 (עונות "iniquities," עונתיו "his iniquities") and vv 4, 7 (כי-עמך "for with you," כי-עם-יהוה "for with Yahweh"). Apart from this overall chiasmic structure, which commences after the introductory vv 1b, 2 and runs right through the psalm, there are the smaller chiasmic groupings within v 7 and the local repetition within vv 5-6 (נפש: . . . נפשי "my soul . . . my soul," קוּתָה . . . קוּיִתִּי "I wait . . . waits") which expresses well yearning, continuing hope (Volz, "Psalm 16 und Psalm 130," 294).

There are thus structural grounds for regarding vv 7-8 as part of the original composition. It is worth asking whether they cannot be given an adequate role within the genre of the psalm. Does the psalm fall into the category of complaint which attests a favorable divine intervention and includes the psalmist's glad response (cf. Westermann, *Praise*, 80)? Examples may be given of the communal concern of 28:8-9 (cf. Kraus, *Psalmen*, 372, 375), the communal exhortation of 64:11 (10; cf. Kraus, *Psalmen*, 605-6) and especially that of 31:24-25 (23-24; cf. Kraus, *Psalmen*, 394) which concludes "Be strong, all you who wait for Yahweh." Then in this psalm a priestly oracle, the "word" awaited in v 5, is to be understood as delivered after v 6. As evidence of Yahweh's loyal love and forgiveness, it prompts the psalmist to encourage the community at large to continue in their larger hope, in view of his own positive experience.

The function of the psalm within the collection of Ps 120-134 remains to be considered. Psalm 129 exhibited an individually formulated passage (vv 2-4), probably originally referring to Zion (v 5), re-interpreted in terms of "Israel" (v 1). The juxtaposition of Ps 129 and 130 suggests that a similar re-interpretation was imposed upon the latter. It is probable that the psalm was divided into voices or groups of voices, the first singing vv 1b-6 in the name of the community and the second vv 7-8, encouraging the community to stand firm in their hope. The original hope of a priestly communication of a divine oracle of salvation (Kraus, *Psalmen*, 1050; A. R. Johnson, *The Cultic Prophet and Israel's Psalmody*, 314) was transformed into hope for the fulfillment of the divine promises concerning Israel's salvation.

A further point needs to be made about the structure of the psalm. Strophically it seems to consist of four pairs of closely related lines, vv 1b-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8 (cf. Mowinkel, *Tricola*, 101; E. Beaucamp, *RSR* 56 [1968] 211. N. B. the pair of divine names or titles in each pair of lines) rather than two units of four lines, vv 1b-4, 5-8 (J. Schildenberger, *Estudios Eclesiásticos* 34 [1960] 675; Dahood, *Psalms III*, 235), in favor of which Dahood urges

the second person divine references in vv 1b-4 and the third person in vv 5-8. The overall chiasmic pattern serves to differentiate the first pair of lines from the rest, while the role of the last pair, both in the original and in the secondary interpretations of the psalm, sets it apart from the preceding verses.

The psalm has been claimed as pre-exilic in date by Dahood (*Psalms III*, 235), who regards it as spoken by a king in view of terminological parallels with Ps 86, which he takes as royal (cf. too Johnson, *The Cultic Prophet and Israel's Psalmody*, 316). Usually the psalm is regarded as post-exilic, both on account of its comparatively degenerate form and, a stronger argument, its language, namely קשב "attentive" (v 2), which recurs in 1 Chr 6:40; 7:15, and סליחה "forgiveness" (v 4), also in Neh 9:17; Dan 9:9.

Did the original psalm ever have a cultic setting? Eissfeldt (*Introduction*, 120) regarded the psalm as non-cultic in view of its "personal terms" and "deeply religious content" (cf. Volz, "Psalm 16 und Psalm 130," 296), hardly compelling arguments. Fohrer too (*Introduction*, 292) defines the psalm as a "personal devotional song with no cultic associations." W. H. Schmidt (*TZ* 22 [1966] 242, 249) views the psalm as "separate from the cult"; the word of v 5 he takes not as a priestly oracle but a late hypostatizing because it is parallel with "Yahweh." There does not appear to be a compelling reason to deny a cultic setting for the basic psalm.

In Christian tradition the psalm became one of the seven penitential psalms, the others being Ps 6, 32, 38, 51, 102 and 143 (cf. N. H. Snaith, *The Seven Psalms*).

Explanation

This psalm illustrates well the manifold relevance of the Scriptures, since its presence in the Psalter already embraces within its scope two interpretations, one relating to the individual and the other to the community. Originally it appears to have been a complaint in which by faith a Judean brought his problems to Yahweh in the temple. For the modern reader "depths" suggests despair; in its cultural setting the term evokes the sea of troubles in which the speaker is engulfed, a deathlike situation of separation from the living God. The description of calamity in such general and brief terms made the psalm ideal for recitation whatever the precise trouble of the sufferer might have been.

The psalmist cries for a positive hearing. But he is acutely conscious that he has little claim upon God, despite a master-servant relationship within the covenant. In this relationship he has proved an unprofitable servant, and the onus of maintaining it can now lie only with the Lord. His present suffering, as so often in the OT, is assumed to be due to his personal wrongdoing. Yet he derives comfort from the known character of Yahweh as a God who forgives (cf. 86:15): this divine quality transcends man's sinfulness. The rhetorical question in v 3 concerning this sorry state expects a negative answer. If Yahweh kept a strict tally of human sin and acted upon it in speedy punishment, none could go uncondemned at that bar of divine justice which providentially controls man's life (cf. 75:8 [7]); none would survive (cf. Gen 6:5-8). Yet the psalmist dares to remind God that he desires not the death of a

sinner but restoration to life (cf. Ezek 18:32; 33:11)—to his greater glory. The sinning believer's obligation is thereby increased, and greater obedience and trust are the result. Such is God's better way.

In vv 5-6 the psalmist reflects upon this prospect of forgiveness, as yet unexperienced in his particular situation. His attitude is one of intense yearning and confident hope that his trauma of trouble—persecution or ill-health or whatever—will be resolved. He awaits a divine ruling from the sanctuary, to be delivered by a priest. Around him lurks a dark night of trouble, sinister with threat and fearfulness. He longs for relief, as ardently as the city sentinels peering into the darkness from the watchtower long for daylight and danger's end.

The psalm presupposes that the awaited positive response from God did come, as in Ps 22. In reaction the psalmist addresses the congregation and draws out from his own experience a lesson for the community at large. Yahweh's covenant attribute of "loyal love" has been attested once more as lavishly true. He does deliver from trouble and so in him lies the community's own hope for total reversal of the problems that beset it, consequences though they are of the nation's departure from Yahweh's covenant standards. Blame is due, but with God it is the prelude not to condemnation but to "redemption"—for those who turn to him in trusting, prayerful hope.

The communal implications already contained in this fine individual psalm evidently encouraged its re-use in a completely communal setting. Vv 1-6 became the voice of the personified community pouring out before Yahweh their prayers, confessing their sins and imploring him to forgive and restore (cf. Dan 9:4-19). They lay claim to divine promises of a glorious future for the covenant nation and, encouraged by a now priestly voice in vv 7-8, look forward to a new redemption surpassing that of the Exodus (111:9) and the return from Babylonian exile (Isa 50:2). Convinced that God has much more salvation and blessing in store for them than they have yet enjoyed, they plead with him to surmount the barrier of their own sinfulness, as they know he can.

The NT with its revelation of Christ gave a new dimension to the longings and affirmations of Ps 130. On the individual level 1 John 1:8-2:2 is its counterpart, assuring the believer that his failure can via confession ever find its remedy in God's grace. For the Christian this grace is grounded not only in a heart of love but in its disclosure through the death of Jesus as the objective basis of divine deliverance. From this initial redemption (Rom 3:23-25; Eph 1:7) is traced an arc which is to culminate in an awaited sequel for the church (Rom 8:19-25).