

## Psalms 28 — Be Not Silent to Me — A Cry from the Edge of the Pit, and the Sudden Blessing of a Prayer Heard

*Psalm 28: a Davidic lament that turns to thanksgiving — a cry to the LORD his rock not to stay silent, a plea not to be dragged off with the wicked, then the abrupt joy of 'he hath heard the voice of my supplications,' and a closing prayer that the Shepherd save, feed, and lift up his people; ascribed to David, a psalm of the temple era of Israel's worship.*

Psalm 28 is a short psalm with a hinge in the middle of it. The first five verses are a man in trouble, pleading with a God who has so far said nothing; the last four are the same man, still on his knees, suddenly praising because the answer came. Nothing in the psalm tells us what changed between verse 5 and verse 6 — no rescue is described, no enemy falls, no circumstance shifts on the page. What flips is that the prayer was heard, and the psalmist knows it. That turn, from "be not silent to me" to "blessed be the LORD, because he hath heard," is the whole architecture of the poem and one of the most honest things the Psalter ever teaches: that assurance often arrives before the deliverance does.

### Hebrew Word Studies

***tsur* (H6697) (צֶרַח) — rock, cliff, boulder — the immovable crag, a place of refuge v. 1.** When the psalmist names God "my rock" he chooses *tsur* — the great mass of stone, the cliff-face you press your back against, not the loose stone you hold in your hand. It is the word of Moses' song ("He is the Rock, his work is perfect... a God of truth," Deut. 32:4), of Hannah's ("neither is there any rock like our God," 1 Sam. 2:2), and of David elsewhere ("The LORD is my rock, and my fortress," Ps. 18:2). The point of the metaphor is permanence under pressure: everything else in the psalmist's life is sliding — that is why he prays — and *tsur* is the one thing that will not move while he holds on. The Book of Mormon builds an entire doctrine of discipleship on the same image, and makes explicit whose rock it is: "it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds... it shall have no power over you" (Hel. 5:12). Notice the order in Psalm 28: he names the rock in verse 1, before he has been delivered. Faith does not wait for the storm to pass to call God a rock; it calls him a rock in order to survive the storm. To pray "O LORD my rock" is to stake, in advance of any evidence, that there is bedrock under the sliding ground.

***tachanunim* (H8469) (תַּחֲנוּנִים) — supplications, pleas for grace — earnest entreaties from one who has no claim but mercy vv. 2, 6.** The psalmist asks God to "hear the voice of my *supplications*" (v. 2), and the whole psalm turns when he learns God "hath heard the voice of my *supplications*" (v. 6) — the same word closes the loop. *Tachanunim* comes from the root *chanan*, "to be gracious, to show favor" — the root beneath the priestly blessing's "the LORD... be gracious unto thee" (Num. 6:25) and beneath the name Hanan/Hananiah, "the LORD is gracious." So the noun is not a demand or a bargaining chip; it is the language of someone who knows he has no leverage and asks only for grace. This is the honest posture the psalm models. He does not approach God claiming to deserve rescue — verses 3–4 make clear he is very aware of the difference between the righteous and the wicked, but even so he pleads, he does not invoice. It is the same spirit the Nephites are taught: "cry unto him for mercy; for he is mighty to save" (Alma 34:18), and the publican's whole prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Lk. 18:13). When verse 6 reports that these *tachanunim* were heard, the psalm is testifying that God answers the prayer of grace-seeking need — not because the pleader earned it, but because the LORD is gracious.

***magen* (H4043) (מָגֵן) — shield, buckler — the hand-held guard carried before the body in battle v. 7.** "The LORD is my strength and my *shield*." *Magen* is the smaller shield strapped to the arm and held out in front, the one that meets the incoming blow — not the great body-length shield (that is a different Hebrew word), but the personal guard you keep between yourself and the sword. It is God's own self-description to Abram in the very first "fear not" of the covenant: "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward" (Gen. 15:1). It is the psalmist's repeated refuge ("my shield, and the horn of my salvation," Ps. 18:2) and the nation's ("Happy art thou, O Israel... the shield of thy help," Deut. 33:29). What makes the image precise is that a shield is useless in the armory — it only protects the body that stays behind it, in the fight, close enough to be covered. That is why verse 7 welds the shield to the trusting heart: "the LORD is my... shield; my heart trusted in him." God does not shield people at a distance; he shields the ones who take cover in him. Paul carries the same picture into the Christian's armor — "above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked" (Eph. 6:16) — and the fit is exact, because in Psalm 28 the shield and the faith are the same motion.

***batach* (H982) (בָּטַח) — to trust, to lean the full weight upon, to feel secure and unafraid v. 7.** "My heart *trusted* in him, and I am helped." *Batach* is the Old Testament's strongest verb for trust — not a cautious hope but a total, weight-bearing

reliance, the confidence of one who has stopped hedging. It is the word of the great commands to rely on God: "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding" (Prov. 3:5); "Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength" (Isa. 26:4). And Scripture is exact about what happens when *batach* is aimed wrongly — "cursed be the man that *trusteth* in man... blessed is the man that *trusteth* in the LORD" (Jer. 17:5, 7) — because the whole force of the word is in where you put your weight. Psalm 28 shows the mechanism plainly: "my heart trusted in him, and I am helped." The trust comes first; the help follows. This is the same order the Book of Mormon teaches over and over — "whoso putteth his trust in him the same shall be lifted up at the last day" (Mosiah 23:22), "trust no one to be your teacher... except he be a man of God" (Mosiah 23:14) — trust is the hinge on which help turns. It is not that trusting people are spared trouble; the psalmist is deep in trouble. It is that trust is the posture in which help can reach you, the open hand into which the shield is placed.

***ra'ah* (H7462) (רָאָה) — to feed, to shepherd, to pasture — to tend a flock, leading it to food and water v. 9.** "Feed them also, and lift them up for ever." The English "feed" is thinner than the Hebrew: *ra'ah* is the whole work of shepherding — pasturing, guiding, guarding, providing — the verb from which the noun *ro'eh*, "shepherd," is formed. It is the verb of the twenty-third psalm's opening claim ("The LORD is my shepherd," where "shepherd" is this same root) and of Jacob blessing "the God which *fed* me all my life long" (Gen. 48:15). Its most searching use is Ezekiel 34, God's indictment of Israel's leaders who "*fed* themselves, and *fed* not my flock" (Ezek. 34:8), answered by God's own promise: "I will *feed* my flock, and I will cause them to lie down" (Ezek. 34:15). So when Psalm 28 ends by asking God to *feed* his people, it is asking for the whole Shepherd's care, and it is asking God to be the Shepherd Israel's kings so often failed to be. The New Testament picks the word up and hands it to the risen Christ, who three times charges Peter, "Feed my sheep" (John 21:15–17), and to Christ himself, the Good Shepherd who "giveth his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). And the Book of Mormon gathers it all: the Lord who declares "I am the good shepherd" (3 Ne. 15:24) and Alma who pleads that his people become "the sheep of his fold" (Alma 5:60). The last request of Psalm 28 — *feed them, lift them up* — is answered fully only in the Shepherd who feeds his flock with himself.

### From the Chapter's Architecture

*The Hebrew reinforces the seam with its parallelism, the pairing of matched lines that is the Psalter's basic music. Verse 1 doubles its fear ("be not silent to me: lest, if thou be silent to me..."), pressing on the dread of silence twice. Verse 7 stacks its confessions in a rising line — strength, then shield, then trusted, then helped, then rejoiceth, then praise — each phrase lifting off the one before until the sentence arrives at song. And the two panels answer each other across the hinge: the "voice of my supplications" that verse 2 begs God to hear is the very thing verse 6 rejoices that God has heard — the same phrase, once as plea and once as praise, framing the turn. There is no elaborate chiasm here, and it would be dishonest to draw one; the artistry of Psalm 28 is not symmetry but reversal — a poem that starts a man sliding down toward the pit and ends with a prayer that God lift up his people for ever, the whole direction of the thing inverted by a single answered prayer.*