

Psalms 31 — Into Thine Hand — A Lament of Trust, the Rock and House of Defence, and the Spirit Committed to God

Psalm 31: a Davidic lament of trust — besieged by slander and 'fear on every side,' wasting with grief, forgotten 'as a dead man out of mind,' the psalmist repeatedly hands himself to God ('Into thine hand I commit my spirit'; 'My times are in thy hand') and closes in praise with a charge to the saints; ascribed to David, a psalm sung in Israel's worship.

Psalm 31 is a lament, and a lament is a strange kind of faith. We tend to think trust looks calm — a settled heart, an untroubled face. This psalm knows better. Here is a man surrounded, slandered, wasting away with grief until his eye is "consumed," a man who feels "forgotten as a dead man out of mind" and "like a broken vessel" — and the same man says, four separate times and in four different keys, that he is putting himself into the hands of God. The complaint and the trust are not sequential, as if he first despairs and then recovers. They are simultaneous. He trusts *while* besieged. That is what a lament of trust is: honesty about the trouble and confidence in God spoken in the same breath, the two braided together so tightly you cannot pull them apart.

Hebrew Word Studies

chasah (H2620) (חָסָה) — **to take refuge, to seek shelter, to trust by fleeing to cover vv. 1, 19.** The very first word of the psalm's argument. English "trust" can sound cerebral — a belief held in the mind — but *chasah* is a verb of motion and shelter. It is what a small creature does when the hawk's shadow falls: it *runs to cover*. The related noun *machseh* is a "refuge," a shelter from storm and rain (Isa. 4:6; Ps. 61:3). So "In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust" (v. 1) is more physical than it looks — David is *taking refuge* in God the way a hunted man dives into a fortress. It reappears at v. 19, where God's goodness is laid up "for them that trust in thee" — the same fleeing-to-cover trust, now rewarded. This is the Psalter's signature word for faith: not a conclusion argued but a shelter entered. "The LORD is my rock, and my fortress... in him will I trust [*chasah*]" (Ps. 18:2); "he is a buckler to all those that trust [*chasah*] in him" (Ps. 18:30). Alma's invitation runs the same direction — the arms of mercy are "extended towards" those who will come, and mercy "hath power to deliver" those who flee to it (Alma 5:33; 34:16). *Chasah* is trust with your feet: the running counts.

ruach (H7307) / padah (H6299) (רוּחַ / פָּדָה) — **spirit, breath, wind / to ransom, to redeem, to buy back v. 5.** The two words that make the psalm's central verse. *Ruach* is spirit, breath, the animating life God breathes — "into thine hand I commit my *ruach*." It is not an abstraction; it is the very breath in David's lungs, the thing that stops when a man dies, offered up into safekeeping. When the Savior prayed these words and then "gave up the ghost" (Luke 23:46), he handed over his *ruach* in the fullest sense — breath and life and spirit, deposited with the Father. The second word is the ground beneath the offering: *padah*, "thou hast redeemed me." *Padah* is the ransom word — to buy a life back out of bondage or death by paying its price, the verb of Israel's firstborn "redeemed" at the sanctuary (Ex. 13:13; Num. 18:15) and of the LORD who "redeemed" Israel out of Egypt (Deut. 7:8). So the logic of v. 5 is a redemption logic: I can safely commit my spirit *because* you have already paid to get me back. What David sang of a rescued life, the New Testament makes literal in Christ — "ye were... redeemed... with the precious blood of Christ" (1 Pet. 1:18–19); "the Son of man came... to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). The Book of Mormon names the price plainly: "he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law" (2 Ne. 2:7). A man commits his breath most freely to the hand that has already bought it.

tsur (H6697) (צֹר) — **rock, cliff, boulder — a massive, immovable stone v. 2, v. 3.** "Be thou my strong *tsur*... for thou art my *tsur* and my fortress." Hebrew has two rock-words, and the psalm reaches for the sturdier one. *Sela* (H5553, also here in v. 3) is a crag or cliff, a place to climb into; *tsur* is the great boulder, the bedrock mass — the word for the "rock" Moses struck that gushed water (Ex. 17:6) and for the "Rock" that is God himself in Moses' song: "He is the Rock, his work is perfect" (Deut. 32:4). To call God your *tsur* is to say he is what does not move when everything else does — the one stable thing to plant your feet on and the one solid thing to put at your back. Hannah sang it — "neither is there any rock like our God" (1 Sam. 2:2); Isaiah made it a title — "the LORD JEHOVAH is... everlasting strength," literally "the Rock of ages" (Isa. 26:4). The whole biblical instinct to build on rock rather than sand (Matt. 7:24–25) grows from this word. And the Book of Mormon turns it into a discipleship charge: "remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation" (Hel. 5:12) — build on the *tsur*, and "when all the storm... shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you." David, storm-beaten already, is doing exactly that: making the immovable Rock his house of defence.

tov (H2898) / chazaq (H2388) (טוֹב / חָזַק) — **goodness, bounty, the best of a thing / to be strong, to take courage, to hold firm v. 19, v. 24.** The psalm's praise and its parting charge, in two words. *Tov* (goodness) at v. 19 is the noun of the great "Oh

how great is thy goodness" — the whole treasury of God's bounty "laid up for them that fear" him. It is the word for the "good" God saw in creation (Gen. 1), the "goodness" that passed before Moses when he begged to see God's glory (Ex. 33:19), the goodness that "endureth continually" (Ps. 52:1). To be staggered by God's *tov* is to glimpse how much of his kindness is held in reserve, out of sight, waiting. Then *chazaq* at v. 24: "Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart." *Chazaq* is a strong, muscular verb — to be firm, to grow strong, to take hold — the very word God pressed on Joshua at the Jordan: "Be strong [*chazaq*] and of a good courage... for the LORD thy God is with thee" (Josh. 1:9). The psalm's genius is to pair them: because God's *goodness* is laid up (v. 19), the saints can *take courage* (v. 24) — the reserved goodness is the reason the strengthened heart is not wishful thinking. The Lord gave the Nephites the same twinned promise: "look forward with steadfastness... having a perfect brightness of hope" (2 Ne. 31:20), and to a discouraged Joseph Smith, "hold on thy way... fear not... God shall be with you for ever and ever" (D&C 122:9). Courage, in Scripture, is never a command to manufacture strength; it is an invitation to receive it. "He shall strengthen your heart" — the strengthening is his to do.

From the Chapter's Architecture

*But over the top of that oscillation, one motif holds the whole poem together and gives it a spine the cycling cannot break: the hand. The word threads through the psalm deliberately. David commits his **spirit** into God's hand (v. 5). He rejoices that God has not shut him up into the enemy's **hand** (v. 8). He declares his **times** are in God's hand (v. 15). He prays to be delivered from the **hand** of his enemies (v. 15). Two hands contend for this man throughout — the enemy's grip and God's keeping — and the psalm is, at its core, the record of a soul deciding, again and again, whose hand to be in. That repeated "into thine hand" is the psalm's true architecture: not a straight line, but a settled choice made over and over as the waves come.*