

## The Book of Psalms

### The Theme of Fire and Purification

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#### Overview

Fire is symbolic of God's refining presence in the Psalms. The Psalmists invite God to 'test' them, using the Hebrew word *tsaraph*, which is synonymous with 'smelt, refine' as a metalsmith would use fire to smelt, refine, and test precious metal (Ps.17:3; 26:2; 66:10; 105:19; cf. Judg.17:4; 2 Sam.22:31; Neh.3:8, 32; Isa.1:25; 41:7; 48:10; Jer.6:29; 10:9). 'For You have tried us, O God; You have refined us as silver is refined ... We went through fire and through water, yet You brought us out into a place of abundance.' (Ps.66:10, 12)

Another Hebrew word for 'test' or 'try' is *bachan* (Ps.7:9; 11:4, 5; 17:3; 26:2; 66:10; 81:7; 95:9; 139:23; cf. Gen.42:15, 16). It seems to be a relatively close synonym for *tsaraph*, 'smelt, refine,' because it is also used to describe the metalworker's intention: 'The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord tests hearts' (Pr.17:3); 'Behold, I will refine them and assay them' (Jer.9:7; 11:20; 12:3; 17:10; 20:12); 'I will bring the third part through the fire, refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested' (Zech.13:9).

The Psalms also use God's word and God's presence in fire at Mount Sinai as a reference point for how God continues to transform people by His word. Psalm 18:6 – 14 uses Mt. Sinai and the divine fire there the framework for God's purification of His people. Psalm 1 and 119 are explicit reflections on God giving His teaching (*torah*) to Israel.

#### Psalm 7

*The LORD Implored to Defend the Psalmist against the Wicked.*

*A Shiggaion of David, which he sang to the LORD concerning Cush, a Benjamite.*

- <sup>1</sup> O LORD my God, in You I have taken refuge;  
Save me from all those who pursue me, and deliver me,
- <sup>2</sup> Or he will tear my soul like a lion,  
Dragging me away, while there is none to deliver.
- <sup>3</sup> O LORD my God, if I have done this,  
If there is injustice in my hands,
- <sup>4</sup> If I have rewarded evil to my friend,  
Or have plundered him who without cause was my adversary,
- <sup>5</sup> Let the enemy pursue my soul and overtake it;  
And let him trample my life down to the ground  
And lay my glory in the dust. Selah.
- <sup>6</sup> Arise, O LORD, in Your anger;  
Lift up Yourself against the rage of my adversaries,  
And arouse Yourself for me;  
You have appointed judgment.
- <sup>7</sup> Let the assembly of the peoples encompass You,  
And over them return on high.
- <sup>8</sup> The LORD judges the peoples;  
Vindicate me, O LORD, according to my righteousness  
And my integrity that is in me.
- <sup>9</sup> O let the evil of the wicked come to an end,  
But establish the righteous;  
**For the righteous God tries the hearts and minds.**
- <sup>10</sup> My shield is with God,

- Who saves the upright in heart.
- <sup>11</sup> God is a righteous judge,  
And a God who has indignation every day.
- <sup>12</sup> If a man does not repent, He will sharpen His sword;  
He has bent His bow and made it ready.
- <sup>13</sup> He has also prepared for Himself deadly weapons;  
He makes His arrows fiery shafts.
- <sup>14</sup> Behold, he travails with wickedness,  
And he conceives mischief and brings forth falsehood.
- <sup>15</sup> He has dug a pit and hollowed it out,  
And has fallen into the hole which he made.
- <sup>16</sup> His mischief will return upon his own head,  
And his violence will descend upon his own pate.
- <sup>17</sup> I will give thanks to the LORD according to His righteousness  
And will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High.

### **Psalm 11**

*The LORD a Refuge and Defense.*

*For the choir director. A Psalm of David.*

- <sup>1</sup> In the LORD I take refuge;  
How can you say to my soul, 'Flee as a bird to your mountain;
- <sup>2</sup> For, behold, the wicked bend the bow,  
They make ready their arrow upon the string  
To shoot in darkness at the upright in heart.
- <sup>3</sup> If the foundations are destroyed,  
What can the righteous do?'
- <sup>4</sup> The LORD is in His holy temple;  
The LORD'S throne is in heaven;  
His eyes behold,  
His eyelids **test the sons of men.**
- <sup>5</sup> The LORD **tests the righteous and the wicked,**  
And the one who loves violence His soul hates.
- <sup>6</sup> Upon the wicked He will rain snares;  
Fire and brimstone and burning wind will be the portion of their cup.
- <sup>7</sup> For the LORD is righteous, He loves righteousness;  
The upright will behold His face.

### **Psalm 12**

*God, a Helper against the Treacherous.*

*For the choir director; upon an eight-stringed lyre. A Psalm of David.*

- <sup>1</sup> Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases to be,  
For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men.
- <sup>2</sup> They speak falsehood to one another;  
With flattering lips and with a double heart they speak.
- <sup>3</sup> May the LORD cut off all flattering lips,  
The tongue that speaks great things;
- <sup>4</sup> Who have said, 'With our tongue we will prevail;  
Our lips are our own; who is lord over us?'
- <sup>5</sup> 'Because of the devastation of the afflicted, because of the groaning of the needy,

Now I will arise,' says the LORD; 'I will set him in the safety for which he longs.'  
**6 The words of the LORD are pure words;  
As silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times.**  
**7** You, O LORD, will keep them;  
You will preserve him from this generation forever.  
**8** The wicked strut about on every side  
When vileness is exalted among the sons of men.

## **Psalm 17**

*Prayer for Protection against Oppressors.*

*A Prayer of David.*

**1** Hear a just cause, O LORD, give heed to my cry;  
Give ear to my prayer, which is not from deceitful lips.  
**2** Let my judgment come forth from Your presence;  
Let Your eyes look with equity.  
**3 You have tried my heart;**  
You have visited me by night;  
**You have tested me** and You find nothing;  
I have purposed that my mouth will not transgress.  
**4** As for the deeds of men, by the word of Your lips  
I have kept from the paths of the violent.  
**5** My steps have held fast to Your paths.  
My feet have not slipped.  
**6** I have called upon You, for You will answer me, O God;  
Incline Your ear to me, hear my speech.  
**7** Wondrously show Your lovingkindness,  
O Savior of those who take refuge at Your right hand  
From those who rise up against them.  
**8** Keep me as the apple of the eye;  
Hide me in the shadow of Your wings  
**9** From the wicked who despoil me,  
My deadly enemies who surround me.  
**10** They have closed their unfeeling heart,  
With their mouth they speak proudly.  
**11** They have now surrounded us in our steps;  
They set their eyes to cast us down to the ground.  
**12** He is like a lion that is eager to tear,  
And as a young lion lurking in hiding places.  
**13** Arise, O LORD, confront him, bring him low;  
Deliver my soul from the wicked with Your sword,  
**14** From men with Your hand, O LORD,  
From men of the world,  
Whose portion is in this life,  
And whose belly You fill with Your treasure;  
They are satisfied with children,  
And leave their abundance to their babes.  
**15** As for me, I shall behold Your face in righteousness;  
I will be satisfied with Your likeness when I awake.

## **Psalm 18**

*The LORD Praised for Giving Deliverance.*

*For the choir director. A Psalm of David the servant of the LORD, who spoke to the LORD the words of this song in the day that the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. And he said,*

<sup>1</sup> 'I love You, O LORD, my strength.'

<sup>2</sup> The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer,  
My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge;  
My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

<sup>3</sup> I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised,  
And I am saved from my enemies.

<sup>4</sup> The cords of death encompassed me,  
And the torrents of ungodliness terrified me.

<sup>5</sup> The cords of Sheol surrounded me;  
The snares of death confronted me.

<sup>6</sup> In my distress I called upon the LORD,  
And cried to my God for help;

He heard my voice out of His temple,  
And my cry for help before Him came into His ears.

<sup>7</sup> Then the earth shook and quaked;  
And the foundations of the mountains were trembling  
And were shaken, because He was angry.

<sup>8</sup> Smoke went up out of His nostrils,  
**And fire from His mouth devoured;**  
**Coals were kindled by it.**

<sup>9</sup> He bowed the heavens also, and came down  
With thick darkness under His feet.

<sup>10</sup> He rode upon a cherub and flew;  
And He sped upon the wings of the wind.

<sup>11</sup> He made darkness His hiding place, His canopy around Him,  
Darkness of waters, thick clouds of the skies.

<sup>12</sup> From the brightness before Him passed His thick clouds,  
Hailstones and **coals of fire.**

<sup>13</sup> The LORD also thundered in the heavens,  
And the Most High uttered His voice,  
Hailstones and **coals of fire.**

<sup>14</sup> He sent out His arrows, and scattered them,  
And lightning flashes in abundance, and routed them.

<sup>15</sup> Then the channels of water appeared,  
And the foundations of the world were laid bare

At Your rebuke, O LORD,  
At the blast of the breath of Your nostrils.

<sup>16</sup> He sent from on high, He took me;  
He drew me out of many waters.

<sup>17</sup> He delivered me from my strong enemy,  
And from those who hated me, for they were too mighty for me.

<sup>18</sup> They confronted me in the day of my calamity,  
But the LORD was my stay.

<sup>19</sup> He brought me forth also into a broad place;  
He rescued me, because **He delighted in me.**

<sup>20</sup> The LORD has rewarded me according to my **righteousness;**  
According to the **cleanness** of my hands He has recompensed me.

<sup>21</sup> For I have kept the ways of the LORD,  
And have not wickedly departed from my God.

<sup>22</sup> For all His ordinances were before me,  
And I did not put away His statutes from me.

<sup>23</sup> I was also **blameless** with Him,

And I **kept myself from my iniquity.**

<sup>24</sup> Therefore the LORD has recompensed me according to my **righteousness,**  
According to the **cleanness** of my hands in His eyes.

<sup>25</sup> With the kind You show Yourself kind;  
With the blameless You show Yourself blameless;

<sup>26</sup> With the pure You show Yourself pure,  
And with the crooked You show Yourself astute.

<sup>27</sup> For You save an afflicted people,  
But haughty eyes You abase.

<sup>28</sup> For You light my lamp;  
The LORD my God illumines my darkness.

<sup>29</sup> For by You I can run upon a troop;  
And by my God I can leap over a wall.

<sup>30</sup> As for God, His way is blameless;  
**The word of the LORD is tried;**  
He is a shield to all who take refuge in Him.

<sup>31</sup> For who is God, but the LORD?  
And who is a rock, except our God,

<sup>32</sup> The God who girds me with strength  
And makes my way blameless?

<sup>33</sup> He makes my feet like hinds' feet,  
And sets me upon my high places.

<sup>34</sup> He trains my hands for battle,  
So that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.

<sup>35</sup> You have also given me the shield of Your salvation,  
And Your right hand upholds me;  
And Your gentleness makes me great.

<sup>36</sup> You enlarge my steps under me,  
And my feet have not slipped.

<sup>37</sup> I pursued my enemies and overtook them,  
And I did not turn back until they were consumed.

<sup>38</sup> I shattered them, so that they were not able to rise;  
They fell under my feet.

<sup>39</sup> For You have girded me with strength for battle;  
You have subdued under me those who rose up against me.

<sup>40</sup> You have also made my enemies turn their backs to me,  
And I destroyed those who hated me.

<sup>41</sup> They cried for help, but there was none to save,  
Even to the LORD, but He did not answer them.

<sup>42</sup> Then I beat them fine as the dust before the wind;  
I emptied them out as the mire of the streets.

<sup>43</sup> You have delivered me from the contentions of the people;  
You have placed me as head of the nations;  
A people whom I have not known serve me.

<sup>44</sup> As soon as they hear, they obey me;  
Foreigners submit to me.

<sup>45</sup> Foreigners fade away,  
And come trembling out of their fortresses.

<sup>46</sup> The LORD lives, and blessed be my rock;  
And exalted be the God of my salvation,

<sup>47</sup> The God who executes vengeance for me,  
And subdues peoples under me.

<sup>48</sup> He delivers me from my enemies;  
Surely You lift me above those who rise up against me;  
You rescue me from the violent man.

<sup>49</sup> Therefore I will give thanks to You among the nations, O LORD,

And I will sing praises to Your name.  
<sup>50</sup> He gives great deliverance to His king,  
And shows lovingkindness to His anointed,  
To David and his descendants forever.

## Psalm 21

*Praise for Deliverance.*

*For the choir director. A Psalm of David.*

<sup>1</sup> O LORD, in Your strength the king will be glad,  
And in Your salvation how greatly he will rejoice!  
<sup>2</sup> You have given him his heart's desire,  
And You have not withheld the request of his lips. Selah.  
<sup>3</sup> For You meet him with the blessings of good things;  
You set a crown of fine gold on his head.  
<sup>4</sup> He asked life of You,  
You gave it to him,  
Length of days forever and ever.  
<sup>5</sup> His glory is great through Your salvation,  
Splendor and majesty You place upon him.  
<sup>6</sup> For You make him most blessed forever;  
You make him joyful with gladness in Your presence.  
<sup>7</sup> For the king trusts in the LORD,  
And through the lovingkindness of the Most High he will not be shaken.  
<sup>8</sup> **Your hand will find out all your enemies;**  
**Your right hand will find out those who hate you.**  
<sup>9</sup> **You will make them as a fiery oven in the time of your anger;**  
**The LORD will swallow them up in His wrath,**  
**And fire will devour them.**  
<sup>10</sup> Their offspring You will destroy from the earth,  
And their descendants from among the sons of men.  
<sup>11</sup> Though they intended evil against You  
And devised a plot,  
They will not succeed.  
<sup>12</sup> For You will make them turn their back;  
You will aim with Your bowstrings at their faces.  
<sup>13</sup> Be exalted, O LORD, in Your strength;  
We will sing and praise Your power.

## Psalm 26

*Protestation of Integrity and Prayer for Protection.*

*A Psalm of David.*

<sup>1</sup> Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity,  
And I have trusted in the LORD without wavering.  
<sup>2</sup> Examine me, O LORD, and **try me;**  
**Test my mind and my heart.**  
<sup>3</sup> For Your lovingkindness is before my eyes,  
And I have walked in Your truth.  
<sup>4</sup> I do not sit with deceitful men,  
Nor will I go with pretenders.  
<sup>5</sup> I hate the assembly of evildoers,

And I will not sit with the wicked.  
6 I shall wash my hands in innocence,  
And I will go about Your altar, O LORD,  
7 That I may proclaim with the voice of thanksgiving  
And declare all Your wonders.  
8 O LORD, I love the habitation of Your house  
And the place where Your glory dwells.  
9 Do not take my soul away along with sinners,  
Nor my life with men of bloodshed,  
10 In whose hands is a wicked scheme,  
And whose right hand is full of bribes.  
11 But as for me, I shall walk in my integrity;  
Redeem me, and be gracious to me.  
12 My foot stands on a level place;  
In the congregations I shall bless the LORD.

### Psalm 51

*A Contrite Sinner's Prayer for Pardon.*

*For the choir director. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.*

1 Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness;  
According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions.  
2 **Wash me** thoroughly from my iniquity  
And **cleans** me from my sin.  
3 For I know my transgressions,  
And my sin is ever before me.  
4 Against You, You only, I have sinned  
And done what is evil in Your sight,  
So that You are justified when You speak  
And blameless when You judge.  
5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,  
And in sin my mother conceived me.  
6 Behold, **You desire truth in the innermost being,**  
And **in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.**  
7 **Purify me** with hyssop, and I shall be **clean;**  
**Wash me,** and I shall be **whiter than snow.**  
8 Make me to hear joy and gladness,  
Let the bones which You have broken rejoice.  
9 Hide Your face from my sins  
And blot out all my iniquities.  
10 **Create in me a clean heart,** O God,  
And **renew a steadfast spirit within me.**  
11 Do not cast me away from Your presence  
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.  
12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation  
And sustain me with a willing spirit.  
13 Then I will teach transgressors Your ways,  
And sinners will be converted to You.  
14 Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation;  
Then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness.  
15 O Lord, open my lips,  
That my mouth may declare Your praise.  
16 For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it;

- You are not pleased with burnt offering.  
17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;  
A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.  
18 By Your favor do good to Zion;  
Build the walls of Jerusalem.  
19 Then You will delight in righteous sacrifices,  
In burnt offering and whole burnt offering;  
Then young bulls will be offered on Your altar.

## Psalm 66

*Praise for God's Mighty Deeds and for His Answer to Prayer.*

*For the choir director. A Song. A Psalm.*

- 1 Shout joyfully to God, all the earth;  
2 Sing the glory of His name;  
Make His praise glorious.  
3 Say to God, 'How awesome are Your works!  
Because of the greatness of Your power Your enemies will give feigned obedience to You.  
4 'All the earth will worship You,  
And will sing praises to You;  
They will sing praises to Your name.' Selah.  
5 Come and see the works of God,  
Who is awesome in His deeds toward the sons of men.  
6 He turned the sea into dry land;  
They passed through the river on foot;  
There let us rejoice in Him!  
7 He rules by His might forever;  
His eyes keep watch on the nations;  
Let not the rebellious exalt themselves. Selah.  
8 Bless our God, O peoples,  
And sound His praise abroad,  
9 Who keeps us in life  
And does not allow our feet to slip.  
10 **For You have tried us, O God;  
You have refined us as silver is refined.**  
11 You brought us into the net;  
You laid an oppressive burden upon our loins.  
12 You made men ride over our heads;  
We went through fire and through water,  
Yet You brought us out into a place of abundance.  
13 I shall come into Your house with burnt offerings;  
I shall pay You my vows,  
14 Which my lips uttered  
And my mouth spoke when I was in distress.  
15 I shall offer to You burnt offerings of fat beasts, with the smoke of rams;  
I shall make an offering of bulls with male goats. Selah.  
16 Come and hear, all who fear God,  
And I will tell of what He has done for my soul.  
17 I cried to Him with my mouth,  
And He was extolled with my tongue.  
18 If I regard wickedness in my heart,  
The Lord will not hear;  
19 But certainly God has heard;



He has given heed to the voice of my prayer.  
20 Blessed be God,  
Who has not turned away my prayer  
Nor His lovingkindness from me.

## Psalm 105

*The LORD'S Wonderful Works in Behalf of Israel.*

1 Oh give thanks to the LORD, call upon His name;  
Make known His deeds among the peoples.  
2 Sing to Him, sing praises to Him;  
Speak of all His wonders.  
3 Glory in His holy name;  
Let the heart of those who seek the LORD be glad.  
4 Seek the LORD and His strength;  
Seek His face continually.  
5 Remember His wonders which He has done,  
His marvels and the judgments uttered by His mouth,  
6 O seed of Abraham, His servant,  
O sons of Jacob, His chosen ones!  
7 He is the LORD our God;  
His judgments are in all the earth.  
8 He has remembered His covenant forever,  
The word which He commanded to a thousand generations,  
9 The covenant which He made with Abraham,  
And His oath to Isaac.  
10 Then He confirmed it to Jacob for a statute,  
To Israel as an everlasting covenant,  
11 Saying, 'To you I will give the land of Canaan  
As the portion of your inheritance,'  
12 When they were only a few men in number,  
Very few, and strangers in it.  
13 And they wandered about from nation to nation,  
From one kingdom to another people.  
14 He permitted no man to oppress them,  
And He reprov'd kings for their sakes:  
15 'Do not touch My anointed ones,  
And do My prophets no harm.'  
16 And He called for a famine upon the land;  
He broke the whole staff of bread.  
17 He sent a man before them,  
Joseph, who was sold as a slave.  
18 They afflicted his feet with fetters,  
He himself was laid in irons;  
19 Until the time that his word came to pass,  
**The word of the LORD tested him.**  
20 The king sent and released him,  
The ruler of peoples, and set him free.  
21 He made him lord of his house  
And ruler over all his possessions,  
22 To imprison his princes at will,  
That he might teach his elders wisdom.  
23 Israel also came into Egypt;

Thus Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham.  
24 And He caused His people to be very fruitful,  
And made them stronger than their adversaries.  
25 He turned their heart to hate His people,  
To deal craftily with His servants.  
26 He sent Moses His servant,  
And Aaron, whom He had chosen.  
27 They performed His wondrous acts among them,  
And miracles in the land of Ham.  
28 He sent darkness and made it dark;  
And they did not rebel against His words.  
29 He turned their waters into blood  
And caused their fish to die.  
30 Their land swarmed with frogs  
Even in the chambers of their kings.  
31 He spoke, and there came a swarm of flies  
And gnats in all their territory.  
32 He gave them hail for rain,  
And flaming fire in their land.  
33 He struck down their vines also and their fig trees,  
And shattered the trees of their territory.  
34 He spoke, and locusts came,  
And young locusts, even without number,  
35 And ate up all vegetation in their land,  
And ate up the fruit of their ground.  
36 He also struck down all the firstborn in their land,  
The first fruits of all their vigor.  
37 Then He brought them out with silver and gold,  
And among His tribes there was not one who stumbled.  
38 Egypt was glad when they departed,  
For the dread of them had fallen upon them.  
39 He spread a cloud for a covering,  
And fire to illumine by night.  
40 They asked, and He brought quail,  
And satisfied them with the bread of heaven.  
41 He opened the rock and water flowed out;  
It ran in the dry places like a river.  
42 For He remembered His holy word  
With Abraham His servant;  
43 And He brought forth His people with joy,  
His chosen ones with a joyful shout.  
44 He gave them also the lands of the nations,  
That they might take possession of the fruit of the peoples' labor,  
45 So that they might keep His statutes  
And observe His laws,  
Praise the LORD!