

*THE  
BOOK  
OF  
PSALMS*

## Psalm 6

To the Chief Musician. With stringed instruments. On an eight-stringed harp. A Psalm of David.

- 1 O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your anger,  
Nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure.
- 2 Have mercy on me, O LORD, for I *am* weak;  
O LORD, heal me, for my bones are troubled.
- 3 My soul also is greatly troubled;  
But You, O LORD—how long?
- 4 Return, O LORD, deliver me!  
Oh, save me for Your mercies' sake!
- 5 For in death *there is* no remembrance of You;  
In the grave who will give You thanks?
- 6 I am weary with my groaning;  
All night I make my bed swim;  
I drench my couch with my tears.
- 7 My eye wastes away because of grief;  
It grows old because of all my enemies.
- 8 Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity;  
For the LORD has heard the voice of my weeping.
- 9 The LORD has heard my supplication;  
The LORD will receive my prayer.
- 10 Let all my enemies be ashamed and greatly troubled;  
Let them turn back *and* be ashamed suddenly.

# Introduction

## Title:

“To the Chief Musician. With stringed instruments. On an eight-stringed harp. A Psalm of David. ”

The title identifies the author as David. Like Psalms 4 and 5, Psalm 6 is addressed to “the Chief Musician”. Again, like Psalms 4 and 5, Psalm 6 does not describe any occasion or circumstances as a motivation for the psalms or explanation of events or allusions. Psalm 4 included musical instruction for the Psalm to be accompanied with stringed instruments. Psalm 5 requires flutes. Psalm 6 gives instructions for stringed instruments also and, specifically an eight-stringed harp.

## The Seven Penitential Psalms

In church history, Psalm 6 was included as one of the so-called “Penitential Psalms”, which were used in the season of Lent. In the Roman Catholic Church, Lent commenced on Ash Wednesday and ends about six weeks later on Good Friday, the day of the week Jesus was crucified. Lent was a time set aside for confession and repentance of sin; so, these Psalms were used during this period as a Scriptural encouragement to focus believers on their sins, on the need for repentance, and on their dependence on God’s mercy.

Several phrases and themes are shared amongst these Psalms:

Psalm 6: O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your anger,  
Nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure.  
<sup>2</sup> Have mercy on me, O LORD, for I *am* weak;  
O LORD, heal me, for my bones are troubled.  
<sup>3</sup> My soul also is greatly troubled;

Psalm 32: When I kept silent, my bones grew old  
Through my groaning all the day long.

Psalm 38: O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your wrath,  
Nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure!  
. . . *There is* no soundness in my flesh  
Because of Your anger,  
Nor *any* health in my bones

Psalm 51: Make me hear joy and gladness,  
That the bones You have broken may rejoice.

Psalm 102: And my bones are burned like a hearth.  
My heart is stricken and withered like grass,  
So that I forget to eat my bread.  
Because of the sound of my groaning  
My bones cling to my skin.

Psalm 130: If You, LORD, should mark iniquities,  
O Lord, who could stand?

Psalm 143: Do not enter into judgment with Your servant,  
. . . For the enemy has persecuted my soul;  
He has crushed my life to the ground;

## Introduction (Cont.)

The Penitential Psalms is an arbitrary grouping of Psalms for which there is no Scriptural basis. However, they do express a connection between physical suffering, grief, and agony over guilt and sin, and the constant presence and attacks of the enemies of God's people.

Some commentators read Psalm 6, and the other Penitential Psalms, and emphasize the effects of sin on the soul and the physical suffering often related to guilt. By so doing, they diminish the real relationship between physical suffering and spiritual suffering, and they tend to "spiritualize" the references to enemies. In the Book of Psalms, the word "enemy" or "enemies" is used 103 times; in all except two or three instances, these words refer to real physical enemies.

It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that where these Psalms refer to physical suffering, they are referring to real physical injury or disease. The physical suffering may have been the consequence of some sinful conduct or action, or it may not have been related to sinful conduct. But, in every instance, there is real physical suffering that has focused the attention of the Psalmist on the reality and threat of the closeness of death and on the constant presence of his enemies who rejoice in seeing him suffer and who hope that he will die.

Satan, temptations, and our own sinful appetites are certainly our enemies. But, these Psalms connect the reactions of unbelievers to the suffering of God's people as a real enemy presence.

## Structure

The Psalm 6 is composed of ten stanzas. There are nine couplets and one, three-line stanza that emphasizes the suffering of the Psalmist.

The ten stanzas comprise a three-part structure:

- I. A cry for mercy and a description of severe suffering of body and soul. vv. 1-3
- II. A description of severe suffering and the threat of death as an argument or motive for praying for deliverance. vv. 4-7
- III. Joyful assurance and a prayer for God to act against his enemies. vv. 8-10

## Theme

The general theme of Psalm 6 is dependence on God's mercy during times of suffering.

In serious physical suffering, we experience our weakness and helplessness. The fact and threat of death focuses our feelings and thoughts on our total dependence on the mercy of God and on the only legitimate reason for God to let us live longer – and that is to thank Him and praise Him before our enemies, who are also His enemies.

# Exposition

## I. A Cry for Mercy and a Description of Severe Suffering of Body and Soul. vv. 1-3

A. “O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your anger,  
Nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure.” v.1

1. Luther interprets this verse as David saying that he will gladly suffer God’s discipline, but that he is asking God “that it may be done in mercy and goodness, not in anger and fury . . .” However, as J.J. Stewart Perowne points out, Luther’s interpretation “does not harmonize with the context. David does not ask that the chastening may be in love, or that its severity may be mitigated, he asks that it may altogether cease.” Verses 2 and 3 support Perowne’s conclusion.

B. “Have mercy on me, O LORD, for I am weak; O LORD, heal me, for my bones are troubled.  
My soul also is greatly troubled,  
But You, O LORD – how long? vv. 2-3

1. Clearly, David believes that his physical suffering is God’s discipline; he states that belief in verse 1. So, here in v. 2, David begs God to have mercy on him and to relieve both his physical and spiritual suffering.



### I.B.1. Continued

1. (Cont.) We do not know the nature of the physical suffering or the cause of his agony of soul. We do know from vv. 4-6 that the physical suffering was very serious and he thought he might die. In such a state of sickness and weakness, he was certainly humbled and brought to the point of total dependence on God. He could easily have been convicted of his pride, of self-reliance, and of taking God's blessings for granted. Such times of suffering often cause us to think about our lives and see sins which we have not previously confronted. It appears that David either realized some heretofore unrecognized sin or that he saw his physical suffering as God's punishment for some specific sin or sins which he knew he had committed.
2. V. 3 ends with an incomplete sentence. His suffering is so great, he cannot even adequately express his request, except to say "How long? In context, it is as though David is asking, "How long will you rebuke me? How long will you chasten me? How long must I be weak and sick? How long must my bones and soul be troubled?"

### II.A Description of Severe Suffering and the Threat of Death as an Argument or Motive for Praying for Deliverance. vv. 4-7

- A. “Return, O LORD, deliver me!  
Oh, save me for Your mercies’ sake! v. 4
1. In Hosea 5:15, God says, “I will return to My place till they acknowledge their offense. Then they will seek my face; in their affliction they will earnestly seek Me.”
  2. So here, David’s situation manifests a truth of God’s people in their relations with God. While God is always present with His people, there are times when he withdraws the sense or experience of His presence from us. David pleads with God to make His presence known to him again.
  3. But, he does not ask God to have heal him and return to him because of his suffering. He asks God to deliver him for the sake of God’s mercy. In Ezekiel 36:22 God says, “Therefore say to the house of Israel, “Thus says the Lord God: ‘I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name’s sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went.’”

II.A.3 (Continued)

3. (cont.) W. S. Plumer writes, “God takes great pains to inform his people in all ages that all their hope is in his sovereign favor and rich grace, and that it is not the merit or the misery of mortals, that moves him to show them pity, or extend deliverance.” Thus, David begs God to save him from his suffering so that God’s reputation as being full of mercy and grace made known by His deliverance of David. Not even David’s severe sufferings and the threat of death can earn God’s favor.

- B. “For in death there is no remembrance of You; In the grave who will give You thanks?” v. 5
1. In v. 5, David does not mean that death terrifies him. He simply states a fact; he is not describing annihilation, mindless or voiceless existence after death, or so-called soul sleep. He only means that if God delivers him from death he will be able to praise Him and tell the world that God is merciful and powerful and loving. If he is dead, he cannot do so.

II. Continued.

C. “I am weary with my groaning;  
All night I make my bed swim;  
I drench my couch with my tears.  
My eye wastes away because of grief;  
It grows old because of all my enemies.” vv. 6-7

1. Whereas verses 4 and 5 appear to focus more on David’s physical agony, vv. 6 and 7 appear to express the suffering of his soul and his struggle with his sense of guilt before God, for whatever reason. He uses exaggerated language to describe how much he is weeping and the effects of his grief on his eyes. And, he blames the suffering of his eyes on his enemies. Since God punished regularly punished Israel by allowing their enemies to defeat them, perhaps here David is making a more direction connection between his sin or sins and God’s chastening hand expressed by the threat of his enemies or by David’s anticipation of his enemies celebrating over his suffering and possible death. His enemies present a very real expression of God’s response to David’s sin or sins.

III. Joyful Assurance and a Prayer for God to Act Against His Enemies. vv. 8-10

- A. “Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity;  
For the LORD has heard the voice of my weeping.  
The LORD has heard my supplication;  
The LORD will receive my prayer.  
Let all my enemies be ashamed and greatly troubled;  
Let them turn back *and* be ashamed suddenly.” vv. 8-10
1. Suddenly, David rejoices in the knowledge that God has heard his prayer. He experiences the assurance of God’s deliverance and of the return of his sense of God’s presence with him. We are not told what occurred to give David such assurance. It might have been relief from pain or a sudden improvement in his physical condition. Most certainly the Holy Spirit assured him of God’s mercy and forgiveness.
  2. He closes his prayer by asking that God cause his enemies to “be ashamed and greatly troubled.” Notice, in verse 2 David complains that his “bones are troubled” and in verse 3 he complains that his “soul also is greatly troubled.” Now, he asks God to make his enemies suffer in the same way he has suffered, so that they will be “greatly troubled.”