

## Psalm 30

A “pit” figures prominently in this psalm.

After reading Joseph’s ordeal of being betrayed by his brothers, put in a pit and sold into slavery, this psalm is a remarkable reflection of what might have been going through his mind, as well as a meditation on the resurrection of Christ, who also descended into the pit and arose.

Not only that, but Jacob’s voice may be heard in this psalm:

In the extremity of grief, according to a classic midrash, “the presence of God abandons him.” Rashi, commenting on this week’s Torah reading in Genesis 37:35, says Jacob cries out, “I shall go down mourning to Sheol: This is Gehinnom - the inferno - for this sign was given by God, that if none of my sons died in my lifetime, I was assured that I would not see Gehinnom.”

Even Isaac, when facing Esau’s accusation of betrayal (Genesis 27:33) “was seized with very violent trembling. He saw Gehinnom - the inferno - open up beneath him.” (Rashi and midrash)

Anyone peering into a personal abyss can identify with Psalm 30.

The opening superscription (not a part of the original) says this was a song of dedication of the House (the Temple), perhaps one that would be sung by the Levites at the Temple’s dedication in the days of Solomon. Thus, it is read every day of the eight-day Feast of Hanukkah, which also celebrates the rededication of the Temple in 165 B.C. by the Maccabees. It is also recited at Pentecost.

But the psalm is very personal, and doesn’t sound like a public psalm for a community gathering that would be dedicating the Temple. This led a modern traditional commentator, Rabbi Meir Weiser (Malbim, 1809-1879) to suggest that the “Temple” referenced in the superscription is actually David’s own body.

This is fascinating, since Jesus, the “Son of David,” referred to his own body as a temple:

**John 2:19-22** - “Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body. When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said.”

**Psalm 30:1** - “I will extol thee, O LORD; for thou hast lifted me up, and hast not made my foes to rejoice over me.”

Rashi: For they would say, "David has no share in the world to come," but when they saw that the doors opened for the Ark because of me, then they knew that the Holy One, blessed be He, had forgiven me for that sin (numbering of the people?), and the faces of David's enemies became as black as the bottom of a pot.

**Psalm 30:2** - "O LORD my God, I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me."

Rashi equates healing with forgiveness of sins: "That is the forgiving of iniquity, as (in Isa. 6:10), 'and he repent and be healed.'"

**Psalm 30:3** - "O LORD, thou hast brought up my soul from the grave: thou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit."

Or "You have revived me from my descent into the Pit." - The resurrection of Christ is foreshadowed here, as well as Joseph's removal from the pit in the wilderness.

**Psalm 30:6-7** - "And in my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved. LORD, by thy favor thou hast made my mountain to stand strong: thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled."

Rashi: "I *thought* that I would never falter. However, the matter is not in my power, but in the power of the Holy One, blessed be He. With His will, He set up my mountain, my greatness to be [my] might, but when He hid His countenance from me, I was immediately frightened."

### **Related to Purim**

Rashi said the Sages explained the entire psalm as referring to Mordecai, Esther, and Haman, in the Pesikta Zuta:

"Weeping may endure for a night." Zeresh advised Haman to erect a gallows for Mordechai, and all of Israel retired in weeping.

"But joy cometh in the morning." i.e., the hanging of Haman, after which 'there was light and joy.'

Haman: "And I said in my tranquility"

Esher: "I cried to thee, O LORD; and unto the LORD I made supplication. What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? Shall the dust praise thee? shall it declare thy truth? Hear, O LORD, and have mercy upon me: LORD, be thou my helper."

Mordecai (and all Israel): "Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness"

The ultimate transformation will occur in the Messianic age, the Rabbis said, when 'I will transform their mourning to joy and will comfort them and make them rejoice from their sorrow' (Jeremiah 31:12).

[See <http://www.thejewishstar.com/stories/Considering-Tehillim-at-Purim,13243>]

Natan Sharansky, a human rights activist in the Soviet Union, spent more than a hundred days in a punishment cell for continually demanding his little book of the Psalms. They finally returned it to him. After nine years in the Gulag, he was released. He said he had been waiting all that time to recite Psalm 30.

[See <http://etzion.org.il/en/shiur-23-psalm-30-i-will-extol-you-o-lord-you-have-lifted-me-part-i>

Natan Sharansky, 'Fear No Evil: The Classic Memoir of One Man's Triumph over a Police State,' p. 266-270]