

Psalm 27:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

Analysis

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? This opening declaration of Psalm 27 stands among Scripture's most powerful expressions of faith-filled confidence in God. David (traditionally attributed as author) makes three foundational affirmations about the LORD, followed by two rhetorical questions that demonstrate the logical implications of such faith.

"The LORD" (יהוָה/Yəhwāh) is the covenant name of God—the personal name He revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14-15), typically rendered "I AM WHO I AM" or "I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE." This is not generic deity but the specific God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who entered into binding covenant relationship with Israel. The use of this name emphasizes that David's confidence rests on God's revealed character and covenant promises, not wishful thinking or optimism. Yahweh is the faithful, unchanging, covenant-keeping God who cannot lie or fail His promises. This name appears twice in this verse, framing both halves of the declaration—all confidence flows from who God is, not from circumstances or personal strength.

"My light" (אֹרֶן/'ôrî) employs light as a multivalent metaphor. In Scripture, light represents truth versus error (Psalm 43:3), guidance versus confusion (Psalm 119:105), joy versus sorrow (Psalm 97:11), life versus death (Job 33:28-30), righteousness versus wickedness (Proverbs 4:18), and God's presence versus His absence (Revelation 21:23). For David facing enemies and danger (verses 2-3), God

as light means illumination of the path forward, exposure of hidden threats, dispelling of paralyzing fear that darkness brings, and revelation of God's own glory that eclipses all lesser lights. The possessive "my" emphasizes personal appropriation—this is not abstract theology but lived experience of God's illuminating presence in specific circumstances.

"My salvation" (יָשֵׁא/yiš'â) derives from the root yāšâ', meaning to deliver, rescue, or save. This is the same root from which "Jesus" (Yeshua) comes—"the LORD saves." For David, salvation was concrete deliverance from enemies, dangers, and threats (both physical and spiritual). The term encompasses both immediate rescue from present danger and ultimate redemption from sin and death. God is not merely the source of salvation but salvation itself—He personally constitutes David's deliverance. Notice the profound theology: God doesn't just provide light and salvation; He is these things. His very presence guarantees these realities. Salvation here is comprehensive—deliverance from enemies (verse 2), vindication against false witnesses (verse 12), and ultimate confidence even in the face of war (verse 3).

"Whom shall I fear?" (אַיִלָּא/mimmî 'îrâ') is a rhetorical question expecting the answer "no one." This isn't denial of danger's reality—the psalm acknowledges enemies, armies, and war (verses 2-3)—but proper evaluation of threat in light of God's presence. If the Creator and Sustainer of the universe personally guarantees my light and salvation, human opposition loses its terror. Fear is the natural response to perceived threat; faith recalibrates our perception by recognizing God's superior power. The question challenges believers to think logically about the relative power of God versus any created threat. 'îrâ' can denote both reverential fear (appropriate before God) and servile fear (inappropriate before creatures)—David is asking who deserves the terror that only God's majesty warrants.

"The strength of my life" (מָעֵז/ma'ôz ḥayyay) uses mā'ôz—a fortified stronghold, fortress, or refuge, a place of protection from enemies and siege. This is not inner psychological strength but external protection—God as an impregnable fortress surrounding and defending David's life. Unlike human fortifications that can be breached or overcome, God is an invincible stronghold. ḥayyay ("my life") indicates not merely biological existence but the totality of one's being, vitality,

purpose, and calling. God doesn't just protect David's physical body but guards the fullness of his life and mission as Israel's anointed king. This phrase connects to other psalms where David calls God his rock, fortress, and high tower (Psalm 18:2, 31:3, 71:3).

"Of whom shall I be afraid?" (**מִמֶּנֶּה אֲנִי מַחְאָד**/mimmî 'ephâd) reinforces the first rhetorical question with a synonym. 'Irâ' and pâhad are closely related Hebrew words for fear, dread, and terror. The repetition isn't redundancy but emphasis—driving home the logical conclusion that proper theology produces practical courage. This is faith's victory over fear—not through denial of danger but through accurate assessment of God's power relative to any threat. The double question creates a rhythm of mounting confidence, building from initial assertion to unshakeable conviction. Together, these rhetorical questions establish the psalm's theme: when God is understood rightly, fear of man becomes irrational and faith becomes the only reasonable response.

Historical Context

Psalm 27 is attributed to David, though the specific historical occasion is not identified in the superscription. The content suggests composition during a period of intense threat—enemies seeking to destroy him (verse 2), false witnesses bringing accusations (verse 12), and potential military assault (verse 3). This could fit multiple periods in David's life: his persecution by Saul when he lived as a fugitive in caves and wilderness; Absalom's rebellion when his own son sought to usurp the throne; or other crises during his kingship when surrounding nations attacked Israel.

The psalm's structure divides into two sections with different tones—confident trust (verses 1-6) and urgent petition (verses 7-14)—leading some scholars to suggest it combines two originally separate compositions. However, this oscillation between confidence and petition mirrors authentic spiritual experience where assurance of God's character coexists with desperate circumstances requiring His intervention. The psalm demonstrates that faith is not the absence of struggle but trust maintained through struggle.

Ancient Israel lived in a dangerous world. Tribal warfare, banditry, wild animals, disease, famine, and invasion were constant threats. The average Israelite had legitimate reasons for fear. Survival was precarious; enemies were real; death was common. Yet Scripture consistently commands, "Fear not" (appearing over 100 times in various forms). This isn't naive denial of danger but a call to proper fear—fearing God rightly (reverential awe) eliminates creaturely fear (servile terror before human threats). As Jesus later taught, "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28).

The metaphor of God as "light" would resonate powerfully in ancient culture where darkness was absolute and terrifying. Before modern lighting, nighttime was truly dark—no streetlights, car headlights, or electronic glow. Darkness concealed predators, enemies, and hazards. Travel after dark was exceptionally dangerous. When David calls God his light, he's claiming that God's presence transforms his darkest circumstances into situations of clear vision and safety. This metaphor appears throughout Scripture, culminating in Revelation's vision of the new Jerusalem where "the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof" (Revelation 21:23).

For New Testament believers, this psalm finds ultimate fulfillment in Christ. Jesus explicitly identified Himself as "the light of the world" (John 8:12), and His work accomplished the salvation David could only anticipate. The name "Jesus" (Yeshua) literally means "the LORD saves"—He is the personal embodiment of the salvation David celebrates. Paul quotes this psalm's theme in Romans 8:31—"If God be for us, who can be against us?"—applying David's confidence to those justified by faith in Christ. The early church, facing persecution, imprisonment, and martyrdom under Roman emperors, found courage by appropriating these same truths, recognizing that nothing could separate them from God's love in Christ (Romans 8:35-39).

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. What specific fears currently dominate your thoughts, and how does viewing God as your 'light' (revealing truth and path) address those fears?
2. How does the distinction between 'fear of the LORD' (reverent awe) and 'fear of man' (servile dread) play out practically in your daily decisions?
3. In what ways do you tend to rely on your own strength as a 'fortress' rather than taking refuge in God as the 'strength of your life'?
4. How might your courage in evangelism, truth-telling, or moral stands change if you genuinely internalized that God is your salvation?
5. What is the relationship between David's confident declarations about God (verses 1) and his desperate petitions to God (verses 7-14), and what does this teach about authentic faith?

Interlinear Text

יְהִי הָ	אָוֶר	וְנִשְׁעָנָ	מִ	אֵיכָא	יְהִי הָ
The LORD	is my light	and my salvation	H4310	whom shall I fear	The LORD
H3068	H216	H3468		H3372	H3068
מָעוֹז	מִ	לִ	אָפָקְדָ		
is the strength	of my life	H4310	of whom shall I be afraid		
H4581	H2416		H6342		

Additional Cross-References

Hebrews 13:6 (References Lord): So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.

Psalms 118:6 (References Lord): The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?

Exodus 15:2 (Salvation): The LORD is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him.

2 Corinthians 12:9 (Parallel theme): And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Psalms 84:11 (References Lord): For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.

Romans 8:31 (Parallel theme): What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?

John 8:12 (Light): Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

Isaiah 12:2 (Salvation): Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation.

Isaiah 61:10 (Salvation): I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.

Psalms 62:6 (Salvation): He only is my rock and my salvation: he is my defence; I shall not be moved.