

# Psalms 88:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

O LORD God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee:

## Analysis

**O LORD God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee.** This opening verse of Scripture's darkest psalm establishes a profound tension: the psalmist addresses God as "God of my salvation" while experiencing crushing affliction that persists day and night. This juxtaposition—confident confession of God's saving character alongside desperate cry for help—models faith that doesn't deny suffering while refusing to abandon God.

"O LORD God of my salvation" (אֱלֹהֵי יְשׁוּעָתִי/Yahweh Elohei yeshuati) combines God's covenant name (Yahweh) with His title as God of salvation. Yeshuah (salvation, deliverance, rescue) shares its root with the name Yeshua (Jesus), meaning "Yahweh saves." Despite present darkness, the psalmist anchors identity in God's saving character and past deliverance. This isn't past-tense faith ("You were my salvation") but present confident confession: You ARE the God of my salvation, even now when I cannot see or feel it.

"I have cried" (צַאֲקֵת/tza'aqt) uses the intensive verb for crying out in distress, anguish, or danger. This is desperate, urgent plea—not quiet prayer but loud lament. The Old Testament frequently describes God's people crying out (tza'aq) in oppression: Israel in Egypt (Exodus 2:23), people under foreign oppression (Judges 3:9, 15), the suffering righteous (Psalm 34:17). The verb implies extremity of need and expectation that God hears.

"Day and night" (יּוֹم וָלַיְלָה/yomam valaylah) emphasizes both persistence and the

relentless nature of suffering. This isn't occasional distress but constant, overwhelming affliction. The cry continues unceasingly because the pain never stops. Yet "day and night" also demonstrates persevering faith—not giving up, not abandoning prayer despite apparent divine silence. This echoes Jesus's parable about the persistent widow who wouldn't stop crying to the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8), teaching that believers "ought always to pray and not to faint."

"Before thee" (בְּפָנֶיךָ/negdekha) indicates the cry is directed specifically to God, in His presence. The psalmist prays to the face of God, not away from Him or to other sources of help. Despite feeling abandoned (v.14: "why castest thou off my soul?"), the sufferer continues praying to God, refusing to turn elsewhere.

## Historical Context

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Psalm 88 is attributed to Heman the Ezrahite, identified as a wise man in Solomon's court (1 Kings 4:31) and possibly the same Heman appointed by David as a worship leader (1 Chronicles 15:17). If so, this Levitical musician, responsible for leading joyful worship, personally knew profound darkness. This reminds us that spiritual leadership and depth of worship experience don't exempt anyone from severe suffering.

The psalm's superscription includes complex musical notations: 'A Song or Psalm for the sons of Korah, to the chief Musician upon Mahalath Leannoth' (Mahalath Leannoth may mean "concerning sickness for affliction" or refer to a musical mode). That such a dark psalm was included in Israel's worship repertoire demonstrates that corporate worship makes space for lament, suffering, and honest struggle. Modern worship often lacks this dimension, creating false expectation that faith equals constant happiness.

Ancient Near Eastern cultures had lament traditions—Mesopotamian laments over destroyed cities, Egyptian funerary texts, Canaanite mourning rituals. Biblical lament differs fundamentally: rather than fatalism or manipulation, it addresses the covenant God who has proven faithful and can be held to His promises. Israel's lament assumes relationship, divine power to help, and God's character as deliverer.

Job's suffering parallels this psalm—prolonged affliction, feeling abandoned by God, friends offering unhelpful explanations, yet refusing to curse God. Early church fathers saw in Psalm 88 a foreshadowing of Christ's Passion—especially Gethsemane's anguish and the cross's darkness when Jesus cried "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). If Jesus, the sinless Son, experienced such abandonment and darkness, believers shouldn't be surprised by similar experiences.

Throughout church history, believers in severe depression, persecution, illness, or spiritual darkness have found this psalm gives voice to their anguish. It validates suffering without providing easy answers, modeling faith that cries out to God even when He seems absent.

## Related Passages

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**Ephesians 2:8** — Salvation by grace through faith

**John 3:16** — God's love and salvation

**James 2:17** — Faith and works

**Hebrews 11:1** — Definition of faith

## Study Questions

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1. How can you honestly address God as 'God of my salvation' when experiencing circumstances that feel like the opposite of salvation?
2. What does persistent prayer 'day and night' look like practically, and how do you persevere when prayers seem unanswered?
3. How does the inclusion of Psalm 88 in Scripture validate lament and struggle as legitimate expressions of faith rather than signs of weak faith?

## Interlinear Text

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תְּגַדֵּבְנִי בְּלִילָה צַעֲקָתִי יְמִין יְמִינָה אֱלֹהִים יְמִינָה  
O LORD God of my salvation day I have cried and night H5048  
H3068 H430 H3444 H3117 H6817 H3915

## Additional Cross-References

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**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.

**Psalms 22:2** (References God): O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.

**Psalms 86:3** (References Lord): Be merciful unto me, O Lord: for I cry unto thee daily.

**Luke 18:7** (References God): And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?

**Psalms 51:14** (Salvation): Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.

**Psalms 53:1** (References God): The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity: there is none that doeth good.

**Psalms 27:9** (Salvation): Hide not thy face far from me; put not thy servant away in anger: thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.

**Genesis 49:18** (Salvation): I have waited for thy salvation, O LORD.

**1 Kings 4:31** (Parallel theme): For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol: and his fame was in all nations round about.