



The Rock of Our Refuge

(Bruce Reeves)

Introduction: Natan Sharansky was a Soviet Jew jailed in 1977 for his outspoken support of freedom. When he was released in 1986 he was clinging to one possession – the book of Psalms in Hebrew. His wife had sent it to him through a friend while he was imprisoned. Soviet Guards had confiscated it, but returned it after Sharansky laid down in the snow and refused to take another step. Sharansky stated that the Psalms enabled him to maintain “spiritual independence against the kingdom of lies” (Autobiography Natan Sharansky, *Fear No Evil*, trans. Stefani Hoffman (New York: Random House, 1988)). While we pray that Mr. Sharansky came to faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God; can we not see the power of the Psalms in our lives as Christians?

I. The Power of the Psalms:

- a. There is tremendous power in the Psalms that in many ways I feel we have not accessed as Christians.
- b. Just what are the Psalms?
 - i. The Songbook of Israel
 - ii. Mirror of the Soul
 - iii. Dialogue with God and
 - iv. Picture of Life Unfiltered.
- c. *Psalms are not only inspired by God, but are also moved by human experience and human struggle to understand God in the midst of a broken world.*

d. Give expression to nearly every emotion of faith:

- i. Assurance
- ii. Doubt
- iii. Joy
- iv. Despair
- v. Devotion
- vi. Disillusionment
- vii. Anger

II. The Purpose of the Psalms:

a. The Psalms swallows doubt and despair in an avalanche of praise.

- i. This beautiful section of scripture is brutally honest about the trials of faith, but it is ultimately oriented toward hope and joy.

b. Function of the Psalms and the Journey of Faith: (Walter Brueggemann proposes three broad types corresponding to the stages through which all true worshippers go).

i. Psalms of Orientation: *These Psalms reflect a confident belief that the world is well ordered, reliable and life giving to the person of faith (Psalm 1, 8, 14, 33, 37, 104, 111, 112, 119, 119, 131, 133, 145).*

1. Initial praise of God when we first become oriented or familiar with His attributes, i.e. God is love, God is merciful, God is righteous, etc.
2. Where we are as a child when we first learn about the Lord.
3. This is a necessary step in faith, but it is not to be the end of our faith.
4. When people remain here they are shortsighted spiritually, superficial in their understanding and vulnerable to the attacks of unbelief.
5. Many of us want to restrict teaching and worship to this stage alone.
6. Such an approach is to stunt the spiritual growth of believers and God's people as a whole.

ii. Psalms of Disorientation: *These Psalms reflect the brokenness of life when it is no longer orderly but savage. Spoken out of the depths, they are still bold acts of faith (Psalm 13, 22, 32, 35, 50, 51, 79, 81, 86, 88, 130, 137).*

1. We tend to be most uncomfortable hearing of this state.
2. While our worship can engage the praise of God's greatness – we must not pretend that believers never have questions for or about God, because they do.
3. ***It is not a sin to cry out to God in righteous anger or frustration – for this will lead us to a deeper understanding of who he is.***
4. ***There is a place in our worship assembly for the penitent, for the broken, for the hurting, for the pain stricken. We find that place in scripture!***
5. For the person who is going through the pain of a broken relationship, the loss of a dear loved one, the disappointment of tribulation, sorrow over past sins of which he or she has repented or the distress of those who are near to his heart – you can go on to new heights of faith in and through your grief.
6. God's heart breaks with ours and we can express our deepest heart to Him.
7. Jesus quoted a psalm in this description while on the cross...
8. God has no intention of leaving us in this place, but he does recognize that we live in a fallen, sin-sick broken world!
9. It is this awareness that lead us to the **"Rock of our Refuge."**

iii. Psalms of New Orientation: *The pit is not the end of life; there is more! The new orientation psalms reflect the surprise of new possibilities that are experienced as a pure gift of God. They are full of thanks (Psalm 23; 27; 30; 34; 40; 65; 100; 103; 113; 117; 124; 135).*

1. These psalms are descriptive of the man who has come through the fire of the trials of his faith and now is demonstrating the genuine proof of his faith (I Peter 1:6-9).
2. It is a faith that sees the reality of the struggle between good and evil and, yet, trusts the Lord's goodness and eternal purpose.

c. Psalm Types

i. Didactic (Instructive) Psalms

1. Characterized by a common theme
2. Orientation, very black and white view of reality.
3. Instructional in tone (Psalm 1; 19; 32; 34; 37; 49; 73; 119; 127-129).

ii. Psalms of Lament

1. Most common in psalms.
2. Complaint:
 - a. Observation of injustice, question posed to God.
 - b. Claim of innocence or confession of sin.
 - c. Condemnation of wicked.
 - d. Affirmation of trust marked by terms such as "but" or nevertheless."
 - e. Petition
 - f. Acknowledgement of God and praise.
 - g. Example Psalm 74

iii. Praise Psalms

1. Call to praise
2. Reason for Praise
3. Renewed Call to Praise
4. Psalm 66

iv. Thanksgiving Psalm

1. Summary of the worship of the Psalmist
2. Narration of the Psalmist's experience.
3. Acknowledgement of God's aid in Praise/Thanks.
4. Ex: Psalm 107.

v. Psalm of Confidence (Psalm 11).

III. What Does the Book of Psalms Teach Us?

a. Didactic Frame: Worship to God should be an **instructive** teaching experience!

b. Dominance of Lament

- i. The Psalms teach us to expect and prepare for crises of faith, also that it is better to question God and come to greater faith than to abandon faith.

c. Doxological Direction

- i. Psalms move us from ***lament*** to ***praise*** at both the micro to the macro; from the immediate situation to all situations.
 1. Praise is not just for the high points, but for the low points as well.
 2. Joy is neither emotional nor circumstantial. It is a discipline.
 3. Suffering, doubt and crisis is always only a midpoint, a transitional phase to victorious faith (Psalm 30: 5, 11).