

PSALM 18:6–19

Verses 6–19 of Psalm 18 present God’s response to the anointed king’s plea for deliverance (see verse 50). The Lord, dwelling in His temple, heard the psalmist’s cry and rushed to his rescue with an awesome display of power. The language used to describe the Lord’s advent is dramatic and colorful, steeped in the imagery of ancient Near Eastern cosmology and tradition.

It is possible that the description of this awe-inspiring theophany (or divine appearance) is meant to invoke in the audience the memory of God’s unforgettable visitation on Mount Sinai. As recounted in Exodus 19, the Lord came to Sinai with thick clouds, thunder and lightning, the voice of a trumpet, smoke, fire, and earthquakes (Exodus 19:9–18; Deuteronomy 4:10–12). Note that the details seem to have been, by comparison, toned down or abbreviated in this Exodus account and even more so in the Deuteronomy 4 version. The description in Psalm 18 is more like the dramatic martial imagery of the theophanies in Judges 5 and Habakkuk 3 (compare also Exodus 15 and Deuteronomy 32–33).

Psalms scholar Klaus Seybold sees Psalm 18 as part of a “Theophany of God” ritual sequence: a pre-exilic liturgical tradition which re-enacted the advent or appearance of God “by the recitation of the festival pericope, or by dramatic cultic symbols” such as the cloud of smoke, blast of trumpets, and festive cry. In essence, the Sinai theophany was reproduced in the temple of Jerusalem.¹

Also instructive is a comparison of the results of this deliverance in Psalm 18 with the sentiments related to the Lord’s redemption expressed by the Book of Mormon prophet Alma in Alma 5:6–9 (and the surrounding verses):

¹ Klaus Seybold, *Introducing the Psalms* (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 1990), 133–34. See also Psalms 17:15; 50:2; 68; 97.

And moreover, have ye sufficiently retained in remembrance that he has delivered their souls from hell? Behold, he changed their hearts; yea, he awakened them out of a deep sleep, and they awoke unto God. Behold, they were in the midst of darkness; nevertheless, their souls were illuminated by the light of the everlasting word; yea, they were encircled about by the bands of death, and the chains of hell, and an everlasting destruction did await them. And now I ask of you, my brethren, were they destroyed? Behold, I say unto you, Nay, they were not. And again I ask, were the bands of death broken, and the chains of hell which encircled them about, were they loosed? I say unto you, Yea, they were loosed, and their souls did expand, and they did sing redeeming love. And I say unto you that they are saved.

Related verses

Exodus 15

Exodus 19:9–18

Deuteronomy 4:10–12

Deuteronomy 32–33

Judges 5

Psalm 17:15

Psalm 50:2

Psalm 68

Psalm 97

Habakkuk 3

Alma 5:6–9

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