

# PSALMS

## Chapter 130

*My Soul Waits for the Lord*  
A Song of Ascents.

**Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD! 2 O Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy! 3 If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? 4 But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared. 5 I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; 6 my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning. 7 O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption. 8 And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.**

**Ps 130** A testimony of trust in the Lord—by one who knows that even though he is a sinner, the Lord hears his cry out of the depths. The language of the psalm suggests a postexilic date. This is the sixth of seven penitential psalms (see introduction to Ps 6). Composed of four couplets, the psalm further divides into two halves of two couplets each. (CSB)

Sixth of the seven penitential psalms (cf Ps 6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 143). Because of its eloquent expression of desperate sorrow, the Church has often used it in the funeral liturgy. When Luther was asked what were the best psalms of all, he cited Ps 130—along with 32, 51, and 143—calling them the “Pauline Psalms.” For Luther, these are like Paul’s Epistles in setting forth the realities of human sin, God’s grace, and Christ’s redemption. (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–2, appeal to the Lord; vv 3–4, forgiveness; vv 5–6, waiting on the Lord; vv 7–8, appeal to Israel. (TLSB)

The 130<sup>th</sup> psalm is a psalm of prayer that comes from the genuine Davidic devotion and understanding. It confesses that before God no one is righteous, nor may one become righteous by his own work and righteousness, but only through grace and forgiveness of sins, God has promised. The psalmist comforts himself as he relies on this promise and Word. He exhorts all of Israel that they should do the same and learn that with God is a throne of grace and redemption. Through him alone and no way else shall Israel be freed of sins, that is, “through forgiveness” (without which there is no grace) become righteous and blessed. Apart from this, he truly would be in the depths and would never stand.

Look! The true master and doctor of the Holy Scriptures is the one who understand what this means: The seed of the woman shall tread on the head of serpent (Gen. 3:15), and through this seed all the nations of the world shall be blessed (Gen. 12:30). Therefore, the psalmist places both a promise and a prophecy of Christ in this verse: “He will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.” Upon this verse, and from it, comes the entire psalm. (Reading the Psalm with Luther)

This psalm begins with a personal confession but takes on a congregational tone at the end. It is especially the congregational aspect which makes it appropriate for the festivals and for times of national repentance like those which occurred under the leadership of Ezra. (PBC)

**130:1–4** A prayer for mercy, and grounds for assurance. (CSB)

**130:1** *out of the depths.* As in 69:2 The vivid imagery that associates distress with “the depths”—so expressive of universal human experience—is common in OT poetry (see 69:2, 15; 71:20; 88:6; 130:1; La 3:55; Jnh 2:2). The depths are often linked, as here, with Sheol (“the grave,” v. 3) and “the pit” (v. 3), together with a cluster of related associations: silence (see 31:17; 94:17; 115:17; 1Sa 2:9), darkness (see 88:6, 12; 143:3; Job 10:21–22; 17:13; Ecc 6:4; La 3:6), destruction (see v. 9; 18:4; 55:23, “corruption”; 88:11; Isa 38:17; Hos 13:14), dust (see v. 9; 7:5; 22:15, 29; Job 17:16; 40:13; Isa 26:19; 29:4), mire (see 40:2; 69:2, 14), slime (see 40:2) and mud (see 40:2; Job 30:19).} ; 32:6). (CSB)

We speak of “depression” or “being down,” spatial metaphors that express the feeling of emotional desolation. The Hebrew here is even more graphic, referring to deep waters, to the sense of being overwhelmed and sinking into the depths of the sea. (TLSB)

The psalmist realizes that his sin has separated him from God. His guilt has plunged him into sorrow and despair. He knows that self-help and positive thinking will not pull him out of the depths. (PBC)

It so happens that the usage of this word is confined to the figure of a man who is caught in dangerous and deep waters. The use of the term is certainly figurative, allowing the reader to think of any and every kind of extremity or danger in which the writer (or even his nation) may find himself, whether it is physical, mental or spiritual. That very vagueness allows each reader to appropriate the words to himself when he is in a more or less extreme difficulty. (Leupold)

**130:2** *Lord hear my voice* – Even from the depths of suffering, God hears our cries and is “attentive” to our “pleas for mercy.” (TLSB)

Doubts so often plague a man as to whether God will deign to hear him. Behind that impression lies a sense of total unworthiness. (Leupold)

**130:3** *mark iniquities* - Remembering, preserving, and recording our sins for future punishment. Imagery is of writing down our offenses as a legal record. The speaker is in the depths of guilt. “Here [the psalmist] confesses his sins and does not list his merits.... He comforts himself by his trust in God’s mercy” (Ap IV 58). (TLSB)

God has perfect knowledge of our sins, but he does not charge them against us, because Christ paid for them. “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them” (2 Corinthians 5:19). – This verse now indicates that is aware of the fact that sin is deeply involved in his problem. He does not say that sin is the ultimate source and root of all his troubles, but he does seem to realize keenly that sin has much to do with his state. In fact, to him sin is so serious a business that he realizes that, if all his sins were to be recorded against him and dealt with as they deserve, his case would quite hopeless. (Leupold)

**130:4** *there is forgiveness.* No doubt recalling such reassuring words as Ex 34:6–7. (CSB)

By stating it thus the speaker appeals to God to let him be the recipient of such forgiveness. The very indirect way in which the subject is broached may be regarded as a delicate and humble

appeal that God may grant him forgiveness. The statement certainly suggests a measure of hope and faith on the speaker's part. (Leupold)

Knowing God's forgiveness increases our sense of awe before Him. (TLSB)

*feared.* Honored, worshiped, trusted and served as the one true God. If God were not forgiving, people could only flee from him in terror. (CSB)

The fear which flows from forgiveness is not dread and terror, but reverence, love and honor for the God who has forgiven us. (PBC)

**130:5–8** Trust in the Lord: a personal testimony, expanding into a reassuring invitation (see 131:3). (CSB)

**130:5** *I wait.* In hopeful expectation. (CSB)

Luther: "Those who wait for the Lord ask ... for mercy; but they leave it to God's gracious will when, how, where, and by what means He helps them" (AE 14:192). "Because You have promised the forgiveness of sins, I am sustained by Your promise" (Ap IV 58). (TLSB)

The word *āwā* kavah, which we translate to wait, properly signifies the extension of a cord from one point to another. This is a fine metaphor: God is one point, the human heart is the other; and the extended cord between both is the earnest believing desire of the soul. This desire, strongly extended from the heart to God, in every mean of grace, and when there is none, is the active, energetic waiting which God requires, and which will be successful. – It rather behooves us to make our plea and then to wait every day in deep humility until it pleases the Lord to act in our behalf. (Leupold)

*his word.* Especially his covenant promises (see 119:25, 28, 37, 42, 49, 65, 74, 81, 107, 114, 147). (CSB)

**130:6** *watchmen.* See 127:1; 2Sa 13:34; 18:24–27; SS 3:3; 5:7. (CSB)

Guards who watch over the city. (TLSB)

The soul waits in darkness, anticipating the dawning of God's light. The repetition emphasizes the sense of yearning and protracted waiting. (TLSB)

This waiting for the Lord has a measure of anxiety in it much like that which those persons feel who have a measure of anxiety for the breaking of the morning because there was a long night of sickness, of pain, or danger. That Levitical Temple watchmen are thought of should be regarded only as a valid example of what kind of waiting is meant. The repetition of the comparison adds a plaintive note. (Leupold)

A night watchman looked to for the light of dawn, which told him that his long night of labor was almost over. (PBC)

**130:7** *unfailing love* – Vital religious experience such as this psalm has dealt with seeks to communicate itself to others. It does not isolate the individual. It draws him closer into the fellowship of other saints who have had the same experience. (Leupold)

*redemption* – Luther: “Although our sin is great, yet His redemption is greater” (AE 14:194). (TLSB)

**130:8** *from all his iniquities*. From the root of trouble—but also from all its consequences. This greatest of all hopes has been fulfilled in Christ. (CSB)

In the conclusion the psalmist looks beyond himself to the whole people of Israel. He invites them to join him in his confession and in his confidence. They can be sure that God will provide complete payment for their sins. He will forgive them fully and freely. He will free them from all the effects of their sins. When this is done, they will live, not in the depths, but on the heights of glory with the Lord. (PBC)

**130** The psalmist is in a state of emotional desolation, overwhelmed with misery and guilt. Yet, as he realizes God hears his pleas and grants him full forgiveness, his darkness slowly gives way to light and the hope of “plentiful redemption” (v 7). If we are honest with ourselves, we must admit the depths of our sinfulness. When we are overwhelmed, God hears our pleas for mercy. He does not remember our sins, but rather grants us free forgiveness through the work of Christ, who gives us hope. Christ plunges into our depths to raise us in salvation. • O Lord, in our happy times we often forget You, but in our suffering we turn to You, and in our weakness we find Your strength. Speak to us the word of Your promise. Amen. (TLSB)