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## Psalm 12: To the choirmaster: according to The Sheminith. A Psalm of David.

Walter E. Keller  
*Valparaiso University*

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## **Psalm 12**

**To the choirmaster: according to The Sheminith. A Psalm of David.**

(RSV)

- <sup>1</sup> **Help, LORD; for there is no longer any that is godly;  
for the faithful have vanished from among the sons of men.**
- <sup>2</sup> **Every one utters lies to his neighbor;  
with flattering lips and a double heart they speak.**
- <sup>3</sup> **May the LORD cut off all flattering lips,  
the tongue that makes great boasts,**
- <sup>4</sup> **those who say, "With our tongue we will prevail,  
our lips are with us; who is our master?"**
- <sup>5</sup> **"Because the poor are despoiled, because the needy groan,  
I will now arise," says the LORD;  
"I will place him in the safety for which he longs."**
- <sup>6</sup> **The promises of the LORD are promises that are pure,  
silver refined in a furnace on the ground,  
purified seven times.**
- <sup>7</sup> **Do thou, O LORD, protect us,  
guard us ever from this generation.**
- <sup>8</sup> **On every side the wicked prowl,  
as vileness is exalted among the sons of men.**

**Psalm 12** is a plea for help in evil times. The Psalmist feels completely alone in his desire for righteousness and justice. This was apparently during a time of great moral corruption and spiritual bankruptcy. The laments of verses 1-2, and verse 8 frame the appeals to God in verses 3-4 and verse 7. God's prophetic word of Promise (verse 5) is the center of this Psalm, which is followed by the assurance that the word of the LORD can be trusted above all seemingly contrary evidence (verse 6).

If, however, instead of dividing this Psalm into the conventional 8 verses, we were to follow the suggestion of the United Bible Society's translators and divide this Psalm into the 6 strophes of the arrangement below, we could discover a rhetorical device called chiasmus. A chiastic arrangement consists of stating a series of ideas, whose thought is then reproduced and repeated in reverse order. Sometimes the repetition restates the original thought (as in A – A', C – C' below), and sometimes the repetition reinforces the original thought by means of a contrast (as in B – B' below, where the purity of the divine speech stand in strong contrast to the deceitfulness of human speech).

- A. Help, LORD; for there is no longer any that is godly;  
for the faithful have vanished from among the sons of men.**
- B. Every one utters lies to his neighbor;  
with flattering lips and double heart they speak.**
- C. May the LORD cut off all flattering *lips*, the *tongue* that makes great boasts,  
those who say, “With our *tongues* we will prevail,  
our *lips* are with us; who is our master?”**
- C’. “Because the poor are despoiled, because the needy groan,  
I will now arise,” says the LORD;  
“I will place him in the safety for which he longs.”**
- B’. The promises of the LORD are promises that are pure,  
silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times.**
- A’. Do thou, O LORD, protect us, guard us ever from this generation.  
On every side the wicked prowl, as vileness is exalted among the sons of men.**

- A** - asks for the Lord’s help, because they live in a situation in which the godly and the faithful have vanished. The same theme which opens the Psalm is repeated in the last strophe.
- A’** - again ask for the LORD’s protection in a generation that is wicked and vile.
- B** - describes the deceitful and insincere speech that characterizes the society around the Psalmist.
- B’** - by way of contrast extols the purity of the LORD’s speech, specifically his promises.
- C** - asks God to intervene and stop the deceitfulness.
- C’** - has the LORD now rousing himself to right the wrong.

**Prayer to accompany Psalm 12:**

Lord our God, by the light of the resurrection of your Son you have helped us see that we shall not sleep in death forever. Look upon the sufferings of your Church, so that our hearts may rejoice in your saving help and sing songs of praise; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Linger longer over verse 6:**

**The promises of the LORD are promises that are pure,  
silver refined in a furnace on the ground  
purified seven (the number of perfection) times.**