

Psalm 7

A SHIGGAION OF DAVID, WHICH HE SANG TO THE LORD CONCERNING THE WORDS OF CUSH, A BENJAMINITE.

Apart from what we learn here in Psalm 7, we don't know anything about Cush. We never hear about him anywhere else in the Bible. But maybe the most important thing we *do* know is that he was a Benjaminite. The first king of Israel, King Saul, was also a Benjaminite (1 Sam. 9:1, 21), but the Lord rejected Saul from being king over His people, and chose David instead, who was from the tribe of Judah. You could say, then, that there was a lot of "bad blood" between David and at least some of the Benjaminites – though this wasn't what David wanted. (cf. 1 Sam. 24:9-15; 26:18; 2 Sam. 16: 5–8, 11–12; 20:1–2) To some in the tribe of Benjamin, David would always be an illegitimate usurper, and nothing more.

This historical background can help us to read and interpret the Psalm rightly. However, we also have to remember that when this psalm was included in Israel's hymnbook, it was meant to be read no longer as just a prayer of David from which we can learn lessons, but rather as a prayer that we ourselves can pray, using the very same words. In other words, many of the Psalms were written by individuals in specific historical circumstances, but they eventually became the property of all Israel, and now they've become the property, and the voice, and the language of the Church. So, with these things in mind, let's come, now, to verse one.

1st Stanza – Cry for Help

I. Psalm 7:1–2 — O LORD my God, in you do I take refuge; save me from all my pursuers and deliver me, lest like a lion they tear my soul apart, rending it in pieces, with none to deliver.

Whenever the word "Lord" is spelled with all capital letters, it tells us that the Hebrew word underlying it is the name, "Yahweh." So David begins his prayer with these words: "O Yahweh, my God..." We know from our time in Exodus that "Yahweh" was the personal, covenant name of God – it was the name by which God had made Himself personally known to the people that He had called to be His very own. In the New Testament, it is this **same** "Yahweh" that we see now incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ. (Heb. 1:10-12; cf. Ps. 102; also see Jn. 8:58) And so what is God's personal, covenant name in the New Testament – the name by which He has made Himself personally known to us whom He has called to be His very own? It's **Jesus**. As David cried out to Yahweh, so today we cry out to Jesus. *Or* we could say that as David cried out to the God whose name was Yahweh, so today we cry out in prayer to the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (cf. Rom. 15:6; 2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3; Col. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:3)

David has confidence in crying out to God because he's in covenant relationship with God, and has come to know him as "Yahweh." **How much more** should we have confidence in crying out to God because we, too, are in covenant relationship with God, and have come to know him even as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? Do we know what it is to cry out to God as His covenant sons and daughters? (cf. Rom. 8:15-17) Do we know what it is to pray with boldness and confidence, "O **Yahweh, my God**"? Is this the natural expression of our relationship with Him?

“O LORD my God, in you do I take refuge; save me from all my pursuers and deliver me, lest like a lion they tear my soul apart, rending it in pieces, with none to deliver.” That’s a graphic picture. David is being chased by lions, who, if they catch him will tear him up and rip him to shreds. He’s helpless. He has nowhere to go but to the Lord. If the Lord does not save Him, there is no one else in the world who can. But what does David say?—“O LORD my God, in you do I take refuge.” In other words, “In you do I *trust*.” (Keil) It’s easy to say that we’re trusting in the Lord when we feel like we still have our own insurance plan, our own “plan B,” our own “safe place” to run to. But what about when there are none of these things, and we feel that we’re completely and totally helpless? Isn’t this what saving faith is? And isn’t this the kind of trust and faith that should characterize *all* of our relationship with the Lord?

But what has happened? Who are these “lions” chasing after David, and how would they rip and tear him to pieces?

II. Psalm 7:3–5 — O LORD my God, if I have done this, if there is wrong in my hands, if I have repaid my friend with evil or plundered my enemy without cause, let the enemy pursue my soul and overtake it, and let him trample my life to the ground and lay my glory in the dust. Selah

Notice how David clearly *delights* to pray *again*, “O Yahweh, my God...” It’s as though he takes comfort in just reminding himself, and also in reminding the Lord, of the reason why he can even pray at all – because he is in covenant relationship with this God, and has come to know Him by His covenant name, Yahweh. So also with us, every time we conclude our crying out to the Lord with “in Jesus’ name, Amen” we should be taking comfort in this reminder to ourselves (and to God) of why we can even pray at all – because we are in covenant relationship with God, and we have come to know Him *as* the Father of *our* Lord, Jesus Christ.

O LORD my God, if I have done this, if there is wrong in my hands, if I have repaid my friend with evil or plundered my enemy without cause... So it seems that here is the problem: David is being slandered and falsely accused of wrongdoing. I think the most likely understanding of these verses is that David is being accused of repaying his *friend* with evil, but David denies this – so much so that he denies plundering even His *enemy* without cause. For some, just the fact that you’re the “enemy” would be cause enough for plundering. But David says that even his enemy he has not plundered without cause, *how much less*, then, His friend? In reality, David is even more bold than this.

What he says is, *if* I have done any of these things, then “**let the enemy pursue my soul and overtake it, and let him trample my life to the ground and lay my glory in the dust.**” We might think that’s a really risky and dangerous prayer. Or maybe it feels presumptuous and arrogant. Would we dare to pray like that, calling down death on ourselves if we have not walked in the right way? But here’s what David understands: The grounds for prayer is not just the existence of a “bare” covenant relationship with God, but the reality of being in **right** covenant relationship with God. David isn’t claiming to be perfect in God’s sight, but he is claiming to be innocent of the charges leveled against him, *and* even more importantly he’s claiming to be innocent of even the “lesser” charges that might be brought against him. I doubt that David’s accusers were charging him with plundering his enemies, but David’s point is that so far was he from repaying his *friend* with evil that he hadn’t even plundered his *enemies* without cause.

So here's the question we need to ask ourselves: If David *had* been guilty of these things (even of plundering "only" his enemies without cause), could he ever come to the Lord and pray with any kind of boldness or confidence? The grounds for confidence in prayer is not just being in covenant relationship with God, but being in *right* covenant relationship with God – in other words, having a conscience that before the Lord is clean and pure. (See Job 31) David isn't boasting in his own righteousness or saying that he's earned the right for God to answer his prayers. But he *is* saying what he knows to be true: he's innocent; and it's only on the basis of this innocence that he feels the freedom to come so boldly into the Lord's presence and cry out (humbly) for help.

Are we living lives so as to always have a clean and pure conscience before God? Even at this moment, am I truly righteous – living in *right* covenant relationship with the Lord? And is it this righteousness in covenant relationship with the Lord that truly gives me boldness and confidence whenever I come before the Lord in prayer? (cf. 1 Jn. 2:28-29; 3:7-10, 18-22) This is a wonderful thing!

David has just prayed that *if* he has done the things of which he is accused, then *let* the enemy pursue his soul and overtake it. But since David's conscience is clean and his heart pure, he can go on to pray in verse 6:

2nd Stanza – God the Righteous Judge

III. Psalm 7:6–8a — Arise, O LORD, in your anger; lift yourself up against the fury of my enemies; awake for me; you have appointed a judgment. Let the assembly of the peoples be gathered about you; over it return on high. The LORD judges the peoples.

Notice how so far David begins each section by always addressing God by His *personal, covenant* name, Yahweh ("Arise, O LORD"). And then notice how boldly David prays: "Arise... lift yourself up" (as though to this point God has been sitting idly), "awake for me" (as though to this point God has been sleeping). David knows that God never slumbers or sleeps. (cf. Ps. 121:3-4) God is never truly idle. But it **looks** to the enemy like He is when they seem to be getting away with their wickedness, and it can **feel** to the psalmist like He is for the very same reason.

If **you're** being accused by the enemy of sins you haven't committed—if the enemy is pursuing **your** soul like a lion and there is none to deliver, wouldn't you be able to pray this prayer with all your heart?

Arise [Imperative], O LORD, in your anger;
lift yourself up [Imperative] against the fury of my enemies;
awake [Imperative] for me;
you have appointed a judgment. [Perfect]
Let the assembly of the peoples be gathered about you [Jussive];
over it **return** [Imperative] on high.
The LORD judges the peoples. [Imperfect]

Do you see how in the midst of all the Psalmist's desperate pleas, he always returns to a simple and beautiful statement of faith? The Lord *has* appointed a judgment... The Lord *will* judge the peoples. The Psalmist believes this. Do we believe this? Our pleas to God should always be grounded in the strong **assurance of faith**. When we read the history books, when we read the news of today, when we experience ourselves the injustices of the ungodly, do we *know* that the Lord has appointed a judgment... that the Lord will judge the peoples? It's *because* David believes this that he can be so bold in crying out for justice "for *himself*," "right now."

"[David's] vision widens and extends from the enemies **immediately around** to the **whole world** in its hostility towards Yahweh and His anointed one... The truth of this combination lies in the fact of the final judgment being only the finale of that judgment which is in constant execution in the world itself." (Keil)

It's important for us to see that this isn't just about David and *his personal* enemies. It's about David *as* God's "anointed one" and so it's also about **all** the true covenant people of God by reason of their connection with David. David knows that the Lord is the righteous judge of **all** the earth, and that He will judge **all** the peoples. And it's on the basis of *this* faith in God as the *final, universal* judge that David prays for justice *now*, not just for Himself, but ultimately for **all** the people in covenant with God – who cry out to God as "Yahweh." (cf. Ps. 102:1-17)

IV. Psalm 7:8b-9 — Judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness and according to the integrity that is in me. Oh, let the evil of the wicked come to an end, and may you establish the righteous— you who test the minds and hearts, O righteous God!

This is how we all *ought* to be able to pray. But *do* we pray like this? Is it our aim and our goal to live in such a way that we *can* indeed pray like this? Remember, when David speaks of his "righteousness" and the "integrity" that is in him, he's not claiming to be perfect. David's righteousness and integrity is simply his faithfulness *to the covenant* that **God has made by His grace**. For the *fourth* time now, David begins this next part of his prayer addressing God by His *covenant* name.

In verse 1, "**O YAHWEH my God...**";
in verse 3, "**O YAHWEH my God...**";
in verse 6, "**O LORD [YAHWEH]...**";
and now, again, in verse 8, "**O LORD [YAHWEH]...**"

What David knows is this: **Outside** of his covenant relationship with God—**outside** of knowing God and being able to call Him by His personal, covenant name—he couldn't possibly speak of his own righteousness or integrity. There would be no such thing. And so even as David **prays boldly** on the basis of his righteousness and integrity, there is not even an inch of space for his **boasting** in this righteousness and integrity! This can be a hard thing for us to understand; but if we don't understand it, then we'll never be able to pray rightly – with the confidence and boldness that we should, and also with the humility and lowliness that we should.

Finally, notice how David's desperate pleas are again concluded with his statement of faith.

Judge me, O LORD...

Oh, **let** the evil of the wicked come to an end,

and **may** you establish the righteous—

you who test the minds and hearts, O righteous God!

Is this the desire of our hearts? Is this what we pray for? Once again, we see that David's concern is not primarily about **himself** and **his enemies**, but about **righteousness** and **wickedness** – about **all the righteous** in God's covenant people and **all the wicked** who will ever mistreat the righteous. "Let the evil of the wicked come to an end, and may you establish the righteous." Is this really just an expression of hungering and thirsting for righteousness? (cf. Mat. 5:6, 10-12) When we cry out to God for justice, our deepest motive should be the triumph of righteousness over evil – not just in our experience, but in the experience of all God's people. The point is never just "me" – but "me" living **righteously** in right covenant relation with the Lord. The point is never just "my enemies," but "my enemies" as those who hate **righteousness** and walk in their evil ways. And so, therefore, the point can never be just "me," but "**all**" of God's covenant people together.

Can you see, now, how this is an appropriate prayer to pray at *all* times – even when it's not specifically "*me*" who's being chased by the lions? This is never a prayer just for me, but always a prayer for all God's people. The Psalms are constantly calling us to a motive in prayer that's truly **godly** because it's truly seeking after righteousness and the glory of the Lord.

David prays that the evil of the wicked would come to an end, and that the Lord would establish the righteous because he knows with all his heart that Yahweh *is* a **righteous** God. **But how should we think of God's righteousness?** David thought of God's righteousness in terms of His faithfulness to **act** according to **His covenant** – to judge the one who wickedly breaks the covenant, and to bless the one who lives day to day in right covenant relationship with Him. Can you see again how David's ultimate confidence is not in his own righteousness, but in the righteousness of God? David's ultimate confidence is not in his own faithfulness to the covenant, but in the faithfulness of God—of **YAHWEH**—to graciously keep His covenant. Once we understand this, we'll be that much closer to truly having the joy of being able to pray as David prayed.

So, now we're ready to move into the third and last stanza of the song, where now David transitions from **praying** into **preaching**. Instead of praying *to* God in the 2nd person ("You," "Your"), now we'll see David speaking to himself and to others *about* God in the 3rd person ("He," "His").

3rd Stanza (Statement of Faith)

V. Psalm 7:10–13 — My shield is with God, who saves the upright in heart. God is a righteous judge, and a God who feels indignation every day. If a man does not repent, God will whet his sword; he has bent and readied his bow; he has prepared for him his deadly weapons, making his arrows fiery shafts.

If you really think about it, that's a really scary picture. We see God full of anger and indignation, sharpening his sword against a stone, drawing the arrow back on the string, readying an entire arsenal of different kinds of deadly weapons, and kindling each one of His arrows. If even for one second we really believed this was happening, wouldn't it turn us all away from the paths of sin and wickedness? Just because God hasn't yet struck with the sword, doesn't mean He's not sharpening the sword. Just because God hasn't yet loosed the arrow doesn't mean He's not fitting the arrow to the string and drawing it back.

And so, on the one hand, here's a warning to all the wicked to repent while God is still giving them time. On the other hand, this is mostly meant to *encourage* the **righteous** – to remind **us** that despite all appearances God is never sleeping or sitting idly by. He is always, every day, full to overflowing with indignation and wrath. We really, really desperately need to know this about God. He is *always* whetting His sword; His bow is *always* bent. Even as David preached this so descriptively to himself, so today in a world where true righteousness—and so also righteous people—are trampled underfoot, we need to be preaching this same thing to ourselves. When we don't see God **striking** with the sword and **loosing** His arrows, by faith, we need to **see** God **sharpening** His sword and **bending** His bow. Even as we pray for justice and judgment *now*, we can know beyond all doubt that it *is* coming – both sooner, **and** later. (cf. 2 Thess. 1:3-12) And it's only because we've preached *this* to ourselves about God that we can also preach *this* to ourselves with the fullest confidence and joy: **“My shield is with God, who saves the upright in heart.”**

So far, we've seen God whetting His sword and bending His bow. Now in verses 14-16, we see God unleash His weapons of death and destruction.

VI. Psalm 7:14–16 — Behold, the wicked man conceives evil and is pregnant with mischief and gives birth to lies. He makes a pit, digging it out, and falls into the hole that he has made. His mischief returns upon his own head, and on his own skull his violence descends.

Of all the verses in this Psalm, these might be the easiest ones to skim over. So it's interesting to me that of all the verses in this Psalm, these are the only ones to begin with the word **“behold.”**

So we stop for a minute and see in our minds eye a wicked man first conceiving an evil plan, then pregnant and carrying his schemes and plots to maturity, and then finally at full-term giving birth to a deformed offspring of falsehoods and lies. It's an ugly, disgusting picture. It's the kind of picture that *might* fill the righteous with fear. But this isn't what we're meant to **“behold.”**

What we're really meant to **behold** is what this sets us up for in verses 15-16: **“He makes a pit, digging it out, and falls into the hole that he has made. His mischief returns upon his own head, and on his own skull his violence descends.”** Behold. Consider. Think deeply on this. And learn **wisdom**. In the end, wickedness never pays, and never wins out. Why? Because God is wholly **righteous**. And so in the end, God *does* unleash his sword and loose His arrows, and in the end they *always* hit their mark.

Can you remember, now, where this Psalm started? David was desperate. The enemy was on his heels like a lion chasing his prey. He was being maliciously and falsely accused. He was

completely helpless with no one to deliver. What a miracle it is that a Psalm that begins like that can end like this:

Closing Vow of Thanksgiving and Praise

VII. Psalm 7:17 — I will give to the LORD the thanks due to his righteousness, and I will sing praise to the name of the LORD, the Most High.

We don't know what's happened. For all we know, the lion is still hot on the psalmist's heels. But after praying earnestly to the Lord and preaching earnestly to himself, David sees things, now, with the eyes of an unassailable, unshakable faith. And it's with this same goal of an unassailable, unshakable faith that we also should always be earnestly **praying to the Lord and preaching to ourselves**.

For the last seven verses, there's been no mention of God's covenant name. Maybe that's partly because these verses were mostly concerned with the relationship between God and the wicked – which is not at all a covenant relationship! But now, at the end of the Psalm, we see again God's covenant name—*twice*: “I will give to the LORD [YAHWEH] the thanks due to his righteousness, and I will sing praise to the name of the LORD [YAHWEH], the Most High.”

Conclusion

There is never a day that goes by when God's people should not see the need for praying this Psalm. How passionate are we for the triumph of **righteousness** (and all the **righteous**) and for the defeat of **evil** (and all the **wicked** who refuse to repent)? And how closely do we see our own experience tied together with the experience of the whole church so that my prayer for me is really, always, a prayer for “**all**,” and so that the false accusations leveled against any of God's righteous people anywhere in the world are seen as a threat to *all* of God's *righteous, covenant* people – even as a threat to **me**? Can you see, then, how true it is that there is never a day that goes by when God's people should not see the need for diligently, earnestly praying this Psalm?

If we are “in Christ,” then we are in covenant relationship with God – we have come to know Him *as* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This covenant relationship is all of God's grace. And so it's in the context of this relationship that we, too, should be living in such a way as to always be able to pray with the Psalmist:

“Judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness and according to the integrity that is in me. Oh, let the evil of the wicked come to an end, and may you establish the righteous— **you who test the minds and hearts, O righteous God!**”

In the end, where is David's confidence? Not in his own righteousness, but in the righteousness of God – the God who is always sharpening His sword and bending His bow; the God who is our shield and who saves the upright in heart. “I will give to the LORD the thanks **due to his righteousness**, and I will sing praise to the name of the LORD, the Most High.”

May we truly learn to pray this Psalm to the Lord and preach this Psalm to ourselves. May this Psalm help to conform our prayers more to the shape of what God would have them be!