

## The Book of Psalms

### Psalm 5

#### Opening Prayer

#### *Read Psalm 5*

#### Overview

Psalm 5 is an individual lament psalm spoken in the morning. (5:3) Where Psalm 3 was David's individual lament as he was in hiding from the armies of Absalom, Psalm 5 is obviously a psalm spoken when he is in Jerusalem since he intends to come to the "house of God" in verse 7. The lament is against the enemies of the psalmist who cannot be trusted.

#### Structure

The psalm breaks up nicely into 5 strophes. *Strophe* is a Greek term that means "turn". It was used in Greek theatre and debate as one moved from one argument to the other, one would move from one side of the stage to the other. Psalm 5 fits that comparison very well since it moves between the one focus on the positive at one side and a focus on the negative at the other. It outlines this way:

1. Listen to my words, Lord – 5:1-3 (positive)
2. Evil does not dwell with God – 5:4-6 (negative)
3. Lead me, Lord, in your righteousness – 5:7-8 (positive)
4. Declare evildoers guilty, O God – 5:9-10 (negative)
5. Surely, Lord, you surround them with favor – 5:11-12 (positive)

#### Listen to my words, Lord – 5:1-3 (positive)

:1-2 - David begins with a common invocation asking God to give him an audience to present his requests before him.

- David also calls God, his King. In our lesson on Psalm 2 we talked about how Christ is the final and ultimate fulfillment of the throne of David. Jesus is the true King. One of the helpful ways to think about Jesus' reign is to think of it in terms of 3 particular kingdoms.

1. The kingdom of power – Jesus rules over everything because He is God.
2. The kingdom of grace – Jesus rules over His church on earth through the means of grace, Word and Sacrament

3. The kingdom of glory – Jesus rules over His church in heaven by His very presence as we see in **Revelation 5**.

*Given the understanding of those kingdoms, what does it mean when we pray “Thy kingdom come”?*

- :3 - Depending on the translation you are using for Psalm 5 you may have this verse translated one of three ways:
1. “lay my requests before you” – The translation found in the NIV has in mind the notion of petitions that are brought before the elders at the city gate as in **Ruth 4:1-6**.
  2. “prepare a sacrifice” – This translation found in the RSV and ESV has in mind the morning sacrifices as found in **Exodus 29:39**
  3. “order my prayer” – This translation is found in the NASB and has in mind the practice of morning prayers. **See Psalm 88:13**
- Whichever of these translations you use know that the meaning remains the same. In the morning I present my request to God. The only difference is the context in which each of the translations fits that request.
- “wait expectantly” – The Hebrew here literally means “look out expectantly” and has the connotation of one looking out for someone coming with a message or answer. **See Habakkuk 2:1**
- As we wait for answers to our prayers from God, what are the three answers we may receive?*

Evil does not dwell with God – 5:4-6 (negative)

- :4 - The wicked cannot be in God’s presence and given that David has in mind going to the temple (5:7), he is probably meaning that the wicked may not be in that place. The temple was the visible place of God’s “residence” for David and the Israelites and no wicked person may be in God’s presence.
- :5-6 - The language used in these verses tells you how serious God takes evil and wickedness. God “hates” and “abhors” it. We have a tendency to water down evil and wickedness. We even separate the “sin” from the “sinner” as in “hate the sin but love the sinner”. Such a notion would have been unknown in David’s day and he makes the point that it isn’t the wicked act that the Lord hates, but the wicked themselves.

*What value is there in the idea of “hate the sin but love the sinner”?*

*What might be a better and more biblical way to approach sin?*

**Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-17**

Lead me, Lord, in Your Righteousness – 5:7-8 (positive)

:7 - It is only because of the mercy of God that we are able to come into His presence through Christ. In light of that mercy, David recognizes the need to approach the place of worship with reverence. Reverence should be the hallmark of our approach to God in worship. Even the angels hide their faces from Him in **Isaiah 6:2**.

*What are ways we express reverence in worship?*

*How might we prepare ourselves in coming to worship for proper reverence?*

:8 - “make straight your way before me” – David asks for understanding and clarity on the way of God. He prays that God would mark the path clearly.

Declare evildoers guilty, O God – 5:9-10 (negative)

:9 - “their throat is an open grave” – Probably one of the most interesting phrases in the psalms, but what does it mean? In context of the rest of the verse, it has to do with deceitful speech. Paul quotes it in **Romans 3:13** in the same manner. The words that come out of their throats are so deceitful they lead to people’s destruction and demise. Thus their throats are an open grave ready to receive those who die by their words.

*How can someone’s words be the death of another?*

*What does this tell us about how we should regard those who speak falsely about the Word of God?*

:10 - David uses judicious language in hoping that God would declare them guilty. He states that their own words, “intrigue”, will be their downfall. This is solid evidence in David’s mind to find them guilty.

Surely, Lord, you surround them with favor – 5:11-12 (positive)

:11 - “love Your name” – Loving the name of the Lord and loving the Lord are synonymous in the Old Testament. An entire commandment is dedicated to keeping God’s name holy. **Read Exodus 20:7**.

:12 - The shield referenced in this verse is a full body shield. It wasn’t a *buckler* which was a small shield used in battle and easily maneuvered. It was a large shield more like a *kite shield* which covered the whole person. David’s point is that God’s protection over the righteous is total!

- It might be helpful to also have in mind the image produced by **Ephesians 6:16**. The Roman shield of the time was called a *scutum*. This type of shield was as large as a door and would cover the warrior entirely. Such a shield was not just defensive but could also be used to push opponents. When fighting as a group, a phalanx of soldiers could position their shields so as to form an enclosure around themselves,

called a *testudo* (“tortoise”). This was especially helpful to protect against arrows launched from the walls of cities they were attacking. Shields, often made of wood and then covered in hide, when wet, could extinguish flaming arrows.

### Summary

Recall that this psalm began as an individual lament crying out for God to hear, yet it ends with a declaration about the protection and shielding of the righteous. You have been made righteous in Christ. The psalm is surely a warning against wickedness and evil, but it is also a reassurance that God protects the righteous!

Closing prayer