

The Book of Psalms

Psalm 6

Opening Prayer

Read Psalm 6

Overview

Psalm 6 is an individual lament psalm. It is counted among the seven penitential psalms of the ancient Christian church. (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143) These psalms were used by the church on Ash Wednesday. While there is no direct confession in this psalm of the author's sins, the psalm seems to be almost an addendum to a previous confession. David is awaiting deliverance and forgiveness. (see v.3) His lament is initiated by one of three things:

1. The naturally occurring result of sin and the condition that follows it
2. The imposition of an illness or condition because of sin
3. The innocent suffering caused because of one's enemies.

Of the three, the last seems to fit most reasonably into the psalm, especially given verse 10.

Structure

The psalm is an individual lament and carries with it some of those common characteristics, yet it introduces a greater emphasis on deliverance because of the anguish of the one praying. With that in mind the psalm may be divided thus:

1. The psalmist cries out to God in anguish – 6:1-3
2. The psalmist cries out for God's deliverance – 6:4-5
3. The psalmist reprises how bad his anguish is – 6:6-7
4. The psalmist expresses confidence in the Lord's deliverance – 6:8-10

An additional consideration for the structure of this psalm is the deliberate parallels that tie the initial crying out in verses 2-4 with their answers in verses 9-10. Here are the parallels:

1. 6:2 – “have mercy” with 6:9 “heard my cry for mercy”.
2. 6:4 - “Turn and deliver me” with 6:10 “the enemies will be turned back”.
3. 6:3 – “anguish” of the psalmist is the same word used for the “dismay” of the enemies in 6:10
4. 6:4 – Hebrew *shub* “turn” is duplicated in 6:10 and there it is played against the word for “shamed” *bush*. It is a sound effect missed by the English translation but which certainly would have been picked up in Hebrew ears.

Title

The title of this particular psalm introduces a new idea. We have already seen that certain psalms were written for particular musical instruments. Psalm 4 for “stringed instruments” and Psalm 5 for “flutes”. Now the title carries with it the phrase *according to sheminith*. This seems to be a musical direction and it appears again in the title to Psalm 12. *Sheminith* literally means “eighth”, but is almost certainly a way of playing music or a particular instrument. **Read 1 Chronicles 15:19-22**

The Psalmist Cries Out to God in Anguish – 6:1-3

- :1 - Psalm 38 begins exactly the same way. The verse demands the question, “does God punish merely to mete out his anger?”

Read Hebrews 12:4-13(Proverbs 3:11-12)

Why according to these verses does the Lord discipline us?

What does the Lord’s discipline of us show us?

What makes it hard to receive discipline as “love”?

- :2 - This is a vivid description of how much mental and spiritual anguish affects physical well-being. The psalmist’s use of the term “my bones” is a literary synecdoche for the entire body, not just the bones. Of course, this is a common experience to all human beings.

What tools can we use in dealing with stress, guilt, and other emotional, spiritual, and mental anguish so that it does not affect our physical well-being?

1. Prayer
2. Daily confession
3. Being in community
4. Trusted other Christians

- :3 - “How long” – This is the cry of seemingly unanswered prayer. It occurs in other psalms as well. (74:10; 80:4; 82:2) As hard as the waiting for answer or deliverance is, the Bible also promises that those who await and receive answer from the Lord will be strengthened. **Read Isaiah 40:29-31**

The Psalmist Cries out for God’s Deliverance – 6:4-5

- :4 - “unfailing love” – This is the translation of the Hebrew word, *hesed*. This word occurs 245 times in the Old Testament, 127 of those in the Psalms. It is a reference to the faithfulness of God. It is used in **Exodus 20:6** in reference to those who keep and obey God’s commandments.

How is the “unfailing” idea of God’s love comforting?

:5 - “Sheol” – This Hebrew word is both a place and a state of being. It is used in a wide variety of ways in the Old Testament.

1. The place or state of being opposite of God. *See Deuteronomy 32:22; Isaiah 7:11*

2. The abode of the dead – *See 1 Samuel 2:6; Isaiah 57:9*

3. The place for the wicked – *See Isaiah 5:14; Ezekiel 32:27*

4. Literal grave in the ground – *See Psalm 30:3; 49:14*

- Here is Psalm 6:5, it is probably best to understand Sheol as the literal grave given the context.

- So Sheol doesn’t correspond exactly to the New Testament concept of Hell, although there are certain aspects of it that relate very well.

Why don’t Christians talk about hell much?

The Psalmist Reprises How Bad His Anguish Is – 6:6-7

:6-7 - These two verses will be taken together because they present one extended image from the flooding of the bed with tear to the result that the eyes grow weak because of the tears.

- The psalmist has returned to his anguish to visibly demonstrate its depths. Just as we saw that spiritual and emotional difficulties can affect our physical well-being, so a part of that is the stealing of sleep! We had addressed this previously in Psalm 4 and won’t return to the issue here.

- The use of the word “couch” in verse 6 also suggests the station of the psalmist, since only the well to do could afford couches. Poor people used straw mats as places to sit and sleep in the home.

The Psalmist Expresses Confidence in the Lord’s Deliverance – 6:8-10

:8 - This verse is really a warning to the “evil-doers”. They had best be on their way for now the Lord is about to answer and they won’t want to be around for that. Notice also that David doesn’t cite his complaint or plea, but that the Lord responded to the effect of his anguish, his weeping.

What does this tell us about how the Lord regards what we are going through?

:9 - “The Lord accepts my prayer” – Prayer that is acceptable to God must be offered up in faith. We should pray with supreme confidence that the Lord hears and answers our prayers.

Read 1 John 5:13-15

What according to these verses gives us confidence to go to God in prayer?

:10 - Since God hears and answers prayer those who oppose David will turn back suddenly!

Summary

Psalm 6 is a reminder that we should take all of our cares and concerns to God; especially those things that cause us the deepest anguish and steal our sleep. The Lord hears and answers! The Lord delivers us out of our distress.

Closing Prayer