

The Book of Psalms

Psalm 7

Opening Prayer

Read Psalm 7

Overview

The psalm is an individual lament like Psalms 3-6. The lament of David this time seems to be over accusations made against him by a certain “Cush, the Benjamite”. This “Cush” is unknown in the rest of the Scriptures apart from the title to this psalm. Yet his identification as a “Benjamite” lends credibility to the idea that this psalm is set against the historical background of Saul’s pursuit and war against David. For the entire historical understanding of that setting *see 1 Samuel 18 – 2 Samuel 4*.

The particular focus of this psalm set within the larger issue between David and Saul seems to be an accusation made by this “Cush, the Benjamite” against David and the psalm is both David’s plea of innocence in the charge and his call to the Lord for deliverance from such false accusations. *See 1 Samuel 24:1-15 (note especially v.9)* Additionally, the use of war metaphors throughout the psalm make it likely that this psalm is set against the backdrop of the battle between Saul and David. War metaphors:

1. “sharpen his sword” – 7:12
2. “bent his bow” – 7:12
3. “my shield” – 7:10
4. “flaming arrows” – 7:13

In the end the psalm is a call for the Lord to judge David’s innocence and to mete out judgment against his accusers.

Structure

The psalm could be divided in half by the musical notation of *selah* after verse 5, though with the ambiguity of what *selah* actually means we can’t be sure of why it is positioned after verse 5. Nevertheless, verse 5 does mark a definite change in focus in the psalm and divides the psalm in half. So the structure of the psalm may look like this with 2 parts and subchapters to each.

- I. David’s Innocence Established (7:1-5)
 - a. Prayer for deliverance (7:1-2)
 - b. Innocence established by oath (7:3-5)

- II. Divine Justice Observed (7:6-16)
 - a. Prayer for justice (7:6-8)
 - b. God's justice affirmed (7:9-13)
 - c. Evil's inherent ruin (7:14-16)
- III. Final praise and vow (7:17)

Title

The psalm is called a *shiggaion* of David. This Hebrew musical term occurs only here and as the title of **Habakkuk 3**. It remains a mystery as to what the exact meaning of the term is but it is generally accepted that it meant “a passionate or energetic song”. The Hebrew word may derive from another word which meant “wildly astray” or “reeling”. We are given the historical setting in the title and have addressed it in the overview above.

David's Innocence Established(Prayer for deliverance) – 7:1-2

:1 - “refuge” – There are many terms in the Old Testament for “refuge”, “protection”, “fortress”, etc. David uses a particular term here, *hosah*, which seems to indicate that he sees and seeks refuge at the temple. **Read 1 Chronicles 16:38; 26:16**. *Hosah* was the name of one of the “gatekeepers” of the temple. For David, the temple was the place of God's dwelling upon the earth and the foremost place, therefore, to seek refuge. Since Christ's death and resurrection, we are no longer bound to seek God at a particular geographic location.

If God is with us at all times and not bound to a particular geographic location, what then is the value of sanctuary and gathering in a particular place?

What also is the value of sacramental presence?

:2 - This verse stems from David's own background as a shepherd and what lions could do to sheep. The imagery forms a framework for David's feelings about what might happen if the enemy (Saul) got ahold of him.

David's Innocence Established(Innocence established by oath) – 7:3-5

:3-5 - David gives a threefold oath defending his innocence in these verse. Each of the oaths begins with “if”.

1. “If I have done this...” – 7:3
2. “If I there is injustice in my hands...” – 7:3
3. “If I have rewarded evil to my friend...” – 7:4

- The Hebrew oath also included an invitation to punishment if the oaths are untrue or unfulfilled. Thus here in verse 5, David invites his demise if what he has said is untrue.

When are we permitted and even required to take oaths?

Read Matthew 5:33-37

Do these verses prohibit the taking of oaths completely?

What is the caution given by Jesus in taking oaths?

What is His final command?

- The best translation of verse 5 is “lay my glory in the dust” with the idea being that David’s reputation would be destroyed if his words are untrue.

Divine Justice Observed(Prayer for Justice) – 7:6-8

:6 - “Arise” – David probably has in mind here that the very presence of the Lord brings judgment on the enemies of God. **Read Numbers 10:33-36**. As the ark going before the Israelites brought God’s presence against her enemies, so David calls upon the presence of God to bring justice against his enemies.

- David is inviting God to mete out appropriate judgment between David and his adversaries. Since David is being truthful, he has no fear of what God’s judgment would reveal.

:7 - This verse is best understood as a recognition of God as judge over all the peoples as in **Psalms 2:1**. This understanding is also supported by 7:8 where the peoples are judged.

:8 - This may be the most bold statement that David makes in the entire psalm. He begins with a declaration of what God does and then invites that scrutiny upon himself. David is not claiming “sinlessness” but innocence on the particular accusations of his accusers here. (Cush before Saul) This is made apparent with the parallel of “righteousness” and “integrity”.

What kind of oath may we take that may parallel what David is doing here?

Divine Justice Observed(God’s Justice Affirmed) – 7:9-13

:9 - David proclaims that God judges all the parts of man, both heart and mind. In the Hebrew understanding however, the heart was the center for thoughts. **Read Luke 6:45**. Also in Hebrew, the kidneys were the place of emotions, while in Western thought emotions proceed from the heart. Thus the English translation conveys the correct idea of “hearts and minds”, but in Hebrew the line would read, “For the righteous God tries the kidneys and hearts.”

Why do you think that the Hebrews saw emotions as being located in the kidneys?¹

- :10 - “shield” – this is a different term than what used in Psalm 5:12. There it referred to a full body shield, here the smaller, portable shield is in mind. (*magen*)
- :11 - This verse is just a declaration and reminder that God is a just judge and the reminder comes in preparation for verse 12-13.
- :12-13 - The war imagery is on full display in these verses, but not the battle has shifted from a battle between David and his enemies to a battle between the untruthful enemies and God.
- “Repent” – While this term is often received harshly, there is within it a built in hope. If one does repent, “turn from their current path”, then God would not have to do any of the warlike things pictured.
What does it mean to repent?
How does our confession invite us to this every time we speak it?
 - “bend the bow” – This is not a reference to loading the arrow, but to stringing the bow originally. It may indicate a time for repentance for the arrow is not yet loaded, but it is coming. (verse 13)

Divine Justice Observed(Evil’s Inherent Ruin) – 7:14-16

- :14-16 -These verses deal with what will happen in the repentance called for in verse 12 does not happen. While verse 12-13 dealt with the punishment that God would bring, verses 14-16 show that wickedness itself can turn on its purveyor.
- Similar thoughts are expressed in ***Proverbs 26:27***.
 - Verse 15 is a metaphor for an inept hunter. One of the methods for hunting was to dig a pit and conceal it with vegetation thus allowing for an animal to fall into it. Here the inept hunter falls into the pit he himself has dug. Verse 16 is an interpretation of verse 15.

Read Galatians 6:7

What is Paul’s warning here?

¹ The Greeks carried the same thought and used the term *splagnizomai* to refer to “an emotional anguish that stirred one’s inner parts”.

Final Praise and Vow

:17 - This verse anticipates the final outcome of God's judgment in this matter and David's praise to the Lord after he had been vindicated. His praise is offered to the "Lord Most High" to elevate David's God above any other supposed gods out there.

How does David's praise of the Lord here reflect what our praise should look like?

How does this give us a better understanding of worship?

Summary

David wanted to be vindicated by the justice of God against the false accusations of his enemies. This psalm may serve as a good way for us to respond when we are slandered and lied about. We may leave the justice to God and like David call upon Him to defend and uphold our integrity.

Closing Prayer