



Bible Study
Biblical Theology of Psalms
Lesson 7: Psalm 7

INTRODUCTION

Psalm Summary:

Psalm 7 calls on God to act as Judge between the righteous and the wicked, which means salvation to the righteous and destruction to the wicked.

Outline

1. 1-5 David's Cause
2. 6-11 Call for Judgment
3. 12-17 Justice Executed

OBSERVATION

Psalm 7 was written by David, as the superscription indicates. The occasion is given as, “concerning the words of Cush the Benjamite.” The person named Cush is unknown to us and this incident is also unknown, as it is not in the recorded history we have. From the text of Psalm 7, we can determine the “words of Cush” were slanderous false charges against David.

We cannot be sure of the instance David is referring to, but we do have record of at least two times of false accusation against David. He was falsely accused when he fled from Saul and during the rebellion Absalom led. Considering those two occasions, David's flight from Saul seem the most connected to this Psalm. Refer to David's words to Saul when he spared Saul's life in the cave (1 Samuel 24:9-22), and David's words when he spared Saul's life while the king slept after he had brought he men out after David (1 Samuel 26:1-25). Alternately, the incident during Absalom's rebellion revealed that David continued to have enemies from the tribe of Benjamin late in his reign. Consider the curses against David uttered by Shimei, who was a Benjamite of the house of Saul (2 Samuel 16:5-14).

David sang this Psalm, which is a prayer, to God and it is called a shiggaion. The meaning of this word is unknown. The best guess is that it means something akin to swerving, or rambling. It indicates something changing or being changeable. It could refer to high emotion, or it could refer to the singing as changing or alternating rhythm.

Psalm 7 is closest to an individual lament in content and structure. It is not penitential, as there is no confession of sin, rather, David protests his innocence. This Psalm echoes themes from Psalm 1 in that it contrasts the ways of the righteous with the wicked and the outcomes of their ways being judged. The Psalm includes a petition for God to act and

closes with confident expression of praise to God.

Walk Through Psalm 7

In verses 1-2, David calls on the Lord. He immediately states his status in reference to God. God is David's God. David has put his trust in him, or has taken refuge in him. The word also occurs in Psalm 2:12 and 5:11, where it means that one who has taken refuge in God is safe from God's wrath.

David states the crisis as his present persecution. He compares his enemies to wild lions, with the potential of tearing him to pieces. Enemies are likened to ferocious beasts a number of times in the Psalms. This happens almost exclusively in the Davidic Psalms (Psalms 10:9; 17:12; 22:13; 35:17; 57:4).

In verses 3-5, David pleads his innocence. These verses refer specifically to the slander and false accusations David was suffering from. He protests he is innocent of doing "this" in verse 3. He refers to bribery, or maybe some other injustice, perhaps robbery, and the treachery of betraying his ally in verses 3-4. His counterargument could well refer to his conduct with Saul when he spared Saul's life, and even Saul pronounced him righteous.

David is not pleading self-righteousness, or righteousness in an absolute sense. He is protesting his innocence of the doings he has been accused of. He claims he is undeserving of what his enemies want to do to him. He states that if he is guilty, he will submit to his enemies' vengeance. He would submit to the taking of his life and the taking of his crown, or kingship. The word for honor is the Hebrew *kavod* we have already seen in Psalm 3:3 and 4:2. Those verses refer to David's kingship.

Verses 6-9 use legal language as a court summons. David calls for God to arise in anger for the purpose of executing judgment. Verse 7 images a court scene. The phrase "return thou on high" refers to God on his throne over, or above. It is a reference to God's universal kingship and his rightful position as Judge and Avenger. David confidently calls to the court assembly and God's judgment because he pleads his innocence in the case of the charges made against him in verse 8.

Verse 9 shows the function of the righteous Judge to end wickedness and establish the just. David states God's righteousness as Judge who tries the inner thoughts and motives of men as well as outward actions. David calls God to act now and these verses seem a gentle complaint that God has not already acted in this case.

In verses 10-13, David's confidence is based on God's character as righteous Warrior. He looks for defense and salvation from the righteous Judge. God's judgment is just and right. He determines the righteous and vindicates them. God is not indifferent to the wicked, but expresses wrath against them daily. David is not calling for the final judgment, but for judgment now, which does come.

The imagery of God as a warrior Judge come through the imagery of God wielding weapons

to take vengeance on the wicked. This is frequent imagery in the Psalms (Psalms 18:14; 21:12; 64:7; 144:6). The imagery also connects with God's promise of temporal judgment in the law (Deuteronomy 28:1-2, 7; 30:15-20; 32:41-42).

The first phrase of verse 12 indicates repentance. God's patience and longsuffering provides space for repentance. These attributes also explain why his judgment seems to be delayed.

Verses 14-16 describe the type of temporal judgment that reveals God's wrath. The wicked are given over and taken by their own devices. Paul described this as God's wrath already being revealed in advance of final judgment (Romans 1:18-32).

Verse 14 uses birth imagery to speak of the wicked conceiving mischief, carrying iniquity, and giving birth to lies. The imagery speaks to the thorough inner corruption of the wicked. It reminds us of Jesus' reference to a bad tree bringing forth bad fruit (Luke 6:43-45).

Verse 17 ends the Psalm with praise. God is the righteous Judge, so David could safely trust him. God is Yahweh Elyon, Lord Most High. His universal kingship is his position over all his creation, with the right and power to execute justice in the earth.

INTERPRETATION

What does Psalm 7 teach?

God as Judge

Psalm 7 teaches the character of God as Judge and Executioner (6-16). God properly discerns between the righteous and the wicked (8-12). His judgment is just. The righteous are saved, or delivered, from his wrath. The wicked are condemned and destroyed. There will be no escape and no hiding from God. His judgment will go thoroughly to the inner parts of man as well as judging his outward actions (9, 14).

That God is angry daily indicates he is not indifferent to wickedness and he will not forget or neglect judgment (11). There are no loopholes. No one will just slide by unnoticed. The imagery of God as Warrior also shows his readiness to carry out the sentence he passes. He will fully punish those he declares guilty.

Mercy in Judgment

Psalm 7 also teaches God's mercy in judgment. David appeals to God's covenant as he takes refuge in him. God's righteousness means he will fairly and fully judge all sin. It also means he will save all who put their trust in him, all those whom he declares righteous.

What seems like a delay in God's judgment is more accurately his patient mercy. The wicked sin and seem to prosper, but that is not an indication of God's indifference. God is not unmoved by evil, but he is patient and graciously gives opportunity for repentance.

Messianic Hope

The immediate context is a call for temporal judgment in David's time to execute vengeance on his enemies and effect deliverance for David. All expressions of temporal judgment are figures of future judgment to come.

David's plea for justice to be done in the earth is the hope for the coming of the Messiah and his kingdom. David refers to God's kingship and we have already see, especially in Psalm 2, how his universal kingship ensures the coming of God's Son, who will execute judgment in the earth. The Messiah is pictured as that avenging warrior in his coming in such passages as Isaiah 63:1-6 and Revelation 19:11-21.

David's plea reminds of the souls under the altar in Revelation 6:9-10. They are crying out for vengeance. David's prayer for justice to be done in the earth is a prayer for the coming of God's kingdom, Jesus taught the disciples to pray (Matthew 6:10).

David also saw the threat of his anointed kingship being laid in the dust (5). His call for God to act was a call for God to keep his covenant promise. That promise is fulfilled in David's Son inheriting the everlasting kingdom.

APPLICATION

What does Psalm 7 say to modern readers?

1. Understanding Psalm 7 help us understand the present prosperity of the wicked. Christ's kingdom has not yet come, so justice is not yet being executed throughout the earth. We may not understand God's timing and how events fit together, but we do know why the wicked can prosper right now.
2. Understanding Psalm 7 helps us understand the times as space for repentance. Now is the time for preaching the Gospel and the repentance the Gospel requires. Now is the time for warning about the judgment to come.
3. Understanding Psalm 7 helps us to praise God and trust him as David did. No matter what the circumstances of your life now, if you believe in Jesus Christ, then you have refuge from the wrath of God. His terrible weapons will not be turned on you. This age will end exactly as God has willed it to end, and you will be on the right side of the righteous judge, if you are in Christ.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

This series is a study in biblical theology of the book of Psalms. Each lesson typically covers one Psalm. This PDF is provided for personal study, small group study, or use in a church class. Unless otherwise noted, all lessons have been prepared by Jeff Short, the pastor of Harmony Baptist Church.

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