

## The Psalms

### Psalm 1: Divergent Paths and Destinations

Psalm 1 was most likely written by David as an introduction to Psalm 2 concerning the rebellion of mankind and God's resultant plan of reconciliation through His Son. Psalm 1 teaches the doctrine of the two ways, two paths, or two roads that mankind may take in their journey through life. It is interesting that the biblical perspective is that there are only two choices--God's way or man's way. Religious leaders and philosophers may try to convince you that there are many ways, or even that it doesn't matter which way as long as you are good. Nevertheless, the Bible is very clear that from God's perspective there are only two ways, His way and all other ways lumped together.

Jesus summed up His longest recorded sermon, the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, by teaching that there are only two gates and two ways (Matt.7:13-23). The narrow gate and the way less traveled leads to the kingdom of heaven, but the wide gate and the crowded way leads to destruction. The narrow gate seems restrictive, so most will choose the wide gate that leads to Broadway Avenue. Broadway is the path of least resistance that appears right to man. There are many appealing "false prophets" that are leading the majority to Broadway by telling them a very positive message that they want to hear. In this conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus wraps it up by giving His audience the choice of ways by using a series of contrasts between two gates, two roads, two trees, two houses, and two foundations (Matt.7:13-29). The Apostle John summed it up very nicely in 1 Jn.5:11-12, "God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life".

#### Psalm 1

In this short psalm, the author contrasts two kinds of people, two ways of living, and two destinies. I take it that this is a divine evaluation of the human race. In verse 1-2 we can see the contrasting images of the two kinds of people. The lifestyle of the godly does not follow the teaching of the wicked, hang out in evil places or with evil people. The godly do not side with those who mock God. This is done with false teaching, disobedient living, profane speech or actions--in short, unbelievers who do things their way. We could call v.1 "the power of negative thinking" because of the way the psalmist portrays it, "does not walk...does not stand...does not sit". By way of contrast in v.2, the godly delight in God's Word and God's prescribed way of living. In English it is translated "God's law". This perplexes many who wonder how anybody could delight in a bunch of rules, but in Hebrew the word is Torah which was used for the first five books of the Bible, therefore he is referring to the whole of God's revelation to Moses. Ultimately he is talking about the person who delights in meditating on and knowing God and His will. The godly people delight in and are blessed by knowing God's Word, God's way, and what God desires them to do.

The effective method the psalmist used was known as parallelism which is the repeating the same thing in a different way in two linked lines. In v.1 you have three linked lines repeating the same truth of blessing to those who don't "walk", "stand", or "sit" with the "wicked", "sinners", or "scoffers". Why would anybody follow the wicked sinners? Keep in mind that this is from God's perspective not man's. The counsel, path, and seat actually have the appearance to the worldly of wisdom, pleasure, and security. Paul said it well in 2 Cor.11:14-15, "Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness". The worldly way seems exciting, pleasurable, and prosperous, but it is the way of emptiness and frustration.

In v.2 we might expect the godly man to be described by way of his associations, but he is described as being delighted in the Word of God which he meditates on, and through which he is blessed by God.

#### Bearing Fruit for God

Verse 3-4 contrast two images of two ways of living and the results of those ways. The godly person is likened to a fruitful tree well planted in good soil next to clean water which yields much fruit. According to this image, if you are living for the Lord, in everything you do you will prosper. In the contrast in v.4, the unbeliever is compared to chaff blowing in the wind. They are lightweights, and have no permanence. This is the image of the threshing floor at harvest time. The grain is separated from the stalk, but still is surrounded by the worthless chaff. They would crush it and throw it into the air so that the heavier grain fell, but the lightweight chaff blew away in the wind. Unbelievers are like chaff in that they have no permanence or substance.

#### God Knows Who Is Who

Make no mistake about it, God knows who is who. He knows the grain from the chaff. Unfortunately, we as people don't always know--we are terrible judges. In His parable in Matt.13 of the wheat and the tares, Jesus even commanded us to not try to make those judgments, but to wait and allow Jesus to separate the wheat from the tares when He comes back to judge

the world. Nevertheless, rest assured that the “wicked” (in God’s sole view) will not be able to “stand” in that judgment, meaning that they will not be able to justify themselves. In the concluding verses 5 and 6 of Psalm 1, God guarantees justice. Appearances are deceiving now to us, but God knows. Solomon wrote in his Proverbs, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to destruction.” Here we find two destinies for two different kinds of people.

## **I’m Making My List**

You may be thinking way out ahead of me, and trying to decide who the different people contrasted in Psalm 1 are. Who is the “blessed man” and who is the “sinner”? Who is the fruit yielding tree and who is the chaff? Who are the righteous and who are the wicked?

When we start making these judgments we must remember that Jesus Himself associated with known sinners, and when He was asked why, He replied that healthy people don’t need doctors, only the sick need doctors. In the same way, Jesus’ purpose statement was that He came to give His life as a ransom to redeem sinners. The Pharisees went away perplexed at these statements, but we the student studying the Gospels realize that Jesus was saying that the Pharisees were only self-righteous. They were not righteous in God’s eyes. If you doubt this just read Matt. 23 where Jesus pronounces a series of “Woes” on the Pharisees with a climatic statement in verse 33, “you brood of vipers, how shall you escape the sentence of hell?” Therefore, by saying that He came to save sinners, we find that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”, and so all of us need God’s grace to be saved.

Well, you say, it is obvious who the good people are and who the bad people are. We have them all sorted out in our mind, but let us just review all the biblical characters that we normally regard as righteous: Abraham was disobedient and went to Egypt, lied, sold his wife, then came back and had a child with the slave from Egypt, Hagar. Jacob’s very name came to mean deceiver as he lied to and tricked his father and brother. Then Jacob was married to four wives at the same time. Judah married an evil idol worshipping Canaanite, and Judah was a regular visitor to pagan prostitutes. Moses was a murderer. Gideon was polygamous and led Israel into idolatry. David committed adultery and murder. In the New Testament, Paul murdered Christians, and wrote of himself that, “I am the foremost of all sinners”. Space prohibits me from reviewing the lives of all the characters, but needless to say they were not righteous in and of themselves. They were righteous in God’s eyes as the Bible says in Romans 4:3-8, “Abraham believed God, and God reckoned it to him as righteousness”, and David was forgiven by God and declared righteous because of his belief in God. The only way any of us have the righteousness that God requires is through faith as Paul wrote in Phil.3:9, “I have no righteousness of my own, but I have a righteousness which is through faith in Christ”.

## **Seeking, Serving, and Knowing**

The first time I read Ps.1, it seemed very legalistic to me. At first I thought he was saying that the righteous only went to the right places and hung out with the right people. It sounded like they did nothing but study God’s laws all day or do good works. Upon further review, I realize David couldn’t have been talking about himself (or anybody else) if this were true. Therefore, the two kinds of people in Ps.1 are believers who respond to God’s grace, and unbelievers who do not. This is perfectly consistent with Jesus’ teaching in Matt.7.

David was painting a picture of what believers and unbelievers look like. Believers do not participate in the wicked lifestyle of unbelievers. Instead they delight in God’s Word, and desire to study it. Believers yield good fruit for the Lord through their service. The destiny of believers is to be judged as righteous by God based on the atoning work of Christ on the cross. Unbelievers delight in the things of this world while believers look forward to the things God has in store for them in Heaven. Through their seeking and serving the Lord, the righteous come to know God as they abide in a relationship with God. After digesting this Psalm about the 2 men, the 2 ways, and the 2 destinies, we are now prepared to study Ps.2, so read ahead.

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## **Psalm 2: Revolt of the Nations**

According to Acts 4:25, David wrote Psalm 2, and he was inspired by the Holy Spirit. Psalm 2 is quoted by Christ’s disciples in Acts 4 in order to explain why Peter and John had been arrested and commanded not to preach the Gospel again. On a larger

scale, Ps.2 also explained why Herod, Pilate, and the Jewish religious leaders had all conspired together to have Christ crucified. These leaders had never gotten along before, and rarely agreed on anything. They were the most unlikely union of leaders imaginable, yet they had come together to crucify Christ.

In Paul's great sermon at Pisidian Antioch, found in Acts 13:14-48, Paul quoted Ps.2:7 as referring to Jesus, "Thou art My Son, today I have begotten you". Paul was stating that Jesus' incarnation and resurrection fulfilled the Old Testament promises of redemption and forgiveness that they were all looking for. Paul also attested to David as the inspired author of Ps.2.

David's writing had both a near term view of his time and a far view of the coming of Christ. David understood himself to be uniquely empowered and chosen by God. His authority was from God, as he was God's mediator on earth, yet he was opposed by many of his own people along with the other nations against him. Ultimately, God was speaking through David referring to the rebellion of mankind against God, and the rejection of the Messiah, the Son of God. The Jewish leaders along with the leaders of the Gentiles formed an unlikely alliance to oppose God's redemptive plan for mankind. They vainly and foolishly sought to set up their own kingdom to replace the true Kingdom of God. Psalm 2 announces that the Gentile world along with Israel will only find fulfillment and lasting joy as subjects of the king that God will send into the world, a ruler who will be more than a mere man---the Son of God.

## **It's a Mad, Mad, Mad World**

Remember that wild zany movie made in the early sixties with all the famous comedians-Jonathon Winters, Sid Caesar, Milton Bearle, Mickey Rooney, etc? The plot was about all the various unique people who just happened to come together on the highway to witness the accident and death of a bank robber whose last words were where he buried all his money. They were all different except one character trait common to all humans---they were selfish and greedy. Jimmy Durante played the part of the dying guy whose "hook" was very much like the devil's; "You can be rich, have it all, live like a king." The underlying message was to stop living the straight and narrow way, don't follow the rules, instead with an opportunity like this, just don't tell. The police came and the lying, conniving, and paranoia began. For the rest of the movie all the characters spin out of control, and in the end even Spencer Tracy (the police captain) becomes crooked. It started out as just a white lie, then they all united against the law, next thing you know they are all warring with each other---they couldn't share, couldn't agree, and the whole thing became a furious competition that none of them were qualified to win. The whole world went MAD. They thought there was something out there that was better; if they just knew something else, had something else they could be a king, so they listen to Jimmy Durante (the devil), and they enter into a lifetime of chasing something that's not there with the consequences of anxiety, anger, frustration, depression, and repressed guilt.

I hope you noticed that somewhere in my description I jumped the fence and started talking about life on planet earth. Of course that was what that movie was all about---real life. The whole world is out there chasing some dream that they think will bring them happiness, yet God created us to be fulfilled by serving and glorifying Him. The human race is very busy in an intense competition to do everything and anything but serve and glorify God.

What would cause Sid Caesar to get in a 1917 Sopwith Camel flown by an octogenarian, while Mickey Rooney got in another airplane flown by a drunk guy? Why would Jonathon Winters totally destroy a gas station, and Spencer Tracy go over to the dark side? They were chasing the elusive dream of freedom, autonomy, riches, and ultimately the right to rule over their own lives. This is what David wrote Psalm 2 about, "Let us break the bonds (God's laws) that bind us and cast away the cords" (Ps.2:3). In the movie, the story pans from one group of characters to another all flailing about in futility---nobody can get there. In the end, nobody gets the prize, the treasure, the great fulfillment of their desires. The money ends up fluttering away in the wind. Just as Solomon wrote at the end of his life, "It was all like chasing after the wind".

## **Psalm 2**

Many scholars will debate whether Ps.2 was really written about the Messiah, specifically Jesus Christ. According to the New Testament authors like Peter, Paul, Luke, and the author of Hebrews, Psalm 2 is about the rebellion of mankind against God, the resultant plan of God to send His Son, the "anointed one" (which means Messiah), and their rejection of God's anointed one. God the Father issued a decree to give His Son dominion over them, and Psalm 2 is just one of the passages we have to confirm that.

Last week we studied Ps.1, which I think David wrote as an introduction to Ps.2. In Psalm 1 we have the doctrine of the two ways, the contrast of the unbeliever going his own way scoffing at God, and the believer who is seeking God according to the truth God has provided. Now in Psalm 2, the way of the unbeliever becomes a cosmic revolt of the nations against God and

His Anointed. It unfolds the wrong path and its consequences. The righteous man of Psalm 1 is now seen to be God's Son, and it is by taking refuge in Jesus that the coming judgment can be avoided.

The structure of Ps.2 can be broken down into four sections, each with its own speaker. The first section is v.1-3 and the speakers are the world rulers who join together in an international conspiracy against the authority of God and His Representative. They are very unlikely co-conspirators like Herod, Pilate, and Caiphas (the high priest) who have nothing in common but their mutual rejection of Jesus. In the same way, the kings and rulers of the earth are united in rebellion against God and against God's plan of redemption. The benevolent rule of God is seen as bondage in v.3, "Let us tear their (God and Jesus) bonds apart, and cast away their cords from us!" They see God's plan and His way as a limit to their freedom and independence. After all don't most people believe that there are many ways to heaven? Can't you just choose your own way? Isn't it too restrictive, too narrow, and unreasonable to expect everyone to conform to one narrow way? Doesn't it inhibit our freedom to be told we must submit to this one narrow restrictive relationship with Christ?

Section two (v.4-6), gives God's response to these questions as well as God's response to the demands of the kings and rulers of v.3. GOD LAUGHS. In v.4-6 God is the speaker who responds to the rebellion. I'm not sure, but I think this is one of the few places where God is seen openly laughing. There are many where it is implied, but here in v.4 it says, "He who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord scoffs at them". God is enthroned in heaven as He is the power that is out of this world. He created the world and all that is in it. What a joke it is that these earthbound created beings that have no more significance or power than a speck of sand, presume to reject His rightful authority. God sees them, knows them, and is unconcerned. In v.5 we read that God will ultimately terrify them with His judgment, and in v.6 we read that in the end God will install HIS KING to rule from His holy mountain, Zion. Zion is in Jerusalem where David built his throne, so this conforms to God's promise to David in 2 Sam.7:16 that David's descendant would rule the world in the kingdom of God. You may be surprised that God laughs at people's arrogance, but just think about how absurd it is that a weak creature should become a critic of the all powerful Creator.

In section 3 of Ps.2, the Son, the Anointed One of God speaks. In v.7 we read, "Thou art my Son, today I have begotten Thee." This is Jesus quoting God the Father's words to Him. Turn to the New Testament and the same words of God spoken to Jesus are found in several places. At Jesus' baptism, and then again at the transfiguration, all the Gospel writers record God saying, "This is My beloved Son"(Matt.3:17;17:5). Paul also quoted Ps.2:7 in his sermon found in Acts 13:33 to be fulfilled by the incarnation and resurrection. Can there be any doubt that Ps.2:8-9 is referring to the second coming of Christ when Jesus will come as the conquering king "to rule with a rod of iron"? Does v.9 sound like those who are so arrogant now will be broken then? In God's amazing program, He is now allowing people to do as they please and it seems like the world leaders are resisting Him, but the Bible leaves no doubt that God is patient now allowing all who will come to Him to come, but there will be a day of reckoning. Hebrews 2:8 says "today we do not see everything subject to Him", but hold on, Christ is indeed coming.

In section 4(v.10-12), I believe the speaker is the Holy Spirit (through David) warning all the people of the earth to "Worship the Lord with reverence, and rejoice in Him with trembling. Do homage to the Son." The consequences otherwise are that God's wrath will be kindled and you will perish eternally. All who submit to God now will avoid divine wrath then, and they will find refuge in Him and be blessed. One of the worst persecutors of Christians ever was the Emperor Diocletian who boasted on ancient coins that we have found that "the name of Christ has been extinguished". Rome fell, its emperors are all dead, and today no one has ever heard of Diocletian, so is the fate of all who oppose God.

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### **Psalm 3: Betrayed**

David wrote Psalm 3 about his experiences and feelings during his flight from his rebellious back-stabbing son Absalom. The story of David's trouble with Absalom began in 2 Samuel 13. David had at least six wives from whom he had children. The Old Testament patriarchs and kings were very bad examples of not fulfilling God's original intent and purpose in marriage being between one man and one woman. They took advantage of their position to have multiple wives. We as the students of the Bible can't help but notice that this never turns out well. In David's case it created Peyton Place times ten. In his family, incest, rape, murder, and rebellion were the norm. In 2 Sam.13, David's son Absalom by his wife Maacah, had a sister named Tamar. David's son Amnon, by his wife Ahinoam lusted greatly for his half sister Tamar. Through deception, Amnon tricked

David into sending Tamar into Amnon's bedroom. In 2 Sam.13:14, we are told that Amnon "was stronger than she, he violated her and lay with her. Amnon's own guilt and shame for this crime caused him to hate her afterwards, so he threw her out and treated her like trash. How did David's family get along? P.T. Barnum used to have an exhibit in his carnival entitled "The Happy Family". It was supposed to be a pictorial of the Kingdom of God as depicted by Isaiah 11:6 "the lion will lay down with the lamb". Barnum put some lions and tigers in a cage with some lambs. The press asked him if it was working out, and he replied, "Apart from replenishing the lambs daily, they get along very well together."

Absalom must have read Shakespeare about "revenge is a dish best served cold" because he acted like he didn't care and waited two full years to get revenge (I know Shakespeare was 2600 years later). At that time, Absalom hatched his own devious plan to kill Amnon which his servants carried out at Absalom's orders. Now earlier, David should have intervened to punish Amnon, but didn't. Then Absalom used David as a sap in his plot to murder Amnon. In both cases of the crimes committed by David's sons, they deserved the death penalty, but David did not follow through out of misplaced love and compassion for his sons. Absalom went into banishment for a while, but David let Absalom come back home in 2 Sam.14:21. After Absalom was reunited to King David, he used David's kindness to pull off a coup d'etat. Absalom hired a bunch of political "spin miesters" to travel around in chariots constantly telling the people propaganda promoting Absalom and denigrating David. Absalom would also stand at the gate in Jerusalem, where everybody would be coming and going, and say, "If I was the king I would give you what you want or rule in your favor on any suit you had, I would give you justice." In this way "Absalom stole away the hearts of the people". This sounds too much like our elections, but I guess human nature was the same then as now.

Absalom sent spies out across Israel to prepare the way for his rebellion against his father. When David finally discovered the plot against him, he fled Jerusalem with his servants and a remnant of faithful followers. As David walked up the Mt. of Olives he wept openly as he was deeply grieved because of the betrayal by his beloved son Absalom. As if things were not bad enough, a low life guy named Shimei came out cursing David and threw stones at the deposed King of Israel. This guy was really unfairly "piling on" David. One of David's men, Abishai, offered to go over and remove the guy's head, but David told him not to. Then David said something very profound, "Perhaps the Lord will look on my affliction and return good to me instead of his cursing" (2 Sam.16:12). In this context David wrote Psalm 3.

## **Blindsided, Sucker Punched**

David woke up one day as usual in Jerusalem to all his kingly duties to carry out all his normal activities of serving the nation and his family. Suddenly, out of nowhere he was blindsided, betrayed by his own son Absalom whom David had done so much for. David had forgiven him, pardoned him, and helped him, but now David's heart was ripped out and trampled on. Most of the army and citizens had gone over to Absalom who promised them "pie in the sky". How did David feel? How did he pray? What did God answer? In Psalm 3 we get to read David's diary (so to speak).

## **The Plight and Complaint of a Broken Hearted Father**

In Ps.3:1-2, David wrote that his adversaries were increasing, they were all against him. It seemed overwhelming to him. One time I said something similar to v.1. I said, "Everybody is against me!" A nearby smart Alec said, "No they are not, because everybody doesn't know you yet!" David's generals, counselors, and soldiers were going over to Absalom. David was desperately seeking a way out, but he saw only his ever increasing enemies pressing closer, and seeking to kill him. In v.2, his enemies were harassing him by boasting that God had forsaken him. This had credibility with David because he had been so convicted of his sin with Bathsheba. I can't imagine any trial that you or I might have to go through being as bad as David's, but maybe someone you loved betrayed you. Maybe your spouse left you, or your children disappointed you. Maybe a business partner you trusted cheated you. These kinds of betrayals leave a hole in our heart that only God can repair. We can relate to David's pain. Can you imagine the humiliation for a truly great man like David with immeasurable accomplishments to be run out of town by a vain scoundrel like Absalom?

## **Selah**

At the end of verse 2, the text says Selah, and then there is a gap in the verses. No one knows for sure exactly what it means, but it conveys the idea of a pause for effect. Some of my Seminary professors used to suddenly announce SELAH. When they said this everybody looked up and paid attention. They announced earlier that whenever they said this, what came before and after would be on the test. The Psalmists used that word like that also to get our attention, and get us to dwell on what he was saying. The next two words in v.3 are always a great blessing, "But God". His circumstances seem terrible, but God is a shield to him, and God lifts up David's head. You can imagine David's humiliation, guilt, and shame as he walked away from Jerusalem, but God lifted him up. David's faith and prayers kept him going, and God was faithful to protect him. In v.4, David said he was crying out to the Lord, and God answered him. We have a pivot from fear and anxiety in v.1-4 to peace and confidence in v.5 and 6.

## **Peace and Confidence**

In the midst of great turmoil, how is it possible to have peace, freedom from anxiety, and a good night's sleep? David simply said, "The Lord sustains me." I can't help but think that this is what Paul was describing in Phil.4:6-7, "the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds". It is a supernatural peace that only God can give. I'm sure he began by worshipping God, recalling God's character, remembering all that God had done in the past, as well as what God promised for the future. I like to remember what God promised Jeremiah in 29:11-12, "For I know the plans that I have for you, plans for welfare and not calamity to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me and I will listen to you." What was David's prayer? Verse 7 was very specific in his requests to the Lord about the upcoming battle. Basically David recalled how God had given him victory in the past. God had always been with him before so David trusted him again. His enemies are like wild beasts with strong jaws who bite their prey and will not let go. The only freedom from these beasts is to break their jaw, and shatter their teeth. David's request in v.7, "Arise O Lord" indicates that God has been silent, seemingly absent, but now at the crisis point God will save him. God will use powerful measures to break the bite of the seemingly insurmountable enemies.

David's conclusion in v.8 is the basis for David's trust in the Lord---Salvation can only come from the Lord, and God blesses His people.

When the adversary attacks, appearances are deceiving. It appears that there is no place to go. It appears everyone is against you. It appears that there is no solution to the problem. David's opening verses are much like my feelings to adversity---God has abandoned us. We are not worthy of His help, and worst of all we need to turn elsewhere for help. Elsewhere usually means the ends justify the means which almost always includes some lying and deception. Nevertheless, we can study David's life and see that in spite of appearances, God loves us and has a plan for our life to do good for us in the end. Therefore David concluded, even before God delivered him from Absalom, that he would rest in God's salvation, and trust in His blessings.

Martin Luther said it well in his famous hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God"

"and though this world with devils filled  
does threaten to undo us  
we will not fear for God has willed  
His triumph through us"

CHARLIE TAYLOR

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## **Psalm 4: A Plea to God with a Critique of Men**

David wrote Psalm 4 under adverse circumstances that appear to be the same as Ps.3 when Absalom revolted against his father, King David. Try to put yourself in David's place of shock and surprise at his ingrate son sneak attacking him. Absalom and his allies were saying terrible lies about David, and making outrageous promises to the people that they could never keep. Consider that Absalom for months had been hanging around the courthouse telling everyone that had a case that he was on their side. Only a politician can be on two opposing sides at once. In 2 Samuel 15:3, Absalom said "See, your claims are good and right, but no man listens to you on the part of the king. Oh that they would appoint me judge in the land...I would give justice." Absalom went about kissing and hugging until "Absalom stole away the hearts of the men of Israel." Then in v.12 we read that "the conspiracy was strong, for the people increased continually with Absalom." David was going about his business working hard and serving the people when out of nowhere he was blindsided by the slander, the intrigue, and then the rebellion.

Within this context of heartache, shock, and distress, David wrote Psalm 3-4 as a plea to God for help, and a plea for justice to prevail. As David pleads with God, he also gives a scathing critique of the nature of man. David's good reputation has actually become a liability. The worthless and deceptive men actually appear to be winning, and God doesn't intervene---they are getting away with it. Nevertheless, in spite of appearances, David knows that God will honor the godly man, and that God actually hears his prayers even though for a little while the wicked seem to prevail. Therefore David's advice is to meditate on the Word of God, do not sin, and keep the faith. The majority will go with whoever promises them the most, but eventually the

light of God's truth will break through the darkness. The thought of this put gladness in David's heart, gave him peace, and made him feel secure even in an insecure situation.

## Take It to the Lord

Like all of us, David has some enemies and some grievances that were unresolved. In Ps.4:1, David takes his case directly to the Lord. David believed that God alone is truly righteous and unbiased. God is above partisanship—even immune to influence peddlers and lobbyists. We never know why people make the decisions they make. Who can forget the juror who voted for OJ Simpson because the accusing witness snapped her fingers? I remember she said, "I didn't like her. I thought, don't be snappin your fingers at me!" God alone is above all that, therefore He knows the psalmist's heart, and He will answer his prayer. David wrote that God had relieved his distress. The Hebrew phrase indicated that his distress was restricting him, or he felt pressure---circumstances were closing in on him. He felt trapped, surrounded, and as if there were no way out. In those circumstances, David prayed for God to "Be gracious to me". Who among us doesn't need more of God's grace? We need God's generous provisions to us as we struggle in a hostile environment called life on planet earth. It is not as if David, or any of us, deserves it, but we believe that God loves us, and He is generous with His gifts. This is a good principle to remember, always make your requests based on God's attributes. If you want to make God laugh, just pray that God should grant your requests because you are a good person and you deserve it. All of the awesome prayers of men like David, Daniel, and Hezekiah that were granted by God, appealed to God based on God's attributes.

## Critique of Human Nature

In Ps.4:2, David cries out to God with a question that is asked by most of the authors of the Bible, "how long?" How long will God allow evil? How long will crooks prosper? How long until depravity is punished? The prophet Habakkuk asked, "Why don't you do something?", and to his amazement God answered, "I am doing something that you wouldn't believe if I told you." When God told Habakkuk that He was raising up the fierce army of the Chaldeans to come and destroy Israel, Habakkuk said, "I don't believe it!" My point is that God is doing something huge that is way over our heads, and has eternal significance. David's comments express his dismay at God's delay in judging leaders who seek false gods. These followers of Absalom "love worthlessness and seek falsehood". This is the vanity of selfishness that provokes only self interest over justice. In contrast to these selfish men, the Lord has set apart some for Himself to serve the Lord instead of themselves (obviously David has in mind himself). David has faith that in spite of the current situation, the Lord hears his prayers and will soon respond with justice(v.3).

To all believers who find themselves in adverse circumstances, David offers the advice of v.4, "Fear God and do not sin; meditate on the Lord when you lie down...and trust in the Lord." Since God's Word promises that in the future God will bring justice, meditate that justice is coming and rest in your faith.

## Pragmatism

In v.6, David is saying that the "many" are making their decisions based on selfish reasons of what leader will do them the most good (sounds like our elections). In David's historical struggle with Absalom, this is precisely what happened. The majority went with the pragmatic view that Absalom would do them the most good. I remember that great line in the movie "Jerry McGuire" when the sports agent asked his pro football client what he wanted him to do for him. His answer expressed the view of most of humanity in a very simple four word sentence, "SHOW ME THE MONEY!"

In contrast to the above world view, David appealed to God in Ps.4:6 to reveal the truth, or lift up the light of God's presence and nature to them. In answer to this request to reveal Himself, God put "gladness in my heart". While the materialistic followers of Absalom were awash in "grain and new wine"(v.7), David was more than satisfied with the internal spiritual joy in the Lord. I think we all know that even if we have all the stuff in the world, we are poor without the One True God that we were created to love and experience. My favorite passage about riches is the example of Jesus that Paul wrote about in 2 Corinthians 8:9, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich (in heaven), yet for your sake He became poor (the incarnation), that you through His poverty might become rich."

## The Peace That Surpasses Our Understanding

When we consider David's situation when he wrote this Psalm, it becomes very difficult to understand how he could have any peace, much less restful sleep. He, the King of Israel, had been run out of Jerusalem. Many of his closest friends and advisors were now against him. His own son whom he loved was trying to kill him. Everything he had worked for, even the fate of the entire nation, hung in the balance. To make matters worse, Absalom occupied David's house and co-habited with David's concubines "in the sight of all Israel."(2 Sam.16:22). This was particularly interesting because Nathan the prophet had predicted years earlier that there would be evil from within David's own household to the extent that someone in his family would take his wives and lie with them in broad daylight (2 Sam.12:11). Absalom did just that. How did Nathan know? As

Daniel said, "There is a God in heaven that reveals mysteries." Within this context, David had a supernatural peace---the peace of God, a spiritual peace that only God can give. He was not talking about an absence of conflict, there was conflict all around. He was expressing the faithful assurance of God's presence, favor, and the fulfillment of God's promises.

## **Show Me the Money !**

Many of the characters in the Bible struggled with the same issues that David struggled with in Psalm 4. One character trait of fallen human nature is that they view religion as a vehicle for material blessing. We can't help but feel that if we obey God and "do the right thing", then we will naturally be blessed (materially). Then, when calamity comes our way, we say or at least feel, "What did I do to deserve this?" This reminds me of Satan's claim on Job. God had said "Consider my servant Job". Satan's response was to say that Job followed the Lord because of what he got out of it. Satan then asked a question we should all ask about ourselves, "Does Job fear God for nothing?" By this he meant that Job expected material blessings from God, and this was his motivation for serving God. It is a valid question, "Will a man serve God for nothing?" If everything goes against you, if your health and wealth is taken away, will you still be able to say what Job said, "Though He slay me, I will hope in Him." What we discover in adversity, as Job did, is that God deserves to be served and worshipped just because of Who He is and for no other reason.

While the Absaloms of this world are yelling "Show Me the Money", David and Job believed in God, and held on to their faith not because of the benefits, they lost everything, but because He is the One True God, the Creator who deserves their worship strictly because of Who He is. SELAH

CHARLIE TAYLOR

Download: [Psalm 4](#)

## **Psalm 5: Approaching the Lord**

We can't be sure of David's circumstances when he wrote Psalm 5, but it is obvious that it was in the midst of adverse circumstances. In his adventurous life, David had no shortage of enemies. Quite often it appeared to David that his evil opponents were winning. In spite of his rich faith in the provision of God, David could not help but have some doubts. He could not help wondering why the evil sneaky conniving so-and-sos seem to be prospering. When he prayed as he did in Psalm 5, you can feel the tension between what David believes and what his circumstances seem to be indicating. On one side you have the holy God that cannot tolerate sin, and on the other side evil human beings getting their way at the expense of others. In today's lingo we call it "cooking the books", or "corking the bat", or "after hours trading". In baseball it's called taking the "juice", and who can deny the effectiveness of this clandestine cheating? How can players past their prime suddenly gain 40 pounds of muscle and set new records while everybody looks the other way? This is what David wonders as he approaches God. How can we balance or rectify the holiness of God, when our experience in real life seems to be different? We believe God loves us, and that God wants the best for us, and that justice will prevail, but at times it seems that the bad guys are getting away with it. Even worse, for us the appearances become overwhelming in their temptations to join in the cheating. Who among us has not said, "Everybody does it", or "The ends justify the means"? We can take a good lesson from David by studying his message in Psalm 5. Be assured that any injustice is temporary, and know that God is watching. In His good time, God will make it clear that He hates evil, and He will destroy the habitual liars, the bloodthirsty, and the deceitful sinners.

## **Teaching On Prayer**

We can learn at least three things about prayer from Verses 1-3. God rewards urgency, persistence, and expectancy. Look at the three imperatives that David used. "Give ear to my words...consider my groaning...listen to the sound of my cry". This was not just some daily prayer routine that he had memorized or felt obligated to do---there is intensity here in his plea.

Notice the repetition of "in the morning". The first thing every morning David addresses the Lord in prayer. It reminds me of the parable Jesus taught in Luke 18:7 of the unjust judge. A widow without bribe money is so persistent in bothering the judge, that the unjust judge gives her justice so she will stop bothering him. The argument is from the lesser to the greater---If even unrighteous men reward persistence, how much more will the righteous God give justice to His people?

We can also see expectancy in David's prayer. He anticipates and watches for God to act. The NIV says that "I wait in



expectation”.

Notice the three types of prayers from David that we can no doubt relate to. David prays with “words”. He expresses himself in clearly understood words that have been thought out and come sincerely from his heart. He also prays by “groaning”. When we get emotional, sometimes all we can do is make noises expressing our emotion, but God knows how we feel and what we are trying to say. Thirdly, David asks that God give attention to his cry. God hears our words, knows our emotions, and responds to our inner feelings.

### **All Important Relationship**

David repeatedly uses the personal pronoun “my” to express his personal relationship with the living God. David says “my King” and “my God” and “my Lord”. This type of personal relationship is unique to Judaism and Christianity. Only the God of our Bible is a personal God. Other religions have transcendent gods who are impassive. Our God hears our individual prayers and cares about us. He knows how we feel, and what we need. He loves us so much that He gave His Son for us. David’s faith is in the God who cares and loves him. Without this relationship, we could not expect God’s attention, or that He would answer our prayers. The gods of Greece, Rome, and Canaan were not morally different from humans. They acted selfishly, they lied, and manipulated. Their distinction was in power and immortality. In contrast to those fake gods of man made religions, the one true God acts only out of love, justice, and holiness. Therefore He is reliable, unchanging, and worthy of our trust. Psalm 5 is about approaching God, and our right to approach God is based on our personal relationship to God. This relationship is made possible by God’s love for us poured out in the blood of Jesus His Son. God’s unchanging love gives David confident belief that God will act to frustrate David’s evil opponents, and vindicate David in the end.

### **God’s View of Evil Acts, v.4-6**

In Psalm 1, he considered “the way of the wicked”, in Ps.2 the rebellion of the wicked, in Ps.3 the attack of the wicked, and in Ps.4 the slander of the wicked. Now in Psalm 5, David is distinguishing himself from evil persons because he must be different if he would be heard by God. As David reviews God’s hate of sin, he progresses from general sin to specific sins as he magnifies the intensity to make his point in verses 4-6. He writes that God does not take pleasure in wickedness, then the more intense God hates all iniquity, and finally that God will destroy those who are liars. The point is that God is incompatible with evil, therefore those who appear to be on top now (by corking their bat), will not prevail.

It is not as though David thinks he is perfect, just forgiven and living in an abiding relationship with the living God. We have only to look at Psalm 32, where David wrote, “How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!”, or Psalm 51, “Be gracious to me, O God according to Your lovingkindness; according to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions.” David was sensitive to sin, and had the conviction that God is the answer to stem the tide. In the same way, critics think that Christians think of themselves as better than other people, when actually it is just the opposite. Christians should actually be more aware of sin, more sensitive to sin, and more easily convicted.

### **Hesed Love of God**

Usually in the Old Testament when you read the translation of the Hebrew into English of God’s lovingkindness, the Hebrew word is hesed. This is the word for the loyal, faithful, forgiving love of God. The love of men is fickle, and dependent on the object of love, but God’s love is merciful, sacrificial, and unconditional—dependent on nothing but His loving nature. In the N.T., the Greek word used for the love of God is agape, but here in Psalm 5:7 the word is hesed.

In v.7-8, David distinguishes himself from the wicked by saying “But as for me”. David approaches God NOT on his own righteousness, but upon God’s mercy and hesed love. What is David’s attitude as he approaches the house of God? David comes in humility, awe, and reverence as he said, “In reverence will I bow down at thy holy temple”. This kind of humility comes only from those who understand their own sinfulness which has been overcome by the mercy and grace of God.

Consider the two different approaches to God that Jesus illustrated with a parable in Luke 18:11-12. The self righteous Pharisee went to the temple and prayed to himself—yes, he acted like he was praying to God but really he was praying to himself—“God I thank you that I am not a sinner like other people because I fast, pay tithes, and keep the law.” On the other hand a tax gatherer came in with his head down, beating his breast saying, “God be merciful to me, the sinner!” Jesus then concluded by saying that the tax gatherer went away justified by God and not the Pharisee, “for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted.”

Verses 1-7 have all prepared the way for David's petition to God in v.8, "lead me in Thy righteousness". Notice that David has no righteousness of his own and is praying that by God's grace He will lead David in the righteousness of God.

## The Imprecatory Prayer

One of the distinctives of the Psalms is what we call imprecatory prayer. These are prayers that curse enemies. Initially you may say that is contradictory to the Bible, but upon further review we discover why this is actually good here. First, they express appropriate righteous anger over sin; secondly they are a natural reaction of emotion against slander and treachery. They also are personal prayers of David expressing his frustration, not revenge or attacks on the people. In doing so, he was entrusting God with the task of retribution. David expressed his outrage to God and not the enemy. Don't forget how forgiving David was to both Saul and Absalom. Therefore in v.9-10, David asked God to hold them guilty, for God to let them fall, because they were rebellious to God.

## Take Refuge

In contrast, David called for believers to take refuge in the Lord, and we will find shelter. David had a sense of certainty grounded on the character of God. The bottom line is, God's nature of holiness is humanity's greatest problem, but God's mercy and love is its greatest hope.

CHARLIE TAYLOR

Download: [Psalm 5](#)

## Psalm 6: The Dark Night of the Soul

The context of David's lament in Psalm 6 has to do with evil enemies that were causing him quite a bit of grief. We have all been there when unexpectedly someone we trusted, stabbed us in the back. When we are innocent victims of slander, harassment, or persecution, it cuts deep into our heart. As bad as we may have been hurt, I doubt if many of us have ever experienced the kind of unfair persecution and injustice that David did. He risked his life fighting Goliath and the Philistines for King Saul, and Saul rewarded his faithful service by throwing spears at him, slandering him, and sending 3000 soldiers to kill him. David spent years hiding in caves in the wilderness with his life constantly in danger. What would that be like to know that "special forces" soldiers were coming to kill you?

I would wet my pants if the local bully was threatening me. In fact, that actually happened when I was 13 years old at summer camp. A big mean kid who looked like he had been "held back" about two years was terrorizing our cabin. This friend of mine told him that if he didn't leave him alone, I was going to beat him up. You can imagine my reaction---"Wait, what?" This kid was twice my size, and needed to shave. You remember the man-boys who went through puberty in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. This kid bragged about fighting in the golden gloves. He accosted me the next day in front of everybody by yelling, "I finally found someone who is willing to fight me, I will meet you tomorrow behind the cabin, and if you don't show up, I'll come and get you", with that he turned and hit the wall with his fist. My memory now is that he punched a hole in the wall where my face would have been. Naturally my friend yelled at him, "Don't worry he'll be there." I suffered for the rest of that day, and I did not sleep that night. All I could think about was what it would be like to have all your teeth knocked out, a broken nose, and black eyes, as well as the humiliation involved. I would be answering questions for a month about what happened to my face. Fortunately, a counselor heard everybody talking about "the big fight", and he managed to put an end to it so I am alive today and able to write this message. My point is that if I was terrorized for two days, what did David feel for like ten to twelve years?

## Don't Give Me What I Deserve!

We don't know exactly the time of David's life or specific circumstances that Psalm 6 was written about, but clearly he is suffering at the hands of his adversaries. David has a strong sense of his own sin, so he pleads with God to not give him what he deserves, which is chastening and discipline. Although he was innocent of a specific sin that caused these consequences, David no doubt understood how God often uses adverse circumstances to mature us, humble us, and cause us to be more dependent on Him. Therefore David seems to link God's discipline and chastening to his situation. If you are like me you can relate to this. I usually get around to praying, "Lord what have I done to deserve this? Why are You allowing this to go on?" Then about a dozen things I have done in my life creep into my memory. From that point on, all I can do is say, "Lord, don't give me what I deserve, give me mercy and grace." This is what I think David is saying in Psalm 6:1 when he wrote, "Lord don't rebuke me in your righteous anger, or discipline me in your wrath." David linked God's failure to help him to a strong sense of personal guilt. Even if it is deeply repressed, I think we all have a sense of personal guilt, so in the bad times we

wonder if God is either paying us back or purposefully not helping us. God is able to save us, yet He continues to delay.

Jeremiah 10:24 may help us figure out what David is expressing in Ps.6. Jeremiah said, "Correct me, O Lord, but with justice", in other words, I know I need correction but don't do it with evil jerks like Saul. Then Jeremiah said, "Don't correct me with your righteous anger, lest you destroy me." By this he was saying don't give me justice, give me mercy. David also was expressing to God in Ps.6:1-4 that his circumstances were going to destroy him, so God needed to "return" and rescue him, not because he deserved it, but because of God's hesed love. By saying "return", David was letting us know his feelings of abandonment by God. When God doesn't seem to answer our prayers according to our time table, we feel that He has withdrawn from us.

### **Let's Make a Deal !**

I can also relate to David's bargaining in v.5. David points out to God that if he is allowed to die, he won't be able to testify to God's mercy, grace, and love. You can't be a witness for the Lord if you are buried in the grave. Who among us has not tried to make deals with the Lord? At the worst times of my life I remember praying that if God would just get me out of this mess, I would serve Him diligently forever! This is what David is saying in v.5, that he can be of great use to God if God would deliver him. David, as king of Israel, would be quite a witness to God's chosen people. Jesus said that David wrote his Psalms "in the Spirit", meaning by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Matt.22:43), and Peter said that David wrote "by the Holy Spirit" (Acts 4:25). Doesn't it make sense that God would prolong his life to serve the Lord? It certainly made sense to David so he reminded God of what a good idea it was in Ps.6:5

### **Hanging On for Dear Life**

In Ps.6:6-7, David makes sure God understands the urgency of the situation by describing his condition. It's not just fear and worry, his very body and soul are deteriorating. He progresses from weariness to what I assume is hyperbole (exaggeration for effect), by saying his bed is "flooded" with tears, and his couch is floating from his tears. Even his body is deteriorating, and he is aging rapidly. This is all being caused by his evil ruthless adversaries.

### **A Radical Change in Mood**

In verse 8-10, David goes through a radical change in mood. This seems like a 180 degree pivot from gloom and doom to everything will be fine because the Lord has heard me. What could have happened? The logical explanation is that God made His presence known to David. Whether God changed his circumstances or just gave him some relief we can't be sure, but you can feel the renewed assurance and confidence in David's tone. He knows that the Lord heard him, will shame David's enemies, and will deliver him. It reminds me of that great line in the Tom Hanks movie, "Forest Gump". They were in the midst of a terrible storm, and it seemed like all was lost, but then "God showed up". By reviewing all the stories of David in the Bible you can confirm that God did eventually deliver him from every adverse situation during his wild "roller coaster" life. In each situation God did hear David's prayers, and God did shame his enemies.

### **Unique Themes**

Don't forget that the Psalms are unique in Scripture in that they are man expressing himself to God instead of God speaking to man. In David's Psalms, he often has at least three unique themes that make us think. First, he expresses the sense that rightness has "run amok". David complains an awful lot for a man of God. I thought godly people were supposed to be happy? The quality of life in 1000 BC was quite a bit different from ours. They lived with war in their own country, as well as famine, plague, high infant mortality, etc. There was also terrible injustice and depravity. David was expressing that the world was broken and needed God's help to be restored. Secondly, it seems like a good thing to bargain with God. David is always trying to make deals to get back in God's good graces. I think David uses this device to be transparent to God, like saying, "Lord I acknowledge my sin, but if you give me another chance I will serve you well." The historical accounts of his life tell us that he did just that. David always had contrition and was repentant. Thirdly, he rejected evildoers, and was always telling God to destroy them. This may be surprising because Jesus hung out with known sinners, and was very forgiving. Don't forget that in practice David was also forgiving and tenderhearted to Saul and Absalom. David was appealing to God based on God's absolute righteousness and justice. Surely God would not honor their evil against him? At the time of his appeal, he was threatened with death, and his enemies were unrepentant and practicing evil against God's law. The sinners Jesus hung out with were contritious and seeking forgiveness—just look at His parable in Luke 18:9-14.

### **Why Does God Allow Suffering?**

Nobody can adequately answer that but God Himself, but let's ask some questions that might lead to some answers. Without the suffering, would David have contemplated his own sin? Would he be as aware of God's mercy and grace? Without the suffering, would he have been so devoted to prayer? Would we have his writings in the Old Testament? Would he have learned the life of faith? In spite of all appearances to the contrary, would David have been so confident in God's deliverance if

God had not been so faithful in the past? I think Paul wrote of the same confidence in God in spite of hard times in Romans 5:3-4. Follow the progression, “we exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance, and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope, and hope does not disappoint”.

CHARLIE TAYLOR

Download: [Psalm 6](#)

## **Psalm 7: Cry Justice**

Historically, every great leader had opponents who did everything they could to bring down the great men that they were envious and jealous of. Their own ambitions drove them to do and say evil things. Whether you study Caesar, Alexander, or especially Jesus, the opposing politicians, generals, and religious leaders resorted to a common tactic to try and destroy them---slander, intrigue, and devious plots. Every U.S. Presidential election in my lifetime has been full of mudslinging, dirty tricks, half truths, and outright lies. I remember the joke about Flanagan who went to confessional, and confessed to the priest, “Bless me father for I have sinned, yesterday I killed two crooked politicians...” then the priest interrupted, “I’m not interested in your civic activities, just tell me your sins.”

The only positive account of slander I ever heard was back in the twenties with Knute Rockne. There was a column in the paper which wrote about the meanest, nastiest, insulting stories concerning Notre Dame’s football team. The author was “Old Bearskin”. He had inside dope because he took true private stories and exaggerated or changed them. Every player was outraged, so boiling mad such that they took it out on the opposing team every week. Every week Rockne would egg them on, “Get out there and show them that the newspaper is wrong!” Only after the coach died did they find out that Rockne was “Old Bearskin”.

In Psalm 7, David pleads with God to save him from his pursuers. I’m sure we can all relate to unfair treatment from competitors or worse, slander. My reaction has always been complete surprise, then outrage, and then a desire for retaliation. I think this is normal for life in a fallen world. Still, how should we respond? Where should we go for relief? Is there a court out there that can give us justice? In Psalm 7, I believe we have the answer.

Based on the title, “concerning Cush the Benjamite”, it is safe to assume this is during the time of David’s trouble with Saul since Saul was a Benjamite, and all that tribe sided with Saul. How bad was David’s situation? There is slander that hurts your reputation, but there is slander that can get you killed. The slander against David (accused of treason) was the kind that gets you killed. Let’s look at David’s trouble with Saul in 1 Samuel 18:7-9 and 24:1-15. David had loyally served Saul, so what was Saul’s problem? The crowds in Israel were singing songs to David expressing his superiority to Saul, so Saul assumed the next step was for David to try and take his kingdom away, “and Saul looked at David with suspicion from that day on.” Next thing you know, Saul is throwing spears at David, accusing him of treason, and sending an army after him.

Interspersed in the continuing story, we are told that there is a spiritual side to this conflict. Evil spirits were influencing Saul, but God was with David. It is just like what Paul said in Ephesians 6:12, our struggle is not just with flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of wickedness. There is a bigger struggle going on than just Saul vs. David that involves spiritual warfare. This kind of envy, jealousy, and paranoia is egged on by the “god of this world”, the adversary of the one true God. The truth was that David was loyal---he proved it many times, but in spiritual warfare truth means nothing to the enemy.

## **Taking Your Case to God**

Psalm 7 has a motif of a law case argued in court before a righteous judge. David’s plea was that the righteous Judge would vindicate the innocent and execute justice on the wicked. In verse 1-2, he lays out his situation using imagery of being pursued by savage ravenous beasts. It is a life and death situation, so David takes “refuge” in God. The tone is one of fear and urgency. Lord, if you don’t deliver me these beasts will tear me apart like wild lions who drag away their helpless prey to devour later.

In v.3-5, David pleads his innocence to God; not that David is perfect, but just innocent of treason. David uses a very risky

method of pleading his innocence called self imprecation (cursing). He tells God that if he is guilty, let his enemies catch him and trample him into the ground. Here is a tip from the top—don't try this unless you are very confident of your innocence, but that is David's point that he is so certain he is willing to live with the consequences. The proof of David's loyalty to Saul can be found in 1 Samuel 24 where two different times David could have killed Saul, but not only spared him, but did not even harm him.

Now that David has stressed his innocence, in v.6-9 David submits a new prayer of imminence—"Hurry up Lord or they are going to get me" (my translation). Notice the repetition of "arise", "lift up", "arouse" as David conveys the urgency of his petition. David is saying that it seems as if God is asleep, and he is frustrated over God's inactivity and failure to answer prayers. This is similar to many of the prophets who cried out, "How long O Lord?" How long will You allow injustice? How long will evil be the rule? Lord, are you asleep at the switch? Of course we know, as does David, that God is never asleep at the switch; yet it certainly seems that way because God's timing is different from ours. Nevertheless, what we believe about God's love, mercy, and justice doesn't seem to line up with our circumstances. In v.8, David says, "Lord I know you are the righteous judge, therefore vindicate me". Then in v.9, he says after you vindicate me, bring the evil to an end. David is confident in this prayer because unlike human courts, there is no partiality, no favoritism, no bribes, and the verdict is not determined by who has the best lawyer. David's assumption is that God defines perfect justice, and in the end He will hold humans to His standard.

### **The Imagery of God as a Righteous Dispenser of Justice, v.10-13**

In spite of David's circumstances, he is confident that the slander of his enemies will be revealed. David believes that in spite of His delay, God is watching, and every day God is indignant about sin. Therefore, David sees God as his protector (my shield) who will save him. If the bad guys don't repent, God "will sharpen His sword" of judgment. God will bend His "bow" in preparation as He has already prepared Himself to dispense justice. These are military images of God ready to mete out justice at His appointed time.

### **Imagery of the Wicked**

In v.14-16, we have three graphic images of the slanderer, and the fate of the unrighteous.

The wicked is like: 1. A woman in labor who conceives in mischief and delivers falsehood, 2. The cowardly hunter who lays a trap by digging a pit, but he falls into his own trap, 3. A boomerang or a club that hits its owner in the head. Imagine the 3 Stooges when they swing a club and hit something so that the recoil smacks them in the noggin.

The point is that the enemy's evil actions backfire on them. As the clichés go, "What goes around comes around", or "Live by the sword, die by the sword".

### **Conclusion, v.17**

David's thankful conclusion in verse 17 is a joyful contrast from the previous verses. In spite of his pain and adverse circumstances, in the end, David is confident in the Lord's provision because of the Lord's attributes of righteousness and faithful love.

### **Three Issues for Us in Psalm 7**

First, take refuge in the Lord. The act of trusting your life to the care of the Lord in threatening situations takes belief and trust in God's attributes. God has promised to be our safe haven, NOT TO END THE STORM BUT TO ENABLE US TO RIDE IT OUT. Don't forget that a refuge must be entered to be effective.

Secondly, the only reason David, or us, can address God on this issue is because of his relationship with God. YHWH is the personal God of David who has forgiven his sins, and given him the right to take refuge.

Thirdly, there will always be a tension between God's justice for the wicked, and God's mercy to men like David (or me). David (or us) is like the politician who got back the proofs of his portrait, and was angry with the photographer. The politician said, "This picture does not do me justice!" The photographer replied, "Sir, with a face like yours, you don't need justice, you need mercy!" God patiently waits for all of us to repent and come seeking Him; yet if they will not, the metaphors in Ps.7:12-13 will come into play, "God sharpens His sword, bends His bow, and readies His arrows." God is prepared, and if a person refuses God's provision of grace and mercy, then justice is coming.

CHARLIE TAYLOR

Download: [Psalm 7](#)

## Psalm 139: The Attributes of God

I read a book years ago that I believe was entitled HOW BIG IS YOUR GOD. The author's point was that most people's view of God is really small. The three leading views of God are: Santa Claus, a Genie in a bottle, or a kindly old grandfather. I have had several people add to that, saying God is "their best friend" or their good buddy. Voltaire, the French philosopher, said, "God created man in His own image, and now man has returned the favor". I think he meant that it is convenient that we paint God as very much like ourselves so that we can justify our lives. Santa Claus exists to bring us presents, to give us three wishes, and like granddaddy, to spoil us rotten. The overriding principle of all this is that God exists to serve us instead of Him creating us to serve Him. Obviously, the Bible teaches just the opposite.

A.W. Tozer said, "A right concept of God is basic not only to systematic theology but to practical Christian living as well. It is to worship what the foundation is to the temple. Where it is inadequate or out of plumb, the whole structure must sooner or later collapse." We must KNOW the one true God before we can serve Him and worship Him properly. Jesus equated salvation and eternal life to knowing God in His high priestly prayer of John 17:3, "And this is eternal life, that they know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou has sent." Paul said that his primary pursuit in his spiritual life was that He might know Jesus in Philippians 3:10, "that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings".

If you are thinking "Don't I know God?", let me remind you that the biblical concept of knowing is very much like believing. Knowing God implies that you are changed by that knowledge. If you "know God and Jesus Christ whom God has sent" then you have been transformed. If we know and believe in the one true God presented in our Bible, our lives will continue to change as Paul said in 2 Cor.4:16, "our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day." One difficulty in this renewing is that you will only trust someone to the extent that you "know" them. We can't know God unless He reveals Himself to us, and we believe that He has in the Scriptures. My favorite passage on the attributes of God is Psalm 139. Here we will see the omniscience, the omnipresence, and the omnipotence of God.

### A Warning and a Comfort

Psalm 139 was written by David very likely during a time in which his opponents were very actively accusing him of various sins. Although David committed his share of sin during his life, at the time of his writing this psalm he was living a straight life. He will establish his innocence by reminding his audience of the omniscience of God, and praying that God who knows everything about him will search him in and out and convict him of any sin. The knowledge that God is omniscient comes across as both a great comfort to the innocent, but a terrible warning to the guilty. Please read Psalm 139 with me.

Notice that David is saying in verse 1 that God has searched and known "me". We have a personal God who knows and cares about us. He knows everything we do and everywhere we go. In verse 2, God even knows what we are thinking at all times. Just imagine all the thoughts of all the people of all the world for all time---now that's omniscience. It is even more amazing that He cares. God's knowledge is infallible and to us it seems incomprehensible. This all knowing of God of all our actions and all our thoughts is both a comfort to believers, but a warning to unbelievers. It is comforting that God is always with us as believers to convict us of our sin, or like David, if we are innocent He will ultimately vindicate us. Also, I can't help but notice the two extremes of the observed and the Observer. We are wandering about aimlessly never knowing what other people are doing, much less thinking. If I had a penny for every time I've been tricked, hoodwinked, bamboozled, and played for a sap, I could build the great pyramids out of pennies. We are so clueless we don't even understand ourselves. The great Searcher of hearts knows what we are going to say even before we say it, while we utter those famous words of Ralph Kramden (The Honeymooners), "I got a big mouth!".

The application of this is we should be so filled with the awe of God that we become more aware of sin, more aware of what we say and do, how we treat each other, because God knows and God is watching. The constant presence of God with us observing both our failures and our successes should have a very sobering effect on how we think and act. Meanwhile, the rest of the world seems to be oblivious to God's presence as they master the art of living two lives---the public life that projects the image they want the world to perceive, and the secret life of insecurities, lusts, jealousies, and hostility. If you are aware of God's omniscience then you know that your thoughts, intentions, and actions are transparent to Him. You can fool the people around you, but to the Lord you are transparent. I love David's conclusion to this first section in verse 6. God's knowledge surpasses my comprehension. It is too lofty for my puny mind, yet most people's way of dealing with it is to reduce

their idea of God so they can understand Him, control Him, and manipulate Him.

## **Nowhere to Hide**

Since God is all knowing, my only recourse is to stay away from Him, hide, do my stuff behind closed doors, in secret or in the dark where nobody can see. In v.7-12, David reveals that is not an option because God is everywhere, He is omnipresent. No one can escape the observation of the omnipresent Spirit of God. There is no hiding from God. Whether you go to the highest mountain or the lowest valley, God is there. God observes everything whether it be done in the daylight or the darkness of night. We can hide from each other, but not from God. Throughout history even prophets and kings of Israel have tried to run away from God, only to find His convicting presence was always with them. No doubt when David sinned with Bathsheba and killed Uriah, he tried as hard as he could to cover it up. He swore everyone who knew to secrecy, and then acted as if everything was normal. Yet for about a year God's Spirit convicted him. We know from Ps. 32:3-4 that God's hand was "heavy upon David". David was torn up physically and emotionally during the cover-up. Who can forget the prophet Jonah who was commanded by God to go to Nineveh, but because Jonah hated the Assyrians, he went the opposite direction trying to escape the presence of God. Most people think that story is all about a whale, but out of four chapters in the book of Jonah, only two short verses are about the whale. Most people are so distracted by the whale they miss the themes of the rebellion of man, the sovereignty of God, and God's redemptive plan. The big fish was just God's agent of depositing the prophet back on the straight path of obedience.

The lesson for us is to fully realize that we are getting away with nothing. Wherever you go, God is there. Whatever you think or say, God hears. Whatever you do, even behind closed doors, God sees it. The good news is if we are living in an abiding obedient relationship with the Lord, he is guiding and helping us wherever we are. Here is where you think I'm going to give the bad news, but the fact is even if we are off track like David or Jonah was, God's presence is still good news for us who believe. God is actively working to bring us to repentance just like He did with David and Jonah, and of course that is the best thing that can happen.

## **Fearfully and Wonderfully Made**

In Ps.139:13-16, David establishes God's omnipotence by reviewing how awesome His creation is. It required an all powerful God to create from scratch something as complex and wonderful as the human anatomy. When you consider that to do even the simplest of tasks requires billions of brain cells to communicate in coordination in an instant, it blows your mind. Years ago I broke a finger so I went to a hand specialist. He showed me a model of just the human hand. I never realized how complex and awesome a machine just a hand is. David wrote that God formed all of our parts. He used the imagery of "weaving" him in his mother's womb. Man is truly wonderfully and fearfully made. Only the omnipotent God could make us and fashion a world that we could thrive in.

I think David was using his own body as an evidence of God's omnipotence to point out that the all powerful God made me just as I am for a purpose. This is sobering because all of us from time to time are unhappy with some defect that we perceive in ourselves is holding us back from our desires. In fact, God made us just as we are for a purpose. God has a plan for each of us, and He is with us helping us carry it out. Like David and Jonah, we often "grieve the Spirit" or "quench the Spirit", but God is always there and He knows what we need, and He is able to help us with it. Even the days of my life are numbered and fixed as David wrote in v.16, "The days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them."

Applications

Knowing God involves living like we are aware of His attributes. He loves us and wants the best for us, but it is also true that God requires holiness and justice. We are always in the presence of God no matter where we go, and God knows all things--even our thoughts and intentions. Shouldn't this be a powerful hindrance to practicing sin? David's prayer in the final verse says this well, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts...and lead me in the eternal way."

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