

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.

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