

Psalm 7 • God's Righteousness at Work

Introduction

Although Scripture does not record this specific incident with "Cush, a Benjamite", that being Saul's tribe, it does refer to problems David encountered with its members, especially in the wake of Saul's death and David's ascension to the throne.

When King David came to Bahurim, behold, there came out from there a man of the family of the house of Saul whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera; he came out cursing continually as he came. He threw stones at David and at all the servants of King David; and all the people and all the mighty men were at his right hand and at his left. Thus Shimei said when he cursed, "Get out, get out, you man of bloodshed, and worthless fellow! The LORD has returned upon you all the bloodshed of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the LORD has given the kingdom into the hand of your son Absalom. And behold, you are taken in your own evil, for you are a man of bloodshed!" — 2 Samuel 16:5-8

As can be seen in this particular encounter, the problem was not just in the nature of physical attacks, but particularly in the use of slander and false accusations. Something similar seems to be at work with Cush, which gives rise to a Psalm that teaches how God's righteousness works, just one of many lessons on this subject repeatedly found in the Psalms. How can we or others know that actually have achieved being righteous by God's standard?

A Shiggaion of David, which he sang to the Lord concerning Cush, a Benjamite.

¹O LORD my God, in You I have taken refuge;
Save me from all those who pursue me,
and deliver me,
²Or he will tear my soul like a lion,
Dragging me away, while there is none to deliver.

³O Lord my God, if I have done this,
If there is injustice in my hands,
⁴If I have rewarded evil to my friend,
Or have plundered him who without cause was my adversary,
⁵Let the enemy pursue my soul and overtake it;
And let him trample my life down to the ground
And lay my glory in the dust. Selah.

[Read v.1-2]

Q: What does David mean, "in You I have taken refuge"?

A: It is an acknowledgment that rather than turning to others or even to one's self, as is most often the case, or even to some kind of replacement for God, David has first turned to God. It is a way of affirming His faith and trust in God from the outset and not feeling justified to act on his own in spite of his innocence.

Q: What is David trying to convey by the imagery of his pursuers as a lion?

A: That they are not content with anything less than completely consuming and disposing of him. These persecutors will not be satisfied with anything less than David's total elimination.

Application: Even in a situation where there is absolutely no fault of our own or even the slightest liability on our part, our first instinct should be to place it in the hands of the Lord alone. We do not have license to respond on our own or with allies.

[Read v.3-5]

Q: What are the four "if" clauses which seem to be comprise the accusations against David?

1. "...if I have done this..." (v.3)
2. "...if there is injustice in my hands..." (v.3)
3. "If I have rewarded evil to my friend..." (v.4)
4. "If I...have plundered him who without cause was my adversary..." (v.4)

Q: What do these actions all have in common?

A: Rather than being responses born out of righteous anger or something meted out in proportion to the crime, they are fleshly anger which is really just sin responding with more sin.

⁶Arise, O LORD, in Your anger;
Lift up Yourself against the rage of my
adversaries,
And arouse Yourself for me; You have
appointed judgment.
⁷Let the assembly of the peoples
encompass You,
And over them return on high.
⁸The LORD judges the peoples;
Vindicate me, O LORD, according to my
righteousness and my integrity that
is in me.
⁹O let the evil of the wicked come to an
end, but establish the righteous;
For the righteous God tries the hearts
and minds.
¹⁰My shield is with God,
Who saves the upright in heart.
¹¹God is a righteous judge,
And a God who has indignation every
day.

Q: What are the four corresponding consequences in v.5 if these accusations are found to exist?

1. "Let the enemy pursue my soul..."
2. "...and overtake it..."
3. "...let him trample my life down to the ground..."
4. "...and lay my glory in the dust."

Q: What do these actions all have in common?

A: They are the consequences of sin, justifiable for the ills listed in v.4.

Q: Why does it seem that David is inviting an inspection of his sin? Won't he fall short of such a high standard?

A: It is a very dramatic way of comparing and contrasting himself to his enemy, to first scrutinize his own soul so that the sinful condition and motives of his protagonists will be especially exposed when compared to his innocence.

Application: When it comes to the standard of God's righteousness, self-evaluation is critical so as to apply the same standard to everyone involved in the situation, both our self and our pursuer. We always point the finger at ourselves before pointing it at others.

[Read v.6-11]

Q: How does this section build upon the previous verses and actually justify that David is in a right spiritual relationship with God?

A: Only someone found to be righteous and innocent of any of the accusations in v.3-5 could trust in this kind of response from God.

Q: How does this divine reaction sharply contrast with what David was specifically avoiding?

A: Because David has not responded out of his own anger or emotion but turned to God, the divine response is composed of righteous anger, (v.6) that which will be properly meted out by God instead of a disproportionate response from man.

Q: Is v.8 describing some kind of final judgment of all the peoples on the earth?

A: No, this is a dramatic way of requesting that God not only be the author of all actions against David's enemies, but also bring about public vindication of him personally.

Application: We don't turn to God just to take care of physical issues, but even when it comes to our reputation and visible witness.

Q: How does v.9 reveal that God's judgment goes far deeper than any earthly legal system?

A: "...God tries the hearts and minds." This is the only possible way that someone can be found to be biblically righteous or falling well short of it. No earthly system can truly examine the heart and mind.

Q: How does David know that he meets this standard?

A: Since this is what God tests, David—like all believers—has been likewise tested. It has given him internal confidence in God over himself.

Observation: This may be why David writes often about meditating on God's Word. It has the effect of testing one's mind and heart.

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For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does. — James 1:23–25

Q: How does David return to the theme of God’s protection?

A: “My shield is with God”. (v.10)

Q: And how does he summarize the nature of that protection as explicated in the above verses?

A: “Who saves the upright in heart.” (v.10) Those who pass God’s test of the mind and heart.

Q: And how is this greater, heavenly standard of judgment of the mind and heart characterized?

A: “God is a righteous judge”. (v.11) He judges everyone fairly and honestly.

Q: What does it mean that God has “indignation”? Is this now addressing His anger?

A: The underlying Hebrew verb from which is rendered “indignation” in English means “to scold, to curse”. In this context it is meant to describe Him as passing sentence on those who fail His testing of the mind and heart.

Observation: Just because God passes sentence does not mean that it is immediately carried out. While in God’s wisdom some things are judged as requiring an immediate response, others are for an appointed time and may yet be remedied before incurring the consequences.

Application: God’s judgment is not something feared by the biblically righteous, but only by those who fail the test of righteousness which extends to the mind and heart.

¹²If a man does not repent, He will sharpen His sword;
He has bent His bow and made it ready.
¹³He has also prepared for Himself deadly weapons;
He makes His arrows fiery shafts.
¹⁴Behold, he travails with wickedness,
And he conceives mischief and brings forth falsehood.
¹⁵He has dug a pit and hollowed it out,
And has fallen into the hole which he made.
¹⁶His mischief will return upon his own head,
And his violence will descend upon his own pate.

[Read v.12-16]

Q: What is the caveat which follows, “If a man does not repent...”?

A: God prepares to deal out His retribution should the inevitable, eventual destination of steadfast unrepentance be achieved:

1. (v.12) “He will sharpen His sword...”
2. (v.12) “He has bent His bow and made it ready.”
3. (v.13) “...prepared for Himself deadly weapons...”
4. (v.13) “...makes His arrows fiery shafts.”

Point: Ephesians 6 famously discusses the armor of God, using these things to describe different aspects of spiritual warfare. Whereas for the believer such are used in the context of withstanding evil, for the unrepentant such are used to overcome them for the choices of their behavior.

Q: What do all of God’s actions described here have in common?

A: They are all preparatory, inferring time still available for repentance, but ultimately inevitable in its absence.

Q: What are the characteristics of someone steadfastly pursuing an unrepentant lifestyle?

1. (v.14) "...he travails with wickedness..."
2. (v.14) "...he conceives mischief..."
3. (v.14) "...brings forth falsehood."
4. (v.15) "...dug a pit and hollowed it out..."
5. (v.15) "...fallen into the hole which he made."

Q: What is the greater picture all of these things combine to describe?

A: A cycle from birth to death.

Q: And what are the inevitable consequences of refusing to repent?

1. (v.15) "His mischief will return upon his own head..."
2. (v.15) "...his violence will descend upon his own pate."

Application: Just as the righteous reap what they sow for their own ultimate good, so the unrepentant reap the consequences of what they sow to the worst possible degree.

¹⁷I will give thanks to the LORD
according to His righteousness
And will sing praise to the name of the
LORD Most High.

[Read v.17]

Q: How would giving thanks and praise "according to His righteousness" properly connect to both the opening and running theme of this Psalm?

A: Because David is an example of someone found on the beneficial side of the working of God's righteousness.

Q: What is the specific meaning of calling Yahweh "Most High"?

A: Used at least 21 times throughout the Psalms, "v'elyon" describes God as greatest and most powerful, a reference especially important in ancient times when every nation believed in their own gods. It is a way of stating "God who is above all gods" or "God who is greater than all others".

Application: We praise God for the dual working of His righteousness not just in His own character, but as it works in us as a result of consistent obedience to His Word and ways alone.