

Israel's Songs of Hope
The Book of Psalms

Wronged By Those You Still Love
Psalm 59

For the choir director; set to Al-tashheth, the tune 'Do Not Destroy'. A Mikhtam of David, when Saul sent men and they watched the house in order to kill him.

- ¹ Deliver me from my enemies, O my God;
Set me securely on high away from those who rise up against me.
- ² Deliver me from those who do iniquity
And save me from men of bloodshed.
- ³ For behold, they have set an ambush for my life;
Fierce men launch an attack against me,
Not for my transgression nor for my sin, O LORD,
- ⁴ For no guilt of mine, they run and set themselves against me.
Arouse Yourself to help me, and see!
- ⁵ You, O LORD God of hosts, the God of Israel,
Awake to punish all the nations;
Do not be gracious to any who are treacherous in iniquity. Selah.
- ⁶ They return at evening, they howl like a dog,
And go around the city.
- ⁷ Behold, they belch forth with their mouth;
Swords are in their lips,
For, they say, 'Who hears?'
- ⁸ But You, O LORD, laugh at them;
You scoff at all the nations.
- ⁹ Because of his strength I will watch for You,
For God is my stronghold.
- ¹⁰ My God in His lovingkindness will meet me;
God will let me look triumphantly upon my foes.
- ¹¹ Do not slay them, or my people will forget;
Scatter them by Your power, and bring them down,
O Lord, our shield.
- ¹² On account of the sin of their mouth and the words of their lips,
Let them even be caught in their pride,
And on account of curses and lies which they utter.
- ¹³ Destroy them in wrath, destroy them that they may be no more;
That men may know that God rules in Jacob
To the ends of the earth. Selah.
- ¹⁴ They return at evening, they howl like a dog,
And go around the city.
- ¹⁵ They wander about for food
And growl if they are not satisfied.
- ¹⁶ But as for me, I shall sing of Your strength;
Yes, I shall joyfully sing of Your lovingkindness in the morning,
For You have been my stronghold
And a refuge in the day of my distress.
- ¹⁷ O my strength, I will sing praises to You;
For God is my stronghold, the God who shows me lovingkindness.

Context: 1 Samuel 19:1 – 12

¹ Sam.19¹ Now Saul told Jonathan his son and all his servants to put David to death. But Jonathan, Saul's son, greatly delighted in David. ² So Jonathan told David saying, 'Saul my father is seeking to put you to death. Now therefore, please be on guard in the morning, and stay in a secret place and hide yourself. ³ I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where you are, and I will speak with my father about you; if I find out anything, then I will tell you.' ⁴ Then Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, 'Do not let the king sin against his servant David, since he has not sinned against you, and since his deeds have been very beneficial to you. ⁵ For he took his life in his hand and struck the Philistine, and the LORD brought about a great deliverance for all Israel; you saw it and rejoiced. Why then will you sin against innocent blood by putting David to death without a cause?' ⁶ Saul listened to the voice of Jonathan, and Saul vowed, 'As the LORD lives, he shall not be put to death.' ⁷ Then Jonathan called David, and Jonathan told him all these words. And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence as formerly. ⁸ When there was war again, David went out and fought with the Philistines and defeated them with great slaughter, so that they fled before him. ⁹ Now there was an evil spirit from the LORD on Saul as he was sitting in his house with his spear in his hand, and David was playing the harp with his hand. ¹⁰ Saul tried to pin David to the wall with the spear, but he slipped away out of Saul's presence, so that he stuck the spear into the wall. And David fled and escaped that night. ¹¹ Then Saul sent messengers to David's house to watch him, in order to put him to death in the morning. But Michal, David's wife, told him, saying, 'If you do not save your life tonight, tomorrow you will be put to death.' ¹² So Michal let David down through a window, and he went out and fled and escaped.

Cultural Background

- Verse 13: 'Destroy them...' seems to contradict what David said just before in v.11, 'Do not slay them.' But 'destroy them' is hyperbolic language that was typical of military ventures in the Ancient Near East. It is very much like how we say of sporting events, 'We crushed them. We blew them out of the water. We annihilated them.'¹

¹ K.A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), p.173 – 174. Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Downers' Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), p.172 lists some examples.

Questions

1. Read the context of this Psalm: 1 Samuel 19:1 – 12.
2. What do you think David is feeling at this point in his life? Fear for himself, fear for Jonathan and Michal, anger at Saul, panic, etc.?
3. Now read Psalm 59.
 - a. When did David write this? It seems like the setting is the span of a few days. David takes stock of how some hitmen stalk him in his own house: ‘They return at evening, they howl like a dog, and go around the city’ (v.6, 14). Perhaps he waits in the house, waiting for cover of darkness, knowing that these hitmen had a contract out on him, and that the law enforcement won’t help him because Saul is corrupt.
 - b. What emotions does David have? Maybe fear in the first stanza, but not in the second and third. Something happens for him in the second and third stanzas as he prays and considers who God is. On the other hand, it’s possible that he’s not really panicked at all...
 - c. Some major questions that will probably come out at first reading:
 - i. Verse 5: ‘Punish all the nations’??? How does David move from the personal to the global so quickly?
 - ii. Verse 11 vs. verse 13: ‘Do not slay them’ vs. ‘Destroy them in wrath.’ What does David mean here?
4. Look at the cry for deliverance in the first stanza, v.1 – 5. What exactly is David hoping God will do?
 - a. Defend him, of course, from the men who are seeking to kill him
 - b. Verse 5: ‘Punish all the nations’??? How does David move from the personal to the global so quickly?
 - i. He is also praying for all Israel while they are under attack from the Philistines. He sees a parallel between himself being attacked and Israel being attacked.
 - ii. Apparently, David is aware that when God finally comes to vindicate His own, that it will have global ramifications. David is asking God to hasten the day of judgment.
5. Look at the final comparison David makes in v.14 – 17 between himself and the hitmen who are after him:
 - a. They howl and growl. David sings and praises God.
 - b. They come at evening. David sings in the morning.
 - c. They wander around the city. David is in the refuge and stronghold of God.
 - d. They act out of their needs (hunger, dissatisfaction). David finds satisfaction in God (joy, lovingkindness).
6. What does David think and pray about in the second stanza (v.6 – 13), that helps him move from fear to security?
 - a. ‘God is my stronghold.’ What does that mean? God had protected David before, from the lion and bear, from Goliath, from the Philistines, and even from Saul. He knows that God has anointed him to be king over Israel, and that God will make that come to pass. So there is a certain kind of protection that God has offered and continues to offer David.
 - b. ‘God is my stronghold.’ Huh? After all, God lived in a tent, not a fortress. David knew that God’s presence in a local sense at the Tabernacle was special. So he went there. Here’s what happened:

¹ Sam.19:18 Now David fled and escaped and came to Samuel at Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him. And he and Samuel went and stayed in Naioth. ¹⁹ It was told Saul, saying, ‘Behold, David is at Naioth in Ramah.’ ²⁰ Then Saul sent messengers to take David, but when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, with Samuel standing and presiding over them, the Spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul; and they also prophesied. ²¹ When it was told Saul, he sent other messengers, and they also prophesied. So Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they also prophesied. ²² Then he himself went to Ramah and came as far as the large well that is in Secu; and he asked and said, ‘Where are Samuel and David?’ And someone said, ‘Behold, they are at Naioth in Ramah.’ ²³ He proceeded there to Naioth in Ramah; and the Spirit of God came upon him also, so that he went along prophesying continually until he

came to Naioth in Ramah. ²⁴ He also stripped off his clothes, and he too prophesied before Samuel and lay down naked all that day and all that night. Therefore they say, 'Is Saul also among the prophets?'

- c. Most importantly, and most generally, David knows that God is opposed to sin. Look at v.12 – 13: 'On account of the sin of their mouth and the words of their lips, let them even be caught in their pride, and on account of curses and lies which they utter, destroy them in wrath...' So David goes on to say that he will not do the same evil that they do, in v.14 – 17.
 - d. 'God will let me look triumphantly upon my foes.' David knows that what God has said He will do, He will do just as He said. God said that David would be King. Before, God brought forth everything and did everything by His word. This time would be the same.
 - e. Why might David pray in v.11, 'Do not slay them, or my people will forget; scatter them by Your power, and bring them down.'
 - i. David sees that the people of Israel need help knowing God. They are enamored with David and see him as a hero. But he's not so enamored with them.
 - ii. Notice the cultural background point that 'destroy them' is hyperbolic language that all people of the Ancient Near East used.
 - iii. He's using 'Babel' language of scattering, lies, and bringing down. This qualifies 'destroy them in wrath' in v.13. The 'destroy them' does not mean 'end their lives,' but destroy their threat, i.e. their intentions and aims. But more importantly, David is concerned about God making a lasting public impact on the people. He's not just concerned about himself.
 - iv. Now, after Jesus, even if evil people seem to win, God is working to transform them and cleanse them of evil. We will see God's final vindication when Jesus returns.
7. Why does David care about bearing witness to the nations in v.5 and v.13? Notice that the 'Selah' pause occurs right after both references to making God known to the nations. We are supposed to reflect in the stillness between the verses on that thought. David's concern broadens out very far, from himself to the whole world.
- a. David knows that Israel's earlier deliverance from Egypt was for God to bear Himself witness to the whole world. So he figures this personal deliverance will also serve the same purpose.
 - b. David knows that God's purpose in Israel was to display His kingship among a people, so that other nations would come to know God through His covenant with Israel.
8. Application: How does the way we pray through our conflicts and handle them with integrity bear witness to the nations?