

Psalms 7

*The LORD Implored to Defend the Psalmist against the Wicked.
A Shiggaion of David, which he sang to the LORD concerning Cush, a Benjamite.*

- ¹ O LORD my God, in You I have taken refuge;
Save me from all those who pursue me, and deliver me,
² Or he will tear my soul like a lion,
Dragging me away, while there is none to deliver.
³ O LORD my God, if I have done this,
If there is injustice in my hands,
⁴ If I have rewarded evil to my friend,
Or have plundered him who without cause was my adversary,
⁵ Let 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.
- ⁶ Arise, O LORD, in Your anger;
Lift up Yourself against the rage of my adversaries,
And arouse Yourself for me;
You have appointed judgment.
⁷ Let the assembly of the peoples encompass You,
And over them return on high.
⁸ The LORD judges the peoples;
Vindicate me, O LORD,
According to my righteousness
And my integrity that is in me.
⁹ O let the evil of the wicked come to an end,
But establish the righteous;
For the righteous God tries the hearts and minds.
¹⁰ My shield is with God,
Who saves the upright in heart.
- ¹¹ God is a righteous judge,
And a God who has indignation every day.
¹² If a man does not repent, he¹ will sharpen his sword;
He has bent his bow and made it ready.
¹³ He has also prepared for himself deadly weapons;
He makes his arrows fiery shafts.
¹⁴ Behold, he travails with wickedness,
And he conceives mischief and brings forth falsehood.
¹⁵ He has dug a pit and hollowed it out,
And has fallen into the hole which he made.
¹⁶ His mischief will return upon his own head,
And his violence will descend upon his own pate.
¹⁷ I will give thanks to the LORD according to His righteousness
And will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High.

David the Psalmist: This Psalm is ascribed to David, the poet, singer, and king.

Adversaries: David was anointed to be king (1 Sam.16) while King Saul was on the throne. Saul and his supporters hunted David, to kill him. Cush, also of the tribe of Benjamin, like Saul, was apparently one of Saul's followers. However, Cush does not appear elsewhere in the biblical narrative.

Selah: a pause

God Tries Hearts: The Hebrew words for 'try' and 'test' are *ubohen* or *bahan* (Ps.7:9; 11:4, 5; 17:3; 26:2; 66:10; 81:7; 95:9; 139:23; cf. Gen.42:15, 16). They are used to describe the metalworker's *intention*: 'The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord *tests* hearts' (Pr.17:3); 'I will bring the third part through the fire, refine them as silver is refined, and *test* them as gold is tested' (Zech.13:9).

The Hebrew word *tsaraph* is synonymous with 'smelt, refine' as a metalsmith would use fire to smelt and refine precious metal (Ps.17:3; 26:2; 66:10; 105:19; cf. Judg.17:4; 2 Sam.22:31; Neh.3:8, 32; Isa.1:25; 41:7; 48:10; Jer.6:29; 10:9). 'For You have *tried* us, O God; You have refined us as silver is refined ... We went through fire and through water, yet You brought us out into a place of abundance.' (Ps.66:10, 12)

¹ The NASB translates the "he" as "He," as referring to God. However, since v.15 refers to the man who "has dug a pit and hollowed it out" just to fall into it, there is more reason to say that in v.12, he who "does not repent" is the one who "will sharpen his sword," and prepare a bow and arrows (v.13) and bring forth mischief and falsehood (v.14).

Questions

1. Unfortunately, we don't know about David's relationship with Cush. They seem to have been acquaintances, maybe friends at one time. But King Saul's attempt to track down and kill David must have taken turned Cush against David. In your own words, describe David's response and prayer to God.
2. Reminder that biblical poetry works primarily by rhyming concepts. We're familiar with poetry that rhymes sounds. So the way I've arranged this Psalm with indentions is meant to show the rhyming of concepts. David gives one line, then he gives a second line that develops the concept. Sometimes there is a third line that goes even further. For example, in verse 17, we see this rhyming pattern:

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

At first David says he will 'give thanks.' Then he gets louder. He will 'sing praise'! Read the Psalm again and let the Spirit draw your attention to one of the rhymes. When we cover that rhyme, please share your observations about it. [give 1 – 2 minutes of silence]

3. Let's look at v.1 – 5 and talk about how David starts the Psalm.
 - a. First, David asks for God to help him, rescue him, in v.1 – 2.
 - b. Second, David says that he's willing to repent. He checks himself. Even though he's not sure what he's done. He gives God space to speak to him. Probably, he gives others the chance to speak to him, too.
 - c. How does David serve as a model for us in his willingness to receive perspective on himself? Do you find this easy or hard to do?
 - i. If easy, then it could be that your identity is firmly in Christ, as opposed to just 'being right.' But be mindful that you could also find it easy to doubt yourself, and doubt what is right, because you're a people-pleaser.
 - ii. If hard, then it could be that you're proud, and find your identity in 'being right' more than in Christ.
 - d. Illus: I once worked for an organization that I believed did not practice the appropriate amount of transparency. I wrote out my concerns and then complaints over email, to my supervisors three levels up. When nothing changed, I resigned and shared my concerns with the people who were affected, and who had been invested in that organization. By doing that, I believed I did what was right. Even so, I tried to listen to those who criticized me, asking God, 'If I have done wrong...'
4. How can David move to inviting God's judgment on *others and himself* in v.6 – 10? Isn't that scary?
 - a. What does it mean for God to 'arise' 'in anger' (v.6)?
 - i. The anger of God is aimed at the 'rage of my adversaries' (v.6).
 - ii. Who are David's 'adversaries' and why do they oppose him? They don't want David to become king, as God anointed him to be through the prophet Samuel (1 Sam.16). They want to cling to power. God's calling on David's life challenges them. That is key to understand. That's why people opposed Jesus, because he claimed to be the true king. And that's one reason why people oppose the people of Jesus, because Jesus raises us up to sit with him on his throne (Rom.5:17 – 21; Eph.1:15 – 2:10).
 - iii. David *wants* God to give a 'judgment' (v.7 – 8). David wants God to act in real time. This is not just referring to 'Judgment Day' although that's the final judgment. When God 'judges,' God wears the mantle that He shared with the human 'judges' of Israel in the *Book of Judges*. God becomes the deliverer and restorer, and sets things right.
 - b. But what about David inviting God to judge him? How is our repentance and willingness to be 'tried' and 'tested' by God foundational for being 'righteous'?
 - i. Notice that repentance is key in v.12
 - ii. Sometimes we think about 'being righteous' as 'being morally perfect.' It doesn't mean that. It's a relational term. It includes being repentant towards God ('If I have done wrong...'), and it means 'being willing to participate in God's plan.'
 - iii. Optional: For those who have been raised assuming that 'righteousness' means 'being morally perfect,' this is going to be a paradigm shift. Martin Luther was once struck by lightning and then approached the phrase 'the righteousness of God' as if God were never really accepted anything but moral perfection, and never really accepted our repentance

either. Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Doctrine of Justification* (1986) argues that the word for 'righteousness' in Hebrew (*sedaqa*) means 'the right ordering of affairs.'

1. It includes God delivering Israel from enemies. But it also includes caring for the poor, needy, and destitute (p.11) – the honoring of need-based justice, not deed-based justice. That's why when Israelites like David repented, they were expressing their *need* to God, and asking God for *help*.
 2. So repenting towards God, while believing He will be faithful, makes you righteous. That's why Noah and Abraham were 'righteous' (Gen.6:9; 15:6). Abraham in particular *repented* of trying to name an heir / produce a son on his own, but trusted God to be faithful to produce a son from his own biologically dead body.
 3. But when Hebrew thought encountered Greek thought, one key question was what people meant when they said 'righteousness' (*dikaioisyne*) and 'justice' and 'to justify.' For Aristotle and most Greeks, 'righteousness' referred to rewarding or punishing actions – what we call *deed*-based justice. McGrath says, 'It is evident that Aristotle's understanding of 'righteousness' is quite different from that signified by the Hebrew word *sedaqa*' (p.15).
 4. Ultimately, God is 'righteous' because God the Son came as Jesus and won the battles against sin we never could (Rom.3:21 – 26). He lived and died in total faithfulness to the Father, where he fought the corruption of sin inside human nature (Rom.8:3) and made it repent all the way until it died when he died. That's why 'the righteousness of God is revealed... through the faithfulness of Jesus' (Rom.3:21 – 22 KJV recognizing that *pistis christou* in Greek is the subjective genitive of possession, meaning it is the quality Christ possesses). Jesus repented more deeply than any of us, so our repentance is within his. Jesus restored his human nature more deeply than any of us, so our restoration is within him.
- c. What is 'righteousness' for God, in v.9?
- i. God will 'put an end' to 'the evil of the wicked.' He sharpens 'His sword' and prepares it for people who don't repent (v.12). We will see what that means in v.11 – 17.
 - ii. God will 'establish' the righteous humans, in v.9. For the Israelites, 'established' means being established in their garden land, as God's true humanity. They were meant to be like Adam and Eve in the original garden of Eden.
5. How does God express His righteousness towards the wicked, in v.11 – 17?
- a. The wicked one makes a plot, using mischief and planning violence. They want to stay in power, so they'll cheat, lie, and steal. Eventually, they'll dispose of other people who stand in their way.
 - b. But that mischief will return upon his own head, and his violence will descend on his own 'pate' (another word for head). God will eventually make it boomerang back on them.
 - i. Maybe in this life. Like David eventually became king. And Cush, whoever he was, had to come to terms with it. Or maybe Cush died fighting men who were loyal to David. Or maybe Cush repented, too, and served David later. Any of those could fit into the meaning of having something be turned back onto his own head.
 - ii. Open Question: Have you seen this happen? Some of the men who sexually harassed or assaulted women are getting their comeuppance in the #MeToo movement. Sometimes it's just the truth coming out, and being known. Another example: Since 2015, the Chicago Police Department is admitting to wrongdoing and paying out restitution for torturing people, mostly black men.
 - c. God is opposed to worthless metal getting mixed with precious metal. That's why God makes the wicked man's sword (v.12) and fiery arrows (v.13) return at him, in some sense. In v.14 – 15, the wicked man will fall into his own pit.
 - i. God appeared as a fiery sword in Genesis 3:24 when He kicked Adam and Eve out of the garden. He wasn't just being mean: He was preventing them from eating from the tree of life in a corrupted state. And He was symbolizing that He needed to cut something away from us, or burn something away from us, in order to bring us back to the garden.

- ii. Jesus appears as a fiery sword in Revelation 1, when his teaching is represented by a sword coming from his mouth, and Jesus is on fire because he has purified the human nature he is wearing.
 - iii. This is why hell is fiery: You bring in worthless stuff into yourself, like an addiction or unforgiveness or any resistance to God, and God will target that stuff. This life is important for our repenting, so we can allow God to burn that stuff away NOW! And so that God can strengthen our desires for Jesus so that when we meet him, we'll say YES to him! People who cultivate an addiction to something else or someone else – their own mischief will return back on their own heads. They will be so addicted to something else or someone else that when they see Jesus, they will resent him for separating them from the object of their addiction. For more information on the theme of fire in Scripture, or the understanding of hell as denial of an addiction, see:
<http://www.anastasiscenter.org/gods-goodness-fire.htm>.
6. Let's think a little bit again about this Psalm being part of a pattern of prayer for God's people.
- a. The shield (v.10) is defensive, just as taking a refuge in God is defensive (v.1). If God is the one to vindicate you, you don't need to go on the offensive. You may need to stand up for truth and invite other people to repent, but that is not offensive per se. That is actually hoping for the best for others and from others.
 - b. On some level, the people of God have prayed through the entire Book of Psalms on some kind of cycle. That means this Psalm comes up early. I think the pattern of prayer is meant to carry on, as we hold things in place in our minds and hearts. That's definitely true for Psalms 1 and 2. Psalms 5 – 7 seem like we're supposed to hold them together, too, because they are about God's judgment on evil, and our repentance and asking God for mercy. What would it do in our hearts to keep Psalm 7 in mind more often? Or pray it more often?