

Series FolkSongs of Faith

This Message My Shield Is God Most High

Scripture Psalm 7

Psalm 7 is one of the less familiar Psalms. It is in the form of a prayer. It begins with a plea for personal safety and protection, shifts into a request for God to judge evildoers with righteousness, and ends with a statement of confidence in God and praise for Him. We will discover that David's words are applicable to us.

Read Psalm 7

There are 150 Psalms in our English language Bibles. About half of them were written by David, and some of those were based on personal experiences he had. The "personal experience" Psalms can be identified by the superscriptions after the number. The superscriptions are clues to the background situation described in the poetry.

Psalm 7 was sung "by David concerning Cush, a Benjamite." This statement is only a little helpful to our understanding since there is no mention of a Benjamite named Cush in the Old Testament history of David. We have to assume that Cush was one of the relatives or associates of King Saul, who was himself from the tribe of Benjamin.

King Saul had been rejected as king of Israel by God because of his several episodes of disobedience. David had been anointed as Saul's replacement because "he was a man after God's heart." Although he was the heir to the throne, David made no move to take over this position as long as Saul was alive. David trusted God to work out the circumstances of their lives, and the transfer of authority. Unfortunately, David's decision meant that he had to be a fugitive in his own country because Saul, in his jealousy and mental instability, wasted a lot of his energy in pursuing and trying to capture and kill David.

This Psalm is most likely a description of those years in which David had no permanent home but, rather, had to be constantly on the run and hiding from his pursuers. The need for protection and safety is the thought behind verses 1 and 2: "O LORD my God, I take refuge in you; save and deliver me from all who pursue me."

The first two words in Hebrew are, "Yahweh, my Elohim." These titles emphasized the confidence of David in the heavenly Father. "Yahweh" was the title used by God to represent His special covenant relationship to His chosen people. "Elohim" represented God in His relationship to the world at large. In the minds of the Hebrew people, "Elohim" was the Creator and Ruler over the affairs of mankind. In view of the problems that David was going to describe, these two names were the most intimate and significant names that David could use.

The desire of David to "take refuge" in "Yahweh, Elohim" indicated his desire to be close to and protected by God. It was a declaration of his loyalty to and trust in God. Given the desperate circumstances in his life, David was acknowledging that God was his only hope.

David compared his situation to that of a lamb about to be mauled by a lion. A lamb is an animal without any ability to defend itself. It is no match for the much larger and more powerful predator, the lion. In Hebrew poetry, such as this Psalm, enemies were often depicted as ferocious wild beasts.

In verses 3 through 5, the writer expressed his confusion about his situation. He wanted to know why he was in such negative circumstances. He began his appeal by repeating the same words with which he began his song: "Yahweh, my Elohim." Notice how he pleaded his innocence: "If I have done something I should not have done;" "if there is guilt on my hands;" "if I have done evil to another person," "if without cause I have taken something that wasn't mine," then he declared his willingness to suffer the consequences for any wrong he may have done. However, David could think of no reasons why God was allowing him to undergo such trials.

The reason this Psalm has meaning to many of us is that we can find ourselves in perplexing situations in life. Just like David, we begin to ask of ourselves “why?” questions. Why have I become the object of ridicule and insult and bullying? Why has misfortune fallen on me? Why am I suffering? Or grieving? Many believers who have tried to be faithful to God in their lives are confronted with circumstantial and human “lions” who seek to destroy them. The implicit question is “Why does a merciful God allow such misery and danger and uncertainty?”

This Psalm does not address those questions, so I will not get sidetracked. David did not dwell on the “why?” questions. He acknowledged his problems, but he did not engage in a “pity party.” Rather, he pursued what is the best course of action for a stressed out follower of God: he made an appeal to God. The thought is: “God, you have called me and anointed me. You are responsible to protect me and to judge my enemies.” This appeal is in verses 6 through 9.

Out of the turmoil of his heart and the deep conviction of his innocence David called on God to act in judgment. “Arise, O Yahweh,” “rise up,” “awake, my Elohim.” This is the third time David used these special terms of relationship.

There are a number of requests in these verses. “Do something about the rage of the enemies;” decree justice;” “rule over the peoples;” “judge the peoples.” David appealed for urgent action. He appealed to God’s sense of justice and righteousness.

He was even willing for God to judge him along with everyone else. He had searched his heart and had concluded that he had been loyal to God and had acted properly to his fellow men. He was willing for God to judge him “according to his righteousness,” and “according to his integrity.”

“Righteousness” has the meaning of “doing the right thing.” “Integrity” means that a person has acted “for the right reasons, with the proper attitude.” One of the functions of God is to vindicate the righteous and to condemn the guilty. David was pleading for personal vindication. He knew that God would declare him to be righteous even though the enemies accused him of wrongdoing.

David's appeal concluded with verse 9: he wanted the "righteous God," the One "who searches minds and hearts," "to bring an end to the violence of the wicked and to make righteous people, like himself, secure." The phrase, "to search the minds and hearts" was a Hebraic way of explaining God's ability to examine a person's hidden character and motives. God Himself used this phrase, "I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve" (*Jeremiah 17:10*).

The parallel statement in the New Testament is, "The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (*Hebrews 4:12*). David knew that God knew his motives and intents as well as those of his enemies, and he wanted God to take action.

Beginning in verse 9, there is an interesting sequence of descriptions which reveal David's understanding of the character and ability of God. He wrote that God is "the righteous God," the One who searches and knows what is in the heart and mind of a person, who is a "shield" of protection for the righteous, who is a "Savior of the upright in heart," who is a "righteous Judge," and who "expresses his wrath on those who will not repent."

These statements are an affirmation of David's confidence in Yahweh. David was among those Old Testament saints who understood what it meant to be called into a relationship with God. He recognized his responsibility to follow a godly lifestyle, and that he had the privilege to write about, sing to, and appeal to the righteous Judge of all the earth with boldness and confidence.

David had complete confidence in "Yahweh, his Elohim," and that his prayer would be heard. In verse 10 he introduced a new title: "My shield is God Most High." David knew that his God had two responsibilities, to "save the upright in heart," and to "express his wrath."

Verse 12 explains how God will express His wrath against "any man who does not relent." The word "relent" refers to any person who does not "change his ways" and "repent." When that is the case, "then God will sharpen his sword; he will bend and string his bow. He has prepared his deadly weapons; he makes ready his flaming arrows." The sharp sword, deadly weapons, and flaming arrows are metaphors of inescapable judgment. God will be prepared to unleash His wrath against the wicked enemies of His people.

David was also confident about what would happen to evildoers. He used three remarkable metaphorical pictures to describe this in verses 14 through 16. 1) Evil gives birth to “disillusionment,” or literally “a lie.” 2) The evildoer who seeks to entrap a victim falls into the pit he has dug. 3) The trouble and violence that the evildoer designs “recoils on himself.” These consequences are sort of like a boomerang which circles back on the thrower.

Our personal experience undoubtedly puts us in agreement with David. We have several idioms which state “that crime does not pay,” and “whoever plays with fire will be burned,” or, as Jesus said, “all who draw the sword will die by the sword” (*Matthew 26:52*). Each day the media is filled with descriptions about the troubles people bring on themselves because of their misdeeds. Drug deals which go bad; drug abusers who damage themselves physically, lifestyles which lead to disease; poor ethical choices; the list of causes and consequences goes on and on. This is why the Apostle Paul wrote, “Do not be deceived; God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction” (*Galatians 6:7-8*).

Verses 14 through 16 seem to relate back to the interesting comment about God in verse 11: He “expresses his wrath every day.” This statement indicates that God’s judgments are not all kept in store for some future day. There are, apparently, immediate consequences for those whose minds and hearts are set on violence.

This Psalm ends with a statement of thanksgiving and praise. What began with a plea for protection and a declaration of innocence turned into a strong expression of confidence in God’s ability to right all wrongs and to judge righteously. David did not dwell on his personal problems, but quickly transitioned to statements about his trust and confidence in Yahweh. David knew that God could be counted on to act appropriately based on His righteous nature. David knew that God’s righteous judgment would affect both the wicked and those who were righteous; that the wicked would fall, whereas the righteous would experience deliverance and be vindicated.

David did not know when his deliverance from his enemies would come, but he was confident about the eventual outcome and was eager to praise Yahweh in advance of his deliverance. His praise was expressed “in the name of the LORD Most High;” “Yahweh who is the ruler over all.”