

## Psalm 35

*Prayer for Rescue from Enemies.  
A Psalm of David.*

- <sup>1</sup> Contend, O LORD, with those who contend with me;  
Fight against those who fight against me.
- <sup>2</sup> Take hold of buckler and shield  
And rise up for my help.
- <sup>3</sup> Draw also the spear and the battle-axe to meet those who pursue me;  
Say to my soul, 'I am your salvation.'
- <sup>4</sup> Let those be ashamed and dishonored who seek my life;  
Let those be turned back and humiliated who devise evil against me.
- <sup>5</sup> Let them be like chaff before the wind,  
With the angel of the LORD driving them on.
- <sup>6</sup> Let their way be dark and slippery,  
With the angel of the LORD pursuing them.
- <sup>7</sup> For without cause they hid their net for me;  
Without cause they dug a pit for my soul.
- <sup>8</sup> Let destruction come upon him unawares,  
And let the net which he hid catch himself;  
Into that very destruction let him fall.
- <sup>9</sup> And my soul shall rejoice in the LORD;  
It shall exult in His salvation.
- <sup>10</sup> All my bones will say, 'LORD, who is like You,  
Who delivers the afflicted from him who is too strong for him,  
And the afflicted and the needy from him who robs him?'
- <sup>11</sup> Malicious witnesses rise up;  
They ask me of things that I do not know.
- <sup>12</sup> They repay me evil for good,  
To the bereavement of my soul.
- <sup>13</sup> But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth;  
I humbled my soul with fasting,  
And my prayer kept returning to my bosom.
- <sup>14</sup> I went about as though it were my friend or brother;  
I bowed down mourning, as one who sorrows for a mother.
- <sup>15</sup> But at my stumbling they rejoiced and gathered themselves together;  
The smiters whom I did not know gathered together against me,  
They slandered me without ceasing.
- <sup>16</sup> Like godless jesters at a feast,  
They gnashed at me with their teeth.
- <sup>17</sup> Lord, how long will You look on?  
Rescue my soul from their ravages,  
My only life from the lions.
- <sup>18</sup> I will give You thanks in the great congregation;  
I will praise You among a mighty throng.
- <sup>19</sup> Do not let those who are wrongfully my enemies rejoice over me;  
Nor let those who hate me without cause wink maliciously.
- <sup>20</sup> For they do not speak peace,  
But they devise deceitful words against those who are quiet in the land.
- <sup>21</sup> They opened their mouth wide against me;  
They said, 'Aha, aha, our eyes have seen it!'
- <sup>22</sup> You have seen it, O LORD, do not keep silent;

*David the Psalmist:* This Psalm is ascribed to David, the poet, singer, and king. King Saul and his supporters hunted David, to kill him. They chased David into the wilderness, where David slowly gathered those who supported him and trusted God and believed that he would one day ascend the throne.

v.5 – 6: David probably is thinking of how "the angel of the LORD" was "the LORD" Himself (Ex.3:2, 6) and delivered Israel out from Pharaoh's rule, driving Pharaoh's soldiers into the "dark and slippery" pathway of the Sea before closing the Sea on them (Ex.14:19; cf. 13:21 – 22; 33:14 – 15). David had just referred to "the angel of the LORD" in Psalm 34:7 as his protector.

v.13a: "sackcloth" was an uncomfortable material that Israelites wore to express before God repentance, grief, and sorrow.

O Lord, do not be far from me.  
<sup>23</sup> Stir up Yourself, and awake to my right  
 And to my cause, my God and my Lord.  
<sup>24</sup> Judge me, O LORD my God, according to Your righteousness,  
 And do not let them rejoice over me.  
<sup>25</sup> Do not let them say in their heart, ‘Aha, our desire!’  
 Do not let them say, ‘We have swallowed him up!’  
<sup>26</sup> Let those be ashamed and humiliated altogether  
 Who rejoice at my distress;  
 Let those be clothed with shame and dishonor  
 Who magnify themselves over me.  
<sup>27</sup> Let them shout for joy and rejoice,  
 Who favor my vindication;  
 And let them say continually, ‘The LORD be magnified,  
 Who delights in the prosperity of His servant.’  
<sup>28</sup> And my tongue shall declare Your righteousness  
 And Your praise all day long.

### Historical and Cultural Background

- *Hebrew Biblical Poetry*: These poets rhyme *concepts* more than *sounds*, where the rhyming goes from a general thought to a more specific one. That makes it nice for those of us who have to work from the English translation. Here’s an example of rhymed concepts in v.13 – 14. Consider what the poet is saying by pairing these two lines:

<sup>13</sup> But as for me,	when they were sick,	my clothing was sackcloth;
	I humbled	my soul with fasting,
And		my prayer kept returning to my bosom.
	<sup>14</sup> I went about	as though it were my friend or brother;
	I bowed down mourning,	as one who sorrows for a mother.

- *David’s Trust in God’s Promise*: David knew that God defended the human leaders He appointed, and also was faithful to fulfill promises He made.
  - *God Defended Human Leaders He Appointed*: In Numbers 12, Aaron and Miriam criticized Moses unjustly, and God defended Moses. In Numbers 16, Korah led a faction in wholesale rebellion, and God used the earth to swallow them up.
  - *God Fulfilled His Promises*: In Genesis 1, God said, “Let there be light,” and then, there was light. Then in Genesis 12, God made promises to His people, and called them to trust Him. For example, God promised Abraham and Sarah He would give them a son despite them being dead in a reproductive sense. In 1 Samuel 16, God through the prophet Samuel anointed David to be king. That was God’s promise; David is trusting God to fulfill His word.

## Questions

1. David asks God to be a warrior and defend him, even though he has tried to avoid conflict and make peace. Is that consistent? Why or why not?
2. According to v.4 – 21, what have David’s opponents and enemies tried to do to him?
  - a. In v.4, they sought his life, and devised evil against him.
  - b. In v.7, they hid a net for him, and dug a pit for his soul – poetically, they set up traps of some sort.
  - c. In v.11, they set up malicious witnesses to apparently frame him and accuse him of doing things that he did not do.
  - d. In v.12, they repaid him evil for good – which probably means that despite him being a faithful and loyal soldier who even defeated Goliath the Philistine, they want to bring him down and kill him.
  - e. In v.15, they rejoiced when David stumbled, gathering themselves together to smite him – probably verbally smite him – and slander him.
  - f. In v.16, they mocked him in public, trying to make fun of him and turn people against him.
  - g. In v.17, they are like lions, who seek to devour him.
  - h. In v.19, they are “wrongfully” his enemies who hate him and wink maliciously.
  - i. In v.20, they do not speak peace, but devise deceitful lies against peaceful people.
  - j. In v.21, they bring false accusations against David.
3. Why are they doing this? What’s at stake for them?
  - a. King Saul and his supporters wanted to keep the kingship, and hold onto power and honor.
  - b. People who wanted to get closer to King Saul may have offered to “sell out” David, to spy for Saul, or produce false testimony against David.
4. According to v.13 – 16, how has David responded to his opponents and enemies?
  - a. He prayed for them when they were sick. Wearing “sackcloth,” in v.13, refers to praying and repenting. In this case, David was praying and repenting for them. That’s pretty generous, given that they were seeking David’s life. Even when they were jealous of him or sought to gain favor with King Saul by siding against David, David wanted their best and peace in Israel.
  - b. Could this “sickness” have been spiritual? It is likely, yes. They opposed David because they did not believe that the prophet Samuel had anointed him to be king (1 Sam.16). If they were unsure, then they could have stayed neutral, or asked the prophet Samuel while he was still alive. But they didn’t.
  - c. David sought peace with them and for them. What David says here in Psalm 35:13 – 14 is remarkably similar to Psalm 34:11 – 14. Perhaps David wrote these two psalms at around the same time, when he was in the cave of Adullam and gathering people to himself (1 Samuel 22:1 – 2) as the nucleus of the new kingdom.
  - d. Application: Have you prayed for those who oppose you, or just plain don’t care enough about you?
5. So what does David ask God to do?
  - a. Yes, there is military language here. It fits with how God defended Israel all the way back in the Exodus. God said He was a warrior.
  - b. Yes, there is Exodus deliverance language here, too. In v.5b and 6b, David prays for the angel of the LORD to drive them on and pursue them into a dark and slippery place, like the wet ground exposed by the parting of the Red Sea.
  - c. David asks God to let the people who set traps for him fall into their own traps (v.7 – 8). Whatever that means in a literal or poetic sense, there is a theological sense in which we are human beings and human becomings, and the evil we do to others becomes somehow part of our character, and then something to repent deeply of when we see Jesus face to face.
  - d. David asks God to give social and public consequences to those who have opposed him (v.26). This is probably the “destruction” that David prayed for. Notice that the structure is:

<sup>26</sup> Let those be ashamed and humiliated altogether      Who rejoice at my distress;  
Let those be clothed with shame and dishonor      Who magnify themselves over me.

This does teach us a lesson about how violent language doesn’t always mean violent action or violent results.

6. What does David pray for God to do on behalf of those who support him?

<sup>27</sup> Let them shout for joy and rejoice, Who favor my vindication;  
And let them say continually, 'The LORD be magnified, Who delights in the prosperity of His servant.'

- a. David wants them to experience joy, and for them to shout for joy
- b. David wants them to magnify God's name, and to know God more deeply.

7. What does David look forward to doing? Sitting on a Mediterranean beach with a cool drink? No:

<sup>28</sup> And my tongue shall declare Your righteousness  
And Your praise all day long.

David saw his role as king primarily as worship leader. For him, God was at the center. When God fulfilled His covenant promise to David, it would be His "righteousness" (v.24, 28). So David looked forward to testifying about God "all day long."

8. How do we read this in light of Jesus?

- a. Jesus as reader and learner of the Psalm and the story of David. Jesus read this as the greatest and truest "David."
  - i. Jesus was anointed to be king, and had to endure being a king-in-exile while other people hunted him down and tried to kill him.
  - ii. Jesus was the king from David's line that God made king of the Jews and king of the world.
- b. Jesus as the one who prayed the Psalm
  - i. Jesus prayed for those who persecuted him.
  - ii. Jesus prayed for God to vindicate him.
- c. Jesus as the one who shares his kingship with us, though we also must wait for our visible enthronement on the earth.
- d. Jesus as the one who calls us to pray for our enemies and opponents. That's the biggest challenge here!