

PSALM 7

- THE FALSELY ACCUSED TAKE REFUGE WITH GOD THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGE -

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Introduction and setting

- ❖ This psalm is a prayer for help. We hear someone speaks who is under attack; he is wrongly accused and he sees this as a deadly danger. He sees it as a danger because he takes the righteousness of his God seriously. The precise setting of this psalm is not known to us. The superscription places the psalm in the life of David. Cush the Benjamite is speaking ill against the anointed king of Israel and his reign (cf. Psalm 2, describing the rejection of God and his anointed king). Opposition from the Benjaminites is apparent from these passages: 1 Samuel 24-26 and 2 Samuel 16:5 and 20:1.
- ❖ The view of Gerstenberger seems to be worthy of consideration: *“Psalm 7 ... as well as the other laments, does not report a single incident, for instance, of somebody being accused of theft. Rather, the complaint represents an accumulation of the agonies of generations of supplicants facing unfounded charges of various types. ...I suggest that the prayer was used in regular complaint and petitionary services for an individual suffering in a legal predicament. Of course it could be recited only by and for people whose guiltlessness had been proven or could be vouched for.”*¹ David reacts against false charges laid against him; David is never

¹ Gerstenberger, Psalms: Part 1, pp. 64, 66.

just any individual. He functions in the role of the anointed messiah-king of Yahweh. In this role he unites the supplications of generations of the righteous being persecuted.

- ❖ The oath in the psalm finds its application in the worship of Israel in 1 Kings 8:31-32.
- ❖ There is no doubt about the purpose of the prayer. It is prayed by one
 - seeking the face of the Lord as refuge
 - to deliver him and
 - to vindicate him.
- ❖ What does it mean “to take refuge in the Lord”? This metaphor is used frequently in the Psalms and refers to the faith whereby a believer entrusts his/her life to God’s care. In this case the prayer to God is a way of “taking refuge in the Lord”. This is what is characteristic of the righteous in contrast with the unrighteous, who do not actually seek shelter in and with the Lord even though they may talk about it.

Form and structure

The basic structure of the Psalm is clear and can be reflected thus:

- ❖ Verses 1-5: An appeal is made for rescue and a declaration/vow of innocence.
- ❖ Verses 6-9: The psalmist makes an appeal for vindication and justice.
- ❖ Verses 10-16: A confession of trust in and praise for the Lord’s righteousness.
- ❖ Verse 17: A closing vow/promise to praise the Lord when given deliverance.

Technical notes

- ❖ Shiggaion in verse 1 = probably meaning “Lament”

Exposition

Heading

- ❖ *A shiggaion of David, which he sang to the LORD concerning Cush, a Benjamite.*
- ❖ Whatever more can be said about this heading, the reality is that in this instance, the resistance against the anointed of the Lord does not come from the heathen nations, but from the midst of the covenant people of God. This is the painful reality that the righteous experience in this psalm. The false accusations come from within the ranks of the people of the Lord!

Verses 1-2:

¹ *LORD my God, I take refuge in you;*

save and deliver me from all who pursue me,

² *or they will tear me apart like a lion*

and rip me to pieces with no one to rescue me.

- ❖ [Vs. 1] However simple the confession of this verse, it still is profound and significant. The Lord, Yahweh, is his God and refuge. He has a history of seeking shelter with the Lord. This is the major confession of the righteous in Israel. The Lord is a refuge because he is a judge, and a righteous one for that (cf. vv. 9, 11)! Praying to the Lord as judge, the righteous must also be aware of the fact that he himself will also be judged by more than mere mortals, i.e. the Lord, the righteous, divine judge.
- ❖ [Vs. 2] Here we can hear the urgency of the petition. The image we see is the alternative to the Lord's just judgement – false accusers tearing him apart like a lion without any mercy – ripping him to pieces! This is the nature of false accusers; they seek the destruction of the righteous. Persecution of the believer comes in different forms. Most often it is in the very simple misportrayal of the intentions, words and deeds of the believer by others. These “others” can be and most often are people very close to us; it can be family members or other members of the congregation.

Verses 3-5:

³ *LORD my God, if I have done this
and there is guilt on my hands—*
⁴ *if I have repaid my ally with evil
or without cause have robbed my foe—*
⁵ *then let my enemy pursue and overtake me;
let him trample my life to the ground
and make me sleep in the dust.*

- ❖ This prayer is a way of placing the judgement of his innocence in the hands of the Lord. He therefore makes his innocence conditional by introducing the “if”. The pattern set by king Solomon in 1 Kings 8:31 is expressed in this supplication and oath. From a human perspective the accuser may also be the one who may punish if the accusations were true (vs. 5). Still, the oath is addressed to God with the trust that He will decide whether execution of punishment will be necessary. Punishment will only occur when the Lord directs and allows it. The innocent swears in the name of the Lord. Even though we should never swear lightly, we should swear in the name of our Lord when occasions necessitate it.

Verses 6-9:

⁶ *Arise, LORD, in your anger;
rise up against the rage of my enemies.
Awake, my God; decree justice.*
⁷ *Let the assembled peoples gather around you,
while you sit enthroned over them on high.*
⁸ *Let the LORD judge the peoples.
Vindicate me, LORD, according to my righteousness,
according to my integrity, O Most High.*
⁹ *Bring to an end the violence of the wicked
and make the righteous secure—
you, the righteous God
who probes minds and hearts.*

- ❖ The falsely accused knows who is the real guilty party and prays accordingly that the Lord will judge and execute punishment. He therefore turns his prayer to a call for the establishment of a court of law. False accusers stir up God's anger, because the Lord is just in all his ways. The call on the Lord to "arise" is a military metaphor (cf. also Psalm 3:8). The image invoked is what is portrayed in Numbers 10:35-36. It recalls God's symbolic seat on top of the Ark of the Covenant that represents the throne of the Lord. The call to the Lord to "rise" was the call given when the Ark of the Covenant was sent out in battle, as a prayer to the Lord to do battle against his enemies. God "rising" was nothing less than God "going out" to do battle! The great reality was that the Lord went out in front of his people when they went into battle, forming a shield and doing battle in their stead. "Awake" can be compared to the battle cry of Deborah in Judges 5:12. These images most probably evoke the image of Yahweh as warrior.
- ❖ [Verse 8] This psalm is certainly not a prayer limited to a single occasion. It uses language familiar to the worship of the Lord in his holy temple and relates the experience of the individual believer to God's judgement over all nations.
- ❖ "*Vindicate me, LORD, according to my righteousness*": too often any reference to personal righteousness is interpreted as a presumptuous insincere "pharisaic" attitude. This is never a claim to be without any sin on the part of the accused. It refers to a specific case in which there must be a verdict – guilty/wicked or innocent/righteous. This includes whether the person lives with an attitude of dependence upon the Lord, seeking his kingdom, or as if there is no God who will judge.

Verses 10-16:

- ¹⁰ *My shield is God Most High,
who saves the upright in heart.*
- ¹¹ *God is a righteous judge,
a God who displays his wrath every day.*
- ¹² *If he does not relent,
he will sharpen his sword;
he will bend and string his bow.*
- ¹³ *He has prepared his deadly weapons;
he makes ready his flaming arrows.*

*14 Whoever is pregnant with evil
conceives trouble and gives birth to disillusionment.*

*15 Whoever digs a hole and scoops it out
falls into the pit they have made.*

*16 The trouble they cause recoils on them;
their violence comes down on their own heads.*

- ❖ In this section we find a confession of the nature of the Lord's justice. The Lord is not addressed, but referred to. The outcome of the Lord's justice is clear: the wicked will receive their just retribution from the Lord. The Lord is not only the defender of the innocent; He is also the opponent of the wicked, displaying aggression against the false accuser (note the bow and sword!). The wicked becomes a victim of his own aggression against the righteous. This is an expression of God's wrath against the wicked that manifests itself every day. God defends by and through judgement. The only hope in this life for the righteous lies not in themselves, but in their God who is righteous. It is only when the wicked is seen by the accused in the light of Yahweh's righteousness that there is hope.
- ❖ The way the wicked functions is portrayed in a metaphor of conception and pregnancy. A seed of wickedness is planted in the wicked and it is conceived as false accusations. This evil has unexpected consequences; what they planned for others backfires upon themselves.

Verse 17:

*17 I will give thanks to the LORD because of his righteousness;
I will sing the praises of the name of the LORD Most High.*

- ❖ The Lord God is praised for his righteousness, demonstrating that there is absolutely no conflict between the love and the righteousness of God. On the contrary – the Lord demonstrates love in keeping up justice and righteousness! The righteous faithfulness of the Lord in the end overshadows and overrules the evil planned against the innocent believer. This moves the righteous in the Psalms to praise the Lord. Hallelujah!

Application

- ❖ False accusations are bound to come primarily from those closest to us and in particular from inside the community of faith. This is found throughout Scripture. This was what David experienced as anointed king over Israel and this psalm could just as well have been found on the lips of our righteous Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. He was the one who carried all false accusations; all the venom of the kingdom of the accuser and the kingdom of the lie was aimed against him; all these false accusations were brought in against Jesus by those over whom he was anointed as king. He was king of the Jews and it was they who shouted: “Crucify him!” His own people denied his righteousness and rejected him as an unrighteous criminal.
- ❖ Those united in faith with God’s anointed Messiah will also have to endure false accusations of all sorts. In society, Christians can so easily come under suspicion because of their “otherness” and then be accused of false agendas and motives. False accusations are difficult to bear, because of the injustice expressed and experienced through it. False accusations also keep the sufferer locked up in a world from which there is no escape, because when a sin is committed, it can be confessed and a pardon or forgiveness received. However, how can you confess a sin of which you are not guilty? Only fleeing to the face of the Lord provides the possibility to live under false accusations; we can be set free by his righteousness in Christ who bore the sting of false accusations and by him alone!
- ❖ The theme of the Lord as warrior plays an important role in these (and many other) psalms. It should receive proper attention in a sermon on this psalm; cf. Kang, Sa-Moon. *Divine War in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East*, p. 131-224.
- ❖ “My righteousness” – the importance of maintaining one’s righteousness when falsely accused is demonstrated in this psalm. If need be, one must suffer injustice. The perspective of Psalm 1 is applied in this psalm: it is always better to maintain justice and righteousness than to join the company and ranks of those who demonstrate no love for what is right.
- ❖ The kingdom of heaven is a kingdom of justice and righteousness because God is a God of justice. This militates against the persistent idea that love and justice are in competition with each other and even in opposition. The love of God lies in the fact that rather than allowing injustice to live a legitimate life, he gave his Son, his anointed King, to bear the injustice of all sin.

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