

Psalm 55

Title: Prayer for Destruction of Enemies

Author and Date: David

Key Verses: Psalm 55:9, 15, 19, and 23

Type: Individual Lament (Complaint)

Outline

- A. Complaint: the psalmist's anguish (verses 1-8).
- B. Condemnation: the psalmist's anger (verses 9-15).
- C. Confidence: the psalmist's anticipation (verses 16-23).

Notes

Title: "For the Chief Musician: on stringed instruments. Maschil of David." See the notes on the title of Psalm 54.

Summary: Psalm 55 is similar to Psalm 54. In both psalms, the psalmist prays to God for help from his enemies, including former friends (54:3, 5, 7 and 55:3). Like Psalm 54, Psalm 55 is an individual lament or "complaint" to the Lord (verse 2 and 17). In Psalm 55, the psalmist wants God to hear his prayer for help from his enemies (verses 1-2). His enemies and the wicked cause him pain and fear (verses 3-5). He wants to escape from all the trouble they cause him (verses 6-8). The psalmist wants his enemies to be destroyed for the wickedness they cause in the city (verses 9-11). One enemy, in particular, is a "familiar friend" to the psalmist (verse 12-14). The psalmist wants God to destroy his enemies (verse 15). He is committed to calling upon God and trusting God and he believes God will destroy the wicked (verses 16-23). If Second Samuel 15-18 is the background to this psalm, then David's "enemy" (verse 3) would be Absalom and David's "familiar friend" (verse 13) would be Ahithophel, David's counselor (2 Sam. 15:12; 16:20-23; 17:21-23). David prayed to the Lord concerning Ahithophel's counsel (2 Sam. 15:31).

Verse 2: Note that the psalmist offers a "complaint" (KJV; see also verse 17) *to* God, but not a complaint *about* God (see also Psa. 64:1; 77:3; 142:2).

Verse 3: The psalmist experiences *troubles around him* (verses 1-3), *terrors within him* (verses 4-5), and *treachery next to him* (verses 9-14, 20-21). For the words, "they cast iniquity upon me" (KJV), see the curse of Shimei in 2 Samuel 16:5-8.

Verses 6-8: The psalmist wants to fly away like a bird and escape his troubles. Compare these words with the words of Jeremiah (Jer. 9:1-2).

Verse 7: For “Selah”, see the notes on Psalm 3:2.

Verse 9: The psalmist wants the Lord to destroy and divide the tongue of the enemies. Like God’s judgment at Babel (Gen. 11:9), the psalmist wants these enemies to be judged by God and have their plans thwarted. Verses 9, 15, 19, and 23, form the imprecatory prayer of the psalmist for divine retribution upon his enemies.

Verses 9-11: Wickedness is taking place in the “city”, “walls”, and “streets”. This is probably a reference to Jerusalem.

Verse 12: To “magnify” (KJV) oneself against another is to build oneself up in order to attack another (see verse 18).

Verse 13: The “acquaintance” (KJV) is a “familiar friend” (ASV); the best of friends (see Job 19:14, 19; Psa. 41:9; Jer. 20:10). The psalmist’s friend turns out to be a traitor.

Verse 14: The “house of God” (KJV) is the tabernacle that stood in Jerusalem in the days of King David (see Judg. 18:31 [in Shiloh]; Psa. 42:4; 52:8).

Verse 17: “Evening, and morning, and at noon” (KJV) shows the consistency and constancy of the psalmist’s devotion to God. Compare this with Daniel’s prayer habits (Dan. 6:10).

Verse 19: “He that abideth of old” (KJV) is a reference to God’s unchanging, eternal character. The wicked are described as men who “have no changes” (KJV). They constantly engage in wickedness without change. They are set in their wicked ways. A lack of “fear” of God is the basic problem of the wicked (Psa. 36:1). For “Selah”, see the notes on Psalm 3:2.

Verses 20-21: The words in these verses revert back to the description of the “familiar friend” (ASV) in verses 13-14. The so-called friend breaks his covenant of friendship (verse 20) and he uses hypocritical flattery (verse 21). He is a traitor.

Verse 22: For “cast thy burden”, see 1 Peter 5:7.

Verse 23: Both Ahithophel (2 Sam. 17:14, 23) and Absalom (2 Sam. 18:9-17) were brought down to the “pit of destruction” with an untimely death. The words, “But I will trust in thee” (KJV), is the theme of the next psalm, Psalm 56 (see 56:3, 4, and 11).

Questions

1. What does the psalmist request of God (verses 1-2)?

2. How does the psalmist describe himself (verse 2)?

3. What do the enemies and the wicked do to the psalmist (verse 3)?
4. What does the psalmist experience in the presence of his enemies (verses 4-5)?
5. What does the psalmist wish he could do (verses 6-8)?
6. What does the psalmist want the Lord to do to his enemies (verse 9)?
7. What do the wicked do in the city (verses 9-11)?
8. Who is it that reproaches and hates the psalmist (verses 12-14)?
9. What does the psalmist want to happen to the one who betrays him (verse 15)?
10. What promise does the psalmist make (verses 16-17)?
11. What does God do for the psalmist (verse 18)?
12. How are the wicked described and what does God do to them (verse 19)?
13. How is the psalmist's enemy described (verses 20-21)?
14. What words of encouragement does the psalmist offer the righteous (verse 22)?

15. What does the psalmist believe God will do to the wicked (verse 23)?

16. What does the psalmist do with God (verse 23)?

Applications for Today

1. Complain *to* God for your troubles, but do not complain *about* God for your troubles (verses 1-2 and 16-17). What is one characteristic of the wicked (Jude 16)?
2. The Lord will punish the enemies and protect the righteous (verses 3-5, 9-11, 15, 18-19, and 23). What does the Lord do to the godly and the ungodly (2 Pet. 2:9)? What happens to the enemies of Christians in the first-century (Rev. 11:5)?
3. Sometimes we feel like flying away and escaping from our troubles (verses 6-8). What does Jeremiah say he wants to do and why (Jer. 9:1-6)?
4. Sometimes a man's enemies are his foes *and* his friends. It is possible to be betrayed by a "familiar friend" (verses 12-14 and 20-21). Who forgets Job (Job 19:14, 19)? Who denounces Jeremiah (Jer. 20:10)? Who betrays Jesus (Jn. 13:18; Psa. 41:9)? Where do some foes come from (Mt. 10:36)?
5. Make prayer a regular part of your day (verses 16-17). What does Paul say about prayer (1 Thess. 5:17)? What does James say about Elijah's prayer (Jas. 5:17)?
6. Cast your burden upon the Lord and he will sustain you (verse 22). What does Peter encourage Christians to do (1 Pet. 5:7)?
7. We can always trust God when all else fails. Trust is the remedy for trouble (verse 23). How are those described who trust in the Lord (Psa. 115:11; 125:1; Prov. 28:25; 29:25)? What does Proverbs 3:5 say? Who does Paul put his trust in (Phil. 2:24)?