

Psalm 57

Title: Prayer for Salvation from Enemies

Author and Date: David

Key Verse: Psalm 57:3

Type: Individual Lament (Complaint)

Outline

- A. Prayer in time of peril (verses 1-5).
- B. Promise in time of peril (verses 6-11).

Notes

Title: “For the Chief Musician; set to Al-tashheth. A Psalm of David. Michtam; when he fled from Saul, in the cave.” For “the Chief Musician”, see the notes on the title of Psalm 4. “Set to Al-tashheth” is a reference to a particular song of the day. It means “destroy not” (RSV; possibly a reference to David’s advice not to destroy Saul, 1 Sam. 24:6-7). Psalms 57, 58, 59, and 75 are set to this song. For “Michtam”, see the notes on the title of Psalm 16 (see also the titles in Psalm 57-60). The occasion when David fled from Saul “in the cave” could be the cave of Adullam (1 Sam. 22:1-2) or the cave of En-gedi (1 Sam. 24:1-7). See also the title to Psalm 142.

Summary: Psalm 57 is an individual lament (complaint) psalm. It is another “trouble and trust” psalm in a series of psalms extending from Psalm 54 through Psalm 59. In Psalm 57, the psalmist prays to God for protection from his enemies (verse 1). He believes God will come from heaven and save him (verses 2-3). His enemies are fierce and cruel (verse 4), but God is exalted above them all (verse 5). After praying to God for help (verses 1-5), the psalmist makes a promise or pledge to God (verses 6-11). Even though his enemies try to trap him (verse 6), his heart is fixed on God (verse 7) and he promises to sing praises to the Lord (verses 8-9). God’s power and authority are above all things (including the enemies). God’s mercy (loving-kindness) and truth reach the heavens (verse 10) and his glory is exalted above the heavens and earth (verse 11). One literary feature of this psalm is “epizeuxis”, or the emphatic repetition of words (see verses 1, 3 and 10, 5 and 11, 7, and 8).

Verse 1: For “Be merciful”, see Psalm 56:1. The “shadow of thy wings” is a place of protection, refuge, and rest in time of peril (Ruth 2:12; Psa. 17:8; 36:7; 63:7). It refers to a mother bird that protects her young under her wings. The “calamities” (KJV) are not natural calamities, but the wickedness displayed by the psalmist’s enemies (see verses 3 and 4).

Verse 2: God is described as “God Most High” (KJV; Heb. *El-‘elyon*). His glory and power are above all creation and he is the supreme ruler of the world (Psa. 78:56). As “God Most High”, he is “possessor of heaven and earth” (Gen. 14:18-22; Heb. 7:1).

Verse 3: God’s “mercy” (KJV) and “truth” are repeated in verse 10. God shows mercy (“loving-kindness”, ASV; or, steadfast love) and truth (faithfulness, certainty, trustworthiness, dependability) to his people. See Psalm 25:10; 26:3; 40:10-11; 61:7; 69:13; 86:15; etc. For “Selah”, see the notes on Psalm 3.

Verse 4: “Lions”, “fire”, “spears and arrows”, and “a sharp sword” are chosen to describe the vicious and malicious acts of enemies against the psalmist. The enemies are fierce and cruel. The enemies burn with contempt and reproach against him like a destructive “fire”.

Verse 5: God is exalted and glorious above the heavens and earth. He is “God Most High” (verse 2) and he rules over all creation. The same wording is repeated in verse 11.

Verse 6: The psalmist says “My soul is bowed down” (KJV) meaning that he has become discouraged or depressed by the enemies’ actions against him. The “net” spread and a “pit” dug are symbols of evil-doing. Note that the enemies fall into the pit they have dug for the psalmist. They are ensnared by their very own trap. God, through his eternal law of retribution, causes the wicked to reap the fruit of their own malicious deeds (Psa. 7:15-16; Prov. 26:27; 28:10; Eccl. 10:8). This happened to Haman (Esther 7:10). What poetic justice! For “Selah”, see the notes on Psalm 3.

Verses 7-11: These verses are repeated in Psalm 108:1-5.

Verse 7: “My heart is fixed” describes the psalmist’s “steadfast” (RSV) resolve to trust God (Psa. 112:7).

Verse 8: “Awake up, my glory” is the psalmist’s encouragement to himself. He wants his spirit or “soul” (RSV; Psa. 16:9; 30:12) to wake up and praise the Lord. The “psaltery and harp” are stringed instruments and David knew how to play them (1 Sam. 16:14-23). “Awake early” (KJV) is literally “awake the dawn”.

Verses 9-10: Note the Hebrew parallelism in these two verses.

Questions

1. What does the psalmist want from God, why does he want it, and for how long does he want it (verse 1).

2. Who does the psalmist cry to (verse 2)?

3. What does the psalmist hope that God will send from heaven (verse 3)?
4. How does the psalmist describe his enemies (verses 3-4)?
5. What does the psalmist say about God's glory (verses 5 and 11)?
6. What happens to the psalmist's enemies (verse 6)?
7. How does the psalmist describe his trust in God (verse 7)?
8. What does the psalmist promise to do (verses 7 and 9)?
9. When does the psalmist praise God (verse 8)?
10. Where does God's mercy and truth reach (verse 10)?

Applications for Today

1. God is our protector and our savior (verses 1-3). Who wanted to protect Israel like a mother bird, but they refused (Mt. 23:37; Lk. 13:34)?
2. God sends us his mercy and truth from heaven (verses 3 and 10). How is sin atoned for (Prov. 16:6)? What comes from heaven through Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:14, 17)? What is combined with God's grace (Col. 1:6; 2 Jn. 3)?

3. Our enemies act like lions (verse 4). Who else besides the psalmist was delivered from lions because they trusted in God (Dan. 6:23; 2 Tim. 4:16-18)? Who else is an enemy that acts like a lion (1 Pet. 5:8)?

4. God is bigger than our problems (verses 5 and 11). How is the Lord described in Psalm 113:4?

5. You reap what you sow (verse 6)? What happens to those who dig a pit (Psa. 7:15-16; Prov. 26:27; 28:10; Eccl. 10:8)? What happened to Haman (Esther 7:10)?

6. Let us have a heart that is fixed on God; fixed, not fearful, fluttering, or floundering (verse 7). What happens to the righteous ones who have their heart fixed on the Lord (Psa. 112:6-8)?

7. Praising God is a good way to start the day (verse 8). What does God do early for his people (Psa. 46:5)?