

Psalm 17

Title: Prayer for Protection from Wicked Enemies

Author and Date: David

Key Verse: Psalm 17:8-9

Outline

- A. Prayer of the righteous: a cry for help based upon the Lord's justice (verses 1-5).
- B. Persecution from the wicked: a cry for help based upon the Lord's loving-kindness (verses 6-12).
- C. Protection from the wicked: a cry for help based upon the Lord's vengeance (verses 13-14).
- D. Promise of the righteous: an expression of trust (verse 15).

Notes

Title: "A Prayer of David." Four other psalms are titled as prayers: 86, 90, 102, and 142. This prayer is a cry for help and protection from wicked enemies. If the psalmist here is David, he certainly had enemies. His enemies were from without (Philistines), from within (Saul), and from his own family (Absalom).

Verses 1-15: Note how the psalmist uses parts of the body in this psalm to describe God's activities with his people (anthropomorphism). He speaks of the Lord's "ear" (verses 1 and 6), "eyes" (verses 2 and 8), "hand" (verse 7), "face" (verse 15), and "form" (verse 15). Consider also the psalmist's desires throughout. He says in effect: "hear me" (verses 1 and 6), "judge me" (verse 2), "prove and test me" (verse 3), "show me" (verse 7), "keep me" and "hide me" (verse 8), "deliver me" (verse 13), and "satisfy me" (verse 15).

Verse 1: The psalmist wants the Lord to "hear the right" (KJV). He wants the Lord not only to hear, but hear the content of his prayer. Hear what is right and do what is right. The word "cry" is intensive (see Psa. 3:4; 5:2). This is a prayer that expresses deep emotion.

Verse 2: The Lord is a judge and defender of the innocent. Note the words associated with the courtroom in verses 1, 2 and 3: "the right", "sentence," "equal", "proved," and "tried" (KJV). The psalmist makes a case for his innocence in verses 1-5. He is living a pure life like the citizen described in Psalm 15 and he can expect his prayer to be heard.

Verse 3: "Visited me in the night" (KJV) may be a reference to God answering the psalmist's prayer made in the night; a night vigil. Or, it may be a reference to passing God's test in the secret of the night when the all-knowing God sees all even as the psalmist sleeps.

Verse 8: “The apple of the eye” (KJV) in Hebrew is literally, “the little man of the eye”. It is a reference to the pupil of the eye. (You can see your reflection as you look into the pupil of another.) The pupil is something that one highly values and carefully protects. This expression, then, is used for someone or something that is very dear to another (see also Deut. 32:10; Prov. 7:2; Lam. 2:18; Zech. 2:8).

Verse 9: For “compass me about” (KJV), see 1 Samuel 23:26.

Verse 13: This verse is another example of an “imprecatory psalm” (see Psa. 5:10). “Arise, O Jehovah” is found in other places like Psalm 3:7; 7:6; 9:19; and 10:12.

Verses 14-15: The men of the world are satisfied with the treasures of this life. In contrast, the psalmist has higher aspirations. He trusts the Lord and hopes that his enemies will be punished. He is satisfied to have a joyful relationship with the Lord. His satisfaction is to see God’s “face” (in a figurative sense) as his relationship with God is restored. Some commentators also see in this verse a reference to the resurrection man in this verse.

Questions

1. What does the psalmist pray for and what kind of lips offered this prayer (verses 1-2)?

2. What has the Lord done to the psalmist and what does the Lord find (verse 3)?

3. What ways does the psalmist avoid and what paths does he walk in (verses 4-5)?

4. What request does the psalmist have and what does he want God to show him (verses 6-7)?

5. How does the psalmist want to be valued (verse 8)?

6. What protection does the psalmist desire and from whom (verses 8-9)?

7. How do the wicked speak and what do they do to the righteous (verses 10-11)?

8. How are the wicked described (verse 12)?
9. What does the psalmist want the Lord to do to the wicked (verse 13)?
10. How are the wicked men of this life blessed (verse 14)?
11. What desire and satisfaction does the psalmist have in the midst of his wicked enemies (verse 15)?

Applications for Today

1. The Lord hears “the right” of people who are right. A righteous life gives confidence in prayer. Prayer needs to come from an honest heart and honest lips (verses 1-3). What prayer is effectual (Jas. 5:16)? What prayer does the Lord hear (1 Pet. 3:12)?
2. The world can be a violent and threatening place, but the righteous have the Lord’s providential protection (verses 7-13). What divine protection are Christians promised (Heb. 13:5-6)?
3. The righteous can and should live an ethically pure and spiritually active life in the midst of violence and threats (verses 3, 5, and 15). How are Christians to live and what are they to do in a “crooked and perverse generation” (Phil. 2:15-16; Jas. 1:27; 1 Pet. 2:11-12)?
4. God keeps us as the “apple of the eye” (verse 8). What are we to keep as the “apple of the eye” (Prov. 7:1-4)?
5. The wicked get the treasures of this life, but the righteous get to see God face to face (verses 14-15). What does Jesus say about seeing God (Mt. 5:8)? What does John say about seeing God (1 Jn. 3:2; Rev.22:4)?