

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

Bereans Sunday School
Placerita Baptist Church
2004

by
William D. Barrick, Th.D.
Professor of OT, The Master's Seminary



Psalm 35 — God Sees and Saves

1.0 Introducing Psalm 35

- This psalm is the second of the imprecatory psalms (Psalms 7; 35; 69; 109).
 - ▶ An imprecation is a curse or invocation of judgment. In the ancient Near East curses were written into treaties between kings or nations to stipulate punishments for violation of the treaty. Psalm 35:4-6, 8, and 26 are quite similar in tone.
 - ▶ This is not in opposition to the New Testament teaching to love and forgive one's enemies. See Luke 18:7-8; Acts 23:3; Galatians 1:8-9; 2 Timothy 4:14.
 - ▶ David prays as the king and supreme judge of Israel about a matter that is not personal, but public.
 - ▶ David prays that God will fulfill His covenant promises (see Gen 12:1-3).
 - ▶ David prays for justice, so that God might be shown to be righteous (Ps 35:27).
 - ▶ It is right to pray for the overthrow of tyrants. A biblical view of the value of life depends on divine justice, judgment, and vindication of what is right.
 - ▶ It is right to pray for justice on behalf of those who are oppressed.
 - ▶ When we pray, "Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven," what will it mean to evil world rulers and wicked people?
 - ▶ It is our prerogative to pray for God to avenge wrongs, because vengeance belongs to Him (Deuteronomy 32:35; Romans 12:19-21).
- The historical background for Psalm 35 is unknown. Commentators sometimes point to the time of Saul's persecution of David or the time of Absalom's rebellion. For the former, appeal is made to 1 Samuel 24:15.

2.0 Reading Psalm 35 (NAU)

A Psalm of David.

- 35:1** Contend, O LORD, with those who contend with me;
Fight against those who fight against me.
- 35:2** Take hold of buckler and shield
And rise up for my help.
- 35:3** Draw also the spear and the battle-axe to meet those who pursue me;
Say to my soul, "I am your salvation."
- 35:4** Let those be ashamed and dishonored who seek my life;
Let those be turned back and humiliated who devise evil against me.
- 35:5** Let them be like chaff before the wind,
With the angel of the LORD driving them on.
- 35:6** Let their way be dark and slippery,
With the angel of the LORD pursuing them.
- 37:7** For without cause they hid their net for me;
Without cause they dug a pit for my soul.
- 35:8** Let destruction come upon him unawares,
And let the net which he hid catch himself;
Into that very destruction let him fall.
- 35:9** And my soul shall rejoice in the LORD;
It shall exult in His salvation.
- 35:10** 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?"
- 35:11** Malicious witnesses rise up;
They ask me of things that I do not know.
- 35:12** They repay me evil for good,
To the bereavement of my soul.
- 35:13** 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.
- 35:14** I went about as though it were my friend or brother;
I bowed down mourning, as one who sorrows for a mother.
- 35:15** 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.
- 35:16** Like godless jesters at a feast,
They gnashed at me with their teeth.
- 35:17** Lord, how long will You look on?
Rescue my soul from their ravages,
My only life from the lions.



- 35:18** I will give You thanks in the great congregation;
I will praise You among a mighty throng.
- 35:19** Do not let those who are wrongfully my enemies rejoice over me;
Nor let those who hate me without cause wink maliciously.
- 35:20** For they do not speak peace,
But they devise deceitful words against those who are quiet in the land.
- 35:21** They opened their mouth wide against me;
They said, “Aha, aha, **our eyes have seen it!**”
- 35:22** **You have seen it**, O LORD, do not keep silent;
O Lord, do not be far from me.
- 35:23** Stir up Yourself, and awake to my right
And to my cause, my God and my Lord.
- 35:24** Judge me, O LORD my God, according to Your righteousness,
And do not let them rejoice over me.
- 35:25** Do not let them say in their heart, “Aha, our desire!”
Do not let them say, “We have swallowed him up!”
- 35:26** 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.
- 35:27** 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.”
- 35:28** And my tongue shall declare Your righteousness
And Your praise all day long.
- For the choir director.

3.0 Understanding Psalm 35



3.1 Outline

- I. The Enemies' Intrigue and the Psalmist's Innocence (vv. 1-10)
- II. The Enemies' Ingratitude and the Psalmist's Indignation (vv. 11-18)
- III. The Enemies' Insinuation and the Psalmist's Impotence (vv. 19-28)

— W. Graham Scroggie, *The Psalms* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1973 reprint of 1948 rev. ed.), 205

3.2 Notes

- v. 1 “Contend ... Fight”
 - “Contend” refers to bringing a lawsuit against someone in a court of law.
 - “Fight” refers to warfare and battle against an enemy.

- Verses 4-10 focus on the legal aspect, while verses 11-18 focus on the military aspect. Both metaphors are involved in the final section of the psalm (vv. 19-28).
- **v. 2** “buckler and shield”
 - The buckler is the round shield worn on the arm while either a spear or sword is wielded by the other hand. This kind of shield allows for mobility.
 - “Shield” here is a reference to a large, body length shield behind which a man might stand and fire arrows from his bow or wield a spear.
- **vv. 5-6** “the angel of the LORD”
 - See notes on Psalm 34:7.
- **vv. 7-8** Retribution
 - Divine punishment meted out against the enemy is expected to be the equivalent of or proportionate to the offense.
 - Such reflection of evil actions back upon the wicked themselves is described elsewhere:
 - Psalm 7:15-16
 - Revelation 11:18; 13:10 (cp. Matthew 26:52)
- **v. 10** “LORD, who is like You”
 - God is an incomparable God. There is no one like Him.
 - Psalm 71:19
 - Isaiah 45–46
- **vv. 13-14** Obligations of covenant partners.
 - “the actions described are typical of those stipulated in international treaties. The sickness of a fellow monarch, linked by treaty relationship, evoked acts of fasting and sorrow in the king; in terms both of duty and of fellow feelings, the king had been faithful in these obligations. The reference to ‘friend’ and ‘brother’ (v 14) is partly a poetic description of his (former) attitude to his treaty partner, but partly also a description utilizing the language of treaty”—Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, Publisher, 1983), 287.
- **v. 13** “my prayer kept returning to my bosom”
 - Most likely meaning is that David’s frequent prayers for the recovery of the individual were being unanswered.
 - The mourning in verse 14 seems to agree with this meaning.

- **v. 17** “My only *life*”
 - “This stylish and artful word (*yahid*) presents the image of a precious, only daughter, which depicts the psalmist’s life as it hangs tenuously in the balance.”—Gerald A. Wilson, *Psalms Volume 1*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002), 583.
 - Compare with Genesis 22:2.
 - See Psalm 22:20.

- **v. 19** “wink maliciously”
 - In Old Testament times and cultures, winking was a conspiratorial gesture indicating a duplicitous act intended to bring ridicule or harm on someone.
 - Proverbs 6:12-14; 10:10; 16:30

- **vv. 21-22** “‘our eyes have seen it!’ ... You have seen it”
 - This pun provides the transition to David’s appeal to God.
 - God sees all and knows who is truly innocent and who is guilty. His omniscience is the basis for His justice.

4.0 Singing Psalm 35

<p>Tune: “O God, Our Help in Ages Past”</p>
--

Now plead my cause, Almighty God,
With all the sons of strife;
And fight against the men of blood,
Who fight against my life.

Draw out thy spear and stop their way,
Lift thine avenging rod;
But to my soul in mercy say,
“I am thy Savior God!”

They plant their snares to catch my feet,
And nets of mischief spread;
Plunge the destroyers in the pit
That their own hands have made.

Let fogs and darkness hide their way,
And slipp'ry be their ground;
Thy wrath shall make their lives a prey,
And all their rage confound.

They fly like chaff before the wind,
Before thine angry breath;
The angel of the Lord behind
Pursues them down to death.



They love the road that leads to hell;
Then let the rebels die,
Whose malice is implacable
Against the Lord on high.

But if thou hast a chosen few
Amongst that impious race,
Divide them from the bloody crew,
By thy surprising grace.

Then will I raise my tuneful voice,
To make thy wonders known;
In their salvation I'll rejoice,
And bless thee for my own.

— Isaac Watts

5.0 **Praying Psalm 35**

- Come to our nation's aid, Lord. [vv. 1-3]
- O God, You are truly incomparable—there is no one like You! [v. 10]
- Father, I don't know what is happening to believers in the Sudan, but You do. Bring justice to them and cause Your righteousness to be seen. [v. 22]
- Judge me, O God, according to Your Word and Your righteousness. [v. 24]
- Show me how to praise You all day long. [v. 28]
-
-



6.0 **Applying Psalm 35**

- Christians ought to pray for God's will to be done on earth, even if it might conceivably result in the death and destruction of His enemies and ours.
- God sees all things and knows all things—even what is in our hearts.
- God cares for the oppressed and the needy. So ought we.