

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

Bereans Sunday School
Placerita Baptist Church
2005

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Psalm 55 — Persevering Prayer Under Pressure

1.0 Introducing Psalm 55

- The background for Psalm 55 has been variously analyzed, but is ultimately unknown.
 - ♦ Some commentators believe the friend who betrayed David was Ahithophel (see 2 Samuel 15–17). This is the view of the Jewish Targum in the fourth century A.D.
 - ♦ Others claim that Jeremiah was the author of this psalm.
- Psalm 55 possesses some similarities to the surrounding psalms:
 - ♦ “Maskil of David” (Psalms 52, 53, 54, and 55).
 - ♦ Both 55:2 and 54:2 have similar expressions of prayer.
 - ♦ Both Psalms 54 and 55 employ a similar variety of divine titles.
- In Psalms 52 and 54 David was in the wilderness, fleeing from King Saul. However, in Psalm 55 David is in Jerusalem as king.

2.0 Reading Psalm 55 (NAU)

55:1 A Maskil of David.

Give ear to _____ my prayer, O God;
And do not hide Yourself from my supplication.

55:2 Give heed to me and answer me;

I am restless in my complaint and am surely distracted,

55:3 Because of the voice _____ of the enemy,

Because of the pressure of the wicked;

For they bring down trouble upon me

And in anger they bear a grudge against me.

55:4 My heart is in anguish within me,

And the terrors of death have fallen upon me.

- 55:5** Fear and trembling come upon me,
And horror has overwhelmed me.
- 55:6** I said, “Oh, that I had wings like a dove!
I would fly away and be at rest.
- 55:7** “Behold, I would wander far away,
I would lodge in the wilderness. **Selah.**
- 55:8** “I would hasten to my place of refuge
From the stormy wind *and* tempest.”
- 55:9** Confuse, O Lord, divide their tongues,
For I have seen **violence and strife** in the city.
- 55:10** Day and night they go around her upon her walls,
And **iniquity and mischief** are in her midst.
- 55:11** Destruction is in her midst;
Oppression and deceit do not depart from her streets.
- 55:12** For it is not an enemy who reproaches me,
Then I could bear *it*;
Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me,
Then I could hide myself from him.
- 55:13** But it is you, a man my equal,
My companion and my familiar friend;
- 55:14** We who had sweet fellowship together
Walked in the house of God in the throng.
- 55:15** Let death come deceitfully upon them;
Let them go down alive to Sheol,
For evil is in their dwelling, in their midst.
- 55:16** **As for me**, I shall call upon God,
And the LORD will save me.
- 55:17** Evening and morning and at noon, I will complain and murmur,
And He will hear my voice.
- 55:18** He will redeem my soul in peace from the battle *which is* against me,
For they are many *who strive* with me.
- 55:19** God will hear and answer them —
Even the one who sits enthroned from of old — **Selah.**
With whom there is no change,
And who do not fear God.
- 55:20** He has put forth his hands against those who were at peace with him;
He has violated his covenant.
- 55:21** His speech was smoother than butter,
But his heart was war;
His words were softer than oil,
Yet they were drawn swords.
- 55:22** Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you;

He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.

55:23 But You, O God, will bring them down to the pit of destruction;
Men of bloodshed and deceit will not live out half their days.
But I will trust in You.

For the choir director; according to Jonath elem rehokim.

3.0 Understanding Psalm 55

3.1 Outline

- I. Supplication Voiced (vv. 1-3)
 - A. My Need for Grace (v. 1)
 - B. My Need for Encouragement (v. 2)
 - C. My Need for Help (v. 3)
- II. Escape Desired (vv. 4-8)
 - A. From Fear and Anxiety (vv. 4-5)
 - B. From Turmoil and Stress (vv. 6-8)
- III. Trouble Identified (vv. 9-15)
 - A. An Immoral Society (vv. 9-11)
 - B. Antagonistic Friends (vv. 12-15)
- IV. Refuge Found (vv. 16-23)
 - A. He Fights My Battles (vv. 16-21)
 - B. He Bears My Burdens (vv. 22-23)



3.2 Notes

- **v. 2** “in my complaint and am surely distracted”
 - The Hebrew words in this verse and in verse 17 are the same.
 - Therefore, they form an inclusio framing David’s references to his prayers.
 - Prayer is the proper response to pressure, stress, and trouble.
- **vv. 3, 12, 15, 19, 21, 23**
 - Note how verses with more than two poetic lines (bicola) commence or conclude sections of the psalm.
- **v. 6** “Oh, that I had wings like a dove!”
 - Compare Jeremiah 48:28.
 - “It is a characteristic of the dove to fly great distances quickly, resting among boulders and in gorges where hunters cannot follow it.”—
Amos Hakham, *Psalms with the Jerusalem Commentary*, 3 vols.,
Koschitzky Edition (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 2003), 1:433.
- **vv. 7, 19** “Selah.”
 - The “Selah” in verse 7 focuses on the psalmist’s emotional response to trouble. Earlier in life he had hidden in the wilderness from King Saul.

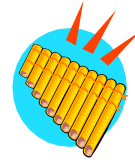
- The “Selah” in verse 19 is unusual because it comes in the middle of the verse. It focuses on “Even the one who sits enthroned from of old”—a reference to the fact that God is sovereign.
 - ✓ David can trust God, because God is in control.
- **vv. 9, 15 Prayers**
 - These two prayers frame this section (vv. 9-15) of the psalm.
- **v. 9 “divide their tongues”**
 - Compare Genesis 10:25 and 11:1-9.
 - David alludes to divine judgment at the Tower of Babel. God judged men then, He can do so again.
- **v. 15 “Let them go down alive to Sheol”**
 - Compare Numbers 16:31-33.
 - Again David alludes to divine judgment recorded in the Torah (the Pentateuch).
 - ✓ David’s faith is based upon the Word of God and its record concerning God’s intervention in the past.
- **v. 16 “As for me”**
 - The pronoun is emphatic, setting up a contrast between the psalmist and his enemies.
 - This is the turning point of the entire psalm.
- **v. 18 “Evening and morning and at noon”**
 - Most commentators allow for a reference here to three times of daily prayer (compare Daniel 6:10).
 - It is also possible to understand this as a way of saying “at all times” or “without ceasing.”
- **v. 21 “But his heart was war”**
 - Compare Psalm 28:3.
- **v. 22 “Cast your burden upon the LORD”**
 - Peter quotes this text in 1 Peter 5:7.
- **vv. 22-23 Reasons for Trusting God**
 - “He will sustain you” (v. 22a).
 - “He will never allow the righteous to be shaken” (v. 22b).
 - He will judge the wicked (v. 23).
- **Subscription: “Jonath elem rehokim”**
 - “Silent dove of distant lands” or “dove of the distant oaks.”

- Compare with verse 6. This supports the theory that the musical notations in psalm headings belong to the preceding psalm (see Habakkuk 3:19).

4.0 Singing Psalm 55

Jehovah, To My Prayer Give Ear

(Tunes: "I Sing the Mighty Power of God"
or "There Is a Fountain"
or "My Faith Has Found a Resting Place")



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|---|---|
| <p>1 Jehovah, to my prayer give ear,
Nor hide Thee from my cry;
Attend my sad complaint, and hear
My restless moan and sigh.
My enemies lift up their voice,
The violent oppress;
To do me wrong my foes rejoice,
And love my soul's distress.</p> <p>3 Lo, wandering far, my rest would
be
In some lone desert waste;
I from the stormy wind would flee,
And to a shelter haste.
O Lord, their malice recompense
Their wicked tongues confound,
For in the city violence
And bitter strife abound.</p> | <p>2 Sore pained in heart I find no ease,
Death's terrors fill my soul,
Great fear and trembling on me seize,
And horrors o'er me roll.
O had I wings, I sigh and say,
Like some swift dove to roam,
Then I would hasten far away
And find a peaceful home.</p> <p>4 They walk her walls both night and day,
Within all vices meet;
Oppression, fraud and crime hold sway,
Nor leave the crowded street.
No foreign foe provokes alarm,
But enemies within;
May God destroy their power to harm
And recompense their sin.</p> |
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— Author unknown

5.0 Praying Psalm 55

- O God, give me rest from restlessness. [v. 2]
- Give me relief from the pressures of wicked people. [v. 3]
- Father, give me refuge from this world. [v. 8]
- Lord, give me peace from the daily battle. [v. 18]
- Take my burdens, Father. [v. 22]
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6.0 Applying Psalm 55

- When life's pressures are unbearable, take them to the Lord in prayer.
- When life's pressures are unbearable, trust the Lord.
- Sometimes our closest friend can become our worst enemy.

We have here the weariness that comes to a valiant warrior or worker late in life or at least after the passing of youthful battles and triumphs. When we are young we do not expect life to be easy, and if we are energetic we tackle problems with optimism and with our full strength. We achieve certain victories too. But as life goes on we find that the problems we thought we had overcome earlier are still around. . . . In addition, we are getting older and therefore have less energy to cope with problems. We find ourselves thinking how nice it would be merely to fly away and escape them.

— James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms*, 3 vols.
(Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1996), 1:460