

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

Adult Sunday School
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Psalm 12 — Words of the Wicked vs. the Word of the LORD

1.0 Introducing Psalm 12

1.1 Psalm 12 in the Synagogue

- In the synagogue Psalm 12 was read on the 8th day of the Feast of Tabernacles.
- Psalms were used in six ways in synagogue worship (C. Hassell Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms*):
 - 1) Psalms, in part or in whole, were recited in synagogue services.
 - 2) Specific psalms were assigned for reading on certain festivals.
 - 3) After various liturgical acts (such as putting on the prayer shawl), verses from the Psalms were recited.
 - 4) The Psalms may have been read in a three-year cycle.
 - 5) During synagogue services the congregation participated in responses from the Psalms.
 - 6) Many prayers were composed of phrases from the Psalms.

1.2 How Others Have Used Psalm 12




- On August 16, 1593, the ship *Tobie* ran into problems and ran aground off the Barbary Coast. It broke up so rapidly that the sailors had no time to put together even a makeshift life raft. They climbed into the shrouds and awaited their watery grave. As their situation progressively worsened, they commended themselves to the Lord and began to sing Psalm 12: “Help, LORD, for good and godly men ...” Before they could finish singing

the four verses of the hymn, 38 men had drowned. Twelve, by God's providence, managed to grasp wreckage and swim the quarter mile to the shore. (cf. W. Graham Scroggie, *Psalms*, 92-93).

2.0 Reading Psalm 12 (NKJV)

A Psalm of David.

- 12:1** Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases!
For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men.
- 12:2** They speak idly
everyone with his neighbor;
With flattering lips and a double heart
they speak.
- 12:3** May the LORD cut off all flattering **lips**,
And the tongue that speaks proud things.
- 12:4** Who have said,
“With our **tongue** we will prevail:
Our **lips** are our own;
Who is lord over us?”
- 
- 12:5** “For the oppression of the poor,
For the sighing of the needy,
Now I will arise,” says the LORD;
“I will set *him* in the safety for which he yearns.”
- 12:6** The words of the LORD are pure words,
Like silver tried in a furnace of earth,
Purified seven times.
- 12:7** You shall keep them, O LORD,
You shall preserve them from this generation forever.
- 12:8** The wicked prowl on every side,
When vileness is exalted among the sons of men.
- To the Chief Musician.

3.0 Understanding Psalm 12

3.1 Outline (potentially a conceptual chiasm)

- I. The Duplicity of Human Beings (vv. 1-2)
- II. The False Words (vv. 3-4)
- III. The LORD's Promise (v. 5)
- IV. The Pure Words (vv. 6-7)
- V. The Degeneracy of Human Beings (v. 8)

3.2 Notes

- v. 1 “the godly man ... the faithful”
 - See notes on Psalm 4:3 and the relationship the “godly man” has to the term “Hasidic” (Jewish covenanters).
 - “The godly man” refers to those who are steadfastly loyal.
 - Note the parallel term is “the faithful” (true to God’s covenant). Luther translated “the faithful” as *Amens-Leute* (“the Amen People”).

- vv. 1, 8 “the sons of men”
 - This phrase marks the beginning and the ending of the poem in what is called an *inclusio* (envelope figure).

- vv. 2, 3 “flattering”
 - “Flattering” or “flattery” in Hebrew is literally “smooth.” Flattery involves the employment of “slippery words” or “smooth talking.”
 - A pun may be involved since there are two homonyms in Hebrew, one meaning “smooth” and the other meaning “divisive.” Flattery can be divisive.

- v. 2 “a double heart”
 - Literally, “a heart and a heart.” Deuteronomy 25:13, “differing weights” is literally “a stone and a stone.”
 - Compare James 1:8, “a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”
 - Revised English Bible (REB): “duplicity in their hearts”; New Living Translation (NLT): “insincere hearts.”

- vv. 3-4 “lips ... tongue ... tongue ... lips”
 - A verbal chiasm.
 - “The central image of this psalm is the spoken word” (Wilson, 271).
 - The thought of the psalm: “Don’t broadcast what will downcast” (W. Graham Scroggie, *Psalms*, 92).
 - Exploitation of language in our own society:
 - ✓ Advertising
 - ✓ Legal system
 - ✓ Lying to ourselves
 - ✓



- v. 5 “Now I will arise”
 - See note on Psalm 7:6. The same phraseology also occurred in Psalms 9:19 and 10:12. Cf. Numbers 10:36.
 - The meaning of God’s declaration is that it is time for Him to intervene. New Jewish Publication Society (NJPS) translation: “I will now act.”
 - “Now” = “now taking place and is to be expected immediately ... entails the zenith of prophetically announced actuality” (Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 209-10).

- v. 6 “*Like silver tried in a furnace of earth, Purified seven times.*”
 - Figure of smelting and refining.
 - Implications for bibliology (doctrine concerning the Word of God):
 - ✓ Authenticity and integrity of God’s Word: The Bible is truly God’s revealed truth and is dependable. Cf. Daniel 10:21; Psalm 119:160; John 17:17.
 - ✓ Inerrancy and infallibility of God’s Word: The Bible does not contain error and does not deceive or lead astray. Cf. Psalm 19:7; Proverbs 6:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:3; 2 Timothy 3:16; 1 John 4:6.
 - ✓ Preciousness of God’s Word: The Bible is dear to the believer and extremely profitable for spiritual nourishment and growth. Cf. Psalm 19:10; 1 Peter 2:2.

- v. 7 “You shall keep them”
 - The “poor and needy” of v. 5?
 - The “words” of v. 6? This is the better view.



4.0 Singing Psalm 12

- 1 *Help, Lord, for those who love Thee fail,
Thy faithful ones fall from the ranks,
And leave the liars to their tale,
False gratitude and treacherous thanks.*

- 2 *Lord, may those flattering lips be lashed,
The boasting mouths stripped of their pride,
Those tongues that murmur unabashed,
Who is this God? We shall abide!*



3 *“Because the poor have been oppressed,
And in their patience sigh alone,
I will protect them in My breast,”
The Lord has said, “These are Mine own.”*

4 *And what He saith is purified
Like silver, sevenfold assayed.
Though by this evil age defied,
His Word of truth shall be obeyed.*

5 *His promises shall stand secure,
His saints are safe, though ill betide,
He will protect His humble poor,
Though rogues are honored far and wide.*

— Author: Richard Church

— Music: “Brookfield,” Thomas B. Southgate, 1855

- Luther’s hymn, “Ach Gott vom Himmel, sieh darein” (“Ah God, from heav’n look down, and see”) is from Psalm 12.

5.0 Praying Psalm 12

- Lord, help me! [v. 1]
- Help the godly person to stand and prevail. [v. 1]
- Oh, God, shut the mouths of the wicked. [vv. 3-4]
- Thank You, Lord, for Your pure and precious Word. [v. 6]
- Give me a greater desire for Your Word, Father. [v. 7]
- Cleanse me with Your Word. [vv. 6-7]
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6.0 Applying Psalm 12

- God’s people must control their words.
- God’s people must preserve and obey His words.

“Help, Lord.”

***A short, but sweet, suggestive, seasonable, and serviceable prayer;
a kind of angel’s sword, to be turned every way,
and to be used on all occasions.***

Charles Haddon Spurgeon
(Treasury of David, 1:141)