



Psalm 5 - Trust in God for Deliverance from Enemies

To the leader: for the flutes. A Psalm of David.

Introduction

This is another individual lament, and the first instance of a psalm with prayers for the personal downfall of the enemies. As indicated in the Literary Features section of the Introduction to the Psalms on the website, such psalms have in view a situation where one is faced with bloodthirsty and deceitful persecutors. David is the attributed author, but there is no information on whether a particular experience of his was the occasion for the psalm.

Psalm 5:1-3 - Asking for God's Attention.

As is common in the laments, the psalm opens by calling out to God. The tone is one of urgency and expectation.

- ¹ Give ear to my words, O Lord;
give heed to my sighing.

Psalm 5:1

Give ear to my words, O Lord. David longs for an audience with God. Using the Hebrew method of parallelism he repeats the same idea three times: 'Lord, please listen to me.' He repeats this plea again: <<*Hear a just cause, O Lord; attend to my cry; give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit*>> (Psalm 17:1), as did Daniel in his prayer for the people: <<*Incline your ear, O my God, and hear. Open your eyes and look at our desolation and the city that bears your name. We do not present our supplication before you on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of your great mercies*>> (Daniel 9:18).

2 Listen to the sound of my cry,
my King and my God,
for to you I pray.

Psalm 5:2

My King and my God. Some psalms that speak of the Lord as king have in mind his rule over all his creation. Others, such as this one, refer to him as king over his people. The Davidic kingship, when it functioned properly, did not usurp either kind of divine kingship, although a faithless king could lead to God punishing the people, as confirmed by: *<<and the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them’>> (1 Samuel 8:7), <<But when you saw that King Nahash of the Ammonites came against you, you said to me, “No, but a king shall reign over us”, though the Lord your God was your king. See, here is the king whom you have chosen, for whom you have asked; see, the Lord has set a king over you. If you will fear the Lord and serve him and heed his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the Lord your God, it will be well; but if you will not heed the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then the hand of the Lord will be against you and your king>> (1 Samuel 12:12-15).*

For to you I pray. David prayed to God. This may sound elementary, but it is an essential aspect of prayer. Often a person comes to prayer so full of their request or their feelings that they never consciously focus on God and sense his presence. David was a great man of prayer because his prayer time was focused on God.

3 O Lord, in the morning you hear my voice;
in the morning I plead my case to you, and watch.

Psalm 5:3

In the morning you hear my voice. David made it a point to pray in the morning. He did this because he wanted to honour God at the beginning of his day, and set the tone for an entire day dedicated to and focused on God.

The mention of the morning here, and the Lord’s house in v.7, favours sacrifice; the idea here is that the prayer comes in the context of a faithful worshipper who receives assurance and expresses personal consecration by way of these ordinances; it is small wonder that such a person will watch, looking around and ahead in expectant faith.

Others, too, saw the morning as the special time for praise, prayer and God's grace and his judgement: <<The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens – wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught>> (Isaiah 50:4), <<O house of David! Thus says the Lord: Execute justice in the morning, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed, or else my wrath will go forth like fire, and burn, with no one to quench it, because of your evil doings>> (Jeremiah 21:12), <<He shall provide a lamb, a yearling without blemish, for a burnt-offering to the Lord daily; morning by morning he shall provide it>> (Ezekiel 46:13), and: <<The Lord within it is righteous; he does no wrong. Every morning he renders his judgement, each dawn without fail; but the unjust knows no shame>> (Zephaniah 3:5).

I plead my case to you is difficult in the Hebrew, which could also be rendered 'I prepare a sacrifice for you,' or 'I direct my prayer to you.'

Psalm 5:4-6 - The God Who Loves Justice.

The singer praises God for loving what is right. The argument of the psalm is that the success of these persecutors would contradict the biblical view of God's commitment to righteousness. The terms describing evil and evildoers are status words; that is, they describe people who reject God's kingship, as well as denoting the behaviour that stems from such rejection, as vv.7-8 will make clear.

- ⁴ For you are not a God who delights in wickedness;
evil will not sojourn with you.

Psalm 5:4

For you are not a God who delights in wickedness. David meditates on the righteous character of God. Our actions matter before a God who hates all workers of iniquity. As David drew closer to God he became more aware of God's holiness and man's sinfulness.

Evil will not sojourn with you. There is no place for evil in God's presence for he is a holy God and cannot abide anything less: <<Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgement, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous>> (Psalm 1:5), <<but the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the treacherous will be rooted out of it>> (Proverbs 2:22).

- ⁵ The boastful will not stand before your eyes;
you hate all evildoers.

Psalm 5:5

The boastful will not stand before your eyes. Those who boast will wilt under the gaze of God for his gaze will pierce their very souls. The same applies with regard to his word: <<*Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart*>> (Hebrews 4:12).

You hate all evildoers. Just as God hates evil, he also hates the perpetrators of evil. Some may find it difficult to comprehend that a God who is love can hate anything, but Scripture supports this: <<*Every evil of theirs began at Gilgal; there I came to hate them. Because of the wickedness of their deeds I will drive them out of my house. I will love them no more; all their officials are rebels*>> (Hosea 9:15), <<*I have loved you, says the Lord. But you say, 'How have you loved us?' Is not Esau Jacob's brother? says the Lord. Yet I have loved Jacob but I have hated Esau; I have made his hill country a desolation and his heritage a desert for jackals*>> (Malachi 1:2-3), and: <<*Yet this is to your credit: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate*>> (Revelation 2:6).

⁶ You destroy those who speak lies;
the Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful.

Psalm 5:6

You destroy those who speak lies; the Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful. David continues to speak not only of the things that God will not tolerate but that he will most certainly take action against the perpetrators of evil deeds: <<*But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death*>> (Revelation 21:8).

Psalm 5:7-8 - Confidence of the Pious.

The genuinely godly recognise that they come before God only <<*through the abundance of your steadfast love*>> (v.7); and thus they pray that God will lead them to walk in the way that is morally straight (v.8). There is nothing self-righteous about the confidence and prayers here.

⁷ But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love,
will enter your house,
I will bow down towards your holy temple
in awe of you.

Psalm 5:7

The abundance of your steadfast love. This is David's confidence. It is not that he is righteous and all others are sinners; his ground of confidence is the mercy of God. The phrase comes from: <<*The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation*>> (Exodus 34:6b-7), the basic confession of OT faith, describing the Lord's benevolence.

I will bow down towards your holy temple in awe of you. David's worship is not based on his feelings, but on his reverence for a righteous, merciful God. The Jerusalem temple did not exist in David's day but he did prepare its construction to be undertaken by his son Solomon.

⁸ Lead me, O Lord, in your righteousness
 because of my enemies;
 make your way straight before me.

Psalm 5:8

Make your way straight before me. This reflects David's constant reliance on God. He needs God to lead him and to make the way straight. David's contrast between the wicked and the godly is humble, and he knows it is only God's power and work in him that can keep him from the way of the wicked.

In later times it would be the role of John the Baptist to make the way straight for the Lord: <<He said, 'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord"', as the prophet Isaiah said>> (John 1:23).

Psalm 5:9-10 - Prayer against the Evildoers.

After a further description of the deceitful means and destructive schemes of these people (v.9) comes a prayer that God would thwart the schemes and judge the schemers. It is actually a mercy to potential evildoers that this occurs in a hymn sung in public worship: it warns them of what awaits any who pursue such evil.

⁹ For there is no truth in their mouths;
 their hearts are destruction;
 their throats are open graves;
 they flatter with their tongues.

Psalm 5:9

For there is no truth in their mouths. David focuses on what the wicked say as evidence of their wickedness. David knew what Jesus said later in Matthew 12:34b: <<*For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks*>>. A person's righteousness or wickedness will sooner or later show up in their speech. David felt the sting of wicked words and lies against him. Yet this prayer shows something good brought out of the attacks from the enemy.

They flatter with their tongues. Spurgeon comments: 'Always beware of people who flatter you, and especially when they tell you that they do not flatter you, and that they know you cannot endure flattery, for you are then being most fulsomely flattered, so be on your guard against the tongue of the flatterer.'

Paul uses this verse in Romans 3:13 as part of his argument that both Jews and Gentiles are under the power of sin.

¹⁰ Make them bear their guilt, O God;
let them fall by their own counsels;
because of their many transgressions cast them out,
for they have rebelled against you.

Psalm 5:10

These prayers describe the judgement that must eventually fall on those members of God's people who harden themselves to persecute the godly, because to harm the godly is to attack God. The request, then, is for God to vindicate his commitment to his people, here in this life for all to see. Prayers of this sort generally carry the unstated assumption that the evildoers will not repent and seek forgiveness.

Let them fall by their own counsels; because of their many transgressions cast them out. David prays that the wicked will come to their deserved end. As rebels against God, they deserve the guilty verdict, as did the people of Judah when God sent them into Babylonian exile: <<*Her foes have become the masters, her enemies prosper, because the Lord has made her suffer for the multitude of her transgressions; her children have gone away, captives before the foe*>> (Lamentations 1:5).

Psalm 5:11-12 - Confidence for All the Godly.

The psalm closes by expressing the assurance enjoyed by the faithful. The song prays that the truly faithful, in contrast to the evildoers, will always rejoice in the Lord and be assured of his care and protection.

11 But let all who take refuge in you rejoice;
let them ever sing for joy.
Spread your protection over them,
so that those who love your name may exult in you.

Psalm 5:11

But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy. The righteous are not made righteous by their words or deeds. The righteousness are those who trust the Lord and love his name. However, their righteousness is evident in their words and their actions: <<*The righteous see it and are glad*>> (Job 22:19a), and: <<*Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart*>> (Psalm 32:11). They rejoice, they shout for joy, and they are joyful in the Lord. This is a permit, a precept, a prayer, and a promise.

Again, Spurgeon comments: 'A touch of enthusiasm would be the salvation of many a man's religion. Some Christians are good enough people: they are like wax candles, but they are not lighted. Oh, for a touch of flame! Then would they scatter light, and thus become of service to their families. 'Let them shout for joy.' Why not? Let not orderly folks object. One said to me the other day, 'When I hear you preach I feel as if I must have a shout!' My friend, shout if you feel forced to do so. (Here a hearer cried, 'Glory!') Our brother cries, 'Glory!' and I say so too. 'Glory!' The shouting need not always be done in a public service, or it might hinder devout hearing; but there are times and places where a glorious outburst of enthusiastic joy would quicken life in all around. The ungodly are not half so restrained in their blasphemy as we are in our praise.'

12 For you bless the righteous, O Lord;
you cover them with favour as with a shield.

Psalm 5:12

For you bless the righteous, O Lord; you cover them with favour as with a shield. This is the greatest blessing of all - the favour of God. Knowing that God looks on his people with favour and pleasure is the greatest knowledge in the world. This is their standing in grace.

A shield does not protect any one area of the body. It is large and mobile enough to cover any and every area of the body. It is armour over armour. This is how fully the favour of God, a person's standing in grace, protects them, as it did the patriarch: <<*After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision,*

'Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great'>> (Genesis 15:1). Paul writes of the shield of faith, being part of the armour of God: <<*With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one*>> (Ephesians 6:16).

When Martin Luther was on his way to face a Cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church to answer for what they said were his heretical teachings, one of the Cardinal's servants taunted him saying, 'Where will you find shelter if your patron, the Elector of Saxony, should desert you?' Luther answered, 'Under the shelter of heaven.'