



## Psalm 7 - Plea for Help against Persecutors

A Shiggaion of David, which he sang to the Lord concerning Cush, a Benjaminite.

### Introduction

This is another individual lament from David. The title refers to an otherwise unknown incident in his life when a man of the tribe of Benjamin, the tribe of King Saul, slandered David. The psalm provides a vehicle by which those unfairly criticised and persecuted may call to God for help.

**Shiggaion occurs only in the title of this psalm and, in the plural, in the verse introducing Habakkuk's prayer: <<A prayer of the prophet Habakkuk according to Shigionoth>> (Habakkuk 3:1). Derived from a verb meaning 'to wander,' it is generally taken to mean a dithyramb or rhapsody.**

### Psalm 7:1-2 - Cry for Safety.

In the face of desperate circumstances, the first words express trust, i.e. my God, and refuge, leading to the specific request.

- 1 O Lord my God, in you I take refuge;  
save me from all my pursuers, and deliver me,
- 2 or like a lion they will tear me apart;  
they will drag me away, with no one to rescue.

### Psalm 7:1-2

In you I take refuge. When David was under attack from Cush the Benjaminite, all he could trust in was God. Every other support was gone, but he needed no other support. Nothing is known of Cush; but from Abasalom's rebellion it emerged that Benjamin, Saul's tribe, held some bitter enemies of David, and it is easy to

understand how the slander described in the psalm could have emerged from the smouldering hostility of this tribe.

Some believe that this Cush was really Saul or Shimei. Maclaren commented: ‘Cush has been supposed to be Shimei or Saul himself, and to have been so called because of his swarthy complexion, with Cush meaning African, or as a jest, because of his personal beauty.’ The Bible comments specifically on Saul’s good looks: <<*There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish son of Abiel son of Zeror son of Becorath son of Aphiah, a Benjaminite, a man of wealth. He had a son whose name was Saul, a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he; he stood head and shoulders above everyone else*>> (1 Samuel 9:1-2). However, Jesus commands: <<*Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgement*>> (John 7:24).

And deliver me. Sometimes God’s strength is evident in helping through a trial. Other times it is evident in the delivery from trials. David was persuaded that God wanted to deliver him from this trial: <<*Rise up, O Lord! Deliver me, O my God! For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked*>> (Psalm 3:7). To be slandered is a severe trial.

Spurgeon comments: “It appears probable that Cush the Benjaminite had accused David to Saul of treasonable conspiracy against his royal authority. This the king would be ready enough to credit, both from his jealousy of David, and from the relation which most probably existed between himself, the son of Kish, and this Cush, or Kish, the Benjaminite. . . . This may be called the SONG OF THE SLANDERED SAINT.”

Like a lion they will tear me apart. David believed there would be grave consequences if he were not delivered from these lion-like enemies. This understanding gave David urgency in prayer. God sometimes allows difficult circumstances so they will awaken this urgency.

David also knew what it was like to overcome a lion. McLaren comments: “The metaphor of the lion is common in the psalms attributed to David, and is, at all events, natural in the mouth of a shepherd king, who had taken a lion by the beard.”

### Psalm 7:3-5 - Claim of Innocence.

These verses make it clear that this psalm is for those cases in which the danger stems from the malice of the persecutors, and not from the wrongdoing of the person in trouble. There is an implicit warning to those who commit the evils listed here – that they may not use this psalm to ask for God’s help in their troubles.

<sup>3</sup> O Lord my God, if I have done this,

if there is wrong in my hands,  
4 if I have repaid my ally with harm  
or plundered my foe without cause,  
5 then let the enemy pursue and overtake me,  
trample my life to the ground,  
and lay my soul in the dust. Selah

### Psalm 7:3-5

If there is wrong in my hands. With these words, David did not claim sinless perfection. Instead, he simply rejected the idea of moral equivalence between himself and his enemies: <<*See, the Lord's hand is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. Rather, your iniquities have been barriers between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue mutters wickedness*>> (Isaiah 59:1-3).

Then let the enemy pursue and overtake me. David knew that his enemies were thirsty for his defeat. He was so confident in his righteousness in comparison to his enemies that he was willing to be given over to their desire if they were in the right. Paul would later take a similar stance in the sight of God at his trial before Festus and King Agrippa: <<*Now if I am in the wrong and have committed something for which I deserve to die, I am not trying to escape death; but if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can turn me over to them. I appeal to the emperor*>> (Acts 25:11).

### Psalm 7:6-11 - Call to God to Arise as Judge.

The singers see their requests as part of the larger picture: God is a righteous judge (v.11), to whom all the peoples of mankind, and not just Israel, are accountable (vv.7-8); thus his anger (v.6) and indignation (v.11) are directed against those who threaten his faithful ones, the righteous of v.9 and the upright in heart in v.10.

In the Psalms, judging is more often than not a saving action, with God intervening on behalf of the innocent and oppressed. In English the word judge tends to focus more on condemning than on rescuing. The particular deliverance, then, is part of God's larger project of putting the whole world back to its right order (v.9).

6 Rise up, O Lord, in your anger;  
lift yourself up against the fury of my enemies;  
awake, O my God; you have appointed a judgement.

7 Let the assembly of the peoples be gathered around you,  
and over it take your seat on high.

### Psalm 7:6-7

Rise up, O Lord, in your anger. David believed that God was a being of human-like passions such as anger. David also believed that the passions of God were on his behalf; he believed God was or would be angry because of David's circumstances, instead of against him for any wrongdoing on his part. David knew he was a sinner but he always demonstrated heartfelt repentance when he realised his error.

It is a mistake to believe that God is without passions. Because he is God it can be said that these passions are not exactly like their human counterparts; yet they are certainly somewhat like them. God is not cold, distant and dispassionate. Yet it is also a mistake to assume that the passions of God are always with his people or support their opinion. Many dangerous fanatics have been wrongly inspired by the mistaken assurance that God was for them when he was not.

Lift yourself up against the fury of my enemies. David believed that God was for him and his cause; yet he did not hold this belief passively. He actively prayed for the accomplishing of what he believed God's will to be: <<*Now rise up, O Lord God, and go to your resting-place, you and the ark of your might. Let your priests, O Lord God, be clothed with salvation, and let your faithful rejoice in your goodness*>> (2 Chronicles 6:41).

Over the assembly of the peoples take your seat on high. David's prayer for protection and vindication was not fundamentally selfish. He knew that his fate was vitally connected to the welfare of God's people. It was in large measure for their sakes, the sake of the congregation.

8 The Lord judges the peoples;  
judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness  
and according to the integrity that is in me.

9 O let the evil of the wicked come to an end,  
but establish the righteous,  
you who test the minds and hearts,  
O righteous God.

10 God is my shield,  
who saves the upright in heart.

<sup>11</sup> God is a righteous judge,  
and a God who has indignation every day.

### Psalm 7:8-11

The Lord shall judge the peoples; judge me, O Lord. This was the attitude that protected David from presumption. He honestly invited God's judgement and correction. Therefore, David asked for God's blessing according to my righteousness, and according to the integrity that is in me. In effect he prayed, 'Lord, to the extent that I am righteous before you, then bless me and protect me from my enemies.' When David longed for justice, it is not that he wanted ultimate and perfect judgement before God; he looks for justice on the earthly level, justice between him and his false accuser.

O let the evil of the wicked come to an end, but establish the righteous. This reveals more of the heart of David's prayer. More than anything he prayed for God to be just. In this sense David did not pray for special favouritism with God; he prayed for God to be just and he searched his own heart to help put him in the right before God. David seemed to pray here beyond his own personal needs.

God is my shield. David knew he was at a significant disadvantage before his enemies and had to rely on the defence that is of God. God promises to protect those who place their trust in him: <<*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), <<*That night the Lord stood near him and said, 'Keep up your courage! For just as you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also in Rome'*>> (Acts 23:11), and: <<*At my first defence no one came to my support, but all deserted me. May it not be counted against them! But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory for ever and ever. Amen*>> (2 Timothy 4:16-18).

David's prior appeal to God's testing of man (v.9) made him think of the justice of God. He declared this fundamental principle: God is a righteous judge. The justice of God is easy to understand if simply compared to what is expected from an earthly judge. It is not thought to be right or good if a human judge excuses crime in the name of compassion; it is expected that judges will be just, a requirement of God's law: <<*You shall not render an unjust judgement; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbour*>> (Leviticus 19:15). Yet many are absolutely confident that God will be an unjust judge on the Day of Judgement. They are so confident of it that they mistakenly rely on this idea for their salvation. David knew the truth: God is a righteous judge.

This is a commonly and dangerously rejected truth about God. Many anticipate that they will one day stand before a God of great love, great mercy, great warmth, and great generosity. The never imagine they will stand before a God who is perfectly just and who cannot ignore the crime of sin. It can be said that sin is a crime; that it breaks the good and holy law of God. And while all sins are not equally sinful, for some sins are worse than others and will receive a greater condemnation according to Matthew 23:14, yet there are no small sins against a great God.

A God who has indignation every day. Adam Clarke believed a more accurate translation of v.11 is, 'He is NOT angry every day.' He writes: "The mass of evidence supports the latter reading. The Chaldee first corrupted the text by making the addition, with the wicked, which our translators have followed." If the original is taken as more correct the sense seems to be that there are daily instances in the world of God's favour toward his people; as also of his displeasure against the ungodly, who are frequently visited by severe judgements, and taken away in their sins.

#### Psalm 7:12-16 - Evil Returns upon the Evildoers.

God's anger toward the persecutors shows itself by turning their own schemes against them.

- 12 If one does not repent, God will whet his sword;  
he has bent and strung his bow;
- 13 he has prepared his deadly weapons,  
making his arrows fiery shafts.

#### Psalm 7:12-13

If one does not repent. There is a way out for the persecutors: namely, they can seek the Lord. This phrase warns the wicked and invites them to repentance; it also helps the faithful to prefer and wish that their oppressors would turn to God rather than suffer punishment; this is, after all, his desire too: <<*The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance*>> (2 Peter 3:9).

God will whet his sword; he has bent and strung his bow. David here considered the readiness of God to judge the sinner. David saw the sword sharpened and the bow bent. With God so ready to judge, the sinner should never presume that God will delay his judgement: <<*when I whet my flashing sword, and my hand takes hold on judgement; I will take vengeance on my adversaries, and will repay those who hate me*>> (Deuteronomy 32:41).

This is another fatal error made by many who see God delaying deserved judgement out of mercy and mistake it for the idea that God is not concerned with justice. Instead, one should ask: Why does God hold back the immediate application of justice? Is it because:

- The sinner is not really guilty?
- The Law is not really clear?
- Mankind in fact deserves such mercy?
- God is not really powerful enough to bring justice?
- God is not really just?

None of these are true. Instead, the sword is sharpened and the bow is bent. The only thing that holds back the immediate judgement of God against the sinner is the undeserved grace and mercy of God, giving the sinner an unknown period of time to repent. Such mercy should never be presumed upon.

He has prepared his deadly weapons, making his arrows fiery shafts. This powerful poetic imagery communicates the severity of God's judgement, hopefully providing another incentive to repentance.

<sup>14</sup> See how they conceive evil,  
and are pregnant with mischief,  
and bring forth lies.

#### Psalm 7:14

See how they conceive evil. This seemingly obvious statement is important. It shows that a wicked heart will show itself in wicked deeds. Those wicked deeds may have the cover of respectability but will nonetheless be filled with iniquity, as was the case with some of the Pharisees of Jesus' day.

They are pregnant with mischief, and bring forth lies. This shows the source of sin, from within the sinner: *<<But one is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it; then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death>>* (James 1:14-15). The sinner gives birth to sin as a mother gives birth to children, from within.

<sup>15</sup> They make a pit, digging it out,  
and fall into the hole that they have made.

<sup>16</sup> Their mischief returns upon their own heads,  
and on their own heads their violence descends.

#### Psalm 7:15-16

They make a pit, digging it out, and fall into the hole that they have made. This shows a common method of God's distribution of justice. He often brings the same calamity on the wicked that they had planned for the righteous: <<*As I have seen, those who plough iniquity and sow trouble reap the same*>> (Job 4:8).

Their mischief returns upon their own heads, and on their own heads their violence descends. Two examples among many in the Bible are the fate of Haman the enemy of Mordecai and the Jews, and the enemies of Daniel in the lion's den. It is a fate prophesied against all who oppose God: <<*For the day of the Lord is near against all the nations. As you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head*>> (Obadiah 15).

### Psalm 7:17 - Closing Confidence.

For the faithful, the Lord's righteousness and his status as the Most High, expounded in vv.6-11, lead to giving thanks and singing praise because God's purpose of justice will prevail.

<sup>17</sup> I will give to the Lord the thanks due to his righteousness,  
and sing praise to the name of the Lord, the Most High.

### Psalm 7:17

I will give to the Lord the thanks due to his righteousness. David was wise enough to praise God according to the Lord's righteousness and not his own. Although David appealed to God in this psalm on the basis of his comparative goodness, this was not a self-righteous prayer. David knew the difference between his relative righteousness and God's praiseworthy perfect righteousness: <<*Lead me, O Lord, in your righteousness*>> (Psalm 5:8a).

And sing praise to the name of the Lord, the Most High. David ended this psalm, which began in gloom, on a high note of praise: <<*Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him*>> (Romans 15:11), and: <<*I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you*>> (Hebrews 2:12). He could praise because he took his cause to God and in faith left it there.