

David's Close Friend Betrays Him

Psalm 55

Psalm 55 - *"Give ear to my prayer, O God, and do not hide Yourself from my supplication. Attend to me, and hear me; I am restless in my complaint, and moan noisily, because of the voice of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked. For they bring down trouble upon me, and in wrath they hate me. My heart is severely pained within me, and the terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fearfulness and trembling have come upon me, and horror has overwhelmed me. Selah*

So I said, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest. Indeed, I would wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest. Destroy, O Lord, and divide their tongues, for I have seen violence and strife in the city. Day and night they go around it on its walls; iniquity and trouble are also in the midst of it. Destruction is in its midst. Oppression and deceit do not depart from its streets.

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 from him. But it was you, a man my equal, my companion and my acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in the throng. Let death seize them. Let them go down alive into hell. For wickedness is in their dwellings and among them. As for me, I will call upon God. Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice. He has redeemed my soul in peace from the battle that was against me, for there were many against me. God will hear, and afflict them, even He who abides from of old. Selah

Because they do not change, therefore they do not fear God. He has put forth his hands against those who were at peace with him; he has broken his covenant. The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart. His words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords. Cast your burden on the LORD, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved. But You, O God, shall bring them down to the pit of destruction; bloodthirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days. But I will trust in You."

Background Notes

In this psalm, David relates his extreme disappointment and anger about a close friend who has betrayed him. At the end of the psalm, David turns it all over to the Lord—and that is what we should do if we find ourselves in similar circumstances.

The title says that David wrote this psalm as a *Maschil*, or a “contemplative psalm.” We also see that it was to be used in Temple worship, accompanied by stringed instruments. The occasion of this psalm of David is not given in the title. However, the possible occasions can be narrowed down, because the content of this psalm speaks of a time when David was betrayed by a close friend. *“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 from him. But it was you, a man my equal, my companion and my acquaintance” (v12-13).* We can’t be 100% sure, but David was likely speaking of Ahithophel, his trusted counselor. Ahithophel betrayed David at the time of Absalom’s rebellion, going over to Absalom’s side and advising him against David.

2 Samuel 15-17 give the account of Ahithophel’s betrayal. 2 Samuel 15:12 – *“Then Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David’s counselor, from his city...escape and the conspiracy grew strong, for the people with Absalom continually increased in number.”* Verse 30 – *“So David went up by the Ascent of the Mount of Olives, and wept as he went up; he had his head covered and went barefoot. And all the people who were with him covered their heads and wept as they went up. Then someone told David, ‘Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom.’ And David said, ‘O LORD, I pray, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness!’* 2 Samuel 16:15 – *“Meanwhile Absalom and all the people, the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem; and Ahithophel was with him. And chapter 17:1 & 4 – “Ahithophel said to Absalom, ‘I would choose 12,000 men, and pursue David tonight. I would attack him while he is weary and weak... and then all the people with him will flee.’ And the plan pleased Absalom and all the elders of Israel.”*

The story was not over at that point, but this event is probably the occasion for Psalm 55. Somewhere away from Jerusalem, probably on the other side of the Jordan River, as David waited for the Absalom’s men who were chasing after him, he found time to write this psalm of lament about Ahithophel’s treachery.

Doctrinal Points

1. David’s betrayal by a close friend has practical implications.

Although we may never have been betrayed as David was, I think all of us have had at least one experience when a trusted friend talked negatively about us behind our back or told things about us that caused us pain. So Psalm 55 has practical implications for us, because we can all identify with David’s situation at least to some degree.

We see that David did the right thing by bringing the matter to the Lord in prayer: *“Give ear to my prayer, O God, and do not hide Yourself from my supplication” (v1).*

Look at his great anguish of soul: *“My heart is severely pained within me, and the terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fearfulness and trembling have come upon me, and horror has overwhelmed me” (v4-5).* David longed to be able to just

get away from the traumatic situation, as a bird flies away from a storm and finds refuge in a remote and restful area. *“Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest. Indeed, I would wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. Selah. I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest”* (v6-8). How many of us can identify with David at this point? Have you ever wished you could just get away to a deserted island?

In verses 9-15, David calls on God to judge this former friend and all those whom he had turned against him. This betrayal of the king had resulted in a breakdown of government in the city of Jerusalem (v9-11).

The “friend” who had turned against David was at one time very close to him. They had fellowship together, and they worshiped in the house of the Lord together. *“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 from him. But it was you, a man my equal, my companion and my acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in the throng”* (v12-14).

But now, in his desire for God’s justice to be maintained, David calls on God to execute the traitor and his evil associates: *“Let death seize them. Let them go down alive into hell, for wickedness is in their dwellings and among them”* (v15).

From verse 16 to the end of the psalm, we see David’s confidence in the Lord. He was sure that God would answer him and bring deliverance, even though Absalom and his army were expected to attack at any moment because of Ahithophel’s wicked advice.

Verses 20-21 give us further insight about the treachery of David’s disloyal “friend.” *“He [Ahithophel] has put forth his hands against those who were at peace with him. He has broken his covenant. The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart. His words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords.”*

David’s prayer of confidence in the Lord concludes with an exhortation to all believers to **trust in the Lord for strength and for justice**: *“Cast your burden on the LORD, and He shall sustain you. He shall never permit the righteous to be moved. But You, O God, shall bring them down to the pit of destruction. Bloodthirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days. But I will trust in You”* (v22-23).

1 Peter 5:7 gives us the same exhortation as verse 22: *“Cast all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”* So, we see that Psalm 55 has very practical advice that applies to believers today. David’s betrayal by a close friend has practical implications.

2. David's betrayal by a close friend has prophetic implications.

It doesn't take too much insight to see the obvious parallel between the betrayal of David by a close friend and the betrayal of our Lord by Judas. Think about it. For three years Judas was part of the close-knit fellowship of disciples, and for most of that time he was not a traitor. Judas really thought that Jesus was going to declare Himself publicly as the king and overthrow the Roman occupation - and then Judas would be right there in the limelight when the Lord set up His earthly kingdom!

But Judas didn't like the way things were working out, so he turned against the Lord. He decided to betray an innocent man. And just as Ahithophel's treachery ended in suicide (2 Samuel 17:23), so Judas's betrayal ended in suicide (Matthew 27:5).

Further prophetic implications in this psalm are yet to be fulfilled in the future. During the tribulation period, a false messiah and his followers will betray the remnant of godly Jewish believers, and they will flee "as a bird" from Jerusalem. They will find refuge in the wilderness, and there the Lord will protect them. The prayers for justice from this group of godly believers will be answered with the return of the Lord and His judgment of the wicked - including the casting of the false messiah alive into the lake of fire (Revelation 19:20).

So, David's betrayal by a close friend has prophetic implications.

Practical Application

1. We can fly away!

In verses 6-8, David longed to get away from his troubles, just as a bird can fly away from a storm to find rest and refuge in a quiet, peaceful place.

We can fly away from our struggles and the storms of our lives when we turn to the Lord as our comfort and refuge! There is a quiet place - a place of refuge - near to the heart of God, when we turn to Him in the midst of our troubles, and pour out our hurts and cares to Him.

This is also what Asaph the psalmist had in mind when he penned Psalm 73:28 - *"But it is good for me to draw near to God. I have put my trust in the Lord GOD."*

So, let's keep this practical application in mind when we're discouraged and want to get away from all our troubles. **We can fly away!**