

Refuge When Attacked by Lies
Psalm 7 | Pastor Jason Van Bommel

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

- O LORD my God, in you do I take refuge;
save me from all my pursuers and deliver me,
² lest like a lion they tear my soul apart,
rending it in pieces, with none to deliver.
- ³ O LORD my God, if I have done this,
if there is wrong in my hands,
⁴ if I have repaid my friend with evil
or plundered my enemy without cause,
⁵ let the enemy pursue my soul and overtake it,
and let him trample my life to the ground
and lay my glory in the dust. Selah
- ⁶ Arise, O LORD, in your anger;
lift yourself up against the fury of my enemies;
awake for me; you have appointed a judgment.
⁷ Let the assembly of the peoples be gathered about you;
over it return on high.
- ⁸ The LORD judges the peoples;
judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness
and according to the integrity that is in me.
⁹ Oh, let the evil of the wicked come to an end,
and may you establish the righteous—
you who test the minds and hearts,
O righteous God!
- ¹⁰ My shield is with God,
who saves the upright in heart.
¹¹ God is a righteous judge,
and a God who feels indignation every day.
- ¹² If a man does not repent, God will whet his sword;
he has bent and readied his bow;
¹³ he has prepared for him his deadly weapons,
making his arrows fiery shafts.
¹⁴ Behold, the wicked man conceives evil
and is pregnant with mischief
and gives birth to lies.
¹⁵ He makes a pit, digging it out,
and falls into the hole that he has made.
¹⁶ His mischief returns upon his own head,
and on his own skull his violence descends.

*17 I will give to the LORD the thanks due to his righteousness,
and I will sing praise to the name of the LORD, the Most High.*

Introduction: Have You Ever Been Slandered?

“Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me.” Is there a bigger lie we learned as children? Have you ever been slandered? If you have, then you know what a vicious lie these words are. Words can have deeper and longer-lasting consequences than a physical attack, and it can also be much harder to defend ourselves against slander than against physical violence.

When we are slandered and we cannot defend ourselves, it is an opportunity to seek refuge and justice in God. Meditating on this psalm will also show us how we are attacked by the lies of the father of lies and how we can trust in Christ in the midst of his relentless assault of lies. As we explore this psalm together, we will start by seeing David in this psalm, then we will see how the psalm points us to Christ. Finally, we’ll see how we can sing and pray this psalm in our lives. So, let’s start with David . . .

A. David

Of all the 13 psalms we’re going to be exploring this summer, this one has the most vague and uncertain title. The reason for that is simple: We know nothing about Cush the Benjaminite other than what is written in the title of Psalm 7. Cush is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. All we know about this man is that his name was Cush, he was from the tribe of Benjamin and he attacked David’s character with vicious slander. But we can draw some inferences from what we know of David’s life and guess when this slander from Cush most likely took place.

Early in David’s life, he was selected by God and anointed by the prophet Samuel to be the next king of Israel. This anointing had to be done in secret because Saul was the king of Israel and had no plans to step down anytime soon. In fact, he was grooming his son, Jonathan, to be king after him. Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin, so it’s reasonable to think that Cush the Benjaminite was probably a close associate or advisor of King Saul. Saul’s father’s name was Kish, so Cush may have been a close relative.

I. Slander

The slander Cush brings against David can be seen in verses 3-4:

*“O LORD my God, if I have done this,
if there is wrong in my hands,
4 if I have repaid my friend with evil
or plundered my enemy without cause,”*

Apparently, Cush had accused David of repaying a friend with evil and of plundering a man who was David’s enemy without cause, someone who had set himself against David but for no real reason. Reading between the lines a bit, it seems like David was being accused of betraying King Saul and of being disloyal and or taking treasure and glory for himself.

Such slanderous accusations were deadly, and David expresses his concern over the deadly consequences such accusations could bring in verses 1-2:

*O LORD my God, in you do I take refuge;
save me from all my pursuers and deliver me,*

² lest like a lion they tear my soul apart,
rending it in pieces, with none to deliver.

Mighty warrior kings were often compared with lions, and so David here is pleading with God against the deadly attack that has been launched against him by the slander of Cush. We know that after David killed Goliath, he served Saul in his royal court and as a loyal soldier in his army, until Saul turned against David. Perhaps as Saul was turning against David, Cush helped fuel the fires of rage and resentment with his slanderous accusations. If so, then Cush was partly responsible for King Saul trying to kill David and hunting him like a wild beast.

2. Righteousness

But David is innocent, and he pleads his innocence to the Lord in verses 3-5 –

O LORD my God, if I have done this,
if there is wrong in my hands,
⁴ if I have repaid my friend with evil
or plundered my enemy without cause,
⁵ let the enemy pursue my soul and overtake it,
and let him trample my life to the ground
and lay my glory in the dust.

David states his innocence in this matter in the strongest possible terms. First of all, he is talking to God, who searches the heart and knows David better than David knows himself. Secondly, in pleading his case before God, he gives God permission to exterminate him at the hands of his enemy, if indeed he is guilty. You can hear his passionate plea in the triple “if” clauses – “if I have done this, if there is wrong in my hands, if I have repaid my friend with evil or have plundered the one who is my enemy without cause.” He is certain that his conscience is clean in this matter.

How different David’s plea is from the way people commonly call out to God in distress. People will often cry to God when they have gotten themselves into trouble and will try bargaining with God: “Lord, if you get me out of this mess, I promise I’ll start going to church.” Now, God can certainly use prayers like that as part of His means of bringing people to Himself, but it’s such a mis-guided way to pray: We can’t somehow place God in our debt and obligate Him to save our hides by promising that we’ll worship Him. We owe Him our worship as our Creator, and worshiping God benefits us far more than it benefits God.

David’s prayer is the opposite. He is innocent, and so he goes on to pray some words that make us very uncomfortable as Christians. Verses 6-8 are the kinds of lines we read in Psalms that make us squirm a little bit and raise all sorts of questions in our minds. David prays:

Arise, O LORD, in your anger;
lift yourself up against the fury of my enemies;
awake for me; you have appointed a judgment.
⁷ Let the assembly of the peoples be gathered about you;
over it return on high.

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

It makes us uncomfortable that David is here pleading for God to be angry and to rise up in fury against his enemies, and then it makes us even more deeply uncomfortable that David invites God to judge him according to his righteousness,

according to the integrity that is within him. Shouldn't we be pleading with God for mercy instead of justice? How can David claim to have righteousness and integrity within himself?

Well, remembering the context helps set these verses in the right perspective. David is not claiming an absolute sinlessness. As we'll see when we study other psalms, especially Psalm 51 later this summer, David was aware of his own sin and need for forgiveness. But it's also true that, in this specific case regarding the slanderous accusations of Cush the Benjaminite, David is innocent, and he is inviting God to judge the situation according to justice.

3. *Justice*

The kind of justice David asks God to provide shows that his interest is not selfish. He asks God to gather the assembly of the people and to take His seat as judge over them. David is concerned for the people of God, who are being oppressed by a wicked king who has departed from God's ways and who is being deceived by false counselors like Cush. The consequences of such wicked leadership and such false counselors are grave, even dire, for God's people and for God's cause in the world. Israel was called to be the light of the nations, and the light was becoming darkness. God's people were being misled- even to their deaths in battles led by foolishness- and the nations were being prevented from seeing the goodness and wisdom of God.

Justice is something that comes from the heart of God and is something for which we, as God's people, are supposed to ask. So, David goes on to pray:

*Oh, let the evil of the wicked come to an end,
and may you establish the righteous—*

*you who test the minds and hearts,
O righteous God!*

*¹⁰ My shield is with God,
who saves the upright in heart.*

*¹¹ God is a righteous judge,
and a God who feels indignation every day.*

*¹² If a man does not repent, God will whet his sword;
he has bent and readied his bow;*

*¹³ he has prepared for him his deadly weapons,
making his arrows fiery shafts.*

*¹⁴ Behold, the wicked man conceives evil
and is pregnant with mischief
and gives birth to lies.*

*¹⁵ He makes a pit, digging it out,
and falls into the hole that he has made.*

*¹⁶ His mischief returns upon his own head,
and on his own skull his violence descends.*

Here, David sees justice coming from two different directions, both of which flow from God. One would be the direct and supernatural intervention of God to bring down the evil-doer and to establish the righteous. The other comes from the natural consequences God has ordained for those who conspire to commit evil against His people. If evil people committing wicked acts against God's people will not repent, will not turn from their ways and seek the Lord, they will suffer the consequences, either in this life or in eternity, or both.

The imagery David uses in verses 14-16 for the natural consequences of wickedness is powerful. He uses the imagery of pregnancy and childbirth in verse 14, speaking of how evil people first conceive in their minds the evil they wish to do, then they nurture and develop their plans, like the developing baby in the mother's womb. Finally, they give birth to lies, as their nurtured and ripened plot of treachery breaks forth in slanderous accusations with deadly consequences. Verse 14 makes it very clear that David knew from personal experience that "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me" is a ridiculous lie.

Verse 15 then uses the imagery of digging a pit and then falling into it yourself, while verse 16 hints at the idea of an archer who shoots in the air only to have his arrow come back down on his own head. These verses display the common reality that people who deal in lies and mischief often end up falling victim to their own plots and schemes. As Sir Walter Scott (and not Shakespeare) famously said, "*Oh what a tangled web we weave When first we practice to deceive.*" - Sir Walter Scott (*Marmion*, 1808)

4. Praise and Thanksgiving

David ends his psalm with praise and thanksgiving to God, in verse 17:

*I will give to the LORD the thanks due to his righteousness,
and I will sing praise to the name of the LORD, the Most High.*

Some Bible scholars have speculated that this psalm must have been written by David years later, looking back at this event, because he ends with such a positive note of thankful praise. But David trusted God in the midst of his distress, and when we trust God, we can thank Him and praise Him, even as we wait for Him to act as He determines is best.

David uses God's covenant name, YaHWeH, twice in this closing verse. He says he will give to YaHWeH the thanks that is due to Him for His righteousness. The slanderous accusation and powerful position of the wicked do not cause David to question, doubt or disbelieve God's righteousness.

He then closes by saying he will sing praises to YaHWeH, the Most High. His confidence is grounded in the truth that God reigns over all earthly powers. He is the Lord, the Most High.

B. Christ

So, that's what we see of David in this psalm. But we also see much of Christ here, too. All of David's psalms point us to Christ, even as they reflect David's own heart.

I. Slander

Like David, Jesus was unjustly slandered. In Mark 3, the Jewish leaders accused Him of casting out demons by the power of Satan. In John 7:20 and in John 8:52, the crowd said He had a demon. In John 8, they also mocked the questionable circumstances surrounding His birth, which looked very fishy from a human perspective.

Jesus' temptations in the Judean wilderness came in the form of slander, as Satan cast doubt on who Jesus really was. The first two temptations each began as a challenge questioning whether Jesus truly was the Son of God. "If you are the Son of God . . ."

At His trial, false witnesses came forward to slander Jesus with baseless accusations, but they could not get their testimony to agree, until two men said that Jesus said He would tear down the Temple and rebuild it in three days, a distortion of what He had said, recorded in John 2:19, "*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*"

So Jesus knew the pain of slander, as those who were His own people rejected Him and attacked Him.

2. Righteousness

Like David, Jesus was innocent. The slanderous accusations made against Him were all false. Unlike David, Jesus was perfectly righteous, absolutely sinless. He was the only truly innocent victim of injustice. Jesus openly challenged His slanderers to bring evidence and prove Him guilty of wrongdoing, in John 8:46, He says, *“Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?”*

3. Justice

Jesus also cried out to God His Father for justice and vindication from the attacks of His enemies. Hebrews 5:7 tells us, *“In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.”* The resurrection and ascension of Jesus are God’s answers to His Son’s cry for vindication from His enemies.

4. Praise and Thanksgiving

Like David, Jesus also praised God in the midst of His distress. When I think of this, I think of Jesus and the disciples after the Last Supper, when we are told that they sang a hymn and then went out to the Garden. Jesus had just instituted the Lord’s Supper, pointing His disciples ahead to His own coming death. He is going out to the Garden, where He will sweat drops of blood in agony, but He is singing a hymn, a hymn of thanksgiving and praise to God. Then, on the cross, as he is dying, Jesus’ last words are expressed to His Father, *“Into Your hands I commit my spirit.”*

Jesus trusted in His Father, even when He was being crushed for our iniquities.

C. You and Me

From David to Christ, we come now to you and me. How can we sing and pray this psalm faithfully?

1. Slander

One of the first things we need to learn to do is to recognize the truly dangerous slander all of us face. Yes, you may be wrongfully slandered by people in your life. I’ve had it happen several times, that I know of. It’s not fun, and often there’s nothing you can do about it but pray. But we all need to come to see the worst slander of all, from our true enemy, the master of mischief, the father of lies, our adversary and accuser, Satan himself. You may think of Satan as the tempter, and He is, but as the Father of lies, he loves to tell us lies about ourselves – You’re not really a Christian. How could you be, when you live the way you do? Do you really think God loves you, when you’re such a miserable loser and a disappointment? God’s not going to forgive you this time, you’ve gone too far!

2. Righteousness

The other thing we need to learn is how to plead with God on the basis of our righteousness, which is Christ in us. Even when we are guilty of a particular sin, we can answer Satan’s lies by our confidence in our righteousness, which is secure and complete in Christ.

3. Justice

The third thing we can learn from this psalm is to pray for God's justice to come. If we trust God's justice and cry out for it, we can better resist the temptation we all face whenever we're slandered, which is to try to get back at the person who has wronged us.

Psalm 7 gives us a way to pray that will help us obey how the Apostle Paul tells us we should live, in Romans 12:17-21 –

Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." ²⁰ To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (ESV)

In Revelation 6, we see a scene in heaven, the souls of martyrs who have been killed for their testimony in Jesus, men and women like the Coptic Christians in Egypt who were killed on a bus a few days ago. "They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer" – Rev. 6:10-11

We learn from these passages that it is wrong for us to seek vengeance but it is right for us to cry out for the justice of God. Ultimately, this justice will come when Jesus comes again, something we should long for and pray for whenever we pray, "Thy will be done, Thy kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven."

4. Praise and Thanksgiving

As we face the slander of Satan through confidence in the righteousness of Christ and we long for the justice of Christ's return, we can be thanking and praising God while we pray and wait. No matter what we're facing in this life, we can always praise God. We can always rejoice in the victory of Jesus over Satan, sin, death and hell and we can always thank God in the words of Psalm 7:17 –

*I will give to the LORD the thanks due to his righteousness,
and I will sing praise to the name of the LORD, the Most High.*