

Ponderings in the Psalms

The following is a Messianic Study on

Psalm 12

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The *Pondering* studies were published in the Brit Chadashah Newsletter. Brit Chadashah (*New Covenant*) is a Messianic Fellowship in Sydney. Led by Paul Cohen a Jewish believer in Messiah Yeshua (Jesus). We meet together fortnightly for Bible studies from a Messianic Jewish Perspective. We are a unique fellowship made up of Jewish and Gentile people who are believers in Yeshua as the promised Messiah of Israel.

If you don't know Yeshua as your Messiah, we encourage you to search out the Scriptures for yourself. God promised in the book of Jeremiah, "*You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart*" (Jeremiah 29:13). And we hope you will make contact with us so that we can share more about the Messiah, His life and ministry.

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Pondering Psalm 12:

The war between God's words and man's words.

Introduction

We do not know what incident took place in David's life that caused him to write this Psalm. Perhaps there were many incidents, and we too may have found ourselves crying out to the Lord "Hoshianah Save o Lord," while we are speaking with godless men whose words are but hollow deceptions.

Many of the Psalms are hard to classify, including this Psalm. Is it a personal lament, a communal lament or a prayer for rescue or salvation? Academics argue about which genre to use to classify this psalm, and how to interpret it. But drowning man might lament his loss and in the same breath pray for salvation. So too here, it is a lament and a prayer.

The title I have given this Psalm is: "The war between God's words and man's words." This battle raged then just as it rages around us today. It comes down to this, who did David believe and whose words did he trust? We have the same problem as David. Who do we believe and whose words do we trust?

Superscript verse 1

1 For the choir director; upon eight, a Psalm of David.

Commentary

A Psalm written by David with instructions for the choir director. This was to be sung in the Tabernacle as a faith-building song. It is upon an שְׁמִינִית (*sheminit*) "eight" this could mean an eighth note upon which the psalm was sung, or as most take it an *eight stringed harp or lyre*. The word is only used in two other places (1 Chronicles 15:21 and Psalm 6:1). Based on this verse the Talmud records Rabbi Judah telling that when Messiah comes there will be an eight stringed harp, as if to say there were no eight stringed harps after the Second Temple (Bavli 'Arakin 13b). It is an interesting thought that Talmud raises *when Messiah comes*. David was indeed a prophet (Acts 2:29-31) who spoke about Messiah (Psalm 2).

Josephus in his tome the *Antiquities of the Jews* identifies the three metre and the five (penta) metre. These would be rhythmic patterns or beats and he identifies the ten and twelve stringed instruments (Antiquities 7.12.3):

"And now David being freed from wars and dangers, and enjoying for the future a profound peace, composed songs and hymns to God of several sorts of metre: some of those which he made were **tri-meters**, and some were **penta-meters**: he also made music instruments, and taught the Levites to sing psalms to God; both on that which is called the Sabbath day, and on other festivals. Now the construction of the instruments was thus: the **viol** was an instrument of ten strings: it was played upon with a bow. The **psaltery** had twelve musical notes; and was played upon by the fingers. ..."

It is thought that the viol signifies the Biblical *kinor* that was more like a lyre or a harp, not a violin. The Harp (נָבֶל *nevel*) and the lyre (כִּנּוֹר *kinnor*) had 3 to 12 strings.

Some see that this Psalm refers to the time of tribulation prior to Messiah's coming, for it is then that the LORD shall arise. This might be true, yet this Psalm also applies to us. Who do we trust and who do we listen to, God or men.

Prayerful lament verses 1-2

- 1 *Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases to be,
For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men.*
- 2 *They speak falsehood to one another;
With flattering lips and with a double heart they speak.*

Commentary

The word הוֹשִׁיעָה (*hoshiah*) is translated here as *help*, but in Psalms 118:25 the same word is translated as *save*. It's a desperate cry: *assist Lord* come to my aid. This is the cry of those who fear the Lord. They are being described as the חֲסִידִים (*chasid*) the *godly* and the אֱמוּנִים (*emunim*) the *faithful ones* i.e. those that are waiting upon the Lord. David despairs that the Godly decrease compared to those who trust the *sons of men*. Generally this phrase includes every person on the earth although here it refers to the wicked.

Note that they speak with falsehood, with flattering lips and with a double heart: literally with *a heart and a heart*; i.e. with two hearts.

Three things are said about the speech of the unbeliever:

1. *Falsehood* here is not so much that they speak lies, but that they speak *worthless things*.
2. *Flattering lips* they say what they think the other wants to hear, *smooth dishonest talkers*.
3. Finally with a *Double heart* this means deceptive speech or language. This is reflected two other times in scripture. In 1 Chronicles 12:33 the men of Zebulun were "*not of double heart*" i.e. not deceptive and secondly, in James 1:8 "*a double minded man is unstable in all his ways.*" In Biblical Hebrew the heart was considered the place of intellect and thinking, so while not the same word it was certainly the same thought. David writes about their words in Psalm 55:21 "*His speech was smoother than butter, But his heart was war; His words were softer than oil, Yet they were drawn swords.*"

Prayer verses 3-4

- 3 *May the LORD cut off all flattering lips,
The tongue that speaks great things;*
- 4 *Who have said, "With our tongue we will prevail;
Our lips are our own; who is lord over us?"*

Commentary

Cut off is a technical term meaning death. David essentially asked the Lord to take the lives of those who speak boastfully against Him.

They say "we will triumph," as if to say "Who does the LORD think He is." They believe that their intellect is lord and master. Today we too see this kind of speech, for example as we talk with atheists, who deny God and the Living Words He spoke. They claim '*it is just a good book*' that was '*written by men,*' and in the same breath they claim their own words are more trustworthy than God's. Clear examples can be seen in the evolution versus creation debates. Those who hold to an evolutionary view have removed God and reduced God's

words by bolstering their own words. We can see that their own speech is now lord over them.

Oracle verse 5

5 *“Because of the devastation of the afflicted, because of the groaning of the needy. Now I will arise,” says the LORD; “I will set him in the safety for which he longs.”*

Commentary

It reads as if the claims of the wicked, *independence from God*, caused others to be harmed to the point that they cry aloud to the Lord. The needy were harmed by the destructive power of the words of the wicked. Words are powerful and this can be seen often in Scripture, especially in Proverbs.

Proverbs 12:18 *“There is one who **speaks rashly** like the **thrusts of a sword**, But the tongue of the wise brings healing.”* We would find it easy to say ‘the words of the ungodly, **they**...’, but **we** too need to keep our tongue in check (James 1:26). Proverbs 18:21a tells us that *“Death and life are in the power of the tongue...”* This applies to everyone; our words can bring pain or healing. It is one of the issues that the apostle Paul raises concerning living a wholesome Messianic life (Ephesians 5:4) let us magnify the Lord with songs of thanksgiving.

For God Himself will arise and be their help and grant them safety, *יְשׁוּעָה* (*yeshua*). It is security and deliverance but also speaks of salvation, for God is the one who will grant them safety and salvation. We have seen in this Psalm that David emphasises speech, words, and now he says *“for which he **longs**.”* The word longs *יָפִיחַ* (*ya-phi-yach*) is an expression of speech. For example, see Proverbs 6:19, 12:17 or Habakkuk (2:3): *“and He shall speak יָפִיחַ (*ya-phe-ach*) of the end, and it shall not fail.”* So *longs* here is the word spoken by the righteous, it is his prayer.

Trust in the Lord verses 6-8

6 *The words of the LORD are pure words;
As silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times.*
7 *You, O LORD, will keep them;
You will preserve him from this generation forever.*
8 *The wicked strut about on every side
When vileness is exalted among the sons of men.*

Commentary

David now compares the words of the sons of men to the words of the Lord. The sayings of the Lord are pure, sayings that are refined seven times. Seven here is symbolic, meaning complete, i.e. the words of the Lord are perfectly pure. This is echoed in Proverbs 30:5 *“Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.”* Here too we see God’s word is tested (for purity) and He is our shield, if we take sanctuary in Him.

How will the Lord prove His Word is true? One only needs to look at Israel. God has preserved the nation, and we could look at our own lives. What has the Lord done for us? He has brought us to salvation and He preserves us from *this* wicked and crooked *generation*

even forever. The last phrase “*forever*” allows us to see that the safety, or physical rescue mentioned above, is now extended to a spiritual salvation.

The last verse is a reality check. If we open the newspapers today we can see wicked men strutting about, and vileness being exalted amongst the people. It is then that we come full circle in crying out with David “*Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases to be, for the faithful disappear from among the sons of men*”.

Conclusion

This Psalm describes the two kingdoms that are at war, in a war of words, a war for our lives and devotion. Whose words do we follow? God’s words are tested and proved right. Have we allowed His Word to purify and cleanse us, by the washing of water with the Word (Ephesians 5:26). Or do we trust the words of men? May we continually call out Help oh Lord, Help and trust and know that *words of the LORD are pure words.*

Selah

Shalom in Messiah

Paul & Sue