

Ponderings in the Psalms

The following is a Messianic Study on

Psalm 35

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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 35

1 A Psalm of David. Contend, O Lord, with those who contend with me; Fight against those who fight against me. **2** Take hold of buckler and shield And rise up for my help. **3** Draw also the spear and the battle-axe to meet those who pursue me; Say to my soul, "I am your salvation." **4** Let those be ashamed and dishonored who seek my life; Let those be turned back and humiliated who devise evil against me. **5** Let them be like chaff before the wind, With the angel of the Lord driving them on. **6** Let their way be dark and slippery, With the angel of the Lord pursuing them. **7** For without cause they hid their net for me; Without cause they dug a pit for my soul. **8** Let destruction come upon him unawares, And let the net which he hid catch himself; Into that very destruction let him fall. **9** And my soul shall rejoice in the Lord; It shall exult in His salvation. **10** All my bones will say, "Lord, who is like You, Who delivers the afflicted from him who is too strong for him, And the afflicted and the needy from him who robs him?"

11 Malicious witnesses rise up; They ask me of things that I do not know. **12** They repay me evil for good, To the bereavement of my soul. **13** But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth; I humbled my soul with fasting, And my prayer kept returning to my bosom. **14** I went about as though it were my friend or brother; I bowed down mourning, as one who sorrows for a mother. **15** But at my stumbling they rejoiced and gathered themselves together; The smiters whom I did not know gathered together against me, They slandered me without ceasing. **16** Like godless jesters at a feast, They gnashed at me with their teeth. **17** Lord, how long will You look on? Rescue my soul from their ravages, My only life from the lions. **18** I will give You thanks in the great congregation; I will praise You among a mighty throng.

19 Do not let those who are wrongfully my enemies rejoice over me; Nor let those who hate me without cause wink maliciously. **20** For they do not speak peace, But they devise deceitful words against those who are quiet in the land. **21** They opened their mouth wide against me; They said, "Aha, aha, our eyes have seen it!" **22** You have seen it, O Lord, do not keep silent; O Lord, do not be far from me. **23** Stir up Yourself, and awake to my right And to my cause, my God and my Lord. **24** Judge me, O Lord my God, according to Your righteousness, And do not let them rejoice over me. **25** Do not let them say in their heart, "Aha, our desire!" Do not let them say, "We have swallowed him up!" **26** Let those be ashamed and humiliated altogether who rejoice at my distress; Let those be clothed with shame and dishonor who magnify themselves over me. **27** Let them shout for joy and rejoice, who favor my vindication; And let them say continually, "The Lord be magnified, Who delights in the prosperity of His servant." **28** And my tongue shall declare Your righteousness And Your praise all day long.

Introduction

This Psalm has the superscript *Of David*, which gives us an approximate timeframe of about 1000 B.C.E. There is little in this psalm that reveals an exact setting, although we can see in verses 4 and 7, that David is crying out to the LORD because of the false accusations being made about him by former friends (1 Samuel 19:5; 20:1; 24:9; 24:11; 26:18-19). As David uses both military and legal language in verses 7, 11 and 19, it may refer to the time when David was being pursued by king Saul (1 Samuel 20:1; 23:15; 24:11; 25:29). As such David appeals to God as the judge in verses 1 and 23-24 (1 Samuel 24:12-15). On a few occasions

David had the opportunity to take Saul's life, but he did not take it. This psalm is not a request for personal vengeance, but a plea for God's righteous judgment to come about.

An outline

The Psalm, as a whole, reads as an imprecatory psalm (see the last newsletter), yet each segment concludes with an expression of praise or a vow of thanksgiving:

1. A prayer for deliverance, an imprecation and praise (verses 1-10)
2. The lament against the violent false witnesses and a vow of thanksgiving (verses 11-18)
3. A complaint, an appeal to the LORD for judgement against the enemy, a second imprecation, and praise (verses 19-28).

1. A prayer for deliverance, an imprecation and praise (verses 1-10)

Verses 1-3: In verse 1 David asks God to contend רִיב (*riv*) with those who contend with him. This has a ring of legal disputation about it, as such David prays on the basis of Covenant. The promise of the Abrahamic Covenant was curse for curse (Genesis 12:3). He then extends it by asking the LORD to fight for him in two ways; with both a small and large shield (defensive) and spear and the battle-axe (offensive), see Exodus 15:1-18; Deuteronomy 32:41; Psalm 24:8; Isaiah 63:1-3; Jeremiah 20:11. In verse 3 David asks the Lord to reassure him that He is his salvation. Salvation in the Tanach (Older Testament) primarily means physical rescue.

Verses 4-8: these verses are an imprecation against those who sought his life (1 Samuel 19:15; 26:4). Both Psalm 34 and 35 have a reference to the Angel of the LORD (see previous newsletter). In Psalm 34:7 He was the protector: "*The Angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them.*" Here the Angel of the LORD is the Divine warrior. He is asked to *drive them on* as dust in the wind (Isaiah 29:5; Hosea 13:3). "*Let their way be dark and slippery, With the Angel of the LORD pursuing them.*" I have to confess that I love the way David expresses this, a flight on a dark and dangerous path, with the Angel of the LORD in pursuit (Jeremiah 23:12).

Verse 8: is a plea for curse for curse, as David asks for the destruction that the enemy planned to come upon him, to instead come upon his enemy unexpectedly. Note that David changes from the plural (they) to the singular (him), indicating that he has a particular someone in mind. I suspect that it is Doeg the Edomite, the chief of Saul's herdsman (1 Samuel 22:6-23, Psalm 52). Both David and Doeg had been in the service of King Saul at the same time.

Verses 9-10 are the concluding praise to this segment. "My soul" and "my bones" are synonyms here, and David informs us that he will "*rejoice.*" He then asks the rhetorical question: "who is like you?" (compare Exodus 15:11; Micah 7:18). The obvious answer is: No One. This is followed by a description of the LORD, the helper of the weak and powerless (Psalm 9:18; 18:27).

It is worth noting that David does not rejoice at the destruction of his enemy. What he does do is rejoice that the LORD had delivered and saved him. So too for us, let us not rejoice in the downfall of people who despised us, but rejoice that our names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20).

2. The lament against the violent false witnesses and a vow of thanksgiving (verses 11-18)

David now gives us the main complaint about these “*witnesses of violence*” חַמָּוֹת (*chamas*). These witnesses were former close friends, who have now become his enemy. They were lying to the authority (King Saul), and accused David of seeking to kill Saul, even though David had no such intent (1 Samuel 24). In fact, David spared Saul’s life, even Saul acknowledged this (1 Samuel 24:17). David had prayed, fasted and worn sackcloth (a sign of mourning) for them; he was in constant prayer about this situation.

You can sense David’s tears as we read how upset he is. David asks the Lord “*how Long will You look on?*” (Psalm 74:10). As the Lord you know all things, You are my salvation, as such O Lord, be my rescue now against those who made the false accusations against me.

David closes this segment with a vow of thanksgiving; he will give thanks publically (Psalm 40:9-10). The “*great congregation*” can be seen in two ways. It could be the *faithful* that come to celebrate at the three pilgrim feasts: Passover, Shavuot (the feast of Weeks or Pentecost) and Sukkot, the feast of Tabernacles (Exodus 23:14-17; Deuteronomy 16:16). Perhaps a more likely explanation could be that David is referring to the 400 odd men who were with him during many of his trials and tribulations (1 Samuel 22:2).

3. A complaint, an appeal to the LORD for judgement against the enemy, a second imprecation, and praise (verses 19-28)

In the third and final segment, David re-issues his complaints about and against his enemies (verses 19-22). David stands with the *quiet in the land* (v. 20), the שָׁלוֹם (*shalom*), or as David Stern translates this, as *the peaceful of the land* (CJB). This translation fits the context well.

David continues in prayer by asking the Lord to *wake up* (Psalm 7:6; 44:23), reflecting a sense of frustration with the perceived lack of progress from God. The gloating enemies (*aha* verse 21 and 25) had taken note, and they believed that they could have taken David (verse 25). So David asked the Lord to be his defence. David is imprecating those who rejoiced at his calamity. Let those who magnify themselves against me, be clothed with shame and dishonour!

David’s own description here is as the Lord’s “*servant*,” strange as it may be to us, is the highest accolade in scripture. Very few have been called by this title.

In the final two verses David and the “*great congregation*” *delight in David’s vindication*. This is the righteous cause of David, so they, the 400 mighty men, no longer need to be on the run with David. They could be glad and shout for joy “The Lord be magnified,” for “He delights in the prosperity (literally the *shalom*) of his servant.” Then “*my tongue shall declare Your righteousness*” for You have raised up David, and brought the enemies low, so we will sing Your praise all the day long.

Concluding thought

As we read about David's experience, it is easy to perceive a prophetic picture here of the Lord Yeshua being falsely accused, standing before his various accusers. There were six *kangaroo courts*, all in quick succession, because Yeshua refused to answer them.

Firstly, there were the Jewish courts before Annas the High Priest (John 18:12-14,19-23), then Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin (Matthew 26:57,59-68, Mark 14:53,55-65; Luke 22:54,63-65; John 18:24). Finally, the Sanhedrin condemned him (Matthew 27:1; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-71), but since they had no power to put him to death, they moved to the Gentile courts. Yeshua first went before Pontius Pilate, the governor (Matthew 27:2,11-14; Mark 15:1-5; Luke 23:1-5; John 18:28-38), then to Herod Antipas (Luke 23:6-12), and then for a second time before Pilate (Matthew 27:15-26; Mark 15:6-15; Luke 23:13-25; John 18:39-19:16).

In all these places He is falsely accused. Although the Brit Chadashah does not quote this psalm in this context, there are glimpses that Yeshua, the Servant of the LORD (Isaiah 52:13-53:12), endured this suffering too, as He was also betrayed by a friend (Matthew 26:14-16; Mark 14:10-11; Luke 22:3-6).

Selah

Blessings in the Messiah

Paul & Sue