

PSALM 35

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Prayers against Open and Concealed Enemies,
followed by Promises of Praise.

ANALYSIS

Three irregular stanzas. Stanza I., vers. 1-10, An Indignant Imprecatory prayer against False Accusers—especially against One. Stanza II., vers. 11-18. A Succession of Accusers, including Former Friends, Wound the petitioner to the Quick. Stanza III., vers. 19-28, A Probable Supplement contains a Prayer for Vindication against Concealed Enemies whose Chief Weapon is Insinuation.

(Lm.) By David.

- 1 Accuse O Jehovah mine accusers—
war on them who war on me;
- 2 Grasp shield and buckler—
and arise in my help;
- 3 Then draw the spear—
and close up¹ against my pursuers:
Say to my soul—"Thy salvation² am I!"
- 4 Put to shame and confounded be they who are seeking my
life,³
turned back and abashed be they who are devising my hurt:⁴
- 5 Let them become as chaff before the wind—
with the messenger of Jehovah pursuing⁵ them,
- 6 Let their way be dark and slippery—
with the messenger of Jehovah thrusting⁵ them down.
- 7 For without cause have they hid for me their net,
without cause have they digged a pit for my life.⁶
- 8 May there reach him⁷ a ruin he could not know,

1. Perh. supply "the way." Per. and others take *sgr* as a noun="battle-axe."

2. Or: "deliverance," "victory."

3. U.: "soul."

4. Cp. 70:2.

5. Most critics suspect here an accidental transposition in the Heb.

6. So *Gt.*—*Gn.*

7. As if thinking of a chief individual—such as Doeg.

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and let his own net which he hath hidden capture him,—
into the pit that he digged let him fall.

- 9 Then my soul will exult in Jehovah—
will exult in his salvation.¹
- 10 All my bones will say "Jehovah! who is like unto thee—
rescuing the humbled from one stronger than he,
yea, the humbled and needy, from his spoiler?"
- 11 There keep rising up witnesses promoting violence—
of what I know not they question me:
- 12 They repay me evil for good—
a bereavement to my soul.²
- 13 But as for me when they were mortally wounded my clothing
was sackcloth!
I humbled with fasting my soul,
though my prayer on mine own bosom might return;³
- 14 Like as for a friend like as for mine own brother I bowed
myself down,⁴
Like as one mourning for a mother I gloomily walked to
and fro.⁴
- 15 But when I stumbled they rejoiced and thronged together,
there thronged together against me smiters and I knew not,
they cried out⁵ and were not silent:
- 16 Amidst profane praters of perversion⁶ have they gnashed
upon me their teeth.
- 17 My Sovereign Lord! how long wilt thou look on?
Recover my soul from their ravages—
from lions my solitary self.
- 18 I will thank thee in a large assembly,⁷
amidst a numerous people will I praise thee.
- 19 Let not those rejoice over me who are my foes for false
reason,
nor those who hate me without cause wink the eye;
- 20 For no salutation do they utter,

1. Or: "victory."

2. "Such conduct makes him feel as desolate as a childless mother"—Kp.

3. "And my prayer—may it return into mine own bosom" ("so true a prayer was it")—Per.

4. *Gt.* "bowed down" and "walked to and fro" should be thus transposed
—Gn.

5. Cp. *G.* Intro. 144.

6. Or: "as profane men, mockers for cake"—O.G.

7. As in 22:25.

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- but against the quiet of the land treacherous things do they devise;
- 21 And they have opened wide against me their mouth—
they have said—“Aha! Aha! our eye hath seen!”¹
- 22 Thou hast seen O Jehovah do not be silent;
my Sovereign Lord! be not far from me:
- 23 Bestir thyself and wake up to my vindication O my God—
yea my Sovereign Lord to my plea.
- 24 Vindicate me according to thy righteousness Jehovah my
God,—
and let them not rejoice over me.
- 25 Let them not say in their heart—“Aha! our desire!”²
let them not say—“We have swallowed him up!”
- 26 Put to shame and at once abashed be they who are rejoicing
at my hurt,
Clothed with shame and confusion be they who are
magnifying themselves against me.
- 27 Let them ring out their joy and be glad who are desiring my
justification,
and let them say continually—“Magnified be Jehovah³
who hath taken pleasure in the prosperity of his servant!”
- 28 And my tongue shall talk to me of thy righteousness—
all the day long of thy praise.

(Lm.) To the Chief Musician.

PARAPHRASE

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O Lord, fight those fighting me; declare war on them for their attacks on me.

2 Put on Your armor, take Your shield and protect me by standing in front.

3 Lift Your spear in my defense, for my pursuers are getting very close! Let me hear You say that You will save me from them!

4 Dishonor those who are trying to kill me! Turn them back and confuse them.

5 Blow them away like chaff in the wind—wind sent by the Angel of the Lord.

1. Cp. 70:3.

2. Ml.: “our soul.”

3. Cp. 70:4.

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6 Make their path dark and slippery before them, with the Angel of the Lord pursuing them.

7 For though I did them no wrong, yet they laid a trap for me and dug a pitfall in my path.

8 Let them be overtaken by sudden ruin, caught in their own net, and destroyed.

9 But I will rejoice in the Lord. He shall rescue me!

10 From the bottom of my heart praise rises to Him. Where is His equal in all of heaven and earth? Who else protects the weak and helpless from the strong, and the poor and needy from those who would rob them?

11 These evil men swear to a lie. They accuse me of things I have never even heard about.

12 I do them good, but they return me harm. I am sinking down to death.

13 When they were ill, I mourned before the Lord in sack-cloth, asking Him to make them well; I refused to eat; I prayed for them with utmost earnestness, but God did not listen.

14 I went about sadly as though it were my mother, friend or brother who was sick and nearing death.

15 But now that I am in trouble they are glad; they come together in meetings filled with slander against me—I didn't even know some of those who were there.

16 For they gather with the worthless fellows of the town and spend their time cursing me.

17 Lord, how long will You stand there, doing nothing? Act now and rescue me, for I have but one life and these young lions are out to get it.

18 Save me, and I will thank You publicly before the entire congregation, before the largest crowd I can find.

19 Don't give victory to those who fight me without any reason! Don't let them rejoice¹ at my fall—let them die.

20 They don't talk of peace and doing good, but of plots against innocent men who are minding their own business.

21 They shout that they have seen me doing wrong! "Aha!" they say, "With our own eyes we saw him do it."

22 Lord, You know all about it. Don't stay silent! Don't desert me now!

23 Rise up, O Lord my God; vindicate me.

1. Literally, "Wink with the eye."

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24 Declare me "not guilty," for You are just.¹ Don't let my enemies rejoice over me in my troubles.

25 Don't let them say, "Aha! Our dearest wish against him will soon be fulfilled!" and, "At last we have him!"

26 Shame them; let these who boast against me and who rejoice at my troubles be themselves overcome by misfortune that strips them bare of everything they own. Bare them to dishonor.

27 But give great joy to all who wish me well. Let them shout with delight, "Great is the Lord who enjoys helping His child!"²

28 And I will tell everyone how great and good You are; I will praise You all day long.

EXPOSITION

Probably the endeavour to get at the authorship of this psalm, will go further than the pursuit of any other line of enquiry, to place the meaning of the psalm within our grasp. The psalm as a whole is inscribed to *David*, nor is there the slightest perceptible reason to doubt the validity of this inscription, especially so long as we confine ourselves to Stanzas I. and II. When careful attention is bestowed on Stanza III., little by little we recognise a difference between the tone of this and that of the previous two; and this perception makes the Davidic authorship of what has gone before, still more evident than it was at first. There is a difference, however, even between Stanzas I., and II. also,—to lay hold of which is to become more completely penetrated than ever with the assurance that David wrote both these stanzas, but under the domination of two successive moods. The governing note of Stanza I. is indignation: that of Stanza II. is wounded love. The indignation is fiery, and finds vent in imprecation (Cp. on 69)—nothing is too bad to ask from Jehovah in avengement of the wrong the petitioner has received from his enemies at court, especially from one of them. But when, in the second stanza, his memory passes from the supreme wrong this one has done him, to other false witnesses that come up before his mind, and he recalls his intimate friendship with some of them, indignation melts into a wail of anguish, as he remembers how keenly *he* had suffered in

1. Literally, "Judge me according to Your righteousness."

2. Literally, "Servant."

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their behalf when *they* were in trouble. He perceives all the meanness of their conduct—all the perfidy of it; but he does not imprecate. He looks their ingratitude and treachery full in the face; the enormous wrong they have done him is revolting, like the *ravages of lions*; but he cannot curse them. He has been robbed of the precious jewel of friendship, and he feels it as a mother feels the loss of her children. All he can do in resentment, is to ask how long his Sovereign Lord will look on. It is David all over: both stanzas are from David—if we know anything of David: David at the court of Saul, with jealous courtiers passing in and out before the king, suddenly asking ensnaring questions, throwing out innuendoes, to David's hurt to which no reply can at once be made. The most casual reader can see this situation reflected in the first stanza; nor does anyone need to be told how exquisitely fitted for friendship was the son of Jesse, and therefore how open to feel the anguish so graphically portrayed in the second stanza. It is not so easy at first to realise the change of situation which almost imperceptibly comes into view in Stanza III. Kirkpatrick recognises the change of tone, as is evident from his anticipatory summary of it: "19-28. Renewed prayer in a somewhat calmer tone." But something more than the "tone" here changes: very informally is here introduced a new situation. In a word, it is no longer David who writes; but rather Prince Hezekiah, in the latter years of his father's degenerate reign; as the prince's ripening godly manhood moves to concealed hatred the sycophants at his father's court. The writer notes with some vexation the withholding of a *salutation* which he was well-entitled to expect, he is intimate with *the quiet of the land*, learns the *treacherous things* that are *devised against them*, and hears the malicious insinuations thrown out regarding himself. The injured one is no longer the high-spirited warrior of Stanza I., nor the wounded personal friend of Stanza II., but one who can afford to wait a little and yet eagerly looks forward to *vindication*—a vindication which will cover his detractors with shame. If, *as prince*, the writer penned this stanza—or at least *lived* it, it may well have been *as king* that he added to it the beautiful climax which now brings it to a conclusion; and fitted it to be soon passed on *To the Chief Musician*. The Refrains to this psalm contribute something material towards the exegesis of the whole. In the first place they serve to mark real divisions in the psalm where otherwise the lines of transition would be less perceptible. It cannot,

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for example, be denied, that vers. 9, 10 form a natural resting-place. And this assists the perception that, although the second stanza, resumes the same general thought, yet it is with a difference: the one enemy is lost sight of by the succession of accusers which comes into view, bringing in those perfidious friends who cause such anguish to the psalmist's mind. Then the close of the second stanza, in vers. 17, 18, is especially arresting, inasmuch as each verse strongly reminds us of Ps. 22: the *lions* recalling vers. 13 and 21 of that psalm, and the *solitary self* its 20th verse; the *large assembly* also linking itself with the same not very usual designation in ver. 25 of Ps. 22;—small things in themselves, it may be thought; but if, as we saw reason to suppose, they came from David's pen in the earlier psalm, then the probability is increased that David wrote them here. Again, the strong climax here reached, distinctly awakens us to note with some surprise that, however well the psalm might have ended here, in point of fact it does not; and so, however quiet the transition to what follows and however neat the "seam" of attachment thereby formed, yet we really do enter upon a new situation as well as perceive a calmer tone. Needless to say the actual conclusion of the psalm, vers. 27, 28, are in every way worthy of that UPRIGHT KING whose harp (Isaiah 38:20) was solemnly enlisted to celebrate the triumphant *vindication* that ultimately came, and which, when it did come, awoke the respectful acknowledgements of all nations.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. If we only understood the circumstances of this psalm, we would feel the writer was generous in his attitude toward his enemies—is this possible? Discuss.
2. There are several figures of speech used to describe the help of the Lord—(cf. vs. 2f.f.). Can we use them for today?
3. Read from verse one through eight—six or seven calamities are wished upon the wicked—have we ever lived in such a way that the Lord answered the wish of the psalmist in our lives? Discuss.
4. When we try to imagine all of the calamities that could have come our way we are constrained to ask why they didn't? Read verse 10 for some help in this question.
5. Here is a commentary on the schemes of sinners—notice the use of the God-given abilities to oppose God.

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6. In the midst of trouble David thanks God—what a lesson for us. How do we develop this capacity?
7. The words of Graham Scroggie are so good here—“Have you ever felt the thrill of doing something really great? If not, begin by singing a song in the night of your present, or next trouble.—*Feet of lead, and a sore head: but daring wings for him who sings.*” (*Psalms* p. 207, 208)

PSALM 36

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Oracles False and True, Prompting Prayer and Praise.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-4, Personified Transgression Deluding and Driving on its Victim. Stanza II., vers 5, 6, Jehovah's Kindness with its Associated Divine Attributes. Stanza III., vers. 7-9, Jehovah's Kindness Experienced by Men. Stanza IV., vers. 10-12, Prayer for Protection, suddenly Giving Place to Triumph.

(Lm.) By the Servant of Jehovah—by David.

- 1 An oracle of transgression¹ hath the lawless one in the midst of his heart,
there is no dread of God² in the sight of his eyes;
- 2 For it flattereth him as to finding out his hateful iniquity:³
- 3 the words of his mouth are trouble and deceit—
he hath ceased to act circumspectly:
- 4 To make trouble thoroughly he deviseth on his bed;
he taketh his stand on a way not good—
evil doth he not refuse.
- 5 Jehovah! in the heavens is thy kindness,
thy faithfulness reacheth as far as the clouds:
- 6 thy righteousness is like the mountains of GOD,
and thine act of justice are a great deep,—
Man and beast thou savest Jehovah!

1. Graphic: Transgression deified, enthroned in the heart of the lawless one, uttering misleading oracles.

2. The lowest form of respect for Divine things—absent.

3. For various explanations of this verse, see Per.