



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 35

Bishop Youssef



Introduction

- This Psalm is simply titled A Psalm of David
- So, it is simply attributed to David by most scholars and church fathers
- However, some, (not many), assign it to Jeremiah because they see a parallel between Psalm 35:6 and Jeremiah 23:12; Psalm 35:12 and Jeremiah 18:20; Jeremiah 18:22; Jeremiah 18:21, and Jeremiah 18:25 in Lamentations 2:16
- But it may well be questioned whether Jeremiah is not merely borrowing the language of the Psalm
- The military figures of Psalm 35:1-3, find no parallel in book of Jeremiah and it would not be natural for him



Introduction

- In terms of the occasion, it may be linked to the period of David's life when Saul pursued him
- The whole psalm is a strong supplication to the Just God, to condemn the enemies, those who persecute His people
- It is the appeal to heaven of a heart hard pressed by oppression and wickedness
- The Psalm expresses, not an individual feeling alone, but that of a community appealing to God against its oppressors
- Beyond a doubt Jesus Christ may be seen here by the spiritual eye



Introduction

- As the prophet David, in many circumstances was a symbol of the Lord Christ
- Our Lord quoted a part of verse 19, and applied it to Himself, *“But this happened that the word might be fulfilled which is written in their law, ‘They hated Me without a cause’”* (John 15:25)
- David’s cries do not imply that he bore a personal hatred against his oppressors, but they represent a prophecy concerning what will dwell upon those who persist on oppressing God with no repentance



Introduction

Psalm Outline

The Psalm falls into three divisions, each ending with a vow of thanksgiving

- A Supplication to the Righteous God 35:1-10
- A Description of the Sufferings 35:11-16
- The Intervention of God 35:17-28

A Supplication to the Righteous God 35:1-10



- The word translated "plead" is a judicial term; but the context shows that it was in the battle-field, rather than in the law-courts, that David's cause was to be pleaded
- David is asking God to take his portion and maintain his cause against those that oppose him and have raised war against him because he is not able to defend himself and have none else to appear for him
- Many adversaries fought against David, and many were the times he prayed, *Fight against those who fight against me*
- He could rightly pray this prayer because he generally lived in God's will, and those who fought against him were opposed to God

A Supplication to the Righteous God 35:1-10



- This is a petition for help against persecutors in general
- We know that the enemy of all believers is our adversary, the devil
- We read in Psalm 34, how the Lord will send angels to encamp around us and keep us safe from our enemies
- *Fight against those who fight against me, "If God is for us, who can be against us?"* (Romans 8:31)
- The enemies of Jesus Christ and of His Church many times tried to appear that in their persecutions they were influenced only by a desire of upholding and keeping the law while they were acting as absolute enemies, instead of being impartial unbiased judges

A Supplication to the Righteous God 35:1-10



- *Take hold of shield and buckler*, These are defensive weapons
- Not that the Lord stands in need of any of these to defend Himself with
- God's defensive weapons are, "*For He put on righteousness as a breastplate, And a helmet of salvation on His head; He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, And was clad with zeal as a cloak.*" (Isaiah 59:17)
- The sense is, that He would Be as these to David
- As He was to him, and is to all His people; namely, their *shield and buckler*

A Supplication to the Righteous God 35:1-10



- He gives unto them the shield of salvation
- God the Almighty stands between us and any danger and protects us
- He is our shield, and He builds a hedge around us to keep us from harm
- St. John Chrysostom says, “That there is no one stronger than him who enjoys the heavenly help; and no one weaker than him who is deprived of it.”
- As David found protection behind God’s *shield* and *buckler*, he also asked God to keep his enemies at a distance with a *spear*

A Supplication to the Righteous God 35:1-10



- *And stop those who pursue me, That they might not overtake him*
- Put so many obstacles before them, that they will not be able to come near
- God can prevent, and He sometimes, according to His will, does prevent persecutors from overtaking His people
- Before the enemy comes closer, the Lord can push them off as with a long *spear*
- Wonderful reflection for a faithful soul, to feel that God stands there armed with *shield buckler* and *spear*, for its protection and hears Him speaking to the heart *I am your salvation*

A Supplication to the Righteous God 35:1-10



- Besides hindering the enemy, the Lord can also calm the mind of His servant by prompt definite assurance from His own mouth, that he is, and shall be, safe under His wing
- One word from the Lord quiets all our fears
- The whole plan of salvation is arranged with a view to give such an assurance, and to give a pledge to the soul that God "will" save
- Death loses its terrors then; the redeemed man moves on calmly - for he has nothing now to fear

A Supplication to the Righteous God 35:1-10



- David tells us what is to happen to those against whom God takes up arms
- He asked God to not only protect him, but also to vindicate him
- There is nothing malicious here, he simply desires and longs for justice, and the petition is natural and justifiable
- He is asking God to let them see so clearly that God is on his side that they will be covered with confusion for having opposed one who was so entirely protected and cared for by the Divine Power
- According to some fathers, the psalmist petition, not against outer enemies, but against inner ones; against the sins, and lusts

A Supplication to the Righteous God 35:1-10



- Applying this verse to Jesus Christ, St. Cyril of Alexandria says, “Having delivered Jesus into Pilate’s hand, they brought perdition upon themselves; for the Roman enemy destroyed them by the sword, and burned their land by fire, even the Holy temple, most revered by them.”
- David wanted it to be seen and known that he really did serve and obey God, and that those who opposed him were made *like chaff before the wind*
- Chaff is the type of whatever is light, vain, and worthless
- Chaff driven before the wind represents the chaotic defeat of a beaten army flying without any resistance before an enemy

A Supplication to the Righteous God 35:1-10



- St. Augustine says, “The wind is temptation; the dust are the ungodly. When temptation comes, the dust is raised, it neither stands nor resists.”
- The angel of the Lord, who protects the righteous, as we read in Psalm 34:7, “*The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, And delivers them.*”, is called on to complete the humiliation of the wicked ones, who are David's enemies
- Angels are often represented in the Scriptures as agents employed by God in bringing punishment on wicked people, 2 Kings 19:35; Isaiah 37:36; 1 Chronicles 21:12,30; 2 Samuel 24:16

A Supplication to the Righteous God 35:1-10



- *Let their way, By which they flee, being chased, be dark and slippery*
- So, they do not know where they are, at what they stumble, whither to flee, nor how to stand
- They can neither discern the right path, nor be able to stand in it, and much less to escape, especially from so swift a chaser as an angel
- St. Augustine comments, “In a dark and slippery way how shalt thou go? where set foot? These two ills are the great punishments of men: darkness, ignorance; a slippery way, luxury.”

A Supplication to the Righteous God 35:1-10



- St. Augustine continues, “These things he predicted would come upon them, not as though he wished them to happen. Although the Prophet in the Spirit of God so speaks these things, even as God does the same, with sure judgment, with a judgment good, righteous, holy, tranquil; not moved with wrath, not with bitter jealousy, not with desire of wreaking enmities, but of punishing wickedness with righteousness; nevertheless, it is a prophecy.”
- He ultimately asks that they should not only be scattered and compelled to fly but that they should be permanently hurried on to destruction

A Supplication to the Righteous God 35:1-10



- In the first six verses the prophet spoke on persecutions in general
- He now details three sorts of persecutions, generally inflicted on the just by sinners
- First, they harass them by deception and conspiracies
- Secondly, by false witnesses, verse 11
- Thirdly, by open force, and not limited to mere words, verse 15
- Of the first he says, *For without cause they have hidden their net for me in a pit, Which they have dug without cause for my life*
- As, without any error or fault, they have been constantly laying snares for him

A Supplication to the Righteous God 35:1-10



- For emphasis, twice David asked God to note that his enemies came against him *without cause*
- *their net for me in a pit*, This is said in allusion to the custom of digging pits, and putting nets into them, for the catching of wild beasts; and covering them with straw or dust
- *Let destruction come upon him unexpectedly*, He prays that God turns those snares to their own destruction
- David prayed that the guilty one would truly be caught in his own trap
- God's providence often brings about such conspiracies to be of more harm to the conspirators themselves and harm them

A Supplication to the Righteous God 35:1-10



- As we read in Proverbs 26:27, *Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, And he who rolls a stone will have it roll back on him*
- On the same cross the wicked Haman prepared to crucify Mordecai on it, he himself was crucified
- And the cross set by the devil to destroy the kingdom of the Lord Christ, destroyed his own kingdom
- We can pray on the same principle against our spiritual adversaries, the principalities and powers that battle against us in the spiritual realm
- The devil has snares (1 Timothy 3:7; 2 Timothy 2:26) and he has plans and devices (2 Corinthians 2:11) set against us

A Supplication to the Righteous God 35:1-10



- A sudden transition from afflicted prayer to thanksgiving
- He turns away from his opponents to his God, and finds a deep complete joy in Him, and in that joy his spirit delights
- It is not joy in the destruction of others; it is joy that he himself would be delivered
- Our own deliverance from the hand of our enemies may involve the necessity of their harm
- What we rejoice in, in such a case, is not their fall, but our own deliverance
- And for this it can never be improper to give thanks

A Supplication to the Righteous God 35:1-10



- Our victory is not in the destruction of others, but in God's salvation given to us
- As the tongue was not enough to bless God with, David is saying that everything within him praises God, who delivered him from his enemies
- The Lord cares for those who are weaker and for the poor
- *All my bones shall say, Is similar to Psalm 103, Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me bless His holy name;* Signifying the perfect joy that fills up the entire man

A Supplication to the Righteous God 35:1-10



- *Lord, who is like You*, Of the perfections of His nature, which appear in the salvation and deliverance of His people
- There is none like unto Him for His wisdom, holiness, power, grace, and mercy; for His foreknowledge, wisdom, and counsel, in forming the plan of salvation
- St. Augustine says, “O Body of Christ, Holy Church, let all thy bones say, “Lord, who is like unto thee?” And if the flesh under persecution hath fallen away, let the bones say, “Lord, who is like unto Thee?” For of the righteous it is said, “The Lord keeps all their bones; not one of them shall be broken.”

A Description of the Sufferings

35:11-16



- The prophet now comes to the second sort of persecutions, through which the wicked, by means of false witnesses openly persecute the just, and gives a highly contradictory story of the wickedness of such witnesses
- False unrighteous witnesses rose against the Lord Jesus Christ, Matthew 26:59; and against His apostles, Acts 24:5; and very frequently they rise up and bear false witness against His people
- He says that they *rise up*, they did not wait to be called, they volunteered, accusing him of things *I do not know*
- David remembered the dishonor of his enemies, who returned evil instead of good all *to the sorrow of his soul*

A Description of the Sufferings

35:11-16



- St. Augustine comments on this verse saying, “But let us say to our Head, Lord, what did You not know? Did You indeed know not anything? Did You not know the hearts of them that charged You? Did You not foresee their deceits? Did You not give Yourself into their hands knowingly? Had You not come that You might suffer by them? What then knew You not? He knew not sin, and thereby He knew not sin, not by not judging, but by not committing.”
- For anyone, to be misunderstood or be made the deliberate target of false accusation is great sorrow

A Description of the Sufferings

35:11-16



- David felt the hurt in his soul that had been done by these evil ones he had been loyal to
- The Lord Jesus Christ presented His love to mankind, to be rewarded with hatred
- He came to heal their wounds, to have His hands and feet nailed, and His side pierced
- He granted them His life; to be brought forth to death
- He intended to honor them; and they sought to crucify Him
- David described some of the good that he did for his enemies
- He neither did evil for evil, nor thought of revenge, but committed himself in great humility to pray to God

A Description of the Sufferings

35:11-16



- David had acted thus, especially in the case of Saul, when he was first afflicted with his terrible illness (1 Samuel 16:14-23, 18:10)
- He showed remarkable love and concern for all *when they were sick*, making their problems his own and caring for them as though they were his friends or brothers
- *My clothing was sackcloth*, David was grieved, and mourned for them, it being usual to put on sackcloth in time of mourning
- Sackcloth and fasting are the wings of prayer
- The king of the Ninevites, when he turned to prayer in fasting and sackcloth, was heard, Jonas 3

A Description of the Sufferings

35:11-16



- *my prayer would return to my own heart*, To show he had no doubt of his prayers producing the desired effect
- Prayers put up in such humility, will not come to him back in vain, but will fill his *heart* with heavenly consolation
- According to some, *my prayer would return to my own heart* means continuous prayer without ceasing
- Others interpreted it as they have repaid him evil for good; but his prayer will not be unrewarded
- And some say that *heart* may denote either the posture—the head bowed or, that the prayer was in secret

A Description of the Sufferings

35:11-16



- In his affliction he not only abstained from doing evil for evil, but he even did good for evil, for he felt towards his enemies, as a friend would for his friend, as a brother for a brother, or rather as a child *who mourns for his mother*
- As Jesus Christ with Judas, whom he called friend, when he came to betray Him; and who not only ate with Him, but was one of His disciples, and carried the bag, Matthew 26:50
- Christ wept over Jerusalem and had a tender concern for and sympathy with the Jews, His cruel enemies, and wept over them, and prayed for them, Luke 19:41

A Description of the Sufferings

35:11-16



- He tells us now how his persecutors did evil for good, and at the same time passes on to the third sort of persecutions
- For the wicked, not content with harassing the just and by deceits and lies, but seek also to injure them by doing them personal harm
- He was grieving for their troubles they were rejoicing at his
- They found a common joy in his troubles and therefore met together to keep the celebration
- *Attackers gathered against me, And I did not know it, The attacks from David's enemies were worse because they were hidden from David and came upon him as a surprise*

A Description of the Sufferings

35:11-16



- What the psalmist proclaimed was realized as a prophecy in the Person of the Lord Christ, He *“who came to His own, and His own did not receive Him”* (John 1:11)
- *They tore at me and did not cease*, Either his character and reputation, with harsh sayings and accusing words
- Or his flesh with strikes; and they did this nonstop; and which was literally true of Christ, whose enemies tore His flesh by beating and scourging Him, and by piercing His hands and His feet with nails, when they crucified Him; and they did not cease, even after death, to pierce His side with a spear

A Description of the Sufferings 35:11-16



- He goes on to narrate the hatred of his enemies
- What they could not affect by the pain of personal injury, they sought to affect by unpleasant language, mockery, and insults
- They spoke fiercely and violently against him like dogs that roar and show their teeth
- It is a gesture of rage, as though they would devour him

The Intervention of God

35:17-28



- Having thus exposed all his persecutors, he now, in the person of all the just who suffer persecution, returns to prayer, and thereby connects the end with the beginning of the Psalm
- *How long?* It is the common cry of sufferers (Job 19:2; Psalm 6:3, 13:1, 79:5, 89:46; Habakkuk 1:2; Revelation 6:10)
- St. Augustine says, “For to us the time is slow ... But our Judge, not from weariness, but from love, delays our salvation.”
- As if David is asking God “when will You prove to us that You see their wickedness, by punishing it?”

The Intervention of God

35:17-28



- As God, when He neglects to punish the wicked, would seem to overlook them entirely
- David spoke honestly before God, admitting that he felt God was passive, unconcern, and indifferent
- He begged God for *rescue* in his distress – which was so bad he felt *lions* were after him
- His enemies were violent, crafty, shrewd, and strong as young lions; only God could deliver him from their jaws
- St. Augustine would apply the expression, *My precious life* to the Church which Jesus Christ prays may be delivered from its persecutors

The Intervention of God

35:17-28



- David vowed that he would give God the glory for His deliverance and do so publicly
- The promise is repeated (verses 9,10)
- However, it is conditional on deliverance being granted
- Should he be delivered from his enemies, he promises he will not be ungrateful
- This is the resolution the psalmist came unto
- He would give God thanks in the most public manner
- He will not be silent but will express his gratitude and joy, before the whole congregation

The Intervention of God

35:17-28



- David continued his prayer, asking God to defend him before his *enemies*
- He begs to be delivered from his persecutors, especially from the hypocrites, who pretended to be his friends, while they were quite the reverse
- *wrongfully my enemies*, They were his enemies wrongfully
- For false reasons, unjust causes
- David feels that no one had any reason to hate him, since he had always sought the good of all with whom he came into contact
- His prayer is simply a request that justice might be done

The Intervention of God

35:17-28



- St. Augustine asks, “What is the meaning of ‘winking with the eyes?’ Expressing, through their eyes, something very different from what they have in their heart”
- This winking of the eye is a sign that a person has tricked someone
- It also shows an arrogant satisfaction that one have defeated someone
- David does not want them bragging of a victory, they have not won
- *do not speak peace*, They are unwilling to be on good terms with others, or to live in peace with them

The Intervention of God

35:17-28



- David's enemies, though they made him a fugitive and a wanderer, were not yet satisfied
- They did not speak *peace* but they continued to conspire against him; they use not only violence, but deceit, and lies against him and his followers, who desire to live quietly and peaceably
- *the quiet ones in the land*, David prayed for vindication against his enemies because they plotted against God's humble, simple people
- Ungodly people do not have peace, how can they speak it, "*an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.*" (Luke 6:45)

The Intervention of God

35:17-28



- *opened their mouth wide*, To devour him; it is a metaphor taken from wild beasts, when they come within reach of their prey
- *opened their mouth wide*, They poured out great lies that needed wide mouths
- *Aha, aha* is an expression of joy and triumph
- They began openly to insult him and to congratulate each other
- This was all fulfilled in Christ
- Sometimes his enemies addressed Him in the flattering manner, *“Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth;”* (Matthew 22:16)

The Intervention of God

35:17-28



- And at the very time they were planning to, “*entangle Him in His talk.*” (Matthew 22:15)
- And when they saw Him nailed to the cross, “*those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, ‘You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! ... He saved others; He cannot save’*” (Matthew 27:39-42)
- David continued his plea and prayers to God repeating it over and over, with a view to move God’s affections
- God is omniscient, and sees all things, all the evil wicked men do to him

The Intervention of God

35:17-28



- God sees all the insults, mockeries, and the hurts they did to him and He will avenge them in His own time
- David is pleading that God hears his prayers
- *do not be far from me*, Do not withdraw Your favor and help from me
- He is asking God to draw near, hasten, and vindicate his name

The Intervention of God

35:17-28



- The psalmists call on God to *awake*, not as though He was really asleep, but as a sort of stirring appeal to Him to arise and manifest Himself to judge and to acquit him, and condemn his enemies
- David was confident that he was on God's side in his contention with his enemies, yet he longed for God to actively vindicate him
- He is asking God to prove that He is no uncaring witness to all this humiliation
- The manner of his appeal shows the strong confidence he had in his own innocence

The Intervention of God

35:17-28



- *according to Your righteousness*, Let His law of righteousness be the rule by which David is judged, and his enemies also
- The righteousness of God, is the highest standard of equity and justice
- David's appeal is here repeated in verse 24
- He feels that the joy of his accusers will not last long as soon as fair justice rules
- *Let them not say in their hearts*, Let them not feel that they have triumphed; let them not come off victorious in doing wrong

The Intervention of God

35:17-28



- *We have swallowed him up*, As roaring lions swallow down their prey, to which he had compared them in verse 17
- Applying it to Christ, saying, *We have swallowed Him up*, namely, death has swallowed Him, they did not perceive that He accepted it by His own authority to save His believers, whom death has previously swallowed
- St. Isaac the Syrian says, “Death, like a wolf swallowed the Lord Christ the Lamb; but his stomach, not enduring His presence inside it, exploded, and He came out together with His believers. ... By His resurrection, neither the grave, nor the whole world, or even Hades, could swallow us!”

The Intervention of God

35:17-28



- David simply and powerfully asked God to be his defense before his enemies
- He is praying that God let them be clothed with shame and dishonor those who magnified themselves against him
- *Who exalt themselves against me*, To make themselves great by humbling and destroying him
- They hope to rise on his destruction
- When David's enemies are *ashamed and brought to mutual confusion*, his friends will naturally *shout for joy and be glad*

The Intervention of God

35:17-28



- David is asking God to let him be delivered and let his friends see that God is on his side, so they have occasion to rejoice
- *Who favor my righteous cause*, The reference is to those who considered his cause a just one, and who were his friends
- The Psalmist is joyful in God because of his own deliverance, not the other's destruction
- *Let the Lord be magnified*, Exalted and praised for His righteousness, and truth, and goodness manifested in his deliverance

The Intervention of God

35:17-28



- *Who has pleasure in the prosperity of His servant, Who delights to make His friends prosperous and happy*
- Let them see that this is the character of God and let them thus be led to rejoice in Him evermore
- He finishes the Psalm in thanksgiving to God for all His favors
- David will continuously be offering gratitude and thankfulness
- He will not merely return thanks publicly, once for all, in the great congregation (verse 18), but will continue to praise God always

The Intervention of God

35:17-28



- *And my tongue shall speak of Your righteousness, Will be employed in declaring it*
- Which he again repeats, by saying he will spend the *day long* in doing so; that means frequently, repeatedly
- St. Augustine remarks on this passage, that he is always praising God, who is always doing what is right
- David spoke much of his own need and trouble in this psalm
- Yet he ended with a strong focus on God and His praise



Discussion

- What did David ask the Lord to do for his enemies? To his enemies? What is the best course of action to follow when you are falsely accused, criticized, or slandered?
- Is it legitimate to ask God to destroy our enemies? Why or why not?
- How many separate appeals are made in this psalm and how does the psalmist close each appeal?



Discussion

- To what character trait of God's did David appeal? (35:1-3,10,23-24)
- Against what did David need to be defended?
- What can we learn from David's example about handling injustice?
- What does this Psalm teach us?