

# PSALM 55

It is the conjecture of many expositors that David penned this psalm upon occasion of Absalom's rebellion, and that the particular enemy he here speaks of, that dealt treacherously with him, was Ahithophel; and some will therefore make David's troubles here typical of Christ's sufferings, and Ahithophel's treachery a figure of Judas's, because they both hanged themselves. But there is nothing in it particularly applied to Christ in the New Testament. David was in great distress when he penned this psalm.

**I.** He prays that God would manifest his favour to him, and pleads his own sorrow and fear (v. 1-8).

**II.** He prays that God would manifest his displeasure against his enemies, and pleads their great wickedness and treachery (v. 9-15 and again v. 20, 21).

**III.** He assures himself that God would, in due time, appear for him against his enemies, comforts himself with the hopes of it, and encourages others to trust in God (v. 16-19 and again v. 22, 23). In singing this psalm we may, if there be occasion, apply it to our own troubles; if not, we may sympathize with those to whose case it comes nearer, foreseeing that there will be, at last, indignation and wrath to the persecutors, salvation and joy to the persecuted.

## PSALM 55:1-8

### SUPPLICATIONS OF DAVID IN DISTRESS

*To the chief musician on Neginoth, Maschil. A psalm of David.*

In these verses we have,

**I.** David praying. Prayer is a salve for every sore and a relief to the spirit under every burden: *Give ear to my prayer, O God!* v. 1, 2. He does not set down the petitions he offered up to God in his distress, but begs that God would hear the prayers which, at every period, his heart lifted up to God, and grant an answer of peace to them: *Attend to me, hear me.* Saul

would not hear his petitions; his other enemies regarded not his pleas; but, “Lord, be thou pleased to hearken to me. *Hide not thyself from my supplication*, either as one unconcerned and not regarding it, nor seeming to take any notice of it, or as one displeased, angry at me, and therefore at my prayer.” If we, in our prayers, sincerely lay open ourselves, our case, our hearts, to God, we have reason to hope that he will not hide himself, his favours, his comforts, from us.

**II.** David weeping; for in this he was a type of Christ that he was a man of sorrows and often in tears (v. 2): “*I mourn in my complaint*” (or in my *meditation*, my *melancholy musings*), “and I make a noise; I cannot forbear such sighs and groans, and other expressions of grief, as discover it to those about me.” Great griefs are sometimes noisy and clamorous, and thus are, in some measure, lessened, while those increase that are stifled, and have no vent given them. But what was the matter? v. 3. It is *because of the voice of the enemy*, the menaces and insults of Absalom’s party, that swelled, and hectored, and stirred up the people to cry out against David, and shout him out of his palace and capital city, as afterwards the chief priests stirred up the mob to cry out against the Son of David, *Away with him — Crucify him*. Yet it was not the voice of the enemy only that fetched tears from David’s eyes, but their oppression, and the hardship he was thereby reduced to: *They cast iniquity upon me*. They could not justly charge David with any mal-administration in his government, could not prove any act of oppression or injustice upon him, but they loaded him with calumnies. Though they found no iniquity in him relating to his trust as a king, yet they cast all manner of iniquity upon him, and represented him to the people as a tyrant fit to be expelled. Innocency itself is no security against violent and lying tongues. They hated him themselves, nay, in wrath they hated him; there was in their enmity both the heat and violence of anger, or sudden passion, and the implacableness of hatred and rooted malice; and therefore they studied to make him odious, that others also might hate him. This made him mourn, and the more because he could remember the time when he was the darling of the people, and answered to his name, *David — a beloved one*.

**III.** David trembling, and in great consternation. We may well suppose him to be so upon the breaking out of Absalom’s conspiracy and the general defection of the people, even those that he had little reason to suspect.

**1.** See what fear seized him. David was a man of great boldness, and in some very eminent instances had signalized his courage, and yet, when the danger was surprising and imminent, his heart failed him. Let not the stout man therefore glory in his courage any more than the strong man in his strength. Now David's *heart is sorely pained within him; the terrors of death have fallen upon him*, v. 4. Fearfulness of mind and trembling of body came upon him, and horror covered and overwhelmed him, v. 5. When without are fightings no marvel that within are fears; and, if it was upon the occasion of Absalom's rebellion, we may suppose that the remembrance of his sin in the matter of Uriah, which God was now reckoning with him for, added as much more to the fright. Sometimes David's faith made him, in a manner, fearless, and he could boldly say, when surrounded with enemies, *I will not be afraid what man can do unto me*. But at other times his fears prevail and tyrannise; for the best men are not always alike strong in faith.

**2.** See how desirous he was, in this fright, to retire into a desert, any where to be far enough from hearing the voice of the enemy and seeing their oppressions. He said (v. 6), said it to God in prayer, said it to himself in meditation, said it to his friends in complaint, *O that I had wings like a dove!* Much as he had been sometimes in love with Jerusalem, now that it had become a rebellious city he longed to get clear of it, and, like the prophet, wished he had *in the wilderness a lodging place of way-faring men, that he might leave his people and go from them; for they were an assembly of treacherous men*, <sup><sup>290</sup></sup> Jeremiah 9:2. This agrees very well with David's resolution upon the breaking out of that plot, *Arise, let us flee, and make speed to depart*, <sup><sup>291</sup></sup> 2 Samuel 15:14. Observe,

(1.) How he would make his escape. He was so surrounded with enemies that he saw not how he could escape but upon the wing, and therefore he wishes, *O that I had wings!* not like a hawk that flies swiftly; he wishes for wings, not to fly upon the prey, but to fly from the birds of prey, for such his enemies were. The wings of a dove were most agreeable to him who was of a dove-like spirit, and therefore the wings of an eagle would not become him. The dove flies low, and takes shelter as soon as she can, and thus would David fly.

(2.) What he would make his escape from — *from the wind, storm, and tempest*, the tumult and ferment that the city was now in, and the danger to

which he was exposed. Herein he was like a dove, that cannot endure noise.

(3.) What he aimed at in making this escape, not victory but rest: "*I would fly away and be at rest*, v. 6. I would fly any where, if it were to a barren frightful wilderness, ever so far off, so I might be quiet," v. 7. Note, Peace and quietness in silence and solitude are what the wisest and best of men have most earnestly coveted, and the more when they have been vexed and wearied with the noise and clamour of those about them. Gracious souls wish to retire from the hurry and bustle of this world, that they may sweetly enjoy God and themselves; and, if there be any true peace on this side heaven, it is they that enjoy it in those retirements. This makes death desirable to a child of God, that it is a final escape from all the storms and tempests of this world to perfect and everlasting rest.

## PSALM 55:9-15

### PROPHETIC IMPRECACTIONS

David here complains of his enemies, whose wicked plots had brought him, though not to his faith's end, yet to his wits' end, and prays against them by the spirit of prophecy. Observe here,

**I.** The character he gives of the enemies he feared. They were of the worst sort of men, and his description of them agrees very well with Absalom and his accomplices.

**1.** He complains of the city of Jerusalem, which strangely fell in with Absalom and fell off from David, so that he had none there but how own guards and servants that he could repose any confidence in: *How has that faithful city become a harlot!* David did not take the representation of it from others; but with his own eyes, and with a sad heart, did himself see nothing but *violence and strife in the city* (v. 9); for, when they grew disaffected and disloyal to David, they grew mischievous one to another. If he walked the rounds upon the walls of the city, he saw that violence and strife went about it day and night, and mounted its guards, v. 10. All the arts and methods which the rebels used for the fortifying of the city were made up on violence and strife, and there were no remains of honesty or love among them. If he looked into the heart of the city, mischief and

injury, mutual wrong and vexation, were in the midst of it: *Wickedness*, all manner of wickedness, *is in the midst thereof. Jusque datum sceleri — Wickedness was legalized.* Deceit and guile, and all manner of treacherous dealing, *departed not from her streets*, v. 11. It may be meant of their base and barbarous usage of David's friends and such as they knew were firm and faithful to him; they did them all the mischief they could, by fraud or force. Is this the character of Jerusalem, the royal city, and, which is more, the holy city, and in David's time too, so soon after the thrones of judgment and the testimony of Israel were both placed there? *Is this the city that men call the perfection of beauty?* <sup>205</sup> Lamentations 2:15. Is Jerusalem, the head-quarters of God's priests, so ill taught? Can Jerusalem be ungrateful to David himself, its own illustrious founder, and be made too hot for him, so that he cannot reside in it? Let us not be surprised at the corruptions and disorders of this church on earth, but long to see the New Jerusalem, where there is no violence nor strife, no mischief nor guilt, and into which no unclean thing shall enter, nor any thing that disquiets.

**2.** He complains of one of the ringleaders of the conspiracy, that had been very industrious to foment jealousies, to misrepresent him and his government, and to incense the city against him. It was one that reproached him, as if he either abused his power or neglected the use of it, for that was Absalom's malicious suggestion: *There is no man deputed of the king to hear thee,* <sup>206</sup> 2 Samuel 15:3. That and similar accusations were industriously spread among the people; and who was most active in it? "Not a sworn enemy, not Shimei, nor any of the nonjurors; then I could have borne it, for I should not have expected better from them" (and we find how patiently he did bear Shimei's curses); "not one that professed to hate me, then I would have stood upon my guard against him, would have hidden myself and counsels from him, so that it would not have been in his power to betray me. *But it was thou, a man, my equal,*" v. 13. The Chaldee-paraphrase names Ahithophel as the person here meant, and nothing in that plot seems to have discouraged David so much as to hear that Ahithophel was *among the conspirators with Absalom* (<sup>207</sup> 2 Samuel 15:31), for he was *the king's counsellor,* <sup>208</sup> 1 Chronicles 27:33. "*It was thou, a man, my equal,* one whom I esteemed as myself, a friend as my own soul, whom I had laid in my bosom and made equal with myself, to whom I had communicated all my secrets and who knew my mind as well as I myself did, — my guide, with whom I advised and by whom I was

directed in all my affairs, whom I made president of the council and prime-minister of state, — my intimate acquaintance and familiar friend; this is the man that now abuses me. I have been kind to him, but I find him thus basely ungrateful. I have put a trust in him, but I find him thus basely treacherous; nay, and he could not have done me the one-half of the mischief he does if I had not shown him so much respect.” All this must needs be very grievous to an ingenuous mind, and yet this was not all; this traitor had seemed a saint, else he had never been David's bosom-friend (v. 14): “*We took counsel together*, spent many an hour together, with a great deal of pleasure, in religious discourse,” or, as Dr. Hammond reads it, “*We joined ourselves together to the assembly*; I gave him the right hand of fellowship in holy ordinances, and then *we walked to the house of God in company*, to attend the public service.” Note,

(1.) There always has been, and always will be, a mixture of good and bad, sound and unsound, in the visible church, between whom, perhaps for a long time, we can discern no difference; but the searcher of hearts does. David, who went to the house of God in his sincerity, had Ahithophel in company with him, who went in his hypocrisy. The Pharisee and the publican went together to the temple to pray; but, sooner or later, those that are perfect and those that are not will be made manifest.

(2.) Carnal policy may carry men on very far and very long in a profession of religion while it is in fashion, and will serve a turn. In the court of pious David none was more devout than Ahithophel, and yet his heart was not right in the sight of God.

(3.) We must not wonder if we be sadly deceived in some that have made great pretensions to those two sacred things, religion and friendship; David himself, though a very wise man, was thus imposed upon, which may make similar disappointments the more tolerable to us.

**II.** His prayers against them, which we are both to stand in awe of and to comfort ourselves in, as prophecies, but not to copy into our prayers against any particular enemies of our own. He prays,

1. That God would disperse them, as he did the Babel-builders (v. 9): “*Destroy, O Lord! and divide their tongues*; that is, blast their counsels, by making them to disagree among themselves, and clash with one another. Send an evil spirit among them, that they may not understand one another, but be envious and jealous one of another.” This prayer was

answered in the turning of Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness, by setting up the counsel of Hushai against it. God often destroys the church's enemies by dividing them; nor is there a surer way to the destruction of any people than their division. A kingdom, an interest, divided against itself, cannot long stand.

**2.** That God would destroy them, as he did Dathan and Abiram, and their associates, who were confederate against Moses, whose throat being an open sepulchre, the earth therefore opened and swallowed them up. This was then a new thing which God executed, <sup>¶¶¶</sup>Numbers 16:30. But David prays that it might now be repeated, or something equivalent (v. 15): "*Let death seize upon them* by divine warrant, and *let them go down quickly into hell*; let them be dead, and buried, and so utterly destroyed, in a moment; for wickedness is wherever they are; it is in the midst of them." The souls of impenitent sinners go down quick, or alive, into hell, for they have a perfect sense of their miseries, and shall *therefore* live still, that they may be still miserable. This prayer is a prophecy of the utter, the final, the everlasting ruin of all those who, whether secretly or openly, oppose and rebel against the Lord's Messiah.

## <sup>¶¶¶</sup>PSALM 55:16-23

### CONFIDENCE IN GOD

In these verses,

**I.** David perseveres in his resolution to call upon God, being well assured that he should not seek him in vain (v. 16): "*As for me*, let them take what course they please to secure themselves, let violence and strife be their guards, prayer shall be mind; this I have found comfort in, and therefore this will I abide by: *I will call upon God*, and commit myself to him, and *the Lord shall save me*;" for whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord, in a right manner, shall be saved, <sup>¶¶¶</sup>Romans 10:13. He resolves to be both fervent and frequent in this duty.

**1.** He will pray fervently: "*I will pray and cry aloud. I will meditate*" (so the former word signifies); "*I will speak with my own heart, and the prayer shall come thence*." Then we pray aright when we pray with all that is within us, think first and then pray over our thoughts; for the true nature

of prayer is lifting up the heart to God. Having meditated, he will cry, he will cry aloud; the fervour of his spirit in prayer shall be expressed and yet more excited by the intenseness and earnestness of his voice.

**2.** He will pray frequently, every day, and three times a day — *evening, and morning, and at noon*. It is probable that this had been his constant practice, and he resolves to continue it now that he is in his distress. Then we may come the more boldly to the throne of grace in trouble when we do not then first begin to seek acquaintance with God, but it is what we have constantly practised, and the trouble finds the wheels of prayer going. Those that think three meals a day little enough for the body ought much more to think three solemn prayers a day little enough for the soul, and to count it a pleasure, not a task. As it is fit that in the morning we should begin the day with God, and in the evening close it with him, so it is fit that in the midst of the day we should retire awhile to converse with him. It was Daniel's practice to pray three times a day (<sup>¶</sup><sup>¶</sup>Daniel 6:10), and noon was one of Peter's hours of prayer, <sup>¶</sup><sup>¶</sup>Acts 10:9. Let not us be weary of praying often, for God is not weary of hearing. “He shall hear my voice, and not blame me for coming too often, but the oftener the better, the more welcome.”

**II.** He assures himself that God would in due time give an answer of peace to his prayers.

**1.** That he himself should be delivered and his fears prevented; those fears with which he was much disordered (v. 4, 5) by the exercise of faith were now silenced, and he begins to rejoice in hope (v. 18): *God has delivered my soul in peace*, that is, he will deliver it; David is as sure of the deliverance as if it were already wrought. His enemies were at war with him, and the battle was against him, but God delivered him in peace, that is, brought him off with as much comfort as if he had never been in danger. If he did not deliver him in victory, yet he delivered him in peace, inward peace. He delivered his soul in peace; by patience and holy joy in God he kept possession of that. Those are safe and easy whose hearts and minds are kept by that peace of God which *passes all understanding*, <sup>¶</sup><sup>¶</sup>Philippians 4:7. David, in his fright, thought all were against him; but now he sees there were many with him, more than he imagined; his interest proved better than he expected, and this he gives to God the glory of: for it is he that raises us up friends when we need them, and makes them faithful to us. There were many with him; for though his subjects

deserted him, and went over to Absalom, yet God was with him and the good angels. With an eye of faith he now sees himself surrounded, as Elisha was, with chariots of fire and horses of fire, and therefore triumphs thus, *There are many with me, more with me than against me,* <sup>¶</sup> 2 Kings 6:16, 17.

**2.** That his enemies should be reckoned with, and brought down. They had frightened him with their menaces (v. 3), but here he says enough to frighten them and make them tremble with more reason, and no remedy; for they could not ease themselves of their fears as David could, by faith in God.

(1.) David here gives their character as the reason why he expected God would bring them down.

[1.] They are impious and profane, and stand in no awe of God, of his authority or wrath (v. 19): “*Because they have no changes* (no afflictions, no interruption to the constant course of their prosperity, no crosses to empty them from vessel to vessel) *therefore they fear not God*; they live in a constant neglect and contempt of God and religion, which is the cause of all their other wickedness, and by which they are certainly marked for destruction.”

[2.] They are treacherous and false, and will not be held by the most sacred and solemn engagements (v. 20): “*He has put forth his hand against such as are at peace with him*, that never provoked him, nor gave him any cause to quarrel with them; nay, to whom he had given all possible encouragement to expect kindness from him. He has put forth his hand against those whom he had given his hand to, and has broken his covenant both with God and man, has perfidiously violated his engagement to both,” than which nothing makes men riper for ruin.

[3.] They are base and hypocritical, pretending friendship while they design mischief (v. 21): “*The words of his mouth*” (probably, he means Ahithophel particularly) “*were smoother than butter and softer than oil*, so courteous was he and obliging, so free in his professions of respect and kindness and the proffers of his service; yet, at the same time, *war was in his heart*, and all this courtesy was but a stratagem of war, and those very words had such a mischievous design in them that they were as *drawn swords* designed to stab.” They smile in a man's face, and cut his throat at

the same time, as Joab, that kissed and killed. Satan is such an enemy; he flatters men into their ruin. *When he speaks fair, believe him not.*

(2.) David here foretels their ruin.

[1.] God shall afflict them, and bring them into straits and frights, and recompense tribulation to those that have troubled his people, and this in answer to the prayers of his people: *God shall hear and afflict them*, hear the cries of the oppressed and speak terror to their oppressors, *even he that abides of old*, who is God from everlasting, and world without end, and who sits Judge from the beginning of time, and has always presided in the affairs of the children of men. Mortal men, though ever so high and strong, will easily be crushed by an eternal God and are a very unequal match for him. This the saints have comforted themselves with in reference to the threatening power of the church's enemies (<sup>312</sup>Habakkuk 1:12): *Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord?*

[2.] God shall *bring them down*, not only to the dust, but *to the pit of destruction* (v. 23), to the bottomless pit, which is called *destruction*, <sup>326</sup>Job 26:6. He afflicted them (v. 19) to see if that would humble and reform them; but, they not being wrought upon by that, he shall at last bring them to ruin. Those that are not reclaimed by the rod of affliction will certainly be brought down into the pit of destruction. They are *bloody and deceitful men* (that is, the worst of men) and therefore *shall not live out half their days*, not half so long as men ordinarily live, and as they might have lived in a course of nature, and as they themselves expected to live. They shall live as long as the Lord of life, the righteous Judge, has appointed, with whom the number of our months is; but he has determined to cut them off by an untimely death in the midst of their days. They were bloody men, and cut others off, and therefore God will justly cut them off: they were deceitful men, and defrauded others of the one-half perhaps of what was their due, and now God will cut them short, though not of that which was their due, yet of that which they counted upon.

**III.** He encourages himself and all good people to commit themselves to God, with confidence in him. He himself resolves to do so (v. 23): "*I will trust in thee*, in thy providence, and power, and mercy, and not in my own prudence, strength, or merit; when bloody and deceitful men are cut off in the midst of their days I shall still live by faith in thee." And this he will have others to do (v. 22): "*Cast thy burden upon the Lord*," whoever thou

art that art burdened, and whatever the burden is. “*Cast thy gift upon the Lord*” (so some read it); “whatever blessings God has bestowed upon thee to enjoy commit them all to his custody, and particularly commit the keeping of thy soul to him.” Or, “Whatever it is that thou desirest God should give thee, leave it to him to give it to thee in his own way and time. *Cast thy care upon the Lord*,” so the Septuagint, to which the apostle refers, <sup>*¶¶¶*</sup>1 Peter 5:7. Care is a burden; it makes the heart stoop (<sup>*¶¶¶*</sup>Proverbs 12:25); we must cast it upon God by faith and prayer, commit our way and works to him; let him do as seemeth him good, and we will be satisfied. To cast our burden upon God is to stay ourselves on his providence and promise, and to be very easy in the assurance that all shall work for good. If we do so, it is promised,

- 1.** That he will sustain us, both support and supply us, will himself carry us in the arms of his power, as the nurse carries the sucking-child, will strengthen our spirits so by his Spirit as that they shall sustain the infirmity. He has not promised to free us immediately from that trouble which gives rise to our cares and fears; but he will provide that we be not tempted above what we are able, and that we shall be able according as we are tempted.
- 2.** That he will never suffer the righteous to be moved, to be so shaken by any troubles as to quit either their duty to God or their comfort in him. However, he will not suffer them to be moved for ever (as some read it); though they fall, they shall not be utterly cast down.