

Psalm 57: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] Psalm 57 To the choir master, according to Do not destroy, a mictam of David, when he fled from Saul in the cave. Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge.

In the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by. I cry out to God Most High, to God who fulfills his purpose for me.

He will send from heaven and save me. He will put to shame him who tramples on me. God will send out his steadfast love and his faithfulness. My soul is in the midst of lions.

I lie down amid fiery beasts, the children of man whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens.

Let your glory be over all the earth. They set a net for my steps. My soul was bowed down. They dug a pit in my way. But they have fallen into it themselves.

[1 : 03] My heart is steadfast, O God. My heart is steadfast. I will sing and make melody. Awake, my glory. Awake, O harp and lyre. I will awake the dawn.

I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples. I will sing praises to you among the nations. For your steadfast love is great to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds.

Be exalted, O God, above the heavens. Let your glory be over all the earth. Psalm 57 is another petition for help. Although throughout, the dominant theme is that of confidence in God's power and his readiness to deliver.

The superscription of the psalm connects it with David's fleeing from Saul in the cave. This might either refer to David's escape to the cave of Adullam at the beginning of chapter 22 of 1 Samuel, or perhaps to his encounter with Saul in the cave in 1 Samuel chapter 24.

His concluding five verses are also found in Psalm 108 verses 1 to 5. Psalm 36 verse 5 reads as follows, And that is almost identical to verse 10 of this psalm.

[2 : 19] Beth Tanner observes the fact that we find repeated sections and phrases of psalms at many points in the Psalter. Indeed, we even find slightly reworked psalms, as in the case of Psalm 53.

Such repeated and remixed elements are certainly not unprecedented in modern Christian music and hymnody, but, if anything, are rather more commonplace in the Psalter. In addition to the fact that its superscription sets it as a similar period in David's life as the preceding psalm, it also shares the opening words of that psalm, Be merciful or gracious to me, O God.

David begins the psalm by seeking refuge from God. He might have sought refuge in the cave, but the true source of his refuge is the Lord himself, and it is to him that he looks for shelter, as if from a storm.

There is danger without, and under the shadow of God's wings he will be safe until it passes by. He declares his confidence in God to others in verses 2 and 3. He calls out to the Most High God.

God will avenge him, send from heaven to deliver him, and put to shame all who trample him. God sending from heaven, although action from an unassailable throne, is not action from a distance of indifference.

[3 : 30] God sends out his very steadfast love and his faithfulness to the psalmist's aid. David's soul is in the midst of lions, enemies with deadly teeth, whose tongues also work destruction.

He is in considerable danger. Verse 5 interrupts this thought, with a refrain to which you will return in the final verse. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens. Let your glory be over all the earth.

He calls for the glory of God to be made manifest, for God to act decisively in his situation, in a manner that reveals his surpassing greatness. In verse 6 he returns to the actions that his enemies took against him, but now described as a danger from which the Lord has delivered him.

His enemies fell into the pit that they themselves had dug. The psalm began with the petition, Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me. Now this is answered with the triumphant words, My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast.

From such a deliverance, song appropriately bursts forth. David must sing and make music to express his joy. He rouses his glory, his bursting soul. He rouses musical instruments, the harp and the lyre.

[4 : 40] He is so filled with praise that he would rouse the dawn itself, the very part of creation that rouses all other creatures of the day. If David began by hiding in a cave, now he wants to find the most exposed place in all of the world, so that his praises and thanks can be heard by all.

In verse 3, God sent down his steadfast love and faithfulness from the heavens. Now in verse 10, they rise up to the heavens. The final verse of the psalm returns to the refrain of verse 5.

Be exalted, O God, above the heavens. Let your glory be over all the earth. However, while the refrain functioned as a petition in verse 5, in verse 11, it functions more as a proclamation of the greatness of God and of his deeds.

A question to consider. This psalm, like many others, plays upon the contrast between the depths and the heights, between the cave and the pit, and God in the heavens.

Looking through the psalm, can you observe some of the ways that David is using this imagery, both for poetic effect and illumination of the truth?