

Tehillim



Psalms, Chapter 7

(The following material is compiled predominantly from an anthology of Orthodox Jewish commentary, written and arranged by Rabbi Avroham Chaim Feuer from the *Artscroll Tanach Series Tehillim Volume 1*. Additional insights from a Nazarene Israelite perspective have been added by Jason Jordan. Additional Tehillim translation by Rabbi Hillel Danziger)

Introduction

“The war between the house of Saul and the house of David lasted a long time. David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker. (2 Samuel 3:1)”

This Psalm is dedicated to King Saul, who David considered his most difficult enemy (Moed Katan 16b). For unlike the rest of his foes, Saul was a truly great and righteous man. In many ways, his excellence even surpassed that of David. Moreover, although Saul relentlessly pursues David with large armies, David could not strike back, for he, more than anyone, appreciated Saul’s exalted and privileged status as ‘The Anointed of Elohim.’ Although constantly in mortal danger, David never compromised his firm conviction that harming Saul would be the equivalent of defying Elohim Himself, for Elohim had chosen Saul to be the first king of Israel.

Twice Saul unwittingly fell into David’s hands. Once, while pursuing him, Saul entered a cave not knowing that the fugitive and his men were hiding in the depths of that very cavern. David could have slain Saul easily; instead, unbeknown to Saul, he merely cut off the corner of his royal robe as evidence of the opportunity he forfeited. **“The men said, ‘This is the day YHWH spoke of when he said to you, ‘I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.’” Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul's robe.” (1 Samuel 24:4)**

Although David meant well, he realised later that he should have chosen some other way to prove his point, because cutting the king's robe is a disgrace to the king. **“Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe.” (1 Samuel 24:5)** David wanted to show Saul that he could have killed him, not disgrace him.

Another time David stood over the slumbering, helpless Saul but instead of slaying him, he took the king's spear as a token of what he could have done. ***“So David and Abishai went to the army by night, and there was Saul, lying asleep inside the camp with his spear stuck in the ground near his head. Abner and the soldiers were lying around him. Abishai said to David, ‘Today Elohim has delivered your enemy into your hands. Now let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of my spear; I won’t strike him twice.’ But David said to Abishai, “Don’t destroy him! Who can lay a hand on YHWH’s anointed and be guiltless? As surely as YHWH lives,” he said, “YHWH himself will strike him; either his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. YHWH forbid that I should lay a hand on YHWH’s anointed. Now get the spear and water jug that are near his head, and let’s go.” (1 Samuel 26:7-11)***

In both cases, Saul, overwhelmed by David's generosity, solemnly swore never to harm him again. But he did not keep his word, for Elohim punished him with a spiritual malady, a dark, jealous depression. ‘An evil spirit from Elohim descended upon Saul and he raved madly in the palace. ***“The next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully upon Saul. He was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the harp, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand and he hurled it, saying to himself, ‘I’ll pin David to the wall.’ But David eluded him twice.” (1 Samuel 18:10-11)***. Note: Saul attempts to kill David twice, but fails and David has two opportunities to kill Saul, but refrains.

Saul himself admitted that he was inconsistent and untrustworthy in his dealings with David. ‘And Saul said: ***“I have sinned...behold I have acted like a fool and erred very much” (1 Samuel 26:21)***. In the Psalm, David proclaims that he has been completely upright and just in all his dealings with Saul. Through it all, he has made but one minor ‘error.’ Although he mourned Saul's death bitterly and eloquently eulogised him, he also sang in gladness over his personal salvation from mortal danger with the death of his pursuer. ***Psalms 18:1*** was inspired mainly by Saul's downfall. David fears now that this was wrong for it displayed a lack of total grief over the demise of one so great as King Saul. ***Romans 11:28-31***; ***“As regards to the good news they are enemies of Elohim for your sake; but as regards the election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors; for the gifts and the calling of Eloah are irrevocable. Just as you were once disobedient to Eloah but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy.”***

Romans 12:18-21; ***“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live in Shalom with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for Eloah’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Eloah. On the contrary: If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”***

The Sages taught that this Psalm was the ‘Song of the day’ for Purim (Sofrim 18:2). Yaavetz gives the reason that Mordecai was a descendant of Saul. Furthermore, the

verse ‘He digs a pit, digs it deep, only to fall into his own trap (v. 16) describes Harman who was hung on the very gallows which he prepared for Mordecia.

Tehillim 7 - Every Day is Judgment Day

Verses 1-3; “A Shigayon, of David, which he sang to YHWH, concerning Kush ben Yemini. YHWH, my Elohim, in You I seek refuge, save me from all my pursuers and rescue me. Lest he tear my soul asunder like a lion, dismembering without rescuer.”

“A Shigayon, of David...” The Sage Menachem (the teacher of Rashi) holds that Shagayon refers to a musical instrument used in the Levite orchestra. The only other place in Scripture we find a reference to this object is in ***Habbakuk 3:1; “A prayer of Habbakuk the prophet, upon Shigayons.”*** The Hebrew “Shigayon” alludes to “Shagag” meaning “physical error” and “shegiya” denotes “intellectual error.” Commentators have derived from this that when David sang a song of the downfall of Saul, he saw it as a mistake and asks for forgiveness, because Saul was YHWH’s first anointed king of Israel and before his downfall was a righteous man. David therefore shifts the theme of this Psalm to a plea for YHWH to judge him. As a result, this Psalm serves as a blueprint for dealing DAILY with sin, punishment, justification, and atonement. ***Philippians 2:12-13; “Therefore, my beloved friends, as you have always obeyed in my presence, it is even more important to do so in my absence: constantly work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is Elohim who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”***

This Psalm twists and turns initially appearing confusing, but there is a pattern. It commences with a voice of trust and faith in Elohim, but then the realisation that David must confront the inevitability of heavenly scrutiny. His plea for rescue is accompanied with a question as to whether he is worthy of YHWH’s mercy. He judges himself without recoiling from fear of YHWH’s wrath because he realises (with the exception of his test with Bath Sheba) that his actions were born from rash circumstances.

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 95a) tells us that because of David many people died. Doeg incited Saul to massacre the entire priestly city of Nob because of David and as a result of this, eventually Doeg was killed and Saul was slain together with his sons. Any person who is the cause of so much bloodshed, although it came about inadvertently, cannot be totally free from guilt. Rashi suggests that David is referring to the poor judgement he exercised when he cut off the corner of Saul’s royal robe. In ***1 Kings 1:1*** David is punished for this act.

“...which he sang to YHWH...” David appeals to YHWH because Saul was indeed a great man only lacking a few attributes that David excelled in. Saul failed in the management of public and royal affairs, whereas David was a great success. It is recorded that YHWH felt that ‘If only Saul could have coupled his personal piety with leadership qualities of David, he would have been so great that even the real David would not have compared to him (Anaf Yosef to Vayikra Rabba 26:7).

“...Kush ben Yemini” means, “the black man of the tribe of Benjamin” referring to Saul who stood out from all Israel like a dark skinned person stands out among a crowd of people with fair skin.

“YHWH, my Elohim, in You I seek refuge, save me from all my pursuers and rescue me.” The Hebrew word for refuge has the numerical value of twenty-two, which leads Rabbi Yochanan to comment: “I seek refuge in You and Your Torah which is written with the twenty-two letters of the Aleph-Beit (Midrash Shochoer Tov).

“YHWH, my Elohim, in You I seek refuge, save me from all my pursuers and rescue me.” The Sage Malbim explains that “rescue” means to prevent the victim from being caught, whereas “rescue” means to liberate the captive after he has already been seized.

“Lest he tear my soul asunder like a lion, dismembering without rescuer.” David compares his pursuer, Saul, to a lion, for just as a lion is the king of beasts, Saul was the king of Israel (Radak). Just as a lion sits down and thoroughly tears apart his prey, so too would Doeg and Archiphel sit down and slander and besmirch him, ripping his reputation and honour to pieces (Midrash Shochoer Tov).

Verses 4-7; “YHWH, MY Elohim: If I have done this, if there is injustice in my hands; If I have repaid my friends with evil, I, who spared those who were my unprovoked tormentors. Then let the enemy pursue my soul and overtake it; Let him trample my life to the ground, and lay my soul in the dust. Selah. Rise up YHWH, Your anger, lift Yourself up in fury against my tormentors, and strengthen me to mete out judgement which You commanded.”

“YHWH, MY Elohim: If I have done this, if there is injustice in my hands; If I have repaid my friends with evil, I, who spared those who were my unprovoked tormentors.” David now proceeds to explain that he does not deserve to be abused and threatened by his enemies because he has never mistreated them. For example, David often had the upper hand with Saul, but never did he exploit his opportunities.

“Then let the enemy pursue my soul and overtake it; Let him trample my life to the ground, and lay my soul in the dust. Selah.” David speaks here of the punishment he deserves according to the distorted image which his enemies have of him. They indeed believe that his spirit should sink into the earth after death and never arise (Radak).

“Rise up YHWH, Your anger, lift Yourself up in fury against my tormentors, and strengthen me to mete out judgement which You commanded.” The Sage Malbim differentiates between the terms “anger” and “fury.” YHWH’s anger can be limited and controlled in a precise measure, equal to the gravity of the sin which aroused it. But fury, specifically YHWH’s fury, is unbridled anger poured fourth with no boundaries or limitations. Since David’s enemies overcame all barriers in trying to seize him, it is only fitting that their punishment be unbridled fury.

Verses 8-11; “When the assembly of the nations surrounds You, Rise up above it, and return to Your heavenly repose. YHWH will punish the nations; But judge me, YHWH, according to my righteousness and my integrity. Let the evil of the wicked vanish, but sustain the righteous, O searcher of hearts and minds, O righteous Elohim. I trust in Elohim to be my shield, He who saves the upright of heart.”

“When the assembly of the nations surrounds You, Rise up above it, and return to Your heavenly repose.” Radak, maintains that this Psalm is dedicated to Saul’s rallying of Israel like a foreign nation to pursue David. When they all joined Saul in pursuing him it is as if they are surrounded YHWH and denied the fact that He anointed David as king.

“YHWH will punish the nations; But judge me, YHWH, according to my righteousness and my integrity.” David asks that YHWH divert His full fury away from Israel as a whole and rout out those among them who acted like the nations who always threaten Israel and punish them.

“Let the evil of the wicked vanish, but sustain the righteous, O searcher of hearts and minds, O righteous Elohim.” David prays that only ‘the evil of the wicked disappear,’ not the wicked themselves. He hopes that they will repent, thus eradicating their evil while they themselves survive.

“I trust in Elohim to be my shield, He who saves the upright of heart.” David puts all his trust in YHWH in order that He is to him an impenetrable shield. Only when we put our full trust in YHWH do we equip ourselves with a complete shield of protection.

Verses 12-16; “Elohim is the righteous Judge, and Elohim is angered every day. If he does not repent: He will sharpen His sword, He will bend and aim his bow. And for him Elohim has prepared deadly weapons, He will use arrows against those in hot pursuit. Behold, he conceives iniquity, is pregnant with evil schemes, and brings forth falsehood. He digs a pit, digs it deep, only to fall into his own trap.”

“Elohim is the righteous Judge, and Elohim is angered every day.”

How long is the duration of YHWH’s wrath in a day? It is taught that it is a fraction of a minute. This is a moment. No living creature could precisely compute when this moment occurred except Bilaam the Wicked. However, on the day when Bilaam attempted to curse Israel, YHWH held back His wrath.

Just as YHWH judges the righteous every day, He does also with the wicked.

“If he does not repent: He will sharpen His sword, He will bend and aim his bow. And for him Elohim has prepared deadly weapons, He will use arrows against those in hot pursuit.” Just as David’s enemies pursued him in haste, YHWH will pursue them in haste.

“Behold, he conceives iniquity, is pregnant with evil schemes, and brings forth falsehood. He digs a pit, digs it deep, only to fall into his own trap.” David compares evil plots with the various stages of the birthing process. The end of the effort will equal naught.

The Sage Malbim describes the toil and exertion of the mind and spirit to develop a scheme for the practice of evil. At first when the plan does not succeed, the seed is fertilised. Then it develops and grows in the mind like the embryo of a pregnant woman.

David prophesies the doom of Saul, who died by falling on his own sword (*1 Samuel 31:5*) and thus fell into his own trap (i.e., the sword which he hoped to use against David). Similarly the Egyptians that planned to drown the all male children of Israel, ultimately had all their most fit and battle ready males drowned in the Red Sea.

Verses 17-18; “His mischief will recoil upon his own head, and upon his own skull will his violence descend. I will thank YHWH according to His righteousness, And sing praises to YHWH’s name, Most High.”

“His mischief will recoil upon his own head, and upon his own skull will his violence descend.” The internal mental exertion to do evil, which churns in the recesses of the brain, will result in a calamity that will fall back on the practitioner’s own head.

“I will thank YHWH according to His righteousness, And sing praises to YHWH’s name, Most High.” In other words King David is saying that when YHWH completes His total judgement of the wicked according to their full measure of evil, he will certainly thank Him (Rashi).

Conclusion

King David recognises sin’s constant presence as it appears in misdirected desires, false intellectual aspirations and poor judgments. His concern however, is how the pieces are picked up. By reflecting upon his own actions he recognises what we did and takes steps to accept their ramifications by seeking judgment. His actions stand as a blueprint for those who struggle to maintain their religious composure even in the darkest hour.

While all believers are familiar with an automatic plea for salvation, David’s routine declaration, “judge me O Elohim” is intriguing. It shows that without YHWH’s daily judgment of all creatures the world could not exist and true justice could never prevail. Without the Almighty’s daily judgment, evil ones who constantly mock the righteous would never ultimately receive their punishment.