

LESSON 2

PSALMS 55—58

PSALM 55: BETRAYED BY A FRIEND

Assuming a Davidic authorship, the psalm expresses the deep-felt emotions of David as he recoils from his disappointment at being “sold out” by one to whom he was very close. His pain travels through three emotional levels: discouragement, indignation, and then release as he gives his burden up to God.

How does one endure personal betrayal? How does a servant of God respond to such disappointment? The answer is made up of prayer and faithful reliance upon the Lord. The psalmist handles his heartbreaking ordeal with spiritual maturity and provides guidance for us to follow in times of crisis.

1. What kind of language does David use to tell of his torment?
2. How does he describe evil people and their actions?
3. Where do we see his confidence in God’s protection?
4. How does the psalmist avoid becoming resentful?
5. What instruction does this psalm give about trusting God?

PSALM 56: THE GOD OF CERTAINTY

Since this psalm and the next one have a striking similarity, they have been regarded as “twins.” They begin with almost the same phrase, “Be gracious, O God.” They are nearly the same length, and each has a refrain which divides it into two parts (56:4, 10; 57:5, 11). Filled with the spirit of despair and distress, they are individual lament psalms. Each begins with a complaint, has at its heart a prayer for deliverance, and ends on a note of triumph and praise. The main difference between the two is that Psalm 56 has an epilogue, while Psalm 57 does not.

Embedded in this prayer is the reliability and trustworthiness of God. The writer is clinging to the unwavering certainties that God gives His people. His prayer holds before us what God does for the righteous during those hours when our hearts almost give way under the stress of terror.

6. How should we call on God when we are suffering?
7. If this psalm was written while David was a fugitive, how would that fact change our understanding of this psalm?
8. Why do you think the writer uses such intimately personal terms when he asks God to watch over him?
9. In which verses do we find the psalmist's trust in God?

**PSALM 57:
UNDER THE WINGS OF PROVIDENCE**

With its obvious similarities to the preceding psalm, this prayer/song could be called "The Companion of Psalm 56." The two have the same spirit, begin with the same phrase, describe the same type of difficulty (56:2; 57:3); they are divided by a similar refrain (56:4, 10; 57:5, 11) and end with the same confidence in God.

Psalm 57 has two qualities: lamentation and thanksgiving. It is a mixture, having too much lament to be called a thanksgiving psalm and too much thanksgiving to be called a lament.

Three basic truths are highlighted within the prayer: God is a refuge for the righteous, He is against the wicked, and He is honored when we praise Him. The same emphasis seen here is seen also in Psalm 56; however, this psalm stresses the believer's triumph and success more than his trial.

10. How does the psalmist try to praise God at all times?
11. What does David say are the characteristics of sin?
12. How does he view his enemies' actions and downfalls?
13. Which verses highlight David's faith in God's protection?

PSALM 58:
EVIL IN HIGH PLACES

This psalm, a national lament, takes the reader to the battlefield and portrays the conflict that rages in a righteous man's heart against the forces of evil in high places. The psalm begins with righteousness and ends with justice. We would call the latter part of the psalm an imprecatory prayer, a plea for God to rain divine destruction upon the wicked. To the Christian, this type of prayer seems harsh and caustic, unchristian and unforgiving. However, the psalm should be viewed contextually, that is, through the warlike lens of the Old Testament Era.

The curse-prayer is aimed more toward sin than sinners. The warring parties arrayed against each other are righteousness and wickedness rather than vengeance between a man and men.

14. How should we react to sin and sinful people today?
15. What characteristics define this psalm as a lament psalm?
16. What are we to make of the imagery the psalmist uses to describe the wicked and their punishment?