

Day 341 - THURSDAY: January 18th

Psalms 41, 53 & 55

Psalms 41:1-13 NKJV

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David. Blessed is he who considers the poor; The LORD will deliver him in time of trouble. The LORD will preserve him and keep him alive, And he will be blessed on the earth; You will not deliver him to the will of his enemies. The LORD will strengthen him on his bed of illness; You will sustain him on his sickbed. I said, "LORD, be merciful to me; Heal my soul, for I have sinned against You." My enemies speak evil of me: "When will he die, and his name perish?" And if he comes to see me, he speaks lies; His heart gathers iniquity to itself; When he goes out, he tells it. All who hate me whisper together against me; Against me they devise my hurt. "An evil disease," they say, "clings to him. And now that he lies down, he will rise up no more." Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, Who ate my bread, Has lifted up his heel against me. But You, O LORD, be merciful to me, and raise me up, That I may repay them. By this I know that You are well pleased with me, Because my enemy does not triumph over me. As for me, You uphold me in my integrity, And set me before Your face forever. Blessed be the LORD God of Israel From everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen.

Psalms 53:1-6 NKJV

To the Chief Musician. Set to "Mahalath." A Contemplation of David. The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, and have done abominable iniquity; There is none who does good. God looks down from heaven upon the children of men, To see if there are any who understand, who seek God. Every one of them has turned aside; They have together become corrupt; There is none who does good, No, not one. Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge, Who eat up my people as they eat bread, And do not call upon God? There they are in great fear Where no fear was, For God has scattered the bones of him who encamps against you; You have put them to shame, Because God has despised them. Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion! When God brings back the captivity of His people, Let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad.

Psalms 55:1-23 NKJV

To the Chief Musician. With Stringed Instruments. A Contemplation of David. Give ear to my prayer, O God, And do not hide Yourself from my supplication. Attend to me, and hear me; I am restless in my complaint, and moan noisily, Because of the voice of the enemy, Because of the oppression of the wicked; For they bring down trouble upon me, And in wrath they hate me. My heart is severely pained within me, And the terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fearfulness and trembling have come upon me, And horror has overwhelmed me. So I said, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest. Indeed, I would wander far off, And remain in the wilderness. Selah I would hasten my escape From the windy storm and tempest." Destroy, O Lord, and divide their tongues, For I have seen violence and strife in the city. Day and night they go around it on its walls; Iniquity and trouble are also in the midst of it. Destruction is in its

midst; Oppression and deceit do not depart from its streets. For it is not an enemy who reproaches me; Then I could bear it. Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me; Then I could hide from him. But it was you, a man my equal, My companion and my acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, And walked to the house of God in the throng. Let death seize them; Let them go down alive into hell, For wickedness is in their dwellings and among them. As for me, I will call upon God, And the LORD shall save me. Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, And He shall hear my voice. He has redeemed my soul in peace from the battle that was against me, For there were many against me. God will hear, and afflict them, Even He who abides from of old. Selah. Because they do not change, Therefore they do not fear God. He has put forth his hands against those who were at peace with him; He has broken his covenant. The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, But war was in his heart; His words were softer than oil, Yet they were drawn swords. Cast your burden on the LORD, And He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved. But You, O God, shall bring them down to the pit of destruction; Bloodthirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days; But I will trust in You.

Daily Deep Dive:

Psalm 41:

The UCG reading program states: "Like Psalms 38 and 39 (and perhaps 40), David composed Psalm 41 when he was severely ill. And like Psalm 40, this song contains a prophetic foreshadowing of events in the life of the Messiah.

Before asking God to heal him in verse 4, David first lays a foundation for that request: "Blessed is he who considers the poor" (verse 1)—or "weak" (NIV). God will deliver, preserve,

bless, protect, strengthen and—directly pertinent to David's situation—“sustain him on his sickbed and restore him from his bed of illness” (verse 3, NIV). David is a compassionate man. It is his practice to pray, fast and mourn for others when they are sick (Psalm 35:13-14). He trusts that God will intervene for him now in his own need (41:3).

Indeed, note that the final verse of the previous psalm reflected on God thinking on David himself in his poor and needy state (Psalm 40:17). Such concern for others in need is the heart of godly character, which God's people must emulate. David well understood this, being a “man after [God's] own heart” (Acts 13:22). The qualities of mercy and compassion figure prominently in the New Testament. The apostle James declares that showing concern for others is an essential element in true religion: “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit the orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27). Jesus taught, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” (Matthew 5:7). He gave His disciples a sobering parable on the subject of compassion (Matthew 18:21-35) and stated that mercy (the word here denoting compassion or pity) is one of the weightier matters of God's law (Matthew 23:23).

Yet as important as it is for all to have concern for the weak—for the lowly and downtrodden—it is especially so of a king such as David, whose duty is to emulate God's righteous rule in defending the powerless (compare Psalm 72:2, 4, 12-14; Psalm 82:3-4; Proverbs 29:14; Psalm 31:8-9; Isaiah 11:4; Jeremiah 22:16). Again, David well knew this—and lived accordingly (as did and does Jesus Christ, who is prefigured in this psalm).

David then prays for mercy and healing, confessing his sin. When we consider parallels with Jesus in this psalm, we realize that He did not sin. Yet the great suffering and anguish that came upon Him at the end of His physical life was the result of bearing the penalty of sin—not His own but that of the rest of mankind (David's included).

David speaks of enemies relishing the thought of his imminent death (verses 5-8), which Christ also endured.

We then arrive at verse 9, which ties directly to the life of Jesus. David speaks of betrayal by a "familiar friend," a close companion, who dined with him. Some have suggested that the reference here and in Psalm 55:12-14 is to David's friend and counselor Ahithophel, who joined Absalom's rebellion against David. This seems a rather likely explanation—although the Bible does not mention David being severely ill at that time (though it would not be surprising for deep anguish and depression on that occasion to have made him physically sick). Since the companion is not named, and since the Bible does not record every detail of David's life, it's of course possible that this was a different friend on a different occasion—the illness, as previously mentioned, perhaps being the plague that struck after the numbering of Israel. Whatever the case, the most significant meaning here is not actually David's personal situation at all—but the fact that this was a prophecy of what would happen in the life of Christ. *The Nelson Study Bible* notes on Psalm 41:9: "The outrage of betrayal by one so close is nearly unbearable (Matt. 26:14-16). The fulfillment of this verse in the experience of Jesus and Judas is remarkable. Not only did the two eat a meal together (Matt. 26:21-25; Mark 14:18-21; Luke 22:21), but Jesus also called Judas a 'friend' at

the moment of betrayal (Matthew 26:50). Moreover Jesus quoted this verse, noting its fulfillment in Judas (John 13:18)."

In Psalm 41:10, "Raise me up" was again David's prayer for healing—to be brought up from his sickbed. Yet "in another sense [given the clear messianic context of this psalm], these words look forward to Jesus' resurrection (Psalm 16:10, 11; Psalm 118:17, 18)" (note on Psalm 41:10-12). David expresses his belief in eternal life when He says confidently of God's salvation: "You...set me before Your face forever" (verse 12).

The psalm closes in verse 13 with the doxology (word of praise) that was most likely appended to the end of the psalm sometime later in compiling Book I of the Psalter or in even later arrangement." [END]

Psalm 53:

The UCG reading program states: "Psalm 53 is another maskil of David. "To Mahalath" in the superscription, which may be part of a postscript to Psalm 52 (and also found in the superscription of Psalm 88 as part of a longer phrase), could represent the psalm being set to the tune of another song. Yet it might mean something else. The words have been variously interpreted as "On sickness," "On suffering," "To pipings" (on wind instruments) or "To dances" (or some sort of choreography).

Psalm 53 repeats much of Psalm 14 with some minor variation. The placement of nearly the same psalm here provides a further commentary on the sort of arrogant godless fool described in Psalms 49 and 52—and thus brings the cluster of psalms beginning with 49 to a close. It also helps to demonstrate that originally the various books of the Psalter were probably separate collections or hymnals.

One noticeable difference between the two psalms is that here the word Elohim ("God") is used throughout rather than Yhwh (the Eternal or "LORD").

The other significant difference occurs in verse 5. As the Zondervan NIV Study Bible notes on this verse, it "differs considerably from Psalm 14:5-6, though the basic thought remains the same: God overwhelms the godless who attack his people. Here the verbs are in the past tense (perhaps to express the certainty of their downfall)." As to God scattering the bones of the enemy, it means "over the battlefield of their defeat, their bodies left unburied like something loathsome (see Isaiah 14:18-20; Jeremiah 8:2...)" (same note). However, it could also be that so many will be destroyed at the end that they will not be able to be buried for some time, such as when the godless army of Gog is destroyed (see Ezekiel 39:11-16).

The closing verse of Psalm 14 and of 53 are identical in expressing a great yearning for salvation, rejoicing and gladness when God restores His people to their land. This speaks prophetically of the future establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth." [END]

Psalm 55:

The UCG reading program states: "Psalm 55 is the last *maskil* of David in a sequence of four. As before, the word *Neginoth* in the superscription, perhaps part of a postscript to Psalm 54, is probably correctly translated in the NKJV as "stringed instruments."

David cries out to God in this song about many enemies acting against him, though his focus is on one in particular. The psalm addresses the pain of being betrayed by a friend--one David knew

well who even worshiped God at the tabernacle alongside him (verses 12-14). Besides being painful on its own, a betraying friend is an enemy with vital knowledge--an adversary particularly adept at causing harm and inflicting pain. David addresses both elements here when he says, "If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him" (verse 12, NIV).

The friend having "broken his covenant" (verse 20) could mean an informal one of friendship or a formal oath of loyalty to David as king--perhaps part of an oath of office. The man's loyalty and slick speech, David says, were a pretense--all part of a calculated plan to stab him in the back (verse 21).

David doesn't name the friend, but many believe the person meant here was his counselor and prime minister Ahithophel, who betrayed him in joining and essentially directing Absalom's rebellion (see 2 Samuel 15-17). Further, many see a connection between Psalm 55 and Psalm 41:9: "Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me." However, Psalm 41 also concerns an illness that befell David--and there is no record of him being ill when Absalom rebelled (though, as pointed out previously, it is not hard to imagine that his deep depression could have made him physically sick). It could be that Psalm 41 and Psalm 55 concern two different friends at different times--or that both concern the same friend but not Ahithophel. In any case, these two psalms are certainly linked by theme if not by occasion. That being so, we should recall that Psalm 41:9 is quoted in the New Testament as a prophecy of the betrayal of Jesus by Judas Iscariot. The betrayal in Psalm 55 would seem to prefigure this as well, as many have recognized.

The NKJV translates David's prayer in verse 15 as: "Let death seize them; let them go down alive into hell"--that is, not just the one treacherous friend but others who were set against him also. In no way does this refer to people descending into a burning hellfire and remaining conscious. Rather, the word translated "hell" here simply means, as the NIV renders it, "grave." In using the word "alive," David could conceivably be calling for what happened to Korah and the other rebels against Moses in the wilderness when the earth opened up and swallowed them--whereupon they were instantly killed. Yet it seems likely that he simply means for their deaths to come while they are in full vigor and not after they have lain on their sickbeds in old age. David later expresses his belief that this will happen when he says near the end of the psalm, "Bloodthirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days" (verse 23).

How are we to understand David's call for death on his enemies, as it may seem very unchristian in light of Jesus' instruction to love our enemies and pray for our persecutors? One book explains regarding such imprecations (callings for curse or judgment on others) in the psalms: "These invocations are not mere outbursts of a vengeful spirit; they are, instead, prayers addressed to God. These earnest pleadings to God ask that he step in and right some matters so grossly distorted that if his help does not come, all hope for justice is lost.

"These hard sayings are legitimate expressions of the longings of Old Testament saints for the vindication that only God's righteousness can bring. They are not statements of personal vendetta, but utterances of zeal for the kingdom of God and his glory. The attacks that provoked these prayers were not just from personal enemies; rather, they were rightly seen as attacks

against God and especially his representatives in the promised line of the Messiah. Thus, David and his office bore the brunt of most of these attacks, and this was tantamount to an attack on God and his kingdom!

"It is frightening to realize that a righteous person may, from time to time, be in the presence of evil and have little or no reaction to it. But in these psalms we have the reverse of the situation. These prayers express a fierce abhorrence of sin and a desire to see God's name and cause triumph. Therefore, those whom the saints opposed in these prayers were the fearful embodiments of wickedness.

"Since David was the author of far more imprecatory psalms than anyone else, let it also be noted that David exhibited just the opposite of a vindictive or vengeful spirit in his own life. He was personally assaulted time and time again by people like Shimei, Doeg, Saul and his own son Absalom. Never once did he attempt to effect his own vindication or lift his hand to exercise what many may have regarded as his royal prerogative....

"Finally, these imprecations only repeat in prayer what God had already stated elsewhere would be the fate of those who were impenitent and who were persistently opposing God and his kingdom. In almost every instance, each expression used in one of these prayers of malediction may be found in plain prose statements of what will happen to those sinners who persist in opposing God" (Walter Kaiser Jr., Peter Davids, F.F. Bruce and Manfred Brauch, *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, 1996, comments on Psalm 137:8-9).

David, we should also remember, was a prophet expressing God's judgment. Furthermore, here in Psalm 55 he even seems to make allowance for repentance when he says that it is such

people's *lack* of repentance that is the basis for their punishment: "God, who is enthroned forever, will hear them [i.e., the evil they say and do] and afflict them...men who never change their ways and have no fear of God" (verse 19, NIV).

Conversely, David has confidence that God will sustain His faithful people. He tells the righteous to "cast your burden on the LORD, and He shall sustain you" (verse 22). The apostle Peter later says the same in 1 Peter 5:6-7: "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.""
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