

TEXT: PSALM 35

TITLE: *CALLING IN THE HEAVY ARTILLERY*

BIG IDEA:
**UNDESERVED, MALICIOUS, PERSONAL ATTACKS
CALL FOR DIVINE VINDICATION**

INTRODUCTION:

When have you come under vicious, unjustified personal attack? What were the circumstances?

How did you feel as your attackers heaped slander upon slander to try to ruin your good name and cause you great harm?

- like vultures circling in for the kill
- like poachers lining you up in the sites of their rifles
- like mockers painting you with the unfair brush of shame and disgrace

cf. David being hunted by Saul and villified by all around him; no friends standing with him; all alone with nowhere to turn for help

I. (:1-10) THE ANGEL OF THE LORD CAN TURN THE TABLES ON OUR ATTACKERS

A. (:1-3) Calling in the Heavy Artillery

1. Calling on God to Engage the Attackers
 - Contend
 - Fight
2. The Weapons of Defense
 - buckler and shield
3. The Weapons of Offense
 - spear and battle-axe

B. (:4-6) Chasing them with the Angel of the Lord leading the pursuit

1. Their evil plans
 - "seek my life"*
 - "devise evil against me"*
2. Their embarrassing predicament
 - "ashamed and dishonored"*
 - "turned back and humiliated"*
 - "like chaff before the wind"*
 - "their way be dark and slippery"*
3. Their energetic pursuer = the angel of the Lord
 - "driving them on"*
 - "pursuing them"*

C. (:7-8) Catching them in their own nets of destruction

1. Unjustified attacks

"without cause they hid their net for me"

"without cause they dug a pit for my soul"

2. Unexpected retribution

"let destruction come upon him unawares"

"let the net which he hid catch himself"

"into that very destruction let him fall"

D. (:9-10) Response to Deliverance = Refrain of Praise

1. Awesome God -- *"Who is like Thee"*

"my soul shall rejoice in the Lord"

"it shall exult in His salvation"

2. Awesome Deliverance -- saving against all odds

"delivers the afflicted from him who is too strong for him"

"and the afflicted and the needy from him who robs him"

II. (:11-18) MALICIOUS PERSONAL ATTACKS MAKE NO SENSE WHEN THEY ARE UNDESERVED

Contrast:

A. My Compassion When They Were in Need

"my clothing was sackcloth"

"I humbled my soul with fasting"

"my prayer kept returning to my bosom"

"I went about as though it were my friend or brother"

"I bowed down mourning, as one who sorrows for a mother"

VS.

B. Their Malicious Personal Attacks When I was Vulnerable

"malicious witnesses rise up"

"they ask me of things that I do not know"

"they repay me evil for good to the bereavement of my soul"

"at my stumbling they rejoiced and gathered themselves together"

"the smiters whom I did not know gathered together against me"

"they slandered me without ceasing"

"like godless jesters at a feast, they gnashed at me with their teeth"

C. (:17-18) Response to Deliverance = Refrain of Praise

III. (:19-28) THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGE WILL SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT

A. (:19-21) Plea for Vindication against those:

1. *"who are wrongfully my enemies"* and *"rejoice over me"*

2. "who hate me without cause" and "wink maliciously"
3. who speak against me with deceitful slander
4. who bear false witness against me

B. (:22-23) The Judge Who Sees All Cannot Remain Silent

C. (:24-26) Plea for Vindication

D. (:27-28) Response to Deliverance = Refrain of Praise

1. Corporate Refrain of Praise

2. Personal Refrain of Praise

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Do we have any examples in our own life of how the Lord has rescued us from those who attacked us without cause? How did the Lord deal with them?

2) What do we do when we experience the frustration of the psalmist who tried to humble himself and seek the Lord in prayer, but found that "*my prayer kept returning to my bosom*"? Sometimes does it seem like we are just praying to our four walls?

3) This is one of the "*How long*" psalms (cf. vs. 17). Why do you think God's clock doesn't always correspond to our clock?

4) Do we really have a sense that the Lord "*delights in the prosperity of His servant*"?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

VanGemenen: "The context in which the psalm arose is not certain as the language of this psalm shifts between legal and military. Whether the psalmist had been maligned and required vindication of his name or whether the problem was of international proportion ... is not clear. There is sufficient ambiguity in the psalm that it may be classified as an individual lament.

The varied metaphors (legal, judicial, martial, and hunting) add to the colorful expressions in the psalm. The prayer may be divided into three sections (vv.1-10, 11-18, 19-28), each of which in a repetitive and overlapping manner calls on the Lord to act on behalf of the psalmist. Because of the individual and general nature of the prayer, it expresses in words the feelings of our hearts whenever injustice comes into our lives."

Leupold: Re Outline:

- a) Prayer that God may arise in the singer's behalf and repay those who have wrongfully attacked him (vv. 1-10).
- b) The singer's true sympathy for the misfortune his foes once suffered which is but poorly rewarded by them now (vv. 11-18).
- c) Prayer that God may bestir himself against these false friends and vindicate the psalmist's righteousness (vv. 19-28).

Kidner: Re vv. 11-18 – “Other psalms will plumb still further depths by describing the treachery of bosom companions (e.g. 41:9; 55:12-14). Here the wound, which is hardly less painful, is the spite and ingratitude of men who were not close friends but had been treated ‘*as though*’ they were (14); such had been David’s care for them: a concern as genuine as that of Romans 12:15 or of the Good Samaritan. In return, it is as though the Samaritan himself now fell among thieves, only to find his former protégé his chief tormentor.”

Perowne: “How are we to account for such prayers for vengeance? We find them chiefly in four Psalms, the seventh, thirty-fifth, sixty-ninth, and one-hundred and ninth, and the imprecations in these form a terrible climax. In the last no less than thirty anathemas have been counted. Are these the mere outbursts of passionate and unsanctified feeling, or are they the legitimate expression of a righteous indignation? Are they to be excused as being animated by the ‘spirit of Elias?’ a spirit not unholy indeed, but far removed from the meekness and gentleness of Christ; or are they the stereotyped forms in which the spirit of devotion may utter itself? Are they Jewish only, or may they be Christian also? An uninstructed fastidiousness, it is well known, has made many persons recoil from reading these Psalms at all... Some have tried to reconcile them with a more enlightened conscience, by regarding such words not as the expression of a wish, but as the utterance of a prediction; the Hebrew optative, which is distinct enough from the simple future, absolutely forbids this expedient. Others again would see in them expressions which may lawfully be used in the soul’s wrestling of righteous zeal for God’s honour, and remind us that if we do not sympathize with such zeal, it may be not because our religion is more pure, but because our hearts are colder.

Now the real source of the difficulty lies in our not observing and bearing in mind the essential difference between the Old Testament and the New. The older dispensation was in every sense a sterner one than the new...The Jewish nation ... had been steeled and hardened by the discipline which had pledged it to a war of extermination with idolaters... it is conceivable how even a righteous man, under it, feeling it to be his bounden duty to root out evil wherever he saw it, and identifying, as he did, his own enemies with the enemies of Jehovah, might use language which to us appears unnecessarily vindictive. To men so trained and taught, what we call ‘religious toleration,’ was a thing not only wrong, but absolutely inconceivable...

These imprecations are not the passionate longing for personal revenge. The singer undoubtedly sees in his enemies the enemies of God and his church. They that are not with him are against God. And because the zeal of God’s house even consumes him, he prays that all the doers of iniquity may be rooted out. The indignation therefore is righteous, though it may appear to us wrongly directed, or excessive in its utterance.”