

Judaean Rhapsody

Psalm 7 September 29, 2024

Bohemian Rhapsody was a joke. Freddie Mercury called it a “mock opera.”¹ *Queen* couldn’t stop laughing while recording. But, the joke went diamond and is now considered their signature song.

Psalm 7 is a *Shiggaion*. It’s a rhapsody - a song of stirred emotions.² But what’s interesting is that the emotions at the *beginning* of the song are very different than those at the *end* of the song. In fact, by the end, it’s as if David has completely changed his tune. Scholars have a hard time even categorizing the genre of this particular Psalm because at first it’s a lament, then it becomes an oath Psalm, then hits other themes before culminating in a hymn of thanks.³

Musicians still do this today. *Bohemian Rhapsody* was three songs put into one. Paul McCartney’s *Band On The Run* also famously has three distinct parts that flow one after the other.

As Psalm 7 opens, we find David as a *man* on the run. Like so many of his psalms, this one was born during a time of great danger, suffering, and oppression against the man after God’s own heart.

Psalm 7:Superscript - A *Shiggaion* of David, which he sang to the Lord concerning the words of Cush, a Benjaminite.

We don’t know exactly who this Cush is or what he said. He was an enemy of David who accused him of some sort of wrongdoing but was also threatening David’s life.

Facing *that* kind of crisis, what does David do? *He sings a song!* He’s like a character in a musical. To David, *now* was always a good time to sing to the Lord. Martin Luther once wrote, “David made psalms: we also will make psalms, and sing as well as we can, to the honor of our Lord God.”⁴ It might seem unrealistic to us, but it really is a needful part of the Christian life.

Psalm 7:1-2 - ¹Lord my God, I seek refuge in you; save me from all my pursuers and rescue me, ²or they will tear me like a lion, ripping me apart with no one to rescue me.

David had *many* enemies. Whether it was Goliath or the hordes of Philistines, rivals within the tribes of Israel or even traitors in his own family, David was always in someone’s crosshairs.

You also have a lion-like enemy who is looking to destroy you: your adversary, the Devil, who prowls like a roaring lion, looking for someone he can devour.⁵ And you have that back-stabbing turncoat, the flesh, living in your heart trying to undermine your walk with the Lord.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bohemian_Rhapsody

² Robert Alter *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation With Commentary*

³ Frank Gaebelin, Willem VanGemern, Allen Ross, J. Stafford Wright, and Dennis Kinlaw. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary Volume 5: Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*

⁴ Martin Luther *Of Temptation And Tribulation: DCXXXVI*

⁵ 1 Peter 5:8

In this crisis, David knew that his only hope was the Lord. The Lord was His *shelter*.

We hear about the ultra-wealthy using different shelters: Tax shelters. Bomb shelters. Billionaires have been building bunkers in Hawaii recently. And why shouldn't they? Everywhere we turn we're being told to be afraid. That disaster is unavoidable. That you are surrounded by enemies.

Psalm 46:1-3 - ¹ God is our refuge and strength, a helper who is always found in times of trouble. ² Therefore we will not be afraid, though the earth trembles and the mountains topple into the depths of the seas, ³ though its water roars and foams and the mountains quake with its turmoil.

The *Lord* is our refuge. The term here literally refers to being sheltered from a rainstorm or when soldiers on the run would hide in the hills.⁶ To be protected in a shadow. I was at a graveside this week and a number of us kept gravitating to the shade of this tall tree so we could get out of the sun. We got into the shade by moving *closer* to the tree. The sun was still out, those UV rays still coming down, but as I moved close to the tree I was sheltered by its shade.

David was the greatest warrior of his generation but he knew that real strength is found in nearness to the Lord. Some trust in chariots, some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.

Psalm 7:3-5 - ³ Lord my God, if I have done this, if there is injustice on my hands, ⁴ if I have done harm to one at peace with me or have plundered my adversary without cause, ⁵ may an enemy pursue and overtake me; may he trample me to the ground and leave my honor in the dust. *Selah*

David welcomed spiritual audits. Psalm 139 is one of his most famous where we read, "Search me and know me. Test my thoughts and concerns. See what You find."

Here he stands before the Lord to say, "Cush has made these accusations, so here I am, ready to be put on trial for it." He's not claiming to be perfect - obviously he wasn't and he *knew* it. But, in *this* case, he knew the accusations were not true. He really was innocent of the charges.

But there's a significant theological lesson for us here: Even though David was the man after God's heart, even though he was the great psalmist, even though he was anointed by God, he knew the rules still applied to him. He expected that sin in his life would bring consequences.

He says, "Lord, if I'm guilty, then I deserve what's coming." He didn't assume he had some sort of spiritual diplomatic immunity.

A while back a famous prosperity teacher was accused of being a part of a bunch of debauched immorality. Speaking to his church, he denied it, but he also said it wouldn't matter - that even if it

⁶ *Theological Wordbook Of The Old Testament*

was all true, he wouldn't be in trouble because all he would have to do is "repent." He said don't worry about him because he's "the man for the job."

That's not the way David looked at things. He recognized that sin brings consequences, even in the life of a believer. He knew it by experience.

Psalm 7:6-8 - ⁶Rise up, Lord, in your anger; lift yourself up against the fury of my adversaries; awake for me; you have ordained a judgment. ⁷Let the assembly of peoples gather around you; take your seat on high over it. ⁸The Lord judges the peoples; vindicate me, Lord, according to my righteousness and my integrity.

David brings us into the courtroom of heaven where God sits as Judge over all. David asks the Lord to judge between him and his enemies.

Our world is full of injustice, full of human authorities making wrong decisions. But this song reminds us that God is the highest Judge and He will settle the score one day.

In December 1944, the Supreme Court of the United States upheld FDR's executive order to arrest and intern US citizens simply because they were Japanese. That decision wasn't officially overturned until 2018. 74 years! Our courts get it wrong sometimes. But the Lord never does. The whole of the universe can gather around Him to bring every case and He will judge them all fairly and rightly. He has a 0% reversal rate.

If you're a Christian, you will be unfairly accused at some point. You may be defrauded, mistreated, attacked, or cheated in some way, but justice will ultimately be done in the court of heaven. The Advocate will take up your case and defend you.

Why? David knew he would be vindicated because of his *righteousness*. But what made David righteous? We know he made a *lot* of serious mistakes. Righteousness is not something we create. It comes through faith in Christ.⁷ Abraham *believed* God and righteousness was credited to him.

As we believe God, as we trust Him and walk in relationship with Him, we are made righteous. It's easy for people to think of righteousness as doing or not doing certain things to prove to God we're worth saving or helping. But Biblical righteousness is not about doing something or knowing everything. It comes through faith.

That doesn't mean that God doesn't have righteous *standards* for us. If we love Him and trust Him, then we're going to follow Him in the paths and boundaries He gives. We walk *in the ways of righteousness*. But the *Lord* is our righteousness and as we live by faith, righteousness has its effect in our hearts and the way we live our lives.⁸

⁷ Philippians 3:9

⁸ Jeremiah 23:6, Romans 1:17

Psalm 7:9 - ⁹Let the evil of the wicked come to an end, but establish the righteous. The one who examines the thoughts and emotions is a righteous God.

Now that David has come into the presence of God, we notice that his focus starts to change. The frantic emotion in the first five verses has dissipated. And now that he's started thinking about righteousness we'll find he becomes preoccupied with *God's* righteousness.

David realizes that he's not a good or virtuous person in and of himself. His integrity exists because *God* is righteous and God makes His people like Himself. He *establishes* them. He plants them. He bears the fruit of righteousness in their lives. He shapes and prepares us.

As He does so, the Lord examines our thoughts *and* emotions. Again, being in proper relationship with God is not only about certain behaviors. Righteousness is about more than just regulations. God wants more than that. He wants deeper than that. He wants to have our hearts and minds.

God is concerned with our thoughts and emotions as much as our tongues or our fists. Jesus spoke a lot about what's going on in the heart. He exposed the failure of the Pharisees. On the *outside* they did everything right. Their behavior was spot on. But *inside* they were hard-hearted, dead, full of jealousy, resentment, pride, greed. Jesus told them, "*That's the problem.*" He knew their hearts.

Psalm 7:10-11 - ¹⁰My shield is with God, who saves the upright in heart. ¹¹God is a righteous judge and a God who shows his wrath every day.

The song started in a minor key, now we're in a much brighter melody. Before it was, "God *will* You rescue me? If you don't I'm dead meat!" Now it's very different. God *is* my shield. God *does* save. Instead of panic and confusion, David makes statements of fact. He is calm and sure and confident.

Now, there at the end we read something a little shocking: "God shows His wrath every day." Your version may say, "God is angry with the wicked every day," or, He "feels indignation every day."

That's not how we usually picture God. We think of His mercies new every morning - of His daily love and grace. But *wrath* every day? That's not the warm fuzzy we're used to.

But remember: God's righteous judgment is David's only hope in this situation. If God doesn't judge, then who will defend David? Who will deliver the oppressed? Who will right the wrongs?

Verse 11 is a *good* promise to us. Another way of reading that phrase is: God "passes sentence" every day.⁹ There's a *legal* context here. God isn't one of these courts that only hears certain cases if they decide they want to or only cases they decide are *really* important.

⁹ Gerald Wilson *Psalms Volume 1*

Another way of understanding verse 11 is to say that God's holy anger does not cool down.¹⁰ We've all been offended by something but then weeks or years later it really doesn't bother us anymore. That doesn't happen with God - *and that's a very good thing!* He upholds His standards. He keeps His promises. He is not slack. He doesn't lower the bar.

Psalm 7:12-13 - ¹²**If anyone does not repent, he will sharpen his sword; he has strung his bow and made it ready.** ¹³**He has prepared his deadly weapons; he tips his arrows with fire.**

We go from the courtroom to the armory. This is like one of those scenes where the hero is gearing up with all his weapons for the big fight at the end of the movie. The hero here is God Himself.

He's got His short-range weapons and His long-range weapons. He whets the blade for optimal lethality. He tips His arrows with fire. It's really a frightening image if you linger on it.

Once again we have a song change here. We went from desperate fear to confident hope, now David has changed focus once again to tell his enemies, "*Actually, you guys are the ones in trouble, not me. God has a fire-tipped arrow with your name on it!*" *Or they could just repent!*

Did you notice that caveat? "If anyone does not repent, here's what's coming." But if they *do* repent, they can be saved from their guilt and the coming judgment. If they will turn to God from their sin, then God will no longer be their Adversary, He will be their Advocate and Savior and Friend.

If you're not a Christian this morning, the good news of the Gospel is that the melody of your life can change. You are currently at war with God, on the run from judgment, but you can be saved.

Psalm 7:14-16 - ¹⁴**See, the wicked one is pregnant with evil, conceives trouble, and gives birth to deceit.** ¹⁵**He dug a pit and hollowed it out but fell into the hole he had made.** ¹⁶**His trouble comes back on his own head; his own violence comes down on top of his head.**

At this point, in a sense, David is more worried about his enemies than himself. They're trying to get David, but they forgot to factor in God's providence. And these murderous enemies don't realize that sin is self-destructive. It's telling them, "Lie about David, go after David, hurt David and you'll be better off," but in the end, *they'll* be the ones caught in the trap. That's what sin does. It delivers us to the devourer. It promises to benefit us while robbing us blind. It brings us down.

Now, for Christians, this reminder of the providential working of God helps us understand why we don't have to be afraid in life. Scary things happen. Suffering happens. But here is the reminder: God *loves* us. And because of that love we can be confident, even in the day of judgment because His perfect love will drive out fear. Because He *is* our Refuge and ever-present help.

Psalm 7:17 - ¹⁷**I will thank the Lord for his righteousness; I will sing about the name of the Lord Most High.**

¹⁰ Derek Kidner *Psalms 1-72*

Suddenly we're in a hymn of thanks and praise. David has totally changed his tune from where he started. Of course, Cush was still out there. He was still working his plan. The danger was still real. But David was reminded of God's love and power and righteousness and His personal care.

And here, David praises the Lord *not* for a mighty deed, but simply for His righteousness.

It is a very good thing that God is righteous. That He is always right. That He is always just. That He is not only the absolute pinnacle of ethics and morality, but that He is the ultimate, unchanging standard of what is good and true.

"Forty feet underground in Gaithersburg, Maryland, in a bright white laboratory that requires three separate keys to enter, the United States stores a precious collection of small, shiny metal cylinders that literally define the mass of everything in [our] country." This lab is at the National Institutes of Standards and Technology. And there they held a hunk of platinum-iridium alloy whose mass defines what a kilogram is.¹¹ Or, at least it *did* until 2019 when they changed the definition. You see, after 129 years, that hunk of platinum has lost about 50 micrograms of mass. And so scientists from all over the world had to get together to figure out how to have a constant standard for what a kilogram is. Without a constant standard, the world's system of measurements would be thrown into chaos.

A scientist involved in changing the definition said something interesting: "*Objects always change...[with the new definition] we go from an object [on Earth] to the stuff that's in the heavens.*"

God never loses any micrograms of righteousness or power or love for you. He is altogether perfect and right and glorious. And so why *wouldn't* we conform to His standards? Why *wouldn't* we allow Him to shape us into His image? Why would we try to save ourselves when He stands ready to help us?

Because God is righteous He can be trusted. Trusted to do what is right. Trusted to do what is best. Trusted to save. Trusted with our lives. Trusted to go before us and prepare the way for our steps.

The song ends with this name, "the Lord Most High." This name was first used all the way back when Abraham met with Melchizedek in Genesis.¹² And then there He was in David's time. And He is still God Most High with us today. Thank God He doesn't change - that His righteousness endures and is exalted forever and ever. That *our* tune changes, but His never does. He is still our shelter, our refuge, our ever-present help in time of trouble.

For that let's praise the Lord and thank the Lord and *trust* the Lord as we walk with Him, allowing Him to play a melody of faith and righteousness in and through our lives.

¹¹ <https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2018/11/14/18072368/kilogram-kibble-redefine-weight-science>

¹² EBC