

A Tale of Two Kings

Living in the Midst of Wicked Rulers

Psalm 7:1 *A Shiggaion of David, which he sang to the LORD concerning the words of Cush, a Benjaminite.*

O LORD my God, in you do I take refuge; save me from all my pursuers and deliver me,

² lest like a lion they tear my soul apart, rending it in pieces, with none to deliver.

³ O LORD my God, if I have done this, if there is wrong in my hands,

⁴ if I have repaid my friend with evil or plundered my enemy without cause,

⁵ let the enemy pursue my soul and overtake it, and let him trample my life to the ground and lay my glory in the dust.
Selah

⁶ Arise, O LORD, in your anger; lift yourself up against the fury of my enemies; awake for me; you have appointed a judgment.

⁷ Let the assembly of the peoples be gathered about you; over it return on high.

⁸ The LORD judges the peoples; judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness and according to the integrity that is in me.

⁹ Oh, let the evil of the wicked come to an end, and may you establish the righteous-- you who test the minds and hearts,

- O righteous God!
- ¹⁰ My shield is with God, who saves the upright in heart.
- ¹¹ God is a righteous judge, and a God who feels indignation every day.
- ¹² If a man does not repent, God will whet his sword; he has bent and readied his bow;
- ¹³ he has prepared for him his deadly weapons, making his arrows fiery shafts.
- ¹⁴ Behold, the wicked man conceives evil and is pregnant with mischief and gives birth to lies.
- ¹⁵ He makes a pit, digging it out, and falls into the hole that he has made.
- ¹⁶ His mischief returns upon his own head, and on his own skull his violence descends.
- ¹⁷ I will give to the LORD the thanks due to his righteousness, and I will sing praise to the name of the LORD, the Most High.

Psalm 7:1-17

Good Leaders, Bad Leaders

“When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; But when a wicked *man* rules, the people groan” (**Prov 29:2** NKJV). Here in the United States of America, we have inherited a form of government quite unlike that of

Old Testament Israel. God gave them kings. Our Founding Fathers rejected kingship in favor of a democratic-republic. Israel's kings came to office mostly through rebellion, revolution, or coup d'état. Judah's kings came to office by birthright, once David was installed on Mt. Zion. In America, Presidents, Senators, Congressmen, and so on are voted into office by the people. Ideally, be they kings or presidents, rulers or leaders, nations are run by just and righteous men who know their place, and care deeply about the rule of law.

Here we are less than four weeks from the next national election cycle. No one I know has ever seen anything quite like what we are experiencing right now. It is repugnant, shameful, despicable in almost every sense of those words. It is easy, given the two candidates—of whom one will almost certainly take office in January—to idealize past leaders that never quite existed, because of a present with leaders who are clearly as corrupt as we have ever had. Many feel hopeless when they think about voting. Noah Webster in his “Advice to the Young,” captures why.

When you become entitled to exercise the right of voting for public officers, let it be impressed on your mind that God commands you to choose for rulers, “just men who will rule in the fear of God.” The preservation of our government depends on the faithful discharge of this duty; if the citizens neglect their duty and place unprincipled men in office, the government will soon be corrupted; laws will be made, not for the public good so much as for selfish or local purposes; corrupt or incompetent men will be appointed to execute Laws; the public revenues will be squandered on unworthy men; and the rights of the citizen will be violated or disregarded. If our government fails to secure public prosperity and happiness, it must be because the citizens neglect the Divine Commands, and elect bad men to make and administer the Laws.¹

Clearly, we are living in times of profound and exponentially growing corruption of our Constitution, original laws, religious beliefs, and social morals. This has been going on for quite some time, but it seems like for the first time in memory, and maybe even in history, we have

¹ Noah Webster, *History of the United States*, “Advice to the Young” 49 (New Haven, Durrie & Peck, 1832), 336.

two candidates that brazenly, shamelessly, braggadociosly embody this corruption in their very persons. It almost seems like the more evil, the more mischief, and more lies, the more the American public eats it up.

How are Christians supposed to respond in days like these? We live in two cities. In the one, we have civic responsibilities as citizens of our country. My job isn't to tell you what your role in this should be, as I think those roles can be varied and not necessarily be mutually exclusive. But we also have religious responsibilities as citizens of the City with Foundations, whose Architect and Builder is God. This is what Psalm 7 speaks to today. Some of what I say might have application to you in the civic realm. Most of what I say will not. All of what we talk about here should have impact on proper thinking and actions towards those who actually become our leaders.

Good king, Bad king

Psalm 7. As with the four “morning and evening” Psalms (3-4, 5-6), and according to **Acts 4:25** also Psalm 2, this is a **psalm of David**. Of course, David is **the king**. As

such, it concludes the Psalms 3-5 series of “royal” petitions to God. This connects the psalm to those that came before it. The psalm ends with singing praises to the “name” of Yahweh-Elyon—God Most High. This connects it immediately to Psalm 8 which begins and ends with singing “How majestic is your name in all the earth” (8:1, 9) and again in Psalm 9 which begins the way Psalm 7 ends (9:2). In this and other ways, as we have seen with the other psalms before it, Psalm 7 is its own historical song, but placed in the Psalter in this exact position for reasons that extend to reading the Psalms as a book and not just individual songs.

Now, the reason I started the way I did this morning is because of the occasion of the Psalm. It is called “A Shiggaion of David, which he sang to the LORD concerning the words of Cush, a Benjaminite” (Ps 1:1). This actually gives us the context of the psalm as well as helps us make sense of some otherwise difficult to interpret verses in the psalm. Let’s try to get a handle on this.

First, what is a “Shiggaion?” It is another of those lost words in the Psalms, like *selah* (pause?) or *sheminith* (eight?). Many think it is a musical notation meaning that David wanted this piece sung to a kind of wandering style with

uneven meter. The word only appears elsewhere in **Habakkuk 3:1**. It may come from an Akkadian word *šegu*, meaning a psalm of **lamentation**. The LXX translates it simply as “**psalm**” (*psalmos*). It may come from the Hebrew *shagah* meaning “**to go astray**.” Young’s Literal Translation thus has it as a title: “**The Erring One,’ by David...**”

This word strongly hints at the setting which is explained in the next words, “**...concerning the words of Cush, a Benjaminite.**” There is a problem here. No one is identified exactly as Cush the Benjaminite in the life of David or anywhere else in the OT. Therefore, some have suggested that perhaps this refers to a story now lost to us about a man named Cush the Benjaminite, which was found in the now lost Chronicles of Nathan the prophet, Gad the Seer, and Samuel the Seer (**1Ch 29:29-30**). If so, we don’t really have the context and the superscription does us little good.

The LXX and Church Fathers said that this refers to the same period of time as Psalm 3, when David is **running from his son Absalom**. If so, there are two options. The first is someone called “**The Cushite,**” who comes to deliver the message to David that the war is over and his son is dead (**2Sa**

18). But the song itself sounds like David is still in the throes of battle against his enemies. Then there is David's friend Hushai the Archite (2Sa 15:32). The LXX has his name as Chusi, which is close to Cush. And we know that the Gentile Archites were merged into the tribe of Benjamin (Josh 16:2). But Hushai was David's friend, and the Psalm seems to have Cush as his enemy.

The other option sees the psalm as having something to do with David's interactions with king Saul. One of these still keeps us in the time period of David's flight from Absalom. It sees David as thinking about the stones and curses that were hurled down on him by a man named Shimei the Benjaminite (2Sa 16:5-14). Shimei was loyal to his tribe and to king Saul.² John Lightfoot thought that he called Shimei "Cush" as a poetic derision, alluding to Kish, Saul's father, but also to the definition of Cush which means "a black countenance," or "deceitful and untrustworthy."³

² Cf. Eric Lane, *Psalms 1-89: The Lord Saves*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2006), 49.

³ John Lightfoot, *The Works of the Reverend and Learned John Lightfoot D. D., Late Master of Katherine Hall in Cambridge such as Were, and such as Never before Were Printed: In Two Volumes: With the Authors Life and Large and Useful Tables to Each Volume: Also Three Maps: One of the Temple Drawn by the Author Himself, the Others of Jerusalem and the Holy Land Drawn according to the Author's Chorography, with a Description Collected out of His Writings*, Early English Books Online (London: W. R. for Robert Scot, Thomas Basset, Richard Chiswell, 1684), 66. On the definition of "Cush" see Stelman Smith and Judson Cornwall, *The Exhaustive Dictionary of Bible Names* (North Brunswick, NJ: Bridge-Logos, 1998), 55 and Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, eds., *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Cush's "darkness" is also a play on the color of the Ethiopian skin, as the Rabbi's took it (see n. 4).

The overwhelmingly best choice is that **Cush actually is king Saul**. Cush (כּוּשׁ) and Kish (קִישׁ) sound alike. There are very old Jewish traditions that Cush was another name for Saul.⁴ Thus, the Targum says that this is about “**the misfortune of Saul the son of Kish, who was from the tribe of Benjamin.**” This idea (or the Shimei option) seems to make the most sense as the words of the Psalm fit very well with the overall story of David and Saul. David’s royal petition in Psalm 7 deals with an earthly king, whose very roots are evil.

We know that the series of events between David and Saul weighed so heavily on him that David wrote at least seven other songs about it (34, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 142). Someone explains:

The psalmist’s petition matches the historical period when a determined Saul pursued David ... in the following ways: being pursued to death (vv. 1–2; 1 Samuel 20–26); is an ally of the enemy (v. 4; 1 Samuel 17–19); is slandered (v. 4; 1 Sam 24:9; 26:19); is innocent (vv. 3–6; 1 Sam. 24:10);

⁴“And this is meant by [Psalms, 7:1]: ‘A Shiggayon of David which he sang unto the Lord, concerning the affairs of Cush (the Ethiopian) the Benjamite.’ Was then his name Cush? It was Saul, but as an Ethiopian is distinguished from others by the color of his skin, so was Saul distinguished from others by his good deeds.” (b. Moed Qat. 3).

appeals to God as judge (vv. 6–13; 1 Sam. 24:12, 15); depends upon God to bring disaster on the wicked (v. 9; 1 Sam. 24:15; 26:10); cites Proverbs on evil (v. 14; 1 Sam 24:13); and speaks of evil/guilt as in his hands (v. 3; 1 Sam 26:18). Finally, the accusation that he rescued Saul’s enemy (v. 7:4B) fits the ... historical epoch.⁵

There are so many times in the history of these two kings that Saul spoke ill of David and tried to have him killed. But the point is, this psalm really is a tale of two very different kings, and it shows the proper, godly reaction of the good king in the face of the evil king. If this is the proper reaction of a king, then how much more you and I who are so much less in our own country? Therefore, we need to look at the psalm to see the differences between the two kings and to see how David handled king Saul.

Psalm 7

As we enter the actual content of the Psalm, we want to think about how it unfolds. Very generally, the [first half is a](#)

⁵ Bruce K. Waltke, James M. Houston, and Erika Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Lament: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 87.

petition of king David where he presents his case before God. The second half is a prayer of confidence that the LORD will answer his prayer. Each half begins with himself, and moves to his enemy. It looks something like this:

- I. Case-Petition: (vv. 1-9)
 - A. SELF: Plea-- Rescue innocent (1-5)
 - B. ENEMY: Counterplea-- LORD, vindicate the innocent by bringing disaster on wicked (6-9)
- II. Confidence: (vv. 10-17)
 - A. SELF: Confession-- God is righteous (10-13) and my warrior
 - B. ENEMY: Praises-- to the Most High for upholding poetic justice (14-17)

King David begins his petition with an act of faith. “O LORD my God, in you do I take refuge” (Ps 7:1). The names of God in this Psalm are varied. In fact, along with various words for justice, the God’s names are the two prominent themes of the psalm. Once he is *Elohim Tsaddiq* (Righteous God; vs. 9, cf. 11, 17). Once he is *Yahweh Elyon*

(The LORD, the Most High; 17). Sometimes he is just *Yahweh* (the covenant name; vs. 6, 8). Sometimes he is just *Elohim* (10-12). Here, it is literally, *Yahweh Elohay* (1st person singular form of Elohim)—Yahweh, my God. These names teach us about what God is like, which is very important in the psalm. He is the covenant-making, righteous, most high God of gods.

We have seen this word “refuge” twice already. In whom does he take refuge? Who is this Yahweh? Reading the Psalter together, “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him” (Ps 2:12). Curiously, the Targum adds Memra (Word or Logos equivalent) here to Psalm 7:1. “But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy, and spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may exult in you. For you bless the righteous, O LORD; you cover him with favor as with a shield” (Ps 5:11-12). We have seen the Trinitarian nature of these psalms. David’s God is our God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

At various times in David’s flight, he took refuge in caves or in foreign cities with foreign kings. These offered

protection from his enemies. But at the end of the day, his True Refuge was in his God, not a foreign king, not a human government, not a high wall protecting a border, not running away to a hole in a rock. God is the refuge of those who seek lasting, true shelter. The Psalm starts this way, and in the context of thinking about wicked rulers, be it in his day or our own, all believers must start here. In a frightening political mess, where is your first thought?

Save Me

He then immediately begins the petitions, of which there are **two**. But these petitions last for 10 verses. They both go to God. As someone put it, “**Since the wicked king functions as Israel’s highest court on earth, the righteous king appeals to the higher court of God’s throne.**”⁶ As he thought about the massive political corruption of his own day, David took his petition to God.

The first petition is for **salvation or deliverance**. “**Save me from all my pursuers and deliver me**” (Ps 7:1). David speaks of physical deliverance from an evil king. Christians

⁶ Bruce K. Waltke, James M. Houston, and Erika Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Lament: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 84.

have been pursued by evil tyrant kings for as long as there have been God's people. John Gill said, "David had his persecutors, and many of them; the Church, in Jeremiah's time, had hers; the saints, in the times of the apostles, and in all ages since, have had theirs. Every one that will live godly in Christ Jesus must expect persecution in one shape or another; and there is none can save and deliver from it but God, and he can and will in his own time."⁷

Recognize that this is *personal deliverance*, not national deliverance he is praying for here. Save "me" from "my" pursuers and deliver "me." Three times he speaks of himself. It is a son talking to his Father and God. It is the life-cry of any believer who is being pursued. We may live in a country, but we are also individual citizens. Things really get personal is when the government comes for *you!*

Physical deliverance is a shadow and type of spiritual deliverance. Didymus the Blind commented, "Who is that one except he who says, 'There is no one who can save except me' (Isa 45:21), the one who has come to seek and to save that which has been lost (Luke 19:10), and to give his

⁷ John Gill, *An Exposition of the Old Testament*, vol. 3, The Baptist Commentary Series (London: Mathews and Leigh, 1810), 549.

soul as a ransom for many? (Matt 20:28). These things show that God the Father saves through God the Son. Through this the deity of the Father and the Son must not be distinguished by the words above and must not be seen as different from one another.” (FRAGMENTS ON THE PSALMS 7.2). Praise God if he has delivered you spiritually, for then no physical harm can ultimately hurt your soul.

What kind of evil is this exactly? “Lest like a lion they tear my soul apart, rending it in pieces, with none to deliver” (Ps 7:2). Lions attack for no other reason than that they are lions. It is their nature. They care not about your feelings, your reasons, your humanity. They simply eat. But they eat by tearing the flesh into pieces, and devouring it with strong jaws. It is brutal to see a lion pursue and eat its prey. The shocking image is meant to show you that true evil does not care a wit about you, and powerful evil thinks there is no one who is able to deliver its prey from its paws. David’s worry here is internal—his soul. There are reasons, then, why people get so frightened by wicked rulers, for they hate Christ like the Dragon hate’s the woman’s son in Revelation 12. More importantly, there are reasons why Christians must start with taking refuge and having faith in a God who

is able to save and deliver. Without Him, we have no hope. With him, it doesn't matter what they do, he will save us in his time and our souls will be secure.

At this point, some of the most important verses for needing the proper context arise. David pleads his innocence. How? “O LORD, my God, if I have done this...” (3). Done what? Like the brilliant poet that he was, David tells you what in three parallel thoughts.

- If there is wrong in my hands (3)
- If I have repaid my friend with evil
- If I have plundered my enemy without cause (4).

Later in vs. 8 it sounds similar. “Judge me ... according to my righteousness and ... integrity that is in me.” Though we will find language that makes it appear like David has never sinned in other Psalms, this is not what he is talking about here.

This is not a general comment to the LORD that he is without sin. No. David is talking specifically about how he has treated Saul. In the Sinai law code it says, “You shall not

revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people” (Ex 22:28). Going back even farther, God had warned Abimelech not to harm Abraham (Gen 20:7) and again told Laban not to touch Jacob (31:24). Both were similar to Saul in that the LORD had chosen them. As Jesus taught about anger and murder, cursing is a form of harm that, when given the chance, could lead a person to murder. David understood both.

Repeatedly, David had the opportunity, in God’s providence, to kill Saul. Once in a cave when Saul went in to relieve himself (1Sa 24:3-7), and a second time when he catches Saul asleep in a camp (26:5-10), David says, “The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD’s anointed, to put out my hand against him” (24:6), and “Do not destroy him, for who can put out his hand against the LORD’s anointed and be guiltless?” (26:9). To take Saul’s life would be the worst form of blasphemy against Yahweh, who had anointed Saul. It would deserve death, as both Shimei and Naboth would later come to learn (1Kg 2:9; 21:8-14). David would not do it. He was guiltless.

Not only this, but David and Saul had confrontations about this very thing. David told Saul of his loyalty and that he was being pursued for no just cause. “May the LORD

judge between you and me. And may the LORD avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you. As the old saying goes, ‘From evildoers come evil deeds,’ so my hand will not touch you” (1Sa 24:12-13). And David **wouldn’t even speak ill of the king**. No where do we find David doing that. No, David is innocent and that is the case he now pleads before the throne of heaven in his prayer.

Given that laws like these seem to be **universal moral imperatives** for all people and not merely part of Israel’s theocracy, and given how David who was being treated much worse than any of us have ever been by our own leaders acted, does this say anything at all about how we should speak of our leaders? Are we guilty of things that king David was innocent?

Perhaps part of what makes questions like this more difficult is that we live in a relatively unique situation compared to 4,000 years of biblical history since Abraham. Almost no believers were ever given by their government “**inalienable rights**,” or the right to vote or even to become leaders themselves. Because of this, we do have a say in our government, and as such the trap is it makes it easier for us to complain, especially when the system breaks down

through countless forms of corruption. Also, our leaders are not technically “rulers,” the way kings are. In fact, our “ruler” is supposed to be the rule of law and “we the people.” So perhaps we justify things we should not because, after all, they aren’t actually our rulers, so we can say whatever we want of them. How are we to behave when it comes to the way we think and speak about those in government that are wicked? Let’s continue thinking about the Psalm.

We come next to David’s **maledictory oath**, the self-cursing that he asks God to bring upon him if he should be found guilty rather than innocent. If David is guilty of threefold evil, let him be threefold cursed:

- Let the enemy pursue my soul and overtake it
- let him trample my life to the ground
- [Let him] lay my glory in the dust (**Ps 7:5**).

It is a movement from **pursuit**, to being **caught** and trampled, to being **killed** and buried. David is actually telling God that he is so sure of his innocence in this matter

that he gives God covenantal permission (if you will) to kill him if he is not telling the truth. Remember, the covenant contained blessings and curses, be it Moses' covenant of the Kingly covenant. David is saying he is covenantally innocent of wrongdoing, and since Yahweh had entered into covenant with him, may this happen if he is lying or self-deceived.

This is a bold prayer, is it not? But it should strike a cord in our hearts of the importance of being innocent of the matters we questioned a moment ago. How ought Christians to behave towards their leaders today, in public or in private? Could you make this oath before God? There are very good reasons why so many martyrs throughout the centuries have gone silently like lambs to the slaughter in the face of tyrannical rulers. They would rather face their heavenly Father in glory than the curses he might bring upon them for treating him with contempt by showing disdain for those he has put into office.

Make no mistake, at the end of the day, who puts a king or a president in office, be he good or wicked? Us or God? Who raised up Cyrus? Who brought Nebuchadnezzar to the throne? How about Herod or Pilate of whom Jesus said,

“You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above” (John 19:11). What kind of a witness are Christians to the world when we act exactly the way they do regarding our politics? Is this what God has called us to?

Selah (vs. 5). The only use of this word which I have suggested means “pause” occurs here, at the self-curing of David. That has to be meaningful, and what it means is that we have got to be introspective here.

Arise in Judgment

Continuing on, we see David move now to a different theme. It is the theme of **justice**. Curiously, this is exactly what I think many of us want when we are complaining about politics. How does David go about seeing justice come forth? He calls for holy war. Will David be the vessel of justice? “**Arise, O LORD, in your anger; lift yourself up against the fury of my enemies; awake for me; you have appointed a judgment**” (Ps 7:6). He calls upon the LORD to rise against his enemies.

This verse teaches that **God has a kind of anger**. In **Psalm 2** God is angry and full of wrath. In **Psalm 6** the same thing

occurs. What is God's anger? Well, **first** I want to say that it is real. This is not pretend anger, not “**just kidding, I don't really get angry because I'm God.**” (The same thing repeats itself in **vs. 11**, “**God feels indignation every day**”). **Second**, his anger takes place not in his divine essence, but in the Persons. Persons get angry, not essences. Our confession says that the “**one**” “**God**” (speaking of Oneness, not Threeness) of “**himself**” (singular not plural) has an “**essence**” (again speaking of the Oneness, not the Threeness) that is “**without passions**” (**London Baptist Confession 2.1**). This means that the nature of God is not subject to external or even internal whims of emotion and fancy. **Third**, in whatever sense the persons (the LORD) gets angry, it is not in a sinful way as we so often get. We were already told not to let the sun go down on our anger (**Ps 4:4; Eph 4:26**). We are not to let our anger become sinful. God's anger never gets that way, for it is always governed by all of his attributes in their fullness: goodness, righteousness, wisdom, justice, holiness, kindness, and so on. Therefore, while there is an analogy of anger, it is not exactly like ours. God's anger is actually something David depends upon so that justice can be carried out.

He appeals then not only to God's attributes, but to **his promises about the future**—the day of judgment. We've seen this in **Psalm 1:5**. There is a day when God will judge all men for what they have done. Because God has a day of judgment, he also has “little days” of judgment. While not every wicked person will be punished in this life, some will.

So he continues his petition, “**Let the assembly of the peoples be gathered about you; over it return on high**” (7). Here, David is acknowledging who the real king of the peoples is. Not Saul. Not himself. The LORD. Yahweh is the King. Would we not do well in thinking about our subject today to remember this? The image is one of the peoples being gathered again after God has brought David to a peaceable possession of the kingdom of Israel, as **Calvin** puts it. He is not waiting for the Judgment Day assembly, but for one in his own lifetime, and soon. God is on the Throne as King and Judge. Only his divine court will render this verdict in David's favor. Only this Divine Warrior can win this battle for him, for he refuses to lift a finger himself to do it. He relies utterly and totally upon God, and in doing so reminds us all that if God comes to his aid, the nations of the earth will assemble around him in worship.

The next two verses thus ask God to come to a verdict on this matter. “The LORD judges the peoples; judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness and according to the integrity that is in me” (Ps 7:8). Again, not that David is claiming to be sinless in all things, but that in this matter, he is without guilt or guile.

“Oh, let the evil of the wicked come to an end, and may you establish the righteous—you who test the minds and hearts, O righteous God!” (9). This is absolute faith in one who is all powerful, all righteous, and all knowing. All three things are in the verse. The LORD is all powerful, because he alone can bring the wicked king and his accomplices to the end they deserve. He is all righteous, because the reason for doing this is to establish righteousness in Israel. So his power and his righteousness are working in tandem. God does not only demonstrate power because he is strong. He demonstrates it because he is righteous. Finally, he is all knowing. This God can test not merely the outward acts of a person, which is hard enough for you and I to do. He tests the minds and hearts. He knows the inner thoughts, motives, and reasons that David claims to be innocent and that Saul is said to be wicked.

If God knows such things, if God is actually righteous in his actions, and if he is truly all powerful, then why would we put our hopes in princes? Too many Christians act just this way with modern politics. This man will save us, he and he alone. “It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes” (Ps 118:9). “Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation” (Ps 146:3). If David can do this, how much more should we?

Let me conclude the first half of this Psalm with some observations. As you think about your own relation to your leaders, don't make a mistake. David is certainly complaining about corruption. But who does he take his complaint to? Again, when you live in a democratic republic, things are quite different than they were in the past. We have rights that are good in this country: the right to protest, the right to speak out against injustice publicly, the right to even call into question platforms and immoral leaders. But I want you to consider something. David was no peon peasant farmer in Israel. He was himself the anointed king of Israel! He had more rights than you will ever have. Yet, he could not take the throne until Saul was dead. But he did not try to hasten the day. If anyone had the

right, it was David, for he was anointed by God himself. But David didn't think he had that right.

While these are much more complex questions that we can answer this morning, and while I think good people may even disagree on how to answer them, what I want you to take away from this Psalm (not only thus far, but the whole thing) is **the content of David's prayer**, and then use it as you think about the coming months and years as our own government moves ever closer to dictatorship, pharaohs, Caesars, and kings.

God is sovereign. God is King. Not our rulers. They serve him. Period. No matter what they think to the contrary, God is King and that will never change. In fact, it was this very notion that made our country what it has always been. (This includes even the deists who acknowledged a higher Ruler than "Law"). Because God is sovereign, he is also the one who puts them in office, for his purposes. We do well to remember that. If tyrants come into office, what can they do about his sovereignty and where will they escape if they disregard it?

Thus, second, **God will take vengeance.** Whether tomorrow or today, God will set all things right. Because he

all powerful, all knowing, and all righteous. The God who rules heaven and earth will do what is right. He will defeat his enemies.

Third, **God's people must be righteous** in the face of evil leaders or rulers. This is what David has said up to this point. When David was not innocent, he often paid for it in one way or another. But in this matter, David would not touch the king. He would not curse the king. But he would call down covenant curses upon himself if he was guilty.

Fourth, in this light, **God's own people deserve (temporal) punishment** if they disregard him. I have thought for a very long time that the reason we are in the place we are in this country is not because of the pagans in it, but because of the Christians. Not just in lack of gospel understanding, but in our lack of moral standing in our society. As goes the church, so goes the nation.

Finally, **God is our refuge**. If all of these things are true, then the place we started is all the more important. David fled Saul. He tried to save his own life. He was not utterly passive. But his true refuge, the place of his faith, the reason for his actions, the hope of his life was in his God. This is the God he has prayed to as he presents his case before the High

Court of Heaven.

Cosmic Judge, Mighty Warrior

As we move to the second half of the Psalm, we will now see how our conclusions are all the more justified and important to remember. For now, David moves from petition to **confession**. From here on out, he is simply going to remind himself, in worship, of who his God is and what he does.

He sees God as two things in the second half of the Psalm. First, **God is a mighty warrior**. “**My shield is with God, who saves the upright in heart**” (Ps 7:10). “**Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God**” (Matt 5:8). Again, talking about what is on the inside of his heart, he now trusts by faith that God will fight for him. Warriors take their shields into battle. For David to give his shield to God is for David to let God fight this fight for him (cf. Ps 3:3; 5:12).

Second, he sees God (the Targum again has Memra) as “**a righteous judge ... who feels indignation every day**” (Ps 7:11). **Righteousness** is key to God’s judging. He is not a wicked judge. He does what is right. This doing what is right and holy is the context for his anger, as we have seen,

he does not let his anger get control of him (God can't do that). Rather, his anger is always tempered by his attribute of righteousness.

Nevertheless, the Warrior and Judge themes are in view together in the next few verses. David suddenly thinks about men. Which men? Saul? His enemies? Himself? All of the above. He is thinking about **repentance**, which as we saw is the theme of **Psalm 6**. “If a man does not repent, God will whet his sword; he has bent and readied his bow; he has prepared for him his deadly weapons, making his arrows fiery shafts” (**Ps 7:12-13**). If you are frightened about the upcoming elections, this verse ought to bring you back to reality. For these are truly frightening verses for anyone who has not repented. The images of a divine warrior from heaven having fiery arrows and a sharp sword that is coming straight after you, well if that will not bring you to your knees and make you turn to God, nothing will. But if you have turned to God, then these verses are a comfort in light of our questions today. For wicked rulers are those who have not repented, and what is God coming to do to them? And how much worse for leaders who feign Christianity to gain votes, while utterly mocking and blaspheming

everything it stands for. God, be merciful!

When candidates who aren't even official leaders yet brag about never asking God to forgive him for anything and yet claim to be Christians, woe to that nation. When other candidates are so absurdly evil that they don't even need to brag about such things yet also claim to be Christian, woe to that nation. When others who are official leaders claim to be Christian and yet mock everything that it means to be a Christian in their theology and practice and ethics, woe to that nation. Where is the repentance? The woes are already upon us, beloved!

So what exactly is the state of wicked people like this? What are they really like? David now describes the unrepentant ruler. “Behold, the wicked man conceives evil and is pregnant with mischief and gives birth to lies” (Ps 7:14). Another **three-fold image** that moves us from one state to another. This one uses the image of pregnancy, which is especially repugnant to a culture where men can't actually give birth (tongue firmly in cheek). **Conception**: evil is conceived by the wicked man. **Pregnancy**. The evil becomes mischief that grows and grows and grows. Until **birth**: every word they speak is lies.

Let me just put this as plainly as I can. It is astonishing to me that what Christians like Noah Webster said openly about character and morality, and even in our own nation we Christians actually believed not that long ago, suddenly seems to mean so little to so many. How are we to make sense of a supposed “lesser of two evils” in the face of this verse which speaks directly to anyone who has not repented, let alone runs around bragging about not repenting in the name of Jesus Christ! We must not lie to ourselves about the nature of human depravity. And we must not sugar coat it for the sake of pragmatism. Does not God’s word have anything to say to us about such things? Even though we live in this world and are called to engage in it, we are Christians first, members of a Heavenly Country—first. Sometimes I wonder if the martyrs who went to their deaths gladly and silently in the face of incomprehensible satanic evil would even recognize us, I shamefully speak to myself foremost.

Another image is given, this time following a similar line as David’s oath against himself. It is an extremely helpful image to remember when faced with hopelessness in a world of deranged, wicked rulers. The wicked “**makes a pit, digs it**

out, and falls into the hole that he has made” (15). Another threefold image. He **makes**: a pit. If these three line up with the previous three, his own evil is the pit he makes. He **digs**: his own mischief with his shovel. He **falls** into the hole: of his own lies. Rather than being enraged, perhaps we ought to be profoundly sorrowful for wicked people and engaged in prayer for their souls, for they are murdering themselves.

The thought completes, “**His mischief returns upon his own head, and on his own skull his violence descends**” (16). His mischief turns to violence. His wrath extends outward to others, but it only comes back to strike him in the head. This is the end of the wicked as we saw in the first two Psalms. This is David’s confession, his confidence that should king Saul continue to rule or even to kill him, that it will not go on forever. Saul will gain his reward for his evil, his deception, his depravity, his mischief, his treason, his blasphemy, his lies, his violence. He is digging his own grave, and the LORD stands above him sword in hand, arrows at the ready. And God answered, as Saul was struck down on the field of battle, but the man took his own life before the enemy could complete the job. An inglorious end to a rotten, weak and godless king.

The Christian's Response

So how are we to think and act in a political season such as ours? All I ask is that you let this Psalm work in your own heart as you consider your own answer to that question. I know some things for certain. We are to **behave blamelessly** in the face of evil. We are to trust that **God really is sovereign**. We are to realize that **wicked people are killing themselves**. We are to **take refuge in the God** who will save us. We are to **take our petitions to his throne** and **believe** that vengeance really does belong to him and that he will repay.

Instead of leading us to despair, our reflections today ought to lead us where they lead the good king—to worship. “**I will give to the LORD the thanks due to his righteousness, and I will sing praise to the name of the LORD, the Most High**” (Ps 7:17). He worships for two reasons. First, because **God is righteous**—a major theme of Psalm 7. Second, because of **his great name**. It is interesting to me that he uses the term **Elyon** here. My working theory is that this name is invoked mostly when the whole world is in view, for God is the Most High God everywhere, not just

in Israel.

Perhaps that is appropriate, in a conclusion to some difficult questions I've raised today. Our God rules heaven and earth. He is the Most High God. No one will ever depose him, for this is his very Name. Therefore, blessed be the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in God's church. God bless ... his people.⁸

8

Psalm 7

Superscript (1:1a)

- I. Petitions (1:1-10)
 - A. Petition for deliverance (1-5)
 1. Affirmation of trust and petition (1-2)
 - a. Trust (1)
 - b. Petition and reason (2)
 2. Purgatory oath (3-5)
 - a. Threefold conditions “if I have done this” (3-4)
 - i. Wrong in my hands (3)
 - ii. Repaid my friend with evil (4)
 - iii. Plundered my enemy without cause (4)
 - b. Threefold curse (5)
 - i. Let enemy pursue my soul and overtake it
 - ii. Let him trample my life to the ground
 - iii. Let him lay my glory in the dust. SELAH
 - B. Petition for justice (6-9)
 1. Please to engage in holy war (6-7)
 - a. Plea to rise against adversaries (6)
 - b. Plea to return over assembled (7)
 2. Plea for a verdict (8-9)
 - a. Plea to be vindicated (8)
 - b. Plea that disaster terminate wicked (9)
- II. Testimony: Most High executes poetic justice (11-17)
 - A. Cosmic Judge is righteous and a mighty warrior (10-13)
 1. God is a righteous judge (10-11)
 - a. God is a shield that defends innocent king (10)
 - b. God is filled with moral indignation (11)
 2. God is a mighty warrior (12-13)
 - a. His sword (12)
 - b. His flaming arrows (13)
 - B. Praise: Righteous Judge upholds justice in kind (14-17)
 1. Proverbs teaching poetic justice towards the “wicked man” (14-16)
 - a. His baby:
 - i. Conceives evil
 - ii. Is pregnant with mischief
 - iii. Gives birth to lies
 - b. His grave
 - i. Makes his own pit
 - ii. Digs it out
 - iii. Falls into his hole
 - c. His actions
 - i. His mischief returns upon his own head
 - ii. His violence descends upon his own skull
 2. Song of praise to Most High for his righteousness (17)
 - a. Because of his righteousness
 - b. Because of his Name: the Most High

“Israel has one king too many ... The innocent king lives by faith in God’s righteousness, and the wicked king and his army live by faith in human might and cunning.”⁹

⁹ Bruce K. Waltke, James M. Houston, and Erika Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Lament: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 83.