

# PSALM 35

David, in this psalm, appeals to the righteous Judge of heaven and earth against his enemies that hated and persecuted him. It is supposed that Saul and his party are the persons he means, for with them he had the greatest struggles.

**I.** He complains to God of the injuries they did him; they strove with him, fought against him (v. 1), persecuted him (v. 3), sought his ruin (v. 4, 7), accused him falsely (v. 11), abused him basely (v. 15, 16), and all his friends (v. 20), and triumphed over him, (v. 21, 25, 26).

**II.** He pleads his own innocency, that he never gave them any provocation (v. 7, 19), but, on the contrary, had studied to oblige them (v. 12-14).

**III.** He prays to God to protect and deliver him, and appear for him (v. 1, 2), to comfort him (v. 3), to be nigh to him and rescue him (v. 17, 22), to plead his cause (v. 23, 24), to defeat all the designs of his enemies against him (v. 3, 4), to disappoint their expectations of his fall (v. 19, 25, 26), and, lastly, to countenance all his friends, and encourage them (v. 27),

**IV.** He prophesies the destruction of his persecutors (v. 4-6, 8).

**V.** He promises himself that he shall yet see better days (v. 9, 10), and promises God that he will then attend him with his praises (v. 18, 28). In singing this psalm, and praying over it, we must take heed of applying it to any little peevish quarrels and enmities of our own, and of expressing by it any uncharitable revengeful resentments of injuries done to us; for Christ has taught us to forgive our enemies and not to pray against them, but to pray for them, as he did; but,

**1.** We may comfort ourselves with the testimony of our consciences concerning our innocency, with reference to those that are any way injurious to us, and with hopes that God will, in his own way and time, right us, and, in the mean time, support us.

**2.** We ought to apply it to the public enemies of Christ and his kingdom, typified by David and his kingdom, to resent the indignities done to Christ's honour, to pray to God to plead the

just and injured cause of Christianity and serious godliness, and to believe that God will, in due time, glorify his own name in the ruin of all the irreconcilable enemies of his church, that will not repent to give him glory.

## ~~181~~ PSALM 35:1-10

### PRAYER FOR DIVINE PROTECTION

*A psalm of David.*

In these verses we have,

**I.** David's representation of his case to God, setting forth the restless rage and malice of his persecutors. He was God's servant, expressly appointed by him to be what he was, followed his guidance, and aimed at his glory in the way of duty, had lived (as St. Paul speaks) *in all good conscience before God unto this day*; and yet there were those that strove with him, that did their utmost to oppose his advancement, and made all the interest they could against him; they fought against him (v. 1), not only undermined him closely and secretly, but openly avowed their opposition to him and set themselves to do him all the mischief they could. They persecuted him with an unwearied enmity, *sought after his soul* (v. 4), that is, his life, no less would satisfy their bloody minds; they aimed to disquiet his spirit and put that into disorder. Nor was it a sudden passion against him that they harboured, but inveterate malice: They *devised his hurt*, laid their heads together, and set their wits on work, not only to do him a mischief, but to find out ways and means to ruin him. They treated him, who was the greatest blessing of his country, as if he had been the curse and plague of it; they hunted him as a dangerous beast of prey; they digged a pit for him and laid a net in it, that they might have him at their mercy, v. 7. They took a great deal of pains in persecuting him, for they digged a pit (~~181~~ Psalm 7:15); and very close and crafty they were in carrying on their designs; the old serpent taught them subtlety: they hid their net from David and his friends; but in vain, for they could not hide it from God. And, *lastly*, he found himself an unequal match for them. His enemy, especially Saul, was *too strong for him* (v. 10), for he had the army at his command, and assumed to himself the sole power of making laws and giving judgment, attainted and condemned whom he pleased, carried not a sceptre, but a javelin, in his hand, to cast at any man that stood in his way;

such was the manner of the king, and all about him were compelled to do as he bade them, right or wrong. The king's word is a law, and every thing must be carried with a high hand; he has fields, and vineyards, and preferments, at his disposal, <sup>(1027)</sup>1 Samuel 22:7. but David is poor and needy, has nothing to make friends with, and therefore has none to take his part but men (as we say) of broken fortunes (<sup>(1027)</sup>1 Samuel 22:2); and therefore no marvel that Saul spoiled him of what little he had got and the interest he had made. If the kings of the earth set themselves against the Lord and his anointed, who can contend with them? Note, It is no new thing for the most righteous men, and the most righteous cause, to meet with many mighty and malicious enemies: Christ himself is striven with and fought against, and war is made upon the holy seed; and we are not to marvel at the matter: it is a fruit of the old enmity in the seed of the serpent against the seed of the woman.

**II.** His appeal to God concerning his integrity and the justice of his cause. If a fellow-subject had wronged him, he might have appealed to his prince, as St. Paul did to Caesar; but, when his prince wronged him, he appealed to his God, who is prince and Judge of the kings of the earth: *Plead my cause, O Lord!* v. 1. Note, A righteous cause may, with the greatest satisfaction imaginable, be laid before a righteous God, and referred to him to give judgment upon it; for he perfectly knows the merits of it, holds the balance exactly even, and with him there is no respect of persons. God knew that they were, without cause, his enemies, and that they had, without cause, digged pits for him, v. 7. Note, It will be a comfort to us, when men do us wrong, if our consciences can witness for us that we have never done them any. It was so to St. Paul. <sup>(425)</sup>Acts 25:10, *To the Jews have I done no wrong.* We are apt to justify our uneasiness at the injuries men do us by this, That we never gave them any cause to use us so; whereas this should, more than any thing, make us easy, for then we may the more confidently expect that God will plead our cause.

**III.** His prayer to God to manifest himself both for him and to him, in this trial.

**1.** For him. He prays that God would *fight against* his enemies, so as to disable them to hurt him, and defeat their designs against him (v. 1), that he would *take hold of shield and buckler*, for the Lord is a man of war (<sup>(1028)</sup>Exodus 15:3), and that he would *stand up for his help* (v. 2), for he had few that would stand up for him, and, if he had ever so many, they

would stand him in no stead without God. he prays that God would *stop their way* (v. 3), that they might not overtake him when he fled from them. This prayer we may put up against our persecutors, that God would restrain them and stop their way.

**2.** To him: “*Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation*; let me have inward comfort under all these outward troubles, to support my soul which they strike at. Let God be my salvation, not only my Saviour out of my present troubles, but my everlasting bliss. Let me have that salvation not only which he is the author of, but which consists in his favour; and let me know my interest in it; let me have the comfortable assurance of it in my own breast.” If God, by his Spirit, witness to our spirits that he is our salvation, we have enough, we need desire no more to make us happy; and this is a powerful support when men persecute us. If God be our friend, no matter who is our enemy.

**IV.** His prospect of the destruction of his enemies, which he prays for, not in malice or revenge. We find how patiently he bore Shimei's curses (*so let him curse, for the Lord has bidden him*); and we cannot suppose that he who was so meek in his conversation would give vent to any intemperate heat or passion in his devotion; but, by the spirit of prophecy, he foretells the just judgments of God that would come upon them for their great wickedness, their malice, cruelty, and perfidiousness, and especially the enmity to the counsels of God, the interests of religion, and that reformation which they knew David, if ever he had power in his hand, would be an instrument of. They seemed to be hardened in their sins, and to be of the number of those who have sinned unto death and are not to be prayed for, <sup><2076></sup>Jeremiah 7:16; 11:14; 14:11; <sup><156></sup>1 John 5:16. As for Saul himself, David, it is probable, knew that God had rejected him and had forbidden Samuel to mourn for him, <sup><901></sup>1 Samuel 16:1. And these predictions look further, and read the doom of the enemies of Christ and his kingdom, as appears by comparing <sup><519></sup>Romans 11:9, 10. David here prays, 1. Against his many enemies (v. 4-6): *Let them be confounded, etc.* Or, as Dr. Hammond reads it, *They shall be confounded, they shall be turned back*. This may be taken as a prayer for their repentance, for all penitents are put to shame for their sins and turned back from them. Or, if they were not brought to repentance, David prays that they might be defeated and disappointed in their designs against him and so put to shame. Though they should in some degree prevail, yet he foresees that it would be to their own ruin at last: *They shall be as chaff before the wind*,

so unable will wicked men be to stand before the judgments of God and so certainly will they be driven away by them, <sup><500></sup>Psalm 1:4. Their way shall be *dark and slippery, darkness and slipperiness* (so the margin reads it); the way of sinners is so, for they walk in darkness and in continual danger of falling into sin, into hell; and it will prove so at last, for *their foot shall slide in due time*, <sup><625></sup>Deuteronomy 32:35. But this is not the worst of it. Even chaff before the wind may perhaps be stopped, and find a place of rest, and, though the way be dark and slippery, it is possible that a man may keep his footing; but it is here foretold that the *angel of the Lord shall chase them* (v. 5) so that they shall find no rest, *shall persecute them* (v. 6) so that they cannot possibly escape the pit of destruction. As God's angels encamp against those that fight against him. They are the ministers of his justice, as well as of his mercy. Those that make God their enemy make all the holy angels their enemies.

**2.** Against his one mighty enemy (v. 8): *Let destruction come upon him*. It is probable that he means Saul, who laid snares for him and aimed at his destruction. David vowed that his hand should not be upon him; he would not be judge in his own cause. But, at the same time, he foretold that *the Lord would smite him* (<sup><900></sup>1 Samuel 26:10), and here that the net he had hidden should catch himself, and into *that very destruction he should fall*. This was remarkably fulfilled in the ruin of Saul; for he had laid a plot to make David *fall by the hand of the Philistines* (<sup><985></sup>1 Samuel 18:25), that was the net which he hid for him under pretence of doing him honour, and in that very net was he himself taken, for he fell by the hand of the Philistines when his day came to fall.

**V.** His prospect of his own deliverance, which, having committed his cause to God, he did not doubt of, v. 9, 10.

**1.** He hoped that he should have the comfort of it: "*My soul shall be joyful*, not in my own ease and safety, but *in the Lord* and in his favour, in his promise and *in his salvation* according to the promise." Joy in God and in his salvation is the only true, solid, satisfying joy. Those whose souls are sorrowful in the Lord, who sow in tears and sorrow after a godly sort, need not question but that in due time their souls shall be joyful in the Lord; for gladness is sown for them, and they shall at last *enter into the joy of their Lord*.

2. He promised that then God should have the glory of it (v. 10): *All my bones shall say, Lord, who is like unto thee?*

(1.) He will praise God with the whole man, with all that is within him, and with all the strength and vigour of his soul, intimated by his bones, which are within the body and are the strength of it.

(2.) He will praise him as one of peerless and unparalleled perfection. We cannot express how great and good God is, and therefore must praise him by acknowledging him to be a non-such. *Lord, who is like unto thee?* No such patron of oppressed innocency, no such punisher of triumphant tyranny. The formation of our bones so wonderfully, so curiously (<sup>2115</sup>Ecclesiastes 11:5; <sup>4336</sup>Psalm 139:16), the serviceableness of our bones, and the preservation of them, and especially the life which, at the resurrection, shall be breathed upon the dry bones and make them flourish as a herb, oblige every bone in our bodies, if it could speak, to say, *Lord, who is like unto thee?* and willingly to undergo any services or sufferings for him.

## ~~4336~~ PSALM 35:11-16

### SORROWFUL COMPLAINTS

Two very wicked things David here lays to the charge of his enemies, to make good his appeal to God against them — perjury and ingratitude.

I. Perjury, v. 11. When Saul would have David attainted of treason, in order to his being outlawed, perhaps he did it with the formalities of a legal prosecution, produced witnesses who swore some treasonable words or overt acts against him, and he being not present to clear himself (or, if he was, it was all the same), Saul adjudged him a traitor. This he complains of here as the highest piece of injustice imaginable: *False witnesses did rise up, who would swear anything; they laid to my charge things that I knew not, nor ever thought of.* See how much the honours, estates, liberties, and lives, even of the best men, lie at the mercy of the worst, against whose false oaths innocency itself is no fence; and what reason we have to acknowledge with thankfulness the hold God has of the consciences even of bad men, to which it is owing that there is not more mischief done in that way than is. This instance of the wrong done to

David was typical, and had its accomplishment in the Son of David, against whom false witnesses did arise, <sup>4266</sup>Matthew 26:60. If we be at any time charged with what we are innocent of let us not think it strange, as though some new thing happened to us; so persecuted they the prophets, even the great prophet.

**II.** Ingratitude. Call a man ungrateful and you can call him no worse. This was the character of David's enemies (v. 12): *They rewarded me evil for good.* A great deal of good service he had done to his king, witness his harp, witness Goliath's sword, witness the foreskins of the Philistines; and yet his king vowed his death, and his country was made too hot for him. This is *to the spoiling of his soul*; this base unkind usage robs him of his comfort, and cuts him to the heart, more than any thing else. Nay, he had deserved well not only of the public in general, but of those particular persons that were now most bitter against him. Probably it was then well known whom he meant; it may be Saul himself for one, whom he was sent for to attend upon when he was melancholy and ill, and to whom he was serviceable to drive away the evil spirit, not with his harp, but with his prayers; to others of the courtiers, it is likely, he had shown this respect, while he lived at court, who now were, of all others, most abusive to him. Herein he was a type of Christ, to whom this wicked world was very ungrateful. <sup>4302</sup>John 10:32. *Many good works have I shown you from my Father; for which of those do you stone me?* David here shows,

**1.** How tenderly, and with what a cordial affection, he had behaved towards them in their afflictions (v. 13, 14): *They were sick.* Note, Even the palaces and courts of princes are not exempt from the jurisdiction of death and the visitation of sickness. Now when these people were sick,

**(1.)** David mourned for them and sympathized with them in their grief. They were not related to him; he was under no obligations to them; he would lose nothing by their death, but perhaps be a gainer by it; and yet he behaved himself as though they had been his nearest relations, purely from a principle of compassion and humanity. David was a man of war, and of a bold stout spirit, and yet was thus susceptible of the impressions of sympathy, forgot the bravery of the hero, and seemed wholly made up of love and pity; it was a rare composition of hardiness and tenderness, courage and compassion, in the same breast. Observe, He mourned as for a brother or mother, which intimates that it is our duty, and well becomes

us, to lay to heart the sickness, and sorrow, and death of our near relations. Those that do not are justly stigmatized as without natural affection.

(2.) He prayed for them. He discovered not only the tender affection of a man, but the pious affection of a saint. He was concerned for their precious souls, and, since he helped them with his prayers to God for mercy and grace; and the prayers of one who had so great an interest in heaven were of more value than perhaps they knew or considered. With his prayers he joined humiliation and self-affliction, both in his diet (he fasted, at least from pleasant bread) and in his dress; he clothed himself with sackcloth, thus expressing his grief, not only for their affliction, but for their sin; for this was the guise and practice of a penitent. We ought to mourn for the sins of those that do not mourn for them themselves. His fasting also put an edge upon his praying, and was an expression of the fervour of it; he was so intent in his devotions that he had no appetite to meat, nor would allow himself time for eating: “*My prayer returned into my own bosom*; I had the comfort of having done my duty, and of having approved myself a loving neighbour, though I could not thereby win upon them nor make them my friends.” We shall not lose by the good offices we have done to any, how ungrateful soever they are; for our rejoicing will be this, *the testimony of our conscience*.

2. How basely and insolently and with what a brutish enmity, and worse than brutish, they had behaved towards him (v. 15, 16); *In my adversity they rejoiced*. When he fell under the frowns of Saul, was banished the court, and persecuted as a criminal, they were pleased, were glad at his calamities, and got together in their drunken clubs to make themselves and one another merry with the disgrace of this great favourite. Well, might he call them *abjects*, for nothing could be more vile and sordid than to triumph in the fall of a man of such unstained honour and consummate virtue. But this was not all.

(1.) They tore him, rent his good name without mercy, said all the ill they could of him and fastened upon him all the reproach their cursed wit and malice could reach to.

(2.) *They gnashed upon him with their teeth*; they never spoke of him but with the greatest indignation imaginable, as those that would have eaten him up if they could. David was the fool in the play, and his disappointment all the table-talk of the hypocritical mockers at feasts; it was the song of the drunkards. The comedians, who may fitly be called

*hypocritical mockers* (for which does a hypocrite signify but a stage-player?) and whose comedies, it is likely, were acted at feasts and balls, chose David for their subject, bantered and abused him, while the auditory, in token of their agreement with the plot, hummed, and *gnashed upon him with their teeth*. Such has often been the hard fate of the best of men. The apostles were made a spectacle to the world. David was looked upon with ill-will for no other reason than because he was caressed by the people. It is a vexation of spirit which attends even a right work that *for this a man is envied of his neighbour*, <sup><2004></sup>Ecclesiastes 4:4. And *who can stand before envy?* <sup><3074></sup>Proverbs 27:4.

## <1817> PSALM 35:17-28

### DAVID'S APPEAL AND PRAYER TO GOD

In these verses, as before,

**I.** David describes the great injustice, malice, and insolence, of his persecutors, pleading this with God as a reason why he should protect him from them and appear against them.

**1.** They were very unrighteous; they were his enemies wrongfully, for he never gave them any provocation: *They hated him without a cause*; nay, for that for which they ought rather to have loved and honoured him. This is quoted, with application to Christ, and is said to be fulfilled in him. <sup><6155></sup>John 15:25, *They hated me without cause*.

**2.** They were very rude; they could not find in their hearts to show him common civility: *They speak not peace*; if they met him, they had not the good manners to give him the time of day; like Joseph's brethren, that could not *speak peaceably to him*, <sup><01504></sup>Genesis 37:4.

**3.** They were very proud and scornful (v. 21): *They opened their mouth wide against me*; they shouted and huzzaed when they saw his fall; they bawled after him when he was forced to quit the court, "Aha! aha! this is the day we longed to see."

**4.** They were very barbarous and base, for they trampled upon him when he was down, rejoiced at his hurt, and *magnified themselves against him*, v. 26. *Turba Remi sequitur fortunam, ut semper, et odit damnatos* — *The*

Roman crowd, varying their opinions with every turn of fortune, are sure to execrate the fallen. Thus, when the Son of David was run upon by the rulers, the people cried, *Crucify him, crucify him.*

**5.** They set themselves against all the sober good people that adhered to David (v. 20): *They devised deceitful matters, to trepan and ruin those that were quiet in the land.* Note,

**(1.)** It is the character of the godly in the land that they are the quiet in the land, that they live in all dutiful subjection to government and governors, in the Lord, and endeavour, as much as in them lies, to live peaceably with all men, however they may have been misrepresented as enemies to Caesar and hurtful to kings and provinces. *I am for peace,* ~~100~~ Psalm 120:7.

**(2.)** Though the people of God are, and study to be, a quiet people, yet it has been the common practice of their enemies to devise deceitful matters against them. All the hellish arts of malice and falsehood are made use of to render them odious or despicable; their words and actions are misconstrued, even that which they abhor is fathered upon them, laws are made to ensnare them (~~204~~ Daniel 6:4, etc.), and all to ruin them and root them out. Those that hated David thought scorn, like Haman, to lay hands on him alone, but contrived to involve all the religious people of the land in the same ruin with him.

**II.** He appeals to God against them, the *God to whom vengeance belongs*, appeals to his knowledge (v. 22): *This thou hast seen.* They had falsely accused him, but God, who knows all things, knew that he did not falsely accuse them, nor make them worse than really they were. They had carried on their plots against him with a great degree of secrecy (v. 15): “I knew it not, till long after, when they themselves gloried in it; but thy eye was upon them in their close cabals and thou art a witness of all they have said and done against me and thy people.” He appeals to God's justice: *Awake to my judgment, even to my cause,* and let it have a hearing at thy bar, v. 23. “*Judge me, O Lord my God!* pass sentence upon this appeal, *according to the righteousness* of thy nature and government,” v. 24. See this explained by Solomon, ~~103~~ 1 Kings 7:31, 32. When thou art appealed to, *hear in heaven, and judge, by condemning the wicked and justifying the righteous.*

**III.** He prays earnestly to God to appear graciously for him and his friends, against his and their enemies, that by his providence the struggle

might issue to the honour and comfort of David and to the conviction and confusion of his persecutors.

**1.** He prays that God would act for him, and not stand by as a spectator (v. 17): “*Lord, how long wilt thou look on? How long wilt thou connive at the wickedness of the wicked? Rescue my soul from the destructions they are plotting against it; rescue my darling, my only one, from the lions. My soul is my only one, and therefore the greater is the shame if I neglect it and the greater the loss if I lose it: it is my only one, and therefore ought to be my darling, ought to be carefully protected and provided for. It is my soul that is in danger; Lord, rescue it. It does, in a peculiar manner, belong to the Father of spirits, therefore claim thy own; it is thine, save it. Lord, keep not silence, as if thou didst consent to what is done against me! Lord, be not far from me* (v. 22), as if I were a stranger that thou wert not concerned for; let not me beheld afar off, as the proud are.”

**2.** He prays that his enemies might not have cause to rejoice (v. 19): *Let them not rejoice over me* (and again, v. 24); not so much because it would be a mortification to him to be trampled upon the abjects, as because it would turn to the dishonour of God and the reproach of his confidence in God. It would harden the hearts of his enemies in their wickedness and confirm them in their enmity to him, and would be a great discouragement to all the pious Jews that were friends to his righteous cause. He prays that he might never be in such imminent danger as that they should *say in their hearts, Ah! so would we have it* (v. 25), much more that he might not be reduced to such extremity that they should say, *We have swallowed him up*; for then they will reflect upon God himself. But, on the contrary, that they might be *ashamed and brought to confusion together* (v. 26, as before, v. 4); he desires that his innocency might be so cleared that they might be ashamed of the calumnies with which they had loaded him, that his interest might be so confirmed that they might be ashamed of their designs against him and their expectations of his ruin, that they might either be brought to that shame which would be a step towards their reformation or that that might be their portion which would be their everlasting misery.

**3.** He prays that his friends might have cause to rejoice and give glory to God, v. 27. Notwithstanding the arts that were used to blacken David, and make him odious, and to frighten people from owning him, there were

some that favoured his righteous cause, that knew he was wronged and bore a good affection to him; and he prays for them,

**(1.)** That they might rejoice with him in his joys. It is a great pleasure to all that are good to see an honest man, and an honest cause, prevail and prosper; and those that heartily espouse the interests of God's people, and are willing to take their lot with them even when they are run down and trampled upon, shall in due time shout for joy and be glad, for the righteous cause will at length be a victorious cause.

**(2.)** That they might join with him in his praises: *Let them say continually, The Lord be magnified*, by us and others, *who hath pleasure in the prosperity of his servant.* Note,

**[1.]** The great God has pleasure in this prosperity of good people, not only of his family, the church in general, but of every particular servant in his family. He has pleasure in the prosperity both of their temporal and of their spiritual affairs, and delights not in their griefs; for he does not afflict willingly; and we ought therefore to have pleasure in their prosperity, and not to envy it.

**[2.]** When God in his providence shows his good-will to the prosperity of his servants, and the pleasure he takes in it, we ought to acknowledge it with thankfulness, to his praise, and to say, *The Lord be magnified.*

**IV.** The mercy he hoped to win by prayer he promises to wear with praise: *"I will give thee thanks, as the author of my deliverance (v. 18), and my tongue shall speak of thy righteousness, the justice of thy judgments and the equity of all thy dispensations;"* and this,

**1.** Publicly, as one that took a pleasure in owning his obligations to his God, so far was he from being ashamed of them. he will do it in the great congregation, and among much people, that God might be honoured and many edified.

**2.** Constantly. he will speak God's praise *every day* (so it may be read) and *all the day long*; for it is a subject that will never be exhausted, no, not by the endless praises of saints and angels.