

Psalm 35 – Plead My Cause! (Part 1 of 3)

Introduction – Psalm 35 is an imprecatory psalm. This means that the psalmist prayed to God to punish his enemies. There are also national imprecatory psalms like Psalm 137. Imprecatory means “to call down an evil or a curse.” This is something that Christians are afraid of doing today because they understand this to be wrong and unloving, for they think the believer is only to love and not curse! How could this be true when the psalmists in the 150 psalms uttered imprecatory psalms a number of times. The range of the number of imprecatory psalms is between 6 and 38. Some commentators consider a psalm as imprecatory as long as it has one imprecatory verse in the entire psalm; whereas others would consider the main thrust of the whole psalm as imprecatory before they call it an imprecatory psalm. That is why there is no consensus on the final number.

However, Psalm 35 is definitely an imprecatory psalm as the content of the imprecation is rather substantial. This psalm was written by David. His enemies were many, and that is to put it mildly. Not only were the enemies numerous, but they were also very powerful. They were kings who wanted David killed! Serving the LORD by obeying Him and living a God-given purpose life in light of the Word of God will result in persecution. This is also true today in New Testament times. It will not change. It will end when the LORD Jesus Christ returns. Jesus says in *Philippians 1:28-29* “*And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God. 29 For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.*”

What ought to be the mind and heart of the believer before God in relation to the persecution that will surely come? David shared with us in Psalm 35 how he endured intense persecution! He asked the LORD to plead His cause!

I. **The Plea for PROTECTION (vs. 1-3)** – The verb “plead” means “to have a controversy.” This is not a simple request for God’s intervention. David was making a request within a courtroom scene. Basically, he asked God to judge him and his enemies inside a court room. David was the defendant and his enemies were the plaintiffs. The latter were attacking him and David declared before his Judge that all their attacks were unfounded and they must cease! He was innocent. Using synonymous parallelism, David drove home his point by asking for the LORD’s direct intervention to deliver him! David began by using an imperative, not so much to command God but to emphasize the urgency of his dire situation to Him. He pleaded for God to come to his help now. It was becoming very unbearable and it was beyond his ability to endure the emotional and physical strain. David was about to be crushed under the heavy load! The courtroom situation was possible only when a prior covenant has been made. Based upon the covenant David had with his LORD (in terms of salvation and witness), David used the covenantal name “LORD” to plead for help, to stand with him against his enemies!

David called the plaintiffs, “the ones who strive with me.” It is interesting to note here that the verb for “plead” and “strive” is the same. In the second line of verse 1, David used the same verb “fight” twice as well! The same sounding verbs were meant to emphasize the intensity of the attackers. Strive versus strive coupled with fight versus fight. It is the repetitive nature of the verbs that gives us this understanding. David was alone and was not able to handle what his enemies were attacking him with. David was on this earth doing the LORD’s will. For example, he did not ask to be king but God chose him to be the next king of Israel. The LORD’s call for David caused King Saul to hate David with a murderous rage! David was a happy “nobody” minding his father’s sheep in the little town of Bethlehem, as an obedient child of God. He did not ask to be thrust into the limelight and be the next king of Israel! But the LORD chose him. His life was turned upside down soon after that! The normalcy that David grew up with in the little town of Bethlehem disappeared like the morning dew when the heart of his calling i.e. to be the next king of Israel, came to the fore and was noticed by the unregenerate and carnal King Saul. David needed the LORD’s help in order for the LORD’s purpose in his life to be fulfilled!

He pleaded his cause before his LORD!

Verse 2 (synthetic parallelism) – The manner in which David cried to his LORD to deliver and protect him was like crying to a soldier for help. He asked the LORD to take hold of shield and buckler. The verb “take hold” means “to seize.” Its imperative construction means to urgently seize. It describes a strong grip onto something in one’s hand. In this context it was a shield, i.e. a small shield that provided immediate protection over the body. A buckler was a larger prickly shield for the outer protection which is the first defence. David cried for total and complete protection from the LORD. If the enemies were able to penetrate through the first defence, let them not penetrate through the second. Of course, the LORD does not require any shields to protect his servants. These were terms used by David to cry to the LORD for complete and total protection from the incessant fiery darts of his enemies.

He also urgently asked the LORD to stand up to help him. To sit means there is still time as the danger is not yet imminent. However, to stand is a sign of readiness as the enemies are very near. David needed the LORD’S help urgently to protect him from all harm and hurt so that he could complete the purpose that the LORD had set for him. If his enemies managed to kill him before his duties to the LORD were completed, then the LORD’s plan for David’s life would have been jeopardised. David was not asking because he feared or was afraid to die. He dared to face Goliath and defeated Goliath! This was a spiritual struggle that was far more difficult to face than any Goliath! One stone brought down Goliath! David must not be forced to disobey God and His holy Word in the course of getting himself out of trouble! That was why he told himself and all his men who followed him that no one was permitted to touch, i.e. kill or hurt the LORD’s anointed and be guiltless! To touch the LORD’s anointed

is the same as going against the LORD Himself! That was why David cried to the LORD for intervention and assistance, to stand with the shield and buckler to defend him!

Verse 3 (synthetic parallelism) – From defence to attack! This is imprecation against the enemies! David needed assurance from the LORD as well and not just intervention and deliverance. He used the verb “draw out” in the imperative to mean “to empty and keep it empty”. This means to take the spear out of its sheath, or wherever the spear was kept, and do not put it back, and stop his enemies from attacking him. For the first time, David cried to the LORD to be offensive in his defence. The shield in verse 2 was for protection and the spear in verse 3 was for attack! David asked the LORD to stand in the way of his enemies so that they could not progress any further to attack him! Do not even let them come near me, was David’s cry of help to the LORD! The verb “persecute” has the idea of running after in hot pursuit! David’s enemies would not leave him alone. David was not after them but they were after him. Their attack was incessant. They would not stop until they had apprehended him and killed him! David urgently requested his LORD to stand in the way to put an end to his enemies for their evil and dastardly deeds.

David asked the LORD to give him assurance by saying to his soul that He was David’s salvation. The LORD would surely come in His time. This is the inner assurance that all God’s servants need throughout the ages whenever they are faced with enemies whose aim is to take the peace of God from their hearts through intimidation and threats and hurt! David wanted the LORD to stop them if they would not stop on their own! David was at breaking point but not broken yet! This was the threat that David faced as seen in the use of the imperatives in these three verses!

II. **The Plea for RETRIBUTION (vs. 4-8)** –The precise desire of David against his enemies was now expressed! He wanted the LORD to confound them. The verb “confound” means “to be disappointed by delaying them.” This is in the jussive which is an imperative in the third person. Again, to continue with the urgency, David appealed by means of an imperative. The next verb “put to shame” has the literal meaning of putting to shame and to confound but in this instance it has the idea of “hurting” with the process of shaming them. Let the David’s enemies, who wanted to hurt him, be hurt by God in return! This is the thrust of verse 4a. The basis and reason for this is divine equal justice. He was not asking the LORD to over or under punish but to be just in His justice against his enemies. David was helpless to do anything against his enemies who were powerful men. For example, King Saul was above the law, for he was the law. He did not fear God or the prophets of God like Samuel who rebuked him. He did what was right in his own eyes like most of the Israelites in his time, which was the period of judges. King Saul was no different. In fact, he was worse because he did so as king and with all his kingly power behind his attack against David. David was completely helpless against such a powerful enemy who not only had an army behind him but also the people of Israel whom he threatened into obedience! The only Person who

could help David was the LORD God of Israel! David cried for justice and not personal vengeance! All David wanted to do was God's will! He was persecuted for this spiritual and divine purpose!

Using synonymous parallelism, David drove home the urgency of his plea to his LORD for divine justice by repeating the same request but using different words. He asked the LORD to turn them back and make them feel ashamed by what they were doing in plotting against David. These enemies of David were plotting like a man weaving a tapestry of destruction to bring him down and stop him from doing God's will.

Verse 5 (Emblematic parallelism) – David wanted his enemies to be like chaff before the wind! Chaff is the husk of grain that is useless and unwanted! The urgency of this desire is seen in his use of the jussive again, like in verse 4. Every farmer would remove the chaff from their harvest. They did so by going to the top of a hill to catch the wind that often blows across the plains. They would stand with the wind to their left or right so that when they shake and throw the harvest of grain into the air, the chaff would be loosened from the grain. Then the wind would blow the chaff away leaving the heavier and denser grain to fall back onto the tray. David asked the LORD to do the same to his enemies. These were the unwanted individuals in society whose agenda was to thwart the will of God in His servants' lives. Let them be blown away like unwanted chaff! The enemies of God's servants need to take note of this truth! Whenever they hinder and attack God's servants, regardless of their claim of righteous motives, they are deceiving themselves. Ignorance is no excuse before God! They are like the chaff that will be blown away! This means that God will deal with them severely.

David cried to the LORD to call the angel of the LORD, who is Christ, to chase them off. The angel of the LORD will chase, i.e. run them to the ground and cast them out! The emblematic parallelism used here is also a synonymous parallelism whereby the emblem describes what David asked in verse 5b. Get them away from David's life so that their evil deeds would not bother David anymore! Out of sight and out of mind! There are many of such enemies in the believer's life. He needs to come into contact with them at least once in his lifetime, and it would be once too many! These are pests who come in the guise of a Christian to deceive the naive and gullible. They will hurt and harm the servants of God by damaging their reputation and ministry. But they fail to realize that they are fighting against God. That is why God's servants who are under attack must turn to God and pray for the LORD's justice and intervention. These enemies will be like the chaff and easily blown away by the LORD, in His time. Remain steadfast and be faithful to the end and do not be afraid. Keep on believing and see the deliverance of the LORD just like David did.

Verse 6 (Emblematic parallelism) – David's emphasis in this verse is slightly different from the previous verse. Again he used the jussive but this time his request was for the angel of the LORD to darken their way so that they will not be able to fulfil what their evil minds

planned to do against David. They will be confounded and make foolish decisions. Not only that, David pleaded with the LORD to cause them to slip and fall! This was to prevent the murderous desires of his enemies from coming to pass. When their way is darkened they will not be able to see what they plan to do and to whom. Regardless of how cunning they are, they will be rendered useless by the LORD. They will be like blind men trying to run a race! They will not be able to see the slippery slope in front of them, and they will fall and not rise to carry out their dastardly deeds!

Let the angel of the LORD, i.e. the Lord Jesus Christ, persecute them. This verb “persecute” is the same one David used in verse 3. He wanted the Lord Jesus Christ to pursue his enemies the same way they hounded and pursued after him. Again, this is crying to the LORD for just retribution against his enemies. This is a cry for divine justice. David was not taking matters into his own hands like a sinful man taking revenge. He was appealing and pleading to his LORD to help him and bring justice upon the earth, especially David’s life!

Verse 7 (synonymous parallelism) – Asking God for help is not simply based upon a personal covenantal relationship but upon truth and righteousness. Children of the living God relate to God in not the same way that earthly children relate to their powerful earthly fathers whereby favours and protection are demanded based upon the blood relationship. When God’s children are in the wrong, do not expect God to help them in their sin. God Himself will chastise them because He loves them. David did not ask God for help based upon this relationship but upon righteousness. He declared that “without cause have they hid for me their net in a pit.” David did not do anything wrong to deserve these evil attacks. To lay a net in a pit and hiding it, waiting for David to fall in, was diabolical. These were men who used evil tactics like hypocrisy and carnal friendships to snare God’s servants. They pretended to be David’s friends. They used their wisdom to get close to David so that they could become his counsellors. These were men who won David’s trust, especially in times of great distress. One’s secrets were known to these men. Then when the time was ripe and the opportunity presented itself, they would strike like a cobra and kill! David had a great and clever counsellor called Ahithophel! He betrayed David and taught David’s rebellious son, Absalom, how to trap and kill David. There are many such evil “servants” in churches today. They enter into the church as members, pretending to be one of the believers. They worm their way into the leadership by their smooth oily tongue. With flattery, they rise to positions of power and when the time is ripe, they would do like Ahithophel and strike like a deadly serpent!

Repeating the same phrase “without cause” for emphasis regarding his innocence before God, David said that they “have digged for his soul.” The word “dig” means “to pry into.” Like a man digging for treasure, they will dig and dig and will not stop until they find and catch hold of David’s soul!

Verse 8 (synthetic parallelism) – David again pleaded for divine equitable justice. His enemies wanted destruction to fall upon him unawares, and so David asked his LORD to catch his enemies unawares! They could not escape. They would face the wrath of God and not His chastisement, for they were not God's children. God's children will not deliberately hinder God's work and attempt to kill by using lies and deception! These are the tactics of the evil one, not God! The father of these evil ones is the Devil! May they fall into the same net that they hid to trap David! This is not idle talk to a dead idol! These are genuine biblical appeals that often happen, for David cried to the one living and true God whose ears are always inclined to hear the cries of his children! Remember how Haman was hung on the gallows that he built for God's servant Mordecai!

David said to his LORD to let them fall into the same destruction. Let their lives be destroyed. He knew that these evil men were bent on destruction, and would not repent and change. Their obsession to kill him had become so great that they already crossed the line of no return! Pharaoh could only harden his heart so many times, for from the moment he crossed the line, God hardened his heart and there was no way he would ever repent of his sin regardless of how severe the plague of God was! There are many of such evil people today who are so obsessed with destroying God's servants that they become blind to their own sin. The scary truth is that they really and sincerely think that they are doing God's work when they are actually doing the work of the evil one. The methods they employ are lying and deception! These are the tools of the devil which only the followers of the devil would use! But they cannot see, for their eyes have been blinded even though everyone around them is able to see so clearly. This kind of spiritual blindness is frightening! They will be destroyed by the LORD in due course! David would be delivered in God's time. King Saul soon died in battle, killed by the Philistines!

God's servants must not be afraid to do what is right. God will take care of them no matter how powerful and evil and cunning their enemies may seem. God is always in sovereign control. They must ensure that they walk in the path of truth and righteousness at all times, according to Holy Scriptures!

[To be continued]