

An Exegetical Analysis of Psalm 55

Aaron Murray

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I. Introduction

What are the benefits that a believer has in Christ? Namely, the benefits a believer has in Christ is his election, calling, regeneration, justification, adoption, faith, sanctification, and glorification. While the believer deeply cherishes all these vertical truths, there are horizontal benefits as well, namely, the communion of the saints. The spiritual family we are adopted into is an immense joy to the Christian.

The camaraderie between two brothers in Christ is an indescribably beauty. Being able to share your heart with them, pray with them, and worship the Lord with them is something an unbeliever cannot understand. There is a communion that all believers share with one another. But there are some saints that share a deeper and fuller friendship than they do with others. This close friendship is what makes apostasy so painful to the faithful.

Psalms 55 is a Psalm expressing the great pain of betrayal that a believer feels when a close friend walks away from everything that they once shared. This is one of the few Psalms¹ where the Psalmist expresses the great anguish he feels when a close companion betrays God and his covenant people. Ultimately, the betrayer in Psalm 55 is a type of Judas, the great betrayer.

This Psalm is important for God's people because it gives them insight into the emotions of Jesus Christ when he is brutally betrayed by a tender kiss on the cheek. Jesus can sympathize with his people when their close companion walks away from the church. Psalm 55 gives the believer words to express their pain as they cast the burdens upon the Lord who cares for them. This paper will explore the historical, literary, exegetical, and applicable contributions of this Psalm for God's people.

¹ Psalm 41 is another Psalm lamenting the betrayal of a friend. Psalm 3 is also written during Absalom's betrayal.

II. Historical and Literary Analysis of Psalm 55

Authorship and Date of Psalm 55

Unlike many Psalms in the psalter, the title of this Psalm clearly indicates that David as the author of this Psalm. There are those who challenge the Davidic authorship of this Psalm saying that “All the other Pss. [sic] which bear the name of David were composed, in their original form, with a single exception, no later than the Middle Persian period.”² The only reason for this claim is pure conjecture and no substantive reason is given for rejecting David as the author of this Psalm.

The date of this Psalm is harder to pin down. Getting the date correct depends on the historical context in which the Psalm was written. Likely, this Psalm was written during the rebellion of Absalom.³ David was reigning in Jerusalem at this time. David reigned for thirty-three years in Jerusalem and seven years before that in Hebron.⁴ David was thirty years old when he began to reign as King over Israel.⁵ When David was anointed king by the prophet Samuel, the scriptures describe him as the youngest of all of Jesse’s boys.⁶ The Scriptures do not give an exact age but the scriptures say he was tending sheep which lends credence to the speculation that David was roughly ten to fifteen years old. It is hard to imagine a boy any younger than that tending to sheep by himself.

In his commentary on 1 Samuel, Gordon Keddie gives this date, 1100 B.C for the end of the time of the Judges.⁷ 1 Samuel is written during the transition from the rule of the Judges to

² S.R. Driver, A. Plummer, C.A. Briggs, *The International Critical Commentary: Psalms Vol I* (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1960), lxii.

³ More on this below.

⁴ ESV: 1 Chronicles 3:4.

⁵ ESV: 2 Samuel 5:4.

⁶ ESV: 1 Samuel 16:11.

⁷ Gordon Keddie, *Dawn of a Kingdom: The Message of 1 Samuel* (Hertfordshire: Evangelical Press, 1988), 17.

the rule of the Kings. Knowing that Hanna asks for a son at the beginning of 1 Samuel, and knowing that God grants her request, and working with Keddie's date, it is likely that Samuel was born sometime around 1099 B.C. It is hard to say how old Samuel was when he anointed David as king, but he was likely between the age of 30-50. If David was fifteen when he was anointed king, and then thirty when he began his rule in Hebron, then David was thirty-seven when he began to rule in Jerusalem.

It is impossible to state dogmatically the date of Psalm fifty-five, but Absalom was clearly old enough to lead a rebellion which means that his revolt must have taken place towards the middle portion of David's thirty-three-year reign in Jerusalem. With all this groundwork laid, a likely date for the writing of Psalm fifty-five is roughly in the 1040's – 1030's B.C.⁸

Historical Context of Psalm 55

As mentioned above, the historical context of Psalm fifty-five is likely inspired by the Absalomian rebellion.⁹ While Absalom's rebellion is the context of the Psalm, David's pain comes from the betrayal of Ahithophel. When David learns that Ahithophel has sided with Absalom, David prays this prayer, "O Lord, please turn the council of Ahithophel into foolishness."¹⁰ David says something very similar in Psalm 55:9, "Destroy, O Lord, divide their tongues." While the two prayers of imprecation are not identical, they are quite similar, which is one reason for thinking that in writing Psalm 55, David had Ahithophel's betrayal in mind.

⁸ This is an educated guess. As mentioned above, it is impossible to produce a specific date dogmatically.

⁹ Keil & Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Volume 5, Psalms* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, 2011), 381.

Arthur Clark, *Analytical Studies in the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1979), 149.

It is worth noting that not everyone agrees on the historical context of Psalm 55, for example see, Marvin Tate, *Word Biblical Commentary: Vol 20 Psalms 51-100* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999) 55.

¹⁰ ESV: 2 Samuel 15:31.

While the event of Absalom's takeover does not take place until 2 Samuel 15, the events leading up to the conspiracy go back to David's adultery with Bathsheba. In fact, one of the resulting consequences from David's adultery was prophesied in 2 Samuel 12:10-12.

It is worth noting, that at this point, David had six sons.¹¹ Amnon was the eldest son¹², Absalom was the third born son, and Tamar was their sister. In listing the names of the sons of David, the author of Chronicles goes out of his way to tell the reader who Tamar is, and what her relationship was to both Amnon and Absalom.

Tamar is described as a beautiful woman in 2 Samuel 13:1. It is in this chapter that the wicked events of Amnon are recounted. Amnon lusted after his sister and desired to be with her. He explains this desire to his cousin, Jonadab, who was a crafty man. Jonadab advises Amnon to feign sickness to get his sister to tend to his needs. Once he has her alone, he violently raped her and cast her out of his presence. When David found out about the rape of his daughter, by his son Amnon, he did nothing. David's inaction drove Absalom to take the matter of justice into his own hands.

After two years of waiting,¹³ Absalom invited all his brothers to a feast following the annual shearing of the sheep. There, he got his brother Amnon drunk, and murdered him for the defilement of his sister Tamar. Absalom did not return to his father, but fled and took refuge with his grandfather, Talmai, the king of Geshur.¹⁴ He spent the next three years of his life in exile.

Through the manipulative tactics of Joab, Absalom was invited back into Jerusalem, but not into the presence of his father. For two years Absalom waited to be invited back into the king's court. Once he was under the good graces of the king, Absalom began to build a following

¹¹ ESV: 1 Chronicles 3:1-4.

¹² As the eldest son, he was likely in line for the throne when David passed away.

¹³ As the saying goes, "Vengeance is best served cold."

¹⁴ ESV: 1 Chronicles 3:2.

for himself. He accrued a chariot and fifty men to serve as his entourage. With his men in tow, he would wait at the city gates to serve as a mock judge over the disputes of the people of Israel.

Absalom acted as a “gracious” judge of the people for four years. It was through this action that Absalom won the hearts and minds of the people of Israel. It was only after Absalom had the people on his side that he made his move for the throne. Absalom’s conspiracy was motivated by his frustration with his Father’s inaction over Amnon’s defilement of Tamar. His vengeance was eleven years in the making. Absalom’s motivation is fairly easy to pick up on, but why did Ahithophel side with Absalom and not David? To answer this question, the Bathsheba narrative must be addressed.

The adultery of David is a well-known story, so this paper will not recount all the details. What is of particular importance is understanding that Ahithophel’s motivation is tied directly to his relationship with Bathsheba. 2 Samuel 11:3 gives a brief biographical sketch of Bathsheba. When David inquires of Bathsheba he was told, “Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam?”¹⁵ Now that Eliam has been introduced as the father of Bathsheba, the following will seek to show who the father of Eliam was.

At the apex of Absalom’s rebellion, the scriptures say, “And while Absalom was offering sacrifices, he sent for *Ahithophel the Gilonite*, David’s counselor, from his city Giloh. And the conspiracy grew strong, and the people with Absalom kept increasing.”¹⁶ Later, Ahithophel is mentioned again in 2 Samuel 23:34 where David’s mighty men are listed. “Eliphelet the son of Ahasbia of Maacha, *Eliam the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite*,”¹⁷ Based on the title, “Gilonite,”

¹⁵ ESV: 2 Samuel 11:3b.

¹⁶ ESV: 2 Samuel 15:12. Emphasis mine.

¹⁷ ESV: 2 Samuel 23:34. Emphasis mine.

this is the same Ahithophel in both passages. What is interesting is that Ahithophel is described as the father of Eliam.

If Eliam is the son of Ahithophel and the father of Bathsheba, then Ahithophel is likely the grandfather of Bathsheba. While this cannot be proven that Ahithophel is indeed the grandfather of Bathsheba, it does seem quite likely that they were related. The only time the name Eliam occurs in Scripture is when Bathsheba's father is mentioned, and Ahithophel's son is mentioned. This fact alone should give the reader pause as they contemplate the relationship between Ahithophel, Eliam, and Bathsheba.

If Ahithophel is indeed Bathsheba's grandfather, this would shed light on why he chose to side with Absalom instead of David. Absalom held onto his bitterness for eleven years before acting on it, it is reasonable to think that Ahithophel held on to his bitterness for at least that long. It is possible that Ahithophel was waiting for an opportunity to take vengeance upon David for taking advantage of his granddaughter and having his grandson-in-law murdered.

Ahithophel was a trusted companion of David. Everything Ahithophel said, David trusted as much as he trusted the words of the Lord.¹⁸ With this background in mind, it adds to the emotion of David's words in Psalm 55:12-14, when he says,

12For it is not an enemy who taunts me — then I could bear it; it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me — then I could hide from him. 13But it is you, a man, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend. 14

One cannot help but feel the pain of betrayal as Ahithophel takes his vengeance upon David. All this time David thought Ahithophel was his trusted counselor only to find out his words were dripping with war and vengeance. It is possible that Ahithophel sided with Absalom because he was power hungry. Perhaps Ahithophel knew that he would have such an influence over Absalom

¹⁸ ESV: 2 Samuel 16:23.

that he would be the king behind the king. Regardless of his motivation, his betrayal of David was extremely painful.

Literary Analysis of Psalm 55

Psalm 55 finds itself in the middle of book two (42-72) of the Psalter. The Psalm could be classified as a Psalm of imprecation, lament, and trust.

Imprecation:

Verse 9 and 15 are prayers against the enemies of David. As has been noted above, verse nine is akin to David's prayer against Ahithophel in 2 Samuel 15:31. While David is praying against his enemies, he is praying that God would be consistent with his character. The following observations will show that David is praying God would suppress the Absalom/Ahithophel rebellion in the same way He suppressed other rebellions in the past.

In verse nine, David is praying that the Lord would divide his enemy's tongue. The Hebrew word, *בָּלַע*, (rendered as "divide" in the ESV) is a Piel imperative verb. It would be more accurate to render the word into English as "confuse." This is the same verb that is used in Genesis 11:7 when the Lord came down to see the construction of the Tower of Babel.

After the Lord had preserved Noah and his family from the flood, He gave them the Edenic Mandate to be fruitful and multiply and to fill the land and subdue it. Yet in the Babel narrative, humanity does not fill the land, they congregate into a singular location for the purpose of building a tower up to God to assert their authority over Him. It is at this point that the Lord "comes down" to *בָּלַע* (confuse) their language. What David is doing by evoking this curse on his enemies is he is praying that as the Lord ended one rebellion through the confusion of language, in like manner, He would end the Absalom/Ahithophel rebellion.

In verse 15 David pleads to the Lord that Sheol would swallow his enemies alive. Like the first imprecation, David is asking the Lord to suppress the rebellion in the same way he suppressed rebellions in the past. This time, David is referencing the rebellion of Korah in Numbers 30. Notice the parallel wording from Psalm 55:15 and Numbers 16:30.

Psalm 55:15 ESV	Let them go down to Sheol alive
Numbers 16:30 ESV	They go down alive into Sheol.
Psalm 55:16 ¹⁹ MT	יִרְדּוּ שְׂאוֹל סַגִּים כִּי־רָעוּת
Numbers 16:30 MT	אַתֶּם וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר לָהֶם וַיִּרְדּוּ סַגִּים שְׂאֵלָה

While the word order is slightly different, the same idea is in mind. David is asking God to deal with Ahithophel and Absalom in the same way that He dealt with Dathan and Abiram.

Praying imprecations is not a vindictive practice where the aggrieved pridefully prays for the destruction of those who have wronged him. Rather, prayers of imprecation are the believer praying for God’s righteous justice to be met out upon the wicked. David does not offer these imprecations because his pride has been wounded, he prays these imprecations asking the Lord to deal out justice against those who have usurped the Lord’s anointed. David is more concerned with God’s honor than with his own.

Lament:

The majority of the Psalm is filled with lament. Throughout the Psalm, David is voicing the deep anguish in his heart for the betrayal that has come from his son and close companion.

¹⁹ The Hebrew versification is different than the English because the first verse of the Hebrew is the title of the Psalm. Verse 16 in the Masoretic Text is the same as verse 15 in the English Text.

Verses 2, 3, 4, 5, and 12 are all expressions of lament. Each of these expressions of lament will be explored in more detail in the exegetical section of this paper.

Trust:

Even through David’s expressions of lament, he ultimately finds himself trusting in the sovereignty of the Lord. Verse 16-19 and 22-23 all express the trust that David has in God. At times it seems that David is a theological schizophrenic with his oscillation between lament and trust. Yet the structure of the Psalm shows that for every expression of lament and fear, there is an expression of rest and trust. The following chart demonstrates this point.

Verse 1 and 19a.	
V1 <u>David’s plea for God’s ear:</u> “Give ear to my prayer, O God, and hide not yourself from my plea for mercy!”	V19a, <u>God giving David His ear:</u> “God will give ear and humble them, He who is enthroned from of Old”
Verse 2 and 17	
V2 <u>David’s plea:</u> “Attend to me, and answer my; I am restless in my complaint, and I moan,”	V17 <u>God listens:</u> “Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he hears my voice.”
Verse 3 and 19b	
V3 <u>Sin against David</u> : “Because of the noise of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked. For they drop trouble upon me, and in anger they bear a grudge against me.”	V19b <u>Sin against God:</u> _ “Because they do not change and do not fear God.”
Verse 4-5 and 23	

<p>V4 <u>David's fear</u>: "Anguish, terrors, fear, trembling"</p>	<p>V23 <u>David's Assurance</u>: "Cast your burden on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved."</p>
<p>Verses 6-8 and 18.</p>	
<p>V6-8 <u>David's flight</u>: "And I say, 'Oh that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest; yes, I would wander far away; I would lodge in the wilderness; I would hurry to find shelter from the raging wind and tempest.'"</p>	<p>V18 <u>God's fortress</u>: "He redeems my soul in safety from the battle that I wage."</p>
<p>Verses 9-11,15 and 23a.</p>	
<p>V9-11,15 <u>David's Imprecations</u>: "Destroy oh Lord, divide their tongues; for I see violence and strife in the city. Day and night they go around it on its walls, and iniquity and trouble are within it; ruin is in its midst; oppression and fraud do not depart from its marketplace. (V15) Let death steal over them; let them go down to Sheol alive; for evil is in their dwelling place and in their hearts."</p>	<p>V23 <u>The Lord's deliverance</u>: "But you, O God, will cast them down into the pit of destruction; men of blood and treachery shall not live out half their days. But I will trust in you.</p>
<p>Verse 12-14 and 20-21.</p>	
<p>V12-14 <u>Perception of the friend</u>: "For it is not an enemy who taunts me— then I could bear it; it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me— then I could hide from him. But it is you, a man, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend. We used to take sweet counsel together; within God's house we walked in the throng."</p>	<p>V20-21 <u>Reality of the friend</u>: My companion stretched out his hand against his friends; he violated his covenant. His speech was smooth as butter, yet war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords.</p>
<p>Verse 16 and 23b.</p>	
<p>V16 <u>David's call</u>:</p>	<p>V23b <u>David's trust</u>:</p>

“But I call to God, and the LORD will save me.”	“But I will trust in you.”
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III. Exegetical Analysis of Psalm 55

Outline of Psalm 55:

- I. The Anguish of David: 1-8
 - 1. David’s Plea for Mercy: 1-2
 - 2. The Trouble of David’s Enemies: 3
 - 3. The Anguish and Terror of David: 4
 - 4. The Fear and Horror of David: 5
 - 5. The Desired Flight of David: 6-7
- II. The Anger of David: 9-15
 - 1. The First Curse of David: 9
 - 2. The Iniquity, Oppression, and Fraud of the Enemy: 10-11
 - 3. The Identity of the Enemy: 12-14
 - 4. The Second Curse of David: 15
- III. The Acceptance of David: 16-23
 - 1. The Lord Hears David’s Plea: 16-19
 - 2. The True Nature of David’s enemy: 20-21
 - 3. The Trust of David: 22-23b
 - 4. The Justice of the Lord: 23a

Verse One:²⁰

ESV ²¹	To the Choirmaster: With String Instruments. A Maskil of David.
MT ²²	לְמִנְצָחַ בְּנִגְיֹת מִשְׁכֵּיל לְדָוִד

²⁰ In the exegetical analysis section of the paper the versification will align with the Masoretic Text.

²¹ English Standard Version.

²² Masoretic Text.

לְמַנְצָחַם לְמִנְצָחַם (To the Choir master with stringed instruments) is in the Piel verb form indicating an intensive active. The word can be rendered as simply “direct,” but because it is in the Piel verb stem, the meaning is something like “master director” or, as most English translation render, “Choirmaster.” נְגִינָה with the “bet” preposition added to the beginning of the word, and with the plural, common, feminine ending added to the word, the rendering of the word is something like, “with much music,” or “with stringed instruments.”

מִשְׁכִּיל (Maskil) Is simply a term for making music. לְדָוִד (of David) With the Lamed preposition added to the front of the word, the meaning is simply “of David.” In full, the verse can be rendered “To the Master Director, with many instruments, a Maskil of David.”

Verse Two:

ESV	Give ear to my prayer, O God, and hide not yourself from my plea for mercy!
MT	הֲאִזְנֶינָה אֱלֹהִים תְּפִלְתִּי וְאַל־תִּתְעַלֵּם מִתַּחֲנֻנָּתִי

הֲאִזְנֶינָה (listen) is a Hiphil verb. The Hiphil verb connotes causative action. If this word were simply a Qal verb, the meaning would be “listened.” But because it is a Hiphil, the word “give” is added to the front of “listen.” A wooden rendering would be something like “give listen to” but that does not exactly roll off the tongue. Therefore, most English translation render this word in the more dynamic “give ear to.”

אֱלֹהִים is the word for God. David first uses the generic word for God. He will use the covenantal name “Yahweh” later, but at this point he uses Elohim. As the Psalm progresses David does use the more personal designation that God has given his people. This is not an indication that the Psalm was written by two different people, or groups of people. This is an

indication of David working through his pain and ultimately finding rest in his God who is his LORD.

תפלתו (prayer) This word is in the first person singular. David is not asking for God to listen to any prayer, but his prayer specifically.

ואל־תִּתְעַלֵּם (hide not yourself) This is a Hithpael²³ verb, it is an intensive reflexive. The verb is in the second person singular. The object of the verb is God, the one David is praying to. It is jussive²⁴ in its meaning, not necessarily its syntax. With the Vav and Alef Lamed prefix, the meaning can be rendered, “and do not hide yourself.” Notice the jussive aspect of David commanding God not to depart from him. It would be more appropriate to say that David is pleading that God does not hide himself rather than David commanding God not to hide himself.

מִתְחַנְּנִי (my plea) This is a first person common singular noun. Rather than David saying, “I plead” he is saying “my plea.” The final rendering of this verse is something like, “Give ear, God, to my prayer, and do not hide yourself from my pleading.”

Verse Three:

ESV	Attend to me, and answer me; I am restless in my complaint, and I moan,
MT	הַקְשִׁיבָה לִּי וַעֲנֵנִי אֲרִיד בְּשִׁיתִי וְאֶהְיֶמָה

הַקְשִׁיבָה (pay attention to me) This is a Hiphil imperative verb. The Qal rendering would be “incline.” But because it is a Hiphil imperative, the meaning has a more intense thrust to the word. The ESV translates this verb as “attend to me” but a rawer rendering of the verb would be “Pay attention to me!” The ESV maintains David’s regal dignity but the rendering “Pay

²³ Expresses reciprocating action.

²⁴ A Jussive is used to express indirect command.

attention to me!” expresses David’s child-like need of his God to notice the suffering that David is going through. לִי Follows הַקְשִׁיבָה which is where the “to me” comes from.

וַעֲנֵנִי (and answer) This verb is a Qal imperative. David is actively imploring the Lord to not only hear his plea for mercy, but to respond to him as well. David’s prayer is instructive to all believers who call on the name of the Lord in prayer. Yes, the Lord hears the prayers of his people, but the Christian is within his right to expect an answer from the Lord as well. Sometimes His answer will be “no,” but the Lord is pleased to answer the prayers of his people.

אָרִיד This is a Hiphil, imperfect, 1cs²⁵ verb. The word means “restless.” David is saying that he becomes restless as he waits on the Lord for an answer to his prayer. He is filled with anxious anticipation as he seeks the Lord in prayer.

בְּשִׁיתִי (complaint) This is a masculine singular noun. The word can mean “babble” or “complain.” With the Bet suffix fixed to the front on the word, it is David’s babbling that is in mind. The ESV renders this word “my complaint” but it seems more appropriate to render this word as, “my babbling” due to the following word.

וְאָהֲמָהּ (and I moan) This is a Hiphil, imperfect, cohortative, 1cs verb. “...the cohortative is used to express a wish, request, or command.”²⁶ Because the verb is cohortative the word is best translated as “let me moan.” Therefore, a translation of verse three could be rendered as, “Pay attention to me, answer me; I am restless in my babbling, let me murmur.” The reason for David’s murmuring is given in verse four.

Verse Four:

ESV	Because of the noise of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked. For they drop trouble upon me, and in anger they bear a grudge against me.
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²⁵ 1st person, common, singular.

²⁶ Gary D. Pratico and Miles V. Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar: Second Edition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 217.

MT	מקול אויב מפני עקת רשע כי יגמטו עלי און ובאר ישטמוני
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מקול (because of the noise) is a 1cs noun. With the Mem and the Nun prefixed to the front of the word, the verse starts with “since.” The word is rendered as “since the voice.”

אויב (face) This is a first person, common, masculine, singular noun. The word means “enemy.” מפני means “because of the face.” A dynamic rendering of the word would read, “of the enemy.” David has one person in mind at this point though later in the verse he moves from speaking of on specific enemy, to a plurality of enemies. The cacophony of his enemies’ voices causes him great distress.

עקת (pressure) Is a common, feminine, singular, construct noun. It’s formal meaning is “pressure.” Its dynamic rendering is “oppression.” Either rendering of the word works to convey the meaning of the word. David is feeling the pressure of his enemies. That pressure could be understood as oppressive considering the persecution that David was experiencing.

רשע Is a masculine adjective that simply means “wicked. The pressure that is put upon David comes from wicked men.

כי יגמטו This third-person, masculine, plural, Hiphil verb means “they tossed about.” Or as the ESV translates it, “they drop.” The Kaf Yod prefix is a conjunction meaning “for,” so the word is translated as, “for they drop.” “They” are the enemies of David.

עלי און the first word is a first-person, common, singular preposition that means “against me.” The second word has a range of meaning. The word could mean “trouble,” “sorrow,” or “disaster.” Any of the three lexical meanings would be appropriate to use. A wooded translation would be, “against me disaster.”

ובאר the literal meaning of this word is “nose.” However, understanding that this word is used in a euphemistic manner, the word means “anger.”

ישטמוני? This verb is a Qal, imperfect, third-person, masculine, plural word. It means “to bear a grudge.” The final rendering of verse four could be interpreted as, “Since the voice of my enemy is before me, because of the pressure of the wicked, they drop trouble upon me, in anger they bear a grudge against me.”

Verse Five:

ESV	My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death have fallen upon me.
MT	לְבִי יַחֲוֶה בְּקִרְבִּי וְאִמּוֹת מָוֶת נִפְלוּ עָלַי

יַחֲוֶה (my heart is in anguish): The verb for “anguish” is יַחֲוֶה. It is a Qal imperfect, third person singular, masculine verb. It’s literal meaning is to be in labor. David is feeling the labor pains of betrayal. It seems like an odd expression for David to make. David is expressing an “intolerable strain”²⁷ that he feels in the very core of his being.

נִפְלוּ (terror and death of fallen upon me): The verb for “fallen” is “נִפְלוּ.” It is a Qal perfect and is describing David’s state of being. The verb is plural in its reference to the complete action that terror and death that have fallen on him.

Verse Six:

ESV	Fear and trembling come upon me, and horror overwhelms me.
MT	יִרְאָה וְרָעַד יָבֵא בִּי וַתִּכְסֹּנֵי פְלִצוֹת

יָבֵא (fear and trembling come upon me): The verb “come upon” is יָבֵא. It is a Qal imperfect 3ms verb. Because this is an imperfect verb, the word “denotes an incomplete

²⁷ Marvin Tate, *Psalms*, 56.

action.”²⁸ That is that say that fear and trembling “are coming” not “have come.” Fear and trembling are perpetually coming upon David. It connotes the idea of waterfall of fear being constantly poured upon David.

וַתִּכְסֵּנִי פְלִצּוֹת (and horror overwhelms me): A wooden translation of this verse would be something like, “shuddering covers me.” In this case, the translators of the ESV and KJV rendering the word פְּלִצּוֹת for “horror.” The word for “overwhelms” is וַתִּכְסֵּנִי and is a Piel verb and is in the wayyiqtol form connoting past action. The horror has completely covered, or overwhelmed, David.

Verse Seven:

ESV	And I say, “Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest;
MT	וְאָמַר מִיִּיְתוֹרֵלִי אֶבֶר כַּיּוֹנָה אֶעוֹפֶה וְאֶשְׁכְּנָה

Here David is not asking for the wings of an Eagle, or a Hawk. These are birds of prey. He longs for the wings of a dove, a helpless bird, though a bird known for its speed in flight. All the verbs in this verse are Qal imperfects. David is looking to flee, not to fight.

Verse Eight:

ESV	Yes, I would wander far away; I would lodge in the wilderness; Selah.
MT	הֲבֵנָה אֶרְחִיק נָגִד אֶלְיוֹן בְּמִדְבָּר סֵלָה

David’s persecution is so great that he would rather hide in the wilderness than face his problems. Remember, David had spent a great portion of his life hiding in the wilderness from Saul and he finds that a better prospect than what he was currently going through. אֶרְחִיק (depart)

²⁸ Van Pelt, *Analytical Studies in the Psalms*, 166.

is a Hiphil imperfect, with a cohortative meaning. It is a self-plea that David is expressing. He is pleading to face the wilderness rather than his enemies.

The term **סֶלָה** (Selah) is used for the first time in this Psalm. It is a musical term that likely means to repeat the above strophe, or line.²⁹ If this is the case, then the Psalmist is emphasizing his fear and desire to escape his present circumstances. The only other time that “Selah” is used in this Psalm is to describe David’s trust in God in verses 16-19. Likely, David, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is wanting the reader to take their eyes off of the fear and horror they experience and lift their eyes on the Lord who “redeems my soul in safety.”

Verse Nine:

ESV	I would hurry to find shelter from the raging wind and tempest.
MT	אָתְּיָשָׁה מִפְּלֹט לִי מֵרוּחַ סַעָה מִסָּעָר

אָתְּיָשָׁה (hurry) is a first person, Hiphil, cohortative which means “I hasten.” David is the one who is actively seeking shelter from the raging storm that has come upon him. The Critical Apparatus³⁰ of the Masoretic Text notes that the Septuagint rendering of **אָתְּיָשָׁה מִפְּלֹט** (I hasten for shelter) as *προσεδεχόμενν τον σωζοντα* (I waited for him that should deliver me). The MT communicates David’s active involvement in seeking shelter. The LXX communicates David’s passive involvement as he waits on the Lord for deliverance. Likely, what the translators of the LXX are doing is trying to reconcile this verse with David’s expression of trust that comes in verse twenty-two. It seems like a needless change that does not offer much in terms of a better

²⁹ There is debate about the actual meaning of the term Selah. The notion that Selah calls the singer to repeat the last refrain comes from Dr. C.J Williams, professor of Old Testament studies at the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

³⁰ Hence forth referred to as CA.

understanding of the passage. David can actively flee from his enemies while also trusting in the Lord's deliverance from those enemies.

Verse Ten:

ESV	Destroy, O Lord, divide their tongues; for I see violence and strife in the city.
MT	בִּלְעֵ אֲדֹנָי פִּלְגֵ לְשׁוֹנָם כִּי־רָאִיתִי הָמָס וְרִיב בְּעִיר

This verse has been dealt with in the literary analysis section of this paper and will not repeat what has already been said, save to say that David has now moved from expressions of anguish to expressions of anger. The MT uses the generic term for Lord (אֲדֹנָי), but the CA shows that multiple manuscripts use the covenantal term for LORD (יהוה). In this case, it seems that the multiple manuscripts referred to are correct. The reason for using the covenantal name of God is because this is how God was referred to in the Bible narrative in Genesis 11. God is referred to five times in the Bible narrative and each time יהוה is used.

The covenantal name of God is used two other times in the Psalm. Verse 16 and 22 both use יהוה in reference to God. It seems that the MT may not have fully captured what David was asking for or referring to in their rendering of verse ten. That being said, they are honest enough to point out how other manuscripts interpret the verse.

Verse Eleven:

ESV	Day and night they go around it on its walls, iniquity and trouble are within it;
MT	יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה יִסּוּבְבָהּ עַל־חֻמֹּתֶיהָ וְאָנוּ וְעָמַל בְּקִרְבָּהּ

Here David is expressing the constant acts of evil that these oppressors take part in. There is a 24-hour cycle of sin. The first part of the verse shows the wickedness around the city walls, and the second part of the verse shows that this wickedness is inside the city walls. יִסּוּבְבָהּ

(surround) is a Poel, third person masculine, imperfect verb. It would be appropriate to render the word as “encompass”. Encompass gives greater expression to the full infection of the evil upon the city. The CA notes that the Septuagint renders the word as a singular verb and renders the verse as, “Day and night he goes around on its walls...” The Septuagint focuses on one individual whereas the MT speaks more generally.

The following strophe narrows in on one person so perhaps this is why the Septuagint changes the tense of the verb. There is no change in meaning, only a change in emphasis. Verse 4 mentions a plurality of enemies in the same way that verse eleven does. Surely the one individual David has in mind is part of the many enemies expressed in verse 4 and 11.

Verse Twelve:

ESV	Ruin is in its midst; oppression and fraud do not depart from its marketplace.
MT	הַזֹּאת בְּקִרְבָּהּ וְלֹא־יִמְיֵשׁ מְרַחֲבָהּ תֵּדַ וּמְרָמָה

Verse 11 expressed the total infection of the wickedness in the city, verse twelve continues that theme by exposing the fraud in the city marketplace. The noun rendered as “marketplace” is מְרַחֲבָהּ. The words literal meaning is “open plaza.” David is articulating that the oppression of the wicked is felt by each citizen in the city. By betraying King David, these wicked men/man are betraying the commonwealth of Israel. In another sense, it could also be said that the whole commonwealth of Israel is complicit in the betrayal of their king.

Verse Thirteen:

ESV	For it is not an enemy who taunts me— then I could bear it; it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me— then I could hide from him.
MT	כִּי לֹא־אוֹיֵב יִקְרַפְנִי וְאִשָּׂא לֹא־מִשְׁנְאֵי עָלַי הַגִּדִיל וְאִסְתֵּר מִמֶּנּוּ

After spending the whole Psalm speaking about the oppression of his enemies, David says he could hide from them. If it were enemies that threw taunts at him, he could bear it. But the next verse shows that it is not from his enemies that have brought trouble upon him. This one man that David is speaking of is a man who hates (קִשְׁנָאִי) him. It comes as no surprise that an enemy would hate David, if this were the case, David could just hide from him. In fact, this is what David longed to do in verses 7-9. He wanted the wings of a dove to flee to the wilderness. David expects opposition, hatred, and taunting from his enemies. David does not expect this kind of behavior from a trusted friend.

Verse Fourteen:

ESV	But it is you, a man, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend.
MT	וְאַתָּה אֲנִישׁ כְּעֶרְכִּי אֱלֹהִי וּמִיָּדָעִי

This is a gut-wrenching verse. David no longer refers to his oppressor as his enemy, but as his friend. David articulates the intimate relationship that he had with this man, presumably, Ahithophel. Notice that David does not say, “it was you my trusted counselor.” David refers to him as a man, his equal, his companion, and his trusted friend. David speaks of this man as being his equal. Keil and Delitzsch address this when they say, “What heart piercing significance this word obtains when found in the mouth of the second David, who, although the Son of God, and peerless king, nevertheless entered into the most intimate human relationship as the Son of man to His disciples, and among them to that Iscariot!”³¹

Verse Fifteen:

ESV	We used to take sweet counsel together; within God’s house we walked in the throng.
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³¹ Keil and Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 384.

MT	אֲשֶׁר יַחַדוּ נִמְתִּיק סֹד בְּבַיִת אֱלֹהִים נִהְלָךְ בְּרַגְשׁ
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When David speaks of taking sweet counsel with this man, he uses the word “נִמְתִּיק” (sweet). This verb is a Hiphil, imperfect, 1cp. In the Hiphil tense, this word means “made sweet.” David is saying that the sweet counsel they took together was not because of the advice, but because of the person giving the advice. The counsel was made sweet by the relationship.

בְּבַיִת אֱלֹהִים נִהְלָךְ בְּרַגְשׁ (in God’s house we walked in the throng). This phrase shows that not only did David and this man trust one another with their counsel, they also worshiped the Lord together. This man that David once shared an intimate relationship with has turned on him. The tongue that this man once used to worship God was now used to curse David. Now instead of taking counsel together, this man was counseling others in how to destroy David.³²

Verse Sixteen:

ESV	Let death steal over them; let them go down to Sheol alive; for evil is in their dwelling place and in their heart.
MT	יִשְׁמֹת * עֲלֵימוּ יִרְדּוּ שְׂאוֹל תַּיִם כִּי־רָעוֹת בְּמִגְוָרָם בְּקִרְבָּם

יִשְׁמֹת (Jeshimoth) can be rendered as desolation. The following word, עֲלֵימוּ, (death), conveys the idea of total destruction. David is praying that the Lord would swallow this man and all his possession instantly.³³ The imprecations are in the plural so David is also praying that all those involved in the betrayal would be destroyed.

³² ESV: 2 Samuel 17:1-3.

³³ For more information on this verse see the literary analysis section regarding imprecations.

Verse Seventeen:

ESV	But I call on God, and the LORD will save me.
MT	אָנִי אֶל־אֱלֹהִים אֶקְרָא וַיְהִי הַיְשׁוּעָה יְיָ

Verse 17 marks a great shift in David’s perspective. Up to this point David was lamenting the betrayal of his friend and articulating the great fear and horror that has come upon him in light of that betrayal. David changes his focus from his enemies to his Savior. All the expressions of fear and anguish were legitimate emotions that David was feeling, but now that he has taken those emotions to the LORD, he is able to recognize it is the LORD who will save him. David uses the covenant term “Yahweh,” in expressing the source of his salvation. The CA notes that the Syriac manuscript uses the term “ישמעני” which means “to hear.” The MT says, “the LORD will save me.” The Syriac say, “The LORD will hear me.” The Syriac rendering is likely a result of the translators attempting to harmonize verse seventeen with verse eighteen in which the LORD does hear the prayers of David. The MT reading is to be preferred.

Verse Eighteen:

ESV	Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he hears my voice.
MT	עָרַב וּבֹקֵר וּצְהָרִים אֶשְׁיַחֵה וְאֶהְמָה וַיִּשְׁמַע קוֹלִי

David beginning his day in the evening comes across as strange to English readers. However, if one understands that the Jews began their 24-hour cycle in the evening it becomes less confusing. The point of the verse is that David is offering his prayers throughout the day. The beauty of the verse stands out when contrasted with verse 2 and 3. David is pleading with the Lord while still in a state of anguish. Through the act of praying, he comes out of the state of anguish and enters a state of assurance, he knows that the Lord hears his voice.

Verse Nineteen:

ESV	He redeems my soul in safety from the battle that I wage, for many are arrayed against me.
MT	פָּדָה בְּשָׁלוֹם גַּפְשִׁי מִמִּקְרַב-לִי כִי-יִבְרָבִים הֵנִי עִמָּדִי

The CA notes a different reading in the Septuagint manuscript. An English rendering of the Septuagint reads, “He shall deliver my soul in peace from them that draw neigh to me: for they were with me in many cases.” While the first part of the verse is not particularly different, the second part of the verse conveys a different thought. The idea of a battle being waged against David is completely lost in the Septuagint reading. “כִּי-יִבְרָבִים הֵנִי עִמָּדִי” (for many are arrayed against me) articulates the enmity between David and his enemies. The Septuagint seems to convey, not enmity, but intimacy. The MT has the preferred reading. David is articulating a beautiful truth that even in the tempest of betrayal, he is a peace (שָׁלוֹם) with God even if he is not at peace with his enemies. A wooden reading of the verse would be “He ransoms my soul in peace in regard to my battle, for many are gathered against me.”

Verse Twenty:

ESV	God will give ear and humble them, he who is enthroned from of old, Selah, because they do not change and do not fear God.
MT	יִשְׁמַע אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְיִצְנַח וְיִשְׁבַּח קִדְמוֹתָי אֲשֶׁר אֵין חֲלִיפוֹת לָמוֹ וְלֹא יִרְאוּ אֱלֹהִים

This is the second and final time that Selah is used in this Psalm. In the first instance, David uses the term to repeat a refrain of lament. The second time the term is employed it is to repeat a refrain of trust. This verse also shows that as David pleaded for God’s ear in verse one, his request is granted in verse twenty.

וַיֵּשֶׁב קִדְמוֹ (he who is enthroned from of old) can be woodenly translated as “he who sits from before.” David is recognizing that even if he has been usurped and, for a time, had his throne taken away, God will never be dethroned. As the term Selah indicates, this is a truth that bears repeating.

The second half of the verse sheds light on the nature of the rebellion. David is beginning to recognize that his enemies are ultimately the enemies of God because they do not fear God. אֵין תִּלְיָפוֹת (They do not change), this indicates that there is no repentance from their wicked acts. If they were taken with the fear of the Lord, perhaps that would lead to change, but they do not fear the Lord and they do not repent for their evil.

Verse Twenty-one:

ESV	My companion stretched out his hand against his friends; he violated his covenant.
MT	שָׁלַח יָדָיו בְּשֵׁלֵמָיו חָלַל בְּרִיתוֹ

אֶלְיוּפִי (friend/companion) is missing from this verse. שָׁלַח (he stretched out) is a Qal perfect, third person, masculine verb. The translators of the English text insert “companion” into this verse to show the reader the connection between verse 14, 20b, and 21. Since the above-mentioned verb is in the 3rd person singular, David is clearly referring to his betrayer and it for this reason that the term “companion” is inserted into this verse. בְּרִיתוֹ (covenant), in this case the term is, “his covenant” Apparently David’s betrayer had made a covenant with him and then broken his covenant. The text does not tell us the nature of the covenant but likely this was a covenant made in fealty to the king.

Verse Twenty-two:

ESV	His speech was smooth as butter, yet war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords.
MT	חֲלָקוֹ וּמִחֶמְצָת פִּיּוֹ וְקֶרֶב־לִבּוֹ רַכּוֹ דְבָרָיו מִשְׁמֵן וְתַמָּה פְתָחוֹת

David is reflecting on past discussions he had with his companion and recalls of charismatic speech that would flow from his lips. Now in hindsight, David can see the hypocrisy of this man’s words. Behind each word of encouragement was a disposition of betrayal. לִבּוֹ (Heart/will/disposition) shows that this man’s desire was always to see David fall. The second half of the verse is a synonymous refrain expressing the same idea with a greater emphasis. In the first half of the verse, war is in the betrayer’s heart. The second half of the verse shows that the war in his heart has escalated to swords in his hands. His desires are exposed by his duplicitous actions.

An English translation of the Septuagint reads, “They were scattered at the anger of his countenance, and his heart drew nigh them. His words were smoother than oil, yet are they darts.”³⁴ The reason for the drastic change in the first half of the verse escapes the author. Perhaps the Translators of the LXX had smudge manuscripts and they did their best to make a proper translation with what they had. In any case, the MT is to be the preferred reading of this verse.

Verse Twenty-three:

ESV	Cast your burden on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved.
MT	הַשְׁלֵךְ עַל־יְהוָה יְהַבְרֵךְ יְהוָה וְיִכְלְכְלֵךְ לֹא־יִתֵּן לְעוֹלָם מוֹט לְצַדִּיק

Here is the verse that this Psalm is best known for. After toiling through a tempest of emotions, David finds his shelter in at the feet of the king who is enthroned from of old. הַשְׁלֵךְ (cast) is a Hiphil, imperative and, as seen above, is translated as “cast.” The word “cast” brings up imagery of a fishermen gently casting his line into a river. Perhaps a better rendering of הַשְׁלֵךְ might be “throw”, or using more dynamic language, “release your burden” could be used. Any of the

³⁴ Sir Lancelot C.L. Brenton, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English* (London: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), 730.

above suggestions capture the meaning being יְלֵכֵנִי . It is the Lord who bears the weight of David's burden.

There are two New Testament connections to this verse. The first is from Matthew 11:28-30 which says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." While there is not a direct exegetical connection between Psalm 55:23 and Matthew 11:28-30, there are literary parallels that should not be missed.

The second New Testament connection comes from 1 Peter 5:7, where Peter quotes Psalm 55:23. "Casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you." Throughout the entirety of the Psalm, whenever the second person is used it is in reference to God or to David's enemies. יְהוָה (your burden) is written in the second person singular. The burden does not belong to God or to David's enemies. Perhaps David is addressing the reader of this Psalm, or he is referencing himself. When Peter quotes Psalm 55:23, the "your" (ὁμῶν) is a second person plural.

While David may be encouraging himself to cast his burdens on the Lord, Peter recognizes that this comforting commandment applies to all of God's people. While David speaks in the second person singular, the fact that he has given this Psalm to the choirmaster for all of God's people to sing shows that David also recognizes that all of God's people are to cast their burdens on the Lord and the Lord has the power and authority to bear those burdens.³⁵

The second half of this verse is a comfort for all those who are in the Lord and serves as a stark contrast to Psalm 10:6. Psalm 10:6 says, He says in his heart, 'I shall not be moved; throughout all generations I shall not meet adversity.'" The context of the Psalm is the arrogance

³⁵ The CA notes that the Aquila manuscript, a Greek translation of the Old Testament, adds, ἀγαπήσει σε , which may be why Peter renders, "he cares for you" in his quotation.

of the wicked. The wicked man says “nothing shall move him” but his confidence is in the hubris of his strength. Compared to Psalm 55:23 where the immovability of the believer comes from the strength of the Lord and not himself.

Verse Twenty-four:

ESV	But you, O God, will cast them down into the pit of destruction; men of blood and treachery shall not live out half their days. But I will trust in you.
MT	וְאַתָּה אֱלֹהִים תִּזְרְזֵם לְבֹאֵר שְׁסֵת אֲנֹשֵׁי דָמַיִם וְמַרְמָה לֹא-יִנְחָצוּ מִיָּמֵם וְאַנֹּשֵׁי אֶבְטָח-בָּךְ

There is quite the contrast between verse 23 and 24. Whereas the Lord will never permit the righteous to be moved, the wicked will not be able to stand before the Lord. While the righteous are called to cast their burdens on the Lord, the Lord promises to cast the wicked into the pit of destruction. As David acknowledges that God will throw the wicked into the pit of destruction, he also gives a description of the ultimate outcome of his betrayer. They “shall not live out half their days.”

This is the ultimate outcome of Ahithophel. The reader will remember that when Ahithophel counseled Absalom to swiftly end David’s life, Absalom rejected Ahithophel’s counsel. Ahithophel knew that if David were not swiftly brought to death, he would be able to regroup and overcome Absalom and his rebellion. Ahithophel took his own life because he knew that David would return to his kingdom and dole out justice on those who had betrayed him. Ahithophel’s life ended prematurely, thus fulfilling the words of David in Psalm 55:24.

The Psalm concludes with the beautiful words, וְאַנֹּשֵׁי אֶבְטָח-בָּךְ, “I will trust in you.” The Psalm begins with a desperate plea for the Lord’s help and ends with resolved peace in the Lord’s protection. David has worked through the unstable ground of the fear and horror he experienced

at the hands of his betrayer to end up in the hand of his Covenant LORD who will not permit the righteous to be moved. The Psalm begins with a plea and ends with trust.

IV. Theological Analysis³⁶

Typology:

The theological implications of the Psalm are seen in the life of Christ. David was a type of Christ, and his life foreshadows the life of the Messiah. The following Chart demonstrates the type/anti-type comparison between David and Jesus.

David	Jesus
David was a son of Jesse. 1 Samuel 17:12	Jesus was the son of David. Matthew 1:1
David was born in Bethlehem. 1 Samuel 17:12	Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Matthew 2:1
David is king of Israel.	Jesus is King of kings. Revelation 19:16
David's son built the temple. 2 Samuel 7:13	Jesus is the temple. John 2:19-22
David is given the Davidic covenant. 2 Samuel 7:1-17	Jesus is the fulfilment of the Davidic covenant. Luke 1:32-33.
David was betrayed by Absalom and Ahithophel. 2 Samuel 15.	Judas and Peter betrayed Jesus. John 18:5, 25-27.

Ahithophel was also a type of Judas. They both betrayed their king.

Ahithophel	Judas
Ahithophel was trusted by David. 2 Samuel 16:23	Judas was trusted by Jesus. John 12:6
Ahithophel betrayed David. 2 Samuel 15:31	Judas betrayed Jesus. John 18:5
Ahithophel took his own life. 2 Samuel 17:23	Judas took his own life. Matthew 27:5

³⁶ All Scripture quotations in this section follow the English versification.

From the above charts, it is easy to see that Jesus experience of betrayal was articulated by David in the Psalms.

In John 13, Jesus is about to share with his disciples that one of them will betray him. He quotes from Psalm 41:9, “Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.” As noted in footnote one of this paper, the language regarding David’s trusted friend from Psalm 41:9 is similar to Psalm 55:13. While it is impossible to say for certain that both Psalms were written in the same historical context, Jesus is identifying with David regarding the pain of betrayal.

The Character of God:

In this Psalm we see that God perceives the prayers of his people, he provides protection for his people, and he proclaims perseverance for his people.

1. God who perceives prayers.

David starts this Psalm by pleading for the ear of the Lord. He speaks to God about his terror, his fear, his complaints, and his horror. As the Psalm progresses, it becomes clear to David that God is indeed listening to him. Verse 17 makes it clear that God provides his ear to his people as he perceives their prayers.

2. God who provides protection.

As David works through the fear he has for his life and for his kingdom, he finds his protection is in the Lord. In verse eighteen, David acknowledges that there is a battle that is waged against him. He reminds himself in verse nineteen that he is under the protection of the Eternal King.

3. God who proclaims perseverance.

Verse 22 shows that God will not permit the righteous to be moved. God causes calamity to fall on those who oppress the wicked (v9,15,23a). David can trust in the Lord because he will

not permit him to be moved. Even when it looks as if the people of God will fall, the Lord preserves his people by punishing the wicked.

The Expression of Faith:

While it may seem that David does not have a strong faith in God due to the great fear that he expresses, it must be noted who he is expressing his fear to. It is not as if David is talking to himself, he is praying to the King who is enthroned from of Old. David is writing to the God who scattered the people of Babel. David is seeking the ear of the one who swallowed up the rebellion of Korah. In the very act of praying, David is expressing faith.

David's faith comes to full expression as he ends the Psalm, "But I will trust in the you." He recognizes that even he, the king, is not in control of his circumstances. It is only the LORD who is sovereign over David's life, and it is that very fact that David is able to place his trust in God. David's faith may have looked weak as he begins the Psalm, but as he worked through his pain, and reminded himself who the Lord is, his faith became strong.

V. Contemporary Significance:

This paper began by lamenting the pain that a believer experiences by the betrayal of a fellow member of the church when they walk away from the Lord. This Psalm provides the words to express to Jesus the pain that is felt amid that betrayal. There is also a broader application to those who have experienced betrayal from a parent, spouse, or close friend.

This Psalm serves as a great comfort to the Christian. Not only does this Psalm provide the words to express their pain to Jesus, but these are the very words of Jesus himself. Jesus knows what it is like to feel the stab of betrayal. As the writer of Hebrews says, He is our great high priest, and He can sympathize with our weakness. While the tears that Jesus shed at the

Garden of Gethsemane were due His impending crucifixion, surely, they were also because of the betrayal of his friends.

This Psalm also gives warrant to pray curses upon the enemies of God. The believer must be careful to not pray in a vindictive way, but it is appropriate to ask God to be consistent with himself. The Christian can pray that God would deal with the wicked as he has always done. The Christian can pray that God would cause the premature death of those who persecute his people. The Christian can pray that God would cause confusion in the camp of the wicked. The Christian can pray that God would supernaturally intercede and cause the wicked to be swallowed up by the earth. The Christian can pray that God's justice was reign over the wicked.

Psalm 55 is also a great encouragement to those who are guilty of betraying the Lord. It cannot be lost on the reader that Peter was just as guilty of betraying Jesus as Judas was. While Judas sold Jesus out, Peter denied his association with Jesus. This is what the apostate does when they walk away from the church. They deny Jesus. This is what the believer does when they sin against Jesus. They deny Jesus.

Even as Jesus tells Peter that he will betray Him, Jesus tells Peter he has prayed for him. Satan was demanding that he sift Peter like wheat, but Jesus would not allow it.³⁷ Even still, Peter denied Jesus. This Psalm is a comfort for those who have denied Jesus by leaving the church, or by being unfaithful to him because Peter, the restored apostate, quotes this Psalm in his first epistle.

Peter must have been thinking about his own betrayal as he quotes Psalm 55 to the diaspora. Despite Peter's betrayal, Jesus still restores him in into the apostleship. Peter was able to say with the Psalmist, that the righteous will not be moved. Peter was preserved, not for his

³⁷ESV: Luke 22:31-34.

own righteousness, but because of the imputed righteousness that he received by faith alone. He was able to experientially say the Lord bears the burdens of his people, even when they betray the Lord.

Therefore, those who have walked away from the church, or have betrayed Jesus can still find forgiveness in Christ. Sinners are reconciled to Jesus because of His righteousness given to them. While Peter is quoting Psalm 55 to offer assurance to the persecuted Christians, he is also a walking testimony that even those who betray Christ can be restored by Christ.

VI. Sermon Outline³⁸

Introduction:

1643: Solemn League and Covenants. The church is Presbyterian.

Charles I was an enemy of Presbyterianism.

Charles II was installed on the throne after his father's death with the requirement that he sign the SLC.

He went back on his word. Kicked Presbyterian pastors out of their churches and begin to kill and persecute those who continued to practice Presbyterianism.

Betrayal of a spouse

Betrayal of a friend

This text helps us work through the pain of betrayal by seeing

1. The anguish of betrayal: v1-8
2. The anger of betrayal: v9-15
3. The acceptance of betrayal: v16-23

HP: In times of betrayal cast your burdens on the Lord who will sustain you.

Historical note: Likely the events of Psalm fifty-five are a result of Absalom and Ahithophel's betrayal. 2 Samuel 15

³⁸ This is an outline of a sermon that I preached at Hope Community Reformed Presbyterian Church on April 10th, 2022. I am not overly proud of this sermon for a couple of reasons. First, I was overly emotional. Emotion is not a bad thing, but I found myself struggling to stay put together. Second, because of the emotion expressed, I ran out of time and was not able to preach experientially. Third, the sermon was too focused on historical exegesis and not on application. In any case, the interested reader can listen to a recording of the sermon here.

<http://www.hopecommunityrpc.com/sermons/cast-your-burden-upon-the-lord/>

1. The Anguish of betrayal: V 1-8

Explain:

- History:
 - A. Bathsheba: 2 Sam 11
 - B. Amnon and Tamar: 2 Sam 13
 - C. Absalom murders Amnon:
 - D. Absalom's rebellion: 2 Sam 15
 - E. Ahithophel

V1: In fear David brings his Anguish to the Lord. This ought to be our first response to hardship. Call out for the ear of God. This is not always easy. Revenge in our own hands.

V2: Is God listening? We can complain to God, but we cannot complain about God.

V3: A grudge, another reference to the motive of Absalom, Ahithophel, and the others who joined in the rebellion.

V4-5: My heart is in anguish. David is possibly still haunted by his past with Uriah. It is worth noting, we are free from the condemnation of sin, but not necessarily the consequences of sin.

2 Sam 13:10-14 Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' 11 Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. 12 For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.'" 13 David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. 14 Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child who is born to you shall die."

Your betrayal is not necessarily because of past sin. But sometimes life is hard because of sin.

2 Sam 16:20-23 Then Absalom said to Ahithophel, "Give your counsel. What shall we do?" 21 Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Go in to your father's concubines, whom he has left to keep the house, and all Israel will hear that you have made yourself a stench to your father, and the hands of all who are with you will be strengthened." 22 So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof. And Absalom went into his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel. 23 Now in those days the counsel that Ahithophel gave was as if one consulted the word of God; so was all the counsel of Ahithophel esteemed, both by David and by Absalom.

V6-8: Hide from pain. Dove to run and hide, not to fight. Lodging in the wilderness is better than having to deal with this pain.

Raging wind and tempest is the whirlwind of what David has sewn in the past.

Apply:

When Experiencing betrayal, our first response is to pray.

Transition: As David prays, he moves from anguish to a holy anger.

1. The Anger of betrayal: V 9-15

Explain:

V9: Divide their tongues because their works are evil - Connection with 2 Sam 15:31 - Tower of Babel. Pray the scriptures.

V10-11: Possible connection to riots in the city, more likely David is making the connection with Absalom's conniving at the city gates.

V12-14:

12: An insult from an enemy has no power.

13: But an insult from a friend is devastating.

14: Taking council together conveys the idea of sharing close intimate secrets together. Not only that, but they used to worship the Lord together.

Connection to Acts 20:29. Ahithophel was a wolf.

The pain of someone you love expresses their hatred toward you, and then to God, is excruciatingly painful.

V15: Let them die! Let them go to hell alive.

- Korah's rebellion Numbers 16.

Illustrate:

Apply:

Transition: As David called on the Lord for justice; he remembers the Lord's protection.

1. The Acceptance of betrayal because ultimately it is the Lord who is betrayed (V19b): V 16-23

Explain:

V16: David is confident in the Lord's deliverance. Connection to 2 Sam 15:25-26 Then the king said to Zadok, "Carry the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the eyes of the Lord, he

will bring me back and let me see both it and his dwelling place. 26 But if he says, 'I have no pleasure in you,' behold, here I am, let him do to me what seems good to him."

Is your confidence in the Lord? How can you be sure? Look to your past to see how God has saved you to give you confidence as you look at the present salvation you will experience from the Lord.

V17: Prayer in the evening, morning, and noon. Their day started in the evening. David is praying all day long and uses the natural breaks for food as a reminder to him to go to the Lord. This is a good practice for us as well.

V18: "He redeemed" is present tense. He prays believingly.

V19: Connection with v1. Their betrayal is ultimately against God.

V20-21: Manipulation and lies. Hug to strangulation. Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss. Ahithophel is a type of the great betrayer, Judas. Both of their actions ended in their taking of their own life. Judas was not the only one who betrayed Jesus, all the disciples did. How often do we betray Jesus?

V22-23: We are unable to manage betrayal by our own strength. We must cast our burdens upon the Lord.
casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you 1 Peter 5:7

Illustrate:

Apply:

Transition:

Conclusion:

Jesus experienced the great betrayal of Judas. He is able to sympathize with us. He was not just betrayed by Judas, but Peter also.

Cast your burdens on the Lord and pray for Pentecost or Bable
For Peter, or Judas.

In times of betrayal, cast your burden on the Lord.

I, Aaron D. Murray, have written this paper exclusively for OT730. If this paper, in part or full, was submitted previously in another context, I have received permission from the course professor to use it for this assignment. While I may have received editing or proofreading advice, I made all corrections myself. I have cited each paraphrase, quotation, and borrowed idea that I included in this paper.

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