

Psalm 35:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Plead my cause, O LORD, with them that strive with me: fight against them that fight against me.

Analysis

Plead my cause, O LORD, with them that strive with me: fight against them that fight against me. This imprecatory psalm opens with a remarkable legal and military metaphor combined. David appeals to God simultaneously as divine advocate and warrior. The Hebrew word for 'plead' (rivah, ריבָה) is a legal term meaning to conduct a lawsuit, to contend in court, to argue a case. David invites God to be his attorney, prosecuting those who falsely accuse him.

But the verse immediately shifts from courtroom to battlefield: 'fight against them that fight against me.' The Hebrew lacham (לָחֶם) means to wage war, to engage in combat. David faces enemies who are both legally slandering him and physically threatening him—likely during his persecution by Saul or Absalom's rebellion. He needs both vindication and protection, justice and deliverance.

This dual appeal reveals a profound theological truth: God is both Judge and Warrior. He establishes justice through righteous judgment and executes that justice through sovereign power. The New Testament reveals Jesus embodying both roles—He is the righteous judge (John 5:22, 2 Timothy 4:8) and the warrior King who rides forth 'conquering and to conquer' (Revelation 6:2, 19:11-16). For believers facing persecution or false accusation, this verse models confident appeal to God's dual role: plead my case and fight my battles.

The verse's structure—'with them that strive with me... against them that fight against me'—creates perfect parallelism that emphasizes God's active

engagement. David doesn't ask God merely to bless his own efforts; he asks God to personally take up his cause. This is the essence of faith: transferring our struggles from our inadequate shoulders to God's omnipotent ones.

Historical Context

Psalm 35 belongs to the category of imprecatory psalms—prayers calling for divine judgment on enemies. These psalms trouble modern readers but were vital to Israel's faith. In a world without international courts, human rights organizations, or criminal justice systems as we know them, the oppressed had no recourse except appeal to divine justice. These psalms represent radical faith that God sees injustice and will ultimately vindicate the righteous.

David's life provided numerous occasions for such prayers. Saul hunted him like an animal for years, forcing him to hide in caves and flee to Philistine territory (1 Samuel 19-27). Later, David's own son Absalom conspired against him, turning Israel's hearts away and forcing David to flee Jerusalem barefoot, weeping (2 Samuel 15). During both crises, David faced not only physical danger but false accusations and betrayal by trusted friends.

The legal language reflects ancient Near Eastern court practices where plaintiffs and defendants would present cases before judges or kings. Without police forces or prosecutors, individuals had to 'plead' their own cases. David's appeal to God as divine judge reflects his conviction that ultimately all injustice will be tried in heaven's court. This theological conviction sustained Jewish martyrs through Roman persecution and inspired Christian martyrs who cried, 'How long, O Lord?' (Revelation 6:10).

The warrior imagery draws on Israel's holy war tradition where YHWH fought for His people. The exodus deliverance demonstrated this: 'The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace' (Exodus 14:14). Joshua's victories, Gideon's triumph with 300 men, David's defeat of Goliath—all demonstrated that battles belong to the Lord. This psalm invokes that same divine intervention.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. What situations in your life require you to ask God to 'plead your cause' rather than defending yourself?
2. How does understanding God as both Judge and Warrior affect your response to injustice or false accusation?
3. In what ways might you be trying to fight battles God wants to fight for you?
4. How can you balance seeking justice through proper channels while ultimately trusting God as final Judge?
5. What does it mean practically to transfer your struggles to God's shoulders rather than carrying them yourself?

Interlinear Text

אֶת	לִפְנֵי:	רִיב	הָיָה	אֶת	יְרִיב	אֶת	רִיבָּה	אֶת	
Plead	my cause	O LORD	H3068	H853	with them	that strive	against them	that fight	H3898
H7378					H3401				H853

לִפְנֵי:

against them that fight

H3898

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 43:1 (Parallel theme): Judge me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation: O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man.

Psalms 119:154 (Parallel theme): Plead my cause, and deliver me: quicken me according to thy word.

Jeremiah 51:36 (References Lord): Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will plead thy cause, and take vengeance for thee; and I will dry up her sea, and make her springs dry.

Isaiah 49:25 (References Lord): But thus saith the LORD, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children.

Proverbs 23:11 (Parallel theme): For their redeemer is mighty; he shall plead their cause with thee.

Proverbs 22:23 (References Lord): For the LORD will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them.

Lamentations 3:58 (References Lord): O Lord, thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul; thou hast redeemed my life.

Acts 5:39 (Parallel theme): But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.

Exodus 14:25 (References Lord): And took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily: so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the LORD fighteth for them against the Egyptians.

1 Samuel 24:15 (References Lord): The LORD therefore be judge, and judge between me and thee, and see, and plead my cause, and deliver me out of thine hand.