
For the Chief Musician. A Psalm by David.

PSALM 109: 1 God of my praise, don't remain silent,

The psalmist speaks against his inveterate enemies, Psa 109:1-5. He prays against them, and denounces God's judgments, Psa 109:6-15. The reason on which this is grounded, Psa 109:16-20. He prays for his own safety and salvation, using many arguments to induce God to have mercy upon him, Psa 109:21-31.

The title of this Psalm, To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, has already often occurred, and on it the Versions offer nothing new. The Syriac says it is "a Psalm of David, when the people, without his knowledge, made Absalom king; on which account he was slain: but to us (Christians) he details the passion of Christ." That it contains a prophecy against Judas and the enemies of our Lord, is evident from Act 1:20. Probably, in its primary meaning, (for such a meaning it certainly has), it may refer to Ahithophel. The execrations in it should be rendered in the future tense, as they are mere prophetic denunciations of God's displeasure against sinners. Taken in this light, it cannot be a stumbling-block to any person. God has a right to denounce those judgments which he will inflict on the workers of iniquity. But perhaps the whole may be the execrations of David's enemies against himself. See on Psa 109:20 (note). Ahithophel, who gave evil counsel against David, and being frustrated hanged himself, was no mean prototype of Judas the traitor; it was probably on this account that St. Peter, Act 1:20, applied it to the case of Judas, as a prophetic declaration concerning him, or at least a subject that might be accommodated to his case.

Verse 1

Hold not thy peace - Be not silent; arise and defend my cause.

PSALM 109: 2 for they have opened the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of deceit against me. They have spoken to me with a lying tongue.

Verse 2

The mouth of the wicked and - the deceitful are opened against me - Many persons are continually uttering calumnies against me. Thou knowest my heart and its innocence; vindicate my uprightness against these calumniators.

PSALM 109: 3 They have also surrounded me with words of hatred, and fought against me without a cause.

PSALM 109: 4 In return for my love, they are my adversaries; but I am in prayer.

Verse 4

For my love they are my adversaries - In their behalf I have performed many acts of kindness, and they are my adversaries notwithstanding; this shows principles the most vicious, and hearts the most corrupt. Many of the fathers and commentators have understood the principal part of the things spoken here as referring to our Lord, and the treatment he received from the Jews; and whatever the original intention was, they may safely be applied to this case, as the Psa 109:2, Psa 109:3, Psa 109:4, and Psa 109:5 are as highly illustrative of the conduct of the Jewish rulers towards our Lord as the following verses are of the conduct of Judas; but allowing these passages to be prophetic, it is the Jewish state rather than an individual, against which these awful denunciations are made, as it seems to be represented here under the person and character of an extremely hardened and wicked man; unless we consider the curses to be those of David's enemies. See the note on Psa 109:20 (note).

But I give myself unto prayer - ואני תפלה vaani thephillah; "And I prayer." The Chaldee: ואנא אצלי vaana atsalley, "but I pray." This gives a good sense, which is followed by the Vulgate, Septuagint, Ethiopic, Arabic, and Anglo-Saxon. The Syriac, "I will pray for them." This, not so correctly; as dreadful imprecations, not prayers, follow. But probably the whole ought to be interpreted according to the mode laid down, Psa 109:20. The translation and paraphrase in the old Psalter are very simple: -

Trans. For that thynge that thai sulde haue lufed me, thai bakbited me; bot I prayed.

Par - That is, that sulde haf lufed me for I was godson, and thai bakbited me sayande, in Belzebub he castes oute fendes; bot I prayed for thaim.

PSALM 109: 5 They have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love.

PSALM 109: 6 Set a wicked man over him. Let an adversary stand at his right hand.

Verse 6

Let Satan stand at his right hand - As the word שטן satan means an adversary simply, though sometimes it is used to express the evil spirit Satan, I think it best to preserve here its grammatical meaning: "Let an adversary stand at his right hand:" i.e., Let him be opposed and thwarted in all his purposes.

All the Versions have devil, or some equivocal word. The Arabic has eblees, the chief of the apostate spirits; but the name is probably corrupted from the Greek διαβολος diabolos; from which the Latin diabolus. the Italian diavolo, the Spanish diablo, the French diable, the Irish or Celtic diabal, the Dutch duivel, the German teufel, the Anglo-Saxon deofal, and the English devil, are all derived. The original, διαβολος, comes from δια βαλλειν to shoot or pierce through.

PSALM 109: 7 When he is judged, let him come out guilty. Let his prayer be turned into sin.

Verse 7

Let him be condemned - יצא רשע yetse rasha. "Let him come out a wicked man;" that is let his wickedness be made manifest.

Let his prayer become sin - Thus paraphrased by Calmet: "Let him be accused, convicted, and condemned, and let the defense which he brings for his justification only serve to deepen his guilt, and hasten his condemnation." I once more apprise the reader, that if these are not the words of David's enemies against himself, (see on Psa 109:20 (note)), they are prophetic denunciations against a rebellious and apostate person or people, hardened in crime, and refusing to return to God.

PSALM 109: 8 Let his days be few. Let another take his office.

Verse 8

Let another take his office - The original is פקדוּתוֹ pekuddatho, which the margin translates charge, and which literally means superintendence, oversight, inspection from actual visitations. The translation in our common Version is too technical. His bishopric, following the Septuagint, επισκοπήν, and Vulgate, episcopatum and has given cause to some light people to be witty, who have said, "The first bishop we read of was bishop Judas." But it would be easy to convict this witticism of blasphemy, as the word is used in many parts of the sacred writings, from Genesis downward, to signify offices and officers, appointed either by God immediately, or in the course of his providence, for the accomplishment of the most important purposes. It is applied to the patriarch Joseph, Gen 39:4, וַיִּפְקְדֵהוּ vaiyaphkidehu, he made him bishop, alias overseer; therefore it might be as wisely said, and much more correctly, "The first bishop we read of was bishop Joseph;" and many such bishops there were of God's making long before Judas was born. After all, Judas was no traitor when he was appointed to what is called his bishopric, office, or charge in the apostolate. Such witticisms as these amount to no argument, and serve no cause that is worthy of defense.

Our common Version, however, was not the first to use the word: it stands in the Anglo-Saxon "and his episcopacy let take other." The old Psalter is nearly the same; I shall give the whole verse: Fa be made his days, and his bysshopyrk another take. "For Mathai was sett in stede of Judas; and his days was fa that hynged himself."

PSALM 109: 9 Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow.

Verse 9

Let his children be fatherless, etc. - It is said that Judas was a married man, against whom this verse, as well as the preceding is supposed to be spoken; and that it was to support them that he stole from the bag in which the property of the apostles was put, and of which he was the treasurer.

PSALM 109: 10 Let his children be wandering beggars. Let them be sought from their ruins.

Verse 10

Set his children - beg - The father having lost his office, the children must necessarily be destitute; and this is the hardest lot to which any can become subject, after having been born to the expectation of an ample fortune.

PSALM 109: 11 Let the creditor seize all that he has. Let strangers plunder the fruit of his labour.

Verse 11

Let the strangers spoil his labor - Many of these execrations were literally fulfilled in the case of the miserable Jews, after the death of our Lord. They were not only expelled from their own country, after the destruction of Jerusalem, but they were prohibited from returning; and so taxed by the Roman government, that they were reduced to the lowest degree of poverty. Domitian expelled them from Rome; and they were obliged to take up their habitation without the gate Capena, in a wood contiguous to the city, for which they were obliged to pay a rent, and where the whole of their property was only a basket and a little hay. See Juvenal, Sat. ver. 11: -

Substitut ad veteres arcus, madidamque Capenam:

Hic ubi nocturne Numa constituebat amicae,

Nunc sacri fontis nemus, et delubra locantur

Judaes: quorum cophinus, foenumque supellex:

Omnis enim populo mercedem pendere jussa est

Arbor, et ejectis mendicat silva Camoenis.

He stopped a little at the conduit gate,

Where Numa modelled once the Roman state;

In nightly councils with his nymph retired:

Though now the sacred shades and founts are hired

By banished Jews, who their whole wealth can lay

In a small basket, on a wisp of hay.

Yet such our avarice is, that every tree

Pays for his head; nor sleep itself is free;

Nor place nor persons now are sacred held,

From their own grove the Muses are expelled.

Dryden.

The same poet refers again to this wretched state of the Jews, Sat. vi., ver. 541; and shows to what vile extremities they were reduced in order to get a morsel of bread: -

Cum dedit ille locum, cophino foenoque relicto,
 Arcanam Judaea tremens mendicat in aurem,
 Interpres legum Solymarum, et magna sacerdos
 Arboris, ac summi fida internuncia coeli.
 Implet et illa manum, sed parcius, aere minuto.
 Qualia cunque voles Judaei somnia vendunt.

Here a Jewess is represented as coming from the wood mentioned above, to gain a few oboli by fortune-telling; and, trembling lest she should be discovered, she leaves her basket and hay, and whispers lowly in the ear of some female, from whom she hopes employment in her line. She is here called by the poet the interpretest of the laws of Solymae, or Jerusalem, and the priestess of a tree, because obliged, with the rest of her nation, to lodge in a wood; so that she and her countrymen might be said to seek their bread out of desolate places, the stranger having spoiled their labor. Perhaps the whole of the Psalm relates to their infidelities, rebellions, and the miseries inflicted on them from the crucifixion of our Lord till the present time. I should prefer this sense, if what is said on Psa 109:20 be not considered a better mode of interpretation.

PSALM 109: 12 Let there be no one to extend kindness to him, neither let there be anyone to have pity on his fatherless children.

PSALM 109: 13 Let his posterity be cut off. In the generation following let their name be blotted out.

Verse 13

Let his posterity be cut off - It is a fact that the distinction among the Jewish tribes is entirely lost. Not a Jew in the world knows from what tribe he is sprung; and as to the royal family, it remains nowhere but in the person of Jesus the Messiah. He alone is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Except as it exists in him, the name is blotted out.

PSALM 109: 14 Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered by the LORD. Don't let the sin of his mother be blotted out.

PSALM 109: 15 Let them be before the LORD continually, that he may cut off their memory from the earth;

PSALM 109: 16 because he didn't remember to show kindness, but persecuted the poor and needy man, the broken in heart, to kill them.

Verse 16

Persecuted the poor and needy man - In the case of Jesus Christ all the dictates of justice and mercy were destroyed, and they persecuted this poor man unto death. They acted from a diabolical malice. On common principles, their opposition to Christ cannot be accounted for.

PSALM 109: 17 Yes, he loved cursing, and it came to him. He didn't delight in blessing, and it was far from him.

Verse 17

As he loved cursing, so let it come unto him - The Jews said, when crucifying our Lord, His blood be upon us and our children! Never was an imprecation more dreadfully fulfilled.

PSALM 109: 18 He clothed himself also with cursing as with his garment. It came into his inward parts like water, like oil into his bones.

Verse 18

Let it come into his bowels like water - Houbigant thinks this is an allusion to the waters of jealousy; and he is probably right, - the bitter waters that produce the curse. See Num 5:18.

PSALM 109: 19 Let it be to him as the clothing with which he covers himself, for the belt that is always around him.

Verse 19

And for a girdle - Let the curse cleave to him throughout life: as the girdle binds all the clothes to the body, let the curse of God bind all mischiefs and maladies to his body and soul.

The Hindoos, Budhists, and others often wear a gold or silver chain about their waist. One of those chains, once the ornament of a Moudeliar in the island of Ceylon, lies now before me: it is silver, and curiously wrought.

PSALM 109: 20 This is the reward of my adversaries from the LORD, of those who speak evil against my soul.

Verse 20

Let this be the reward of mine adversaries from the Lord, and of them that speak evil against my soul - Following the mode of interpretation already adopted, this may mean: All these maledictions shall be fulfilled on my enemies; they shall have them for their reward. So all the opposition made by the Jews against our Lord, and the obloquies and execrations wherewith they have loaded him and his religion, have fallen upon themselves; and they are awful examples of the wrath of God abiding on them that believe not.

But is not this verse a key to all that preceded it? The original, fairly interpreted, will lead us to a somewhat different meaning: *zoth peullath soteney meeth Yehovah, vehaddoberim ra al naphshi*. "This is the work of my adversaries before the Lord, and of those who speak evil against my soul," or life. That is, all that is said from the sixth to the twentieth verse consists of the evil words and imprecations of my enemies against my soul, laboring to set the Lord, by imprecations, against me, that their curses may take effect. This, which is a reasonable interpretation, frees the whole Psalm from every difficulty. Surely, the curses contained in it are more like those which proceed from the mouth of the wicked, than from one inspired by the Spirit of the living God. Taking the words in this sense, which I am persuaded is the best, and which the original will well bear and several of the Versions countenance, then our translation may stand just as it is, only let the reader remember that at the sixth verse David begins to tell how his enemies cursed Him, while he prayed for Them.

PSALM 109: 21 But deal with me, the LORD the Lord, for your name's sake, because your loving kindness is good, deliver me;

Verse 21

But do thou for me - While they use horrible imprecations against me, and load me with their curses, act thou for me, and deliver me from their maledictions. While they curse, do thou bless. This verse is a farther proof of the correctness of the interpretation given above.

PSALM 109: 22 for I am poor and needy. My heart is wounded within me.

Verse 22

I am poor and needy - I am afflicted and impoverished; and my heart is wounded - my very life is sinking through distress.

PSALM 109: 23 I fade away like an evening shadow. I am shaken off like a locust.

Verse 23

I am gone like the shadow - "I have walked like the declining shadow," - I have passed my meridian of health and life; and as the sun is going below the horizon, so am I about to go under the earth.

I am tossed up and down as the locust - When swarms of locusts take wing, and infest the countries in the east, if the wind happen to blow briskly, the swarms are agitated and driven upon each other, so as to appear to be heaved to and fro, or tossed up and down. Dr. Shaw, who has seen this, says it gives a lively idea of the comparisons of the psalmist.

PSALM 109: 24 My knees are weak through fasting. My body is thin and lacks fat.

 Verse 24

My knees are weak through fasting - That hunger is as soon felt in weakening the knees, as in producing an uneasy sensation in the stomach, is known by all who have ever felt it. Writers in all countries have referred to this effect of hunger. Thus Tryphiodorus II. Excid. ver 155: Τειρομενου βαρυθειεν ατερπει γουνατα λιμω. "Their knees might fail, by hunger's force subdued;

And sink, unable to sustain their load."

Merrick.

So Plautus, Curcul, act. ii., scen. 3: -

Tenebrae oboriuntur, genua inedia succidunt. "My eyes grow dim; my knees are weak with hunger."

And Lucretius, lib. 4: ver. 950: -

Brachia, palpebraeque cadunt, poplitesque procumbunt. "The arms, the eyelids fall; the knees give way."

Both the knees and the sight are particularly affected by hunger.

PSALM 109: 25 I have also become a reproach to them. When they see me, they shake their head.

Verse 25

When they looked upon me they soaked their heads - Thus was David treated by Shimei, 2Sam 16:5, 2Sam 16:6, and our blessed Lord by the Jews, Mat 27:39.

PSALM 109: 26 Help me, LORD, my God. Save me according to your loving kindness;

PSALM 109: 27 that they may know that this is your hand; that you, LORD, have done it.

Verse 27

That they may know that this is thy hand - Let thy help be so manifest in my behalf, that they may see it is thy hand, and that thou hast undertaken for me. Or, if the words refer to the passion of our Lord, Let them see that I suffer not on my own account; "for the transgression of my people am I smitten."

PSALM 109: 28 They may curse, but you bless. When they arise, they will be shamed, but your servant shall rejoice.

Verse 28

Let them curse, but bless thou - See on Psa 109:20 (note): Of the mode of interpretation recommended there, this verse gives additional proof.

PSALM 109: 29 Let my adversaries be clothed with dishonour. Let them cover themselves with their own shame as with a robe.

Verse 29

Let them cover themselves - He here retorts their own curse, Psa 109:18.

PSALM 109: 30 I will give great thanks to the LORD with my mouth. Yes, I will praise him among the multitude.

Verse 30

I will greatly praise the Lord - I have the fullest prospect of deliverance, and a plenary vindication of my innocence.

PSALM 109: 31 For he will stand at the right hand of the needy, to save him from those who judge his soul.

Verse 31

He shall stand at the right hand of the poor - Even if Satan himself be the accuser, God will vindicate the innocence of his servant. Pilate and the Jews condemned our Lord to death as a malefactor; God showed his immaculate innocence by his resurrection from the dead.

The whole of this Psalm is understood by many as referring solely to Christ, the traitor Judas, and the wicked Jews. This is the view taken of it in the analysis.