

# PSALM 58

## INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 58

### *To the chief Musician, Altaschith, Michtam of David*

According to the Syriac version, this psalm was written when Saul threatened the priests, because they did not show him where David was, when they knew it. Dr. Lightfoot thinks that the title “Altaschith” refers to David’s not destroying Nabal, as he threatened; and that the venom of Nabal’s tongue in reviling him, and the deafness of his ears in not attending to the messengers that told their errand wisely, are designed in this psalm; and in which the psalmist prophesies of his sudden death, before the pots for his feast could be warmed by the thorns under them, and while he was lively and jovial. Jarchi is of opinion that it was composed after David had been in the trench where Saul lay, and took away the spear and cruse, and went his way, and called to Abner, saying, “answerest thou not?” which is as if he should say, hast thou it not in thy power now to convince Saul, and show him that he pursues me without cause, since, if I would, I could have slain him? Kimchi says it was written on account of Abner, and the rest of Saul’s princes, who judged David as a rebel against the government, and said it was for Saul to pursue after him to slay him; for if they had restrained him, Saul would not have pursued after him; and indeed they seem to be wicked judges who are addressed in this psalm; “do not destroy”. Arama says, it declares the wickedness of Saul’s judges.

**Ver. 1.** *Do ye indeed speak righteousness, O congregation?* etc.] Of the mighty, as in (<sup><1830></sup>Psalm 82:1); the judges of the land, who were many, and therefore called a congregation, as it is necessary they should; for, being many, they are not so easily bribed; and besides, one may see that in a cause which another does not. The word signifies a “sheaf”<sup>f767</sup>; and so it is by some rendered, to which a bench or assembly of judges may be compared; because consisting of many, and a select body, who should unite together in a sentence or decree, and act uprightly, like a sheaf of wheat standing upright; (see <sup><1870></sup>Genesis 37:7); some think the word has the signification of dumbness, or silence; so Jarchi and R. Moses<sup>f768</sup>; as “elem” in (<sup><1850></sup>Psalm 56:1), title, and render it, “do ye indeed speak dumb justice?”

or “the dumbness of justice”<sup>f769</sup>; or are you dumb, or your mouth silent, when ye should speak righteousness? and so the psalmist accuses them for their criminal silence, in not contradicting Saul and his courtiers when they spake against him; and for not advising him to another kind of conduct towards him. All men ought to speak that which is right and truth; but especially judges on the bench, who are to judge the people with just judgment, (<sup><051618></sup>Deuteronomy 16:18); but here this is doubted of, and called in question; at least their sincerity in giving judgment: yea, it is denied; for this interrogation carries in it a strong denial; and the meaning is, that they did not speak righteousness, or that which was just and right in the cause of David, when before them;

*do ye judge uprightly, O ye sons of men?* no, they did not; they were unjust judges. The psalmist calls them “the sons of men”, as in (<sup><0229></sup>1 Samuel 26:19), in distinction from God the Judge of all, and to put them in mind of their frailty and mortality; for though they were gods by office, they were but men, and should die like men, and be accountable to the supreme Judge for all their proceedings in judgment here, (<sup><03801></sup>Psalm 82:1,6,7).

**Ver. 2.** *Yea, in heart ye work wickedness*, etc.] So far were they from speaking righteousness, and judging uprightly. The heart of man is wickedness itself; it is desperately wicked, and is the shop in which all wickedness is wrought; for sinful acts are committed there as well as by the tongue and hand, as follows. This phrase also denotes their sinning; not with precipitancy, and through surprise; but with premeditation and deliberation; and their doing it heartily, with good will, and with allowance, and their continuance and constant persisting in it;

*ye weigh the violence of your hands in the earth*; they were guilty of acts of violence and oppression, which, of all men, judges should not be guilty of; whose business it is to plead the cause of the injured and oppressed, to right their wrongs, and to protect and defend them: these they pretended to weigh in the balance of justice and equity, and committed them under a show of righteousness; they decreed unrighteous decrees, and framed mischief by a law; and this they did openly, and everywhere, throughout the whole land.

**Ver. 3.** *The wicked are estranged from the womb*, etc.] Which original corruption of nature accounts for all the wickedness done by men: they are conceived in sin, shapen in iniquity, and are transgressors from the womb; they are alienated from God, and from that godly life which is agreeable to

him, and he requires; and from the knowledge and fear of him, and love to him; and they desire not the knowledge of him nor his ways; they are far from his law, and averse to it; and still more so to the Gospel of Christ; the doctrines of which, as well as the great things written in the law, are strange things to them; and they are aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, estranged from the people of God, know nothing of them, neither of their joys, nor of their sorrows;

*they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies*; they are wicked from their infancy, from their youth upward; and sin, which is meant by “going astray”, as soon as they are capable of it, and which is very early. Sin soon appears in the temper and actions of them; they go out of God’s way, and turn everyone to their own way, and walk in the broad road which leads to destruction: and particularly they are very early guilty of lying; as soon as they can speak, and before they can speak plain, they lisp out lies, which they learn from their father the devil, who is the father of lies; and so they continue all their days strangers to divine things, going astray from God, the God of truth, continually doing abominations and speaking lies; which continuance in these things makes the difference between reprobate men and God’s elect; for though the latter are the same by nature as the former, yet their natures are restrained, before conversion, from going into all the sins they are inclined to; and if not, yet at conversion a stop is put to their progress in iniquity.

**Ver. 4.** *Their poison [is] like the poison of a serpent*, etc.] Either their “wrath” and fury, as the word <sup>1770</sup> may be rendered, against God, his people, and even one another, is like that of a serpent when irritated and provoked; or their mischievous and devouring words are like the poison of asps under their lips, ( ~~4813~~ Romans 3:13); or the malignity of sin in them is here meant, which, like the poison of a serpent, is latent, hid, and lurking in them; is very infectious to all the powers and faculties of the soul, and members of the body; and is deadly and incurable, without the grace of God and blood of Christ;

*[they are] like the deaf adder [that] stoppeth her ear*; the adder is a kind of serpent, in Hebrew called “pethen”; hence the serpent “Python”. This is not, deaf naturally, otherwise it would have no need to stop its ear, but of choice; and naturalists <sup>1771</sup> observe, that it is quicker of hearing than of sight. Jarchi indeed says, when it grows old it becomes deaf in one of its ears, and it stops its other ear with dust, that it may not hear the voice of

the charmer; though others say<sup>f772</sup> it stops one ear with its tail, and lays the other to the ground; but these seem fabulous. David speaks of it figuratively, that it acts as if it was deaf, regarding no enchantments, but bites notwithstanding; these having no influence on it, which, if they had any, could not be hindered by its deafness; and he compares wicked men to it, who are wilfully deaf to all good counsel and advice given them<sup>f773</sup>.

**Ver. 5.** *Which will not hearken to the voice of charmers*, etc.] Or “that use enchantments”, to enchant serpents, by muttering certain words, or by magical songs; by which means it is said that they have been drawn out of their holes, or caused to fly, or have become stupefied, and have lost their poison, and even burst asunder; as Bochart<sup>f774</sup> relates from Pliny, Aelianus, Lucan, Isidore, Virgil, Ovid, Horace, and others: but an “asp” is unmoved by enchantments, and they are of no avail against its bites and poison<sup>f775</sup>. Nor do these words suppose that the psalmist approved of enchantments, or affirms the virtue of them to be real, but rather suggests the contrary; he only takes his similitude from the seeming deafness and disregard of serpents to enchantments, to set forth the obstinacy of wicked men: and their resolution to continue in their wicked ways; like the serpent that disregards men:

*charming never so wisely*; being “wise, skilful”<sup>f776</sup>, or made wise in enchanting enchantments; one very learned and expert in the art; or in “associating associations, skilful”<sup>f777</sup>: who makes a consort of magical words to obtain his point, as some think; or because by his enchantments he associates and gathers many serpents together, and tames them; or because he does this by society and fellowship with the devil; methods no ways approved of by the psalmist, only alluded to. It may perhaps better be rendered, “which will not hearken to the voice of the eloquent, putting things together ever so wisely”: the word is used for an eloquent orator, (<sup>(-2XRB)</sup>Isaiah 3:3). Such Gospel ministers are, who are mighty in the Scriptures. The voice of the Gospel is a charming voice; it publishes good news and glad tidings; it is a voice of love, grace, and mercy, of peace, pardon, righteousness, and salvation by Christ; and is wisely charmed when it gives no uncertain sound, is all of a piece, and is faithfully preached, as it was by the apostles of Christ; who, as wise men, laid him as the foundation of eternal life and salvation; and especially as it was preached by Christ himself, who spake as never man did: and yet, such were the hardness and obstinacy of the wicked Jews, that they stopped their ears to his ministry, nor would they suffer others to attend upon it; and so it is now: which

shows the insufficiency of the best means of themselves, and the necessity of powerful and efficacious grace, to work upon the hearts of men.

**Ver. 6.** *Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth*, etc.] From the description of the wicked, the psalmist passes to imprecations on his enemies; whom he represents as cruel and bloodthirsty, and as being stronger than he; and therefore he applies to God, who could, as he sometimes did, smite his enemies on the cheekbone, and break the teeth of the ungodly; which is done by taking the power and instruments of hurting from them: and it may be by “their teeth in their mouth” may be meant their malicious words, calumnies, and detractions; teeth being the instrument of speech; and by “breaking” them, preventing the mischief designed by them;

*break out the great teeth of the young lions, O Lord*: Saul was the old lion; his princes, nobles, and courtiers, the young ones; whose jaw teeth were as knives to devour David and his men, unless plucked out; or God in his providence should interpose, and hinder the performance of their mischievous and cruel designs; and who could easily destroy them by his blast, and by the breath of his nostrils, (<sup><1005></sup>Job 4:9,10).

**Ver. 7.** *Let them melt away as waters [which] run continually*, etc.] Let them be disheartened, and their courage fail them, and let there be no spirit left in them, (<sup><1005></sup>Joshua 7:5); or let them be unstable as water that is continually running, ever upon the flux and motion; let them never be settled, but always changing in their state and circumstances, (<sup><1001></sup>Genesis 49:4); or let them “come to nought”, as the Septuagint and Vulgate Latin versions; which is the case of water that runs over or runs away: or “let them be despised”, as Jarchi, and the Arabic, Syriac, and Ethiopic versions; being useless and unprofitable, as water is when passed and gone: or let their ruin and destruction be as swift as the gliding water; let them be brought to desolation in a moment; (<sup><1018></sup>Job 24:18); and let it be irrecoverable, as water running over the cup, and scattering itself, is spilled upon the ground, and cannot be gathered up, (<sup><1044></sup>2 Samuel 14:14). The Targum is,

“let them melt in their sins as water;”

*[when] he bendeth [his bow to shoot] his arrows, let them be as cut in pieces*; either when the wicked man bends his bow to shoot his arrows against the righteous; when he devises, his chief against him, shoots out bitter words, and attempts to do hurt unto him; let it be as if the string of

his bow and his arrows were all cut to pieces; let all his designs, words, and actions, be without effect, and let not his hand perform his enterprise: or when God bends his bow against the wicked, so Jarchi; and prepares the instruments of death for them, and ordains his arrows against the persecutors, (<sup><4972></sup>Psalm 7:12,13); let then his and his people's enemies be cut off, as the tops of the ears of corn; as the word used signifies, (<sup><4824></sup>Job 24:24). The words may be rendered, "let him (God) direct his arrows; as the tops of the ears of corn are cut off"<sup>f778</sup>; so let them be.

**Ver. 8.** *As a snail [which] melteth, let [everyone of them] pass away*, etc.] As a snail when it comes out of its shell liquefies, drops its moisture, and with it makes a "path", from whence it has its name **ל וּלְ בֹצ'**, in the Hebrew language; and so the Targum here,

"as the snail moistens its way;"

which moistness it gradually exhausts, and melts away, and dies: so the psalmist prays that everyone of his enemies might die in like manner. Some think reference is had to the snail's putting out its horns to no purpose when in danger, and apply it to the vain threatenings of the wicked; a strange difference this, between a roaring young lion, (<sup><4886></sup>Psalm 58:6), and a melting snail. The Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, and all the Oriental versions, render it, "as wax [which] melteth": (see <sup><4882></sup>Psalm 68:2);

*[like] the untimely birth of a woman, [that] they may not see the sun*; (see <sup><4886></sup>Job 3:16). The Targum is,

"as an abortive and a mole, which are blind and see not the sun."

So Jarchi renders it a "mole", agreeably to the Talmud<sup>f779</sup>. Or, "let them not see the sun"<sup>f780</sup>; let them die, and never see the sun in the firmament any more; Christ, the sun of righteousness; nor enjoy the favour of God, and the light of his countenance; nor have the light of life, or eternal glory and happiness; (see <sup><4949></sup>Psalm 49:19).

**Ver. 9.** *Before your pots can feel the thorns*, etc.] Which is soon done; for as dry thorns make a great blaze, so they give a quick heat; the pots soon feel them, or the water in them soon receives heat from them. From imprecations the psalmist proceeds to prophesy, and foretells the sudden destruction of wicked men, which would be before a pot could be heated with a blaze of thorns. The Targum is,

“before the wicked become tender, they harden as the thorn:”

that is, they never become tender, or have any tender consciences, but are hardened in sin from their infancy. Some render the words, “before your thorns grow up to a brier” or “bramble”<sup>[781]</sup>; little thorns become great ones, tender thorns hard ones, as Jarchi; that is, as he interprets it, before the children of the wicked are grown up, they are destroyed; those sons of Belial, who are like to thorns thrust away, (<sup>[4236]</sup>2 Samuel 23:6). Others, as Aben Ezra, “before they understand”; that is, wise and knowing men; “that your thorns are a bramble”; or from lesser ones are become greater; and so denotes, as before, the suddenness and quickness of their destruction, as follows:

*he*, that is, God,

*shall take them away as with a whirlwind*: not to himself, as Enoch; nor to heaven, whither Elijah went up by a whirlwind; but out of the land of the living, and as with a tempest, to hell, where snares, fire, and brimstone, are rained upon them; (see <sup>[4271]</sup>Job 27:20,21 <sup>[4916]</sup>Psalms 11:6);

*both living, and in [his] wrath*: when in health and full strength, and so go quick to hell; as Korah and his company alive into the earth; and all in wrath and sore displeasure: for the righteous are also taken away; but then it is from the evil to come, and to everlasting happiness; and through many tempestuous providences, which are in love, and for their good, do they enter the kingdom: and those that are alive at Christ’s coming will be caught up to meet him in the air; but the wicked are taken away as in a whirlwind, alive, and in wrath.

**Ver. 10.** *The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance*, etc.] Before imprecated and foretold; the punishment inflicted by the Lord, to whom vengeance belongs, in a way of vindictive wrath; for what befalls the wicked in an afflictive way is in wrath, and as a vengeance upon them: and as the judgments of God are sometimes manifest, are to be seen, they are observed by the righteous, who rejoice at them; not as evils and miseries simply considered, nor from a private affection; but as the glory of divine justice is displayed therein, and the goodness of God is shown to them, by delivering them out of their hands; (see <sup>[6630]</sup>Revelation 18:20 19:1-3);

*he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked*; which denotes the great destruction of the wicked, and the abundance of blood that shall be shed; (see <sup>[6640]</sup>Revelation 14:20); and the entire victory the saints shall have over

them, and their security from them, (~~1821~~ Psalm 68:21-23); as well as the satisfaction, and pleasure and refreshment, as it were, they shall have in their destruction; signified by their feet being washed in their blood, instead of being washed in water, usual in the eastern countries; because of the glory of the divine perfections appearing therein. The Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, and all the Oriental versions, read, “his hands”.

**Ver. 11.** *So that a man shall say*, etc.] Any man, and every man, especially, that is observing, wise, and knowing; he shall conclude, from such a dispensation of things, from God’s dealing with the wicked after this manner:

*verily, [there is] a reward for the righteous*; or “fruit”<sup>f782</sup> for them: they have the fruits of divine love, the blessings of an everlasting covenant; and the fruit of Christ, the tree of life, which is sweet unto their taste, as are the benefits of his death, his word and ordinances; and the fruits of the Spirit, his several graces wrought in their souls; and the fruits of righteousness, the effect of which is peace; and is a reward they receive in, though not for keeping the commands of God; and they gather fruit unto eternal life, which is the recompence of reward, the reward of the inheritance, the great reward in heaven, which remains for them; and which they shall have, not for their own righteousness’s sake, but for the sake of Christ’s righteousness; from which they are denominated righteous persons, and which gives them a right and title to it: so that this is a reward, not of debt as due to them, and to be claimed by them on account of any thing they have done; but of grace, streaming through the blood and righteousness of Christ;

*verily, he is a God that judgeth in the earth*; that there is a God is known by the judgments that he executeth; and that he judgeth in the earth, and is the Judge of all the earth, who will do right, may be concluded from the vengeance inflicted on wicked men; and he will one day judge the world in righteousness, by him whom he has ordained to be Judge of quick and dead. The words in the Hebrew text are in the plural number, **μϣϣ ρϙ** **μϣϣ** **א**, “gods that judge”: which Kimchi and Ben Melech say is on account of honour; or as they, with Aben Ezra, interpret it, of the angels: but these are not judges in the earth; rather it is expressive of a trinity of Persons in the Godhead, Father, Son, and Spirit. The Father is the Judge of all, though he does not execute judgment; but has committed it to the Son,

who is Judge of quick and dead; and the Spirit judges, reproveth, and convinces the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment.