

PSALM 59

INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 59

*To the chief Musician, Altaschith, Michtam of David;
when Saul sent, and they watched the house to kill him.*

The history of Saul's sending messengers to watch the house of David, and to kill him when he rose in the morning, is in (^{<091>}1 Samuel 19:11); which was the occasion of his writing this psalm; though the title of the Syriac version of it is,

“David said or composed this, when he heard that the priests were slain by Saul:”

and in the same is added,

“but unto us it declares the conversion of the Gentiles to the faith, and the rejection of the Jews.”

And which perhaps is designed in (^{<091>}Psalm 59:5,13); and some interpreters are of opinion that the whole psalm is to be understood of Christ, of whom David was a type, especially in his sufferings; and there are some things in it which better agree with him than with David, as particularly his being without sin, (^{<091>}Psalm 59:3).

Ver. 1. *Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God,* etc.] David had his enemies in his youth, notwithstanding the amiableness of his person, the endowments of his mind, his martial achievements, his wise behaviour and conduct, and the presence of God with him; yea, it were some of these things that made Saul his enemy, who, by his power and authority, made others; (see ^{<091>}1 Samuel 18:5-16). Christ had his enemies, though he went about doing good, both to the bodies and souls of men, continually; the chief priests, Scribes, and Pharisees, were his implacable enemies, and even the people of the Jews in general: and the church of God, and members of it, whom David may represent, have their enemies, sin, Satan, and the world; and as David and Christ, so the church has a covenant God to go unto, from whom deliverance from enemies may be desired and expected;

defend me from them that rise up against me; or, “set me on high above them”^{f783}; out of their reach, as David was protected from Saul and his men, who rose up in an hostile manner against him; and as Christ was, when raised from the dead, and exalted at his Father’s right hand; and as the saints are in great safety, dwelling on high, where their place of defence is the munition of rocks; and therefore it matters not who rise up against them.

Ver. 2. *Deliver me from the workers of iniquity*, etc.] (See Gill on “~~1008~~ Psalm 6:8”);

and save me from bloody men; such as Saul sent to kill David, as appears from the title of the psalm; and such as were concerned in the death of Christ; and such, are the enemies of God’s people, the followers of the man of sin. The heap of words, the various expressions used in a way of petition, in this verse and (~~1801~~ Psalm 59:1), show the distress the psalmist was in, and whom he represents; his importunity, earnestness, and fervency in prayer.

Ver. 3. *For, lo, they lie in wait for my soul*, etc.] As the men did that watched his house, when Saul sent to kill him; so the Jews sought and lay in wait to take away the life of Christ; and very often was it the case of the Apostle Paul, that he was in danger of his life, through the lying in wait of the Jews; so Satan makes use of cunning devices, stratagems, and wiles, to ruin the souls of God’s people, if possible; and false teachers lie in wait to deceive them. The emphasis lies upon the word “soul”, which is so precious, and the redemption of which has cost so much, even the blood of Christ;

the mighty are gathered against me; or, “dwell by me”; (see ~~1806~~ Psalm 56:6); around his house, the soldiers that Saul sent; and such were the enemies of Christ, (~~1804~~ Psalm 69:4); the chief priests, Scribes, and elders, men of great authority and influence among the people; the kings of the earth and rulers, Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and people of the Jews, (~~4005~~ Acts 4:26,27); yea, Satan, and his principalities and powers; and who are also those against whom the saints wrestle, and would be too mighty for them, were it not that God, and Christ, and the Holy Spirit, and the holy angels, are on their side;

not [for] my transgression, nor [for] my sin, O Lord; as the cause of such usage and treatment. David was not without original sin, in which he was

conceived and born; nor without inward corruptions, of which he often complained; nor without actual transgressions, and some very gross ones, and which he owned and confessed, and prayed for the pardon of: but in the case of Saul there was no transgression nor iniquity in him, as he declared to him himself, and appeals to God for the truth of it, (^{<0241>}1 Samuel 24:11 ^{<0208>}Psalm 7:3-5). One of the words here used signifies “rebellion” ^{f784}; of this he was not guilty; he never entered into any treasonable measures, nor committed any treasonable practices, nor conspired against the life and crown of his sovereign; in this respect he was quite clear and innocent. Christ, his antitype, was entirely without sin, without original or actual transgression; he had no sin in his nature, nor committed any in his life; he had none inherent in him, only the sins of his people imputed to him; and therefore the usage he met with from men was very cruel and unjust. And as for the saints, though they are not free from sin, original and actual, yet in the case for which they suffer reproach, and are persecuted by men, they are not criminal; they have done nothing to deserve such usage; they do not suffer as evildoers, but as Christians, (^{<0045>}1 Peter 4:15,16).

Ver. 4. *They run and prepare themselves without [my] fault*, etc.] Or, “without sin [in me]”; or “without punishment [in them]”; so the same word is rendered, (^{<0280>}1 Samuel 28:10). “They run”, in an hostile manner, “against me”, as the Syriac version adds; or like dogs up and down, about the city, to find him and kill him; (see ^{<0207>}Psalm 59:7,14). Or this may denote their readiness and swiftness to shed blood, (^{<0016>}Proverbs 1:16); “and prepare themselves” with weapon, with instruments of death, as the men did that were sent to kill him; and as the band of men that came with Judas to take Christ prepared themselves with swords and staves. The Targum is,

“they order or ordain war;”

which they prosecuted without any occasion of it from him, and wilt, impunity in them. Wherefore it follows,

awake to help me; or “to meet me” ^{f785}; (see ^{<0429>}Genesis 46:29 ^{<0044>}Exodus 4:14,27); with succour and supplies, and to deliver out of the hands of enemies. The Lord, though he neither slumbers nor sleeps, yet seems to be asleep when he does not arise to help his people, but suffers the enemy to prevail; and when he seems to take no notice of their case, but hides his eyes, and shuts them as a man asleep. Hence the following petition,

and behold; the distress the psalmist was in, and the wickedness and malice of his enemies against him.

Ver. 5. *Thou therefore, O Lord God of hosts*, etc.] Of the armies in heaven, the angels, and of all the inhabitants of the earth; who are all under him, and at his dispose, and can do among them and with them whatsoever he pleases;

the God of Israel; of the people of Israel, literally understood; and mystically of all the elect of God, Jews and Gentiles. The former epithet is expressive of his power, this of his grace and goodness in a covenant way; and both encouraged the psalmist to address him on the following account:

awake to visit all the Heathen: either the wicked Israelites that rose up against David, and sought to take away his life, who behaved like Heathens towards him, and were accounted as such by him; and the petition is, that God would arise and punish them, everyone of them, according to their deserts: or else the Gentiles, properly so called, whom he desires the Lord would visit, either in a way of grace, by sending the Gospel to them, and taking out of them a people for his name, as he did, (~~4154~~ Acts 15:14); foreseeing, by a spirit of prophecy, that the Jews would be rejected for their ill usage of the Messiah; (see Gill on "~~4906~~ Psalm 59:1"), title: or in a way of punishment for their idolatry and impiety; and particularly the antichristian states and powers, called the Heathen, and Gentiles, and nations of the earth, (~~4906~~ Psalm 10:16 ~~6102~~ Revelation 11:2,18); may be here meant; whom God will visit for their idolatry, blasphemy, and bloodshed;

be not merciful to any wicked transgressors; that are perfidiously and abominably wicked, as Judas Iscariot, the Romish antichrist. The Targum renders it, "princes of a lie"; that speak lies in hypocrisy, and are given up to believe a lie, as the followers of antichrist. God is merciful to wicked men and to transgressors, but not to wicked transgressors; apostates may be meant, such as deal perfidiously and treacherously, as the word ^{f786} used signifies; who sin wilfully and knowingly, after they have received the knowledge of the truth; sin against light and evidence, and obstinately and wickedly persist therein: who sin the sin against the Holy Ghost, the sin unto death, which is not to be prayed for, (~~6346~~ 1 John 4:16); or otherwise this may seem to be contrary to the command and example of Christ, (~~4154~~ Matthew 5:44 ~~4234~~ Luke 23:34).

Selah; on this word, (see Gill on "~~4180~~ Psalm 3:2").

Ver. 6. *They return at evening*, etc.] It was at evening Saul sent messengers to watch David's house, that they might take him in the morning; but missing him, perhaps after a fruitless search for him all the day, returned at evening to watch his house again; or they might come, and go and return the first evening. So it was night when Judas set out from Bethany, to go to the chief priests at Jerusalem, to covenant with them, and betray his master; and it was in the night he did betray him, after he had eaten the passover at evening with him. Or, "let them return"^{f787}, as in (⁴⁵⁹⁴Psalm 59:14); with shame and confusion, as David's enemies, when they found nothing but an image in the bed, which they reported to Saul; and as Judas returned to the chief priests with confusion and horror. Or, "they shall return"^{f788}; which being prophetically said, had its accomplishment, both in the enemies of David and of Christ; and will be true of all the wicked, who will return from their graves and live again, and give an account of themselves at the evening of the day of the Lord, which is a thousand years; in the morning of which day the dead in Christ will rise, but the rest will not rise until the end of the thousand years;

they make a noise like a dog: which is a very noisy creature, and especially some of them, which are always yelping and barking; though indeed there are some that are naturally dumb, and cannot bark: such there are in the West Indies, as we are told^{f789}; and to which the allusion is in (²⁵⁶⁰Isaiah 56:10); and which may serve to illustrate the passage there: but those referred to here are of another kind; and this noise of theirs either respects their bark in the night, as some dogs do continually, as Aben Ezra and Kimchi; or to their howling, as the Syriac and Arabic versions. Wicked men are compared to dogs, (⁴¹⁰⁶Matthew 7:6) (⁴⁶²⁵Revelation 22:15); and particularly the enemies of Christ, (⁴⁹²⁶Psalm 22:16,20), in allusion either to hunting dogs, who make a noise all the while they are pursuing after the game; or hungry ravenous ones, who make a noise for want of food; and this character agrees not only with the Roman soldiers, who were Gentiles, and whom the Jews used to call by this name, (⁴¹⁵⁶Matthew 15:26); but the Jews also, even their principal men, as well as the dregs of the people, who were concerned in the death of Christ; and may be truly said to make a noise like dogs when they cried Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas, crucify him, crucify him; for which they were instant and pressing with loud voices, and their voices prevailed, (⁴²³⁸Luke 23:18,21,23);

and go round about the city; as Saul's messengers, very probably, when they found David had made his escape from his house, searched the city round in quest of him; and there was much going about the city of Jerusalem at the time of our Lord's apprehension, trial, and condemnation; after he was taken in the garden: they went with him first to Annas's house, then to Caiaphas's, then to Pilate's, and then to Herod's, and back again to Pilate's, and from thence out of the city to Golgotha. The allusion is still to dogs, who go through a city barking ^{f790} at persons, or in quest of what they can get; so informers and accusers may be called city dogs, as some sort of orators are by Demosthenes ^{f791}.

Ver. 7. *Behold, they belch out with their mouth*, etc.] Bark like dogs, so Aben Ezra; or "bubble out" ^{f792}, as a fountain bubbles out with water; so they cast out their wickedness in great abundance; (see ~~~~Jeremiah 6:7); the phrase denotes the abundance of evil things and wicked speeches that came out of their mouths, which showed the naughtiness of their hearts; so David's enemies blustered and threatened what they would do to him could they find him; and Christ's enemies poured out their wicked charges of blasphemy and sedition against him, in great plenty, and without proof;

swords [are] in their lips; the words of their lips were like sharp swords; (see ~~~~Psalm 55:21 57:4); threatening the most severe and cruel things: or, besides their lips, and what they belched out with their mouths, they took swords in their hands in a literal sense; as Saul's messengers did to kill David, and as Judas and his band of men, who came to take Christ as a thief, with swords and staves, (~~~~Matthew 26:55);

for who, [say they], doth hear? what they uttered with their mouths and lips, in a blustering and threatening manner; though they were overheard by men, who carried what they said and designed to do to Michal, David's wife. The meaning may be, they would say what they pleased, and did not care who heard them, having nothing to fear from any, they having their orders from the king; (see ~~~~Psalm 12:4); and so the Targum,

“behold they belch out with their mouths words which are sharp as swords, and with their lips saying, we shall prevail; for who is he that hears, and can punish?”

Aben Ezra's note is,

“they thought that God did not hear their counsels;”

and therefore the next words are in direct opposition to them; but so to think is monstrous stupidity and brutishness, (^{<3904>}Psalm 94:4-9); some take the words to be the words of David, complaining that the civil magistrate, none of the judges, took notice of or punished such who belched out their lies and calumnies against him, saying, “for who doth hear?” no man.

Ver. 8. *But thou, O Lord, shall laugh at them*, etc.] Disappoint their counsels, hinder them from performing their enterprise; send them back with shame and confusion, and expose them to the laughter and derision of others; as Saul’s messengers were, when instead of David they found an image in the bed, with a pillow of goats’ hair for its bolster, (^{<0916>}1 Samuel 19:16); the same is said as here with respect to the enemies of Christ, (^{<1911>}Psalm 2:4);

thou shall have all the Heathen in derision: either David’s enemies, who, though Israelites, yet acted like Heathens to him, as in (^{<1815>}Psalm 59:5); or the Gentiles that were gathered together against Christ, (^{<1911>}Psalm 2:1-4); or the antichristian states and powers, who will be triumphed over at the time of their ruin, (^{<6620>}Revelation 18:20); and even all the wicked at the last day, (^{<1023>}Proverbs 1:26).

Ver. 9. [*Because of his strength will I wait upon thee*, etc.] Either because of the strength of Saul, who was stronger than David, he determined to wait upon the Lord for salvation and deliverance from him; or because of the strength of the Lord, which he expected from him, and therefore would wait upon him for it. The Septuagint and Vulgate Latin versions, and also the Chaldee paraphrase, render the words, “my strength will I keep for thee”; or “with thee”. I ascribe all my strength unto thee; I expect every supply of it from thee, and put my trust and confidence in thee for it: so did Christ as man, and had strength from the Lord, according to his promise, (^{<2307>}Isaiah 50:7,9) (^{<1821>}Psalm 89:21 86:17); and so every believer, (^{<2424>}Isaiah 14:24 40:31);

for God [is] my defence; or “my high refuge”; or “high tower” ¹⁷⁹³; (see ^{<0910>}Psalm 9:9 46:7); where he was defended and exalted, as is petitioned (^{<1810>}Psalm 59:1); and was safe and secure from every enemy.

Ver. 10. *The God of my mercy shall prevent me*, etc.] Or “of my grace”, or “goodness”, as the Targum; (see ^{<0110>}1 Peter 5:10). God is gracious in himself, and he has treasured up a fulness of grace in Christ: he is the donor of all the blessings of grace in the covenant; and the author of all

internal grace in the hearts of his people; and who supplies them with more grace as they want it; and he is the Father of all temporal and spiritual mercies. The “Cetib”, or writing, is **wdsj** , “his mercy”; the “Keri”, or reading, is **ydsj** , “my mercy”; grace or mercy is the Lord’s; it is his own, which he disposes of as he pleases; being given and applied, it is the believer’s; all the grace and mercy in the heart of God, in his Son, and in his covenant, is the saints’, which he keeps for them with Christ for evermore; “the God of my mercy”, or “grace”, is the same with “my merciful”, or “my gracious God”; who goes before his people, as he does the Messiah, with the blessings of his goodness, (^{<1210>}Psalm 21:3). It may be rendered, “hath come before me”; and denote the antiquity of his love, being before his people’s to him, and the early provisions of his grace and mercy for them: or “doth prevent me”: expressing the freeness of it; he not waiting for any duties, services, or conditions to be performed, but bestows his grace and mercy, notwithstanding much unworthiness: or “shall come before me”; designing the seasonable and timely application of mercy come before his fears, as it sometimes does the prayers of his people, (^{<2363>}Isaiah 65:24);

God shall let me see [my desire] upon mine enemies; expressed in the following verses, (^{<1591>}Psalm 59:11-15); or “vengeance upon them”; as the Targum paraphrases it; (see ^{<15810>}Psalm 58:10).

Ver. 11. *Slay thou not*, etc.] Though they deserved to be slain, and the Lord seemed as if he was about to slay them, who was able to do it; he seemed to be whetting his glittering sword, and his hand to take hold of vengeance ready to execute it; wherefore intercession is made to spare them, which agrees with Christ’s petition on the cross, (^{<1234>}Luke 23:34). The Targum adds, “immediately”: slay them not directly, and at once; give them space for repentance; and so the Jews had: for it was forty years after the death of Christ before their destruction was: or the meaning may be, slay them not utterly; destroy them not totally: and so it was; for though multitudes were slain during the siege of Jerusalem, and at the taking of it, yet they were not all slain: there were many carried captive, and sent into different parts of the world, whose posterity continue to this day. The reason of this petition is,

lest my people forget: the Syriac version renders it, “lest they should forget my people”; or my people should be forgotten. David’s people, the Jews by birth and religion, though not as yet his subjects, unless in designation and

appointment, and Christ's people according to the flesh: now if these had all been slain at once, they had been forgotten, like dead men out of mind: or Christ's special and peculiar people; his chosen, redeemed, and called ones, who truly believe in him, and are real Christians; and then the sense is, if full vengeance had been taken of the Jews at once, and they had been cut off root and branch, so that none of them remained, Christ's people would have forgot them, and the vengeance inflicted on them for their rejection of the Messiah; but now they are a continued and lasting instance of God's wrath and displeasure on that account, and they and their case cannot be forgotten. The Arabic version renders it, "lest my people forget the law"; its precepts and sanction, its rewards and punishments;

scatter them by thy power; or let them wander up and down like fugitives and vagabonds in the earth, as Cain did, and as the Jews now do, being dispersed in the several parts of the world; and which was done by the power of God, or through the kingdom of God coming with power upon that people, (⁴⁰⁰Mark 9:1); or "by thine army"^{f794}; the Roman army, which was the Lord's, being permitted by him to come against them, and being made use of as an instrument to destroy and scatter them, (⁴²⁷Matthew 22:7);

and bring them down; from their excellency, greatness, riches, and honour, into a low, base, mean, and poor estate and condition, in which the Jews now are;

O Lord, our shield; the protector and defender of his people, while he is the destroyer and scatterer of their enemies.

Ver. 12. [*For*] *the sin of their mouth, [and] the words of their lips*, etc.] The words may be read as one proposition, "the words of their lips [are] the sin of their mouth"^{f795}; they speak nothing but evil; whatever they say is sin; out of the abundance of their evil hearts their mouths speak: or "for the sin of their mouth" and lips; because of the calumnies cast by them on the Messiah, traducing him as a sinful man, a blasphemmer, a seditious person, and even as one that had familiarity with the devil;

let them even be taken in their pride; in their city and temple, of which they boasted, and prided themselves in; and so they were: or for their pride in rejecting the Messiah, because of his mean descent and parentage, and because his kingdom was not with outward pomp and observation; and being vain boasters of their carnal privileges, and works of righteousness,

they refused to submit to the righteousness of God, and were neither subject to the law of God, nor to the Gospel of Christ;

and for cursing and lying [which] they speak; for cursing the Messiah, pronouncing him accursed, and treating him as such, by hanging him on a tree; and for lying against him, saying that he was a Samaritan, and had a devil, and cast out devils by Beelzebub; and that he was a deceiver of the people, and a wicked man: for these things they were taken in their besieged city, as is here imprecated.

Ver. 13. *Consume [them] in wrath, consume [them]*, etc.] The repetition of the request shows the ardour and vehemency of the mind of the petitioner, and the importunity in which he put up the petition; and suggests that the persons designed were guilty of very great sins, deserving of the wrath of God, and which came upon them to the uttermost, (^{<31216>}1 Thessalonians 2:16);

that they [may] not [be]; either any more in the land of the living; be utterly extinct, having no being in this world, (^{<2815>}Jeremiah 31:15); or that they might not be in the glory and grandeur, in the honour, dignity, and felicity, they once were in; which best suits the present state of the Jews; and this sense better agrees with what follows;

and let them know that God ruleth in Jacob, unto the ends of the earth; this is to be understood of the Messiah, who is God over all, blessed for ever, and is the ruler in Israel, King of saints; reigns over the house of Jacob, in his church, and among his people, wherever they are; even to the ends of the earth, where he has had, or will have, some that are subject to him: for his dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth, (^{<3718>}Psalm 72:8); and this his government is known to men good and bad, by the judgments which he executeth; and particularly it is apparent that he is made Lord and Christ, and that he is come in his kingdom, and with power, by the vengeance taken on the Jewish nation.

Selah; on this word, (see Gill on “^{<4812>}Psalm 3:2”).

Ver. 14. *And at evening let them return; [and] let them make a noise like a dog, and go round about the city.*] What in (^{<3816>}Psalm 59:6) is related as matter of fact, is here expressed by way of imprecation; and what is there taken notice of as their sin, is here wished for at their punishment; unless it can be thought that this should refer to the conversion and return of the Jews in the evening of the world, and to their humiliation and mourning for

piercing Christ, and to their very distressed and uncomfortable condition they will be in, until they have satisfaction that their sins are forgiven them; (see Gill on “⁻³⁹¹⁶Psalm 59:6”).

Ver. 15. *Let them wander up and down for meat*, etc.] Like hungry dogs;

and grudge if they be not satisfied; or murmur and howl as dogs when hungry, and can find nothing to eat; or “when they shall not be satisfied, and shall lodge”¹⁷⁹⁶; when they shall get nothing to satisfy their hungry appetite, and shall go to bed without a supper, and lie all night without food. The Targum is,

“they shall wander about to seize the prey to eat, and will not rest till the are satisfied, and will lie all night;”

that is, in quest of prey.

Ver. 16. *But I will sing of thy power*, etc.] In creating all things out of nothing; in upholding all things in being; in the redemption of his people; in their conversion and calling; in the preservation of them to eternal happiness; in the performance of his promises to them; in the destruction of their enemies; and in their protection:

yea, I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning; of providential mercies, which are new every morning; and of special mercy in the heart of God, in the covenant of his grace, in redemption, in regeneration, in the pardon of sin, and in eternal life and salvation;

for thou hast been my defence; (see Gill on “⁻³⁹¹⁹Psalm 59:9”);

and refuge in the day of my trouble; whither he fled, and found protection and safety; (see Gill on “⁻³⁹¹⁹Psalm 9:9”).

Ver. 17. *Unto thee, O my strength, will I sing*, etc.] That is, to God, whom he made his strength, and put his trust in for strength, and from whom he received it; and he therefore determined to sing praise to him for it, and give him the glory of it;

for God [is] my defence: as before in (⁻³⁹¹⁹Psalm 59:9,16);

[and] the God of my mercy; (see Gill on “⁻³⁹¹⁹Psalm 59:10”).