

## PSALM LVIII.

To the Chief Musician.—Although David had his own case in his mind's eye, yet he wrote not as a private person, but as an inspired prophet, and therefore his song is presented, for public and perpetual use, to the appointed guardian of the Temple psalmody. Al-taschith. The wicked are here judged and condemned, but over the godly the sacred "Destroy not" is solemnly pronounced. Michtam of David. This is the fourth of the Psalms of the Golden Secret, and the second of the "Destroy nots." These names if they serve for nothing else may be useful to aid the memory. Men give names to their horses, jewels, and other valuables, and these names are meant not so much to describe as to distinguish them, and in some cases to set forth the owner's high esteem of his treasure; after the same fashion the Oriental poet gave a title to the song he loved, and so aided his memory, and expressed his estimation of the strain. We are not always to look for a meaning in these superscriptions, but to treat them as we would the titles of poems, or the names of tunes.

Division.—The ungodly enemy is accused, verses 1—5; judgment is sought from the judge, verses 6—8; and seen in prophetic vision as already executed, verses 9—11.

### EXPOSITION.

**D**O ye indeed speak righteousness, O congregation? do ye judge uprightly,  
O ye sons of men?

2 Yea, in heart ye work wickedness; ye weigh the violence of your hands in the earth.

3 The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.

4 Their poison is like the poison of a serpent: they are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear;

5 Which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely.

1. "*Do ye indeed speak righteousness, O congregation?*" The enemies of David were a numerous and united band, and because they so unanimously condemned the persecuted one, they were apt to take it for granted that their verdict was a right one. "What everybody says must be true," is a lying proverb based upon the presumption which comes of large combinations. Have we not all agreed to hound the man to the death, and who dare hint that so many great ones can be mistaken? Yet the persecuted one lays the axe at the root by requiring his judges to answer the question whether or not they were acting according to justice. It were well if men would sometimes pause, and candidly consider this. Some of those who surrounded Saul were rather passive than active persecutors; they held their tongues when the object of royal hate was slandered; in the original, this first sentence appears to be addressed to them, and they are asked to justify their silence. Silence gives consent. He who refrains from defending the right is himself an accomplice in the wrong. "*Do ye judge uprightly, O ye sons of men?*" Ye too are only men though dressed in a little brief authority. Your office for men, and your relation to men both bind you to rectitude; but have ye remembered this? Have ye not put aside all truth when ye have condemned the godly, and united in seeking the overthrow of the innocent? Yet in doing this be not too sure of success, for ye are only the "sons of men," and there is a God who can and will reverse your verdicts.

2. "*Yea, in heart ye work wickedness.*" Down deep in your very souls ye hold a rehearsal of the injustice ye intend to practise, and when your opportunity arrives, ye wreak vengeance with a gusto; your hearts are in your wicked work, and your hands are therefore ready enough. Those very men who sat as judges, and pretended to so much indignation at the faults imputed to their victim, were in their

hearts perpetrating all manner of evil. "*Ye weigh the violence of your hands in the earth.*" They were deliberate sinners, cold, calculating villains. As righteous judges ponder the law, balance the evidence, and weigh the case, so the malicious dispense injustice with malice aforethought in cold blood. Note in this verse that the men described sinned with heart and hand; privately in their heart, publicly in the earth; they worked and they weighed—they were active, and yet deliberate. See what a generation saints have to deal with! Such were the foes of our Lord, a generation of vipers, an evil and adulterous generation; they sought to kill him because he was righteousness itself, yet they masked their hatred to his goodness by charging him with sin.

3. "*The wicked are estranged from the womb.*" It is small wonder that some men persecute the righteous seed of the woman, since all of them are of the serpent's brood, and enmity is set between them. No sooner born than alienated from God—what a condition to be found in! Do we so early leave the right track? Do we at the same moment begin to be men and commence to be sinners? "*They go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.*" Every observer may see how very soon infants act lies. Before they can speak they practise little deceptive arts. This is especially the case in those who grow up to be adepts in slander, they begin their evil trade early, and there is no marvel that they become adepts in it. He who starts early in the morning will go far before night. To be untruthful is one of the surest proofs of a fallen state, and since falsehood is universal, so also is human depravity.

4. "*Their poison is like the poison of a serpent.*" Is man also a poisonous reptile? Yes, and his venom is even as that of a serpent. The viper has but death for the body in his fangs; but unregenerate man carries poison under his tongue, destructive to the nobler nature. "*They are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear.*" While speaking of serpents the Psalmist remembers that many of them have been conquered by the charmer's art, but men such as he had to deal with, no art could tame or restrain; therefore, he likens them to a serpent less susceptible than others to the charmer's music, and says that they refused to hear reason, even as the adder shuts her ear to those incantations which fascinate other reptiles. Man, in his natural corruption, appears to have all the ill points of a serpent without its excellences. O sin, what hast thou done!

5. "*Which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely.*" Ungodly men are not to be won to right by arguments the most logical, or appeals the most pathetic. Try all your arts, ye preachers of the word! Lay yourselves out to meet the prejudices and tastes of sinners, and ye shall yet have to cry, "Who hath believed our report?" It is not in your music, but in the sinner's ear that the cause of failure lies, and it is only the power of God that can remove it.

"You can call spirits from the vasty deep,  
But will they come when you do call for them?"

No, we call and call, and call in vain, till the arm of the Lord is revealed. This is at once the sinner's guilt and danger. He ought to hear but will not, and because he will not hear, he cannot escape the damnation of hell.

6 Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth: break out the great teeth of the young lions, O LORD.

7 Let them melt away as waters *which* run continually: *when* he bendeth *his bow* to shoot his arrows, let them be as cut in pieces.

8 As a snail *which* melteth, let *every one of them* pass away: *like* the untimely birth of a woman, *that* they may not see the sun.

6. "*Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth.*" If they have no capacity for good, at least deprive them of their ability for evil. Treat them as the snake-charmers do their serpents, extract their fangs, break their teeth. The Lord can do this, and he will. He will not suffer the malice of the wicked to triumph, he will deal them such a blow as shall disable them from mischief. "*Break out the great teeth of the young lions, O Lord.*" As if one brute creature had not enough of evil in it to complete the emblem of ungodly nature, another specimen of *feræ naturæ* is fetched in. For fierce cruelty the wicked are likened to young lions, monsters in the prime of their vigour, and the fury of their lustiness; and it is asked that

their grinders may be smashed in, broken off, or dashed out, that the creatures may henceforth be harmless. One can well understand how the banished son of Jesse, while poisoned by the venomous slander of his foes, and worried by their cruel power, should appeal to heaven for a speedy and complete riddance from his enemies.

7. "*Let them melt away as waters which run continually.*" Like mountain torrents dried up by the summer heats let them disappear; or like running streams whose waters are swiftly gone, so let them pass away; or like water spilt which none can find again, so let them vanish out of existence. Begone, ye foul streams, the sooner ye are forgotten the better for the universe. "*When he bendeth his bow to shoot his arrows, let them be as cut in pieces.*" When the Lord goes forth to war, let his judgments so tell upon these persecutors that they may be utterly cut in pieces as a mark shattered by many shafts. Or perhaps the meaning is, when the ungodly man marches to the conflict, let his arrows and his bow drop into fragments, the string cut, the bow snapped, the arrows headless, the points blunted; so that the boastful warrior may not have wherewithal to hurt the object of his enmity. In either sense the prayer of the Psalm has often become fact, and will be again fulfilled as often as need arises.

8. "*As a snail which melteeth, let every one of them pass away.*" As the snail makes its own way by its slime, and so dissolves as it goes, or as its shell is often found empty, as though the inhabitant had melted away, so shall the malicious eat out their own strength while they proceed upon their malevolent designs, and shall themselves disappear. To destroy himself by envy and chagrin is the portion of the ill-disposed. "*Like the untimely birth of a woman, that they may not see the sun.*" Solemn is this curse, but how surely does it fall on many graceless wretches! They are as if they had never been. Their character is shapeless, hideous, revolting. They are fitter to be hidden away in an unknown grave than to be reckoned among men. Their life comes never to ripeness, their aims are abortive, their only achievement is to have brought misery to others, and horror to themselves. Such men as Herod, Judas, Alva, Bonner, had it not been better for them if they had never been born? Better for the mothers who bore them? Better for the lands they cursed? Better for the earth in which their putrid carcasses are hidden from the sun? Every unregenerate man is an abortion. He misses the true form of God-made manhood; he corrupts in the darkness of sin; he never sees or shall see the light of God in purity, in heaven.

9 Before your pots can feel the thorns, he shall take them away as with a whirlwind, both living, and in *his* wrath.

10 The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked.

11 So that a man shall say, Verily *there is* a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth.

9. "*Before your pots can feel the thorns.*" So sudden is the overthrow of the wicked, so great a failure is their life, that they never see joy. Their pot is put upon the hook to prepare a feast of joy, and the fuel is placed beneath, but before the thorns are lit, before any heat can be brought to bear upon the pot, yea, even as soon as the fuel has touched the cooking vessel, a storm comes and sweeps all away; the pot is overturned, the fuel is scattered far and wide. Perhaps the figure may suppose the thorns, which are the fuel, to be kindled, and then the flame is so rapid that before any heat can be produced the fire is out, the meat remains raw, the man is disappointed, his work is altogether a failure. "*He shall take them away as with a whirlwind.*" Cook, fire, pot, meat and all, disappear at once, whirled away to destruction. "*Both living, and in his wrath.*" In the very midst of the man's life, and in the fury of his rage against the righteous, the persecutor is overwhelmed with a tornado, his designs are baffled, his contrivances defeated, and himself destroyed. The passage is difficult, but this is probably its meaning, and a very terrible one it is. The malicious wretch puts on his great seething pot, he gathers his fuel, he means to play the cannibal with the godly; but he reckons without his host, or rather without the Lord of hosts, and the unexpected tempest removes all trace of him, and his fire, and his feast, and that in a moment.

10. "*The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance.*" He will have



no hand in meting it out, neither will he rejoice in the spirit of revenge, but his righteous soul shall acquiesce in the judgments of God, and he shall rejoice to see justice triumphant. There is nothing in Scripture of that sympathy with God's enemies which modern traitors are so fond of parading as the finest species of benevolence. We shall at the last say, "Amen," to the condemnation of the wicked, and feel no disposition to question the ways of God with the impenitent. Remember how John, the loving disciple, puts it. "And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: for true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever." "*He shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked.*" He shall triumph over them, they shall be so utterly vanquished that their overthrow shall be final and fatal, and his deliverance complete and crowning. The damnation of sinners shall not mar the happiness of saints.

11. "*So that a man shall say.*" Every man however ignorant shall be compelled to say, "*Verily,*" in very deed, assuredly, "*there is a reward for the righteous.*" If nothing else be true this is. The godly are not after all forsaken and given over to their enemies; the wicked are not to have the best of it, truth and goodness are recompensed in the long run. "*Verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth.*" All men shall be forced by the sight of the final judgment to see that there is a God, and that he is the righteous ruler of the universe. Two things will come out clearly after all—there is a God and there is a reward for the righteous. Time will remove doubts, solve difficulties, and reveal secrets; meanwhile faith's foreseeing eye discerns the truth even now, and is glad thereat.

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#### EXPLANATORY NOTES AND QUAIN T SAYINGS.

*Title.*—The proper meaning of the root of *Michtam* is to engrave, or to stamp a metal. It therefore, in strictness, means, an engraving or sculpture. Hence in the Septuagint, it is translated *σηλογραφία*, an inscription on a column. I would venture to offer a conjecture in perfect harmony with this view. It appears by the titles of four out of these six Psalms, that they were composed by David while flying and hiding from the persecutions of Saul. What, then, should hinder us from imagining that they were inscribed on the rocks and on the sides of the caves which so often formed his place of refuge? This view would accord with the strict etymological meaning of the word, and explain the rendering of the Septuagint.—*John Jebb*, in "*A Literal Translation of the Book of Psalms,*" 1846.

[See also Explanatory Notes on Psalms xvi. and lvi. "*Treasury of David,*" Vol. I., pp. 192, 197—98; Vol. II., pp. 464, 468.]

*Whole Psalm.*—*Kimchi* says this Psalm 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.—*John Gill*.

*Verse 1.*—"Are ye dumb (when) ye (should) speak righteousness, (and) judge equitably, sons of man?" The first words are exceedingly obscure. One of them (דומ), not expressed in the English, and the ancient versions, means *dumbness*, as in Psalm lxi. 1, and seems to be here used as a strong expression for *entirely speechless*. In what respect they were thus dumb, is indicated by the verb which follows, but the connection can be made clear in English only by a circumlocution. The interrogation, *are ye indeed*, expresses wonder, as at something scarcely credible. Can it be so? Is it possible? are you really silent, you, whose very office is to speak for God, and against the sins of men?—*Joseph Addison Alexander*.

Verse 1.—“*O congregation,*” *O band, or company.* The Hebrew *ælem*, which hath the signification of *binding as a sheaf or bundle*, seemeth here to be a company that are combined or confederate.—Henry Ainsworth.

Verse 2.—“*In heart ye work wickedness,*” etc. The Psalmist doth not say, they had wickedness in their heart, but they did work it there: the heart is a shop within, an under-ground shop; there they did closely contrive, forge, and hammer out their wicked purposes, and fit them into actions; yea, *they weighed the violence of their hands in the earth.* That is an allusion to merchants, who buy and sell by weight; they weigh their commodity to an ounce; they do not give it out in gross, but by exact weight. Thus saith the Psalmist, *they weigh the violence of their hands;* they do not oppress grossly, but with a kind of exactness and skill, they sit down and consider what and how much violence they may use in such a case, or how much such a person may endure, or such a season may bear. They are wiser than to do all at once, or all to one, lest they spoil all. They “*weigh*” what they do, though what they do be so bad that it will hold no weight when God comes to weigh it. Nor do they arrive at this skill presently, but after they have, as it were, served an apprenticeship at it; and they bind themselves to the trade very early; for as it follows at the third verse of the Psalm, “*The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies,*” that is, they are estranged both by nature and by early practice; they lose no time, they go to it young, even “*as soon as they are born,*” as soon as they are fit for any use, or to do any thing, they are using and setting themselves to do wickedly.—Joseph Caryl.

Verse 2.—The word *רָעָה*, *wickedness*, properly signifies the *inclinations of scales*, when the scale weighs down to one side; then it is transferred to respect of persons, to injustice and iniquity, especially in public tribunals and decisions, as in Psalm lxxxii. 2, *How long will ye judge (רָעָה) by an unjust inclination of the scales?*—Hermann Venema.

Verse 2.—The principles of the wicked are even worse than their practices, premeditated violence is doubly guilty.—George Rogers.

Verse 3.—“*The wicked are estranged from the womb,*” etc. How early men do sin! How late do they repent! *As soon as they are born* “*they go astray,*” but if left to themselves they will not return till they die; they will never return. Children can neither go nor speak as soon as born, but as soon as born they can “*go astray*” and “*speak lies;*” that is, their first speaking is lying, and their first going is straying; yea, when they cannot go naturally, they can go astray morally or metaphorically: the first step they are able to take is a step out of the way.—Joseph Caryl.

Verse 3.—“*They go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.*” Of all sins, no sin can call Satan father like to lying. All the corruption that is in us came from Satan, but yet this sin of forging and lying is from the devil more than any; tastes of the devil more than any. Hence every man is a liar (Romans iii. 4), and so every man is every sinner else; but in a special manner every man is a liar; for that the very first depravation of our nature came in by lying, and our nature doth taste much still of this old block to be given to lying, the devil also breathing into us a strong breath to stir us up to lying. Hence *no sooner do we speak but we lie.* As we are in body, subject to all diseases, but yet, some to one sickness rather than to another: so in the soul, all are apt enough to all sin, and some rather to one vice than to another; but all are much inclined to lying. A liar then is as like the devil as ever he can look: as unlike to God as ever he can be.—Richard Capel, 1586—1656, in “*Tentations, their Nature, Danger, Cure.*”

Verse 3.—The figure of the wicked going astray as soon as they are born, seems to be taken from the disposition and power of a young serpent soon after its birth. The youngest serpent can convey poison to anything which it bites; and the suffering in all cases is great, though the bite is seldom fatal. Place a stick near the reptile whose age does not amount to many days, and he will immediately snap at it. The offspring of the tiger and of the alligator are equally fierce in their earliest habits.—Joseph Roberts, in “*Oriental Illustrations of the Sacred Scriptures,*” 1844.

Verse 4.—“*Poison.*” There is such a thing as poison; but where to be found? *Ubique fuerit, in homine quis quæret?* Wheresoever it is, in man who would look for it? God made man’s body of the dust; he mingled no poison with it.

He inspireth his soul from heaven; he breathes no poison with it. He feeds him with bread; he conveys no poison with it. *Unde venenum?* Whence is the poison? Matt. xiii. 27—"Didst not thou, O Lord, sow good seed in thy field?" *Unde zizaniz*—"From whence then hath it tares?" Whence? *Hoc fecit inimicus*—"The enemy hath done this." We may perceive the devil in it. That great serpent, the red dragon, hath poured into wicked hearts this poison. His own poison, *malitiam*, wickedness. *Cum infundit peccatum, infundit venenum*—"When he pours in sin he pours in poison." Sin is poison. Original pravity is called corruption; actual poison. The violence and virulence of this venomous quality comes not at first. *Nemo fit repente pessimus*—No man becomes worst at the first dash. We are born corrupt, we have made ourselves poisonous. There be three degrees, as it were so many ages, in sin. *First*—secret sin; an ulcer lying in the bones, but skinned over with hypocrisy. *Secondly*—open sin, bursting forth into manifest villainy. The former is corruption, the second is eruption. *Thirdly*—frequented and confirmed sin, and that is rank poison, envenoming soul and body.—Thomas Adams, 1614.

*Verse 4.*—"Adder." Heb. *ḥayyān*, *pethen*, the Egyptian cobra (*Naja haje*), one of the venomous Colubrine Snakes (*Colubridæ*). This is one of the so called hooded snakes, with which serpent charmers chiefly deal. The Spectacled Snake proper (*Naja tripudians*) is a closely related species. The well known Cobra di Capello is another. They are all noted for their deadly bite. The hollow fangs communicate with a poison gland, which being pressed in the act of biting, sends a few drops into the puncture. The venom quickly acts on the whole system, and death soon ensues.—John Duns, D.D., in "*Biblical Natural Science*," 1868.

*Verse 4.*—"The deaf adder." Certain it is, says a modern writer upon the Psalms, that the common adder or viper here in England, the bite of which too, by the way, is very venomous, if it is not wholly deaf, has the sense of hearing very imperfectly. This is evident from the danger there is of treading upon these animals, unless you happen to see them; for if they do not see you, and you do not disturb them, they never endeavour to avoid you, which when they are disturbed and do see you, they are very solicitous of doing. Allowing, then, that there is a species of these noxious animals, which either not having the sense of hearing at all, or having it only in a low degree, may very well be said to be deaf; this may help to explain the present poetical passage of the Psalmist. He very elegantly compares the pernicious and destructive practices of wicked men to the venom of a serpent; and his mentioning this species of animals, seems to have brought to his mind another property of at least one sort of them, in which they likewise resembled perverse and obstinate sinners, who are deaf to all advice, utterly irreclaimable, and not to be persuaded. This the adder resembled, which is a very venomous animal, and moreover is deaf, or very near it. And perhaps his saying that *she stoppeth her ear*, may be no more than a poetical expression for deafness; just as the *mole*, which in common speech is said to be *blind*, might in a poetical phrase, be said to shut her eyes; as in fact she does when you expose her to the light. The next clause, "*Which refuseth to hear*," etc., is another poetical expression for the same thing.—Samuel Burder, in "*The Scripture Expositor*," 1810.

*Verse 4.*—"The deaf adder." Several of the serpent tribe are believed to be either quite deaf, or very dull of hearing. Perhaps that which is called the *puddeyan*, the "beaver-serpent," is more so than any other. I have frequently come close up to these reptiles; but they did not make any effort to move out of the way. They lurk in the path, and the victim on whom they pounce will expire within a few minutes after he is bitten.—Joseph Roberts.

*Verse 4.*—"The deaf adder." The "adder," or "asp," is the *haje naja* or *cobra* of Egypt, according to Cuvier. The hearing of all the serpent tribes is imperfect, as all are destitute of a tympanic cavity, and of external openings to the ear. The "deaf adder" is not a particular species. The point of the rebuke is, the *pethen*, or "adder," here in question, could hear in some degree but would not; just as the unrighteous judges, or persecutors, of David could hear with their outward ears such appeals as he makes in verses 1, 2, but would not. The charmer usually could charm the serpent by shrill sounds, either of his voice or of the flute, the serpent's comparative deafness rendering it the more amenable to those sounds which it could hear. But exceptional cases occurred of a "deaf adder" which was deaf only in the sense that it refused to hear, or to be acted on. Also Jer. viii. 17; compare Eccl. x. 11.—A. R. Fausset.



Verse 4.—“*The deaf adder that stoppeth her ear.*” With respect to what is said of the animal’s stopping its ears, it is not necessary to have recourse to the supposition of its actually doing so, which by some persons has been stated, but it is sufficient to know, that whilst some serpents are operated upon in the manner above described, others are partly or altogether insensible to the incantation.—*Richard Mant.*

Verse 4 (second clause).—This clause admits of a different construction, like *the deaf adder he stops his ear*, which some interpreters prefer, because an adder cannot stop its ears, and need not stop them if naturally deaf, whereas it is by stopping his, that the wicked man becomes like a deaf adder.—*J. A. Alexander.*

Verses 4, 5.—Experienced and skilful as the serpent-charmers are, however, they do not invariably escape with impunity. Fatal terminations to these exhibitions of the psyllic art now and then occur; for there are still to be found “*deaf adders, which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely.*” . . . Roberts mentions the instance of a man who came to a gentleman’s house to exhibit tame snakes, and on being told that a cobra, or hooded snake, was in a cage in the house, was asked if he could charm it; on his replying in the affirmative, the serpent was released from the cage, and no doubt, in a state of high irritation. The man began his incantations, and repeated his charms; but the snake darted at him, fastened upon his arm, and before night he was a corpse.—*Philip Henry Gosse, in “The Romance of Natural History,” 1681.*

Verses 4, 5.—One day, a rattlesnake entered our encampment. Among us was a Canadian who could play the flute, and who, to divert us, marched against the serpent with his new species of weapon. On the approach of his enemy, the haughty reptile curls himself into a spiral line, flattens his head, inflates his cheeks, contracts his lips, displays his venomous fangs and his bold throat; his tongue flows like two flames of fire; his eyes are burning coals; his body, swollen with rage, rises and falls like the bellows of a forge; his dilated skin assumes a dull and scaly appearance; and his tail, whence proceeds the death-announcing sound, vibrates with such rapidity as to resemble a light vapour. The Canadian begins to play upon his flute—the serpent starts with surprise, and draws back his head. In proportion as he is struck with the magic notes, his eyes lose their fierceness; the oscillations of his tail become slower, and the sounds which it makes become weaker, and gradually die away. Less perpendicular upon their spiral line, the rings of the charmed serpent are by degrees expanded, and sink one after another on the ground in concentric circles. The shades of azure, green, white, and gold recover their brightness on his quivering skin, and slightly turning his head, he remains motionless, in the attitude of attention and pleasure. At this moment the Canadian advances a few steps, producing with the flute sweet and simple notes. The serpent, inclining his variegated neck, opens a passage with the head through the high grass, and begins to creep after the musician; stopping when he stops, and beginning to follow him again as soon as he advances forward. In this manner he was led out of the camp, attended by a great number of spectators, both savages and Europeans, who could scarcely believe their eyes which had witnessed this effect of harmony.—*François Auguste, Viscount de Chateaubriand, 1768—1848.*

Verses 4, 5.—The serpent, when she begins to feel the charmer, clappeth one ear presently to the ground, and stoppeth the other ear with her tail, although by hearkening to the charmer, as some observe, she would be provoked to spit out her poison, and renew her age.\* So hot is man upon his harlot sin, that he is deaf to all that would counsel him to the contrary; he stoppeth his ear, hardeneth his heart, stiffeneth his neck against the thunders of the law, the still voice of the gospel, the motions of the Spirit, and the convictions of his own conscience. When sin calls, they run through thick and thin for haste; when the world commands, how readily do they hearken, how quickly do they hear, how faithfully do they obey! but when the blessed God crieth to them, chargeth them by his unquestionable authority, beseecheth them for their own unchangeable felicity, they, like statues of men, rather than living creatures, stand still and stir not at all. Other things move swiftly to their centres; stones fall tumbling downward, sparks fly apace upward, conchs run with speed to their burrows, rivers with violence to the ocean, and yet silly man hangs off from his Maker, that neither entreaties, nor threatenings,

\* This is a specimen of the old-fashioned *unnatural* history. No one will be misled by it.—*C. H. S.*

nor the word, nor the works of God, nor hope of heaven, nor fear of hell, can quicken or hasten him to his happiness. Who would imagine that a reasonable soul should act so much against sense and reason?—*George Swinnoek*, 1627—1673.

*Verse 5.*—"Will not hearken." The Lord hath some of his elect ones whom he seeth walking in by-paths and crooked ways: the Lord giveth a commission to his servants, the ministers, and saith, Go invite and call yon soul to come to me, and say, Return, O Shulamite; but the soul stirs not: the Lord sends and calls again: yet with the deaf adder, he hearkeneth not to the voice of the enchanter: well, saith the Lord, "If you will not come; I will fetch you; if fair means will not do, foul means must; then he hisseth for the fly and the bee of affliction, and calls forth armies of trouble, and gives them commission to seize upon, and to lay siege to such a man or woman, and saith, Ply them with your cannon shot, till you make them yield, give up the keys and strike the sail; he sends sickness to their bodies, a consumption to their estate, death to their friends, shame to their reputation, a fire to their house, and the like, and bids them prey and spoil, till they see and acknowledge the hand of the Lord lifted up.—*J. Votier's "Survey of Effectual Calling,"* 1652.

*Verse 6.*—"Break their teeth," destroy the fangs of these serpents, in which their poison is contained. This will amount to the same meaning as above. Save me from the adders, the sly and poisonous slanderers: save me also from the lions—the tyrannical and bloodthirsty men.—*Adam Clarke*.

*Verse 6.*—"Great teeth." *אֵימָתַי*, according to Michaelis and Gesenius, are the eye-teeth, which in lions are sharp and terrible.—*George Phillips, B.D.*, in "*The Psalms in Hebrew: With a Commentary*," 1846.

*Verses 6-9.*—David's enemies were strong and fierce as young lions: he therefore prayed that their teeth might be broken, even their strongest teeth, their grinders, with which they were ready to devour him; that so they might be disabled from doing mischief. They overwhelmed him like an inundation: but he desired it might prove a land-flood, which is soon wasted. They were about to shoot at him: but he would have their bows, or their arrows, to be shivered to pieces, and become like straw, and do no execution, and he prayed that they might waste insensibly as the snail, which leaves its substance all along its track; and that they might come to nothing, like an abortion. He also predicted, that their prosperous rage (which resembled the crackling of thorns under a pot), would soon be extinct, and produce no effect; while the Lord in his wrath would hurry them into speedy destruction; as a furious whirlwind drives a living man down a precipice, or into a dreadful pit.—*Thomas Scott*, 1747—1821.

*Verse 7 (first clause).*—*Perowne* renders this clause, "Let them melt away, as water (which) runneth apace," and says that the reference is to "water running away, and so wasted and lost."

*Verse 7 (first clause).*—In desert parts of Africa it has afforded much joy to fall in with a brook of water, especially when running in the direction of the journey, expecting it would prove a valuable companion. Perhaps before it accompanied us two miles it became invisible by sinking into the sand; but two miles further along it would re-appear, and raise hopes of its continuance; but after running a few hundred yards, would sink finally into the sand, no more again to rise.—*John Campbell*, 1766—1840.

*Verse 8.*—"As a snail which melteth away as it goeth," lit., "which goeth in melting" (or slime), the noun being in the accusative as describing the nature of the action, and the allusion being to the slimy trail which the snail leaves behind it, so that it seems to waste away. Evidently this is nothing more than a poetical hyperbole, and need not be explained, therefore, as a popular error or a mistake in natural history.—*J. J. Stewart Perowne, B.D.*, in "*The Book of Psalms; a New Translation, with Introductions and Notes*," 1864.

*Verse 8.*—"As a snail which melleth," etc. This is a very remarkable and not very intelligible passage. The Jewish Bible renders the passage in a way which explains the idea which evidently prevailed at the time the Psalms were composed: "As a snail let him melt as he passeth on." The ancients had an idea that the slimy track made by a snail as it crawled along was subtracted from the substance of



its body, and that in consequence the farther it crept the smaller it became, until at last it wasted entirely away. The commentators on the Talmud took this view of the case. The Hebrew word, שַׁבְּלִי *shablul*, which undoubtedly does signify a snail of some kind, is thus explained:—"The Shablul is a creeping thing; when it comes out of its shell, saliva pours from itself until it becomes liquid, and so dies." Other explanations of this passage have been offered, but there is no doubt that the view taken by these commentators is the correct one, and that the Psalmist, when he wrote the terrible series of denunciations in which the passage occurs, had in his mind the popular belief regarding the gradual wasting away of the snail as it "passeth on." It is needless to say that no particular species of snail is mentioned, and almost as needless to state that in Palestine there are many species of snails, to any or all of which these words are equally applicable.—*J. G. Wood, in "Bible Animals," 1869.*

*Verse 8.*—"The untimely birth of a woman." The wicked are all, so to speak, human abortions; they are and for ever remain defective beings, who have not accomplished the great purpose of their existence. Heaven is the one end for which man is created, and he who falls short of it does not attain the purpose of his being; he is an eternal abortion.—*O. Prescott Hiller.*

*Verse 8 (second clause).*—David when he curseth the plots of wicked men, that though they have conceived mischief; and though they have gone with it a long time, and are ready to bring it forth, yet saith he, "Let them be" (that is, let their counsels and designs be) "like the untimely birth of a woman, that they may not see the sun:" that is, let them be dashed and blasted, let them never bring forth their poisonous brood to the hurt and trouble of the world.—*Joseph Caryl.*

*Verse 9 (first clause).*—"Before your cooking vessels," etc. It would puzzle *Œdipus* himself to make any tolerable sense of the English translation of this verse. It refers to the usage of travellers in the East, who when journeying through the deserts, make a hasty blaze with the thorns which they collect, some green and full of sap, others dry and withered, for the purpose of dressing their food; in which circumstances, violent storms of wind not unfrequently arise, which sweep away their fuel and entire apparatus, before the vessels which they use become warm by the heat. An expressive and graphical image of the overwhelming ruin of wicked men!—*William Walford, 1837.*

*Verse 9.*—"Before your pots feel the bramble." By this proverbial expression the Psalmist describes the sudden eruption of the divine wrath; sudden and violent as the ascension of the dry bramble underneath the housewife's pot. The brightness of the flame which this furnishes, the height to which it mounts in an instant, the fury with which it seems to rage on all sides of the vessel, give force, and even sublimity to the image, though taken from one of the commonest occurrences of the lowest life—a cottager's wife boiling her pot! The sense, then, will be: "Before your pots feel the bramble, he shall sweep them away in whirlwind and hurricane."—*Samuel Horsley, 1733—1806.*

*Verse 9.*—In all the book of God I do not remember any sentence so variously and differently translated as this verse. . . . This variety of translations ariseth chiefly from the original Hebrew word, סִירֹת *siroth*, which in the Hebrew tongue signifies, first, *pots or caldrons*, wherein flesh is sod, as Ex. xvi. 3; xxxviii. 3; Ezek. xi. 11. Secondly, *thorns*, and pricks of thorns and briars, as Isa. xxxiv. 13; Hosea ii. 8. Thirdly, because the pricks of the great bramble are very sharp and hooked, this word is used to signify fish-hooks. Amos iv. 2. In all our English Bibles of the old, new and Geneva translation, and some Latin Bibles, this word is taken to signify pots or caldrons; but the Septuagint, Hierome, vulgar Latin, Austine, Pagnine, Tremellius, and all others that I have seen, take this word in the second sense, for the sharp pricks of thorns and brambles. Here, certainly, this word signifies the sharp pricks of the great dog-bramble, where here in the Hebrew text is אֲתָד *atad*, and is used (Jud. ix. 14, 15) in *Jotham's* parable to signify the bramble, which being made king of the trees, kindled a fire, which devoured the cedars of Lebanon. Now this bramble in the body, and every branch of it, is beset with sharp hooked pricks, some of which are green and have life and moisture in them, and though they be sharp, yet they are not so stiff and strong as to make any deep wound in a man's flesh. Others are greater, more hooked, and hardened by drying and parching with the vehement heat of the sun; and they strike to the quick, and bold fast, or tear where they catch hold of man's skin or flesh. The first are here

called, —, living or green; the others are called, יָבֵשׁ, dried, or parched and hardened; and the prophetic Psalmist affirmeth that "God who judgeth in the earth, will take away and destroy as with a tempestuous whirlwind, every one of them, as well the green as the dry," as Tremellius out of the original doth most truly translate the word. . . . The whole text runs thus: "Before they feel your thorns or pricks, O ye bramble, he will take away every one as with a whirlwind, as well the green as the dry." "Before they," that is, the righteous whom ye hate and persecute; "do feel," that is, have a full sense and understanding of your thorns or pricks, that is, of the sharpness, fury, and mischief which is in the heart and hand of all and every one among you; for every one in your band and congregation is a grievous thorn and sharp prick of the cursed bramble, sharply set and bent to do mischief in malice and fury to the people and church of God. "He that is God who judgeth in the earth" (as it is expressed in the eleventh verse, in the last words) "will take away as with a whirlwind" (that is, scatter and destroy tempestuously), "every one, as well the living and green as the dry and hardened." That is, of every sort banded together, as well the green-headed and young persecutors, sharp set, but not so strong to hurt, as the old and dry who are hardened in malice by long custom, and in power and policy are strong to do mischief.—George Walker, in a *Fast Sermon before the House of Commons*, 1644.

Verse 10.—"The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance." When the just man seeth the vengeance and rejoiceth, it is not of malice, but of benevolence, either hoping that the wicked may by punishment be amended, or loving God's justice above men's persons, not being displeased with the punishment of the wicked, because it proceedeth from the Lord, nor desiring that the wicked may be acquitted from penalty because they deserve in justice to be punished.—Nicholas Gibbens.

Verse 10.—"The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance." Not that he shall be glad of the vengeance purely as it is a hurt, or a suffering to the creature, but the righteous shall be glad when he seeth the vengeance of God, as it is a fulfilling of the threatening of God against the sin of man, and an evidence of his own holiness. Psalm lxiv. 9, 10.—Joseph Caryl.

Verse 10.—"He shall wash his feet," etc. That is, he gets comfort and encouragement by the Lord avenge his cause against his adversaries.—Joseph Caryl.

Verse 10.—"He shall wash his feet in the blood," etc. As the victorious survivor of a conflict, walking over the battle-field, might be said to do.—R. T. Society's Notes.

Verse 10.—When angels execute God's judgments upon sinners, the saints see much in it; they see matter of fear and praise; of fear, in that God's power, wrath, and hatred are manifested in them against sin and sinners; of praise, in that themselves are delivered and justice is performed. When the wicked are taken away by a divine stroke, by the hand of justice, and God hath the glory of his justice, the righteous rejoice at it: but is that all? No, "he washeth his feet in the blood of the wicked;" that is, by this judgment he fears and reforms. It is a metaphor taken from the practice of those parts where they went barefoot, or with sandals and so contracted much filth, and used to wash and cleanse their feet when they came in; so here, the godly seeing the hand of God upon the wicked, fears and judges himself for his sins, purges his conscience and affections, and stands now in awe of that God who hath stricken the wicked for those sins which he himself in part is guilty of. Waldus, a man of note in Lyons, seeing one struck dead in his presence, he washed his hand in his blood; for presently he gave alms to the poor, instructed his family in the true knowledge of God, and exhorted all that came unto him to repentance and holiness of life.—William Greenhill, 1691—1677.

Verse 10.—No doubt, at the sight of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zebaim destroyed, angels saw cause to rejoice and sing, "Hallelujah." Wickedness was swept away; earth was lightened of a burden; justice, the justice of God, was highly exalted; love to his other creatures was displayed in freeing them from the neighbourhood of hellish contaminations. On the same principles (entering, however, yet deeper into the mind of the Father, and sympathising to the full in his justice), the Lord Jesus himself, and each one of his members shall cry "Hallelujah," over Antichrist's ruined hosts. Rev. xix. 3. "The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked." He shall be refreshed at the end of his journey (John xiii. 5; Luke vii. 44; Gen. xviii. 4), he shall wipe off all the dust of the way, and end its weariness by entering into that strange,

that divine joy over sin destroyed, justice honoured, the law magnified, vengeance taken for the insult done to Godhead, the triumph of the Holy One over the unholy. It is not merely the *time when that joy begins*—it is also the occasion and cause of that day's rapturous delight.—*Andrew A. Bonar.*

*Verse 10.*—A broad and vital distinction is to be made between *desire for the gratification of personal vengeance*, and zeal for the vindication of the glory of God. "The glory of God" includes necessarily the real good of the offender and the well-being of society. Desire for *retaliation* is always wrong; desire for *retribution* may be in the highest degree praiseworthy. For personal motives only can I desire retaliation upon the wrong-doer; but for motives most interested and noble I may desire retribution.—*R. A. Bertram*, in "*The Imprecatory Psalms*," 1867.

*Verse 11.*—"So that a man shall say, Verily," etc. This shall be said not by a man, nor by any particular man, but by men in general, by man as opposed to God. The particle translated "*verily*" really means *only*, and denotes that this and nothing else is true.—*J. A. Alexander.*

*Verse 11.*—"So that," etc. There is something worth noting from the connexion of this verse with the context, and is implied in the first word, "*so that*," which joins this verse with the former parts of this Psalm, and shows this to be an illation from them. What? did God so suddenly, "as with a whirlwind," overthrow those wicked judges who lorded it over his people? did he make those "lions" melt like snails? did he confirm the joints of his people, which were little before, trembling and smiting one against another, as if they had been so many forlorn wretches exposed and cast forth, and no eye to pity them; as if they had been floating with Moses upon the sea in a basket of bulrushes, without any pilot to guide them, and even ready to cry out with the disciple, "Master, carest thou not that we perish?" Did he then command a calm, and bring them to the haven where they would be? Did he turn their howling like dragons and chattering like cranes, under the whips and saws of tyrannical taskmasters, into a song of joy and triumph? Did he dismantle himself of that cloud wherein for a time he had so enveloped himself, that he seemed not to behold the pressures of his people? Did he, I say, then step in to his people's rescue, by breaking their yokes as in the day of Midian, and kissing them with the kisses of his mouth? "*So that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth.*" Observe: Though the passages of God's providence may seem so rugged and uncouth, as if they were destructive to his church, and likely to put out the eye of his own glory; yet our God will so dispose of them in the close, that they shall have an advantageous tendency, to the setting forth of his honour and our good.—*John Hinckley*, 1657.

*Verse 11.*—Some of the judgments of God are a shallow, or a ford, over which a lamb may wade; every child may read the meaning of them; and "*a man*"—any ordinary man—"may say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth."—*Joseph Caryl.*

*Verse 11.*—This judging here does not refer to the judgment to come, at the last day, when there shall be a general convention of quick and dead before the Lord's dreadful tribunal; though so, 'tis most true *affore tempus*, that there will be a time when God will ride his circuit here in a solemn manner, "so that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth;" but that is not the scope of this place. 'Tis in the present tense, ο κρινων, *that now judgeth, or is now judging* the earth and the inhabitants thereof; and therefore it must be understood of a judgment on this side, the judgment of the great day; and so God judges the earth, or in the earth, three manner of ways. First, by a providential ordering and wise disposal of all the affairs of all creatures. Secondly, in relieving the oppressed and pleading the cause of the innocent. Thirdly, in overthrowing and plaguing the wicked doers.—*John Hinckley.*



## HINTS TO PREACHERS.

*Verse 3.*—I. The natural effects of original sin are seen in early suffering and death. II. Its moral effects are seen in the early commission of actual sin. III. Early depravity is evinced in the conscious guilt of telling lies.—*G. R.*

*Verse 3 (first clause).*—The inner pandemonium, or the calendar of the heart's crime.

*Verse 4 (first clause).*—A generation of serpents.—*T. Adams's Sermon.*

*Verse 4.*—Sin as a poison. Poisons may be attractive in colour and taste, slow or rapid in action, painful in effect, withering, soporific or maddening. In all cases deadly.

*Verse 5.*—The serpent charmer. I. He charms with moral suasion, promise, threatening, etc. II. He charms wisely, earnestly, affectionately, argumentatively. III. He charms in vain; the will is averse. Hence the need of divine grace and of the gospel.

*Verse 8.*—The snail-like course of ungodly men. Their sin destroys their property, health, time, influence, life.

*Verse 11.*—Remarkable cases of divine judgments and their results.

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