

## PSALM LIX.

To the Chief Musician.—*Strange that the painful events in David's life should end in enriching the repertoire of the national minstrelsy. Out of a sour, ungenerous soil spring up the honey-bearing flowers of Psalmody. Had he never been cruelly hunted by Saul, Israel and the church of God in after ages would have missed this song. The music of the sanctuary is in no small degree indebted to the trials of the saints. Affliction is the tuner of the harps of sanctified songsters. Altaschith. Another "destroy not" Psalm. Whom God preserves Satan cannot destroy. The Lord can even preserve the lives of his prophets by the very ravens that would naturally pick out their eyes. David always found a friend to help him when his case was peculiarly dangerous, and that friend was in his enemy's household; in this instance it was Michal, Saul's daughter, as on former occasions it had been Jonathan, Saul's son. Michtam of David. This is the Fifth of the Golden Secrets of David; God's chosen people have many such. When Saul sent, and they watched the house to kill him. Great efforts are made to carry the Psalms away to other authors and seasons than those assigned in the headings, it being the fashion just now to prove one's learning by disagreeing with all who have gone before. Perhaps in a few years the old titles will be as much revered as they are now rejected. There are spasms in these matters, and in many other things among the would-be "intellectuals" of the schools. We are not anxious to show our readiness at conjecture, and therefore are content with reading this Psalm in the light of the circumstance here mentioned; it does not seem unsuitable to any verse, and in some the words are very appropriate to the specified occasion.*

*DIVISIONS.—In verses 1 and 2 he prays, in 3 and 4 he complains of his woes, and again in verse 5 he prays. Here he inserts a Selah, and ends one portion of his song. In 6 and 7 he renews his complaint, in 8, 9, 10 declares his confidence in God, and in 11, 12, 13 lifts up his heart in prayer; closing another part of his Psalm with Selah. Then he prays again in 14, 15, and afterwards betakes himself to singing.*

### EXPOSITION.

**D**ELIVER me from mine enemies, O my God: defend me from them that rise up against me.

2 Deliver me from the workers of iniquity, and save me from bloody men.

1. "*Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God.*" They were all round the house with the warrant of authority, and a force equal to the carrying of it out. He was to be taken dead or alive, well or ill, and carried to the slaughter. No prowess could avail him to break the cordon of armed men, neither could any eloquence stay the hand of his bloody persecutor. He was taken like a bird in a net, and no friend was near to set him free. Unlike the famous starling, he did not cry, "I can't get out," but his faith uttered quite another note. Unbelief would have suggested that prayer was a waste of breath, but not so thought the good man, for he makes it his sole resort. He cries for deliverance and leaves ways and means with his God. "*Defend me from them that rise up against me.*" Saul was a king, and therefore sat in high places, and used all his authority to crush David; the persecuted one therefore beseeches the Lord to set him on high also, only in another sense. He asks to be lifted up, as into a lofty tower, beyond the reach of his adversary. Note how he sets the title "*My God,*" over against the word "*mine enemies.*" This is the right method of effectually catching and quenching the fiery darts of the enemy upon the shield of faith. God is our God, and therefore deliverance and defence are ours.

2. "*Deliver me from the workers of iniquity.*" Saul was treating him very unjustly, and besides that was pursuing a tyrannical and unrighteous course towards others, therefore David the more vehemently appeals against him. Evil men

were in the ascendant at court, and were the ready tools of the tyrant, against these also he prays. Bad men in a bad cause may be pleaded against without question. When a habitation is beset by thieves, the good man of the house rings the alarm-bell; and in these verses we may hear it ring out loudly, "*deliver me,*" "*defend me,*" "*deliver me,*" "*save me.*" Saul had more cause to fear than David had, for the invincible weapon of prayer was being used against him, and heaven was being aroused to give him battle. "*And save me from bloody men.*" As David remembers how often Saul had sought to assassinate him, he knows what he has to expect from that quarter and from the king's creatures and minions who were watching for him. David represents his enemy in his true colours before God; the bloodthirstiness of the foe is a fit reason for the interposition of the righteous God, for the Lord abhors all those who delight in blood.

3 For, lo, they lie in wait for my soul: the mighty are gathered against me; not for my transgression, nor for my sin, O LORD.

4 They run and prepare themselves without my fault: awake to help me, and behold.

3. "*For, lo, they lie in wait for my soul.*" They were in ambushade for the good man's life. He knew their design and cried to God to be rescued from it. Like wild beasts they crouched, and waited to make the fatal spring; but their victim used effectual means to baffle them, for he laid the matter before the Lord. While the enemy lies waiting in the posture of a beast, we wait before God in the posture of prayer, for God waits to be gracious to us and terrible towards our foes. "*The mighty are gathered against me.*" None of them were absent from the muster when a saint was to be murdered. They were too fond of such sport to be away. The men at arms who ought to have been fighting their country's battles, are instead thereof hunting a quiet citizen; the gigantic monarch is spending all his strength to slay a faithful follower. "*Not for my transgressions, nor for my sin, O Lord.*" He appeals to Jehovah that he had done no ill. His only fault was, that he was too valiant and too gracious, and was, besides, the chosen of the Lord, therefore the envious king could not rest till he had washed his hands in the blood of his too popular rival. We shall always find it to be a great thing to be innocent; if it does not carry our cause before an earthly tribunal, it will ever prove the best of arguments in the court of conscience, and a standing consolation when we are under persecution. Note the repetition of his declaration of integrity. David is sure of his innocence. He dares repeat the plea.

4. "*They run and prepare themselves without my fault.*" They are all alive and active, they are swift to shed blood. They prepare and use their best tactics; they beset me in my house, and lay their ambushades as for some notable enemy. They come up fully armed to the attack, and assail me with all the vigour and skill of a host about to storm a castle; and all for no cause, but out of gratuitous malice. So quick are they to obey their cruel master, that they never stay to consider whether their errand is a good one or not; they run at once, and buckle on their harness as they run. To be thus gratuitously attacked is a great grief. To a brave man the danger causes little distress of mind compared with the injustice to which he is subjected. It was a cruel and crying shame that such a hero as David should be hounded down as if he were a monster, and beset in his house like a wild beast in its den. "*Awake to help me, and behold.*" When others go to sleep, keep thou watch, O God. Put forth thy might. Arouse thee from thine inaction. Only look at thy servant's sad condition and thy hand will be sure to deliver me. We see how thorough was the Psalmist's faith in the mercy of his Lord, for he is satisfied that if the Lord do but look on his case it will move his active compassion.

5 Thou therefore, O LORD God of hosts, the God of Israel, awake to visit all the heathen: be not merciful to any wicked transgressors. Selah.

5. "*Thou,*" thyself, work for me personally, for the case needs thine interposition. "*Therefore,*" because I am unjustly assailed, and cannot help myself. "*O Lord,*" everliving, "*God of Hosts,*" able to rescue me; "*the God of Israel,*" pledged by covenant to redeem thine oppressed servant; "*awake to visit all the heathen,*" arouse thy holy mind, bestow thy sacred energies, punish the heathen among thine Israel, the falsehearted who say they are Jews and are not, but do lie. And when thou art about the business, let all the nations of thine enemies, and all the heathenish

people at home and abroad know that thou art upon circuit, judging and punishing. It is the mark of a thoughtful prayer that the titles which are in it applied to God are appropriate, and are, as if were, congruous to the matter, and fitted to add force to the argument. Shall Jehovah endure to see his people oppressed? Shall the God of hosts permit his enemies to exult over his servant? Shall the faithful God of a chosen people leave his chosen to perish? The name of God is, even in a literal sense, a fortress and high tower for all his people. What a forceful petition is contained in the words, "*awake to visit!*" Actively punish, in wisdom judge, with force chastise. "*Be not merciful to any wicked transgressors.*" Be merciful to them as men, but not as transgressors; if they continue hardened in their sin, do not wink at their oppression. To wink at sin in transgressors will be to leave the righteous under their power, therefore do not pass by their offences but deal out the due reward. The Psalmist feels that the overthrow of oppression which was so needful for himself must be equally desirable for multitudes of the godly placed in like positions, and therefore he prays for the whole company of the faithful, and against the entire confraternity of traitors. "*Selah.*" With such a subject before us we may well pause. Who would not sit still and consider, when vengeance is being meted out to all the enemies of God? How wrong is that state of mind which hates to hear of the punishment of the wicked!

6 They return at evening: they make a noise like a dog, and go round about the city.

7 Behold, they belch out with their mouth: swords *are* in their lips: for who, say *they*, doth hear?

6. "*They return at evening.*" Like wild beasts that roam at night, they come forth to do mischief. If foiled in the light, they seek the more congenial darkness in which to accomplish their designs. They mean to break into the house in the dead of night. "*They make a noise like a dog, and go round about the city.*" Howling with hunger for their prey, they sneak round and round the walls, prowling with stealthy footstep, and barking in unamiable concert. David compares his foes to Eastern dogs, despised, unowned, loathsome, degraded, lean, and hungry, and he represents them as howling with disappointment, because they cannot find the food they seek. Saul's watchmen and the cruel king himself must have raved and raged fiercely when they found the image and the pillow of goats' hair in the bed instead of David. Vain were their watchings, the victim had been delivered, and that by the daughter of the man who desired his blood. Go, ye dogs, to your kennels and gnaw your bones, for this good man is not meat for your jaws.

7. "*Behold, they belch out with their mouth.*" The noisy creatures are so remarkable in their way, that attention is called to them with a *behold*. *Ecce homines*, might we not say, *Ecce canes!* Their malicious speech gushes from them as from a bubbling fountain. The wicked are voluble in slander; their vocabulary of abuse is copious, and as detestable as it is abundant. What torrents of wrathful imprecation will they pour on the godly! They need no prompters, their feelings force for themselves their own vent, and fashion their own expressions. "*Swords are in their lips.*" They speak daggers. Their words pierce like rapiers, and cleave like cutlasses. As the cushion of a lion's paw conceals his claw, so their soft ruby lips contain bloody words. "*For who, say they, doth hear?*" They are free from all restraint, they fear no God in heaven, and the government on earth is with them. When men have none to call them to account, there is no accounting for what they will do. He who neither fears God nor regards man sets out upon errands of oppression with gusto, and uses language concerning it of the most atrociously cruel sort. David must have been in a singular plight when he could hear the foul talk and hideous braggings of Saul's black guards around the house. After the style in which a Cavalier would have cursed a Puritan, or Claverhouse a Covenanter, the Saulites swore at the upstart whom the king's majesty had sent them to arrest. David called them dogs, and no doubt a pretty pack they were, a cursed cursing company of curs. When they said, "*Who doth hear?*" God was listening, and this David knew, and therefore took courage.

8 But thou, O LORD, shalt laugh at them; thou shalt have all the heathen in derision.



9 *Because of his strength will I wait upon thee : for God is my defence.*

10 The God of my mercy shall prevent me : God shall let me see *my desire* upon mine enemies.

8. "*But thou, O Lord, shalt laugh at them.*" He speaks to God as to one who is close at hand. He points to the liars in wait and speaks to God about them. They are laughing at me, and longing for my destruction, but thou hast the laugh of them seeing thou hast determined to send them away without their victim, and made fools of by Michal. The greatest, cleverest, and most malicious of the enemies of the church are only objects of ridicule to the Lord ; their attempts are utterly futile, they need give no concern to our faith. "*Thou shalt have all the heathen in derision.*" As if David had said—What are these fellows who lie in ambush ? And what is the king their master, if God be on my side ? If not only these but all the heathen nations were besetting the house, yet Jehovah would readily enough disappoint them and deliver me. In the end of all things it will be seen how utterly contemptible and despicable are all the enemies of the cause and kingdom of God. He is a brave man who sees this to-day when the enemy is in great power, and while the church is often as one shut up and besieged in his house.

9. "*Because of his strength will I wait upon thee.*" Is my persecutor strong ? Then, my God, for this very reason I will turn myself to thee, and leave my matters in thy hand. It is a wise thing to find in the greatness of our difficulties a reason for casting ourselves upon the Lord.

" And when it seems no chance nor change  
From grief can set me free,  
Hope finds its strength in helplessness,  
And, patient, waits on thee."

" *For God is my defence,*" my high place, my fortress, the place of my resort in the time of my danger. If the foe be too strong for me to cope with him, I will retreat into my castle, where he cannot reach me.

10. "*The God of my mercy shall prevent me.*" God who is the giver and fountain of all the undeserved goodness I have received, will go before me and lead my way as I march onward. He will meet me in my time of need. Not alone shall I have to confront my foes, but he whose goodness I have long tried and proved will gently clear my way, and be my faithful protector. How frequently have we met with preventing mercy—the supply prepared before the need occurred, the refuge built before the danger arose. Far ahead into the future the foreseeing grace of heaven has projected itself, and forestalled every difficulty. "*God shall let me see my desire upon mine enemies.*" Observe that the words, "*my desire,*" are not in the original. From the Hebrew we are taught that David expected to see his enemies without fear. God will enable his servant to gaze steadily upon the foe without trepidation ; he shall be calm, and self possessed, in the hour of peril ; and ere long he shall look down on the same foes discomfited, overthrown, destroyed. When Jehovah leads the way victory follows at his heels. See God, and you need not fear to see your enemies. Thus the hunted David, besieged in his own house by traitors, looks only to God, and exults over his enemies.

11 Slay them not, lest my people forget : scatter them by thy power ; and bring them down, O Lord, our shield.

12 *For* the sin of their mouth *and* the words of their lips let them even be taken in their pride : and for cursing and lying *which* they speak.

13 Consume *them* in wrath, consume *them*, that they *may* not be : and let them know that God ruleth in Jacob unto the ends of the earth. Selah.

11. "*Slay them not, lest my people forget.*" It argues great faith on David's part, that even while his house was surrounded by his enemies he is yet so fully sure of their overthrow, and so completely realises it in his own mind, that he puts in a detailed petition that they may not be too soon or too fully exterminated. God's victory over the craft and cruelty of the wicked is so easy and so glorious that it seems a pity to end the conflict too soon. To sweep away the plotters all at once were to end the great drama of retribution too abruptly. Nay, let the righteous be buffeted a little longer, and let the boasting oppressor puff and brag through

his little hour, it will help to keep Israel in mind of the Lord's justice, and make the brave party who side with God's champion accustomed to divine interpositions. It were a pity for good men to be without detractors, seeing that virtue shines the brighter for the foil of slander. Enemies help to keep the Lord's servants awake. A lively, vexatious devil is less to be dreaded than a sleepy, forgetful spirit which is given to slumber. "*Scatter them by thy power.*" Blow them to and fro, like chaff in the wind. Let the foemen live as a vagabond race. Make Gains of them. Let them be living monuments of divine power, advertisements of heaven's truth. To the fullest extent let divine justice be illustrated in them. "*And bring them down.*" Like rotten fruit from a tree. From the seats of power which they disgrace, and the positions of influence which they pollute, let them be hurled into humiliation. This was a righteous wish, and if it be untempered by the gentleness of Jesus, we must remember that it is a soldier's prayer, and the wish of one who was smarting under injustice and malice of no ordinary kind. "*O Lord, our shield.*" David felt himself to be the representative of the religious party in Israel, and therefore he says "*our shield,*" speaking in the name of all those who make Jehovah their defence. We are in good company when we hide beneath the buckler of the Eternal; meanwhile he who is the shield of his people is the scatterer of their enemies.

12. "*For the sin of their mouth and the words of their lips let them even be taken in their pride.*" Such dreadful language of atheism and insolence deserves a fit return. As they hope to take their victims, so let them be taken themselves, entangled in their own net, arrested in the midst of their boastful security. Sins of the lips are real sins, and punishable sins. Men must not think because their hatred gets no further than railing and blasphemy that therefore they shall be excused. He who takes the will for the deed, will take the word for the deed and deal with men accordingly. Wretches who are persecutors in talk, burners and stabbers with the tongue, shall have a reckoning for their would-be transgressions. Pride though it show not itself in clothes, but only in speech, is a sin; and persecuting pride, though it pile no fagots at Smithfield, but only revile with its lips, shall have to answer for it among the unholy crew of inquisitors. "*And for cursing and lying which they speak.*" Sins, like hounds, often hunt in couples. He who is not ashamed to curse before God, will be sure to lie unto men. Every swearer is a liar. Persecution leads on to perjury. They lie and swear to it. They curse and give a lying reason for their hate. This shall not go unnoted of the Lord, but shall bring down its recompense. How often has it happened that while haughty speeches have been fresh in the mouths of the wicked they have been overtaken by avenging providence, and made to see their mischief recoil upon themselves!

13. "*Consume them in wrath.*" As if he had changed his mind and would have them brought to a speedy end, or if spared would have them exist as ruins, he cries, "*consume them,*" and he redoubles his cry, "*consume them,*" nay, he gives a triple note, "*that they may not be.*" Revilers of God whose mouths pour forth such filth as David was on this occasion obliged to hear, are not to be tolerated by a holy soul; indignation must flame forth, and cry to God against them. When men curse the age and the place in which they live, common humanity leads the righteous to desire that they may be removed. If they could be reformed it would be infinitely better; but if they cannot, if they must and will continue to be like mad dogs in a city, then let them cease to be. Who can desire to see such a generation perpetuated? "*And let them know;*" i. e., let all the nations know, "*that God ruleth in Jacob unto the ends of the earth.*" He whose government is universal fixes his headquarters among his chosen people, and there in special he punishes sin. So David would have all men see. Let even the most remote nations know that the great moral Governor has power to destroy ungodliness, and does not wink at iniquity in any, at any time, or in any place. When sin is manifestly punished it is a valuable lesson to all mankind. The overthrow of a Napoleon, is a homily for all monarchs, the death of a Tom Paine a warning to all infidels, the siege of Paris a sermon to all cities. *Selah.* Good cause there is for this rest, when a theme so wide and important is introduced. Solemn subjects ought not to be hurried over; nor should the condition of the heart while contemplating themes so high be a matter of indifference. Reader, bethink thee. Sit thou still awhile and consider the ways of God with man.

14 And at evening let them return; and let them make a noise like a dog, and go round about the city.

15 Let them wander up and down for meat, and grudge if they be not satisfied.

14. Here verse six is repeated, as if the songster defied his foes and revelled in the thought of their futile search, their malice, their disappointment, their rage, their defeated vigilance, their wasted energy. He laughs to think that all the city would know how they were deceived, and all Israel would ring with the story of the image and the goats' hair in the bed. Nothing was more a subject of Oriental merriment, than a case in which the crafty are deceived, and nothing more makes a man the object of derision than to be outwitted by a woman, as in this instance Saul and his base minions were by Michal. The warrior poet hears in fancy the howl of rage in the council of his foes when they found their victim clean escaped from their hands.

15. "*Let them wander up and down for meat.*" Like dogs that have missed the expected carcass, let them go up and down dissatisfied, snapping at one another, and too disappointed to be quiet and take the matter easily. "*And grudge if they be not satisfied.*" Let them act like those who cannot believe that they have lost their prey: like a herd of Oriental dogs, unhoused, unkenneled, let them prowl about seeking a prey which they shall never find. Thus the menial followers of Saul paraded the city in vain hope of satisfying their malice and their master. "Surely," say they, "we shall have him yet. We cannot endure to miss him. Perhaps he is in yonder corner, or concealed in such a hidingplace. We must have him. We grudge him his life. Our lust for his blood is hot, nor can we be persuaded but that we shall light upon him." See the restlessness of wicked men; this will increase as their enmity to God increases, and in hell it will be their infinite torment. What is the state of the lost, but the condition of an ambitious camp of rebels, who have espoused a hopeless cause, and will not give it up, but are impelled by their raging passions to rave on against the cause of God, of truth, and of his people.

16 But I will sing of thy power; yea, I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning: for thou hast been my defence and refuge in the day of my trouble.

17 Unto thee, O my strength, will I sing: for God is my defence, and the God of my mercy.

16. "*But I will sing of thy power.*" The wicked howl, but I sing and will sing. Their power is weakness, but thine is omnipotence; I see them vanquished and thy power victorious, and for ever and ever will I sing of thee. "*Yea, I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning.*" When those lovers of darkness find their game is up, and their midnight howlings die away, then will I lift up my voice on high and praise the lovingkindness of God without fear of being disturbed. What a blessed morning will soon break for the righteous, and what a song will be theirs! Sons of the morning, ye may sigh to-night, but joy will come on the wings of the rising sun. Tune your harps even now, for the signal to commence the eternal music will soon be given; the morning cometh and your sun shall go no more down for ever. "*For thou hast been my defence.*" The song is for God alone, and it is one which none can sing but those who have experienced the lovingkindness of their God. Looking back upon a past all full of mercy, the saints will bless the Lord with their whole hearts, and triumph in him as the high place of their security. "*And refuge in the day of my trouble.*" The greater our present trials the louder will our future songs be, and the more intense our joyful gratitude. Had we no day of trouble, where were our season of retrospective thanksgiving? David's besetment by Saul's bloodhounds creates an opportunity for divine interposition and so for triumphant praise.

17. "*Unto thee, O my strength, will I sing.*" What transport is here! What a monopolising of all his emotions for the one object of praising God! Strength has been overcome by strength; not by the hero's own prowess, but by the might of God alone. See how the singer girds himself with the almightiness of God, and calls it all his own by faith. Sweet is the music of experience, but it is all for God; there is not even a stray note for man, for self, or for human helpers. "*For God is my defence, and the God of my mercy.*" With full assurance he claims possession of the Infinite as his protection and security. He sees God in all, and all his own. Mercy rises before him, conspicuous and manifold, for he feels he is undeserving,



and security is with him, undisturbed and impregnable, for he knows that he is safe in divine keeping. Oh, choice song! My soul would sing it now in defiance of all the dogs of hell. Away, away, ye adversaries of my soul, the God of my mercy will keep ye all at bay—

“Nor shall th’ infernal lion rend  
Whom he designs to keep.”

### EXPLANATORY NOTES AND QUAIN T SAYINGS.

This Psalm has in its stern contents something no doubt strange to our ears. But never let us omit to distinguish from each other the times and diverse economies, and to place ourselves, as far as possible, in sympathy with the experience of a heart which burned for nothing more than for the glorifying of God in this world. Everything that tended to obscure the theocratic relation of God to his people, called up in the soul of David the most vehement passion. The scornful oppression with which Saul and his venal satellites visited him, the man of God, could not but have, upon the eyes of all, the appearance as if Jehovah were no longer Lord in his own land, who inexorably adhered to his laws and rights. Treason, falsehood, and every kind of evil then prevailed unchecked. What wonder, that as formerly Moses in the wilderness was provoked against the stiff-necked people, so also David, whom the awful holiness of God had already made to tremble, should feel his spirit stirred against the ungodly who surrounded him, and should say, with Job, “My bowels boiled within me.”—*Frederick William Krummacher, D.D., in “David, the King of Israel,” 1867.*

*Verse 1.*—“*O my God.*” There are two pleas which the Psalmist makes use of; one was, that God was *his God*, ver. 1; the other was the *power and strength* of his *enemies*. It is a blessed thing to have the covenant to fly to in all times of straits and troubles; there is always an anchor-hold of hope there. “*My God,*” is such a plea as infinitely over-balances all other things. He has engaged himself to do his people good; and it is time for him to work when the enemy exalts himself. The church’s enemies are never so near destruction as when they think they have nothing to do, but take and divide the spoil. We may plead God’s promise and the enemies’ power too; both are a ground of hope to a believer in Jesus.—*John Hill (1711–1746), in “Sermons on Several Occasions.”*

*Verse 1.*—“*That rise up against me.*” He insists upon the strength and violence of his enemies, with the view of exciting his mind to greater fervour in the duty of prayer. These he describes as *rising up* against him, in which expression he alludes, not simply to the audacity or fierceness of their assaults, but to the eminent superiority of power which they possessed; and yet he asks that he may be lifted up on high, as it were, above the reach of this over-swelling inundation.—*John Calvin.*

*Verse 3 (first clause).*—On the expression, “they lie in wait for my soul,” compare 1 Sam. xix. 11, “And Michal, David’s wife, told him, saying, If thou save not thy life [soul] to night, to-morrow thou shalt be slain;” and Ps. vii. 2, 5.—*E. W. Hengstenberg.*

*Verse 3.*—“*The mighty are gathered against me,*” is rendered by Chandler, *The mighty are turned aside to lay snares against me.*

*Verse 3.*—“*The mighty are gathered against me.*” As if he would say, “But I am weak, be thou, however, my strength, and vindicate my innocence.—*Arnd.*”

*Verses 3, 4.*—He pleads his own innocency, not as to God, but as to his persecutors. Note, 1. The innocency of the godly will not secure them from the malignity of the wicked. Those that are harmless like doves, yet for Christ’s sake are hated of all men, as if they were noxious like serpents, and obnoxious accordingly. 2. Though our innocency will not secure us from troubles, yet it will greatly support and comfort us under our troubles. The testimony of our conscience for us, that we have behaved ourselves well toward those that have behaved themselves ill

towards us, will be very much our rejoicing in the day of evil. If we are conscious to ourselves of our innocency, we may with humble confidence appeal to God, and beg of him to plead our injured cause which he will do in due time.—*Matthew Henry*.

Verse 4.—“*They run*,” as armed warriors rushing to the assault (Ps. xviii. 29). The Hebrew for “prepare themselves,” (רָצוּ) means also “they establish themselves;” they make firm their footing, like forces assaulting a city. Job xxx. 14.—*A. R. Fausset*.

Verse 4.—“*They run and prepare*.” The zeal and diligence of the wicked in the cause of unrighteousness might well reprove the languor and tardiness of saints in the work of faith and labour of love. In the church of God nothing is the source of more mischief than the want of true zeal and liveliness. It is only when “many run to and fro” that “knowledge shall be increased.”—*William S. Plumer*.

Verse 4.—“*Without fault*.” As it respected Saul, he was a faithful subject and an obedient son-in-law.—*Benjamin Boothroyd*.

Verse 4.—“*Awake to help me*,” literally, *Awake to meet me*. In time of temptation the Lord seems to be absent from us, and not to observe our distress—to be, as it were, as Jesus, in the storm, is described as having been “asleep in the hinder part of the ship.” Mark iv. 38. But it is only an appearance; the Lord neither slumbers nor sleeps (Ps. cxxi. 4); he is always ready to come to our help when we call upon him.—*O. Prescott Hiller*.

Verse 4.—“*And behold*.” The expression is one which savours at once of faith and of the infirmity of the flesh. In speaking of God, as if his eyes had been hitherto shut to the wrongs which he had suffered, and needed now for the first time to be opened for the discovery of them, he expresses himself according to the weakness of our human apprehension. On the other hand, in calling upon God to behold his cause, he shows his faith by virtually acknowledging that nothing was hid from his providential cognisance.—*John Calvin*.

Verse 5.—“*O Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel*.” In time of straits we should set our eyes most upon those styles of God which most serve to strengthen our faith, especially such as hold forth his power and goodwill to employ his power for us.—*David Dickson*.

Verse 5.—“*Lord God of hosts*.” יְהוָה, *Elohim, Tsebaoth*; as in lxxx. 4, 19; lxxxiv. 8. Comp. 2 Sam. v. 10; 1 Kings xix. 10, 14; Ps. lxxxix. 8.—From “*The Psalms translated from the Hebrew, with Notes chiefly exegetical*. By *William Kay, D.D.*, 1871.”

Verse 5.—“*Lord God of hosts*.” Some have thought this equivalent to God of battles; the true force of the epithet, however, is, “Sovereign of the stars, material hosts of heaven, and of the angels their inhabitants.”—*A. A. Hodge, in “Outlines of Theology,”* 1866.

Verse 5.—1. “*God of hosts*,” and therefore able; 2. “*God of Israel*,” and therefore willing.—*Andrew A. Bonar*.

Verse 6.—“*At evening*.” The *evening* expresses the time of calamity and want, and alludes to the wild beasts which are wont in the *evening* to go forth in quest of prey.—*Hermann Venema*.

Verse 6.—“*They make a noise like a dog*.” The noise I heard then I shall never forget. To say that if all the sheep-dogs in going to Smithfield on a market-day, had been kept on the constant bark and pitted against the yelping curs upon all the carts in London, they could have given any idea of the canine uproar that now first astonished me, would be to make the feeblest of images. The whole city rang with one vast riot. Down below me, at Tophane; over about Stamboul; far away at Scutari; the whole sixty thousand dogs that are said to overrun Constantinople, appeared engaged in the most active extermination of each other, without a moment’s cessation. The yelping, howling, barking, growling, and snarling, were all merged into one uniform and continuous even sound, as the noise of frogs becomes, when heard at a distance. For hours there was no lull. I went to sleep and woke again, and still, with my windows open, I heard the same tumult going on; nor was it until daybreak that anything like tranquillity was restored.—*Albert Smith, in “A Month at Constantinople,”* 1850.

Verse 6.—In bringing their secret plans to bear, they are represented as hungry dogs, prowling about the city in the darkness for prey; ranging, each with his



own object, but in one common cause. To take in the full force of this metaphor it must be remembered that in Eastern cities formerly, as at the present day, it was the custom to cast out all the refuse of food—bones, offal, etc.—into the streets, which was consumed chiefly by dogs, great numbers of which were kept, as it would seem, for that particular purpose. With this idea in mind, the metaphor has great propriety in its application to Christ's enemies.

"Every evening they return,  
They howl like dogs,  
And surround the city."

William Hill Tucker.

Verses 6, 7.—This is a continued metaphor, which must be well observed, of a famished and rabid dog, unable to satisfy either its hunger or thirst; and describes men, howling formerly like dogs, pursuing, seizing all good things for themselves, and devouring; but now destitute of all things, unable to quench their cupidity, despised, miserable, and desperate wanderers. Such did Saul and his messengers sent against David in Najoth Rama show themselves to be, and give the prelude to their coming misery.—*Hermann Venema*.

Verses 6, 7.—1. They are diligent about it: "*They return at evening.*" 2. Mad, and set to do it: "*They make a noise like a dog,*" and threaten boldly. 3. Unwearing and obdurate in their purpose: "*They go round about the city.*" 4. Impudent, and brag what they will do to me: "*Behold, they belch out with their mouth.*" 5. And their words are bloody: "*Swords are in their lips.*"—*Adam Clarke*.

Verse 7.—"*Behold, they belch out with their mouth,*" etc. Bark like dogs, so Aben Ezra; or, *bubble out*, as a fountain bubbles out with water; so they cast out their wickedness in great abundance (see Jer. vi. 7); the phrase denotes the abundance of evil things and wicked speeches that come 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.—*John Gill*.

Verse 8.—God seeth and smleth, he looketh and laugheth at these giants; he sitteth in heaven far above their reach; neither doth he much trouble himself about the matter; no more should we, but trust in him, and know that there is a counsel in heaven, that will dash the mould of all contrary counsels upon the earth, as the stone cut out of the mountain did the four great monarchies. Dan. ii. 34. And therefore though the wicked, in the pride of his heart, doth persecute the poor; though they belch out with their mouth, and seek to double murder the innocent, by detraction and by deadly practice, yet God both hears and jeers at their madness, and will bring all their purposes to nought with little ado; nay, the very cruelty of his enemies will move God to make haste. The saints fare the better for the insolence and outrages of their enemies, whose ruin is thereby accelerated; and somewhat God will do the sooner for his people, lest the enemy exalt himself. Ps. cxl. 8.—*Abraham Wright*.

Verse 8 (last clause).—In the close of the verse, mention is made of *all nations*, to intimate, that though they might equal the whole world in numbers, they would prove a mere mockery with all their influence and resources. Or the words may be read—*EVEN AS thou hast all the nations in derision*. One thing is obvious, that David ridicules the vain boasting of his enemies, who thought no undertaking too great to be accomplished by their numbers.—*John Calvin*.

Verses 8, 9:—

- 8 But thou, Lord, laughest at them;  
Thou deridest all the heathen.  
9 His strength! Toward thee will I keep watch,  
For God is my high-fort.

William Kay

Verse 9.—"*Because of his strength will I wait upon thee.*" Those seem to come nearest the meaning of the Psalmist, who construe the words as one continuous sentence, "*I will put in trust his strength with thee,*" meaning that however

intemperately Saul might boast of his strength, he would rest satisfied in the assurance that there was a secret divine providence restraining his actions. We must learn to view all men as subordinated in this manner, and to conceive of their strength and their enterprises as depending upon the sovereign will of God. In my opinion, the following version is the best—"His strength is with thee, I will wait." The words are parallel with those in the end of the Psalm, where there can be no doubt that the nominative case is employed, "*My strength is with thee, I will sing.*"—John Calvin.

Verse 9 (first clause).—"His strength" is great, humanly viewed; but to the eye of faith what is it! LXX, τὸ κρᾶτος μοι (= uzzi); and so most ancient versions. (The contrast is given in verses 16, 17.)—William Kay.

Verse 9.—"Will I wait upon thee," lit., "I will keep watch to thee," alluding to the title, "When Saul sent, and they watched the house to kill him." David sets watching before God, against their watching to kill him.—A. R. Fausset.

Verse 9.—How weak soever the believer finds himself, and how powerful soever he perceives his enemy to be, it is all one to him, he hath no more to do but to put faith on work, and to wait till God works. "Because of his (that is, the enemy's) strength, I will wait upon thee," saith he to the Lord, "for God is my defence."—David Dickson.

Verse 10.—"The God of my mercy shall prevent me." Oh, how the saints sing of the love of Christ! Oh, how they sing that this love was not moved by worthiness, and it disdains all hire and price, but loves us because he loves us! Deut. vii. 8. O sing of his wonderful love, and of the prevention of this love of Christ: "*The God of my mercy shall prevent me.*" How, 1. It preventeth thy love to him. 1 John iv. 19: "We love God, because he first loved us." 2. It preventeth our sins, as in Paul's case. Acts ix. 3: "And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven." 3. It preventeth our calamities. Psalm lxxix. 8: "Let thy tender mercies speedily prevent us." And, 4. It prevents our endeavours: "*The God of my mercy shall prevent me.*"—John Spalding, in "*Synaxis Sacra*," 1703.

Verse 10 (first clause).—The Psalmist was sure of mercy upon these grounds, he knew he was safe, because God was his God, and the God of his mercy: "*The God of my mercy shall prevent me.*" Some read it, *hath prevented me*; others, *doth prevent me*; and others as in my text, *shall prevent me*. Each of these senses is exceedingly sweet and full. Take it in the first sense, *hath prevented me*, and it implies thus much, that the Psalmist never was in any difficulty, temptation, or fear, but God was beforehand with him; having always the mercy ready which he stood in need of; and had given it in due season, and that when he least expected it, and it may be was least prepared for it. Take it in the second sense, *doth prevent*, it argues the Psalmist's ground of confidence when all present appearances were gone; as if he had said, "God is of one mind, his thoughts are thoughts of peace, and not of evil; he may vary his providence, but his heart is the same as ever; why should I fear, why should I not hope and rejoice? for my God is a tried God, he is working for me even now. He prevents my fears, and he will prevent my falling." Take the words as they lie in my text, and it comes to the same thing. "God sees all my enemies' designs, and he is ready for them; my prayer is heard, and sure I am deliverance will come, though I know not the time of it."

My design, under the Spirit's influence, is to look into my own heart and yours, and show you what wonders of providence and grace God, as *the God of our mercy*, has caused to pass before us. In discoursing on these words, I shall enquire, I. In what sense, or in what respects, God is *the God of our mercy*? II. How, as the God of our mercy, he doth prevent us? III. Apply, I. I am to enquire in what respects God is said to be *the God of his people's mercy*, and it seems to include in it these three things. I. That all the mercy which is in God's nature, is for his saints. It is a great word that (1 Peter v. 10), "*the God of all grace.*" God has in him all sorts of grace for his saints. He hath pardoning, quickening, strengthening, comforting, and preserving grace. His mercy is rich mercy, abundant mercy, inexhaustible mercy, sure mercy. A man's riches are his glory; God glories in his mercy; it is his delight, he rests in it; and so may we, because there is an infinite inconceivable fulness of it in *him*. "With thee is the fountain of life." God distributes and parcels out this mercy, that we may conceive of it the better; hence he is called by the apostle, "*The Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort.*"

2 Cor. i. 3. God is not called the author of our mercies, but the *Father* of them; to show how freely they come from him; they are his bowels; he is pleased with them, as the father is with his own child; dwell on the name, it is a sweet one, the *Father of mercies*. In my text, David grasps all this mercy, lays hold of it as his own mercy: "*The God of my mercy shall prevent me.*" That is one sense. 2. It supposes, farther, that there is a portion of mercy laid by, in the purpose of God,—for every saint; a portion of mercy which he may call *his own*. This some understand to be Christ's meaning to Paul (2 Cor. xii. 9): "My grace is sufficient for thee;" *i.e.*, that grace which I have allotted for thee thou wilt find sufficient. I knew what thou wouldst need in my eternal counsels; I have made provision beforehand; I have taken care thou shouldst have enough. 3. The words suppose, farther, that God has taken it upon him as his charge, to keep this portion of his mercy for his people. Whatever it be, soul, it is trust for thee with him. Every saint may apply to God, as the God of every mercy which he needs.—*Condensed from John Hill's Sermon.*

Verse 10.—"*God shall let me see my desire upon mine enemies.*" The words "*my desire*," are not in the original, and would be better omitted. The sense is—God will enable me to look down calmly upon my enemies. So Christ looked upon his murderers. So Stephen was enabled to do when they "gnashed upon him with their teeth." "All that sat in the council looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel." Acts vi. 15.—*Christopher Wordsworth.*

Verse 11.—"*Slay them not*," that they may be a whetstone to others' faith—as the Spartans (mentioned in Plutarch's Apothegms) refused to allow the destruction of a neighbouring city which had often called forth their armies, saying, "Destroy not the whetstone of our young men."—*Andrew A. Bonar.*

Verse 11.—"*Slay them not*:"—

"Live loathed and long  
You smiling, smooth, detested parasites."

*W. Shakspeare.*

Verse 11.—The enemies must serve for monuments of the divine righteousness, not less in the abiding wretchedness of their race than by their own sudden destruction. Parallel to this verse, and to verses 6, 14, is the curse which David utters upon Joab, in 2 Sam. iii. 29: "Let there not fall from the house of Joab one that hath an issue, or that is a leper, or that leaneth on a staff, or that falleth on the sword, or that *lacketh bread*;" then the threatening of the man of God to Eli, in 1 Sam. ii. 36, where, after announcing the violent death of the evildoers themselves, corresponding to verse 13 here, it is said: "And it shall come to pass that every one that is left in thine house shall come and crouch to him [the new high priest] for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, and shall say, Put me, I pray thee, into one of the priests' offices, that I may eat a piece of bread." Christian expositors have all along drawn attention to the fact, that the substance of our verse, as that also of verses 6, 14, has gone into fulfilment on the Jews. "They have been scattered into all lands, and must go and stand before the eyes of all Christians as a living witness, that they have crucified the true Messiah and Saviour of the world. So that if you see a Jew, think on this word." (*Arnd.*)—*E. W. Hengstenberg.*

Verse 11.—"*Slay them not*;" namely, suddenly. "*Scatter them.*" It should seem that he hath a relation to Cain's punishment, whom God would not have killed, but would have him to be a wanderer all the days of his life for a spectacle, and an example of his judgments. Gen. iv. 12. Others translate it, *shake them*; namely, their degree of honour and glory.—*John Diodati, 1576—1649.*

Verse 12.—"*For the sin of their mouth and the words of their lips*," etc. Albeit the persecutors do not accomplish their purpose against the righteous; yet their pride, their brags, their lies, their slanders, their curses against the godly, are a sufficient ditty for damnation and wrath to come upon them.—*David Dickson.*

Verse 12.—"*The word of their lips*." The phrase, *word of the lips*, is often used for empty loquacity and boasting; the opposite of a word that is sold and founded on fact, as in 2 Kings xviii. 20. "Thou speakest, but it is only a *word of the lips*." Prov. xiv. 23. "In all labour there is profit: but the *word of the lips* tendeth only to penury."—*Hermann Venema.*



Verse 13.—“*Consume them,*” emphatically, “*consume them in wrath, that they may not be;*” which at first sight seems contrary to his first desire, “*Slay them not;*” but it is not so, for he speaks not of their life, as if he would have them so consumed, that they should not remain alive; but he desires only a consumption of their power, royalty, command, etc. And so these words are a farther explication of his second desire, “*Bring them down.*” He would have them so brought down and consumed in their strength, dignity, command, wealth, riches, that made them proud, that they never be able any more to oppose God, hurt his people, trample upon religion and his church; he would have them live.—*William Nicholson.*

Verse 13.—“*Consume them.*” I hear of sad doings in Poland, of villages burnt down, of peaceable men deported to Siberia by hundreds, of women flogged; and when I look away to that Warsaw market-place where a woman, nearly naked, is being publicly beaten, and when I see cruel Mouravieff smile as the blood jets forth from the scourged shoulders, I will not deny that I feel very much tempted to say, “*Happy man, whose bullet in fair fight should empty that saddle!*” Am I bloodthirsty in this? Am I vindictive? Do you condemn me for this feeling?—*R. A. Bertram.*

Verse 13.—“*That they may not be.*” By the word, *בָּרָא*, *that they may not be*, may be understood either a vile and wretched state in general, or even total destruction. The former must indeed here be admitted, as is plain from the context, yet not to the exclusion of the latter sense; since a miserable condition, such as in a disease, issues in destruction at length. *Not to be* is evidently by no means rarely taken for to be *nobody*, to be wretched, afflicted, despised. Comp. Jer. xxxi. 15.—*Hermann Venema.*

Verse 13.—“*Selah.*” Though God be in all his words *Yea* and *Amen*, yet in setting this seal of “*Selah*” to this doctrine, he hath testified his will that he would have all these things the better understood and the deeper imprinted; that if the wicked go on to persecute the godly, “*Selah,*” assuredly God will have them in derision; “*Selah,*” assuredly God shall shiver their bones, shake their best actions, and discover their impurity; “*Selah,*” assuredly God’s hand shall be heavy upon them, and they shall not discern it to be his hand till they are consumed. “*Selah,*” assuredly, verily, amen, this is a faithful, an infallible truth; as the Lord liveth it shall be so.—*Abraham Wright.*

Verse 14.—“*Dog.*” Is it the influence of Christianity extending its law of kindness to the lower animals, or something in the nature of northern dogs and northern men, which makes dogs among us Anglo-Saxons, and all the associations connected with them, so entirely different from what they are in the East? Imagine the effigy of an Oriental saint reposing with its feet on a dog, like that of William the Silent, the heroic Prince of Orange, on the faithful spaniel which rescued his life in the night attack of the Spanish troops, and like so many a sculptured knight of mediæval times! The very presence of such an image would, in Oriental eyes, be the greatest desecration an enemy could inflict on a sacred edifice. And in the Bible how exceedingly contemptuous, and how inapplicable to English dogs, are the terms employed in describing canine habits. “*They grin like a dog, and go about the city, and grudge if they be not satisfied;*” “*Without are dogs.*” What possible resemblance is there between such a description and the grave dignity of a Newfoundland; the sagacious, acute expression of a terrier; the wistful, almost human eyes of our house spaniels? But here at Tyre, as in most Eastern towns, the familiar words came to us with all their true and forcible meaning. The wolfish, hungry, masterless dogs which “*go about the cities* (of Alexandria, for instance), gathering in packs like jackals, prowling about for offal, and grudging if they be not satisfied;” or the famished outcasts, like our dogs at Tyre, prowling “*outside*” the city. To these we may apply the highly unfavourable definitions of Scripture, which every Englishman and Englishwoman must indignantly disclaim on behalf of the loyal, faithful, patient creatures who watch beside our homes like sentinels, and guard our flocks like shepherds, and welcome us with ecstatic joy when we come home again, and sometimes will even die rather than desert a master’s grave.—*From “Wanderings over Bible Lands and Seas.” 1862.*

Verse 14.—Those that repent of their sins when they are in trouble, *mourn like doves*; those whose hearts are hardened when they are in trouble, *make a noise like dogs.*—*Matthew Henry.*

*Verse 15.*—"Let them wander up and down," etc. A beggarly and indigent, and so an unsatisfied and wearisome condition, shall be their lot; the greatest worldly plague that can fall on any—large appetites and no possessions or acquiescence to satisfy them.—*Henry Hammond.*

*Verse 15.*—"And grudge if they be not satisfied." A contented man, if he has not what he would have, yet doth not grudge, doth not quarrel with providence, nor fret within himself; but those whose God is their belly, if that be not filled and its appetites gratified, fall out both with God and themselves. It is not poverty, but discontent that makes a man unhappy.—*Matthew Henry.*

*Verse 15.*—The hunger of a dog is deservedly their plague, of whom a resemblance of that unclean animal's disposition hath been the sin. Reader, be it thy care to avoid such sins, and cultivate a spirit of lively devotion; that, instead of receiving thy portion where there is weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth, thou mayst sing to the God of thy mercy for ever.—*Benjamin Boothroyd.*

*Verse 16.*—We must not pass by the contrast with the wretched condition of the wicked, which is indicated by the pronouns *they*, in verse fifteen, and *but I*, which are in exact antithesis; also the "*evening*," mentioned above, and the "*morning*," now occurring, for the times of trouble and happiness, and the *dog-like noise* of the wicked, and the *singing* with joyful sound of David, to pass by other particulars, likewise give to the diverse states additional difference.—*Hermann Venema.*

*Verse 16.*—*Cantabo* and *exaltabo*, "I will sing," and "I will sing aloud." Here is *singing* only of God's power; but there is *singing aloud* of his mercy; as if his mercy were more exaltable than his power, and that reached the very heavens; *this unto the clouds*. Ps. xxxvi. 5.—From *Humphrey Sydenham's Sermon*, entitled "The Well-toned Cymball," 1637.

*Verse 17.*—"Unto thee, O my strength, will I sing."—Formerly he had said that the strength of his enemy was with God, and now he asserts the same thing of his own. The expression, however, which admits of two meanings, he elegantly applies to himself in a different sense. God has the strength of the wicked in his hands, to curb and to restrain it, and to show that any power of which they boast is vain and fallacious. His own people, on the other hand, he supports and secures against the possibility of falling, by supplies of strength from himself.—*John Calvin.*

*Verse 17.*—"Unto thee, O my strength." In opposition to the enemy's "strength," ver. 9. "Thy power," or "strength"—the Hebrew word is the same (ver. 16)—is "my strength." There is an elegant play on similar sounds in the Hebrew for "I will wait upon thee," *וַיִּשְׁכַּח* (ver. 9), and "I will sing,"—*וַיִּשְׁבַּח*—*A. R. Faussett.*

*Verse 17 (first clause).*—As on account of *Saul's strength* my watching was directed to thee; so now, on account of *thy strength* vouchsafed to me, my *singing* of praises also shall be directed to thee alone.—*Martin Geier.*

*Verse 17.*—"Strength"—"Mercy." He joins these two attributes, "strength" and "mercy," very well; for take away strength from him, and he cannot; remove mercy, and he will not, protect; both must go together in any one that will defend: power, that he can, mercy, that he will; otherwise 'tis but in vain to hope for help from him. David found God to be both, and for both he extols him.—*William Nicholson.*

#### HINTS TO PREACHERS.

*Verse 1 (first clause).*—Deliver me from temptation, uphold me in temptation, cleanse me from the result of temptation. The world, the flesh, the devil, and chiefly sin, these are our enemies. We cannot escape them of ourselves, but the Lord by providence and grace can rescue us.

*Verse 2 (first clause).*—From being tempted by their promises, cowed by their threats, corrupted by their teaching, influenced by their example, injured by their slander, hindered in usefulness by their opposition.

*Verse 3 (first clause).*—The subtleties of Satan. Watches for places, times, states, and ways in which to assail us. Errors in doctrine, practice, spirit, set forth to

entrap us. "Ye are not ignorant of his devices." Or, the diabolical ambush, discovered by watchfulness, and defeated by faith.

Verse 4.—The activity of the evil a rebuke for the good. I. Their activity, "run." II. Unanimity—"they run." III. Their care—"prepare themselves." IV. Their readiness—"without my fault."

Verse 5.—"O Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel." This title furnishes an admirable topic.

Verse 9.—The greatness of difficulty a reason for prayer and faith.

Verse 10 (*first clause*).—The divine forwardness to bless.

Verse 11.—The continuance of our enemies a salutary ordinance of God for the prevention of an evil to which we are very liable.

Verse 13 (*last clause*).—God as the God of the church, his government as such, known in all human history.

Verse 16.—The heavenly chorister. I. His song is sweet in contrast with the revilings of others—"but I." II. It treats of subjects which terrify others—"thy power." III. It grows louder on tender themes—"thy mercy." IV. It has its choice seasons—"in the morning." V. It is tuned by experience—"for thou hast." VI. It is all to God's glory—"thy power," "thy mercy," "thou hast."

Verse 17.—I. A doctrine—God is his people's strength. II. An appropriation—"my strength." III. A resolution. The song of gratitude for the past, faith for the present, hope for the future, of bliss for eternity.