

## PSALM LXIV.

**TITLE.**—To the chief Musician. *The leader of the choir, for the time-being, is charged with this song. It were well if the chief musicians of all our congregations estimated their duty at its due solemnity, for it is no mean thing to be called to lead the sacred song of God's people, and the responsibility is by no means light.*

A Psalm of David.—*His life was one of conflict, and very seldom does he finish a Psalm without mentioning his enemies; in this instance his thoughts are wholly occupied with prayer against them.*

**DIVISION.**—From 1—6 he describes the cruelty and craftiness of his foes, and from 7—10 he prophesies their overthrow.

### EXPOSITION.

**H**EAR my voice, O God, in my prayer: preserve my life from fear of the enemy.

2 Hide me from the secret counsel of the wicked; from the insurrection of the workers of iniquity.

3 Who whet their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words:

4 That they may shoot in secret at the perfect: suddenly do they shoot at him, and fear not.

5 They encourage themselves in an evil matter: they commune of laying snares privily; they say, Who shall see them?

6 They search out iniquities; they accomplish a diligent search: both the inward thought of every one of them, and the heart, is deep.

1. "*Hear my voice, O God, in my prayer.*" It often helps devotion if we are able to use the voice and speak audibly; but even mental prayer has a voice with God which he will hear. We do not read that Moses had spoken with his lips at the Red Sea, and yet the Lord said to him, "Why criest thou unto me?" Prayers which are unheard on earth may be among the best heard in heaven. It is our duty to note how constantly David turns to prayer; it is his battleaxe and weapon of war: he uses it under every pressure, whether of inward sin or outward wrath, foreign invasion or domestic rebellion. We shall act wisely if we make prayer to God our first and best trusted resource in every hour of need. "*Preserve my life from fear of the enemy.*" From harm and dread of harm protect me; or it may be read as an expression of his assurance that it would be so; "from fear of the foe thou wilt preserve me." With all our sacrifices of prayer we should offer the salt of faith.

2. "*Hide me from the secret counsel of the wicked.*" From their hidden snares hide me. Circumvent their counsels; let their secrets be met by thy secret providence, their counsels of malice by thy counsels of love. "*From the insurrection of the workers of iniquity.*" When their secret counsels break forth into clamorous tumults, be thou still my preserver. When they think evil, let thy divine thoughts defeat them; and when they do evil, let thy powerful justice overthrow them: in both cases, let me be out of reach of their cruel hand, and even out of sight of their evil eye. It is a good thing to conquer malicious foes, but a better thing still to be screened from all conflict with them, by being hidden from the strife. The Lord knows how to give his people peace, and when he wills to make quiet, he is more than a match for all disturbers, and can defeat alike their deep-laid plots and their overt hostilities.

3. "*Who whet their tongue like a sword.*" Slander has ever been the master

weapon of the good man's enemies, and great is the care of the malicious to use it effectively. As warriors grind their swords, to give them an edge which will cut deep and wound desperately, so do the unscrupulous invent falsehoods which shall be calculated to inflict pain, to stab the reputation, to kill the honour of the righteous. What is there which an evil tongue will not say? What misery will it not labour to inflict? "*And bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words.*" Far off they dart their calumnies, as archers shoot their poisoned arrows. They studiously and with force prepare their speech as bended bows, and then with cool, deliberate aim, they let fly the shaft which they have dipped in bitterness. To sting, to inflict anguish, to destroy, is their one design. Insult, sarcasm, taunting defiance, nicknaming, all these were practised among Orientals as a kind of art; and if in these Western regions, with more refined manners, we are less addicted to the use of rough abuse, it is yet to be feared that the less apparent venom of the tongue inflicts none the less poignant pain. However, in all cases, let us fly to the Lord for help. David had but the one resource of prayer against the twofold weapons of the wicked, for defence against sword or arrow he used the one defence of faith in God.

4. "*That they may shoot in secret at the perfect.*" They lie in ambush, with bows ready bent to aim a coward's shaft at the upright man. Sincere and upright conduct will not secure us from the assaults of slander. The devil shot at our Lord himself, and we may rest assured he has a fiery dart in reserve for us; He was absolutely perfect, we are only so in a relative sense, hence in us there is fuel for fiery darts to kindle on. Observe the meanness of malicious men; they will not accept fair combat, they shun the open field, and skulk in the bushes, lying in ambush against those who are not so acquainted with deceit as to suspect their treachery, and are too manly to imitate their despicable modes of warfare. "*Suddenly do they shoot at him, and fear not.*" To secrecy they add suddenness. They give their unsuspecting victim no chance of defending himself; they pounce on him like a wild beast leaping on its prey. They lay their plans so warily that they fear no detection. We have seen in daily life the arrow of calumny wounding its victim sorely; and yet we have not been able to discover the quarter from which the weapon was shot, nor to detect the hand which forged the arrowhead, or tinged it with the poison. Is it possible for justice to invent a punishment sufficiently severe to meet the case of the dastard who defiles my good name, and remains himself in concealment? An open liar is an angel compared with this demon. Vipers and cobras are harmless and amiable creatures compared with such a reptile. The devil himself might blush at being the father so so base an offspring.

5. "*They encourage themselves in an evil matter.*" Good men are frequently discouraged, and not unfrequently discourage one another, but the children of darkness are wise in their generation and keep their spirits up, and each one has a cheering word to say to his fellow villain. Anything by which they can strengthen each other's hands in their one common design they resort to; their hearts are thoroughly in their black work. "*They commune of laying snares privily.*" Laying their heads together they count and recount their various devices, so as to come at some new and masterly device. They know the benefit of co-operation, and are not sparing in it they pour their experience into one common fund, they teach each other fresh methods. "*They say, Who shall see them?*" So sedulously do they mask their attacks, that they defy discovery; their pitfalls are too well hidden, and themselves too carefully concealed to be found out. So they think, but they forget the all-seeing eye, and the all-discovering hand, which are ever hard by them. Great plots are usually laid bare. As in the Gunpowder Plot, there is usually a breakdown somewhere or other; among the conspirators themselves truth finds an ally, or the stones of the field cry out against them. Let no christian be in bondage through fear of deep-laid Jesuitical schemes for surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, nor divination against Israel; the toils of the net are broken, the arrows of the bow are snapped, the devices of the wicked are foiled. Therefore, fear not, ye tremblers; for the Lord is at your right hand, and ye shall not be hurt of the enemy.

6. "*They search out iniquities.*" Diligently they consider, invent, devise, and seek for wicked plans to wreak their malice. These are no common villains, but explorers in iniquity, inventors and concoctors of evil. Sad indeed it is that to ruin a good man the evil-disposed will often show as much avidity as if they were searching after treasure. The Inquisition could display instruments of torture.

revealing as much skill as the machinery of our modern exhibitions. The deep places of history, manifesting most the skill of the human mind, are those in which revenge has arranged diplomacy, and used intrigue to compass its diabolical purposes. "*They accomplish a diligent search.*" Their design is perfected, consummated, and brought into working order. They cry "Eureka;" they have sought and found the sure method of vengeance. Exquisite are the refinements of malice! hell's craft furnishes inspiration to the *artistes* who fashion deceit. Earth and the places under it are ransacked for the *materiel* of war, and profound skill turns all to account. "*Both the inward thought of every one of them, and the heart, is deep.*" No superficial wit is theirs; but sagacity, sharpened by practice and keen hatred. Wicked men have frequently the craft to hasten slowly, to please in order to ruin, to flatter that ere long they may devour, to bow the knee that they may ultimately crush beneath their foot. He who deals with the serpent's seed has good need of the wisdom which is from above: the generation of vipers twist and turn, wind and wriggle, yet evermore they are set upon their purpose, and go the nearest way to it when they wander round about. Alas! how dangerous is the believer's condition, and how readily may he be overcome if left to himself. This is the complaint of reason and the moan of unbelief. When faith comes in, we see that even in all this the saints are still secure, for they are all in the hands of God.

7 But God shall shoot at them *with* an arrow; suddenly shall they be wounded.

8 So they shall make their own tongue to fall upon themselves: all that see them shall flee away.

9 And all men shall fear, and shall declare the work of God; for they shall wisely consider of his doing.

10 The righteous shall be glad in the LORD, and shall trust in him; and all the upright in heart shall glory.

7. "*But God shall shoot at them with an arrow.*" They shoot, and shall be shot. A greater archer than they are shall take sure aim at their hearts. One of his arrows shall be enough, for he never misses his aim. The Lord turns the tables on his adversaries, and defeats them at their own weapons. "*Suddenly shall they be wounded.*" They were looking to surprise the saint, but, lo! they are taken at unawares themselves; they desired to inflict deadly wounds, and are smitten themselves with wounds which none can heal. While they were bending their bows, the great Lord had prepared his bow already, and he let slip the shaft when least they looked for such an unsparing messenger of justice. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." The righteous need not learn the arts of self-defence or of attack, their avengement is in better hands than their own.

8. "*So they shall make their own tongue to fall upon themselves.*" Their slander shall recoil. Their curses shall come home to roost. Their tongue shall cut their throats. It was both sword, and bow and arrow; it shall be turned against them, and bring home to them full punishment. "*All that see them shall flee away.*" Afraid, both of them and their overthrow, their former friends shall give them wide space, lest they perish with them. Who cares to go near to Herod when the worms are eating him? or to be in the same chariot with Pharaoh when the waves roar round him? Those who crowded around a powerful persecutor, and cringed at his feet, are among the first to desert him in the day of wrath. Woe unto you, ye liars! Who will desire fellowship with you in your seething lake of fire?

9. "*And all men shall fear.*" They shall be filled with awe by the just judgments of God, as the Canaanites were by the overthrow of Pharaoh at the Red Sea. Those who might have been bold in sin shall be made to tremble and to stand in awe of the righteous Judge. "*And shall declare the work of God.*" It shall become the subject of general conversation. So strange, so pointed, so terrible shall be the Lord's overthrow of the malicious, that it shall be spoken of in all companies. They sinned secretly, but their punishment shall be wrought before the face of the sun. "*For they shall wisely consider of his doing.*" The judgments of God are frequently so clear and manifest that men cannot mis-read them, and if they have any thought at all, they must extract the true teaching from them. Some of the divine judgments are a great deep, but in the case of malicious persecutors the matter is plain enough, and the most illiterate can understand.

10. "*The righteous shall be glad in the Lord.*" Admiring his justice and fully acquiescing in its displays, they shall also rejoice at the rescue of injured innocence yet, their joy shall not be selfish or sensual, but altogether in reference to the Lord. "*And shall trust in him.*" Their observation of providence shall increase their faith; since he who fulfils his threatenings will not forget his promises. "*And all the upright in heart shall glory.*" The victory of the oppressed shall be the victory of all upright men; the whole host of the elect shall rejoice in the triumph of virtue. While strangers fear, the children are glad in view of their Father's power and justice. That which alarms the evil, cheers the good. Lord God of mercy, grant to us to be preserved from all our enemies, and saved in thy Son with an everlasting salvation.

#### EXPLANATORY NOTES AND QUAIN T SAYINGS.

*Whole Psalm.*—This Psalm is applied by R. Obadiah to Haman and Moredecai. The enemy is Haman, the perfect man shot at is Mordecai; about whom Haman communed with his friends to lay snares for him, and search diligently for occasions against him and his people, which issued in his own destruction. The ancient Midrash of the Jews applies it to Daniel, when cast into the den of lions; and Jarchi supposes that David, by a spirit of prophecy, foresaw it, and prayed for him who was of his seed; and that everything in the Psalm beautifully falls in with that account. Daniel is the perfect man aimed at; the enemy are the princes of Darius's court, who consulted against him, communed of laying snares for him, and gained their point, which proved their own ruin. But the Psalm literally belongs to David, by whom it was composed.—*John Gill.*

*Whole Psalm.*—A cry of God's elect, when persecuted for righteousness' sake, to their Deliverer and sure Avenger. The general principle stated is very clear. The Psalm will adjust itself, as an experimental utterance, to the lips of Christian faith whenever brought into contact with the evil forces of the prince of this world, so as to suffer affliction for the gospel's sake; for it expresses the condition and the hope of one actually imperilled for the truth. How aptly a portion of this Psalm applies to the suffering Truth Himself in the days of his affliction, when, pierced in his spirit by lying words, he endured the contradiction of sinners against himself, needs not be pointed out.—*Arthur Pridham, in "Notes and Reflections on the Psalms,"* 1869.

*Verse 1.*—"Preserve my life." Hebrew, *lives*; so called for the many faculties, operations, revolutions, and commodities of life.—*John Trapp.*

*Verse 3.*—"Who whet their tongue," etc. The verb means, says Parkhurst, "to whet, sharpen," which is performed by reiterated motion or friction; and by a beautiful metaphor it is applied to a wicked tongue. It has, however, been rendered, "*vibrate,*" as it is certain a serpent does his tongue.—*Richard Mant.*

*Verse 3.*—The ingenuity of man has been wonderfully tasked and exercised in two things, inventing destructive weapons of war, and devising various methods of ruining men by wicked words. The list of the former is found in military writings. But the various forms of evil speaking can hardly be catalogued. Evil speakers have arrows, sharp, barbed, dipped in poison. They have "swords, flaming, swords, two-edged swords, drawn swords, drawn in anger, with which they cut, and wound, and kill the good name of their neighbour." Sins of the tongue are commonly very cruel. When slander is secret, as it commonly is, you cannot defend yourself from its assaults. Its canons are infernal. One of them is, "If a lie will do better than the truth, tell a lie." Another is, "Heap on reproach; some of it will stick."—*William S. Plumer.*

*Verses 3, 4.*—We saw in the Museum at Venice an instrument with which one of the old Italian tyrants was accustomed to shoot poisoned needles at the objects of his wanton malignity. We thought of gossips, backbiters, and secret slanderers, and wished that their mischievous devices might come to a speedy end. Their weapons of inuendo, shrug, and whisper, appear to be as insignificant as needles;

but the venom which they instil is deadly to many a reputation.—*C. H. Spurgeon, in "Feathers for Arrows; or, Illustrations for Preachers and Teachers."*

*Verses 3, 4.*—David, upon sad experience, compareth a wicked, reviling tongue to three fatal weapons—a *razor*, a *sword*, and an *arrow*. To a *razor*, such a one as will take off every little hair: so a reviling tongue will not only take advantage of every gross sin committed by others, but those peccadilloes, the least infirmities which others better qualified cannot so much as discern; secondly, to a *sword* that wounds: so the tongues of reproaching men cut deeply into the credits and reputations of their brethren, but a sword doth mischief only near hand, not afar off; and, therefore, it is in the third place compared to an *arrow*, that can hit at a distance: and so revilers do not ill offices to those only in the parish or town where they live, but to others far remote. How much, then, doth it concern every man to walk circumspectly; to give no just cause of reproach, not to make himself a scorn to the fools of the world; but, if they will reproach (as certainly they will), let it be for forwardness in God's ways, and not for sin, that so the reproach may fall upon their own heads, and their scandalous language into their own throats.—*Jeremiah Burroughs.*

*Verses 3, 7, 8.*—The most mischievous weapons of the wicked are *words*, "even bitter words;" but *the Word* is the chief weapon of the Holy Spirit: and as with this sword the great Captain foiled the tempter in the wilderness, so may we vanquish "the workers of iniquity" with the true Jerusalem blade.—*J. L. K.*

*Verse 4.*—"That they may shoot in secret." The wicked are said to shoot their arrows *in secret* at the perfect; and then "they say, Who shall see them?" verse 5. Thus Satan lets fly a temptation so secretly, that he is hardly suspected in the thing. Sometimes he useth a wife's tongue to do his errand; another while he gets behind the back of a husband, friend, servant, etc., and is not seen all the while he is doing his work. Who would have thought to have found a devil in Peter, tempting his Master, or suspected that Abraham should be his instrument to betray his beloved wife into the hands of a sin? yet it was so. Nay, sometimes he is so secret, that he borrows God's bow to shoot his arrows from, and the poor Christian is abused, thinking it is God chides and is angry, when it is the devil tempts him to think so, and only counterfeits God's voice.—*William Gurnall.*

*Verse 6.*—"They search out iniquities," etc. It is a sign that malice boils up to a great height in men's hearts, when they are so active to find matter against their neighbours. Love would rather not see or hear of others' failings; or if it doth and must, busieth itself in healing and reforming them to the utmost of its power.—*John Milward* (—1684), in "*Morning Exercises.*"

*Verse 7.*—"With an arrow suddenly." As was Ahab, and the rich fool (Luke xii.): while he sat pruning himself like a bird on a bough, death fetched him off suddenly by his shaft, shot at him, and down he came tumbling. See 1 Thess. v. 3.—*John Trapp.*

*Verse 8 (first clause).*—

In these cases,  
We still have judgment here, that we but teach  
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return  
To plague the inventor: This even-handed justice  
Commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice  
To our own lips.

*William Shakspeare.*

*Verse 8.*—"Their own tongue to fall upon themselves." That is, their own words shall be brought as a testimony against them, and condemn them: "The tongue is a little member" (saith the apostle James, ch. iii. 5), and therefore a light member; yet it falls heavy, as heavy as lead. A man were better have his house fall upon him, than that, in this sense, his tongue should fall upon him. Some have been pressed to death because they would not speak, but stood mute before the judge; but more have been pressed to death by their sinful freedom, or rather licentiousness in speaking; this hath brought them to judgment, and cast them in judgment. . . . A strange thing that the fall of a man's tongue should oppress his body and whole estate; yet so it is, the weight of a man's tongue falling upon him crushes him to powder.—*Joseph Caryl.*

Verse 8.—“*Their own tongue to fall upon themselves.*” The arrows of idle words, though shot out of sight, and possibly quite forgotten, will hereafter drop down upon the heads of such as drew the bow. Words are but wind, is the common saying, but they are such wind as will either blow the soul to its haven of rest, if holy, wholesome, savoury, spiritual, and tending to edification, or else sink it into the Dead Sea, and bottomless gulf of eternal misery, if idle, prophane, frothy, and unprofitable.—*Edward Reyner* (1600—1670), in “*Rules for the Government of the Tongue.*”

Verse 10.—“*The righteous shall be glad in the Lord, and shall trust in him.*” That is, if they have failed in their trust heretofore, and not given God honour by confiding in him, yet these wonderful works of God (of which he speaks in the Psalm) work this hope.—*Joseph Caryl.*

Verse 10.—“*All the upright in heart.*” The word of this text, *jashar*, signifies *rectitudinem*, and *planitiem*, it signifies a direct way; for the devil’s way was circular, compassing the earth; but the angel’s way to heaven upon Jacob’s ladder was a straight, a direct way. And then it signifies, as a direct and straight, so a plain, a smooth, an even way, a way that hath been beaten into a path before, a way that the fathers and the church have walked in before, and not a discovery made by our curiosity, or our confidence, in venturing from ourselves, or embracing from others, new doctrines and opinions. The persons, then, whom God proposes to be partakers of his retributions, are first, *recti* (that is, both direct men, and plain men), and then, *recti corde*, this qualification, this straightness and smoothness must be in the heart; all the upright in heart shall have it. Upon this earth, a man cannot possibly make one step in a straight and a direct line. The earth itself being round, every step we make upon it must necessarily be a segment, an arc of a circle. But yet, though no piece of a circle be a straight line, yet if we take any piece, nay, if we take the whole circle, there is no corner, no angle in any place, in any entire circle. A perfect rectitude we cannot have in any way in this world; in every calling there are some inevitable temptations. But, though we cannot make up one circle of a straight line (that is impossible to human frailty), yet we may pass on without angles and corners, that is, without disguises in our religion, and without the love of craft and falsehood, and circumvention, in our civil actions. A compass is a necessary thing in a ship, and the help of that compass brings the ship home safe, and yet that compass hath some variations, it doth not look directly north; neither is that star which we call the north-pole, or by which we know the north-pole, the very pole itself; but we call it so, and we make our uses of it, and our conclusions by it, as if it were so, because it is the nearest star to that pole. He that comes as near uprightness as infirmities admit, is an upright man, though he have some obliquities.—*John Donne.*

Verse 10.—“*All the upright in heart shall glory.*” The Psalm began in the first person singular, “Hear my voice, O God,” but it ends by comprehending all the righteous. He who is most anxious about his own salvation will be found to be the man of the truest and widest love to others; while, he who talks most of unselfishness in religion is generally the most selfish. We cannot take a more efficient method for benefiting others than by being earnestly prayerful for ourselves that we may be preserved from sin. Our example will in itself be useful, and our godliness, by putting power into testimony, will increase the value of every rebuke, exhortation, or encouragement we may utter. Our sin is or will be the church’s sorrow, and the way to make all the upright rejoice is to be upright ourselves.—*C.H. S.*

Verse 10.—“*Shall glory.*” This retribution is expressed in the original in the word *halal*; and *halal*, to those translators that made up our Book of Common Prayer, presented the signification of gladness, for so it is there: “*They shall be glad.*” So it did to the translators that came after, for there it is, “*They shall rejoice;*” and to our last translators it seemed to signify glory, “*They shall glory,*” say they. But the first translation of all into our language (which was long before any of these three), calls it *praise*, and puts it into the passive: “*All men of rightful heart shall be praised.*” And so truly *jithhalelu*, in the original, bears it, nay, requires it; which is not of praise which they shall give to God, but of a praise that they shall receive for having served God with an upright heart; not that they shall praise God in doing so, but that godly men shall praise them for having done so. All this will grow naturally out of the root; for the root of this word is *lucere, splendere*, to shine out in the eyes of men, and to create in them a holy and a reverential

admiration; as it was John Baptist's praise, that he was "*A burning and a shining lamp.*" Properly it is, by a good and a holy exemplary life, to occasion others to set a right value upon holiness, and to give a due respect for holy men. . . . "*Shall glory.*" It is so far from diminishing this glory, as that it exalts our consolation that God places this retribution in the future; if they do not yet, certainly they *shall* glory, and if they do now, that glory shall not go out, still they shall, they shall for ever glory.—*John Donne.*

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### HINTS TO PREACHERS.

*Verse 1.*—I. *The preservation of life desired.* 1. The desire expressed. 2. Qualified—from violent death, from fear of, etc. II. *The preservation of life prayed for.* 1. For self-improvement. 2. For usefulness. 3. For the divine glory.—*G. R.*

*Verse 2 (first clause).*—Applied to Satan. I. *The danger considered.* 1. The enemy, wicked, mighty, malicious, experienced. 2. His counsel. He tempts cunningly, and with deliberation. 3. The secrecy of it. He may be exciting others against me, or sowing evil in myself. II. *The deliverance implored.* "Hide me." 1. Keep me from being tempted. 2. Keep me from evil when tempted. 3. Bring me out of it all unharmed. 4. Meanwhile, let me be in thy secret place. III. *The consolation of faith.* 1. God does preserve praying ones. 2. Our enemy is his enemy. 3. He has preserved us. 4. We are his own. 5. His honour is involved.

*Verse 3.*—"Bitter words." An excellent topic in reference both to the sinner and to professed saints.

*Verse 3.*—*The whetting of the tongue.* Fresh faults discovered, evil motives imputed, exaggerations invented, lies forged, inuendoes suggested, old slanders furbished, and ancient hatreds rekindled.

*Verse 5.*—The mutual encouragements of sinners a rebuke to professors who dishearten each other.

*Verse 6 (two first clauses).*—The fault-hunter; his motive, his character, his pretences, and his punishment.

*Verse 9.*—I. *The subject for consideration*—Judgments upon the wicked. 1. As judgments. 2. As judgments from God—that work of God—his doing. II. *The consideration of the subject.* 1. They are intended to be considered by others. 1. They are to be considered wisely. III. *The effect of this consideration.* 1. Fear of God. 2. Praise to God; shall declare, etc.—*G. R.*

*Verse 10.*—I. *The persons.* 1. What they are, in distinction from others; the righteous; the justified. 2. What they are in themselves; upright in heart; not perfect, but sincere. II. *Their privilege.* 1. Amidst all their persecutions to joy in God. 2. Amidst all their dangers to trust in God.—*G. R.*

*Verses 9, 10.*—I. An act of God; something of his doing. II. Its effect upon men in general: "*All men shall fear, and shall declare,*" etc. III. A special duty resulting from it, incumbent on good men: "*The righteous,*" etc.—*H. Dove.*