

PSALM 58

SURROUNDED BY SERPENTS!

This is a somewhat difficult Psalm to properly interpret and understand; yet it is a Psalm of high originality, with poetic imagery that is both abundant and uncommon. Also, it gives such clear expression to the voice of everlasting righteousness that it is worthwhile to make an effort to study and comprehend it.

The Psalm opens (verses 1-5) with a description of the throne of iniquity, where wickedness and injustice seem to reign without hindrance or opposition. Here David is accusing the administrators of justice of the sin of bribery. Then he describes them as weighing out violence in the scales of justice, where only righteous judgments ought to be measured out. In other words, they observed all the solemn formalities of justice, but they had no regard for the interests of those who could not afford to pay for the verdict to be tipped in favor of their cause. Alas! Bribery and corruption in high offices has always been – and still is, even at the present day – one of the leading features of evil times. Justice cannot be procured; the well-doing person is harassed and persecuted by his wicked neighbors; and if he appeals to the law, he cannot win the case.

The effect of this sorry state of affairs on the community in general is given in verses 3-5. Society is poisoned in every department! The sin of lying, in particular, is in fashion everywhere – as it always will be where there is a corrupt administration of justice. Insensibility to the voices of reason is universal. Men are like deaf adders, which stop their ears and will not listen to those who pretend to be able to “charm” them with their voices or their music. There have been many sorrowful epochs like this throughout all the ages of history. It has never been uncommon to have, at the top of society, a corrupt court with a wicked aristocracy; and then, down through all ranks of the people, the poison of falsehood and worldliness has been diffused freely. In such a state, matters eventually become so bad that there is apparently no audience for anyone speaking for

Overview of the Psalm, adapted from Charles Spurgeon:

Again we meet with Al-taschith in the title of this Psalm – for here the wicked are judged and condemned; but over the Godly ones, the sacred “Destroy not” is solemnly pronounced. Michtam reminds us that this is the fourth of the “Golden Secret Psalms,” and it is the second of the “Destroy nots.” These names, if they serve for nothing else, may be useful to aid our memories. People give names to their horses, jewels, and other valuables; and these names are not so much intended to describe them as to distinguish them – and, in some cases, to set forth the owner’s high esteem of his treasure. After the same fashion, the Hebrew poet gave titles to the songs he loved; and thereby, he aided his memory and expressed his high thoughts of the composition.

The ungodly enemy is accused in the first five verses; judgment is sought from the judge, in verses 6-8; and in prophetic vision, it is seen as if it were already executed (verses 9-11).

God; and there seems to be no employment for anyone who only wishes to be honest, simple, and true. The few faithful ones who are the remnant of Jehovah's people find themselves in a position where those above them are false, reckless, and immoral. Success seems to be only obtainable by lying and selfishness, and a tender conscience has no chance for survival.

What is to be done in such a situation? The natural thing to do is to merely conform to all the evil on every side, in order to "fit in" and "be accepted" by society. And this is what the majority of persons do in all ages. Since they live in wicked Rome, they will act as wicked Rome does. Indeed, without religious conviction, it is difficult to see how anyone can act otherwise in a place where sin is strong and tyrannical – occupying all the high places, speaking through the organs of public opinion, and exhibiting hundreds of horrific examples to the impressionable young children of the next generation.

But it is here that the Bible helps us! In verses 6-9, we are presented with another scene. Although David found himself surrounded by prosperous wickedness, he saw – in opposition to the throne of iniquity – another throne that is lofty and eternal! This was the throne of the living and righteous God. He fixed his eyes upon it until his soul was filled with faith and strength. And then, when he turned his eyes to look again at the images of the world's evil power, their glory and stability had disappeared, and they looked fleeting and paltry indeed! In a series of striking figures of speech, David proceeds to express his disdain for them. They are like toothless lions and fangless serpents (verse 6). They are like a torrent of water which seems, for a moment, to be a raging river; but it immediately disappears in the sand (verse 7). They are like a miscarriage of a child in his mother's womb, for their plans – which seem to be so promising – will come to nothing (verse 8). They are cooking the flesh of their pleasure in a pot that is boiling over a fire of thorn-branches; but before it is ready for eating, a whirlwind from the desert will carry the fire away (verse 9).

The Psalm closes with a spectacle of true justice (verses 10-11). The Psalmist was inspired by the vision of the Lord's eternal throne of righteousness; and not only does he foresee that His righteous judgment must come to pass, but he also pleads for it. And he does so on two grounds: first, so that the righteous may obtain the reward of their righteousness; and second, so that all people may see that there is a God Who does indeed judge in the earth. The triumph of those corrupt rulers and their wicked injustice can only be temporary. Even now, God asserts Himself and vindicates His own children; and when He does so, the instincts of every honest heart must rise up to welcome Him!

O Lord, we praise You as the Righteous Judge and Great Ruler of the all the earth, Who breaks in pieces oppressive thrones, and preserves Your people safely! Amen.

