

END OF PSALM 139

## You are Psalms

Some people think you never get discouraged, but the fact is, when you do, you know where to run. Your prayers are open and honest because you realize that God already knows your heart, He's just waiting to hear you spill it. And when you do, what starts out as heavy ends up becoming a song of praise. You may struggle... and often you do... but each time, you grow in your understanding of God's faithfulness. You're just a song waiting to happen.

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## PSALMS (SONGS OF PRAISE)

TRUST  
IN THE  
LORD *and do good;  
dwell in the land and  
enjoy safe pasture.*  
PSALM 36: 3

PSALM NUMBER: 139

**A prayer to be delivered from the wicked.**

1. Deliver me, O Lord, from the evil man: rescue me from the unjust man.
2. Who have devised iniquities in their hearts: all the day long they designed battles.
3. They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent: the venom of asps is under their lips.
4. Keep me, O Lord, from the hand of the wicked: and from unjust men deliver me. Who have proposed to supplant my steps:
5. The proud have hidden a net for me. And they have stretched out cords for a snare: they have laid for me a stumbling block by the wayside.
6. I said to the Lord: Thou art my God: hear, O Lord, the voice of my supplication.
7. O Lord, Lord, the strength of my salvation, thou hast overshadowed my head in the day battle.
8. Give me not up, O Lord, from my desire to the wicked: they have plotted against me; do not thou forsake me, lest they should triumph.
9. The head of them compassing me about: the labor of their lips shall overwhelm them.
10. Burning coals shall fall upon them: thou wilt cast them down into the fire: in miseries they shall not be able to stand.
11. A man full of tongue shall not be established in the earth: evils shall catch the unjust man unto destruction.
12. I know that the Lord will do justice to the needy, and will revenge the poor.
13. But as for the just, they shall give glory to thy name: and the upright shall dwell with thy countenance.

*The Psalms are songs of praise and cover a period of about 1000 years, from the time of Moses (ca. 1400 B.C.) to the Israelites' return from exile (ca. 450 B.C.). They deal with selected events of that period and provide us with the thoughts and feelings of those who went through the experiences recorded. After being made a Cardinal by Pope Clement VIII, Saint Robert Bellarmine, prepared for posterity his very own commentary on each of the Psalms. Enclosed are his interpretations on each of the Psalms.*

## **PSALM NUMBER: 139**

### **EXPLANATION OF THE PSALM**

1. "Deliver me, O Lord, from the evil man: rescue me from the unjust man." The prayer of the faithful in general. By the evil man, St. Augustine says he means the devil, who is called in the Gospel "the enemy." Others will have it that it means evil men in general, who are excited and governed by the devil. Both interpretations are true, and, therefore, may be united; and thus, the meaning will be: "deliver me from the evil man," be he the evil spirit, who directly, or through servants of his, harass me. And as the word "me" does not apply to one individual in particular, but to the faithful in general, in like manner the expression, "the evil man," is not confined to one individual persecutor, but to persecutors in general, or to every persecutor. The next sentence, "rescue me from the unjust man," is no more than a repetition; for, though some sinners may not be looked upon as being unjust, still, to a certain extent, every sinner is an unjust man, because he is, at all events, unjust to himself, and to others, if he injures them by his example, as St. John says, "whosoever committeth sin, committeth also iniquity, and sin is iniquity."

2. "Who have devised iniquities in their hearts: all the day long day designed battles." He assigns a reason but having said, "deliver me," and the reason is because he was assailed through thought, word, and deed; and so repeatedly; that they might be called daily, without intermission or truce; and the apostle, therefore, justly exhorts us "to put on the armor of God," or, as the Greek has it, all sorts of armor, to wit, the helmet, coat of mail, shield, and sword, to enable us to offer the necessary resistance, and to stand perfect in every respect. First, then, in regard to our engagement, in respect of thought. "Who have devised iniquity in their hearts." This proves that the expression, "the evil man," in the first verse, is not intended for an individual, such as Saul, but for a lot of evil men, be they demons or men; "to devise iniquity in their hearts;" means they having recourse to all manner of deception, scheming, and intrigue. "All the day long they devised battles." They never ceased arranging the plans of battle they had previously decided on. All this may, possibly, referred to the interior struggle within us, in respect of bad thoughts the Prince of darkness turns up to us; such as unchaste thoughts, temptations, infidelities to grace, scruples, and mental perplexities; all the source of much annoyance and trouble.

3. "They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent: the venom of asps is under their lips." The second persecution of our enemies is that of the tongue, which consists in calumny, detraction, abuse, deception, and the like, restored to by our

12. "I know that the Lord will do justice to the needy, and will revenge the poor."

13. "But as for the just, they shall give glory to thy name: and the upright shall dwell with thy countenance." He now comes to the conclusion, that the delivery and the happiness of the just are certain, as are also the miserable state and the punishment of the wicked. "I knew that the Lord will do justice to the needy." I am convinced, both from my own experience, from the records of my ancestors, as well as from a knowledge of God's promises and of his justice, that he regards the humble and the poor; which include those abounding in the wealth of the world, yet, by reason of their not looking upon such wealth as their own, but as so much entrusted to them by God to dispense, as being but so many stewards, are still really poor in spirit. "I know that the Lord will," beyond all manner of doubt, "do justice to the needy;" and he will also "revenge the poor," by punishing those that persecuted them, with the greatest severity. "But as for the just, they shall give glory to thy name," giving themselves credit for nothing, but attributing all to God, "and the upright shall dwell with thy countenance," will see him, and know him, as he is. One is known from his countenance. Look at anyone's person, you will never recognize him; look at his face alone, and you need no more!

fellow creatures, either through selfishness or through revenge, and by the evil spirit, with a view of provoking man to impatience or anger, or hatred of his neighbor, and to the sins consequent thereon. The aforesaid wicked, then, "have sharpened their tongue like a serpent," the more easily to pierce the ears and the heart; "the venom of asps," the most deadly of all poison, "is under their lips;" in store, ready to shoot it with their tongues on their hearers.

4. "Keep me, O Lord, from the hand of the wicked: and from unjust men deliver me. Who have proposed to supplant my steps." Next in order is persecution the third, or personal persecution, in reference to which the just ask for protection, to "keep off the hand of the wicked" from harming them. By the "wicked," he seems to have the Prince of darkness in view; and then he, furthermore, asks, "and from unjust men deliver me," they being members of the Prince of darkness; and, for fear they, too, may have got the power of doing harm. The harm he dreads, and from which he seeks to be delivered, is explained as follows: "who have proposed to supplant my steps." The object of the Prince of darkness is to keep us out of the path of salvation, from which he irreparably fell. He and his angels, therefore, have the one object in view, at all times, and that is, "to supplant our steps," so that we may no longer walk in the path of the Lord, that we may fall therein, or turn back, or, at least, make slow progress in it. They accomplish this by laying snares for, and by concealing them in the way as we move along, as we are told in the following verse.

5. "The proud have hidden a net for me. And they have stretched out cords for a snare: they have laid for me a stumbling block by the wayside." The demons could not be called by a more appropriate name than "proud," because their fall was not owing to the concupiscence of the flesh, nor to the concupiscence of the eyes, but to "the pride of life;" they would be equal to the supreme being; hence we have in Tobias, "never suffer pride to reign in thy mind or in thy words: for from it all perdition took its beginning," and in the book of Job the devil is styled, "king over all the children of pride." Now, the devil "hides his net" when he displays the advantage of any human act, and hides the evil of it; that is, when he causes man to look upon the utility or the pleasure of anything, without reflecting on the consequent sorrow and suffering sure to follow from it. Thus, he causes the adulterer to revel in the beauty of the object of his desire, and hides the heinousness of the in sin from him. He makes the thief gloat over the stolen property, and keeps from his view his having lost the kingdom of heaven for it. He puts before the eyes of the ambitious the advantages of their preeminence, and conceals the danger of a fall from such a height. Finally, he never fails in bringing under our notice the pleasure of the transgression, while he studiously conceals the bitterness of the consequent punishment. "And they have stretched out cords for a snare;" set additional snares; for no sooner has one snare taken its victim, than the evil spirits set another; thus, he who has fallen into the snare of adultery will at once fall into that of murder, in the hope of concealing it, and they soon lead him to perjury, in order to conceal both, and thereby escape a well-deserved sentence. Finally, "they have laid for me a stumbling block by the wayside;" for in the way of the

Lord there can be no stumbling block; as we read in Psalm 118. "Much peace have they that love thy law; and to then there is no stumbling block." The moment we turn out of that way we fall into all manner of snares, and knock against all manner of stumbling blocks. The only remedy, then, is that of the apostle, "to walk with caution," and never to let our foot outside the path of the Lord.

6. "I said to the Lord: thou art my God: hear, O Lord, the voice of my supplication."

7. "O Lord, Lord, the strength of my salvation, thou hast overshadowed my head in the day of battle." He now invokes the divine assistance, without which we can do nothing against so many dangers. "I said to the Lord thou art my God," and I am, therefore, your people. "Thou art my Lord," and I am, in consequence, your servant; and, therefore, as I belong to you, "hear the voice of my supplication." In order, then, to show that the dangers were present and pressing, he again appeals to the Lord, saying, "O Lord, the strength of my salvation," I appeal to you with such confidence, because you are my strength, on whom I depend for salvation; you are the only power to save and protect me from my enemies. "Thou hast overshadowed my head in the day of battle." It is not the first time you have protected me; you did so in the day of battle, when I was hemmed in on all sides by my enemies, when "you overshadowed my head," as if with a helmet, and saved me from the death that stared me in the face, and that now emboldens me to appeal to you with so much confidence. This may also apply to a spiritual overshadowing of not only the head, but of the whole person; "in the day of battle," the interior battle, in which man has to fight against his own concupiscence's, because poor man, tired and feverish through temptation and bad desires, would wither and succumb altogether if not overshadowed by God Almighty.

8. "Give me not up, O Lord, from my desire to the wicked: they have plotted against me; do not forsake me, lest they should triumph." In consequence of the foregoing, he now asks for constant overshadowing, or protection, from the fire of his evil desires, because, if concupiscence had not got a hold of us, vain would be the temptation of the evil one or the rage of man. "Give me not up, O Lord;" that is, do not suffer me to be given up "from my desire to the wicked," be he man or demon that tempts me. "We are given up from our desires to the wicked" when concupiscence holds us captive, and gives us up to the power of Satan; for instance, when you look on another with an eye of concupiscence you become guilty at once, and subject to temptation; when death, in the time of persecution, is threatened, nothing can be offered to the evil one by the persecutor but the desire of life; when the tempter puts an opportunity for committing fraud in the way of man he can offer him nothing but the desire of lucre, and so of other sins. "They have plotted against me, do not thou forsake me." The reason why I am so desirous of the overshadowing of your grace is, because my enemies "have plotted against me," have laid snares for me, and, if they chance to take me, will "triumph," and glory, and rejoice, for not only having conquered me, but you along with me.

9. "The head of them compassing me about: the labor of their lips shall overwhelm them." He now begins to predict the punishment sure to overtake the wicked, who

so persecuted the just. There is a degree of obscurity as to the nature of that punishment here that is so clearly expressed in Psalm 7, where he says, "he is fallen into the hole he made, his sorrow shall be turned on his own head;" the persecutions they prepared for the just will recoil on themselves, and will "overwhelm them." The wicked feel that at their death, and, on the day of judgment, the whole world will see it; for on that day all the sufferings of the just will be turned into glory, and all the sins of the wicked into eternal misery. "The head of them compassing me about;" the sum total of their snares, which the wicked sought to lay by going round and round about me, just like the devil, who "goes about like a roaring lion," will all recoil on themselves, "and overwhelm them;" and he repeats it when he adds, "the labor of their lips shall overwhelm them;" that is to say, the labor of affliction or trouble inflicted on the just by their lips, by their bad or vicious language, will also overwhelm them.

10. "Burning coals shall fall upon them: thou wilt cast them down into the fire: in miseries they shall not be able to stand." A further relation of the punishments of the wicked: "coals" imply they will be punishments of the severest description; and the expression, "shall fall," conveys that they will come from above, from the supreme and sovereign Judge. Lest we should imagine they will be few in number, he adds, "thou wilt cast them down into the fire;" for such will be the quantity of fire rained down upon them that it will completely cover and overwhelm them, as if they had been cast into the fire; and, in order to explain it more fully, he adds, "in miseries, they shall not be able to stand;" they will be stretched so prostrate by all the misery that will accumulate on them that they will not be able to rise or the stand erect.

11. "A man full of tongue shall not be established in the earth: evils shall catch the unjust man unto destruction." Having predicted the future punishment of the wicked, he now turns to the punishments in store for them here below. "A man full of tongue." The man, too, given to talk, the liar, the flatterer, the detractor, the scold, the brawler, "shall not be established in the earth," for such people are hated by the wicked, and even as well as by the good, and, therefore, St. James desires, "and let every man be swift to hear, but slow to speak, and slow to anger." "Evils shall catch the unjust man unto destruction." Not only will the man full of tongue, and, therefore, an unjust man, neither thrive nor prosper, "but the evils that will catch him," which would have gone to reward his patience, as they do to the just, will tend to his everlasting "destruction." The expression "catch" implies a sudden unexpected catch, like that of a hunter; and such is the mode in which the wicked are generally surprised, while they are bent on the capture and spoliation of the just; they apprehend no danger from the devil, who is as intent on them as would a hunter on a wild beast. And it is not alone by the devil that they are led away captives; but they are captives to much misery, anxiety, troubles, fears, and bad passions, with this difference, however, between them and the virtuous who, too, have to contend against the like, that with them all such things "cooperate unto good," while, with the wicked, they only tend to their eternal condemnation.