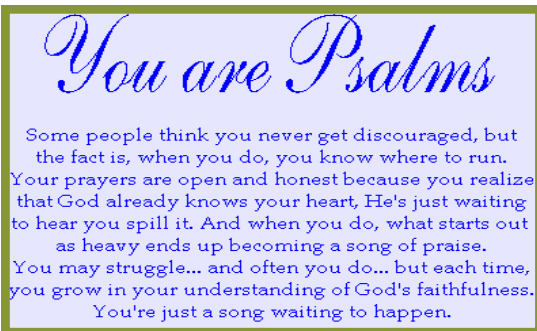


9. "Before your thorns could know the briar; he swalloweth them up, as alive, in his wrath." The last simile through which the Prophet teaches us that the wicked will be uprooted and cut down by God, before they can carry out their wicked designs against the just, and thus balk them of the gratification they calculated on from their ruin. Thus Saul had an unhappy end, before he could rejoice on David's death; so with Diocletian and the other persecutors of the Church, we had a miserable exit before they could witness the extirpation of Christianity they were so bent on. The simile is taken from thorns, which, when young, are easily cut down, but when they grow to any age, so as to get into timber, or, as the verse expresses it: "to know the briar," cannot be rooted out but with great difficulty. "He swalloweth them up as alive in his wrath." He will annihilate, them is completely as if the earth opened and swallowed them up alive.

10. "The just shall rejoice when he shall see the revenge: he shall wash his hands in the blood of the sinner." When the sinners shall have been so signally punished, "the just shall rejoice when he shall see the revenge;" not through love of revenge, but from a love of justice, seeing it was God's goodness that prevented himself will falling into such sins and meriting such punishment; and he will not only rejoice, but "he shall wash his hands in the blood of the sinner;" that is, his own good works will shine forth in bright contrast to the wickedness of the sinner. Contraries show more clearly when placed in juxtaposition; and the Scripture not infrequently uses the term "blood" to signify sin.

11. "And man shall say: if indeed there be fruit to the just; there is indeed a God that judgeth them on the earth." When the wicked shall be punished and that just shall rejoice, then, in reality, "a man shall say;" the men, witnessing those things, will say: if justice brings any advantage with it, the greatest is, that God, the supreme Judge, does not let the wicked go unpunished, nor the just unrewarded; but he reverses all unjust judgments, and judges all, both good and bad, rewarding the good for the good works they did, and for all the persecutions they suffered; and inflicting condign punishment on the wicked for all their bad acts, and for all the wantonness in which they reveled; and thus is fulfilled the sentence in Apocalypse 18, "as much as she had glorified herself; and hath been in delicacies, so much torment and sorrow give unto her."

END OF PSALM 57



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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: 57

David reproves the wicked, and fortells their punishment.

1. **If in very deed you speak justice: judge right things, ye sons of men.**
2. **For in your heart you work iniquity: your hands forge injustice in the earth.**
3. **The wicked are alienated from the womb; they have gone astray from the womb: they have spoken false things**
4. **Their madness is according to the likeness of a serpent; like the deaf asp that stoppeth her ears:**
5. **Which will not hear the voice of the charmers; nor of the wizard that charmeth wisely.**
6. **God shall break in pieces their teeth in their mouth: the Lord shall break the grinders of the lions.**
7. **They shall come to nothing, like water running down: he hath bent his bow till they be weakened.**
8. **Like wax that melteth they shall be taken away: fire hath fallen on them, and they shall not see the sun.**
9. **Before your thorns could know the briar; he swalloweth them up, as alive, in his wrath.**
10. **The just shall rejoice when he shall see the revenge: he shall wash his hands in the blood of the sinner.**
11. **And man shall say: If indeed there be fruit to the just; there is indeed a God that judgeth them on the earth.**

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: 57

EXPLANATION OF THE PSALM

1. “If in very deed you speak justice: judge right things, ye sons of men.” When men are asked whether it is right to steal, commit adultery, cheat, and the like, they, very properly, answer that it is not right; because the law written in their hearts teaches them so, and no one wishes to be robbed, abused, etc.; and thus, all evildoers stand convicted of deceit when they say so, and still rob, steal, commit adultery, etc.; things they would not do unless they believed a certain amount of good or advantage was in them. Not only that, but they stand convicted of falsehood while they cry up justice, and descant on the sin of theft, adultery, etc.; but they also prove themselves to be laboring under a deplorable blindness, loud in their denunciations of theft, etc., and, at the same time, devoted themselves to those vices, and dealing with others as they would not be dealt with themselves. For, if theft be good in itself, why are they unwilling to be plundered? If it be not good in itself, why plunder another? The Holy Spirit exclaims against such voluntary and inexcusable blindness, saying, “if, in very deed, you speak justice,” when you condemn theft, anger, etc.; “judge right things, ye sons of men;” consider it in your hearts that you should not do them, and do not what you have acknowledged to be bad.

2. “For in your heart you work iniquity: your hands forge injustice in the earth.” He shows he had reason for the admonition he gave them, to judge justly if they would speak justly; for, it appears, they did the very contrary; and thus spoke with the semblance of justice, while they were full of malice and deceit. “For in your heart you work iniquity;” you think of nothing but what is bad, and you do not stop there; for “your hands forge injustice in the earth;” your hands put into execution what your heart conceived.

3. “The wicked are alienated from the womb: they have gone astray from the womb: they are spoken false things.” Another misfortune of sinners is, that they fall, not after a lapse of years, but at once, almost from the cradle. “The wicked are alienated from the womb.” Scarcely out of the womb when they leave the straight path, the path of life, of happiness. “They have spoken false things;” lies and falsehood our corrupt nature first shows itself.

4. “Their madness is according to the likeness of a serpent; like the deaf asp that stoppeth her ears.”

5. “Which will not hear the voice of the charmers; nor of the wizard that charmeth wisely.” Having told us that sin, as a disease, attacks us in our very infancy, he now adds that the disease is of long duration, but that it is also a most grievous disease; sinners being sometimes so overpowered by it, and hurried on to ruin others by it, that they may be compared to serpents of a certain kind, that will yield to no incantations whatever. “Their madness,” the madness of those grievous sinners, such as Saul, “is according to the likeness of a serpent,” that no art will tame; nay, even like a “deaf asp,” that stops her ears with her tail, for fear she should “hear the voice of the charmers, nor of the wizard, that charmeth wisely;” that is, of one well skilled in charming. Whether such be true of the asp or not is no matter for David speaks according to general opinion on the subject. St. Augustine observes that this passage no more approves of the arts and practices of wizards and charmers, than do the parables of our Lord regarding the unjust steward, and the man who found the treasure in the farm, of their honesty in such cases.

6. “God shall break in pieces their teeth in their mouth: the Lord shall break the grinders of the lions.” Having painted the enormity of the sins of certain persons, Saul being the principal person in view, he now describes the punishments in-store for such sinners, by most appropriate similes. The first is in this verse, the gist of which is, that however great and formidable the power of the sinner may appear to be, still that he would be deprived of it. No animal more terrible, more formidable than a lion, and his teeth are the weapons he makes most use of, and the most destructive to his enemies. “God will break in pieces their teeth,” the teeth of the sinners, who, like lions, tear and plunder the unoffending. However powerful and strong like lions they made appear to be; “in their mouth,” while they are alive, and not after death – a thing easily done; and it is not the small teeth will be so broken, but their very grinders; for, “he shall break the grinders of the lions,” the largest and most durable of all the teeth.

7. “They shall come to nothing, like water running down: he hath bent his bow till they be weakened.” Another simile, teaching us that the power of the wicked would be very brief, and, after a very short time, would be so extirpated that not a trace of it would be found; like a sudden fall of rain, that creates, for the moment, a great inundation, of which, in a few hours, not a trace can be found. Such was the case with Saul, Achab, Jeroboam, Nero, Caius, Domitian, and, with the great heresiarchs, Arius, Nestorius, and others. “They shall come to nothing, like water running down;” that runs with great velocity, leaving not a trace of itself. And lest we may suppose this happened in an ordinary way, he adds, “he hath bent his bow till they be weakened;” the show it was all God’s work, all his doings; for it was he who bent his bow against them, and kept it bent against them until they were utterly ruined.

8. “Like wax then melteth they shall be taken away: fire hath fallen on them, and they shall not see the sun.” The third simile, showing that it is as easy for God to destroy the power of the tyrant or the sinner, as it is for the fire or the sun to melt wax, which, however hard it may be, readily yields to the action of either. “like wax that melteth away,” when the fire or the sun comes to act upon it, so shall the sinners “be taken away,” and utterly destroyed. “For fire hath fallen on them;” the fire of the anger of God; and being thus melted, they disappeared; “and they shall not see the sun;” a thing they could not do when they were utterly destroyed.