

men." Again, he does not imply that all who waylay and kill will perish by the sword; but that, generally speaking, they will be juridically put to death, or killed in battle, or by themselves, or by some chance, which is no chance in the sight of God, but a disposition of his providence. Finally, the expression, "shall not live out half their days," is not to be taken in the strict sense of the words, it being only a figure of speech, to express the shortness of their lives. An objection to this passage is raised from an expression in Psalms 72, where the Psalmist complains of sinners, "that full days shall be found in them," to which may be stated, in reply, that the passage quoted refers to sinners not guilty of shedding blood; or to a few who are an exception to the rule that shortens the days of sinners. The Prophet concludes with the most unusual expression of his, "but I will trust in thee, O Lord," which seems to have reference to the aforesaid; thus, that I may escape from my secret enemies, as well as my avowed ones; that I may not incur the punishment of the wicked, and fall into the pit of destruction, and that my days may not be cut short, "I will put my trust in thee, O Lord," and not in my own strength.

END OF PSALM 54

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: 54

A prayer of a just man under persecution from the wicked. It agrees to Christ persecuted by the Jews, and betrayed by Judas.

1. Hear, O God, my prayer, and despise not my supplication.
2. Be attentive to me, and hear me. I am grieved in my exercise; and am troubled.
3. All the voice of the enemy, and at the tribulation of the sinner. For they have cast iniquities upon me: and in wrath they were troublesome to me.
4. My heart is troubled within me: and the fear of death is fallen upon me.
5. Fear and trembling are come upon me; and darkness hath covered me.
6. And I said: who will give me wings like a dove, and I will fly, and be at rest?
7. Lo, I have gone far-off flying away; and I abode in the wilderness.
8. I waited for him that hath saved me from pusillanimity of spirit, and a storm.
9. Cast down, O Lord, and divide their tongues; for I have seen iniquity and contradiction in the city.

Continued >

(Continued from preceedong page)

10. Day and night shall iniquity surround it upon its walls: and in the midst thereof are labor.
11. And injustice. And usury and deceit have not departed from its streets.
12. For if my enemy had reviled me, I would verify have borne with it. And if he that hated me had spoken great things against me: I would perhaps have hid-den myself from him.
13. But thou a man of one mind, my guide, and my familiar.
14. Who didst take sweet meats together with me: in the house of God we walked with consent.
15. Let death come upon them, and let them go down alive into hell. For there is wickedness in their dwellings: in the midst of them.
16. But I have cried to God: and the Lord will save me.
17. Evening and morning, and at noon I will speak and declare; and he shall hear my voice.
18. He shall redeem my soul in peace from them that draw near to me: for among many they were with me.
19. God shall hear, and the Eternal shall humble them. For there is no change with them, and they have not feared God:
20. He hath stretched forth his hand to repay. They have defiled his covenant.
21. They are divided by the wrath of his countenance; and his heart hath drawn near. His words are smoother than oil, and the same are darts.
22. Cast thy care upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee; he shall not suffer the just to waver forever.
23. But thou, O God, shalt bring them down into the pit of destruction. Bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days: but I will trust in thee, O Lord.

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: 54

EXPLANATION OF THE PSALM

1. "Hear, O God, my prayer, and despise not my supplication." David begins with a preface to arrest the benevolence of the Judge, and asks for a kind and patient hearing, saying, "hear, O God, my prayer;" and for fear the prayer, or the person offering it, may not be agreeable, he recommends both, and first the prayer, saying,

scandalous lives, by not living up to the covenant God gave them, and therefore,

21. "They are divided by the wrath of his countenance; and his heart hath drawn near. His words are smoother than oil, and the same are darts." They are scattered and dispersed in God's anger, "and his heart hath drawn near" to punish and chastise them. "His words are smoother then oil, and the same are darts." He now reverts to the malice of the principal traitor, Achitophel, in regard of David and Judas in respect to Christ. "His words are smoother than oil;" apparently soft, kind, smooth, and yet his language does not consist of words, but of darts; delighting the ear, but wounding the heart; such are all detractions, indelicate language, and all false pretense of the betrayer.

22. "Cast thy care upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee; he shall not suffer the just to waiver forever." In the end of the Psalm the Prophet consoles himself and all in similar circumstances, and exhorts them to put their whole confidence in God, but is most undoubtedly solicitous for his servants and friends, as St. Peter reminds us in his 1 Epistle 5, "casting all your solicitude upon him, for he hath care of you," and is copiously explained by Christ himself, in the sixth chapter of Matthew, and in various other places; which passages are not to be understood as an encouragement to lead a life of idleness, and take no trouble about the world, but that we should not be over solicitous about the world, or depend more on our own strength and industry than on the Providence and mercy of God. "Cast thy care" you that fear God, "upon the Lord," leave to divine providence what you need for your support, "and he shall sustain thee." He will provide you with all necessities, blessing your labors and prospering your work; and one not only "sustain" and support you, but will defend you from your enemies. And, though he may sometimes "suffered the just a waiver," whether by want of necessities of life, or by the persecution of the wicked, it will not be "forever." These trials will not be of long duration, because God will not suffer the just be always buffeted by the waves of affliction; for everlasting affliction belongs to the wicked alone, as the following adverse expresses.

23. "But thou, O God, shalt bring them down into the pit of destruction. Bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days." You, O Lord, the a capacity of Judge, will consign them to the pit of death, for which they will never rise. It is called the pit of destruction, for those who fall therein are perpetually dying; for they live always in punishment, that they may be always dying, and never find that death they so ardently long for. "Bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days." Not only will those men of blood be cast into "the pit of destruction" hereafter, but even in this life will their days be shortened, for it is only just that those who take away a life should lose their own. So God says, Genesis 9, "whosoever shall shed man's blood, his blood shall be shed;" and the Lord himself said, "fall all that take the sword shall perish with the sword." Now, all these testimonies in this Psalm, as well as those in Genesis and the Gospel, do not go to prove that all manner of persons who take life away shall lose their own; but those only who take it away unjustly, and especially, those who lie in ambush to do so, for such are, properly speaking, the "bloody and deceitful

15. "Let death come upon them, and let them go down alive into hell. For there is wickedness in their dwellings, in the midst of them." An imprecation, or rather a prophecy, in the shape of an imprecation, of the punishment that was justly inflicted on Dathan and Abiron, who, for this sedition and rebellion, were swallowed up alive, they went "down alive into hell," and so did many of those who followed Absalom in his rebellion against David, when, as we read in 2 Kings 16, "there were many more of the people whom the forest consumed, than whom the sword devoured that day." The same came to pass in the siege of Jerusalem, when they dropped with hunger in the streets or flung themselves from the walls; and the same happens to many sinners, who either close their eyes against the truth, or if they see it, still prefer remaining in a state in which they cannot possibly be saved. "For there is wickedness in their dwellings, in the midst of them." A reason assigned for so severe an imprecation. Those who prefer so wicked a life, will be justly swallowed up alive, and will undergo everlasting punishment, "for there is wickedness in their dwellings," and dwellings that are not empty, but "in the midst of them;" that is, at the very time they were fully inhabited.

16. "But I have cried to God: and the Lord will save me."

17. "Evening and morning, and at noon I will speak and declare; and he shall hear my voice." He foretells the death of his enemies, and his own safety, "but I have cried to God" when an earnest prayer, "and he will save me" in the danger with which I am beset; and, thence-forward I will cry to him, not once, but twice, thrice; I will cry to him at evenings, mornings, and noon," in telling and announcing my own misfortunes, then the mercies of the Lord, and "he shall hear my voice." The practice of praying three times in the day was a usual one, as we read in Daniel 6, perhaps in honor of the Most Holy Trinity, a mystery not unknown to the prophets. He says, "evening, morning, and noon," rather than, morning, noon, and evening, because their festivals began in the evening, and were celebrated, according to Leviticus 23, from evening to evening, and, therefore, evening was the first, a practice still observed by the church that begins the office with the first Vespers.

18. "He shall redeem my soul in peace for them that draw near to me: for among many they were with me." He tells us in what respect he will be heard by God. "He shall be deemed my soul in peace." He will restore peace to it in spite of those "that draw near to me," coming to close quarters to fight with me, "for among many they were with me;" my aggressors were most numerous, and I was single-handed. This I consider the best interpretation of this most difficult passage.

19. "God shall hear, and the Eternal shall humble them. For there is no change with them, and they have not feared God." I that am most unjustly oppressed, will be heard by him, "who is eternal," and he will humble them. For there is no change with them, they have become hardened, and quite impenitent of their crimes. "They have not feared God," they rather feared men, and, therefore,

20. "He hath stretched forth his hand to repay. They have defiled his covenant." To give them their deserts: and justly, "for they have defiled his covenant" by their

"and despise not my supplication;" that is, my humble and suppliant prayer, for such is the force of the word in Hebrew.

2. "Be attentive to me, and hear me. I am grieved in my exercise; and am troubled." He now refers to the person praying, "be attentive to me, and hear me." He now refers to the person praying, "be attentive to me, and hear me." Look on me in your mercy, listen to me patiently. It is possible that he repeats the same prayer three times, in reference to the Trinity; directing his "prayer," to the Father; his "supplication" to the Son; and the person praying, to the Holy Ghost. The same prayer is repeated three times, to show his earnestness, as Christ did when he prayed in the garden, and as the apostle Paul thrice asked of the Lord. "I am grieved in my exercise, and am troubled." He now tells us why he prays. He was persecuted fiercely by his enemies, which saddened and dejected him; and he longed to be freed from such persecution, and therefore, in exercising, or turning the thing in his mind, he was "troubled" and confounded, not only for the present, for the future, because,

3. "At the voice of the enemy, and at the tribulation of the sinner. For they have cast iniquities upon me: and in wrath they were troublesome to me." "The voice of the enemy" threatening, vowing vengeance, and "the tribulation, of the sinner" the troubles they vowed to inflict on me, also grieved and troubled me. "The voice of the enemy" may refer to Saul or Absalom, as regards David; Caiaphas and Annas, as regards Christ; or any persecutor, in regard of the just. "For they have cast iniquities upon me." To show his fears were not groundless, "they," his enemies, "cast iniquities" upon me; falsely accused me, reproached, abused me, "and in wrath against me, that they did not confine themselves to abusive language, but even sought to inflict personal injury.

4. "My heart is troubled within me: and the fear of death is fallen upon me." Having said in the second verse that he was "troubled," he now explains how he was troubled; it was in his heart, in the inmost recesses of it; and assigns a reason for it, saying, "the fear of death is fallen upon me;" nothing enters into the heart of man so deep, or upsets him so much, as the fear of death at the door; as was the case with David, when, with lamentations, he fled from Absalom; and with Christ, when he trembled in the garden, and fell into the bloody sweat, recorded in Matthew 26.

5. "Fear and trembling are come upon me; and darkness hath covered me." A repetition of the same idea, and a sort of summary of the whole thing. Fear got a hold of his soul, tremor of his body, and the gloom of grief enveloped the entire man; for, as joy exhilarated and expands the heart, so also sorrow contracts and confines it, and thus darkens it up; for which reason persons in grief fly to a dark chamber, hide themselves therein and close the windows.

6. "And I said: who will give me wings like a dove, and I will fly, and be at rest?" Such are the expressions of the just, sighing for their heavenly country, will alone true rest is to be had; as if he said: oh! That I could fly to the highest mountains

of the heavenly Jerusalem, in imitation of the dove who escapes the bird of prey by soaring above him. The just man is, with great propriety compared to a dove, harmless, prolific, innocent, conquering by flight instead of by resistance; and so with the just man, who flies from temptation, instead of wrestling with it.

7. "Lo, I have gone far off flying away; and I abode in the wilderness." Words most applicable to David, who, in his flight from Saul, and afterwards from Absalom, betook himself to the desert; as if he said: as I cannot, like a dove, ascend to a place of real rest, I did my utmost, for "I have gone afar off, flying away;" which is applicable to every just man in trouble, who, when he cannot get back to his own country, removes himself internally as far as he can from the tumult of the world, betakes himself to the solitude of his heart and conscience, where, alone, in conference with God, he finds rest to some extent.

8. "I waited for him that hath saved me from pusillanimity of spirit, and a storm." In that solitude "I waited for him," that is, for his help, "that hath saved me" as he often did before, "from pusillanimity of spirit and a storm;" that is, from great temptation, with little strength to go through it. Two things are united to show the more than ordinary necessity for the help of God. If we have small temptations to encounter, with little strength of mind, or great temptations, with much strength of mind, the contest will not be so unequal; but if one with little strength of mind has to encounter great temptations, they cannot possibly bear up against them. Such, he says, is his case now; and he prays to God to increase his strength, or else to lessen the temptation, or, which is preferable, to do both.

9. "Cast down, O Lord, and divide their tongues; for I have seen iniquity and contradiction in the city." Having hoped for salvation through the Lord, he now prays to him to baffle the designs of his enemies. "Cast down." Hurl my enemies into the abyss; for such is the force of the word in Hebrew; and he says how he wishes that to be done, by "dividing their tongues;" by causing such dissension among them, that they shall have no unity of purpose, and thus embarrass each other, as really happened to his enemies; for, after the taken of the city, when various plans for capturing David were suggested to Absalom, he was so infatuated by God as not to adopt the advice of Achitophel, but preferred another; and the consequence was that the expedition failed, and most of them miserably perished; and thus, by division of tongues, they were ruined. "For I have seen iniquity and contradiction in the city." Words quite applicable to David, who had witnessed a most villainous conspiracy against his person, and most palpable rebellion (called contradiction here, because they contradicted David when they chose Absalom as King,) in the city. These words are applicable, to Christ, as well as to every innocent person who suffers unjust persecution and contradiction from the citizens of Babylon; that is, from the votaries of pleasure, will always persecute and hate those who are not of the world; but live in it as if they were foreigners and strangers.

10. "Day and night shall iniquity surround it upon its walls: and in the midst thereof are labor,"

11. "And injustice. And usury and deceit have not departed from its street." He proceeds in describing the wickedness of the city, for which he had suffered so much persecution, and most expressively says, that iniquity, like an armed soldiery, had so got possession of its walls, that it was impossible for justice to enter. "Day and night," that is, at all hours, "shall iniquity surround it upon its walls." Vice, like a guard of soldiers on its walls will surround; "and in the midst thereof are labor and injustice;" inside the city the poor were oppressed with "labor" by the "injustice" of the rich, who ground them down, and lorded it over them with impunity. "And usury and deceit have not departed from its streets." The oppression was partly open, for they required enormous usury in the streets; and partly private, for they harassed and circumvented the poor by various "deceits." Such was the state of things in David's time, at Jerusalem, infinitely worse in the days of our Savior; and are quite applicable nowadays to Babylon; that is, to the lovers of this world, in whom the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life absolutely rule.

12. "For if my enemy had reviled me, I would verily have borne with it. And if he that hated me had spoken great things against me: I would perhaps have hidden myself from him."

13. "But thou a man of one mind, my guide, and my familiar."

14. "Who didst take sweetmeats together with me: in the house of God we walked with consent." Having complained of the whole city and people in general, he now complains of one traitor in particular, who seems to be Achitophel, if we apply the Psalm the David; Judas, if to Christ; and any false friend, if we apply it to men in general. "For if my enemy," any avowed one, "had reviled me, I would verily have borne with it;" it would be only what I should expect. "And if he that hated me;" if such avowed enemy were to abuse, calumniate, and reproach me, "I would perhaps, have hidden myself from him," to see what his anger cool in my absence, and to remove the occasion of his abuse. But I could not hide myself from you, nor could I dream of your betraying me, for you seemed to be "a man of one mind" with me, my most intimate friend, having only one heart, one soul with me; you were also "my guide," my principal counselor, whose advice I always followed; but such was Achitophel, of whom we read in 2 Kings 16, "that the counsel he gave in those days, was as if a man should consult God." As regards Judas he is called a "guide," having been appointed by Christ, with the other apostles, over the people, according to Psalm 44, "thou shalt make them princes over all the earth." He was also "his familiar," and "took sweetmeats with him," as is well known; and the meets are called sweet, because agreeable company makes them so. "By sweetmeats," Saint Augustine says, the blessed Eucharist is meant, the sweetest of all meats, and possessing the flavor and virtual of all. Finally, he was not only of one mind, and his guide and familiar, but of the same opinion in regard of the sacred ceremonies; for "in the house of God we walked with consent." There was no dissension between us in regard of anything connected with the worship of God.