

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

Bereans Sunday School
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Psalm 58 — There Is a God Who Judges

1.0 Introducing Psalm 58

- “[T]his is the psalm which the 1980 Service Book excused Anglicans from ever having to use in worship.”—Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Psalms 1–72*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 208-9.
- This is one of the seven imprecatory psalms (6; 35; 58; 69; 83; 109; 137).
- Psalm 58 has similarities to Psalm 57:
 - ♦ Mikhtams by David.
 - ♦ Same tune: “Al-tashheth.”
 - ♦ The presence of “lions” (57:4; 58:6).

2.0 Reading Psalm 58 (NAU)

58:1 A Mikhtam of David.

Do you indeed speak righteousness, O gods?
Do you judge uprightly, O sons of men?

58:2 No, in heart you work unrighteousness;
On earth you weigh out the violence of your hands.

58:3 The wicked are estranged from the womb;
These who speak lies go astray from birth.

58:4 They have venom like the venom of a serpent;
Like a deaf cobra that stops up its ear,

58:5 So that it does not hear the voice of charmers,
Or a skillful caster of spells.

58:6 O God, shatter their teeth in their mouth;
Break out the fangs of the young lions, O LORD.

- 58:7** Let them flow away **like water** that runs off;
When he aims his arrows, let them be **as headless shafts**.
- 58:8** Let them be **as a snail** which melts away as it goes along,
Like the miscarriages of a woman which never see the sun.
- 58:9** Before your **pots** can feel *the fire of thorns*
He will sweep them away with a whirlwind, the green and the burning alike.
- 58:10** The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance;
He will wash his feet in the blood of the wicked.
- 58:11** And men will say, “Surely there is a reward for the righteous;
Surely there is a God who judges on earth!”

For the choir director; *set to* Al-tashheth.

3.0 Understanding Psalm 58

3.1 Outline

- I. Corrupt Officials Defied (vv. 1-2)
- II. Corrupt Officials Described (vv. 3-5)
- III. Corrupt Officials Diminished (vv. 6-9)
- IV. Corrupt Officials Destroyed (vv. 10-11)



3.2 Notes

- **v. 1** “O gods”
 - “Silent ones” in NKJV is the most accurate translation of the Hebrew text as it stands.
 - Both “gods” and “rulers” (NET Bible) are based on a change in the text.
 - Even though “rulers” fits the context and there could have been confusion in supplying the vowels for the Hebrew, “silent” rulers is the most obvious meaning.
 - David addresses this psalm to corrupt governmental leaders (Saul?). It is about wickedness and perversion of law in high places.
 - Isaac Watts’ hymn addressed those in the British government who desired to sabotage the 1689 Toleration Act that promised protection for the freedom of thousands of non-Anglicans like himself:

Yet you invade the rights of God,
And send your bold decrees abroad,
To bind the conscience in your chains.
- **v. 2** “violence”
 - Governmental corruption in this case is not something relatively harmless or only involving the misuse of national funds or resources.
 - Citizens of this corrupt government are subjected to great harm. “Violence” is the word *hamas*—yes, the same as the name of the radical and violent Palestinian terrorist group.

- “You weigh out the violence” may refer to a judge weighing two sets of arguments in the scales of justice.
- v. 3 “go astray from birth”
 - David addresses the theological reason for political corruption: original (hereditary) sin.
 - Everyone has the sin nature.
 - ✓ See David’s own confession in Psalm 51:5.
 - ✓ See Romans 3:10-18, 23.
- v. 4 “Like a deaf cobra that stops up its ear”
 - The wicked are terminally willful and rebellious—they refuse to change. They cannot be persuaded by words.
 - The saved are saved by God alone; the lost are lost by choice.
- v. 6 The Bite of the Wicked
 - O God,
shatter
their teeth in their mouth
the fangs of the young lions,
Break out
O LORD.
 - The chiasm (inverted or mirror arrangement) focuses on the teeth/fangs of the wicked.
 - God will put an end to the harm the wicked perpetrate.
 - See Psalms 3:7; 124:6.
- vv. 7-9 Metaphors of Mortality
 - Water disappears even where it had once been an overwhelming flood.
 - Headless arrows have no effect in battle or the hunt.
 - Snails appear to melt away like their slimy paths in the heat of the sun.
 - Stillborn children never experience life.
 - A fire of thorns provides but a flare of flame and heat.
- v. 10 “wash his feet in the blood of the wicked”
 - See, also, Psalm 68:21-23.
 - Many Christians think this is contrary to New Testament teachings.
 - The wicked are not slain by believers—they are slain by God.
 - Compare Revelation 18:20, 20; 19:1-7, 11-21.
- v. 11 Compare with v. 1
 - speak ... righteousness ... gods ... judge ... sons of men (v. 1).
 - men ... say ... righteous ... God ... judges (v. 11).
 - Such an inclusio brings us back where we began, but with the resolution to the problem revealed at the start of the psalm.



4.0 Singing Psalm 58



A Warning to Magistrates

(Tune: "Sweet Hour of Prayer" — Continuous with repetition of final four lines.)

Judges, who rule the world by laws,
Will ye despise the righteous cause,
When th' injured poor before you stands?
Dare ye condemn the righteous poor,
And let rich sinners 'scape secure,
While gold and greatness bribe your hands?

Have ye forgot, or never knew,
That God will judge the judges too?
High in the heav'ns his justice reigns;
Yet you invade the rights of God,
And send your bold decrees abroad,
To bind the conscience in your chains.

→

A poisoned arrow is your tongue,
The arrow sharp, the poison strong,
And death attends where'er it wounds:
You hear no counsels, cries, or tears;
So the deaf adder stops her ears
Against the power of charming sounds.

Break out their teeth, eternal God,
Those teeth of lions dyed in blood;
And crush the serpents in the dust:
As empty chaff when whirlwinds rise
Before the sweeping tempest flies,
So let their hopes and names be lost.

→

Th' Almighty thunders from the sky,
Their grandeur melts, their titles die,
As hills of snow dissolve and run,
Or snails that perish in their slime,
Or births that come before their time,
Vain births, that never see the sun.

Thus shall the vengeance of the Lord
Safety and joy to saints afford;
And all that hear shall join and say,
"Sure there's a God that rules on high,
A God that hears his children cry,
And will their suff'rings well

→ repay." — Isaac Watts

5.0 Praying Psalm 58

- Lord, preserve our nation from corrupt leaders. [v. 1]
- O God, stop those who would terrorize with violence. [v. 2]
- Father, help me to understand that I, too, am infected by sin. [v. 3]
- How I praise You for the ultimate demise of the wicked! [v. 10]
- Lord, thank You for being a God concerned with justice. [v. 11]
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6.0 Applying Psalm 58

- Corruption in government is an evidence of the depravity of mankind.
- Wicked people are living on borrowed time.
- A God of justice does exist and will do that which is right.