

Psalm 58

Title: Prayer for the Punishment of the Wicked

Author and Date: David

Key Verse: Psalm 58:6

Type: Individual Lament (Complaint)

Outline

- A. The Need for Punishment (verses 1-5).
- B. The Prayer for Punishment (verses 6-9).
- C. The Response to Punishment (verses 10-11).

Notes

Title: See the notes for the title of Psalm 57.

Summary: Psalm 58 is an individual lament (complaint) psalm. It is another “trouble and trust” psalm in a series of psalms extending from Psalm 54 through Psalm 59. In Psalm 58, the psalmist wants the wicked around him to be punished. In particular, the wicked are dishonest and unjust in their judgments (verse 1), they have evil in their hearts and hands (verse 2), they are quick to speak lies (verse 3), and they are poisonous and obstinate (verses 4-5). Because of their wickedness, the psalmist delivers several curses upon these evil men (verses 6-9). The psalmist knows that when the wicked are punished, the righteous will rejoice (verse 10) and men will say that there is indeed a God that judges in the earth (verse 11). Psalm 58 is one of the strongest of the imprecatory psalms (see especially the curses in verses 6-8). Here, the psalmist is more caustic in his charges against the wicked than in the preceding psalms. He uses strong language that many today would consider to be excessive or offensive.

Verse 1: The KJV reads “O congregation”, the ASV reads “in silence”, and the NASV reads “O gods”. The first part of the verse is speaking of earthly “rulers” (NEB, NIV) or “mighty ones” (Heb. *'elim*; ASV margin); individuals who are in authority to be judges. These rulers are unjust and pervert justice. They do not render righteous or upright decisions. The wicked and unjust rulers do not judge righteously or justly (Ex. 21:6; 22:1-2; Psa. 82:1-2). The last part of the verse makes this clear. Note how this psalm ends in verse 11 with a contrast where God executes righteous judgment.

Verse 2: The unjust and wicked rulers scheme in their hearts and execute it in their hands.

Verse 3: This is not proof that people are born with “original sin”, a “sinful nature”, or “total inherited depravity”. It is literally impossible for an infant to speak lies. The psalmist is

using a figure of speech, hyperbole (to speak in an exaggerated manner), to show how quickly in life some engage in their wickedness and go astray from God.

Verses 4-5: The wicked and unjust rulers are like a deaf snake (cobra) who will not hear the charmer. They refuse to turn from their wicked ways.

Verse 6: The wicked and unjust rulers are also like young lions that attack with their teeth (Psa. 57:4). To break the teeth of the lion is to render it harmless. The strong language used in this verse and those that follow show the psalmist's righteous indignation against the Lord's enemies (Psa. 139:19-24).

Verses 7-8: The different figures the psalmist uses in these two verses shows the quick and irreparable destruction of the wicked in a vivid and forceful way.

Verse 9: "Thorns" were used for fuel (Psa. 118:12; Eccl. 7:6). "He shall take them away" is a reference to God and his divine punishment of the wicked. The psalmist wants divine punishment to come quickly, before the warming of a pot on the fire. The KJV reads "both living and in *his* wrath" and the ASV reads "the green and the burning alike".

Verse 10: The righteous rejoice because of God's self-vindication (and vengeance), not because the wicked are punished. This is not the personal vengeance of the psalmist, but the righteous vengeance of God (2 Sam. 22:48; Psa. 18:47; 94:1; 99:8). "Wash his feet in the blood of the wicked" (KJV) is a reference to the wicked falling by divine judgment in the presence of the righteous.

Verse 11: The punishment of the wicked convinces men (note the "Verily" used twice) that: 1) right living has a reward; and, 2) God is in control and judges the earth. The wicked will one day meet their Judge and justice will prevail! Note that God's just judgment in verse 11 stands in contrast to how the psalm begins in verse one with unjust judgment.

Questions

1. What two rhetorical questions does the psalmist ask concerning the wicked judges (verse 1)?
2. What is the answer to the questions asked in the first verse (verse 2)?
3. How soon do the wicked go astray (verse 3)?
4. What are the wicked compared to (verses 4-5)?

5. What does the psalmist want God to do to the wicked (verse 6)?
6. What four things are the wicked compared to (verses 7-8)?
7. What does God do with the wicked and how soon does he do it (verse 9)?
8. What do the righteous do when the wicked are punished by God (verse 10)?
9. What two things do men say when the wicked are punished by God (verse 11)?

Applications for Today

1. Men are often unjust in their judgments (verse 1). How are rulers to lead (Prov. 31:1-9)? What are Christians to do (1 Tim. 2:1-2)?
2. What is planned in the heart is executed in the hands (verse 2). How are we to keep our heart and hands (Psa. 24:4; Jas. 4:8)?
3. Some people practice wickedness very early in life (verse 3). What is the spiritual condition of man when he is born and what does he do later in life (Eccl. 7:29)?
4. The wicked are like snakes and lions (verses 4-6). What is the Devil like (Gen. 3:1; 1 Pet. 5:8; Rev. 12:9)?
5. Like the psalmist, we need to have a holy anger against sin (verses 6-9). What attitude are Christians to have toward evil (Rom. 12:9; 1 Thess. 5:22)?

6. God always rules with righteous judgment (verses 10-11). How do Paul and John describe the judgments of God (Rom. 2:5; 2 Thess. 1:5; Rev. 16:7; 19:2)?